

# Strategy Research Project

## Enhancing NATO Interoperability

by

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United States Army War College  
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Enhancing NATO Interoperability**

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## **Abstract**

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As the United States rebalances its efforts to the Asia Pacific Region it must reassess its alliance relationships in other parts of the world. The most enduring of these alliances is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO has proven to be a steadfast partner of the United States for the past 60 years. To ensure this relationship remains relevant well into the future requires enhanced military interoperability amongst alliance members, and the United States must play a prominent role. Three meaningful ways to achieve the goal of an enhanced interoperable capability in the landpower and joint arenas include: the development of stronger military-to-military relationships utilizing U.S. units currently stationed in Europe, in consonance with other available reinforcements, such as the National Guard State Partnership Program;; the integration of alliance and partner officers and non-commissioned officers into joint training centers, such as the Joint Multinational Readiness Center; and the further development of the NATO Response Force training and certification program as a multinational, multi-echelon capstone event that challenges command control and communications across the European continent at a minimum.



## **Enhancing NATO Interoperability**

Developing a relationship on the battlefield in the midst of a crisis with someone I have never met before can be very challenging... Trust has to be built over time. You can't surge trust.

—Admiral Mike Mullen<sup>1</sup>

The strategic interests of the United States will ultimately determine where and how it commits its elements of national power. As the United States rebalances its military force after 10 years of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan it must reevaluate where and how to apply its finite resources to remain an effective and relevant applicator of national power. Rebalancing resources to the Asia Pacific Rim, without sacrificing America's security interests in other parts of the world requires the military to maximize the resources it can generate and the relationships it possesses. In the case of Europe this requires the United States to review its relationships with its North American Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and further build an interoperable and credible multinational force that will endure for decades to come.

The official NATO website defines interoperability "as the ability for Allies to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational and strategic objectives."<sup>2</sup> Building an enduring interoperability requires the United States to reinvigorate partnerships as low as the ground maneuver battalion and brigade level, which can be accomplished using European based units and facilities. This interoperability enhancement can be achieved through more effective partnering of the remaining U.S. forces in Europe with similar units from other NATO countries, fully integrating alliance members into the combat training center at Hohenfels, Germany, and using the NATO Response Force train-up as a multinational and multi-echelon capstone exercise. These recommendations are examples of tactical initiatives that

have strategic import: building this interoperability ensures our allies are as well prepared as any other alliance country for combat operations. It also increases the chances that all will both be available and ready when called and maintain the political resolve required to fulfill common operational requirements.

Through the application of an Ends, Ways, and Means approach, this project will demonstrate how the United States can, through interoperability enhancements, maintain an influence in Europe that ensures trained and committed allies and strategic partners for years to come.

### The Desired Ends

The U.S. military, as an element of national power, is instrumental to securing U.S. interests around the world. To determine the role the military will play in advancing U.S. interests one must first look to the objectives the Nation desires to attain. This end state can be obtained from several different sources starting with the President and the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS, in general terms, reaffirms the Nation's interests, and provides general guidance for how those interests will be achieved. Supporting and supplemental documents to the NSS often outline more specifically the ways and means for achieving the objectives or ends defined by the President.

The U.S. NSS published in May 2010 focuses on “renewing American leadership so that we can more effectively advance our interests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>3</sup> It calls for a renewed commitment to the economy to “lay the foundation for long term growth and competitiveness of Americans.”<sup>4</sup> This NSS commits to rebuilding infrastructure that will be more reliable and secure in the face of terrorist threats and natural disasters. It also calls for the building of a stronger foundation of leaders in the United States to “promote

the values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law to maintain U.S. strength and influence in the world.”<sup>5</sup> It is through this foundation that the United States can help to shape an international system that is capable of meeting future challenges. The opening pages of the NSS leave little doubt that to advance American interests the United States must be engaged abroad. It calls for the United States not to walk away from the international system, but to strengthen international institutions as part of a collective effort to achieve common interests. The necessity of American participation in the international system is spelled out in America’s enduring interests:

- The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;
- A strong innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
- Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
- An international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.<sup>6</sup>

Focused abroad, but with domestic consequences, each of these enduring interests requires engagement by at least one of the elements of national power beyond the borders of the United States to facilitate success. Two years after the 2010 NSS was published with these enduring interests, President Obama reinforced the importance of America’s leadership in the international system in *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, which states:

We seek the security of our Nation, allies and partners. We seek the prosperity that flows from an open and free international economic system. And we seek a just and sustainable international order where the

rights and responsibilities of nations and people are upheld, especially the fundamental rights of every human being.<sup>7</sup>

*Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense* initially discusses the need to rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, citing stability and growth of the region as primary motivators. It further outlines future relations with China and the Middle East. It is two pages before Europe is mentioned as the United States' "principal partner in seeking global and economic security."<sup>8</sup> It later indicates that "the United States has enduring interests in supporting peace and the prosperity in Europe as well as bolstering the strength and vitality of NATO, which is essential to the security of Europe and beyond".<sup>9</sup> While these statements are powerful, their placement in the document and the references to rebalancing away from Europe give the impression of a diminished interest in that continent. This may be of concern to those nations that have, according to the President of the United States, been part of "the most successful alliance in human history."<sup>10</sup>

## The Means

### NATO as a Diminishing Means?

*Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense* identifies that the United States must alter its posture in Europe to keep up with the "evolving strategic landscape."<sup>11</sup> It emphasizes that "we will work with NATO allies to develop a "Smart Defense" approach to pool, share and specialized capabilities as needed to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges."<sup>12</sup>

This too could be interpreted by the European community as a diminished interest in the region. America's deeds, at least on the surface, do not align with its words. Our allies and partners in Europe are left with many questions about what this

means for the future security of the region. What is the “evolving strategic landscape”? The Cold War ended over 20 years ago, and the United States has continued to draw down its military presence in Europe since that time. America has maintained a presence in Europe for the last 60 years. How, if at all, will a further reduction in combat forces impact its ability to meet NATO Charter obligations? Further, how does the Smart Defense impact readiness? NATO has always pooled resources and shared specialized capabilities. In the past, many of these resources and capabilities have been American-provided. Who now is going to provide the resources to pool and the specialized capabilities required to maintain a secure continent?

