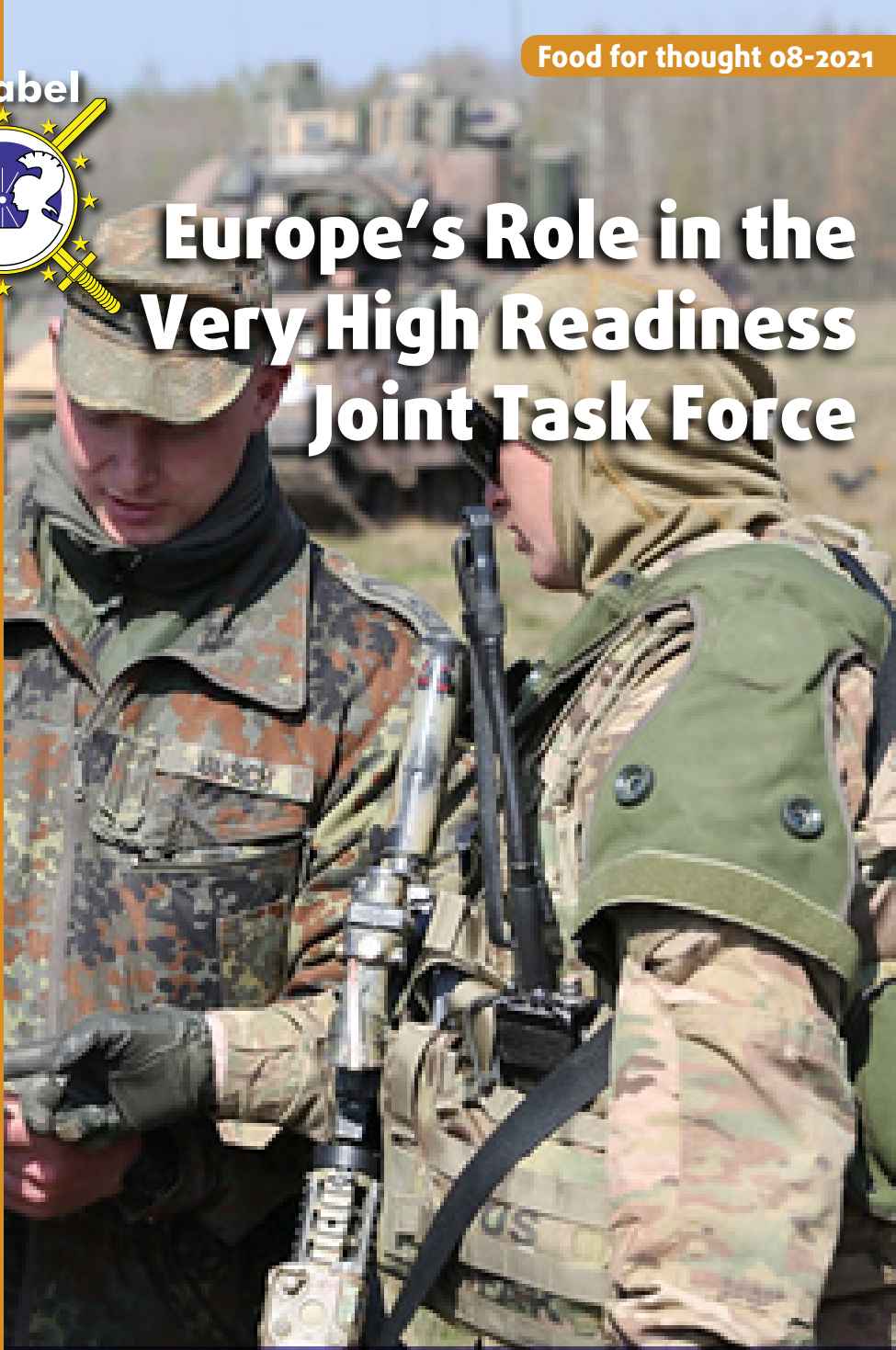


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Europe's Role in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN
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European Army Interoperability Centre

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DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

Targeted interoperability may be understood through the ongoing development of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. This brigade-size rapid response force is designed to deploy its lead elements within 48 hours, ensuring prompt response to conflict. This multinational unit is unique in its very tight deployment timeline, which implies functional interoperability between several alliance members to a degree so far unseen within NATO.

In this regard, the role of the European armed forces proves to be crucial in building upon different levels of interoperability. Effectiveness is more likely to manifest when land forces grow closer in acting as a united corps. However, challenges concerning the ability of rotating leading nations to solve current gaps in interoperability may potentially hinder upcoming military operations. Germany's lead in the upcoming years will be a determinant in ensuring crisis response success.

This paper is our attempt to bring targeted interoperability to the forefront of the European defence discussion. Broad institutional cooperation has shown to be valuable in the expansion and consolidation of European institutions. However, declarative politics has its limits and getting one's hands dirty is necessary to create a functional European military response in times of crisis. This is why NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force is worth taking a look at in-depth.

Suppose you are interested in Europe's importance and position within the wider transatlantic alliance in general and in more technical cooperation examples such as this one. In that case, this paper may be of interest to you. In reading on Europe's contribution to this task force and Germany's continental leadership role on this issue, you will gain insights into the future development of European interoperability within the framework of NATO.*



Mario Blokken

Director PSec

* This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

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INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has fostered an environment for the development of stronger European cooperation in defence. NATO operations are crucial tools in building military partnerships among European member states (MS). However, the rapidly changing international security context demands enhanced coordination and multinational initiatives as responses to crises have become a matter of constant concern. Within this context, during the 2014 Wales Summit, the Allies agreed on the need for an international rapid response force that would be provided by the Very High Readiness Joint Taskforce (VJTF): a high-readiness Spearhead Force formed by approximately 5,000 troops made up of mostly land brigades, with some air and sea forces support. Its key innovative features are the ability to deploy on short notice (within 48 hours) and its required increased degree of interoperability. Both appear to have become imperatives to adequately provide rapid reinforcement capability in major crises concerning NATO MS.

Furthermore, other than ensuring a more effective reaction to imminent dangers on the military level, the VJTF offers the chance to

address issues requiring targeted interoperability. Europe's input in this regard may be crucial in providing mechanisms and partnerships enabling targeted interoperability. Common goals and similar command strategies are more likely to result in effective targeted interoperability.

