

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

**Why and How the U.S. Should Establish
a Permanent Military Presence on
NATO's Eastern Flank**

**Peter B. Doran
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November 2018**



Center *for*
European Policy
Analysis

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The Issue

The security situation on NATO's Eastern Flank has significantly changed for the worse since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 (and arguably before that). An organizing problem: the permanent force posture of the United States and NATO has remained trapped in time—a holdover from the tranquil, idealistic days of the post-Cold War era. In exchange for a promise of constructive behavior by Russia in the 1990s, the Alliance only extended to its Eastern Allies the treaty and political infrastructure of NATO membership. It did not extend the hard security infrastructure that other signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty enjoy—like permanent U.S. forces on their soil if they wished. Since that time, failure to update this force posture has invited aggressive Russian probing of our defenses and new challenges to the rules-based security architecture of Europe. It is now time to update the Alliance's permanent presence on the Eastern Flank. We can start with Poland—and here's how.

What is Permanent?

Much of the recent debate over permanent basing in the Central-East European (CEE) region has been snarled in a discussion about definitions. What is “permanent?” What is a “base?” Too often, advocates and critics alike have different meanings about which they disagree. Resolving these differences is a helpful first step in advancing the policy debate.

When it comes to overseas deployments, the U.S. Army has varied concepts of bases and approaches to soldier assignments.¹ In plain, non-Pentagon language, bases can be conceptualized as:

- ④ **“Towns.”** Think: large megasites, or base clusters in Germany and South Korea. These are fixed, permanent, overseas locations. Soldiers arrive individually or as a group, and they live alongside their families. These places can resemble American towns with U.S. schools, hospitals, recreational facilities, commissaries, etc.
- ④ **“Rotations.”** Think: active combat theaters like Afghanistan and previously Iraq. These are overseas locations where forces arrive as units—and without their families. Once in theater, soldiers are typically located at U.S. Allied/partner bases. When their time in theater expires, soldiers return home as a unit. New rotations replace them. (Notably, this is also how U.S. units are rotated into the CEE region under the European Deterrence Initiative.)

How a service member is assigned to an overseas post is also important. In plain language, these assignments can be conceptualized as:

- ④ **“Long Tours.”** Think: a two-year assignment to Germany (sometimes without a family), or a three-year assignment with a family. In Pentagon parlance, this is known as a “Permanent Change of Station” (PCS).
- ④ **“Shorter Tours.”** Think: an assignment to South Korea for a year unaccompanied by a family. These year-long orders can be known as “All Others Orders” (AOO) in Pentagon parlance. The duration of the tour can vary. The emphasis here is short-term and without families.

Each of these concepts have real world applications. For example, the service members who are posted to the current U.S. Air Force Aviation Detachment in Poland are there on one-year unaccompanied assignments to a Polish base. Their orders are AOO. Also in Poland, under Operation Atlantic Resolve, Army units are stationed in theater on rotational deployment orders (without their families) at non-U.S. bases. These rotations are for four-, six-, or nine-month periods. Elsewhere in the world, service members can receive orders to combat theater bases in Afghanistan, Kosovo, or Iraq for a temporary duration (12 months or less).

The point here is that the Pentagon has a lot of different ways to send Americans overseas. How troops are ordered to a country has a major impact on not only the stability of family life, but also on support for an overseas mission inside the American communities that military families touch. Military families and the strength of their communities are pillars upon which American overseas power projection rests. This point cannot be overstated.

Understanding the concepts for how the Pentagon sends Americans overseas is

therefore a key—yet often overlooked—dimension of the permanent presence debate. In any other era, the importance of these distinctions might never be considered or understood by the wider policy and expert community. However, this is not a tranquil era.

The Polish Proposal

In the spring of 2018, the Polish government catapulted the question of *permanent* U.S. forces east of Berlin to the top of the transatlantic policy discussion. The forcing action was a fresh proposal from Warsaw to Washington. Specifically, the Polish government requested that the Pentagon permanently deploy a U.S. Army division on Polish soil.

In many corners of the Washington policy establishment, the Polish proposal was welcomed. The immediate balance of forces in the East had clearly shifted in Russia's favor; there was a requirement to buttress U.S. Alliance structures east of Berlin; and the aggressive posture of the Russian military injected this requirement with added urgency. The catch: permanent basing would be expensive. Poland was prepared for this. In order to soften the sticker shock of its proposal, Warsaw simultaneously offered \$1-2 billion to cover the costs. It was an ambitious idea, a bold offer, and a large sum of money from Polish coffers. Only, the concept itself was not a new one.

For well over a decade, the establishment of permanent U.S. forces in Poland has been the standing priority of every Polish government—regardless of party or political orientation. What changed in 2018 was the size of Warsaw's ask. It was tremendous in scale. Today's U.S. Army is a shadow of its former size during

the Cold War. By requesting a division in the spring of 2018, Poland was essentially asking that a considerable portion of the U.S. Army's total combat power be permanently planted in Poland.

