

NATO Response Force (NRF) Fact Sheet

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The NATO Response Force (NRF) was established in 2003 as a high readiness force comprising of air, land, maritime and special forces units capable of rapid deployment. The NRF is capable of performing a wide variety of tasks including:

- Immediate collective defence response capability, prior to arrival of other forces;
- Crisis management & peace support operations;
- Disaster relief and the protection of critical infrastructure.

Overall command of this force belongs to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). NATO's two Joint Force Commands (based in Brunssum, The Netherlands and Naples, Italy) have operational command of the NRF each year on a rotational basis. Rotating forces through the NRF requires contributing Allies and partner nations to meet strict standards and adopt procedures required for defensive and expeditionary operations. As a result, participation in the NRF is preceded by a six-month NATO exercise programme in order to integrate and standardize the various national contingents. Additional training serials are carried out by contributing nations during the 6-18 month period prior to assuming the role of an NRF high-readiness unit.

The Enhanced NRF: developing the VJTF concept

At the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO Allies agreed to enhance the capabilities of the NATO Response Force (NRF) in order to adapt and respond to emerging security challenges posed by Russia, as well as the risks emanating from the Middle East and North Africa.

Having carefully considered the options presented during post-Wales discussions, the decision to incorporate a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the overall NRF structure was taken, increasing the size of the NRF to 40,000 and providing NATO with a highly capable and flexible air, land, maritime and special forces package capable of deploying at short notice when tasked.

The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)

The VJTF comprises a multinational brigade (approximately 5,000 troops), with up to five manoeuvre battalions, supported by air, maritime and special forces. Once fully operational, the VJTF will be supplemented by two additional brigades, as a rapid-reinforcement capability, in case of a major crisis. If activated, the force will be available to move immediately, following the first warnings and indicators of potential threats, before a crisis begins, to act as a potential deterrent to further escalation. The rapid arrival of this small but capable military unit would send a very clear message to any potential aggressor: "any attempt to violate the sovereignty of one NATO nation will result in a decisive military engagement with all 28 allied nations".

The VJTF is established on a rotational and persistent basis and will not be permanently based. Contributions to NRF will rotate between different NATO countries each year, with the need for a number of lead or framework nations to stand up the force. These framework nations, the core of the new force, are expected to provide headquarters, combat forces, logistics and enablers.

In addition, NATO Allies have a wide range of other forces at their disposal. For example: Allies often send forces to conduct exercises in various locations across Europe; all Allies have national troops at high states of readiness that can quickly respond to a crisis.

The VJTF's rapid yet flexible response times are what set it apart from other components of the NRF; some units will be ready to deploy in just two days, whilst the majority of units will be ready to move in less than seven days.

In ensuring a high level of readiness the VJTF will be regularly exercised and deployed at short notice.

NRF Structure

With the introduction of the VJTF concept, the enhanced NRF now comprises 4 parts:

- Command and Control element: based on a deployable Joint Task Force HQ;
- Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF): a new component of the NRF consisting of forces at the highest level of readiness. It is a joint force, consisting of a land component with appropriate air, maritime and special operations components, as needed, able to deploy within a few days in response to any threats or challenges that may arise on NATO's flanks;
- Initial Follow On Forces Group (IFFG): These are high-readiness forces that can deploy quickly, following the VJTF, in response to a crisis;
- Response Forces Pool (RFP): NATO will retain the same broad spectrum of military capabilities that it did in the previous NRF structure.

Assets Assigned to NRF 2016

Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC Brunssum) is the lead headquarters for the NRF during 2016; it will be supported by the following command and control elements:

- Land - Spanish NATO Rapid Deployable Corps (NRDC);
- Maritime - United Kingdom Maritime Force (UKMARFOR);
- Air - Italian Joint Force Air Component Command (JFAC);
- Special Operations - United States Special Operations Command Europe;
- Logistics - Joint Logistics Support Group (JLSG) from JFC Brunssum;
- Multinational Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear (CBRN) Battalion led by Poland.

Combat Forces. Air, land, maritime, special forces, and logistics troops from across the Alliance have been placed on a high level of readiness and are available to support NRF 2016 if required. For reasons of operational security, details of the exact composition, locations and readiness of these forces are not publicly releasable. Twenty-five Allies will contribute military forces to NRF 2016.

The VJTF framework nation for 2016 is Spain.

Current development of the VJTF concept: Exercises 2015-2016

Work on developing and testing the VJTF concept commenced in 2015, with the Land Component of the 'traditional' NRF 2015 acting as an Interim VJTF; this is the basis for VJTF concept development.

The Interim VJTF in 2015 was led by Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, supported by other participating Allies, and was tested through a series of exercises, trials, and evaluations aimed at developing, refining and implementing the concept:

- Table-top exercises occurred in January and February 2015, which refined the overarching military concepts that will underpin the VJTF;
- Exercise NOBLE JUMP was conducted during April and June 2015; this exercise refined NATO's ability to deploy troops at short notice across the Alliance in response to an evolving crisis;
- Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE, led by JFC Brunssum, was conducted during October/November 2015; this was NATO's most ambitious exercise in over a decade, demonstrating that high-readiness forces from across the Alliance can be deployed within a matter of days.

The development and enhancement process of the VJTF concept will continue throughout 2016 with further exercises, such as BRILLIANT JUMP, TRIDENT JOUST and BRILLIANT CAPABILITY, demonstrating NATO's commitment to safety, security and continual improvement.

NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs)

Rapid deployment of the VJTF, if activated, will be facilitated by small command and control nodes

enabling deployment and sustainment activity called NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs). As an initial step, NFIUs were established in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania during 2015, and will be staffed on a rotational basis. Subsequently 2 further NFIUs will be established in Slovakia and Hungary in 2016 and 2017 respectively

NFIUs are working in conjunction with host nations to identify logistical networks, transportation nodes and supporting infrastructure in order to ensure that NATO high-readiness forces (VJTF) can deploy to an assigned region as quickly as possible, within two and up to seven days

Each NFIU will provide a vital link between national forces and multinational NATO forces, and will have a key role in planning, exercising, and assisting potential reinforcements. In short, the NFIUs will facilitate the rapid deployment of Allied forces to the region, support collective defence planning and assist in coordinating training and exercises.

All six of the NFIUs were declared active as of 1st September 2015. By 1st January 2016, they achieved their Initial Capability and all are expected to reach full capability ahead of the Warsaw Summit in July 2016.

Readiness Action Plan

Changes to the NRF are just one of the adaption measures approved by Allies at the Wales Summit in 2014 under the Readiness Action Plan. Other related initiatives include:

- Assuring Allies with an increased presence including exercises, maritime and air patrols, surveillance, and policing;
- Upgrading intelligence gathering and sharing and updating defence plans in order to enhance NATO's ability to quickly detect and respond to ambiguous, hybrid threats;
- The pre-positioning of military equipment and supplies;
- Improvement of NATO's ability to reinforce its eastern Allies through preparation of national infrastructure, such as airfields and ports;
- More exercises focused both on crisis management and collective defence;
- Enhancing NATO's Standing Naval Forces;
- Raising the readiness and capabilities of the Headquarters Multinational Corps North-East (Szczecin, Poland) and enhancing its role as a hub for regional cooperation.