

# European Deterrence Initiative: the transatlantic security guarantee

## SUMMARY

The illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 marked a crucial moment for European, transatlantic and international security. Acting like a wake-up call, this event redefined strategic and security considerations in individual EU Member States, in the United States and in international organisations such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Russia's increasingly assertive military posture is unsettling for its European neighbours. Four years ago, in June 2014, US President Obama announced what was to become a key security guarantee from America to Europe. The European Reassurance Initiative, as it was called during the first half of its existence, is a military programme supporting the activities of the US military and its allies in Europe. In 2017, it was renamed the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) to reflect the shift in the international security environment characterised by a prioritisation of deterrence. Activities under the EDI include training of forces, multinational military exercises and development of military equipment and capabilities. They all take place under the umbrella of Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR) whose core mission is to enhance deterrence.

Despite recent turmoil in transatlantic relations, the budget for building up defences in central and eastern Europe through the EDI has seen major increases; even under the Trump administration. The EDI has deepened security and defence cooperation between the US and the main beneficiaries of OAR, namely Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. The US European Command, which coordinates all EDI and OAR activities, is working to forge enhanced interoperability between different countries' military forces through joint training, staff exchanges and exercises. The Command's leadership also recognises the cyber domain as a pressing area where integration is needed, although the EDI budget for 2019 makes no mention of it. The recent proliferation of EU defence initiatives and the revamp of EU-NATO relations should also contribute to EDI's core mission: to establish a strong deterrence posture able to meet today's security challenges.



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- American reassurance and deterrence in Europe
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- EDI-funded capabilities on the eastern flank
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## American reassurance and deterrence in Europe

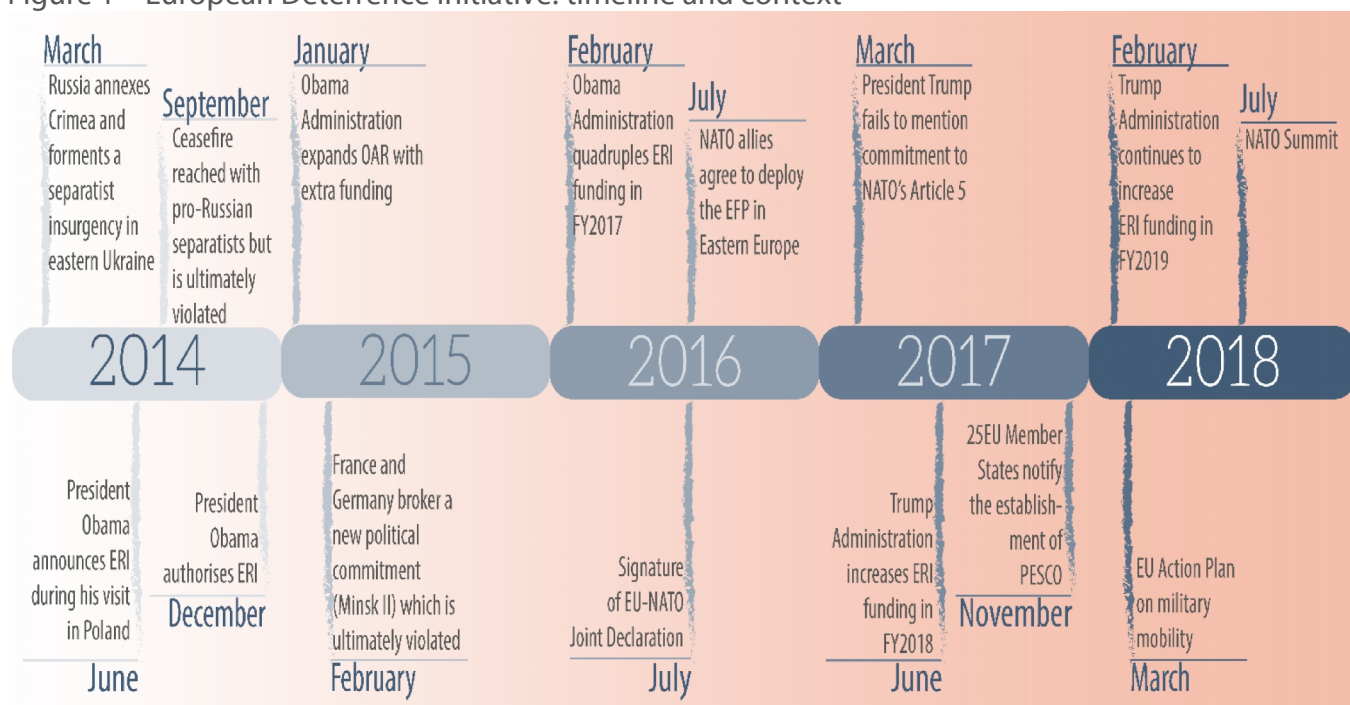
The European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) was [announced by US President Obama](#) on 3 June 2014 and represents a direct response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. It is meant to address European allies' concerns about Russian aggression by means of increased US military presence on European territory. The 2017 [US National Defense Authorization Act](#) changed the name of the programme to European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) to reflect the changes in the international security environment, which the US Congress saw as requiring deterrence rather than reassurance.

