

Revitalized NATO: Expansion and Capability Enhancement in 2022

Author: M. Ahsan Jamal

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Not long ago, in November 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron famously described NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) as a ‘brain-dead’ alliance. He was not happy about U.S.’s withdrawal from Northern Syria without NATO’s consultation. Little did he know that the importance of NATO would be redefined in a few years ahead.¹

The predominantly European military alliance was created in the 1940s to provide collective security against Soviet Union’s increasing influence in Europe and beyond. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO had been dubbed as a ‘Cold War relic’ without a purpose. Former U.S. President Donald Trump often referred to it as an ‘obsolete’ entity throughout his term and election campaigns.²

Mocked by the critics and ridiculed by the leaders of its member states, the NATO alliance was in a dire need of a post-Cold War purpose. NATO got involved in the Middle East, but it was not as intense as it would be if it was a threat directed at Europe. The time finally came for NATO to become more relevant as Russia started its invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022. Through Russian President Putin’s decision to carry out a “special military operation” in Ukraine, NATO not only found an opportunity to revive itself but also to expand its membership and gain access further into Europe.

In wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg ordered an immediate deployment of NATO’s Rapid Action Force, consisting of 4,000 troops, to protect the alliance’s European borders. Although NATO remains uninvolved in the military actions that are taking place in Ukraine, its forces are currently on high alert while keeping a close eye on Russia’s advancements toward the west.

NATO’s expansion

Russia’s attack on Ukraine recommenced the rusted communication channels between the NATO member states and brought Europe and its Western partners back into frequent communications regarding European security. Several European countries started to line up to increase cooperation with NATO. These countries include Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Serbia, Georgia, and Moldova.

1. Economist, Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead, The Economist, November 07, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>

2. Cyra Master, Trump tells German paper: NATO is ‘obsolete’, The Hill, January 15, 2017. <https://www.thehill.com/homenews/administration/314432-trump-nato-is-obsolete/amp/>

So far, Finland and Sweden are well on track to become NATO members. In January 2022, NATO's Secretary General Stoltenberg hinted at Sweden and Finland's accession to the alliance by stating that "Finland and Sweden are NATO's closest partners. We share the same values. And we face the same challenges, in the Baltic Sea region and beyond. Our forces have trained and exercised together for many years. We continue to share information and situational awareness. And both Finland and Sweden have contributed to NATO missions and operations, from the Western Balkans to Iraq."³

In April 2022, leaders of Finland and Sweden met to discuss the possibilities of joining the NATO alliance and agreed upon initiating a joint accession request. Apart from fulfilling the formal protocols, all joining nations require unilateral approval from all existing NATO member states to formally join the alliance.⁴ Turkey was the only country to oppose the accession of the two Nordic states into the alliance citing its reservations over their support for terrorism. Turkey accused the two countries of harboring terrorists as several individuals associated with the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) have taken asylum in Sweden and Finland. Turkey deems PKK a terrorist organization.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has openly expressed on several occasions that Turkey is "not in favor" of letting the two states into the NATO alliance. He compared their application to the time when NATO added, Turkey's regional rival, Greece into the alliance. The Turkish president pointed out that NATO's decision to accept Greece as a member in 1952 was a "mistake."⁵ Turkey



U.S., Romanian and British soldiers finish Bull Run II at the training area in Bemowo Piskie, Poland. (Image Credit: U.S. Army/Capt. John W. Strickland)

holds a significant say in NATO's decision-making as it is one of the founding members of the alliance with a significantly large share of troops. Turkey joined the NATO alliance in 1952 and holds the second-largest military contribution after the United States in the 30-member alliance.

In a breakthrough development during NATO's Madrid Summit in June 2022, Turkey agreed to lift its opposition against Sweden and Finland. In a meeting moderated by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Turkey and the two Scandinavian states agreed on the following points.