To assess the extent to which European NATO MS can develop the VJTF to its full capabilities, this paper will proceed according to the following structure. In the first chapter, the roots of the VJTF will be explained through an overview of its founding force: the NATO Response Force (NRF), which set the premises for the development of multinational operations focused on readiness. The second chapter will discuss the two different types of interoperability and the need for both for a fully effective VJTF. As a third point, the paper shall illustrate a full-on analysis of the role of the European Corps within the VJTF, with a specific focus on Exercise Noble Jump 2021. In the last chapter, future perspectives will be considered as Germany's lead role approaches, whose upgraded system provides an opportunity for interoperability enhancement.

NATO RESPONSE FORCE: INCREASING INTEROPERABILITY

Brief History of the NRF

The NATO Response Force (NRF) is an effective technological alliance unit with a global deploy range that combines land, air, maritime, Special Operations Forces (SOF), chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and logistical consultancy¹ established in 2002. It is responsible for conducting military actions that range from non-combatant evacuation missions to combat operations, evacuation missions encompassing humanitarian and crisis response missions, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and embargo operations. The overlapping tactical challenges between military and political strategies clarify the extent to which the “first force in, first force out”² NRF’s principle can be enforced. To mitigate some of the more pressing military needs, such as technological disparities, doctrinal differences, resource gaps, command and control dissimilarities in response time and operational behaviour, NATO established the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI). They leverage the changing conditions to raise levels of NATO interoperability and operational readiness by operating on the three following levels: technical, procedural, and human interoperability.³ Technical advances and upgraded technology have tremendously improved the existent cooperation relationship by introducing initiatives like the Joint

Multinational Training Command (JMTC), which established a Joint Military Operations Center (JMRC) aiming to control the distribution portion of military exercises while leaving the execution to the JMRC. The JMRC identifies and codifies tactics, techniques, and procedures aiming to diminish doctrinal diversity by focusing on functional interoperability. Furthermore, the JMTC created the Joint Common Academic Program, standardising education and training and providing an environment that promotes a higher level of interoperability and readiness.

The NATO response to the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in September 2014 was a turning point in the Alliance history, as deciding to increase the prevention and defence efforts required a higher level of readiness and strategic planning, resulting in collaboration levels that were only reached during the Cold War.⁴ The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) presents the new measures for the Alliances’ innovative strategic behaviour to reform how NATO responds to security challenges. Those adaptations include the NRF and the outlines for the VJTF. There are currently five interoperability tools: standardisation, education (including training, exercises, and evaluation), lessons learned, technical and other demonstration, trials and tests, and cooperative programmes. To implement these

1. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO (2020), ‘Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces’. [online] Available at : https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84112.htm. [Accessed: 13 July, 2021].

2. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO, (2020) ‘BACKGROUND Interoperability for joint operations’. [online] Available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_files/pdf_publications/20120116_interoperability-en.pdf. [Accessed: 13 July, 2021].

3. James Derleth, (2015), ‘Enhancing interoperability: the foundation for effective NATO operations’, NATO. [online] Available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2015/06/16/enhancing-interoperability-the-foundation-for-effective-nato-operations/index.html>. [Accessed: 13 July, 2021].

4. Vanessa Hegykozi and Rob Trabucchi, (2019). ‘Expanding interoperability integrating interoperability tools in multinational exercises’, Atlantic Forum. [online] Available at: <https://atlantic-forum.com/content/expanding-interoperability-integrating-interoperability-tools-multinational-exercises>. [Accessed: 13 July, 2021].

across the Alliance, the NATO Standardisation Office proposed a sixth interoperability tool, namely 'force affiliation', as standardisation is an essential tool to develop, maintain, and improve interoperability, it provides a common basis used by each of the other tools. The NRF force abides by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, but there are different layers to the NRF command structure. From the three NATO's Joint Forces Commands, two can take over the assigned NRF forces, each year following a rotational basis to determine the new headquarters. For the duration of the 2021 rotation, JFC Naples is the certified designated Stand-By Command, and the other units are Turkey (Land), Italian Joint Force Air Component (JFAC) HQ, French Maritime Force (SPMARFOR), Special Operations Deutsch/ Netherlands Corps and the Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG) from JFC Naples for the chemical, biological, radiological, and Nuclear Defence Taskforce Czech (CBRN).

The NRF is composed of three parts: the Command and Control element (VJSTF), the Initial Follow On Forces Group, and the Response Forces Pool.⁵ It gathers around 40,000 troops that share the RAP to respond to the changes in the security environment and strengthen the Alliance's collective defence. To be a part of the NRF, allies and partner nations must meet the strict standards by which the unit abides, requiring six to 18-month training and regular exercises to make the new arrivals capable of achieving necessary readiness levels. As mentioned above, the NRF overall command abides by the Supreme AL-

lied Commander Europe (SACEUR) responsible for making the deployment decisions on very short notice. The troops can deploy for between two to seven days if the North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest political decision-making body, decides this will be the best strategic move. The NRF also focuses on increasing cooperation in education and training. In a shared initiative, the European Corps (Eurocorps) and NATO support the NRF during its standby period. Eurocorps operated as NRF 7 in 2006 for six months, NRF 15 in 2010 for another six months and NRF 20 in 2020 for twelve months and is expected to join in 2024 by assuming the NATO Joint Headquarter role.⁶

Developing a Joint Multinational Force through Special Operations Forces

Modern age warfare is no stranger to the use of Special Forces, which played a small strategic role during the Cold War when the Allies would rarely rely on small specialised units. Nevertheless, this changed after the Cold War as SOF supported NATO activities by training the Kosovo Liberation Army and capturing war criminals. The idea of SOF as an elite team that takes the biggest risks is part of popular imagination and has become more crucial to combat over the years. Successful examples of missions like these include the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in Haiti and Iran, and the French SOF efforts in Algeria and Indochina, which had a critical outcome.

To take on the challenge of increasing SOF

5. Shape Nato, (2021). 'NATO Response Force'. [online] Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/steadfast-defender/media-centre/questions-and-answers/the-nato-response-force>. [Accessed: 13 July, 2021].

