

NATO Response Force

- Last updated: 02 Jul. 2014 14:40

The NATO Response Force (NRF) is a highly ready and technologically advanced multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and Special Operations Forces components that the Alliance can deploy quickly, wherever needed. The NRF will become more important post-2014, after the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has completed its mission in Afghanistan. It will provide a vehicle to demonstrate operational readiness and act as a “testbed” for Alliance transformation. It can be used in the implementation of NATO’s Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) as a vehicle for greater cooperation in education and training, increased exercises and better use of technology.



On 21 February 2013, NATO Defence Ministers agreed that the NRF will be at the core of the CFI in order to maintain NATO’s readiness and combat-effectiveness.

As part of the initiative, the ministers agreed that the Alliance should hold a major live exercise in 2015 that will include the NATO Response Force, and draw up a comprehensive programme of training and exercises for the period 2015-2020.

The NRF is comprised of three parts: a command and control element from the NATO Command Structure; the Immediate Response Force, a joint force of around 13,000 high-

readiness troops provided by Allies; and a Response Forces Pool, which can supplement the Immediate Response Force when necessary.

Purpose

The NRF has the overarching purpose of being able to provide a rapid military response to an emerging crisis, whether for collective defence purposes or for other crisis-response operations.

The NRF gives the Alliance the means to respond swiftly to various types of crises anywhere in the world. It is also a driving engine of NATO's military transformation.

A rotational force

The NRF is based on a rotational system where Allied nations commit land, air, maritime or Special Operations Forces units to the Immediate Response Force. Rotations were initially for a six-month period, but since 2012, the rotation periods have been extended to 12 months.

The flexibility offered by the Response Forces Pool, which permits NATO nations to make contributions on their own terms for durations of their choosing, is particularly relevant in this regard.

The NRF is also open to partner countries, once approved by the North Atlantic Council.

Participation in the Immediate Response Force is preceded by national preparation, followed by training with other participants in the multinational force. As units rotate through the NRF, the associated high standards, concepts and technologies are gradually spread throughout the Alliance, thereby fulfilling one of the key purposes of the NATO Response Force – the further transformation of Allied forces.

Operational command of the NRF currently alternates among NATO's Joint Force Commands in Brunssum, the Netherlands and Naples, Italy.

A powerful package

The Immediate Response Force has:

- a brigade-sized land component based on three Battle Groups and their supporting elements;
- a maritime component based on the Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) and the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group (SNMCMG);
- a combat air and air-support component;
- Special Operations Forces; and
- a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence task force.

Before use, the force will be tailored (adjusted in size and capability) to match the demands of any specific operation to which it is committed.

Any mission, anywhere

The NRF provides a visible assurance of NATO's cohesion and commitment to deterrence and collective defence. Each rotation of the force has to prepare itself for a wide range of tasks. These include contributing to the preservation of territorial integrity, making a demonstration of force, peace-support operations, disaster relief, protecting critical infrastructure and security operations. Initial-entry operations are conducted jointly as part of a larger force to facilitate the arrival of follow-on forces.

Elements of the NRF helped protect the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, and were deployed to support the Afghan presidential elections in September of the same year.

The NRF has also been used in disaster relief.

- In September and October 2005, aircraft from the NATO Response Force delivered relief supplies donated by NATO member and partner countries to the US to assist in dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
- From October 2005 to February 2006, elements of the NATO Response Force were used in the disaster-relief effort in Pakistan, following the devastating 8 October earthquake. Aircraft from the NRF were used in an air bridge that delivered almost 3,500 tons of urgently needed supplies to Pakistan, while engineers and medical personnel from the NATO Response Force were deployed to the country to assist in the relief effort.

Evolution

The NATO Response Force initiative was announced at the Prague Summit in November 2002.

In the words of General James Jones, the then NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, *"... NATO will no longer have the large, massed units that were necessary for the Cold War, but will have agile and capable forces at Graduated Readiness levels that will better prepare the Alliance to meet any threat that it is likely to face in this 21st century."*

The NRF concept was approved by Allied Ministers of Defence in June 2003 in Brussels.

From concept to reality

On 13 October 2004, at an informal meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Poiana Brasov, Romania, the NATO Secretary General and Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) formally announced that NRF had reached its initial operational capability and was ready to take on the full range of missions.

The capabilities of the NRF were tested in a major live exercise, Steadfast Jaguar 06, in the Cape Verde Islands in June 2006. The challenging location was specifically designed to demonstrate and prove the viability of the NRF concept. At NATO's Riga Summit in November 2006, the NRF was declared to be fully ready to undertake operations.

Since then, the way the NRF is generated and composed has been adjusted twice, in 2008 and 2010. This was to provide a more flexible approach to force generation, thereby facilitating force contributions which were being hampered by the enduring high operational tempo arising from Iraq, Afghanistan and other missions. To further support force generation, Allies have set themselves voluntary national targets for force contributions.

Authority

Any decision to use the NRF is a consensual political decision, taken on a case-by-case basis by all 28 Allies in the North Atlantic Council, NATO's principal decision-making body.