



INTEROPERABILITY AND INTEGRATION

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The NATO Response Force hones tactics to confront challenges in Europe

NATO has stood as the primary guarantor of European security for more than 65 years. With the end of the Cold War, however, the most substantial security threat dissipated. Nevertheless, the current instability of Europe's security environment necessitates a renewed focus on NATO and operational readiness. Such increased readiness is demonstrated by the Alliance's collective security presence, command and control, and quick deployment of responsive forces. A robust capacity from all member nations and interoperability are key components.

The United States supports partner nation capacity building and increased NATO interoperability. Central to this approach is the NATO Response Force (NRF), a high readiness and technologically advanced multinational force made up of land, air, sea and special forces components that the Alliance can quickly deploy wherever needed. To certify the NRF in 2014, the Alliance conducted a series of exercises (Noble Arrow, Noble Justification and Noble Mariner) across the European theater. These separate component-level air, sea and land exercises

contributed to the overall joint certification exercise Trident Juncture and qualified NATO Joint Force Command (JFC) Headquarters in Naples, Italy, to command and control the NRF in 2015.

Noble Arrow and Noble Justification exercises

Allied JFC in Brunssum, Netherlands, and Headquarters Air Command in Ramstein, Germany, led the NRF Air Component Command (ACC) live-fly exercise Noble Arrow for three weeks in October 2014. The exercise trained participants in the orchestration and conduct of air operations in a realistic and high threat environment to provide component-led force integration training.

U.S. Air Forces Europe (USAFE) participated in Noble Arrow alongside 13 other NATO nations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom) and two partner nations (Finland and Sweden). The multinational exercise enabled ACC to demonstrate its ability to activate the NRF, establish and maintain command and control of assigned forces, and liaise between forces and host nation agencies. Moreover, Noble Arrow optimized interaction to ensure the best training value and interoperability of the allied forces.

The exercise provided force integration and combat readiness training with integrated tanker refueling and fighter missions. It validated the readiness of forces to respond rapidly and cooperatively to any NATO contingency.

USAFE assets employed operational firepower alongside other NATO nations, conducted air refueling missions, and notably, developed and maintained Alliance and regional relations. U.S. Air Force bombers from U.S. Strategic Command supported Noble Justification's maritime forces by practicing the command, control and employment of simulated conventional weapons operations. Bomber flights were specifically designed to provide opportunities to synchronize the capabilities of the U.S. and its allies and partners. These operations emphasize NATO's combined capabilities and demonstrate power projection capabilities in the European theater.

Leadership posture

Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, commander of Supreme Allied Command Europe and U.S. European Command, stated in September 2014: "It is indeed a momentous time in Europe. But with the support of our partners and allies in Europe and NATO, we will face these challenges like we have in the past — together — and work toward our version of a Europe whole, free and at peace."

To address any threats or destabilization, the U.S. and its NATO allies will continue to increase the capability, readiness and responsiveness of NATO forces. Fighting together requires training together. Gen. Breedlove added: "NATO's focus is NRF readiness, command and control and forward presence that are both affordable and sustainable. In order to improve responsiveness, the NRF is expected to test their readiness through irregular and off-schedule exercises, command and control of allied interoperability, and forward presence through strategic exercises and basing."

The general made the comments in the context of reassuring NATO allies: "This is NATO power, not just air power, but NATO power, assuring our allies that we're there, and we can be there rapidly if required. We brought assurance to those forward nations."

The current European security environment may be in flux, but NATO will continue to prepare its response forces for unpredictable events. "Successful certification demonstrates the highest achievable measures of proficiency for these parts of the NRF," said Canadian Forces Lt. Gen. D. Michael Day, deputy commander of JFC Naples. "These exercises are not just important to the life cycle of the NRF, but also act to assure NATO members and their allies of the Alliance's unity, ability and commitment to respond to any threat to NATO members' integrity and sovereignty."

While U.S. Air Force participation in Noble Arrow and Noble Justification was limited to flying air refueling, and fighter and bomber missions, its contribution to NRF certification exercises demonstrates a steadfast commitment to the defense of NATO and its ability to resolve emerging threats for decades to come. □