6. European Corps, Eurocorps, (2020). 'NATO Response Force'. [online] Available at: <https://www.eurocorps.org/readiness/nato-response-force/> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

tives that strengthened the Allies' capability of adaptation into a new security environment. With the launch of SOF, the idea was to transform the cooperation among Allies regarding training, operation and the improvement of equipment capabilities. This later became known as the NATO SOF Transformation Initiative (NSTI), and it bears three core missions. The first mission aims to establish a Director Special Operations Office that will then provide SOF with the necessary direct advice to allow the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Tod D. Wolters, the Commander in power since May 2019, to an effective strategy. The second mission is a NATO SOF Coordination Centre responsible for creating a direct link between the two powers and coordinating the national SOF capabilities with NATO needs. The last mission manages the Federations of NATO Coordinate Centres for national SOF training and education, which was integrated in 2010 with NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) established to assume this responsibility.⁹

In 2017, the defence ministers from Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands agreed on the creation of the Composite Special Operations Component Command (C-SOCC), aiming to participate in the NRF and provide further support to NATO operations and multinational missions. After the initial memorandum of 2018, the C-SOCC evolved to reach the full operational capability in 2021. The former NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller advocated in favour of the idea that this was an "important reminder

that special operations forces today increasingly operate in a multinational context."¹⁰ The C-SOCC is formed by Belgium's Special Operation Regiment (SOR), Denmark's Jaeger and Frogman Corps and the Netherlands' Maritime SOF (NL-MARSOFF), and Korps Commandotroepen (KCT) regiments. Following this initiative in 2019, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia signed a letter of intent that established the Regional Special Operations Component Command (R-SOCC) that conducts a 'small joint operation' and is expected to gain Austrian support soon. The evolving pattern will follow the C-SOCC abiding by NATO standards and endorse NATO and EU operations regarding multilateral training, missions, and exercising. R-SOCC is expected to achieve full operating capability by the end of 2024.¹¹

The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) as a Tool for European Military Interoperability

The VJTF is one of the NRF structural points brought into the spotlight during the 2014 NATO Wales summit and reaffirmed during the 2016 NATO Warsaw summit. That resulted in the enhancement of the VJTF. The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) was a breakthrough on NATO's military adaptation to the new security and defence environment. Initially drafted during the 2014 Wales Summit, when the Allies leaders agreed upon the aims and guidelines, in 2016, the importance of this comprehensive package became evident, and the Allies decided to implement it

9. Ibid.

10. Defense Media Network, (2020), 'International Special Operations Forces Cooperation' [online]. Available at: <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/international-special-operations-forces-cooperation/>. [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

11. Ibid.

as a baseline of their deterrence and defence overall posture. The assurance measures predicted in the VJTF include land, sea, and air activities circulating the east of NATO Allies in Central and Eastern Europe, reassuring that the defence forces will be able to contain and respond to threats. Furthermore, RAP is responsible for the standardisation of the shared troops,¹² which, at its full capacity, includes around 40.000 soldiers from land, air force, navy, and SOF that are constantly at the ready.

VJTF provides Allies with armour, infantry, and intelligence assessments as it supplies NATO with an adaptable and credible deterrent force. The VJTF's primary function is to deter rather than defend, by analysing and calculating potential risks. Thus, the VJTF reassures the Alliance members that the strategic decision will consider different scenarios based on a multidimensional defence plan. Cooperation in training improves the troops' capability to respond to different challenges. NATO's deterrence effect increased after the adoption of the VJTF with the "dual-track approach"¹³ that combines dialogue and strength when exerting control over the troops. The VJTF provides a force that adds credibility to NATO deterrence: its quick deployment speed alters adversaries' risk calculations. It clears the path for the Allies response

strategy, which has proven to be a highly potent contribution. The VJTF 17 experience is expressed by a common doctrine that practises moving forward. In its year of training, the VJTF evolved into a strongly coherent and capable force, with a deploy response time of five to seven days, symbolising Alliance cohesion with a hard military edge.¹⁴ The two VJTF brigades provide the Initial Follow-On Forces Group that should be ready to deploy within 30–45 days. The latter could be delegated to the regionally focused MNC NE HQ or the land force command on standby for the particular NRF and VJTF-rotation.

This new enhanced NRF successfully implements two new factors to NATO: strategy and the response time of the standby forces. The Initial Follow On Forces Group (IFFG) is a support team for the VJTF response to a crisis, consisting of 13.000 soldiers. Two extra teams are composed of 13.000 soldiers in training and another 13.000 ready to wind down after the standby. Part of the VJTF troops is ready to deploy within 48 hours, a great advance from the IRF's 30 days response time, placing quick decision making at the core of the VJTF operation mode. For this to be possible and effective, NATO has to be constantly aware of "early warning indicators."¹⁵

12. NATO, (2021), 'Readiness Action Plan'. [online] Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm. [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

13. Small Wars Journal, 'NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Land) 2017: An Analysis'. [online] Available at: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/nato%E2%80%99s-very-high-readiness-joint-task-force-land-2017-an-analysis>. [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

14. Ibid.

15. Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, "Can NATO's new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force Deter?", Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (2016). [online] Available at: <http://www.istor.org/stmble/resrep07991>. [Accessed July 23, 2021].

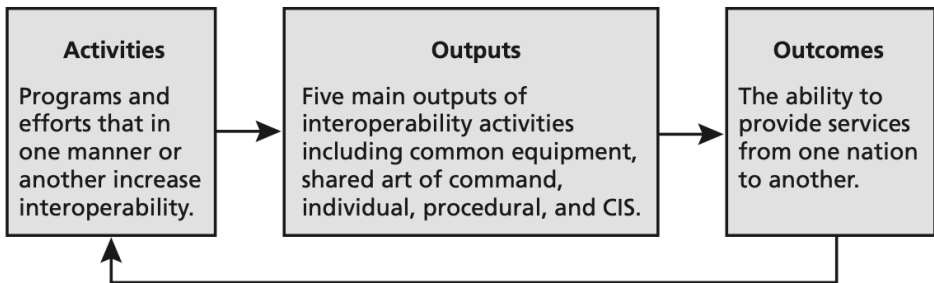
BALANCING TWO TYPES OF INTEROPERABILITY

As briefly mentioned, an indiscernible component of the VJTF is interoperability. Military interoperability, however, has taken various forms and developed only to a limited level in the past, often hindering its effectiveness, especially within NATO operations. For this reason, it is useful to distinguish general from targeted interoperability, where the former can take place across a wide range of diverse countries, whilst the latter requires a more advanced degree of interoperable operations, making it exclusive to specific situations. The VJTF necessitates a combination of both, but targeted interoperability may pose a larger challenge.