Inside the Pentagon, reaction to the Polish proposal was initially cautious, mainly on practical grounds:

- ④ The first issue was **manpower**. While the Trump Administration has signaled its desire to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps by 70,000 in the coming years, the Pentagon did not have a division to spare for Poland—at least not yet.
- ④ Second, the **money** offered by Warsaw, while considerable, did not approach the level of investments made over many previous decades to host U.S. forces at permanent bases like Ramstein and Baumholder, Germany. Poland's proposed financial outlay would be a start—but only that. From where would the rest of the money come?
- ④ Third, there was the **concept** itself. It was not immediately apparent if the Polish proposal was consistent with the Army's approaches to overseas deployments. Did Poland want "Towns" or "Rotations," and what kind of "Tours"?
- ④ Finally, there was the possible **reaction** from Allies. It was unclear how the rest of NATO would respond to such a major move by the United States. Would it strengthen or weaken political unity within the Alliance?

By issuing its proposal, Warsaw was essentially offering to Washington a puzzle piece—one whose size and shape did not fit neatly into the Pentagon's global force posture puzzle.

Despite many questions about the Polish proposal, the idea itself attracted great interest from Congress. The legislative branch wanted to know: was Poland's puzzle piece a workable one? While a division was obviously too large, what about a U.S. Army Brigade Combat Team (BCT)? In the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (which became law in summer 2018), Congress instructed the Pentagon to

“For well over a decade, *the establishment of permanent U.S. forces in Poland has been the standing priority of every Polish government.*”

report back by March 2019 on the “feasibility and advisability of permanently stationing United States forces in the Republic of Poland.” In addition to practical questions over such a move, Congress also wanted to know how it might impact the Alliance as a whole. Overall, however, this was real progress. The Polish proposal was gaining traction.

When Polish President Andrzej Duda visited President Donald Trump in September 2018,

the question of a permanent U.S. presence in Poland was now squarely on the table. Except, Warsaw had modified its earlier expectations. Perhaps recreating Ramstein or Baumholder in Poland was too ambitious. A U.S. Army BCT might obviously be more realistic for the United States and Poland. Importantly, the size of the proposed force was one of scale. The deeper issue was: the United States, Poland, and NATO urgently needed to deter Russia. This was an organizing problem for Europe. It needed to be swiftly addressed. Warsaw saw the establishment of a permanent U.S. force posture in Poland as taking a major step toward maximizing deterrence. And many in Washington agreed.

Viewed from the frontline perspective of Warsaw and other CEE capitals, the regional military status quo needed to be improved if the Alliance was going to fully deter Russia from probing Europe's defenses. Clearly, meaningful progress had already been made since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. NATO and the United States had updated their contingency plans for responding to a crisis in the East. Many frontline Allies were spending more on their own defense. Together, the United States and NATO were also sending *rotations* of forces to Poland and the Baltic States (under Operations Atlantic Resolve and Atlantic Resolve North-East). These were needed. But in the case of U.S. and NATO troops, they were temporary/rotational—and limited. The Kremlin still retained too many options for threatening the Alliance and fracturing its political unity.

In the summer of 2017, Russia had previously demonstrated its ability to mobilize and exercise around 100,000 combat forces in a real-world simulation of a war against NATO. This mobilization dwarfed the size of NATO's



U.S. soldiers brief Polish soldiers in Zagan, Poland in 2017. Photo Credit: Capt. John Strickland / U.S. Army.

armies in the East. And Russia's units were very well armed. Across Russia's Western Military District (its militarized border zone with NATO), the Kremlin had equipped its forces with a high-tech loadout of weapons, vehicles, and munitions. This arsenal featured multi-layered air defense, mobile coastal defense, land-and sea-based cruise missiles, and tactical ballistic-missile platforms. Meanwhile, Russian war planners were turning their exclave of Kaliningrad (near the Polish-Lithuanian border) into an armed fortress. They likewise deployed WMD-capable SS-26 Stone (Iskander) ballistic missiles to that territory. With a striking range of 500 kilometers, these missiles could target critical infrastructure, counterforce assets, troop concentrations, Command and Control facilities, and civilian populations in a wide arc across Poland and the Baltic region. All the while, a still greater strategic threat emanated from the Russian Baltic Fleet, whose ships, in the near term, included *Kalibr* Land Attack Cruise Missile capabilities. The advanced variant of *Kalibr* reportedly has a 2,500-kilometer range—putting most of Europe at risk of a WMD strike.

The underlying logic of the Polish proposal thus offered to address the widening force imbalance in the East. It asserted that, while Poland was obviously building up its own defenses, U.S. combat power should also be closer to where it was needed; that it needed to be sufficient in size to deter Russia; and that it needed to convey *permanence* to Allies and adversaries alike. In doing so, the Polish proposal applied a key lesson-learned from an old war.

At the start of World War II, Warsaw's Great Power Allies (France and the UK) were too far away to materially assist in the defense of Poland when Germany and Russia attacked. Distance was a key factor in deterrence and response. By welcoming a covenant Ally (like the United States) onto Polish soil, Warsaw could increase NATO's deterrence against future threats by closing the distance gap. Allied forces would be closer to where they might be needed in a crisis. When applied to 21st century threats, the question then became: what size of force by a Great Power Ally would be sufficient to deter Russia?

What is Sufficient?