While it is true there are considerably fewer U.S. forces in Europe than 20 years ago, the commitment to NATO remains unwavering. *Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* comments further that for the United States to be successful in building and sustaining partnerships it must, whenever possible, “develop low-cost innovative approaches.”<sup>13</sup> Still, the United States must better align its deeds with its words in order to maintain credibility with those who have sacrificed alongside Americans in the past.

Since the formation of NATO, many American politicians have argued that the United States bears an unfair responsibility for funding and resourcing the defense of their European allies. John Deni, former Political Advisor to the Commander, United States Army Europe, in his October 2012 article, *The Future of American Landpower: Does Forward Presence Still Matter? The Case of the Army in Europe*, points out that these politicians believe that if the United States were to withdraw its forces from Europe, then European countries would be obligated to step up defense spending. In fact, Deni points out, the opposite has occurred. Since the end of the Cold War,

European defense spending has largely decreased.<sup>14</sup> The table below charts defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) for the five largest militaries in NATO from the mid-1980s (and the end of the Cold War) through 2008. Since that time the United States has reduced its ground combat troop presence in Europe from 210,000 Soldiers to a current strength of around 40,000, with a goal of 30,000 by 2015. In that same time the United States has divested itself of more than 540 installations, and will return four more major bases by 2015.<sup>15</sup>

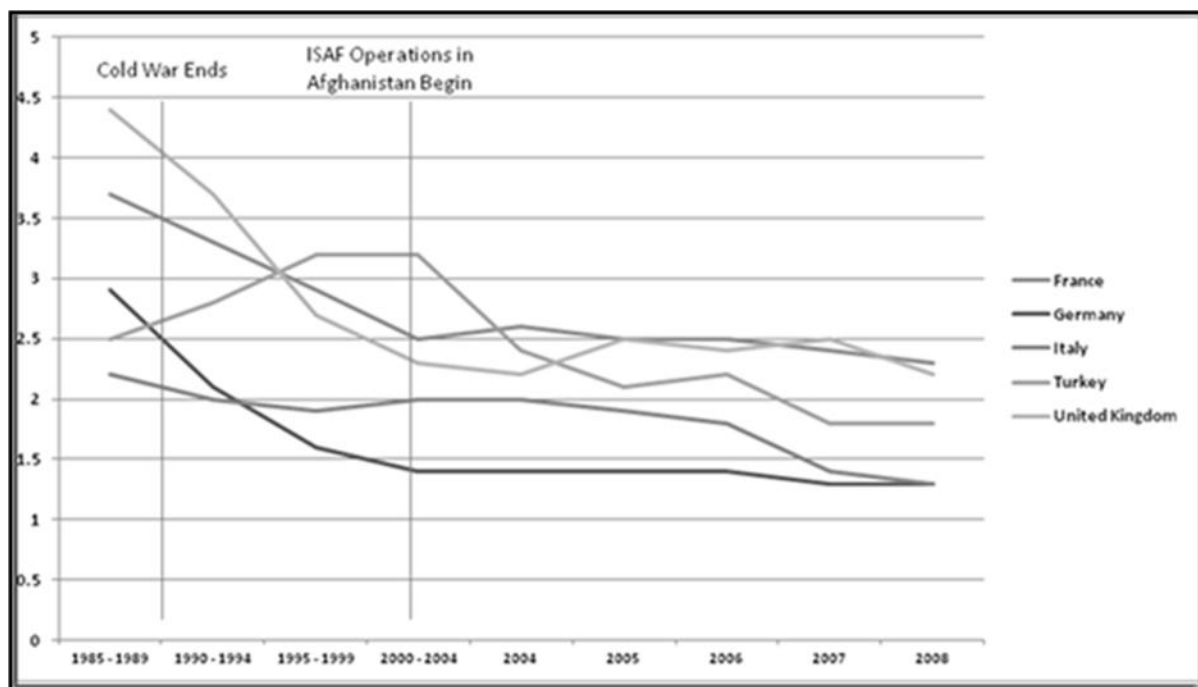


Figure 1: Military Spending as a Percentage of GDP for the Five Largest Militaries in NATO<sup>16</sup>

In a 2011 *Foreign Affairs* article, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen wrote:

Although defense is and must remain the prerogative of sovereign nations, an alliance that brings Europe and North America together requires an equitable sharing of the burden in order to be efficient. Downward trends in European defense budgets raise some legitimate concerns. At the current pace of cuts, it is hard to see how Europe could maintain enough military capabilities to sustain similar operations in the future. And this

touches on a fundamental challenge facing Europe and the alliance as a whole: how to avoid having the economic crisis degenerate into a security crisis. The way Europe responds to this challenge could determine its place in the global order and the future of security.<sup>17</sup>

Rasmussen's identification in the article of the fiscal constraints faced by European nations leads to the introduction of "Smart Defence", a concept that "lies not in spending more but in spending better."<sup>18</sup> Rasmussen states that Smart Defence "...means encouraging multinational cooperation. As the price of military equipment continues to rise, European states acting alone may struggle to afford high-tech weapons systems.... Here, NATO can act as a matchmaker, bringing nations together to identify what they can do jointly at a lower cost, more efficiently, and with less risk."<sup>19</sup>

With a smaller military presence in Europe and a general decrease in European defense spending, the United States must reevaluate how it can cost and resource effectively maintain confidence and credibility with its NATO allies. NATO is an available Means. However, with diminishing defense budgets and U.S. troop draw-downs, it requires more attention and creative partnering than ever before if the alliance is to last another 60 years.