The programme supports increased joint training, military exercises and capability development in central and eastern Europe to build a strong deterrence posture. What was once seen as a short-term emergency instrument has now become a long-term [American commitment to Europe](#) as the programme has received on-going bipartisan support from Congress. As suggested by its initial name, the initiative aims to reassure NATO allies by funding a rotational military presence and improving allies' capabilities and readiness [at sea, on land and in the air](#).

The majority of US military activities in Europe funded by the EDI support the US European Command (EUCOM) based in Stuttgart, Germany and take place under the umbrella of [Operation Atlantic Resolve](#) (OAR). OAR's core mission is to enhance deterrence by helping allies to improve their readiness to defend themselves and respond effectively during crises. The operation provides a nine-month rotational presence of US troops and focuses on reinforcing capabilities and organising bilateral and multinational exercises. The OAR countries are Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

In March 2018, General Curtis M. Scaparrotti stated before the Congress Committee on Armed Services that the EDI is [crucial](#) for preserving peace and stability in Europe. He wears two hats, being commander of both the US European Command (EUCOM) and NATO's Supreme Allied Command Europe (SACEUR). His statement on the EDI stands in line with the 2018 [US National Defense Strategy](#) which supports the maintenance of a credible posture in Europe, seen as essential for ensuring deterrence and reassuring allies. The strategy also treats Russian aggression as a national security threat. As such, the continuous presence of US forces in Europe's air, land and waters is considered the ['cornerstone'](#) of the United States' commitment to NATO Article 5'.

Figure 1 – European Deterrence Initiative: timeline and context



Source: EPRS

## Facts and figures: US presence on the eastern flank

The US military presence in Europe has shrunk by 85 % compared with the height of the Cold War. In the 1960s, there were over [400 000 US troops](#) in Europe, while the numbers had fallen to roughly [200 000](#) by the 1980s. Additional cuts to defence budgets were made as a result of the [peace dividend](#), which today brings the number to approximately [60 000](#) authorised military personnel stationed across [28 European communities](#) (operating sites).

Table 1 – US troop deployment in Europe, 1988 - 2018



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center.

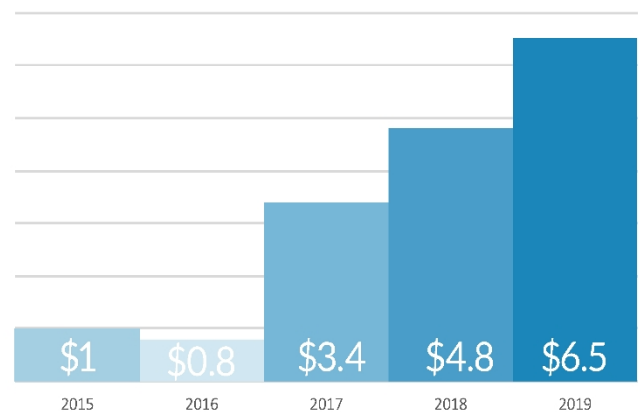
Based on figures from [2016](#), Europe is currently host to:

- 25 000 US Army troops, 21 000 of which are supporting EUCOM;
- 28 000 US Air Force troops, 24 000 of which are supporting EUCOM;
- 8 500 US Navy troops/marines, 7 000 of which are supporting EUCOM.

Funding for the EDI has increased every year since it was announced, rising from [\\$1 billion](#) in 2014 to [US\\$3.4 billion](#) in 2017, [US\\$4.8 billion](#) in 2018, and reaching [US\\$6.5 billion](#) in the budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2019. The initiative focuses its efforts on [boosting the US presence in Europe](#) in the following [five key areas](#):

1. Increasing the presence of US **rotational forces** (but not US permanent forces)
2. Committing more resources to increase the breadth and depth of **military exercises** to improve interoperability and readiness
3. Enhancing **pre-positioning of equipment** and material to facilitate rapid deployment
4. Investing in the **improvement of infrastructure** in key strategic locations to support deterrence requirements and contingency operations
5. Dedicating resources to enhancing the allies' military forces (**building partnership capacity**) to boost deterrence

Table 2 – Evolution of the EDI budget (US\$ billion)



Data source: Office of US Under Secretary of Defense.