Thankfully, the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA) offers a basis for assessing: what is sufficient to deter Russia?

Back in 1997, the world was a different, more sanguine place. Flush with the optimism of that era, NATO and Russia mutually pledged to “build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security.”² NATO and Moscow likewise agreed that Russia:

- ⦿ Was building a democratic society;
 - ⦿ Was revising its military doctrine to be more pacifist (i.e. “consistent with new security realities”);
 - ⦿ Had withdrawn its forces on an unprecedented scale from CEE; and
 - ⦿ Had withdrawn all nuclear weapons back to Russian Federation territory.
- Moreover, the Kremlin committed to continue this progress by:
- ⦿ Completing deep reductions to its conventional and nuclear forces; and
 - ⦿ Fully accepted, *inter alia*, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) as the basis for a 21st century security architecture of Europe.

Based on this upbeat assessment, and *only if* the strategic conditions of 1997 did not change, then NATO agreed to defer the permanent stationing of “substantial” combat forces in CEE. (Alas, “substantial” was never defined with Moscow. At the time, U.S. officials considered this to mean anything above and

beyond a brigade.) Consequently, the Alliance did not build new infrastructure to facilitate the positioning of multiple U.S./NATO divisions east of Berlin. Instead, the Alliance relied on existing infrastructure circa 1997 to fulfill its collective security obligations to new Member States like Poland. This would remain the case so long as Russia exercised “similar restraint” in its force posture and behavior.

On account of Russia’s actions, the strategic conditions of 1997 are now long gone, and NRFA can inform some next moves. Presently, Russia:

- ⦿ Is an authoritarian kleptocracy (not a democracy);³
- ⦿ Has revised its official military doctrine to explicitly treat NATO as its main threat;
- ⦿ Has put its society into a state of constant warfare with the West under the Gerasimov “doctrine;”
- ⦿ Has re-militarized the Baltic and Black Sea littorals to an unprecedented degree; and
- ⦿ Has very likely re-deployed nuclear weapons back to Kaliningrad (and possibly onto the Crimean Peninsula).⁴

Moreover, Russia has broken its covenants and promises by:

- ⦿ Illegally “suspending” its participation in the CFE Treaty;
- ⦿ Allegedly breaking the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty;
- ⦿ Using a chemical weapon for a targeted assassination inside of NATO territory (Salisbury);

- ④ Shooting down a commercial airliner (MH17);
- ④ Forcefully rejecting, *inter alia*, the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the CFE Treaty, the Vienna Document of 1994, and the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation as the basis for a 21st century security architecture of Europe;⁵
- ④ Waging offensive war against its European neighbors (Georgia, Ukraine); and
- ④ Conducting regular and large-scale exercises along NATO's Eastern Border, attempting to threaten and intimidate U.S. Allies by rehearsing similar wars against their territory.

The world has changed. So too must the response by NATO and the United States. For starters, Allies should end their outdated deferral of permanent force deployments east of Berlin. Even under the most peaceful of conditions, a “sufficient” deterrent to Russia can be one permanent U.S./NATO brigade (under the NRFA limit). In addition, permanent assignment of key U.S./NATO enabling units should be considered in this discussion – which provide increased stand-off and counter the significant and increasing regional Russian A2/AD threat rings. Poland's current military modernization program envisions the deployment of state of the art long-range precision missile and other artillery, air and missile defense (AMD) capabilities, improved anti-tank rocket systems, and utility and combat helicopters. U.S. hardware is going to be included in these capabilities (i.e. U.S. Army Patriot AMD is already contracted). Still larger formations should also be acceptable—indeed they may be required—now that Russia has fundamentally altered the strategic conditions of 1997 by suspending CFE, violating its promises and the founding documents of the

post-1991 settlement of Europe, and waging aggressive war upon Ukraine. Moreover, Russia cannot dispute or abrogate NRFA without ending other privileges that the agreement extends to Moscow (such as the existence of the NATO-Russia Council). In fact, under NRFA, the Kremlin has no grounds to object to any changes in permanent Allied force posture. Indeed, under NRFA, NATO members are already free to position their military

“On account of Russia's actions, the *strategic conditions of 1997* are long gone.”

capabilities “individually or in conjunction with others, as are commensurate with individual or collective legitimate security needs.”⁶ Poland and the United States can determine what this means bilaterally, and Russia has already agreed to that.⁷ The theoretical consequences for Russia's suspension of CFE and its invasion of Ukraine (e.g. violating the conditions of NRFA) were clear to Moscow from the start. To date, these consequences have not fully materialized. Now they should.

When it comes to the specific question of basing, NRFA also offers some useful vocabulary. Here, it may be helpful to employ NRFA's actual language when referring to Polish or other CEE “bases.” In fact, rather than “bases” (a word that does not appear in NRFA),

a better phrase is “*permanent infrastructure*.” This phrase is already in the public discourse on account of NRFA. By employing an existing term from this agreement, we can thus clarify the differences in meaning between advocates and critics when debating the question of permanent force posture. That alone will be helpful. But there are additional benefits as well.

Benefits

In addition to its linguistic clarity, the vocabulary of permanent infrastructure (instead of bases) has a variety of knock-on benefits. Indeed, infrastructure can mean many things.