General Interoperability

Any military strategy set up in a multinational framework inevitably encounters interoperability. For the most part, this is very widely developed and preferably maintained by national interest on a general level. Even though maximisation of opportunities implies that units prepare to operate with partners as needed, the functions shared among partners remain quite limited.¹⁶ Since the Cold War, interoperability was feasible in practice only at a division level, whilst the group army and specific corps were individually guided by each nation. In this scenario, the tactical level faces large interoperability gaps. On the other hand, it allows many states to cooperate. Initiatives for exchanges involving transborder

Logical Framework for Building Interoperability



Logical Framework for building Interoperability, Pernin, Christopher G. et al, (2019), 'Targeted Interoperability: A New Imperative for Multinational Operations,' Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation

16. Christopher G. Pernin et al, (2019), 'Targeted Interoperability: A New Imperative for Multinational Operations', RAND Corporation. [online] Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2075.html [Accessed 19 February, 2021].

training exercises and coalition solutions are the main activity allowing the most disparate countries among the allies to work together.¹⁷ A general approach highlighted significant failures in various areas, specifically regarding NATO's intervention in Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Information sharing and communication in cultural understanding, styles of command and standard equipment, policies and intelligence sharing all require more advanced interoperability.¹⁸ Especially in the case of short timelines calling for prompt response and readiness, general interoperability can prove to be quite inefficient, as it requires time-consuming workarounds and discrepancies between single partners. In most of NATO's activity, the focus has been on training individual readiness of armed forces rather than building resilient relationships between units. Operational and tactical interoperability have therefore never been treated as a top priority among the allies.

The most evident challenges constraining multinational operations' fully rounded success revolve around several key points. Communications and Information Systems (CIS) interoperability serves as a crucial starting point, as it guarantees that nations can connect and work together through information transparency. At the micro-level, individual interoperability is also fundamental, as it allows soldiers to understand each other and work as a unit. The Art of Command (AoC) interoperability can be quite demanding, depending on the military culture of the states involved. Sharing a sense of purpose and command style is unlikely to be common among

a wide range of countries. Deriving from this, procedural interoperability fosters the ability to follow both tactical and strategic procedures to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to the demise of the operation itself. Finally, on a very practical and tool-based level, equipment interoperability is a component that must not be underestimated. Conflicting equipment on the battlefield would inevitably lead to a disastrous outcome, therefore compatibility of weaponry bears considerable importance.¹⁹

These challenges are particularly relevant for fostering military interoperability within NATO activity because of the obvious prevailing presence of the United States. General interoperability can be maintained to a certain extent, especially concerning communication and information sharing on a military level. Still, other gaps remain, for example, the willingness of land forces to coordinate in joint training and exercises. Due to the divergence in strategic and tactic procedures deployed according to different commanding styles, corps cannot maintain a united front. They operate with different technical equipment in line with different standards and criteria.

Most NATO members have shown the willingness and means to develop a higher degree of interoperability regarding armed forces' readiness on the battlefield. Especially within the European framework, the evolution of targeted interoperability appears to be more compatible with national interests where a shared sense of purpose and command style is more likely to occur. Multinational operations pursued by European policy planners

17. Christopher Permin, (2015), 'Commentary: Building Interoperability for European Defense', Defense News. [online] Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2015/11/06/commentary-building-interoperability-for-european-defense/>. [Accessed 19 February, 2021].

18. Christopher G. Permin et al, (2019), 'Targeted Interoperability' [online].

19. Ibid.

require balancing of the current prevailing general interoperability basis with a focus on targeted interoperability among specific units.²⁰ This would imply that when called to action, European defence forces act at a truly interoperable level on the battlefield, enhancing European defence overall. The VJTF represents an opportunity for European troops to combine strategic objectives and land force mechanisms, relying on targeted interoperability as an overarching goal.

Targeted Interoperability

Even though targeted interoperability is a fairly new ambition among NATO members, a few limited examples have started to pursue such an objective. For instance, the United States and the United Kingdom have combined extensive exercise and training according to detailed planning of the American 82nd Airborne Division and the British Air Assault Brigade for 18 months. Targeted interoperability was fostered through joint training, especially by working on technical, procedural, and cultural connections. These are the largest challenges posed by general interoperability, and their efforts reveal the willingness to generate a standing multinational capability.²¹

The positive interoperability results stimulated similar commitments between Germany and the Netherlands that in 2014 lead to the integration of the Dutch Airmobile Brigade into the Schnelle Kräfte German Division. European efforts have not stopped there, as a Franco-British cooperation kicked off in

2016, aiming at full operational interoperability with its Combined Joint Expeditionary Force. These initiatives are expected to advance interoperability on a much more tactical level, calling for the ability to combine units at division, brigade and battalion levels, reaching far beyond general interoperability.

As previously introduced, the most sophisticated example of such an approach is undoubtedly the VJTF set up by NATO. This multinational unit has specifically been directed towards efficient and effective response on a very tight deployment timeline. This brigade-size force has purposefully been designed to act within 48 hours, deploying lead elements across several alliance countries, interoperating at an unseen degree in NATO. These unique features make the VJTF the ‘Spearhead Force’ topping off the NRF, which already supplies the allies with a technologically advanced multinational framework involving land, air, and maritime components. Collective defence in crisis management is at the top of the NRF’s agenda. The VJTF is the ultimate tool to respond to the abrupt changes in the security environment, strengthening the measures of NATO’s RAP.²² A crucial aspect brought about by the VJTF is leadership. While most Operation Forces and SOF rely on a single nation for overall command and control, VJTF leadership is expected to rotate annually among allies. This directly tackles challenges concerning AoC interoperability whilst fostering an environment that facilitates individual micro-level interoperability among soldiers. It is not by chance that this degree of interoperability was only reached

20. Christopher Permin, (2015), ‘Commentary: Building Interoperability for European Defense’ [online].

21. C. Todd Lopez, (2015), ‘Army planning more combined operations with British Army’, U.S. Army. [online] Available at: <https://www.army.mil/about/>. [Accessed 21 February, 2021].

22. NATO, (2021), ‘NATO Response Force’, [online]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm. [Accessed 21 July, 2021].

in NATO with a new Joint Task Force (JTF) allowing a rotating lead role among European MS. France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom all agreed to assume this role, with Poland starting in June 2015 for Exercise Noble Jump.²³

The closer the forces are, the faster and the easier it is to plan, build, and execute interoperability. However, deliberately built interoperability which is typical of the ‘targeted’ approach is tendentially limited to a defined period. For this reason, even though prompt crisis response necessarily recurs to

targeted interoperability for its immediate effectiveness, it is fundamental to maintain relationships and multinational training operating with foreign militaries encouraged by a ‘general’ approach for long term success. A ‘balance’ is imperative in these terms, as the two types of interoperability complement one another. Even though European forces leading the VJTF present innovative targeted interoperability for readiness, they can only fully operate if general interoperability is kept across all MS.