When it comes to budget planning for the EDI in recent years, the biggest share is consistently allocated to enhanced pre-positioning. This means that in 2019 almost half of the EDI's budget will be allocated to the [European Activity Set](#) (EAS). This is comprised of various types of armament, military vehicles and other equipment that is then used by the US Army during their rotations, training or operations on European territory. From a purely budgetary perspective, this signifies that most of the investment is used for strengthening the capacities of the US Army in Europe rather than European capabilities and forces.

Table 3 – Budget breakdown for the EDI

European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) (\$ in millions)	FY 2017 Enacted	FY 2018 Request	FY 2019 Request
Increased presence	1 049.8	1 732.7	1 874.7
Exercises and training	163.1	217.7	290.8
Enhanced prepositioning	1 903.9	2 221.8	3 235.4
Improved infrastructure	217.4	337.8	828.2
Building partnership capacity	85.5	267.3	302.4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3 419.7</b>	<b>4 777.3</b>	<b>6 513.4</b>

*Numbers may not add due to rounding*

*Data source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Budget for Fiscal Year 2019, 2018*

After the election of [Donald Trump as US President in 2016](#), EU Member States and NATO allies expressed concerns regarding US commitment to European security given then-candidate Trump's statements about the EU and NATO. German Chancellor Angela Merkel famously said at the Munich Security Conference in 2017 that Europeans must be prepared to [take their fate into their own hands](#) and stop relying on others. Despite all this, President Trump's [2018 National Defense Authorization Act](#) included additional funding for a stronger US military presence in Europe as well as an increase in security assistance for Ukraine. The message from US diplomats as well as from President Trump himself is that [actions speak louder than words](#).

The US [National Defense Authorisation Act](#) (NDAA) of 2018 strengthens the US presence on Europe's eastern flank and includes additional air-, sea- and land-based support. The bill also offers support of up to US\$100 million for the development of a [single joint programme of the Baltic States](#) to further deter Russian aggression in the region. As much as [81 % of the requested funding](#) would be used to enhance the American military presence in Europe (US\$1.7 billion) and to boost US pre-positioned military equipment (US\$2.2 billion). Additionally, the bill [mandates](#) the US Department of Defense (DoD) to provide Congress with a five-year plan for the EDI.

## Land Army

The budget request for EDI in 2019 supports a [capacity of 9 095](#) active, reserve and guard personnel in the Army, serving under EUCOM. The land force includes a total of [three US Brigade Combat Teams](#) (BCT) rotating on the European continent at all times and four BCTs during a rotation handover. A BCT is the Army's primary deployable unit consisting of up to 5 000 troops. The persistent rotational units are supported by [pre-positioned stocks and infrastructure](#) which facilitate rapid deployment and reinforcement. The [2019 EDI request](#) funds three main programmes: the maintenance of the BCTs, the Division Headquarters, and the service enablers supporting the overall mission. US Army Europe is also planning to [improve intelligence](#),

In military terms, [pre-positioning](#) means installing military equipment such as ammunition, war stocks, supplies and various logistical materials in strategic locations or 'points of planned use' to reduce deployment response time and support fast response expeditionary missions during a potential crisis.

[surveillance and reconnaissance](#) (ISR) processing and to continue enhancing interoperability between partners through deterrence exercises.

### **NATO forces in eastern Europe**

During the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO leaders agreed on the establishment of eight (initially six) [NATO Force Integration Units](#) (NFIUs) in Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to strengthen NATO's presence on the eastern flank. The concept of the NFIU was developed to serve the 'Receipt, Staging and Onward Movement' phase of military operations and the deployment of NATO's high readiness forces by ensuring the [capacity of host nations](#).

At the July 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, leaders adopted the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Poland and the Baltic States and the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Black Sea region. The EFP consists of [four multinational rotational battlegroups](#): in Estonia - led by the UK, in Latvia - led by Canada, in Lithuania - led by Germany, and in Poland - led by the United States. Each battlegroup includes [forces from 17 NATO member states](#). The EFP today can deploy roughly 4 400 troops at any given time; whether this is sufficient in the event of a crisis is still disputed by experts.

The TFP covers the land, air and maritime domains. The land component relies on the [Romanian multinational 2nd Infantry Brigade \('Rovine'\)](#) of up to 4 000 troops, the maritime element focuses on integrated training in the Black Sea, and the air component engages in air policing missions across south-eastern European airspace.