First, permanent infrastructure grants a greater degree of freedom to planners in the Pentagon. Instead of being shackled with a specific mandate to “build bases,” the Army can recalibrate its marching orders from the Administration to “build the permanent infrastructure” of force posture. Maybe this means bases. Maybe it means components of bases *plus* other infrastructure. No doubt, the Army can find several ways in which to use this kind of mandate to meet real-world needs—*permanently*.

Second, the use of the “permanent infrastructure” vocabulary may be more appealing within the Alliance since it is already included in NRFA. Neither NATO nor Russia enjoys a veto over bilateral decisions between the United States and Poland on force posture. At the same time, U.S. leaders should not act over the heads of other Allies (or give the unwanted impression that they are doing so). The reality is: Russia has belligerently broken its promise to every country in NATO. Its promise was that it would ensure peace in

Europe based on democracy and cooperative security. The response now from the United States (and all other member of the Alliance) must be clear and firm—yet it can also be framed within the logic of NRFA. While NRFA is not a legally-binding document, using its logic and structure as a basis for responding to Russia lowers the possibility for greater friction to emerge within NATO should questions arise over permanent infrastructure. After all, NRFA is a point of commonality that all Allies share.

Lastly, the benefits of permanent infrastructure do not end with Pentagon planning or diplomacy. At the strategic level, Polish leaders have consistently asserted—with good cause—that increased U.S. force posture in Poland represents an investment in the security of the whole CEE region and—by extension—the Alliance as a whole. Indeed, permanent infrastructure would grant the United States and its Allies some tremendous advantages, which are currently unmet. These include:

Greater Deterrence

- ④ Permanent infrastructure will move us beyond NATO’s traditional focus on defense-in-depth in favor of a nimbler, more “preclusive defense.” CEPA has published extensive analysis for why this change is needed (i.e. “Securing the Suwałki Corridor,” and “A Preclusive Strategy to Defend the NATO Frontier”).⁸ Making this move *in combination* with other NATO and EU initiatives is important. These other steps are aimed at speeding the mobility of forces across borders and over distances, increasing the effective organization of personnel and resources (namely RSOM: Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement), and improving Alliance-level communications in a shared battlespace—all will help to establish greater deterrence dominance across the entire

spectrum of potential conflict in Europe. The result: Russia will have robust and clear reasons to avoid any test of NATO in the first place. Presently, this is not a foregone conclusion.

④ **Greater Ballast in the U.S.-Polish Bilateral (Direct)**

Unlike the U.S.-German or U.S.-Turkish bilateral relationship, U.S.-Polish relations suffer from a chronic lack of ‘ballast’ at the foundation of their bilateral interactions. At sea, ballast provides stability to a vessel. When the wind blows hardest, ballast ensures that a vessel does not capsize. In diplomatic terms, this is what we enjoy with Germany and Turkey. The existence of permanent U.S. defense infrastructure in Germany and Turkey (along with other forms of ballast like defense-industrial cooperation) endows these relationships with a tremendous degree of inherent stability. Without such ballast, small disagreements and/or major flare-ups in the bilateral relationship risk escalation into potentially existential ruptures or dangerous distractions. This is unfortunately the current inclination in U.S. bilateral relations with Poland. It is also not a new development. The Obama Administration’s September 17, 2009 cancellation of the Bush-era missile defense system was one such example of a potentially existential break due to a lack of ballast. With the extra ballast of permanent infrastructure, however, escalations in any diplomatic disagreement—even the most strenuous—are always below the threshold of existential breaks. The distractions, though they may be many in number, are less dangerous. This is what we must achieve in Poland (and other CEE Allies). Presently, it is lacking. As such, permanent infrastructure in the East would help to eliminate the constant need for temporary-yet-expensive *symbols* of reassurance, while simultaneously decoupling

to a significant degree the U.S.-Polish bilateral from the ebb and flow of the news cycle.

④ **Greater Ballast in U.S.-CEE Bilaterals (Indirect)**

U.S. relationships with neighboring CEE Allies (Baltic, Visegrád, and Black Sea) suffer from a similar dynamic as the bilateral with Poland. Our ballast is missing from these relationships as well. The original sin was the 1997 Founding Act. By deferring the build-out of our permanent infrastructure across the CEE region, NATO enlargement was left *unfinished*. In exchange for a promise of constructive behavior by Russia, the Alliance only extended to its post-communist Allies the *treaty* and *political* infrastructure of membership. It did not extend the *hard security* infrastructure that other signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty enjoy—like permanent U.S. forces on their soil. Obviously, being a member of NATO does not require an Ally to host foreign bases. Nevertheless, many of Poland’s neighbors in the Baltic and Black Sea region would welcome this change. The United States can thus use its increased permanent infrastructure in a country like Poland to signal a wider and enduring commitment to the entire CEE region. And as CEPA analysis has demonstrated, plus-ups in U.S. forces can also help to facilitate the deployment of logistical and/or air defense units across the region.⁹ These developments would be cheered by many frontline capitals; and indirect ballast can be achieved.