#### NATO as an Available Means

Referring back to the 2010 NSS, Europe remains central to the security of the United States. The President referenced this in his NSS call for the Nation to "be steadfast in strengthening those old alliances that have served us so well, while modernizing them to meet the challenges of a new century."<sup>20</sup> The most steadfast and enduring of these alliances were those formed in the aftermath of the Second World War, specifically through the inception of NATO.

NATO was created on April 4, 1949, with the adoption of the Washington Treaty by 12 foreign ministers and centered around a mutual defense agreement.<sup>21</sup> Over the next 40 years NATO expanded minimally by adding just five members between 1952 and 1982. The inclusion of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1954 added a large military capability to the Alliance, although it also proved to be the catalyst for the formation of the Warsaw Pact seven months later in May 1955.<sup>22</sup>

It was at the end of the Cold War when many foresaw the decline in the usefulness of NATO. The Warsaw Pact had ceased to exist, and there was no other apparent existential threat on the continent. Despite this the alliance continued to grow, adding 12 new members since 1999, largely through the entry of new members which were formerly part of the Warsaw Pact, the coalition of countries against which NATO had generally aligned its forces. The German assimilation of the former East Germany as part of its 1990 reunification was the first signal that the former Warsaw Pact might grow towards the Alliance.<sup>23</sup> That so many nations believe NATO can be a means for advancing their interest demands that the United States continue to play a prominent role in this growing organization. If, as stated in the NSS, the United States truly believes Europe is their “principal partner in seeking global and economic security”,<sup>24</sup> then NATO is also a means for the United States to advance its national interests.

In his introduction to the *European Command 2012 Posture Statement*, Admiral Stavridis, the Commander of the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), reinforces this notion. He succinctly advocates the importance of U.S. presence in Europe in five areas. He cites the importance of European economics; Europe’s geostrategic location, the NATO Alliance, shared values, and the United States’ long standing leadership and

engagement on the continent.<sup>25</sup> The EUCOM mission statement ties these tasks together where it states:

The mission of the U.S. European Command is to conduct military operations, international military engagement, and interagency partnering to enhance transatlantic security and defend the United States forward.<sup>26</sup>

At the conclusion of his introduction Admiral Stavridis reaffirms his belief in a long enduring partnership with the European nations when he states, “As I have said many times throughout the years, and believe now more firmly than ever, we are *stronger together* with our European partners”.<sup>27</sup> This statement validates the contributions U.S. allies have made the past 60 years, but most significantly in the last 20 years. Clearly, a strong and relevant NATO is of import to the United States as it rebalances to the Pacific.

#### NATO as an Active Means

Following the September 11 attacks by Al Qaida, the alliance joined the United States in what has become the most significant and enduring operation NATO forces have ever conducted. NATO allies have shown great resolve in Afghanistan, regardless of when they joined the alliance. Of the top 15 NATO contributing countries to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), seven joined after the Cold War, demonstrating their immediate and full commitment to the alliance. Although the United Kingdom and the United States provide nearly 80% of the forces in Afghanistan, every country in NATO is providing troops to the mission.<sup>28</sup> The United States must now ensure that the level of support demonstrated in Afghanistan is available in the future by maximizing its efforts to maintain then shape the alliance so it is trained and ready to meet challenges of the future. This is most effectively achieved by developing greater interoperability amongst the alliance, with the United States assuming a prominent role.

## Interoperability Challenges

In his 2011 *Foreign Affairs* article Secretary General Rasmussen further stated that, “European countries can help bridge the gap with the United States by increasing their contribution of two ingredients, deployable and sustainable capabilities, as well as mustering the political resolve to use them”.<sup>29</sup>

Bridging this gap requires U.S. participation. The United States has both the resources and knowledge of how to deploy a force and then sustain it for extended periods of time and can, when necessary, muster the political resolve to use it. Deploying and sustaining a force involves tasks with tangible results. A force either arrives where it will conduct operations or it does not. It is either supplied with the equipment it needs or it goes without. Political resolve is much less tangible. It is subject to the interests of individual nations and their assessment of whether the cost in blood and treasure is worth the stated objectives.

One of the greatest challenges to national resolve is when the population believes the cost and blood and treasure is not worth the stated ends. Graphic real-time images and increased combat zone connectivity brings unprecedented public pressure on politicians to end conflicts in far away locations. Like any alliance between sovereign nations, political resolve varies according to the desired objectives of each individual nation. When a nation feels that employment of a military force no longer supports its interests it will withdraw from the alliance or fulfill its obligations with as little effort as possible. In some cases the death of a single Soldier is the catalyst for withdrawal discussions. Medical operations in Afghanistan have already demonstrated unprecedented, but still lagging, interoperability amongst ISAF nations. Since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan medical advances both on the battlefield and at

home station have been remarkable. Other armies, although benefiting from aero-medevac and U.S. military hospitals, have lacked tactical medical training and equipment. It is impossible to gauge if U.S. advances in combat medicine have helped to maintain ISAF's resolve in Afghanistan, but it certainly has not hurt. Developing medical interoperability before the next conflict is only one way to ensure resolve in the next fight. It is one of those gaps, referred to by Secretary General Rasmussen, in which the United States can take the lead.