## Air Force

The 2019 budget projections for EDI support a [capacity of 458](#) active, reserve and guard personnel in the Air Force, serving under EUCOM. Both the 2018 and 2019 US defence budget requests specify additional pre-positioned equipment for contingency operations and airfield infrastructure improvements. The requests also entail capability development projects for generation fighters, air support, air refuelling and air mobility. The EDI has helped provide fourth and fifth generation fighter aircraft for training and execution of [deterrence missions together with multinational air forces](#). As such, EDI funds are directed towards improving existing airfield infrastructure and deepening interoperability of allies.

An additional rotational force financed by the EDI is the [Combat Aviation Brigade](#) alternating between Latvia, Poland and Romania. This consists of 2 200 personnel whose training and exercise capabilities include 10 Chinook helicopters that are used for carrying heavy cargo, 50 Blackhawk helicopters specialising in tactical and troop transport as well as 24 Apache helicopters that are used for target acquisition and night vision.

[US Air Force Europe](#) has also pledged to enhance its ISR missions and to continue supporting NATO's air policing missions. While executing its broader responsibilities under the EDI, the Air Force will maintain its commitment to [infrastructure projects and training](#) in the Baltic States given that projecting military air power is recognised as crucial for [active US defence and deterrence](#) in Europe.

## Marine Corps and Navy

The 2019 budget request for the EDI will fund [the deployment of 350](#) active, reserve and guard personnel in the Navy, serving under EUCOM. The US Marine Corps are also set to enhance their rotational presence and to improve the pre-positioning of key assets across the operational theatre. Although US Marine Forces Europe (MARFOREUR) were initially focused on northern Europe, today they are actively engaged in eastern Europe with programmes such as the [Black Sea Rotational Force \(BSRF\)](#). The BSRF enables the regions of the Black Sea, Balkans and Caucasus to engage in

security cooperation, training and building military capacity through a rotational deployment of Marine Forces.

The 20request for the 2019 financial year allows MARFOREUR to expand its [antisubmarine warfare capabilities](#) through the Integrated Undersea Surveillance System that improves recognition of submarine threats. EUCOM is requesting additional maritime capabilities to upgrade sea ports of debarkation and to enlarge the pre-positioning of naval capabilities in order to increase readiness and be able to match Russian maritime capabilities. Additionally, EUCOM is asking for an increase in guided missile destroyers and attack submarines to counter undersea threats.

## Cybersecurity in the EDI framework

The increasing use of politically motivated [cyber-attacks](#) by both state and non-state actors targeting critical infrastructure is undermining democratic institutions and values. As it is integrated to a growing extent within the hybrid spectrum of threats, cyber warfare has made it to the top of many states' security priority lists. Cybercrime was formally [acknowledged by the US European Command](#) in its 2015 strategy as a functional, transnational threat to the European security environment. The 2015 theatre strategy calls for a 'defensible architecture, ready cyber forces, and improved situational awareness' as being critical to EUCOM's ability to defend and secure its assets.

According to General Scaparrotti, USEUCOM is expanding the integration of cyber capabilities across military activities. [Cyber attacks are recognised as a fluid threat](#) that transcends boundaries, thus reinforcing the importance of intelligence sharing with partners. In March 2018, the EUCOM Commander referred to the ongoing work with European partners to '[develop a shared framework for cybersecurity](#)'. The J6 Directorate within EUCOM coordinates the organisation's cybersecurity capabilities and activities in Europe. The directorate is responsible for Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) and Cyber. Moreover, the Bavarian town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen hosted USEUCOM's yearly [Cyber Summit](#) in March 2018 together with European stakeholders. Interestingly, the budget request for [FY2017](#) includes several mentions of cybersecurity and readiness while those for [2018](#) and [2019](#) make no mention of cybersecurity.

Eastern European countries – barring Estonia – generally enjoy limited institutional capacity to [protect themselves effectively against cyber-attacks](#). This is why the [Declaration of Intent](#) signed by six EU countries to develop an EU Cyber Rapid Response Force is good news. Formalised in June 2018 by Estonia, Croatia, Romania, Lithuania, Spain and the Netherlands, this PESCO project is led by Lithuania and represents a positive step towards consolidating collective cyber defence.