DEPLOYING EUROPEAN CORPS FOR THE VJTF

The VJTF: Preparing for Rapid Deployment

This section will introduce the VJTF more elaborately and discuss its aims and practical implications. At the NATO Wales Summit 2014, the VJTF was set up²⁴, and by the NATO Warsaw Summit 2016, it was operationally capable.²⁵ The VJTF was established by NATO as part of a revision of the NRF.²⁶ Specifically, it was set up to respond to transforming security challenges NATO was facing – particularly to counter Russian threats at NATO’s eastern flank and to anticipate unrest in the Middle East²⁷ and North Africa.²⁸ However, it has been argued that

the VJTF was mostly driven by the desire to counter Russian aggression.²⁹ One could argue this claim can be confirmed if one looks at France’s 2017 Strategic Review, in which Russia’s aggression was mentioned as the main reason for the VJTF’s establishment, rather than threats coming from the Middle East and North Africa:

In the Baltic area, Moscow’s aggressive posture manifests itself through recurrent military demonstrations. This posture has led the Atlantic Alliance to adopt, in complement to the air policing and maritime surveillance missions already in place, a set of measures to reaffirm its unity and to respond with a balanced, deterrent and predictable posture, including the creation

23. Ibid.

24. NATO, (2020), ‘Turkey takes charge of NATO high readiness force’. [online] Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180627.htm.

25. NATO, (2021), ‘NATO Response Force’, [online].

26. NATO, (2015), ‘Fact sheet’. [online] Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150414014221/http://www.aco.nato.int/page349011837.aspx>.

27. NATO, (2020), ‘Turkey takes charge’, [online].

28. Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, ‘The NATO Response Force: A qualified failure no more?’, Contemporary Security Policy 138, no. 3 (2017): 447.

29. Ringsmose and Rynning, ‘The NATO Response Force’, 447-448.

*of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the deployment of forward forces.*³⁰

Scholars have considered the VJTF in the context of NATO's transforming strategic behaviour.³¹ First and foremost, the VJTF can be regarded as one of the core elements in NATO's arrangements in response to Russian revisionism.³² In general, NATO's recent arrangements aim to enhance the Alliance's collective military capacities.³³ By setting up and combining mobile elements, such as the NRF and the VJTF, with permanent elements concerning military infrastructure, NATO has integrated its traditional and modern toolboxes.³⁴ In this regard, it was argued the VJTF is part of a "moderate renovation" within NATO as a whole.³⁵ However, it was also argued that the VJTF could be considered a consequence of the EU's strategy for Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership, because the EU accepted that it might need military instruments outside the EU, such as NATO, to implement its strategies.³⁶

The NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) were created to receive the VJTF in times of crisis.³⁷ Since the VJTF predominantly formed a response to threats coming from Russia, one could argue it is unsurprising that all NFIUs were set up in Central and Eastern Europe. In this sense, the VJTF is particularly relevant to European land forces. Currently, there are NFIUs "[...]in Sofia (Bulgaria), Tal-

linn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Bydgoszcz (Poland), and Bucharest (Romania), Bratislava (Slovakia), and Székesfehérvár (Hungary)."³⁸ If the threats coming from North Africa were deemed as key as the threats coming from Russia, one would expect more NFIUs in NATO's southern European MS.

On 1 January 2021, Turkey's army took over the lead of the VJTF from Poland, which rotates among the following countries: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.³⁹ Turkey has provided the VJTF with its newest models of armed vehicles, anti-tank missiles, and howitzers but also invested in the VJTF's logistics and ammunition requirements planning. Although the leading country provides the VJTF's core, other units serve in the VJTF simultaneously, including "[u]nits from Albania, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the UK, and the United States [...]".⁴⁰ The VJTF is meant to respond to early warnings and threat indicators to deescalate and deter hostile situations. Therefore, several elements of the VJTF are supposed to be deployed within two or three days. In case of a crisis, the Initial Follow-On Forces Group (IFFG) could be deployed soon after the VJTF's deployment. Both the VJTF and the IFFG are stationed in their home countries.⁴¹ Besides land forces, the VJTF is supported by air and maritime forces. The VJTF conducts

30. Government of France, *Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017* (Paris: Bureau des éditions, 2017), 23.

31. Tomáš Karásek, "Modes of Strategic Adaptation: NATO and the EU under Revisionist Pressure", *Defence and Strategy* 18, no. 2 (December 2018): 45.

32. *Ibid.*, 47.

33. *Ibid.*, 52.

34. *Ibid.*, 54.

35. *Ibid.*, 56.

36. Sven Biscop, (2015), "Out of the blue: a white book", Egmont Institute. [online] Available at: <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/out-of-the-blue-a-white-book/>.

37. Ringsmose and Rynning, "The NATO Response Force", 448.

38. SHAPE NATO, (no date), "Nato Force Integration Units (NFIU)". [online] Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/operations/nato-force-integration-units>.

39. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online].

40. NATO, (2020), "Turkey takes charge", [online].

41. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online].

factors that contributed to this conclusion are that the Russian forces would outnumber the NATO forces in the area, the Russian forces would be better equipped than the NATO forces that were present in Estonia and Latvia, the Russian forces would be more mobile, and NATO air power would not have the capacity to limit the Russian advancements soon enough.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the NRF's and VJTF's effectiveness has been disputed, because NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) seems to have taken on a primary role in NATO's defence. The question remains whether the EFP became relatively prominent because of the NRF's and VJTF's lack of success. Nevertheless, one could argue that the VJTF and the ENF remain inherently connected.⁴⁷

Another issue that concerns the VJTF and the NRF, in general, is the way it is financed:

*NATO's principle for the VJTF and NRF as a whole is that costs-lie-where-they-fall. In other words, the contributing allies must pay for upkeep, readiness, and exercises that happen on their watch. Moreover, exposed (i.e. eastern) allies must build the infrastructure for receiving the VJTF on short notice—as a measure of “host nation support”—but this is costly, politically sensitive, and a complex matter considering all the moving parts of a multinational brigade.*⁴⁸

Although the VJTF's and NRF's financing was presented as a potential problem, one could also argue it could enhance the interoperability between European land forces, because NATO's eastern allies are encouraged to invest in their military infrastructure and be prepared to receive foreign forces.