The Ways for achieving the Ends described in the NSS must evolve with the changing and diminishing Means. The United States must establish a "new normal" with its NATO partners that genuinely increases interoperability to a point where the national flag worn on a uniform is immaterial to mission accomplishment. In a speech at the Foreign Press Center in Washington D.C. in January 2012, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phillip Gordon reinforced the "trans-Atlantic relationship as an essential source of stability in an unpredictable world."<sup>30</sup> He also emphasized "the need to continue enhancing U.S. cooperation and interoperability with European partners to maintain this commitment and address global challenges."<sup>31</sup>

Joint Publication 1-02 defines interoperability as, "The ability to operate in synergy in the execution of assigned tasks."<sup>32</sup> Developing interoperability in a constrained environment, even amongst our closest allies requires new and innovative approaches to partnership, and demands more effective and efficient training models for more transparent combat operations. Developing synergy whether working in a multinational operating room or calling for close air support requires more than reading a manual or sharing a dining facility.

Referring again to the NATO website regarding interoperability; it describes a policy that “enables forces, units and/or systems to operate together and allows them to share common doctrine and procedures, each others’ infrastructure and bases, and to be able to communicate.”<sup>33</sup> Developing interoperability required to maintain an effective alliance requires frequent interaction and face to face contact in a more structured environment before a multinational force deploys to combat. Interoperability has been thrust upon ISAF forces in Afghanistan, initially at least, with generally poor results, as illustrated by the following vignette:

In 2007 in Ghazni province Afghanistan a company of Polish Infantry was responsible for, amongst other tasks, manning guard towers for an American Infantry battalion. Two rockets fired into the base were observed by one of the Polish towers. They immediately determined the point of origin and called it to their company command post. In turn the company command post translated the position into English and called the American Infantry Battalion Tactical Operations Center. This information was relayed to the Battalion Fires Effects Cell, where clearance of fire for both the Poles and American forces commenced. It took over 30 minutes to clear fires because the Polish Company did not understand the task and their visually identified point of origin was more than 400 meters from the electronically acquired point of origin. After clearance had been achieved, the call for fire mission was relayed back to the Polish company command post and to the tower to observe for effects. Again, delays ensued as it was explained first in English, then in Polish to the command post and the tower. After another 30 minutes the American Battalion Commander cancelled the counter-fire mission.<sup>34</sup>

After this event the American battalion commander conducted an After Action Review to determine the causes for the delayed and ultimately cancelled counter-fire mission. He found several reasons for the delay:

- language differences that included military terminology
- lack of common call for fire procedures

- lack of common target reference points known to the tower guards and the command posts
- misunderstandings of national caveats

The battalion commander immediately directed measures to reduce the time required in counter-fire missions. The plan required the execution of several simultaneous tasks. The commander's first task was to establish better personal relationships, hoping it would lead to greater trust and understanding, with the Polish officers. He further requested Polish Soldiers participate in counter-fire battle drills in the tactical operations center, demonstrating to them the capabilities of the bases indirect fire acquisition and surveillance systems. As a result of this review, panoramic images of the terrain were placed in towers and in command centers that established common target reference points when calling for and adjusting fires.<sup>35</sup>

All the issues identified by the battalion commander could have been addressed with a better appreciation for the capabilities of each force. This appreciation should have been developed before the countries were fighting along-side one other and relying on each other in one of the most dangerous locations in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the Polish Infantry company rotated out of theater shortly after the two units had achieved a small degree of interoperability. The battalion commander immediately seized the opportunity with the new Polish Infantry company to ensure they were more integrated by applying previously learned lessons.<sup>36</sup> The American battalion, based in the United States, had not had the opportunity to work with their Polish Army counterparts prior to deployment. A lack of cultural empathy, misunderstanding of national caveats and limited understanding of force capabilities led to this relatively

minor incident. It is decidedly not an example of the desired interoperability referenced by NATO or the Joint Publication 1-02.

A tangible yet of often overlooked benefit of developing interoperability and relationships at the lowest level is the continuity it provides NATO in the long term. Battalion and brigade level commanders from America's NATO allies are the future general officers of their armies. These commanders will retain lessons learned as they advance through the ranks and it will become the standard for NATO operations. They have an understanding of policies and procedures and know friends they made long ago are a phone call or email away.

### A New Way

#### Enhancing Ground Combat Force Interoperability in Europe

The United States recently announced the return of all ground combat forces from Europe minus two Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs).<sup>37</sup> The BCTs remaining in Europe are the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), located in both Germany and Italy, and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment (CR) located in Germany. These Brigades, as with all European based American units, have had few genuine opportunities to train with NATO allies unless it was during a Mission Readiness Exercise (MRX) prior to a deployment to Afghanistan or Iraq. Relationships built at the BCT or battalion level with host nation forces or other NATO allies is encouraged but is neither formalized nor funded. It is generally left to the discretion of each commander to select and nurture partnerships based on personal preference, unit location, or type of unit.<sup>38</sup> Daily garrison interaction with allies is virtually non-existent. In general, customs, courtesies, and capabilities are not understood. This is partially a result of the training and preparation cycle American units undergo prior to deployment, and partially a result of

American arrogance. There is very little time for a deploying unit to do anything other than training prescribed by higher headquarters, and time spent with a unit with a foreign unit is generally considered to be time not well spent. With the drawdown in Afghanistan, Europe based units will not be as constrained by pre-deployment requirements. Using this time wisely allows for enhanced interoperability during the next operational employment of NATO forces.