④ **Greater Movement on Burden-Sharing**

CEPA analysis has recently advanced a concept for rethinking and recalibrating NATO’s “2 percent” benchmark in order to achieve a more accurate measure of real military value to the Alliance.¹⁰ By executing



Exercise Allied Spirit VIII in 2018. Photo Credit: Spc. Dustin D. Biven / U.S. Army.

a tandem build-out of NATO/EU infrastructure (in addition to specific steps that the Pentagon may wish to take), regional Allies can assist Washington by synchronizing plans for current and future construction projects. This can and should feature dual-use builds that provide real military value, including underground fiber-optic networks, fuel distribution and pipeline networks, better cyber and intelligence capabilities, and mobility improvements to railheads, bridges, ports, and road networks. All of these elements will be needed in order to derive full-spectrum deterrence from new permanent infrastructure. These can also nest well into the Three Seas Initiative, and can incentivize greater movement on burden-sharing by Allies.

Harms

Critics of permanent U.S./NATO infrastructure in Poland have put forward several arguments against it. In brief, these can be summarized as:

- ⦿ Don't reward political leaders in Warsaw;

- ⦿ Don't risk a security spiral;
- ⦿ Don't go if Poland is not ready;
- ⦿ Don't undermine NATO's political unity.

Accepted as true, any argument against permanent infrastructure must offer an alternative that improves upon the status quo, offers equal or greater benefits (i.e. greater deterrence, greater ballast, and greater burden-sharing), and fulfills the requirements of NRFA—now that Russia is in violation of its covenants. On their own, or in combination, none of the counterarguments reach this mark.

Any variation on the **first argument** clearly puts politics over the long-term security needs of the Euro-Atlantic region.¹¹ In the case of Poland specifically, positive moves toward permanent infrastructure would benefit all sides of the Polish political spectrum. The (ruling) PiS and (opposition) PO parties may disagree on many topics—but permanent infrastructure is not one of them. A permanent U.S. military presence

in Poland is a non-partisan issue. If/when permanent infrastructure is finally established, all sides can and should claim the historic victory since they supported it from the start.

The **second argument** is equally important to refute.¹² As noted previously, Russia has divorced itself from its treaty-bound commitment to a 21st century security architecture based on democracy, the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the CFE Treaty, the Vienna Document, etc. It has invaded neighbors, threatened them with nuclear weapons, militarized its border with NATO, and offered a competing security architecture for Europe based on the principles of “might makes right” and spheres of influence. Endless European war will result if Russia succeeds in establishing its competing architecture. What is more, the security spiral argument accepts the Kremlin’s reasoning as true: that only Russia may feel threatened by NATO, but NATO cannot feel threatened by Russia. As has been recently noted, there is already a “Ft. Putin” in Kaliningrad, Ukraine, Georgia, and in Syria. Russia has taken four major moves on the geopolitical board—all without a permanent answer by our side.¹³ It also ignores the fact that previous attempts to avoid a security spiral with Russia only invited greater warfare by the Kremlin and the death of 10,000-12,000 soldiers and citizens in Ukraine.¹⁴ Finally, Russia knows that it can immediately return the European theater to a state of tranquility by keeping faith with its covenants and also withdrawing from all sovereign Ukrainian (and Georgian) territory. Alas, Russia refuses to do so. By contrast, the Kremlin has threatened to increase its presence in Belarus and the Western Military District still more—even if Allies keep to the letter of the Founding Act on their force posture.

The sad fact is: the security spiral is already underway. Russia is accelerating this spiral because it enjoys a permissive environment to do so. This must change.

The **third argument** is certainly a valid one from the perspective of readiness.¹⁵ If U.S. forces are going to be permanently located in Poland, then they will need room to train, shoot, and maneuver. Forces in Poland must not develop the readiness of a sleepy, sedentary garrison. Rather, they should be a rough-and-ready force that is prepared to engage any threat—large or small—to the territorial integrity of NATO. Here, there are encouraging signs, including the Polish government’s obvious willingness to improve its existing facilities to meet U.S. Army needs, as well as its expressed intention to address additional requirements that the Pentagon might have for troops. If the issue is one of ‘Poland being ready’ to immediately accept permanent forces, then this is an eminently fixable challenge—not a deal breaker.

Addressing the **fourth argument** will be just as much of a task for diplomats as for generals.¹⁶ There should be no doubt: the political unity of NATO (i.e. its cohesion) is the Alliance’s strongest defense against potential adversaries. On this unity rests the remainder of our capabilities, contingencies, and deterrents. NATO cohesion is under stress today, yet it has suffered strains before. During the Obama Administration, for example, some early policy moves by the United States gave the impression to Allies that Washington was offering one-sided deals to Russia over their heads. This put a great deal of pressure on NATO’s cohesion.¹⁷ Fast-forward to today. Russia is actively using disinformation and influence operations to divide Allies against each other with the goal of weakening NATO’s

unity. Going forward, one risk is that the permanent infrastructure debate becomes a cleavage point within the Alliance—something that Russia will try to exploit. Under certain circumstances, a decline in NATO’s political unity could be aggravated if: (1) America (again) appeared to act unilaterally over the heads of Allies; and/or (2) the Pentagon executed a sudden relocation of permanent units from Germany to Poland. (Current bases in Germany are a center of gravity for worldwide U.S. military operations. It is neither feasible nor

environment. Doing so will prepare them for a greater, potentially costlier, and longer-term competition over the horizon: China.