Additionally, there is an issue that concerns the authority to use force through the VJTF. While the NRF's – and therefore the VJTF's – overall command lies with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)⁴⁹, it is impossible to consult national parliaments about the VJTF's deployment due to the time constraints in an emergency.⁵⁰ This issue was a point of discussion between the Cabinet of the Netherlands and the Dutch House of Representatives. Eventually, the cabinet said it would aim to inform the parliament before the VJTF would be deployed.⁵¹ However, this issue is not unique to the VJTF, but applies to any kind of international rapid response force.

Besides, one could argue that Turkey's leadership over the VJTF in 2021 could cause challenges, because some of Turkey's actions in recent years have led to turmoil within NATO. For instance, it was claimed Turkey had attempted to blackmail NATO military plans for the Baltics, although Turkey denied this claim.⁵² Another issue Turkey and many other NATO allies disagreed on was a dispute over Cyprus' and Greece's maritime boundaries.⁵³ Furthermore, Turkey pursued closer relations with Russia after the failed coup d'état in Turkey on 15 July 2016, while Turkey's response to the coup attempt worsened

46. Shlapak and Johnson, Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank, 5-6.

47. Ringsmose and Rynning, "The NATO Response Force", 450.

48. *Ibid.*, 449.

49. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online].

50. Ringsmose and Rynning, "The NATO Response Force", 449.

51. Marja Kwast van Duursen, (2016), "Inzet van snelle militaire reactiemachten in een instabiele wereld." Clingendael Institute. [online] Available at: <https://spectator.dlingendael.org/nl/publicatie/inzet-van-snelle-militaire-reactiemachten-een-instabiele-wereld>.

52. Patrick Wintour, "Turkey denies blackmailing Nato over Baltics defence plan", The Guardian, 3 December, 2019 [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/02/turkey-denies-blackmailing-nato-over-baltics-defence-plan>.

53. Marc Pierini, (2020), "New Power Struggles in the Mediterranean", Carnegie Europe [online]. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/30/new-power-struggles-in-mediterranean-pub-82403>.

its relations with other NATO members.⁵⁴ In this context, Turkey also bought Russian defence systems.⁵⁵ Turkey's relations with Russia could be particularly sensitive with regards to the VJTF, since the Force was primarily established to counter potential Russian aggression.⁵⁶ So far, however, Turkey's close relations with Russia and tense relations with other NATO members have not negatively affected the VJTF's efforts under Turkey's leadership in 2021.

VJTF Exercises Enhancing Interoperability among European Land Forces

This section will discuss how the VJTF's exercises have enhanced interoperability among European land forces so far and how they can enhance it in the future. As pointed out earlier, the NFIUs that the VJTF can make use of are relevant to general interoperability on the one hand, because they synchronise land force mechanisms. On the other hand, the VJTF's exercises can enhance targeted interoperability, because the exercises can focus more specifically on operational readiness.

Exercise Noble Jump, for instance, takes place regularly. The first time the VJTF was deployed to this exercise was in June 2015. More than 2.100 troops from nine different NATO members joined the exercise. Six years later, Exercise Noble Jump 2021 formed a part of a larger exercise called Steadfast De-

fender 2021, which ran from 22 May until 22 June and "focused on the reinforcement of the VJTF across the Atlantic and throughout Europe."⁵⁷ Exercise Noble Jump 2021 itself started on 19 May 2021 and ended on 2 June 2021. The VJTF Land Component was the focal point of Exercise Noble Jump.⁵⁸

At the start of Exercise Noble Jump 2021, launched at the Cincu training area in Romania, about 4.000 troops and 600 vehicles from twelve different countries were deployed. This deployment was enabled by the NFIU and the Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast.⁵⁹ Captain Jason Salata, the exercise's spokesperson, said that Exercise Noble Jump 2021 allowed the VJTF to show its capacity to rapidly respond to a crisis, but also demonstrated the NATO members' dedication to protect one another.⁶⁰ Besides testing the VJTF's rapid reaction deployment, Exercise Noble Jump and Brilliant Jump aim to test the VJTF's mobility as well.⁶¹ Regarding enhancing interoperability between European land forces through the VJTF, one could argue that it is a good sign that the number of troops participating in Exercise Noble Jump increased from 2.100 troops from nine NATO members in 2015 to 4.000 troops from twelve NATO members in 2021.

Like Exercise Noble Jump and Brilliant Jump, other NATO exercises aim to increase military mobility in Europe. Another example of such an exercise is Trident Juncture, in which the VJTF has participated as well. Trident

54. Jeffrey Mankoff, (2016), "A Friend in Need? Russia and Turkey after the Coup", Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) [online]. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/friend-need-russia-and-turkey-after-coup>.

55. Wintour, "Turkey denies blackmailing Nato", 3 December, 2019.

56. Ringsmose and Rynning, "The NATO Response Force", 447-448.

57. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online]

58. SHAPE NATO, (2021), "Exercise noble jump 2021 begins in Romania", [online]. Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/steadfast-defender/newsroom/news/exercise-noble-jump-2021-begins-in-romania#:~:text=begin%20in%20Romania,Exercise%20Noble%20Jump%202021%20begins%20in%20Romania,training%20area%20in%20central%20Romania>.

59. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online].

60. SHAPE NATO, (2021), "EXERCISE NOBLE JUMP 2021", [online].

61. Eva Haströmm Frisell et al., "Deterrence by Reinforcement: The Strengths and Weaknesses of NATO's Evolving Defence Strategy", Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, (2019): 31.

Juncture 18 was held in Norway between 25 October 2018 and 7 November 2018. 51,000 personnel from MS and partner countries were involved in this exercise. The exercise included land, air, maritime, and special forces.⁶² After Trident Juncture 18, however, the exercise's value to the VJTF was put into question. Because the VJTF did not move over land in this exercise, it did not prepare the Force much for an actual operation in Eastern Europe, which would involve more movement of land forces. The Crisis Management Exercise 19 faced similar criticism.⁶³ Exercise Noble Jump 2021, however, seemed to have filled this void to at least some extent, because it focused more on the movement of land forces. In light of the enhancement of interoperability between European land forces, it would be key to continue emphasising the role of land forces in the relevant NATO exercises.