Few American service members stationed either in the United States or Europe have the opportunity to work with foreign armies until they are themselves sharing a base in a combat zone. This often leading to misunderstandings or worse, mistrust when the consequences are most significant. American service members remaining in Europe must use every opportunity to develop relationships, language proficiency, and cultural understanding. They must promulgate this throughout the remainder of the force to remove the curiosity and suspicion when meeting allies in a combat zone. In his 2012 Posture Statement submitted for the U.S. Congress, Admiral Stavridis cited the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Teams' (ABCT) Full Spectrum Training Event (FSTE), a field training exercise held at Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in October 2011, as an engagement where "multinational training events reinforce U.S. leadership in NATO, enhances interoperability and strengthens key theater relationships."<sup>39</sup> While training events like this and others listed in the 2012 EUCOM Posture Statement are a good start towards interoperability, they are most effective if these relationships are maintained following the event. The 173<sup>rd</sup> ABCT returned to the same training area for another training exercise 5 months later, with none of the multinational partners from the previous FSTE.<sup>40</sup>

One solution for more timely development of these relationships is to require the Europe-based units to maintain formalized training relationships with similar units in allied countries. The size of the commitment, in terms of funding and size of the force and training exercises would be determined by the EUCOM commander's priorities for engagement. Once aligned, with a relatively little funding units conduct a variety of events to promote interoperability, cultural understanding and build long term personal relationships. These events range from large to small and can include:

- Full spectrum training exercises conducted at a variety of training areas in Europe
- Company Sized Reciprocal Unit Exchanges
- Individual personnel (officer and NCO) exchanges
- Marksmanship / Crew-served Weapon Gunnery Competitions
- Dining Ins / Dining Outs
- Parachute Jump Exchanges
- Guest speaker exchanges at military schools
- Skills competitions (Expert Infantryman Badge / Expert Field Medical Badge)
- Military schooling opportunities (Officer and NCO Professional Development, Mountain Warfare, Sniper, Counter IED)

An additional benefit to this alignment is the development of young staff officers. It forces coordination with foreign armies in planning and executing events. Working with embassies and Defense Attaches of their aligned countries broadens their experiences to a much greater degree than their peers stationed in the United States.

To ensure longevity requires a paradigm shift to the U.S. Army's personnel system. It is difficult to gain cultural understanding and language proficiency if Soldiers are rotated out of Europe every two to three years. Attempts should be made to stabilize Soldiers for at least a 5 year tour. Similar to the Special Forces' Group alignment, they should be returned as often as feasible to maintain their language proficiency, cultural understanding and personal relationships. Although this would not be possible for all Soldiers and officers, it would build a cadre of American service members comfortable operating with European armies.

This alignment would augment the U.S. National Guard State Partnership program referred to in Admiral Stavridis' Posture Statement and a *Military Review* article co-authored with Colonel Bart Howard, "Strengthening the Bridge: Building Partnership Capacity". In this article, Stavridis and Howard underpin the value of the State Partnership program in Europe when they state that "in the end, personal relationships trump everything, and are the key to our success."<sup>41</sup> While this program is key, the cost effectiveness of utilizing units and Soldiers stationed in Europe to develop the same personal relationships cannot be overlooked.

#### Making the Joint Readiness Training Center Truly Multinational

The EUCOM Posture Statement refers to the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMTC) in Grafenwohr, Germany as a "strategic asset" and the "linchpin for achieving vital theater objectives meeting the comprehensive security cooperation mission". Further it "enables a broad range of multinational training events that ensures U.S. and partner nation forces are well-prepared...for global contingencies."<sup>42</sup> The Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) at Hohenfels Germany, subordinate to the JMTC, is the U.S. military's only combat training center in Europe. Located in eastern

Bavaria, it has been a maneuver training center since 1938 when it was first used to train German units preparing for combat. Since the 1950's, the JMRC trained American infantry and armor maneuver battalions to combat the threat of the Warsaw Pact. Most recently, the JMRC has hosted Maneuver Rehearsal Exercises (MRXs) for units preparing to deploy to Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>43</sup> These units have comprised a mix of NATO forces. Other training exercises have included 1200 personnel from 18 different countries conducting Operational Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT) and Police Mentor Liaison Team (POMLT) training for deployment to Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> According to Mr. Chris Irwin, the JMRC Protocol Officer, since 2005 the installation alone has hosted over 170 foreign flag officers, Chiefs and Ministers of Defense, and parliamentary level civilians. In that same time representatives from nearly 50 countries visited the center to observe some aspect of the training environment.<sup>45</sup> Although each visit had a separate agenda the number of foreign visitors demonstrates JMRCs importance as America's allies strive for greater interoperability.

A critical aspect of any training event at the JMRC is the feedback facilitated by the eight Observer Controller (OC) Teams assigned to the Operations Group. Each team is comprised of hand selected American commissioned and non-commissioned officers who have successfully served in tactical unit of the same type and size of the organization they are tasked to observe. Feedback is provided to units in the form of both informal and formal AARs and is designed to allow the rotational unit to learn from their actions. The goal is that a unit, regardless of nationality, departs the JMRC better trained than when it arrived and prepared to fight and win in a combat zone. The AAR is a sensitive event: the unit members should feel that they can learn from their

mistakes without feeling as if they are being belittled, humiliated, or at risk of being relieved. It is particularly sensitive for foreign armies who have not experienced AARs in the past. For the AAR to be an effective learning tool requires rapport building and proficiency across a broad range of technical and tactical skills. As foreign units rotate through the training center it also requires a greater degree of cultural empathy and an understanding of foreign weapons and tactics. OCs develop themselves professionally through interaction with rotational units and through discussion with other officers and NCOs assigned to the center. Most OCs depart the JMRC to re-join regular Army units where their expertise often sets them apart from their peers. Many OCs depart having initiated relationships with their rotational counterparts that endure.<sup>46</sup>

Currently OC teams are comprised of only American personnel: there are limited opportunities for other countries to integrate into the existing teams. To further develop interoperability and subject matter expertise amongst our NATO allies there needs to be more multinational representation on the OC teams. A gradual integration of our NATO allies into the teams would develop deeper understanding, cultural awareness, and ensure interoperability into the future. It is also mutually beneficial for the United States Army and any army that participates: allied officers and non-commissioned officers will leave the training center with a greater understanding of how to integrate into the planning and execution process of the U.S. Army.