Other frameworks for transatlantic cooperation on cyber defence:

- [NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence](#) in Tallinn, Estonia
- The [European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats](#) in Helsinki, Finland
- EU-US high-level dialogue on cybersecurity

## Military-to-military engagements

Military-to-military cooperation, often referred to as 'mil-to-mil' cooperation, refers to the engagement between different military forces in terms of joint exercises, military training, staff liaison and exchanges. Mil-to-mil relations are generally encouraged as they foster inter-personal relationships between foreign militaries and thus contribute to enhanced interoperability. The European Deterrence Initiative dedicates [US\\$14.5 million to mil-to-mil engagements](#) to 'facilitate interoperability and various engagements with NATO allies and non-NATO partners'. The liaisons extend institutionally through [government exchange programmes](#) that allow US officials to gain a better understanding of countries' defence ministries.

For example, the annual EDI-funded joint exercise [Saber Guardian 17](#) in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria engages nearly 25 000 military personnel from 20 European countries and focuses on [building capacity, readiness and interoperability](#) under a single command and control framework. In 2017, EUCOM engaged with European allies in 22 exercises which included approximately 2 500 mil-to-mil contacts focusing on tackling emerging security challenges and improving the integration of forces. This year's [Saber Strike exercise](#) took place between 3 and 15 June and was held in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The exercise involved 18 000 participants from 19 countries who trained battlegroups in land operations, exercised joint operational capability and tested interoperability. Out of the total number of participants, 12 500 came from the US.

#### NATO mil-to-mil engagements

The [Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training \(TACET\)](#) programme was created to foster interoperability and capability development among allies. The programme was launched on the initiative of Germany, the UK and the US and was supported by 12 other NATO allies. The host nations of TACET are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. They coordinate the activities of the programme with the purpose of enhancing regional collective defence and resilience across the land, air and maritime domains.

## Missile defence

Ballistic missile defence (BMD) is a military capability designed to intercept and destroy offensive missiles in the air. BMD shield systems detect, target and ultimately destroy incoming missiles. In Europe, US missile defence strategy was built around the [European Phased Adaptive Approach](#), a four-stage strategy guiding missile defence capability development.

The first Europe-based Aegis Ashore missile defence system purchased from the United States is located in southern Romania and was [declared operational](#) in October 2017. The shield's range is set to cover Western Europe as well as parts of Eastern Europe, reaching up to 1 200 km. Poland is due to complete the construction of an [Aegis Ashore missile defence](#) site in the northern part of the country by 2020. This will provide a defence umbrella stretching from Greenland to the Azores. Poland has additionally signed an agreement to purchase the [Patriot Integrated Air and Missile Defense system](#) from the US, expected in 2022. Like Poland, Romania has also announced its intention to [purchase the Patriot system](#), and to this end signed a contract in November 2017.

Across the EU, Patriot interceptors are also permanently based in Ramstein, Germany, home to NATO Air Command, and in the Netherlands. [Spain](#) owns Patriot systems based in Adana, Turkey and has a mobile, deployable missile defence capability in the town of Rota, and Sweden is also [reported](#) to have closed a deal with the US government to buy the air and missile defence system.

## EDI-funded capabilities on the eastern flank

The European Deterrence Initiative 'is the oxygen that sustains our deterrence effort', [said](#) former Commander of US Army Europe Lieutenant General Ben Hodges. The presence of US Army forces in eastern Europe consists of rotating brigades (some permanently stationed) as well as pre-positioned capabilities. By 2016, the United States had invested roughly US\$250 million in [improving European military bases](#). The individual maps below provide a non-exhaustive list of key military bases that US forces also use. As regards infrastructure investments, the FY2018 request allocated US\$337.8 million, while the 2019 request more than doubled the amount, set at [US\\$828.2 million](#). Such investments include improving air fields, military bases, naval support systems and other facilities.

This increase symbolises acceptance of a persisting, and perhaps even worsening, Russian threat in Europe's east and is in line with the emphasis placed on countering Russian aggression in the 2018 US national security and national defence strategies. The FY2019 EDI budget request also provides US\$3.3 million funding for [missile defence](#) enhancements in European countries and for the development of an architecture for integrated missile defence through exercises and simulations (see NATO exercise [Formidable Shield](#)).

## Estonia

The US and Estonia are very close allies and enjoy a 'special relationship'. Besides cooperation in NATO and EDI-related frameworks, the two countries have signed a [cooperation agreement](#) on defence research and development. Signed in 2016, this agreement allows their respective defence sectors to work closely together. Since 2015, the Estonian [Ämari and Tapa](#) air bases have received [US\\$32 million in funding](#) under the EDI in order to expand and refurbish the facilities. The NATO EFP battlegroup also operates in the same Estonian airbases. In addition, Estonia has received US\$33 million in EDI funding to [procure anti-tank missiles](#). The 2017 [bilateral defence cooperation](#) agreement between Estonia and the US allows American forces unlimited access to the Ämari and Tapa military bases.