- Establishing a joint, structured dialogue and cooperation mechanism at all levels of government, including between law enforcement and intelligence agencies, to enhance cooperation on counter-terrorism, organized crime, and other common challenges.
- Sweden and Finland will conduct the fight against terrorism with determination, resolve, and

3. IRIA, Finland and Sweden sign the Accession Protocols for NATO membership, IRIA News, July 6, 2022. <https://www.ir-ia.com/news/finland-and-sweden-sign-the-accession-protocols-for-nato-membership>

4. IRIA, Finland, Sweden leaders meet to discuss Russia-Ukraine war, express willingness to join NATO, IRIA News, April 15, 2022. <https://www.ir-ia.com/news/finland-sweden-leaders-meet-to-discuss-russia-ukraine-war-express-willingness-to-join-nato>

5. IRIA, Turkey does not support Finland and Sweden's bid to join NATO: Erdogan, IRIA News, May 15, 2022. <https://www.ir-ia.com/news/turkey-does-not-support-finland-and-swedens-bid-to-join-nato-erdogan>

in accordance with the provisions of the relevant NATO documents and policies.

- Finland and Sweden will address Turkey's pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects, taking into account information, evidence, and intelligence provided by Turkey, and establish necessary bilateral legal frameworks to facilitate extradition and security cooperation with Turkey in accordance with the European Convention on Extradition.
- Finland and Sweden agreed to investigate and interdict any financing and recruitment activities of the PKK and all other terrorist organizations and their extensions, as well as affiliates or inspired groups.
- Turkey, Finland, and Sweden commit to fighting the disinformation and prevent their domestic laws from being abused for the benefit or promotion of terrorist organizations, including through activities that incite violence against Turkey.
- Sweden and Finland agreed to ensure that their respective national regulatory frameworks for arms exports enable new commitments to Allies and reflects their status as NATO members.
- Finland and Sweden commit to supporting the fullest possible involvement of Turkey and other non-EU Allies in the existing and prospective initiatives of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy.⁶

Following the major development during the Madrid Summit, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto and his Swedish counterpart Ann Linde visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels to hold a joint meeting with the ambassadors of all 30 NATO countries as they signed the Accession Protocols at the North Atlantic Council in July 2022.⁷



Polish soldiers assigned to the 3rd Air Defense Rocket Brigade, and U.S. Soldiers assigned to the 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, hold closing ceremonies for the Poland phase of exercise Saber Strike 22 at BPTA, Poland on February 26, 2022. (Image Credit: U.S. Army/Staff Sgt. Clinton Thompson)

Military exercises and forward deployment strategy

One of the most significant tasks for NATO was to prepare its forces and forge their capabilities to address the looming threat of Russia's continued invasion of Ukraine. This came in the form

6. Trilateral Memorandum, Trilateral Agreement between Turkey, Finland, and Sweden, NATO, June 2022. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220628-trilat-memo.pdf

7. Ibid 3.

of updating the military equipment and expanding the scope of NATO military exercises.

NATO announced several new military exercises focusing on military training while bolstering capabilities in all aspects including land, aerial, naval as well as cyber warfare. As part of NATO's revived spirit, the allies and partners started conducting a series of planned military exercises spread across Europe.

NATO claims that all its exercises are defensive, transparent, and in line with international commitments. In 2020 and 2021, many of NATO's pre-planned annual exercises were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, as soon as the Russian invasion of Ukraine started, around 35,000 soldiers from NATO countries took part in one of the largest NATO exercises called the Cold Response 2022, in Norway. During the exercise, NATO partners conducted live-fire drills to ensure that the allies' armed forces are prepared to respond to emerging threats or crises.

NATO's highest priority in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was to contain the threat by strengthening its eastern flank. This came in the form of organizing military exercises and wargames as well as deploying weapons and troops on the eastern flank. NATO's eastern flank spans Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The eastern flank is managed by NATO's command stationed at the Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters in Szczecin, Poland.

NATO currently has eight battle groups stationed at its eastern flank totaling 10,232 troops. Details of these battle groups are as follows.⁸



Battlegroup of Kabile in Bulgaria - The battlegroup of Kabile consists of 945 troops and it is managed by Italian command while Bulgaria, Greece, and the United States are contributing states.

Battlegroup of Tapa in Estonia - The battlegroup of Tapa consists of 1,373 troops. It is managed by the United Kingdom while Denmark, France, and Iceland are also contributors.

Battlegroup of Tata in Hungary - The battlegroup of Tata has 1,054 active troops. It is managed by the Hungarian command while Italy, Croatia, and the United States are contributors.