The first phase of this integration would assign NATO officers to key billets within the organization. This would include the Deputy Commander of the Operations Group, a position normally held by an Army senior lieutenant colonel. This assignment would place him as second in command of JMRC, and should be for a period of not less than

2 years. Integration would continue to the OC teams where alliance officers would assume executive officer positions, normally reserved for senior Army majors.

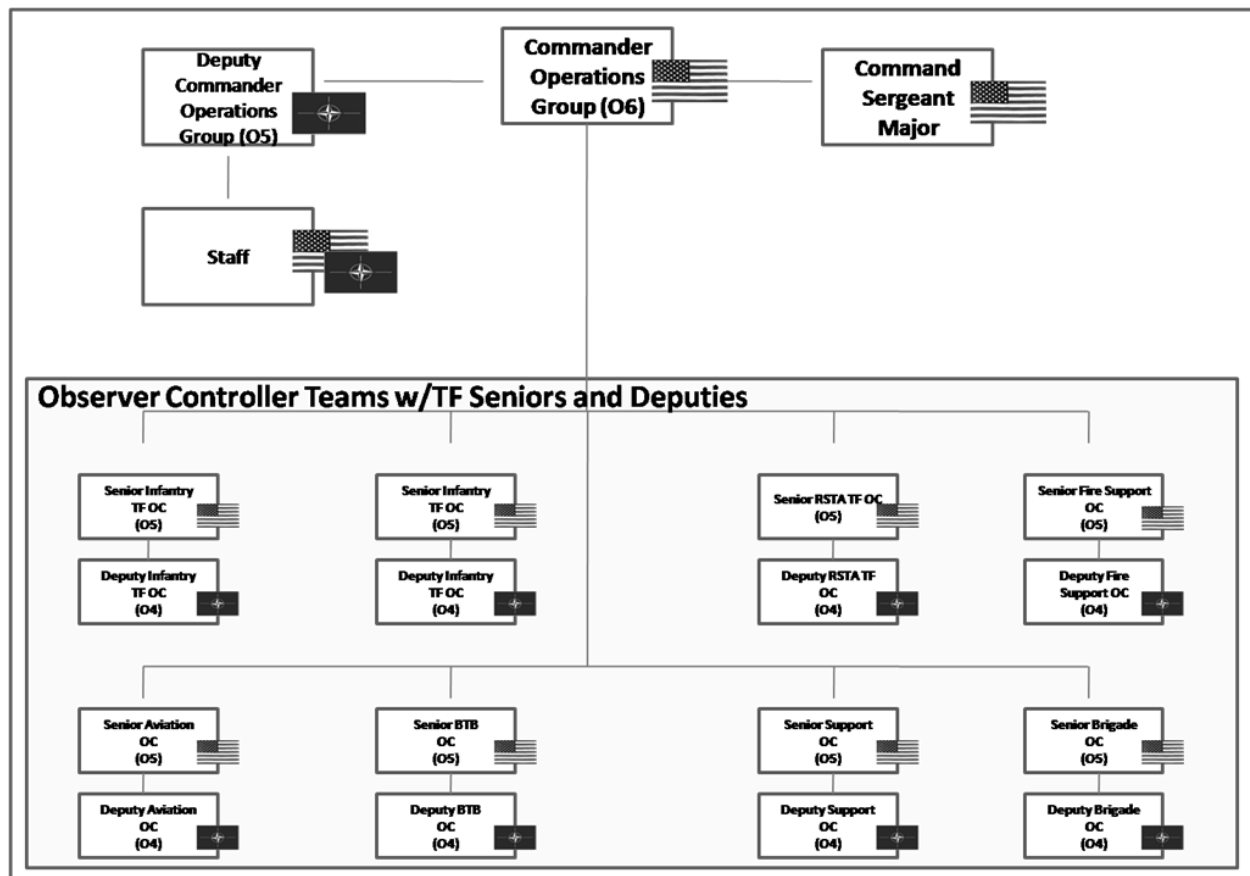


Figure 2: Example of Key Position Integration.

The second phase of this integration is the creation of a multi-national OC team where American commissioned and non-commissioned officers man only half of the authorized positions available. Over time, as countries see the benefit of this integration, NATO officers and NCOs could fill any position within any team. NATO observer controllers would have the opportunity to develop lifelong relationships, understand the complexities of developing training exercises, facilitate learning through the AAR process, and gain greater understanding of operating in a multinational force.