No Two Fronts

The real elephant in the room over the permanent infrastructure debate in Europe is not Russia, but China. This may seem counterintuitive at first. But by neglecting strategic deficiencies in one part of the world (Europe), the United States could weaken itself for Great Power competition in another (Asia).

“Permanent infrastructure will move us beyond NATO’s traditional focus on defense-in-depth.”

In the 21st century, a conflict between the United States and China is absolutely avoidable. Unfortunately, the potential for some form of military dispute with Beijing cannot be discounted. If such a crisis were to escalate into an actual conflict, it could require the United States to mobilize national resources on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War—and potentially not since World War II. Most importantly, the United States will almost certainly not be going it alone in a Pacific conflict. It will need European Allies.

Under the guidance of the new National Security Strategy, the Pentagon is preparing for this potential future with:

practical to transplant the infrastructure.) The key for Washington is to avoid these pitfalls and consult with Allies. Finally, it is important to note: permanent infrastructure in Poland and Germany is not an either/or proposition. The United States can and should make the case for both.

- ⌚ New thinking on contingencies;
- ⌚ Updated operational plans;
- ⌚ Associated changes in military end strength; and
- ⌚ Modernization for high-end conflict against peer- and near-peer adversaries.

In all, it is certainly possible to answer the well-meaning criticism of permanent infrastructure in Poland with reasonable solutions. Done correctly, the United States, Poland, and all members of the Alliance can “fix” the current deficiencies in the European security

While the United States does not seek war with Russia or China, it must nevertheless grapple with a two-pronged problem: (1) in



An M1A2 Main Battle Tank in Poland. Photo Credit: Staff Sgt. Micah VanDyke / U.S. Army.

order to compete with China, we (2) must “fix” the defense of Europe. This means foreclosing on the smallest possibility that Russia could use any attention in Asia as an opening to test the fortifications of NATO. “Fixing” this problem in Europe can therefore be achieved with greater deterrence, greater ballast in our bilateral relationships, and greater burden-sharing—all benefits that permanent infrastructure can achieve. Best of all, this move would simultaneously support *all* 11 “defense objectives” listed in the National Defense Strategy—making for a safer and more secure Europe.

What now?

There is good news here. We are off to an encouraging start when it comes to aligning finite resources with national/NATO aims.

Presently, the Pentagon is setting the European theater with:

- ② The prepositioned stocks needed for a full Army division (located in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Poland). This includes the equipment for a full brigade in Powidz, Poland, along with nearly 800 U.S. Army personnel who facilitate in-country logistics.
- ② A Division Tactical Command Post (known as a “Mission Command Element” in Army parlance) located in Poznań, Poland. Ideally, this should be expanded into a full Divisional Headquarters as the Army’s overall force structure expands.

Coupled with some additional steps, the United States will have a lot more firepower, mobility, and lethality which are required to better deter Russia.¹⁸ These include:

- ⦿ Combat Aviation Brigade rotations (funded & underway);
- ⦿ New integrated Air and Missile Defense enhancements (funded & planned);
- ⦿ New Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance initiatives (funded & planned); and
- ⦿ New allocations to Europe of highly-coveted smart weapons (funded & planned);

The question is: what do we do with these and other forces? Here, we have a tremendous opportunity. With an eye to updating force posture in the East, the unifying focus on both sides of the Atlantic can now be directed at finding new ways for:

- ⦿ Making these developments *permanent*;
- ⦿ Identifying how to best *combine* permanent U.S. infrastructure & new Allied capabilities (i.e. JAASM, IFVs, HIMARs, rotary wing, etc.); and
- ⦿ Increasing the overall political unity of the Alliance.

Tour of Duty

On the menu card of basing and troop assignment options to Poland, assigning permanent U.S./NATO units to Poland, with troops on AOO tour orders are likely the most actionable “good fit” solution for permanent force posture. These forces could then be located at existing Allied facilities in Poland. When it comes to the types of orders, such an approach would allow the United States to take a page from the playbook in Korea—gaining major cost savings as a bonus. Indeed, not having to build new infrastructure from scratch

is one attractive aspect of this option. In most cases, facilities already exist. Nevertheless, some locations may need to be improved now (and in the future) to meet the requirements of U.S. forces.

Notably, the above option is not entirely like Korea. Presently, U.S. forces are assigned to that theater in a mixed fashion. Indeed, some units are deployed there on heel-to-toe rotations for a set timeframe. (This is akin to the rotational forces deployed to Afghanistan and to CEE under Operation Atlantic Resolve.) That said, most of the forces in Korea are not rotational. Rather, U.S. soldiers are issued orders for a tour with a permanently assigned unit in Korea. Individual soldiers may come and go, but the unit itself remains in place. Within these permanent units, a soldier’s tour is typically from 1 to 2 years (depending on their assignment/family status, and/or individual requests).