Battlegroup of Adazi in Latvia - The battlegroup of Adazi is one of the largest battlegroups in NATO's eastern flank. It consists of 1,840 troops. Canadian command is in charge of the battlegroup while Albania, Czech Republic, Iceland, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain are contributor NATO states.

8. New NATO Force Model, NATO's forward deployment, NATO, August 2022.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf

Battlegroup of Rukla in Lithuania - The battlegroup of Rukla is the second-largest NATO battlegroup in the eastern flank. It consists of 1,805 troops managed by the German command. Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Norway are the contributing states.

Battlegroups of Orzysz in Poland - The battlegroup of Orzysz consists of 1,033 troops and it is managed by the United States command. Croatia, Romania, and the United Kingdom are contributors to the battlegroup.

Battlegroup of Cincu in Romania - The battlegroup of Cincu consists of 574 troops stationed by the NATO command managed by France and Netherlands. Romania is also home to 1,126 additional soldiers stationed under NATO's supreme Allied Commander Europe by Poland, Portugal, and the United States, however, these troops are not integrated into the battlegroup of Cincu.

Battlegroup of Lest in Slovakia - The battlegroup of Lest consists of 1,056 troops managed by the Czech Republic. Germany, Slovakia, and Slovenia are contributors to the battlegroup.

During the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, Allies agreed to implement a new NATO Force Model. The new model represents a broader expansion of high-readiness forces potentially available to NATO where and when required. The details of the NATO Force Model, including its precise scale and composition, continue to be developed. The transition to the new model is planned to be completed in 2023.

According to the new Force Model, NATO allies also agreed to boost the collective ability to reinforce its forces in the eastern flank by 1) Deploying more pre-positioned equipment and weapon stockpiles in the eastern flank. 2) Enhancing forward-deployment capabilities, including integrated air and missile defense systems. 3) Strengthening command and control. 4) Upgrading



Troops with the Gotland regiment of the Swedish Army reload their machine guns during target practice on Gotland Island, Sweden, on May 11, 2022. (Image Credit: Sergey Ponomarev/The New York Times)

defense plans, with specific forces pre-assigned to the defense of specific allies in the region.⁹

In the wake of Russian aggression, the alliance has put particular focus on strengthening counterattack capabilities. This came in the form of elaborated and well-planned military exercises. Some of the major NATO exercises of 2022 are highlighted below.¹⁰

Defender Europe 2022

Defender Europe is an annual large-scale U.S.-led multinational joint military exercise that is not only confined to the NATO partner states but also includes non-NATO European allies. Defender Europe has been designed to focus on the readiness of troops and interoperability of the U.S. and NATO military. The Defender Europe 2022 has become more significant due to the ongoing Ukraine war and increased security threat in Europe.

Exercise Dates: May 3, 2022 - June 2022

Participants: 8,730 security personnel from 11 different countries participated in Defender Europe 22. The participant countries included the United States, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Venue: Defense Europe 22 exercise took place across 9 different countries throughout Europe. The exercise venues were based in Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland Slovakia, and Estonia.

Swift Response 2022

Swift Response is a large-scale U.S.-led multinational military exercise focusing on enhancing airborne interoperability. The exercise took place in Eastern Europe, Arctic High North, and the Baltic and Balkan regions. The objectives of Swift Response 2022 were to prepare combat-

credible Army forces in Europe while particularly focusing on building airborne interoperability with allies and partners and the integration of joint service partnerships.

Exercise Dates: May 2 - May 20, 2022

Participants: More than 9000 troops from 15 NATO and non-NATO allied countries took part in the exercises including forces from the U.S., UK, France, Italy, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, and Georgia.



U.S. Marines take part in Cold Response 2022 exercises in Evenes, Norway, on March 22, 2022. (Image Credit: Yves Herman/Reuters)

9. NATO, NATO's military presence in the Eastern side of the Alliance, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, December 21, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

10. IRIA Report, NATO's ongoing and upcoming Military Exercises, IRIA, May 22, 2022. <https://www.ir-ia.com/NATO-Military-Exercises-2022.html>

Venue: Swift Response 2022 was conducted at several different venues throughout eastern Europe, the North Pole, Baltic, and Balkan regions as well as in Alaska in the U.S.