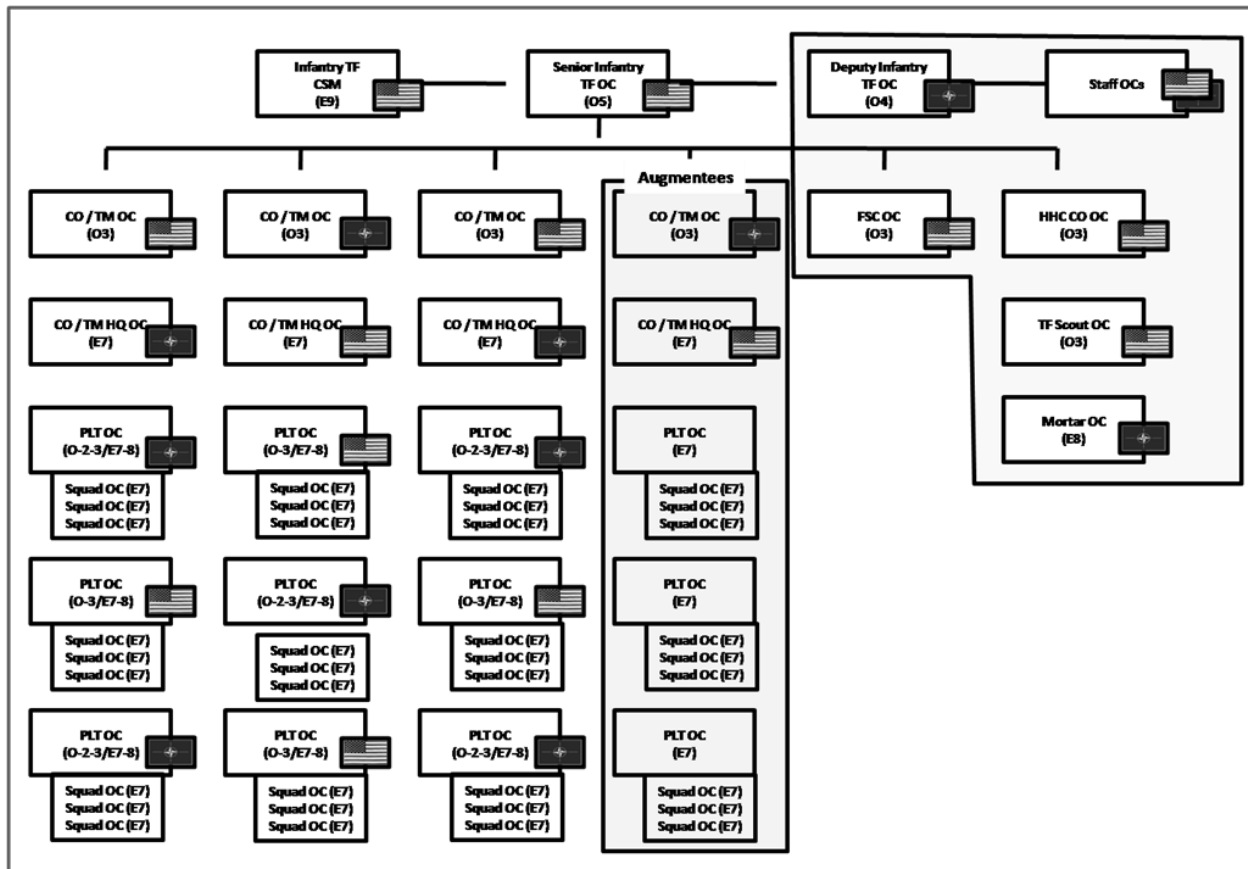


Figure 3: Example of Integrated Maneuver Observer Controller Team

Service as an OC should be recognized throughout NATO as a career enhancing assignment for those selected. Attendance and successful graduation from the required OC Training Academy training should serve as NATO professional military education for junior officer and senior non-commissioned officers. Two years of successful service on an OC team should result in the award of a skill identifier and NATO qualification badge. Future assignments should, as much as feasible, include service in NATO integrated units like those assigned to the NATO Response Force (NRF).

Integration of the best officers and non-commissioned officers by our NATO allies into the existing structure at JMRC is a great investment in the future of NATO, and builds interoperability from the bottom up. This investment of officers and NCOs

demonstrates commitment to the alliance that later translates to resolve, trust, and more effective operations when deployed together.

### Additional Ways

Although outside the scope of this project, both the NRF and the Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) are additional ways to enhance interoperability if they are blended. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference in February 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, pledged forces to the NATO Response Force as an assurance to our NATO allies that “the U.S. commitment to the continent remains strong.”<sup>47</sup> This force commitment, although not specifically mentioned, is presumably a brigade combat team regionally aligned with Europe. A year later, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen highlighted this commitment in his remarks at the 2013 Conference. When referring to the NATO Response Force, he stated; “I see us revitalising this Force, to keep our ability to train and operate together, as Allies, and with partners. To take advantage of the United States’ decision to rotate dedicated units to Europe. And to conduct more demanding, more realistic, and more frequent exercises. The NATO Response Force should become the engine of our future readiness.”<sup>48</sup> This comment assumes NRF training events are challenging, that participating units are open to change and have the opportunity to implement the changes.

While committing a force as part of the NRF can effectively enhance interoperability, it is the Secretary General’s comments regarding more realistic and frequent exercises that ensures longevity. The NRF’s preparation period provides ideal conditions for the training he refers to. With the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMTC) as the hub for training, the NRF could certify its capabilities in training areas across Europe on a simultaneous basis. To limit costs, ground forces could operate

from training areas in their own country while conducting out of sector missions in other countries using available multinational rotary and fixed wing lift. This would force early planning and coordination and challenge the command, control and communications of the NRF headquarters. Multinational OCs teams would travel to training areas to provide input and feedback to both rotational units and certifying officials. Incorporation of the Joint Multinational Simulations Center, co-located with the JMTC headquarters in Grafenwohr, Germany allows multi-echelon training at a lower cost than a conventional full spectrum exercise, and could and should be harnessed: the use of live and constructive (computer simulated) forces simultaneously provides a robust challenge for the headquarters and develops the multinational interoperability required to be successful.