Permanently assigned units in South Korea bring tremendous advantages to:

- ⦿ Washington’s ability to project power in Asia;
- ⦿ The deterrence of regional threats;
- ⦿ The stability and geostrategic orientation of South Korea;
- ⦿ The maintenance of local political relationships that ensure the sustainability of essential intelligence-sharing and related allied operations; and
- ⦿ Increased interoperability with Republic of Korea (ROK) forces, which deepen with habitual unit assignments (not constant unit changes).

These are all gains that permanent infrastructure in Poland would grant to



Polish and U.S. soldiers in Poland in 2014. Photo Credit: Sgt. A.M. LaVey / U.S. Army Europe.

the United States. Such benefits would be welcomed and needed.

Around the world, not all duty stations can support accompanying families for soldiers who are on an extended overseas tour. However, an AOO tour is just that—a tour. It is not an exile. Families can—and do—visit. What is more, an AOO tour is not unique to Korea. As noted earlier, this option is already being used to station the U.S. Aviation Detachment at Łask Air Base in Poland. Comprised of airmen who are on a tour with a permanent U.S. unit operating from a Polish base, it represents a model that the Pentagon should explore for larger force posture options in Poland.

If Pentagon planners opted to apply the AOO concept to wider Poland, they would need to house, feed, and train soldiers in theater. Here too, existing practices by the Pentagon offer

a solution. There is, for example, already a template being employed to support the U.S. missile defense mission under the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). In Poland (and in Romania) under EPAA, U.S. personnel, classified technology, and equipment are all stationed on host-country military installations. Rather than recreating Ramstein in Poland, the Pentagon could “nest” a fires, armored, or infantry brigade in much the same way that it is already “nesting” EPAA assets and personnel in theater. Like EPAA, U.S. forces could be plugged into the permanent infrastructure that already exists in Poland.

Added benefits abound. In Trondheim, Norway, for example, the Marine Corps has already shown how placing U.S. forces alongside Allies at host-country installations can be successful. In Norway, Marines live, work, and eat, as well as train with the weapons of their Norwegian

counterparts at the firing range. When it comes to working alongside forces with whom we might one day have to fight beside, the Trondheim example indicates just how effective it could be to “mix” U.S. and Polish forces together in one location. Transplanting this concept to Poland could be feasible; and it would make the best and highest use of Warsaw’s offer to provide \$1-2 billion in financial assistance to make it happen. Such funds could be employed to not only to bring local facilities in line with Army standards (if needed), but they could also be used to greatly expand and improve upon associated training grounds and ranges in Poland. This would help to ensure a high state of readiness for permanent forces in Poland—and it is cheaper than replicating Ramstein.

Once the initial phase of deploying U.S. forces to permanent infrastructure in Poland is complete, the Army can next look to Korea for additional models of improving its warfighting with an in-theater Ally. Last year in Korea, for example, the Eighth Army and the Third ROK Army established the first ever ROK-U.S. Combined Division. This could be a great next step for the United States and Poland to consider. After all, Poland has more active and capable divisions than Germany. Poland is increasing the readiness of its three existing divisions, and recently the Polish Defense Ministry has called for establishment of a 4th Division structure. Still, this is where Poland can also assist the United States. Currently, its own divisions need to move to a much higher readiness level. What’s more, the positioning of U.S. forces in Poland will also require more flexibility and adjustment from Poland. For example, it is exceptionally difficult to secure approval from Poland for live fire training in joint and combined arms at their national facilities. Warsaw should swiftly address this unwanted and avoidable deficiency by allowing the U.S.

Army to train as realistically in Poland as it does at Grafenwöhr, Germany. The good news here: all of these issues can be addressed in a bilateral agreement that outlines U.S. support, sustainment, training, and operational requirements for permanent American units in Poland.

“Moving east of Berlin is only a start. Permanent infrastructure must be considered the next step—not the last step—toward deterring Russia.”

One argument against the Korean model is readiness. Because individual soldiers are rotating into and out of their permanent units (typically on a monthly basis), the Army faces the constant challenge of keeping its forces sharp and ready for a fight. Each month, the pool of experienced soldiers in Korea is partially replaced by new arrivals. Because the mission in Korea is so important, however, the Army has nevertheless been able to engage and overcome this readiness challenge. The lesson here: high readiness can be achieved when the mission is a crucial one. This lesson is applicable to Poland.

Conclusion

It is now time to update the Alliance's permanent presence on the Eastern Flank, starting with Poland. Maximizing deterrence against an increasingly aggressive Russia, and adding substantial assurance to Poland and CEE allies are the priority reasons, but there are manifold additional benefits to the U.S., Poland, and NATO:

(1) Washington will be in an unparalleled position to leverage its force posture with important additional access for rapid response in the region and beyond—and it can be a stimulating factor for U.S.-EU synchronization for improving dual-use infrastructure with real military value in Europe;

(2) After taking the plunge on a permanent force posture in Poland, the United States and Poland can significantly deepen the interoperability at the soldier-soldier and unit-unit level, and of equipment—fielding the most modern weapons systems NATO's inventory;

(3) Building up permanent forces in country creates unique opportunities for joint training, live-fire exercises, and unit partnerships. The Pentagon already has a number of unit partnerships at various echelons with Allies. Even without deploying a permanent division to Poland, increasing the size of the Mission Command Element in Poznań to a division staff level allows for many untapped advantages.

