



## NATO Military Committee follows up on July Summit:

A review of the NATO Military Committee meeting, Warsaw, 28-30 September 2018

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*This briefing paper presents an overview of the 180th NATO Military Committee meeting, which took place in Warsaw on the 28-30 September 2018. It is limited to information that NATO published on the event and what is publicly known from other sources (mainly press briefings by individual Defence Chiefs to their domestic media).*

The [NATO Military Committee](#)—the most senior military authority within NATO and comprising the 29 chiefs of defence—met in Warsaw for a three-day conference to discuss issues arising from the July NATO Summit including security in Eastern Europe. (For a detailed account of what was agreed at the July 2018 NATO Summit, see the [NATO Watch Observatory No.48](#)).

The meeting, one of three held by the Military Committee each year, took place in Warsaw to mark 100 years of the formal organization of independent Poland's army. It also provided an opportunity for the hosts to press their argument for greater security measures in Eastern Europe—and specifically [more allied states' troops in Poland](#)—amid concerns over Russia's increased military activity in the Baltic region. According to [reports](#), Poland's Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak told the attendees: "[Poland sees] the possibility of boosting the military presence of the allied forces in [NATO's] eastern flank". The United States is currently reviewing a request from Polish President Andrzej Duda to site a permanent US base in Poland for which Warsaw is willing to pay up to \$2 billion to fund.

British Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, the new chairman of the Military Committee, [said](#) the alliance faces "an unpredictable and fluid environment, with many challenges and developing threats posed by state and nonstate actors in the traditional domains of land, sea and air, as well as hybrid warfare and cyberattacks".

The chiefs of defence gave their guidance on a number of issues facing the alliance, Peach said, and that guidance will be discussed further at the next meeting of NATO's defence ministers in Brussels (on the 3-4 October 2018). The meeting had [four key sessions](#):

- NATO operations and missions, with a focus on Afghanistan and Iraq;
- NATO military strategy;
- 'Responsiveness', 'Reinforcement' and the NATO Readiness Initiative; and
- Alliance modernisation, including adaptation of the NATO Command Structure and the NATO Headquarters' Functional Review.

The discussions in the four sessions were carried out in private and there were no official documents or summaries of the outcomes, which is regrettable, given that Sir Stuart Peach [told](#) reporters that the discussions "were frank and thought-provoking throughout".

During the conference, it was also [announced](#) that the chiefs of defence elected Lieutenant General Hans-W. Wiermann of the German Armed Forces to be the next Director of the NATO International Military Staff (DGIMS). The

DGIMS is nominated by the NATO chiefs of defence to head the alliance's International Military Staff for a term of three years. Lieutenant General Wiermann will take up the position in the summer of 2019 when Lieutenant General Jan Broeks' tenure ends.

### **NATO operations and missions**

According to NATO's short [news release](#) about the committee meeting, almost 20,000 military personnel are currently engaged in NATO missions around the world in "complex ground, naval and air operations in all types of environment". The Chiefs of Defence received "detailed intelligence and operational briefings noting the changes to the security environment and ongoing challenges". They went on to discuss the need for "increased cooperation and coordination, especially in areas where a number of institutions are involved".

NATO's main operational effort is the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces, as well as the NATO Mission in Iraq recently launched at the Brussels Summit. In his [opening remarks](#), Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach described NATO's commitment to Afghanistan as "unwavering", while acknowledging that the security situation remains "challenging".

The air marshal also [said](#), the Afghan security forces "have now been in the lead for three years, and we welcome their determination and commitment to improve their ability to conduct offensive operations, to develop their special forces, their air force and other capabilities -- and above all, to deny the Taliban their strategic objectives". He also emphasised that the ultimate goal is peace through reconciliation: "An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is essential to a long-term, inclusive political settlement", Peach said. The NATO mission in Iraq will be "modest and scalable and complement the efforts of coalition nations in the country", he added.

### **NATO military strategy**

On this session, the NATO [news release](#) resorts to vague gobbledygook when it says that the chiefs of defence agreed the need to "focus

both on current means and capabilities, based on a broad and strengthened deterrence and defence, in order to contribute to projecting stability and strengthening security outside its territory, thereby contributing to alliance security overall".