Additionally, some events aim to enhance other forms of interoperability between

NATO members. This year's Coalition Warrior Interoperability eExercise (CWIX) aims to enhance technical interoperability in the VJTF and the NRF, among others. CWIX was launched on 8 June 2020 and ended on 26 June 2020.⁶⁴ CWIX aimed to contribute to the readiness of Communication and Information Systems (CIS) by testing interoperability now and in the future. In doing so, CWIX focused on processes, technologies, and troops, as these different elements have to go hand in hand before and throughout an operation. The benefit of CWIX is that it can assist in identifying and finding solutions to future challenges. Another benefit of CWIX is that it is a relatively inexpensive way of enhancing interoperability.⁶⁵ Since CWIX addresses challenges that emerge from ongoing technological developments in warfare, it takes on a key role in enhancing interoperability. In this regard, it can continue to be of value to the VJTF in the future.

GERMANY AT THE VERTEX OF THE VJTF

The leadership role in the VJTF is decisive in determining and securing appropriate interoperability. The rotational mechanism has ensured that several European countries have gotten their chance at enhancing the VJTF. 2021 saw the Turkish Army taking the lead, hereby putting its 66th Mechanised Infantry

Brigade with 4,200 troops at its core.⁶⁶ As a backbone of the European contribution to defence within this context, the future of the VJTF is expected to be ultimately updated with Germany's takeover in 2023, where a modernised system shows potential regarding both effectiveness and interoperability.

62. NATO, (2021), "NATO Response Force", [online].

63. Hagström Frisell et al., "Deterrence by Reinforcement", 33.

64. NATO, (2020), "CWIX – Improving Interoperability for 22 Nations Across 10 Times Zones", [online]. Available at: <https://www.act.nato.int/articles/cwix-improving-interoperability-for-22-nations-across-10-times-zones>.

65. NATO, (2021), "CWIX 2021: NATO's Premier Interoperability Exercise Goes Hybrid Across 10 Time Zones", [online]. Available at: <https://www.act.nato.int/articles/cwix-2021-starts>.

66. Nicholas Fiorenza and Dr. Dylan Lehrke, (2021), "Turkey leads NATO VJTF in 2021", *Janes, Defence News*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/turkey-leads-nato-vjtf-in-2021>. [Accessed 20 February, 2021].

Germany's Responsibility as a Framework Nation

Since NATO's Summit in Wales in 2014, the adaptation of the military alliance and reorganisation of defence capabilities has seen Germany at its core. Germany has acted on a conceptual level working on the strategic adaptation per se, and in material terms providing a substantial political, military and financial contribution. Already in 2013, Germany agreed to take on leadership in the NRF, and in 2015 the German-Dutch corps were in command.⁶⁷ The Bundeswehr has provided 2.700 soldiers together with paratroopers, mechanised infantry, and transport aircraft contributing, making it the largest contributor by far.

Such a key role implies considerable obligations on a military level. Even though the German armoured brigades can conduct full-on operations independently, they require integration of personnel and equipment to relocate faster and have transportation capacity readily available. The solution proposed by Berlin was that of the framework nation. The latter foresees a country to be set up as the organisational backbone of collaboration that constructs multinational units to provide sustainable military capabilities.⁶⁸

This endeavour can be successful only if appropriately complimented on the political side, entailing direct communication with the Bundestag and the public about radical changes occurring in the defence sector. To underpin its military contributions, the Bund-

estag must be comprehensively informed to promptly decide on the matter. The reason for this also resides in the different requirements determined by the operation at stake. Even exercises involving troops' relocation call for a political decision that is not necessary to launch VJTF alarm exercises. Any action of the Bundeswehr involving armed operation needs to be voted upon.

Furthermore, the persistent hybridisation of security threats expanded the role of Collective Defence based on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. This implies political, consensus-driven decisions. In this regard, Germany's gain in credibility and political latitude has made forging a tighter alliance willing to increase interoperability feasible. Despite remaining indispensable in their support, the United States has left the leading role on all activities in the RAP to European members, among which Germany has become the primary political shaper of the Alliance.

In 2019, Germany managed to secure cooperation among nine allies contributing to the VJTF. Already sharing control with the Netherlands for the NRF's land forces, Germany took the lead of the Spearhead Force. The Netherlands and Norway supplied aviation and mechanised infantry capabilities, while forces were provided by France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania. The VJTF, however, ultimately relied on the German 9th Panzerlehrbrigade as a basis for the 8.000 troops multinational brigade.⁶⁹ This outstanding display of capabilities showed the willingness of a significant number of Euro-

67. Claudia Major, (2015), 'NATO's Strategic Adaptation,' SWP Comments, German Institute for International and Security affairs. [online] Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2015C16_mjc.pdf. [Accessed 20 February, 2021].

68. *Ibid.*

69. Army Technology, (2019), 'Germany to lead Nato's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force,' Army Technology. [online] Available at: <https://www.army-technology.com/news/germany-nato-high-readiness-joint-task-force/>. [Accessed 19 July, 2021].

pean countries to engage at a higher degree of interoperability. The role Germany has been consolidating over the past years has set up the preconditions for further enhancing the VJTF system, with stronger ties with European allies and the upgrading of its equipment foreseen for 2023.

The French-German Brigade

Germany has been striving for multinationalism in European land force defence since the final years of the Cold War. Close cooperation with European countries is not something that only recently appeared in the German military scenario. The Franco-Ger-

man Brigade dates back to 1989, creating a closer partnership on the military plane between the two countries. Oriented towards international operations, the brigade consists of motorised infantry battalions of which two units are German and one French, a French reconnaissance battalion with AMX-10RC and a German artillery squadron using Pzh. 2000 and MLRS systems.

This mixed brigade is characterised by binational command setting the premises for increased interoperability. Moreover, the French-German brigade is a hallmark of the German 10 Armoured Division: a mechanised major unit directed towards a high-intensity spectrum including not only national,



Source: https://www.themilitarydefence.com/fr/information/defence/public-relation/news/index_26880.php, Accessed 22 July 2021.

Logical Framework for building Interoperability, Pernin, Christopher G. et al, (2019), 'Targeted Interoperability: A New Imperative for Multinational Operations,' Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation

but also collective defence.⁷⁰ Multinationality is a common feature of the Division, whose partnership goes beyond the Franco-German liaison and expands to other European countries such as Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

Starting in 2021, NATO's VJTF is led by the 10 Armoured Division, enabling rapid and flexible response as a standby brigade on duty for a total of three years (the first being the 'stand-up phase' with a 45-day readiness, the second in standby for the VJTF 48 hour required readiness and the last stand-down year expecting a readiness of 30 days). In 2022, as the 10 Armoured Division enters the stand-down phase, the 37 Armoured Infantry Brigade will take its place as the standby component of the VJTF, providing land force from 2023 onwards.

