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NATO to surge troops to Russian border



NATO forces land in Estonia during BALTOPS 2019 (NATO via Flickr)

NATO plans to surge troops to Russia's border as part of an effort to become a "war-fighting alliance," the *New York Times* reported Monday.

The *Times* wrote that "NATO now has deployed a battalion of multinational troops to eight countries along the eastern border with Russia. It is detailing how to enlarge those forces to brigade strength in those frontline states."

A battalion can include up to 1,000 troops, while a brigade can include up to 5,000 troops, meaning that NATO could potentially plan to increase the number of troops on Russia's borders fivefold, to up to 40,000 troops.

The *Times* reports that NATO "is also tasking thousands more forces, in case of war, to move quickly in support, with newly detailed plans for mobility and logistics and stiffer requirements for readiness."

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Politico, meanwhile, has cited even larger numbers. On March 18, it reported, “In the coming months, the alliance will accelerate efforts to stockpile equipment along the alliance’s eastern edge and designate tens of thousands of forces that can rush to allies’ aid on short notice... The numbers will be large, with officials floating the idea of up to 300,000 NATO forces.”

“The North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” wrote the *Times*, has launched “a full-throttled effort” to prepare for military operations all along its eastern flank.

As the *Times* put it, this “means a revolution in practical terms: more troops based permanently along the Russian border,” It also means “more integration of American and allied war plans, more military spending and more detailed requirements for allies to have specific kinds of forces and equipment to fight, if necessary, in pre-assigned places.”

The alliance has “shed remaining inhibitions about increased numbers of Western troops all along NATO’s border with Russia,” the *Times* stated. The aim is “to make NATO’s forces not only more robust and more capable but also more visible to Russia.”

Additional troops will be placed under the direct authority of Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, who also commands American forces in Europe, as part of the NATO alliance’s decision.

The *Times* reports that General Cavoli is integrating American and allied war-fighting plans for the first time since the Cold War. Citing a NATO official, the newspaper wrote, “Americans are back at the heart of Europe’s defense ... deciding with NATO precisely how America will defend Europe.”

This will entail a massive military buildup, involving enormous increases in military spending. “Now the demands will be tougher and more rigorous to bring the alliance back to a war-fighting capacity in Europe and make deterrence credible—to ensure that NATO can fight a high-intensity war against a rival, Russia, from the first day of conflict,” the *Times* wrote.

Instead of meeting the previous goal of 2 percent of gross domestic product devoted to the military, NATO members will be expected to spend between 2.5 and 3 percent, the *Times* reported.

In perhaps the most ominous passage in the article, the *Times* wrote, “Previously, the annual exercises of NATO’s nuclear forces, known as Steadfast Noon, were kept quiet. But last year, after Russia’s invasion, the exercise went ahead openly. It was important, a NATO official said, to show Moscow that the alliance wasn’t deterred by nuclear threats.”

NATO's headquarters is likewise "being transformed into a major strategic and war-fighting command, charged with drawing up the alliance's plans to integrate and deploy allied troops."

The accession of Finland to NATO, which doubled the length of NATO's land border with Russia, will be a key component of these plans, with Russia's entire border with NATO becoming a militarized zone.

Just weeks after its accession to NATO, Finland has begun building a fence on the Russian border, with the initial section to be completed in June.

In June of last year, NATO published a strategy document declaring that the alliance must prepare for "high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors." The document declared that "the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace"—all but declaring that the alliance is at war.

In January, Rob Bauer, NATO's top military spokesperson, declared that the US-led NATO alliance is prepared for a "direct clash with Russia." Asked by Portugal's RTP News, "You don't believe that it's only about Ukraine?" Bauer replied, "No, it's about turning back to the old Soviet Union."

The interviewer continued, "So the entire Eastern Flank is at risk somehow?" Bauer replied, "Yeah." The interviewer asked, "We are ready to [sic] a direct confrontation with Russia?" To this Bauer replied, "We are."

In this supercharged environment, NATO will begin Defender 23, the alliance's annual war game, on April 22.

The exercise will involve 9,000 US troops and 17,000 soldiers from other NATO members. The "nearly two-month-long exercise is focused on the strategic deployment of U.S.-based forces, employment of Army pre-positioned stocks and interoperability with European allies and partners," a Pentagon spokesperson said April 5.

A key goal of the exercise will be to "increase lethality of the NATO Alliance through long-distance fires" according to U.S. Army's Europe and Africa commands.

This will be followed by Air Defender 2023, the largest NATO air exercise since its founding. A US Air National Guard official told the *War Zone* that Russian officials can "take away whatever message they want" from the drill.

Against this background, a group of former top officials from France, Germany, the United States and Spain have written an op-ed in the *Guardian* Sunday encouraging more direct NATO military intervention against Russia, declaring "We have to go 'all in' in our support for Ukraine." They declare that "Ukraine needs the combined force of tanks,

longer-range missiles and aircraft to conduct a successful counterattack, paving the way to Ukrainian victory.”

The press is full of such declarations. David Ignatius, writing in the *Washington Post*, argued, “President Biden doesn’t want to start World War III, but he will look back with regret if the United States and its allies leave any weapons or ammunition on the sidelines that could responsibly be used in this conflict. Whatever Biden might wish later he had done if things go badly, he should do now.”

As the deteriorating military situation for the Ukrainian armed forces becomes increasingly apparent, NATO is making open plans to massively intensify its conflict with Russia.

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