## Latvia

The US and Latvia have a close defence relationship based on a [common threat perception](#). Cooperation within the bilateral and NATO frameworks is growing especially as Latvia and its neighbouring countries are experiencing the highest level of threat emanating from Russia.

In Latvia, the [Adaži Military Base and Lielvarde Air Base](#) have received US\$7 million and US\$1 million of EDI funding respectively towards modernisation and reconstruction. Furthermore, [US\\$33 million](#) in EDI funds have supported the purchase of a sophisticated air defence radar system. Latvia also hosts [forward positioned aircraft](#) (five Black Hawk helicopters) at its Lielvarde Air Base for Operation Atlantic Resolve.

## Lithuania

Like its Baltic neighbours, Lithuania has a close bilateral relationship with the US. In January 2017, the two countries signed a [defence cooperation agreement](#) further enhancing their security partnership and supports additional military activities. In 2015, over [US\\$30 million worth of equipment](#) funded by the EDI was directed towards military infrastructure development in Lithuania. Further investments within the EDI framework are planned towards the modernisation of the [Pabradė and Gaižiūnai](#) training grounds and Šiauliai, the Lithuanian Air Force's air base. Moreover, Lithuania has received [US\\$33 million worth of US-funded specialised radio equipment](#). Lithuania is also home to a logistical hub for Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Figure 2 - US military presence in Estonia

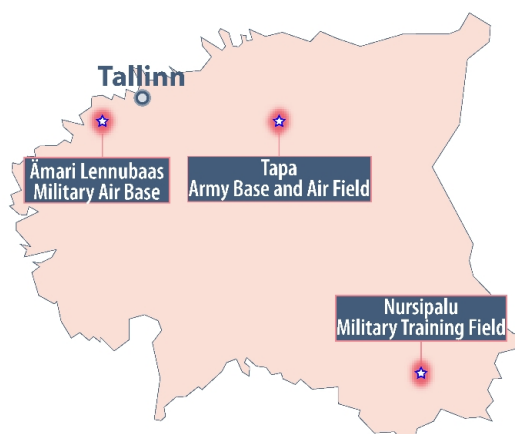


Figure 3 - US military presence in Latvia



Source: EPRS

Figure 4 - US military presence in Lithuania



Additional Baltic military cooperation frameworks:  
 Baltic Air Surveillance Network  
 Baltic Naval Squadron  
 Baltic Defence College  
 Baltic Combined Joint Staff Element

## Poland

Lieutenant General Hodges [has referred to Poland](#) as the 'centre of gravity' and the 'hub for all of northern Europe'. Poland could be considered the United States' closest ally in central and eastern Europe, building on several agreements and declarations of [defence cooperation](#). Polish National Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak expressed his [optimism about increasing American military presence](#) in Poland during a visit to the US Department of Defense in April 2018.

In May 2018, the Polish Defence Ministry published a [document](#) outlining a plan for establishing a permanent US military presence in the country. The Polish government is proposing funding of between US\$1.5 and \$2 billion as an incentive for the US government. Earlier in the same month, Senator John McCain [called upon](#) the US Secretary of Defense to report on the feasibility of a permanent BCT in Poland. The move is unprecedented and is poised to generate sensitive political talks in both the EU and NATO given its bilateral nature and the implications it holds for the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.

The Polish city of Poznań has been host to the regional headquarters of [Operation Atlantic Resolve](#) since 2015, responsible for overseeing over 5 000 US Army troops in rotational units. Poland also hosts the operation's Combat Sustainment Support Battalion which provides logistical support for the mission at large and retains forward positioned aircraft (four Black Hawk helicopters and four Apache helicopters) belonging to OAR's [1st Air Cavalry Brigade](#) in the town of Powidz.

## Romania

According to EUCOM Commander Scaparrotti, Romania ['is an influential and steadfast ally'](#). US-Romania [bilateral relations](#) are cemented by a strategic partnership and by a defence cooperation agreement. Like Poland and Latvia, Romania also retains forward positioned aircraft (five Black Hawk helicopters) in task forces from [OAR's 1st Air Cavalry Brigade](#) in the Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) Air Base. The base also serves as a logistics hub supporting the mission. In use by the US military since the late 1990s, Romania's MK Air Base is home to a [US transit centre mission](#) operating as a personnel and cargo base for American troops in Afghanistan. The centre can process 2 000 personnel per day, and can facilitate customs, security and also life support facilities for returning troops.