These include: increased cooperation and interoperability at the staff level and new partnering opportunities with the rare European Ally which possesses real division structures. CEPA analysis has determined the need for the U.S. Army to, at a minimum, permanently position a division staff, a heavy/armor brigade, and associated enabling units. These will significantly improve the United States and Poland's combat capabilities, and that of other regional Allies.

Moving east of Berlin is only a start. Permanent infrastructure and forces must be considered the next step—not the last step—toward deterring Russia. In taking that step, we would send a resounding message to Allies of America's unbreakable commitment to the region.

Finally, a permanent U.S. military presence in Poland would provide greater responsiveness for all of NATO and vital increased interoperability with regional armies. It would communicate the staying power and political will to resist Russian aggression against any covenant Ally. And by taking this action now, the United States can significantly fortify Europe against the troubling uncertainties that we are facing in the 21st century. Making the move toward permanent presence does not have to come at the cost of political unity within the Alliance; and it will improve the security of the entire European theater. This dramatically increases our prospects for peace.

Endnotes

- 1 Obviously, multiple basing concepts exist, not just the ones noted in the text. The highlighted concepts and approaches are the ones, which are particularly applicable to the CEE debate over force posture.
- 2 “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation,” May 27, 1997. https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.
- 3 Brian Whitmore, “Putin’s Dark Ecosystem,” *Center for European Policy Analysis*, September 20, 2018.
- 4 Russia has not confirmed if its deployment of Iskander tactical ballistic missiles in either location are the nuclear variant. It is sufficient to state that Russia’s Iskander capabilities in Kaliningrad and Crimea are WMD-capable. Briefing, Polish Ministry of Defense, Suwałki Corridor, March 12, 2018. See also: *UNIAN*, “Russia amasses 32,000 troops, Iskander and S400 systems in Crimea – Ukraine,” April 24, 2018. See also: Transcript, “Department of Defense Press Briefing by Gen. Breedlove in the Pentagon, Briefing Room, General Philip Breedlove, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe and commander of United States European Command,” *Department of Defense*, February 25, 2015.
- 5 Peter B. Doran and Marta Sikorski, “Issue Brief No. 133: Crisis in Crimea: Four Scenarios,” *Center for European Policy Analysis*, March 3, 2014.
- 6 The NRFA clearly envisioned that the CFE Treaty would help to govern and define these needs—but Russia has suspended its participation in this Treaty. This has not only altered the strategic conditions of 1997, but also limited that document’s utility as a guide for what “legitimate security needs” might be. Allies are free to determine these needs as they see fit. *Ibid.*, “Founding Act.”
- 7 Jim Townsend, “Fort Trump Is a Farce,” *Foreign Policy*, October 8, 2018.
- 8 Jakub Grygiel, A. Wess Mitchell, “A Preclusive Strategy to Defend the NATO Frontier,” *The American Interest*, December 2, 2014. See also: Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, and Peter Doran, “Securing the Suwałki Corridor: Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defense,” *Center for European Policy*, July 2018.
- 9 *Ibid.*, “Securing the Suwałki Corridor.”
- 10 Ben Hodges and Carsten Schmiedl, “Targeting 2%: Logistics of a More Sophisticated Approach to Burden-Sharing,” *Center for European Policy Analysis*, September 24, 2018.
- 11 A representative sentiment: Tomasz Siemoniak, Twitter Post. September 28, 2018, 4:42 PM. <https://twitter.com/TomaszSiemoniak/status/1042151789179674624>.
- 12 Michael Kofman, “Permanently Stationing U.S. Forces in Poland is a Bad Idea, But one Worth Debating,” *War on the Rocks*, September 12, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/permanently-stationing-u-s-forces-in-poland-is-a-bad-idea-but-one-worth-debating/>.

13 For views from the U.S. side, see: Randall Palmer, David Ljunggren, “NATO Commander Says Must Consider Permanent Troops in Eastern Europe,” Reuters, May 6, 2014.

14 For an excellent description of how this dynamic has unfolded, see the testimony of Assistant Secretary A. Wess Mitchell, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, August 21, 2018. https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/us_russia-relations-082118

15 Agence France-Presse, “US Army Head: Poland May Not Be Ready for ‘Fort Trump,’” September 19, 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-army-head-poland-may-not-be-ready-for-fort-trump-/4578714.html>.

16 John Vandiver, “Former Army Europe boss: Pulling US troops from Germany would be a big win for Russia,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 2, 2018. <https://www.stripes.com/news/former-army-europe-boss-pulling-us-troops-from-germany-would-be-a-big-win-for-russia-1.535699>

17 This was eloquently expressed in “An Open Letter to The Obama Administration From Central And Eastern Europe,” July 16, 2009. https://www.rferl.org/a/An_Open_Letter_To_The_Obama_Administration_From_Central_And_Eastern_Europe/1778449.html.

18 For more on these steps, see LTG James F. Pasquaretti’s Keynote address to the 2018 CEPA Forum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=983&v=EkUdklyjmg4.



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