Before Germany takes over once again as the framework nation in 2023, it is noteworthy to examine the engagement of other European allies as framework nations working towards a stronger interoperable VJTF, by looking at the involvement of other countries in connection to the French-German Brigade. The Polish 21st Highland Infantry Brigade served this purpose as a response component during Poland's role as a framework nation in the previous year. In this case, a multinational framework was envisaged as Czech and British troops supplied their support.⁷¹

This year, however, Turkey took Poland's place based on its 66th Mechanised Brigade. The Franco-German Brigade will maintain a con-

siderable role. Next year, France is expected to take the lead with Polish battle groups also involved, together with other nations providing support. Cooperation in this role is not new to Poland, whose soldiers have already taken part in the 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade mechanised battalion during the standby phase for the British lead of the VJTF in 2017.⁷² The past operations of the VJTF show evidence of the expanding multinational character of land forces, leading to an opportunity to creating a true balance between general and targeted interoperability. As Germany's turn as a framework nation approaches, its experience and initiative towards reshaping European defence shows the potential to increase European military interoperability even further, something seemingly to be ever more likely with the latest upgrading of System Panzergrenadier.

2023: System Panzergrenadier

In March 2021, the Bundeswehr System Panzergrenadier has been approved as fit to fight, having been supplied by Rheinmetall and its partner companies. As a global first-tier supplier of threat-appropriate security technology, Rheinmetall has had long-lasting cooperation with armed forces.⁷³ The Chief of the German Army, Lieutenant General Alfons Mais, spurred the System to become the basis for the VJTF when Germany takes the lead in 2023. The reasons triggering such a stance are the significant advantages offered by the

70. Bundeswehr, (2021), '10 Armoured Division,' Bundeswehr. [online] Available at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/organization/army/organization/10-armoured-division>. [Accessed 22 July, 2021].

71. Jakub Palowski, (2021), 'Polish Armed Forces as a Part of the French-German VJTF,' Defence 24. [online] Available at: <https://www.defence24.com/polish-armed-forces-as-a-part-of-the-french-german-vjtf/>. [Accessed 21 July, 2021]

72. Ibid.

73. Rheinmentall, (2021), 'Rheinmentall, the Integrated Technology Group,' Rheinmentall AG. [online] Available at: https://www.rheinmetall.com/en/rheinmetall_ag/home.php. [Accessed 22 July, 2021].

upgraded System. In the first place, mounted and dismounted soldiers can access the same information, increasing to some extent the degree of multinational interoperability at the individual soldier-to-soldier level.

Moreover, such information is more easily available and can be shared instantly without any loss of accuracy. These features are guaranteed by Rheinmetall and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann's upgrading of the infantry fighting vehicle Puma together with Rheinmetall's VJTF 2023 version of the 'future soldier'.⁷⁴ In particular, the forty VJTF-grade Puma infantry fighting vehicles include standoff capable effectors together with additional sensors and improved C4I architecture. Furthermore, a panoramic and driver vision system will allow soldiers to see through the armour 24/7, in light and darkness, thanks to the fusion of daylight vision and high-performance thermal imaging.

The modernisation of the System is specifical-

ly designed to provide the VJTF with the best combination of readiness and effectiveness in combat. The new digitised vehicle platform complementing soldiers' digital radio communication equipment enables sensors and effectors to work more efficiently. This implies minimising any period separating target detection from actual target engagement. The Spearhead Force will therefore be strengthened through the tactical interaction ensured by the overarching System Panzergrenadier.

More than just a tool for the VJTF, System Panzergrenadier conceptualises a digitally networked greater coherent system. It is not by chance that the next generation of such systems is already being worked on, as Puma VJTF is only the starting point to expand capabilities in this field. This new technological trailblazer appears to be developing towards a potentially more effective and more interoperable system.

CONCLUSION

The transforming international security environment asks for enhanced multinational crisis response initiatives. The Russian military invasion in Ukraine in 2014 formed a turning point for NATO and the NRF in particular. In this context, NATO established the VJTF in 2014 as part of the NRF. The VJTF consists of about 5.000 land and maritime, air, and special forces. The VJTF can be deployed within 48 hours and has enhanced the degree

of interoperability among NATO members. Through different exercises, the VJTF can enhance general and even more targeted interoperability among European land forces. While the VJTF necessitates both targeted and general interoperability, targeted interoperability poses the largest challenge. General interoperability tends to occur on the tactical level and allows many states to cooperate, but a general approach leaves gaps in NATO in-

⁷⁴ Rheinmetall, (2021), 'German Army declares "System Panzergrenadier" fit to fight,' Rheinmetall AG Media. [online] Available at: https://www.rheinmetall-defence.com/en/rheinmetall_defence/public_relations/news/latest_news/index_26880.php. [Accessed 22 July, 2021].

terventions. In crisis scenarios, information sharing, communication, cultural sensitivity, and standard equipment, among other things, are key to make rapid, multinational responses successful. Especially among European NATO members, the desire to develop a higher degree of interoperability seems to be present. The VJTF provides an opportunity for European land forces to achieve this.

The VJTF has been part of different exercises with different levels of success. Trident Juncture, for instance, involved relatively little movement over land, which would be necessary with a possible invasion at NATO's eastern flank. The more recent Exercise Noble Jump 2021, however, better prepared the VJTF for such a scenario. Furthermore, some events aim to enhance the VJTF's communication and information interoperability.

Nevertheless, the VJTF continues to face

challenges. The Force is arguably too small and too slow to respond to real-life crises, such as a Russian invasion at NATO's eastern flank. Other issues concern how the VJTF is financed and the extent to which national parliaments can be consulted before the VJTF is deployed.

However, these challenges can be faced if the European NATO members continue their efforts regarding the VJTF's interoperability. With the prospect of Germany's leadership over the VJTF in 2023 and the country's large contributions in terms of troops, contributions by other European countries are stimulated as well, resulting in an expanding multinational dedication to interoperability. As such, the VJTF is showcasing its capacity to yield an improved balance between general and targeted interoperability among NATO's European land forces.

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Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

- Promoting interoperability and cooperation of armies, while seeking to bring together concepts, doctrines and procedures;
- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



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