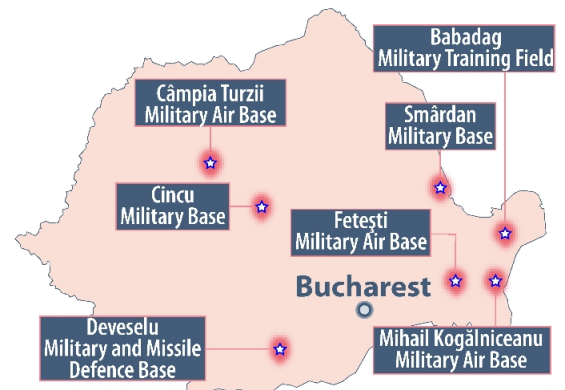
Additionally, the air base hosts the [Black Sea Area Support Team](#), which coordinates and supports US forces in the theatre of operations surrounding the Black Sea region, besides assisting the Black Sea Rotational Force. Additional bases in use for military training by the US army include the Smârdan base, the Cincu training range and the Babadag facility. Lastly, the Romanian Defence Minister, Mihai Fifor, has also made [positive remarks](#) regarding a permanent American military presence in the country.

Figure 5 - US military presence in Poland



Source: EPRS

Figure 6 - US military presence in Romania



Source: EPRS

## Bulgaria

The US and Bulgaria have [several memoranda and agreements](#) that facilitate cooperation on defence and other security matters. The Bulgaria-US [cooperation agreement on defence](#) allows the US to make use of Bulgarian military facilities and enhance training activities. The agreement has permitted the [US to deploy 120 troops](#) (out of a maximum of 2 500 as per the agreement) under the EDI at the Novo Selo training base, where it has also engaged over a dozen combat vehicles and various types of military equipment. The EDI has also funded [air field improvements](#) at the Graf Ignatievo air base and helps with the maintenance of the Aitos co-base. The US also makes use of the [Bezmer air force](#) base, although it is NATO, rather than EDI funded.

According to the [Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), bilateral military activities between the US and Bulgaria have expanded by over 400 % in recent years. Security cooperation includes multinational training and exercises in the land, sea and air domains and has fostered enhanced interoperability. The US is supporting Bulgarian forces with roughly US\$7 million in equipment, infrastructure modernisation and staff-to-staff exchanges every year. This sum is provided via various funding schemes, including the EDI.

Figure 7 - US military presence in Bulgaria



Source: EPRS

## EU-NATO cooperation

The 2014 and 2016 NATO summits in Wales and Warsaw respectively brought the [eastern flank](#) of the Alliance into the security spotlight. The spotlight has meant more equipment, training and rotational forces to strengthen the deterrence posture on the eastern border. These shifts have taken place in an emerging strategic environment in which Russia is perceived as a [strategic competitor](#) rather than an interlocutor and potential partner. NATO's deterrence in the east is represented through multinational rapid response forces, including a spearhead force entitled the [Very High Readiness Joint Task Force](#) and through its Enhanced Forward Presence.

The 2016 [EU global strategy](#) (EUGS) also acknowledges the need to enhance resilience in the east in view of Russia's destabilising behaviour. Russia is [enhancing its military capabilities](#), is increasing the number of its armed forces and is expanding the breadth and sophistication of its military exercises; for instance, Kavkaz 2016 and Zapad 2017. In view of such challenges in its neighbourhood, the EU and NATO signed a [joint declaration](#) cementing their cooperation in 2016. They agreed to [cooperate in areas](#) such as hybrid threats, strategic communications, maritime security, cybersecurity, research and capability development, among others. Another such statement [is expected](#) at the July 2018 NATO summit.

Taking place between 11 and 12 July, this year's NATO summit is anticipated with caution as President Trump has expressed his displeasure with the alliance on [several occasions](#). After a tense G7 meeting in June 2018, European diplomats are [preparing for a downturn](#) in transatlantic relations. In times of transatlantic tensions and increased Russian assertiveness, the fourth anniversary of the EDI is ever more important. It is very likely that the NATO summit will acknowledge its achievements in preserving security and enhancing deterrence. What is more,

Figure 7 - EU-NATO cooperation



Source: European External Action Service

President Trump's [recent letters](#) to some NATO allies urging them to share more of the burden highlight his own allocation of political capital towards defence spending.