Air Chief Marshal Peach offered a little more clarity in his opening remarks, stating that it was the role of the Military Committee to "ensure the alliance continues to have an overarching framework to promote a common understanding of NATO's military goals, intended approaches and resource requirements" and to "be ready and able to operate decisively across all domains, now and in the future". And in [reported comments](#), he said, as part of NATO seeking to address a wide range of threats, "The chiefs of defence highlighted the importance of keeping pace with technological advances through a focus on innovation". "At the moment, we have a series of risks that we have identified, and we respond with presence, with training, with exercises in order to generate deterrence. ... And that provides the sense of collective security for the people of Poland and the people of the other NATO allies", he added.

It would seem, however, that the main focus of the discussion was on the need to combat Russia's 'hybrid war strategy'. In his comments to reporters, the alliance's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR), US Army Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, who also leads the US European Command, [said](#) that Russia already is a competitor that operates in domains "particularly below the level of war". These include the use of cyber activity, social media, disinformation campaigns "with basically the common theme of undermining Western values and the credibility of Western governments". "That is particularly true of the countries that are in the Eastern part of the alliance that are on their border", he added. Scaparrotti also said he has no doubt that Russia would repeat its actions in Crimea and Ukraine "if they saw the opportunity and they thought the benefits exceeded the costs". In defining the hybrid approach, he said, "It's a lot of things, and most of it is not in the military realm".

Planners need to determine what the military can do as part of a counter-strategy and what other agencies, branches efforts can contribute, he said, “in a whole-of-government approach”. In terms of what NATO brings to the military component of this strategy, the general emphasised the role of special forces: “We have special operations forces, and this is their business. They understand it. To the extent that they can identify hybrid activity, they can help our nations build their ability to identify and counter it”.

### **Heightening readiness, increasing responsiveness and improving reinforcement**

NATO faces the challenge of accommodating the divergent security priorities among its 29-member states. Southern allies generally prioritise action against terrorism and unchecked migration, while Eastern allies are primarily concerned with deterrence and Russia. These differences have grown more difficult to reconcile in recent years, as an assertive Russia and instability across the Middle East and North Africa have oriented NATO to multiple tasks. In an attempt to bridge this divide, the alliance continues to seek a 360-degree approach in which NATO forces are capable of deterring threats from the East and engaging with challenges emerging from the South and the North.

At the Brussels Summit in July 2018, NATO leaders agreed the ‘Four Thirties’ [Readiness Initiative](#) with allies committing to having 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels, ready to use within 30 days or less by 2020. According to the NATO [news release](#), the Chiefs of Defence provided “further advice and recommendations on the initiative” and received progress reports on NATO-EU cooperation in the area of military mobility.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach [said](#), “As we continue to ensure that the alliance’s deterrence and defence posture remains credible, coherent, and resilient, it is of strategic importance to increase our

responsiveness, heighten readiness and improve reinforcement”. He also predicted that NATO’s Readiness Initiative will “ensure that more high quality, combat capable national forces are made available to NATO” and “further enhance the alliance’s rapid response capability, either for reinforcement of allies in support of deterrence or collective defence”.

General Scaparrotti [said](#) that following the July Summit he now has the tools to work on alliance readiness. “We are back to establishing force where I, as the commander, now have the authority to require readiness of units on a specific timeline and the ability to check them to ensure they can actually do it,” he said. “This all comes together with our ability to move at speed to meet the environment to do what we need to do”.

In looking at current means and capabilities and what will be needed in the future, the chiefs of defence also looked at NATO’s deterrence posture. “We stressed the need to look to the future, and where possible, anticipate future requirements, based on the analysis provided by our strategic commanders,” Peach [said](#). It is unclear whether the nuclear component of NATO’s deterrence posture was discussed.

### **Alliance modernisation**

As NATO modernises, it also continues to pursue a 360-degree approach to security and effectively fulfil all three core tasks as set out in the 2010 Strategic Concept: collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. The Chiefs of Defence reviewed the progress of the Command Structure changes approved at the NATO Summit as well as the ongoing Functional Review, which aims to improve how the NATO Headquarters is governed.

Many recent NATO [statements](#) and [reports](#) highlight the need for a ‘360 degrees’ response to future threats from all points of the compass, although threats from the south (terrorism and instability) and the east (Russia) are clearly the priority.