Hedgehog 2022

Hedgehog 2022 is a NATO-led military exercise that started at the Estonia-Latvia border. Hedgehog military exercise is Estonia's largest multinational military exercise, which takes place every three or four years. The exercise tests combat readiness and the ability to respond to different threat scenarios in an international framework. Different military units from infantry brigade, air force, navy, cyber command, special operations command, support command, military police, and territorial defense forces from NATO member states participated in the exercise, together with other allies and partner nations.

Exercise Dates: May 16 - May 30, 2022

Participants: More than 16,000 troops from 11 different NATO and non-NATO countries participated in the exercises including the United States, United Kingdom, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden Ukraine, Georgia, France, and Germany.

Venue: The Hedgehog 2022 took place in Estonia near the Estonia-Latvia border. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO has increased its military presence in Estonia.

Steadfast Cobalt 2022 (STCO22)

Steadfast Cobalt 2022 or STCO22 is designed to establish and test the networks and systems needed for the NATO Response Force (NRF) to connect with each other and conduct missions together. The exercise validated and enhanced the interoperability under a federated environment of the deployed NATO Command Structure (NCS) forces, NATO Force Structure (NFS) forces, and partners for the C4ISR (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance).

Exercise Dates: April 25 – June 10, 2022

Participants: Representatives from all 30 NATO member countries participated in STCO22. 19 different NATO Command Structures and 14 NATO Forces Structure units took part in the exercise directly while around 9 countries obtained observer status for STCO22 after having approval from the North Atlantic Council (NAC).

Venue: STCO22 was conducted simultaneously in the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, and the NATO Response Force headquarters in Brunssum, Netherlands.

Ramstein Legacy 2022

Ramstein Legacy was this year's largest ground-based Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) exercise in the world, bringing together NATO IAMD allies and partners to build theater-wide procedural interoperability.

Exercise Dates: June 5 - June 16, 2022

Participants: The complete list of participants for the Ramstein Legacy 2022 includes 25 different countries mostly from the NATO alliance with Sweden being the only non-NATO country.

Venue: Operations for the Ramstein Legacy 2022 include live fire and missile defense system



Airmen from 4th Fighter Wing, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and the 48th Fighter Wing, RAF Lakenheath arrive at Amari Air Base, Estonia on Jan. 24, 2022. (Image Credit: USAF/Staff Sgt. Megan Beatty)

exercises. These events took place at four different locations in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland.

Dynamic Mongoose 2022

Dynamic Mongoose is a NATO-led annual military exercise held in the High North every summer. It is hosted consecutively by Norway and Iceland each year. The exercise focuses on the interoperability of surface ships, submarines, as well as aircraft, and personnel converges for anti-submarine warfare and training to conduct sea control or sea denial-related naval tasks in preparation for future collective defense and crisis response operations.

Exercise Dates: June 12 - July 8, 2022

Participants: The exercise Dynamic Mongoose 2022 involved units, sailors, and airmen along with submarines, surface ships, and maritime patrol aircraft from seven NATO nations (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

Venue: According to the schedule of annual rotation between Iceland and Norway, the Dynamic Mongoose 2022 took place in the Arctic Circle of Norway.

Dynamic Guard 2022 (II)

Dynamic Guard is NATO's five-day-long biannual multi-national maritime electronic warfare exercise series designed to provide tactical training and help build and maintain proficiency in maritime electronic warfare and anti-ship missile defense for the NATO Response Force and NATO national units.

Exercise Dates: September 4 – September 8, 2022.

Participant Countries: The participants of the Dynamic Guard exercise are limited only to the NATO member states. 5 to 10 different naval fleets participate in each exercise with rotation.

Venue: The Dynamic Guard 2022 (I) was conducted in February 2022 along the coast of Norway. Dynamic Guard 2022 (II) took place in the Mediterranean Sea.

Apart from these major military exercises, several short-level military training programs were also conducted by NATO partners to prepare the member states and allies for war readiness.

Although some countries such as Sweden and Finland are prepared to join the NATO alliance in the backdrop of Russian aggression toward the west, it would take months before their applications are accepted and approved by all 30 NATO member states. To address the short-term security concerns in Europe, many NATO member countries are signing military pacts, and defense deals with non-NATO members are making security pacts and defense agreements as well as providing each other with weapons and equipment to strengthen their collective defense against Russia. The most recent security pact was made between the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Finland.



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