Building on the ambitions of the EUGS, November 2017 marked a historical moment for the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy: the coming into being of the 'sleeping beauty' of European defence, entitled [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) or, in short, PESCO. The trigger of the [PESCO Article 42](#) of the Treaty on the European Union was pressed by a convergence of elements ranging from internal and neighbourhood security aspects, to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as US President. PESCO aims to address deficiencies in Europe's technological and defence industrial base. Greater [EU cooperation on defence](#) includes synergies between PESCO, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, the European Defence Fund and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme, which is still [under negotiation](#).

Together, these initiatives seek ways to fund and develop military capabilities jointly in those Member states willing to do so. [Complementarity with NATO](#) is addressed in PESCO's founding documents and reiterated by EU leadership at every occasion. Questions regarding third party cooperation in these mechanisms have been raised by non-EU NATO members as well as by the United States and are to be answered [by the end of 2018](#) by the Council. Lastly, the issue of military mobility – which is a [PESCO project](#), an [action plan by the European Commission](#) and an EU-NATO project – is often seen as a flagship example of the EU and NATO working together for a common interest in a [mutually reinforcing](#) and beneficial manner.

To date, [bilateral EU-US cooperation on defence](#) has focused on common geographical security concerns in eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific region and Africa, and on issues ranging from cyber-threats to terrorism and nuclear non-proliferation. Discussions on security policy and capabilities take place multilaterally at NATO as US security commitments to Europe are embedded in the [1949 North Atlantic Treaty](#). Both sides have expressed interest in [enhancing dialogue and cooperation](#) at a higher strategic level. Commander Scaparrotti has stated [EUCOM's intention](#) to step up 'close coordination among US agencies, NATO, the EU, and individual European nations'. As regards the eastern flank, such cooperation between all actors is essential for a credible deterrence and for Western solidarity.

## What the stakeholders are saying

When it comes to US military involvement in Europe the research is wide-ranging in its scope. For instance, researchers from the [Heritage Foundation](#) do not hesitate to point out that the Europeans are not meeting their defence spending commitments and are thereby weakening the alliance and emboldening Russia. The report notes that if the EDI was a NATO member in 2019, 'it would be the 10th-largest defence budget of the alliance'. The report also supports the stationing of permanent US forces in central and eastern European countries. Authors from the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) argue that US forces in Europe have not been able to keep up with the speed of evolving threats and are unfit to offset Russia's increasingly able military, which maintains superiority over its NATO adversaries in eastern Europe. The study points out the weakness of the time-gaps that US rotational forces allow in their schedules. In a policy brief published in the aftermath of Donald Trump's election as US President, the Egmont Institute makes an argument for Europe to decrease dependence on the US and its domestic politics, and thus to develop the means to [become strategically autonomous](#). The report advises European countries to follow the lead of the EUGS and use the instruments made available by EU institutions for deepening defence integration and for coordinating defence planning. It argues that such integration would allow the US to focus its defence spending on NATO and the EU to act autonomously as a global player in its wider neighbourhood. Lastly, a [paper by the European Leadership Network](#) lays out an approach for achieving European strategic autonomy in a way that would deepen transatlantic relations: state-led, supported by the EU and the US, aligned with NATO and post-Brexit UK.

## The position of the European Parliament

The European Parliament sets great store by the transatlantic relationship. Formal ties with the US House of Representatives date from 1972. Today, the two legislative bodies cooperate in the framework of the [Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue](#) (TLD). The [joint statement following the 81st TLD](#) noted the indispensability of the transatlantic partnership in security. The US delegation welcomed recent EU initiatives in defence while Members of the European Parliament for their part acknowledged the substantial support provided through the EDI.

In a 2015 [resolution on the strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia](#), Parliament expressed concern about the 'intensified Russian pressure on the EU eastern border, including on Romania, Poland and the Baltic States'.

Parliament's 2017 [resolution on the annual report on the implementation of the common security and defence policy](#) (CSDP) stresses the positive contributions of the United States to the effectiveness of the CSDP and 'welcomes the renewed US commitment to European security'. The resolution highlights the need for the EU to become a strategically autonomous and self-assured foreign policy actor.

In June 2018, Parliament adopted a [resolution on EU-NATO relations](#) that welcomes the reaffirmation of the US commitment to European security and emphasises the role of EU-NATO cooperation in strengthening the transatlantic bond. The resolution also calls for this cooperation to be enhanced on the eastern flank and for it to work on deterring Russian hybrid and conventional warfare.

## MAIN REFERENCES

US Department of Defense; [European Deterrence Initiative](#), February 2018.

US European Command Public Affairs, [EUCOM 2018 Posture Statement](#), March 2018.

Sawyer Samp L. and Cancian M. F., [The European Reassurance Initiative](#), February 2016.

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