### Conclusion

The United States military possesses the resources to conduct unilateral operations at the time and place that it chooses. It is unlikely, however, that the United States will ever conduct extended or large scale operations in the future without coalition or alliance support. This is absolutely the case when operations are considered for Europe or its environs. The President refers to Europe and NATO as a “partner in seeking global and economic security.”<sup>49</sup> With post Cold War expansion NATO has proven it is not a dinosaur, and with operations in Afghanistan and Libya it has proven to be a reliable and ready alliance. With a global focus the United States must reevaluate the ways it employs the means available to achieve its goals. Shrinking European defense budgets require a reevaluation of NATO as a Means. Calls for greater interoperability and Smart Defence initiatives are the way NATO will remain a reliable alliance well into the future. Enduring interoperability must be

achieved at the military level through more frequent and repetitive contact with our allies. Three methods to achieve this with existing means are to fully align remaining U.S forces in Europe with NATO country counterparts, to assign NATO officers and non-commissioned officers as observer controllers at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, and to utilize the NATO Response Force validation period, conducted over numerous training areas, as a valid test of interoperability of the force. This interoperability will ensure that when NATO allies fight they will possess the mutual trust and understanding to be successful faster when entering the combat zone. As these officers, NCOs, and Soldiers become the leaders of their respective countries they will expect this level of interoperability to be the “new normal”. This new normal will be essential for protecting U.S. interests into the future.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Admiral James G. Stavridis and Colonel Bart Howard. “Strengthening the Bridge: Building Partnership Capacity,” *Military Review*; (Jan / Feb 2010): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Unknown.”Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_84112.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84112.htm) (accessed 1 February 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama. National Security Strategy. (Washington D.C., The White House, May 2010),1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>7</sup> Barack Obama. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*. (Washington D.C., The White House, January 2012), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>10</sup> Admiral James G. Stavridis, *European Command, 2012 Posture Statement*, Posture Statement presented to 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d Session. (United States European Command, 2012), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Obama, *Sustaining US. Global Leadership*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> John Deni. "The Future of American Landpower: Does Forward Presence Still Matter? The Case of the Army in Europe," October 9, 2012, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1130> (accessed December 15, 2012).

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<sup>16</sup> Unknown. "Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence". (NATO Press and Media, Brussels, 13 April 2012). [www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2012\\_04/20120413\\_pr\\_cp\\_2012\\_047\\_rev1](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2012_04/20120413_pr_cp_2012_047_rev1) (accessed on 1 December 2012), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO After Libya. The Atlantic Alliance in Austere Times" June 29, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67915/anders-fogh-rasmussen/nato-after-libya> (accessed December 20 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Obama, *National Security Strategy*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, *The Globalization of NATO* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 2012), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Obama. *National Security Strategy*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Stavridis, *European Command, 2012 Posture Statement*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Unknown. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures. (3 December 2012) [www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf) (accessed on 10 December 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Rasmussen. "NATO After Libya. The Atlantic Alliance in Austere Times"

<sup>30</sup> Donna Mills. "Official: Strategic Guidance Recognizes U.S. NATO Commitments". American Forces Press Service, January 9, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 8, 2010), 157

<sup>33</sup> Unknown. "Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces".

<sup>34</sup> Notes from personal observations made as an Asymmetric Warfare Group Troop Commander advising an American Infantry Battalion in Ghazni Province Afghanistan in November 2007.

<sup>35</sup> The notes from the After Action Review were taken from my trip report submitted to the Asymmetric Warfare Group headquarters in November 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Viola Gienger, "Panetta Pledges Troops for NATO Response Force to Assure Europe", February 4 2012, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-04/panetta-pledges-troops-for-nato-response-force-to-assure-europe.html> (accessed on 20 December 2012).

<sup>38</sup> This was my personal experience as a Squadron Commander in Schweinfurt, Germany serving in the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

<sup>39</sup> Stavridis, *European Command, 2012 Posture Statement*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Notes from personal experience as a Task Force Senior Observer Controller for the 173<sup>rd</sup> Full Spectrum Training Event and their Mission Readiness Exercise. Both training events hosted multinational partners but none of the same forces were represented at both events.

<sup>41</sup> Stavridis and Howard, *Strengthening the Bridge*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Stavridis, *European Command, 2012 Posture Statement*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Unknown. "Mission / History," linked from The Official Website of USAG Hohenfels, <http://www.hohenfels.army.mil/sites/about/mission.html> (accessed on 2 January 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Unknown. "Fact Sheet Headquarters, United States Army Europe," March 2012, linked from the United States Army Europe Home Page, [www.eur.army.mil/pdf/usareurtransformation.pdf](http://www.eur.army.mil/pdf/usareurtransformation.pdf) (accessed 24 December 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Christy M. Irwin, JMRC Protocol Officer, email message to author that included his compiled record of visitors to the Joint Multinational Readiness Center since September 2005. February 7, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Notes from personal observations made as a Task Force Senior Observer Controller on the Warhog Observer Controller Team at the JMRC, Hohenfels Germany.

<sup>47</sup> Gienger, "Panetta Pledges Troops for NATO Response Force to Assure Europe".

<sup>48</sup> Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO After ISAF – Staying Successful Together" February 2, 2013, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_94321.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_94321.htm) (accessed February 10, 2013)

<sup>49</sup> Barack Obama. Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense. (Washington D.C., The White House, January 2012), 2.

