NATO is an active and leading contributor to peace and security on the international stage. Through its crisis management operations, the Alliance demonstrates both its willingness to act as a positive force for change and its capacity to meet the security challenges of the 21st century.

Since its first major peace-support operation in the Balkans in the early 1990s, the tempo and diversity of NATO operations have increased. NATO has been engaged in missions that cover the full spectrum of crisis management operations – from combat and peacekeeping, to training and logistics support, to surveillance and humanitarian relief. Today, over 140 000 military personnel are engaged in NATO missions around the world, successfully managing complex ground, air and naval operations in all types of environment. These forces are currently operating in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Mediterranean, off the Horn of Africa and in Somalia.

Current operations and missions

NATO in Afghanistan

NATO’s operation in Afghanistan currently constitutes the Alliance’s most significant operational commitment to date. Established by UN mandate in 2001, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been under NATO leadership since August 2003.

ISAF comprises just over 130 000 troops from 50 different countries deployed throughout Afghanistan. Its mission is to extend the authority of the Afghan central government in order to create an environment conducive to the functioning of democratic institutions and the establishment of the rule of law.
A major component of this mission is the establishment of professional Afghan National Security Forces that, step by step, will enable Afghans to assume more and more responsibility for the security of their country. Much progress has already been made. From a non-existent force in 2003, the Afghan army currently comprises approximately 175,000 soldiers, and has begun taking the lead in most operations.

In addition to conducting security operations and building up the Afghan army and police, ISAF is also directly involved in facilitating the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan through 28 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) which are engaged in identifying reconstruction needs and supporting humanitarian assistance activities throughout the country.

**NATO in Kosovo**

While Afghanistan remains NATO’s primary operational theatre, the Alliance has not faltered on its other commitments, particularly in the Balkans. Today, approximately 5,500 Allied troops operate in the Balkans as part of NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR).

Having first entered Kosovo in June 1999 to end widespread violence and halt the humanitarian disaster, KFOR troops continue to maintain a strong presence throughout the territory, preserving the peace that was imposed by NATO nearly a decade earlier.

Following Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008, NATO agreed it would continue to maintain its presence on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. In June 2008, the Alliance decided to take on responsibility for supervising the dissolution of the Kosovo Protection Corps and to help create a professional and multi-ethnic Kosovo Security Force.

**Monitoring the Mediterranean Sea**

NATO operations are not limited only to zones of conflict. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, NATO immediately began to take measures to expand the options available to counter the threat of international terrorism. With the launching of the maritime surveillance operation *Active Endeavour* in October 2001, NATO added a new dimension to the global fight against terrorism.

Led by NATO naval forces, *Operation Active Endeavour* is focused on detecting and deterring terrorist activity in the Mediterranean.

Since April 2003, NATO has been systematically boarding suspect ships. These boardings take place with the compliance of the ships’ masters and flag states in accordance with international law.

The increased NATO presence in these waters has benefited all shipping traveling through the Straits of Gibraltar by improving perceptions of security. More generally, the operation has proved to be an effective tool both in safeguarding a strategic maritime region and in countering terrorism on and from the high seas. Additionally, the experience and partnerships developed
through Operation Active Endeavour have considerably enhanced NATO’s capabilities in this increasingly vital aspect of operations.

**Counter-piracy off the Horn of Africa**

Building on previous counter-piracy missions conducted by NATO (Operation Allied Provider and Operation Allied Protector - see below), Operation Ocean Shield is focusing on at-sea counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. Approved on 17 August 2009 by the North Atlantic Council, this operation is contributing to international efforts to combat piracy in the area. It is also offering, to regional states that request it, assistance in developing their own capacity to combat piracy activities.

**Supporting the African Union**

Well beyond the Euro-Atlantic region, the Alliance continues to support the African Union (AU) in its peacekeeping missions on the African continent.

Since June 2007, NATO has assisted the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) by providing airlift support for AU peacekeepers. Following renewed AU requests, the North Atlantic Council has agreed to extend its support by periods of six months and has done this on several occasions. NATO also continues to work with the AU in identifying further areas where NATO could support the African Standby Force.