



## **NATO Military Committee sets the stage for July Summit: A review of the NATO Military Committee meeting, Brussels, 16 May 2018**

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*This briefing paper presents an overview of the 179th NATO Military Committee meeting, which took place at NATO HQ, Brussels on the 16 May 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 the alliance’s [new headquarters](#) in Brussels to discuss proposals that will go to defence ministers at their NATO meeting in June, and ultimately to alliance heads of state/government at the July NATO Summit.

Czech Gen. Petr Pavel, the chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, [said](#) that NATO continues “to adapt, to strengthen its deterrence and defence, and to ensure it meets its core objectives of protecting the population and territory of the alliance”, adding NATO needs “to remain agile, transformative -- always ready and able to counter any threat or challenge that comes across our horizon”. This meeting was Pavel’s last as chairman; British Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peach takes over the role in June.

Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff [said](#) that, “We spoke about the NATO mission in Iraq, we spoke about furthering NATO’s ability for intelligence and information sharing in the south, [and] we talked about some specific

measures to improve NATO’s deterrent posture to include the change in the NATO command structure”. The meeting had [four key sessions](#):

- A ‘scene-setting’ discussion on the key strategic issues facing the alliance, which also involved NATO’s Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller and Greek army Gen. Mikhail Kostarakos, the chairman of the EU Military Committee;
- Security and stability in Europe’s southern neighbourhood, with a focus on instability and conflict in the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel, including military aspects of NATO’s [Projecting Stability](#) initiative and the NATO training effort in Iraq, as well as the continuing mission in Afghanistan—and this session also featured talks with NATO’s Enhanced Opportunity Partners: Australia, Georgia, Jordan, Finland and Sweden;
- Enhancing NATO’s deterrence and defence, including NATO-EU cooperation, especially in regard to military mobility, the reinforcement of the alliance maritime posture and the NATO [Readiness](#) Action Plan; and
- Alliance modernisation with a focus on the proposed adapted command structure.

### **The strategic issues facing the alliance**

Very little information was provided on this discussion, which apparently centred on the

priorities for the July Summit. In terms of the strategic threats facing the alliance, in the final press conference General Petr Pavel said, “The international security environment continues to be highly volatile, which means that the alliance needs to ensure its constant readiness to respond to any threat or challenge”.

These remarks are in keeping with many recent NATO [statements](#) and [reports](#) that 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.

### **Projecting stability in the South: Counter-terrorism and NATO training missions in Iraq and Afghanistan**

Following the decision taken by [NATO foreign ministers in April](#), the Military Committee explored the potential make-up of a new NATO training mission to Iraq. A small NATO team was sent to Iraq in January to assess what the alliance could do to further the training mission at the institution-level, including the Iraqi defence and interior ministries, noncommissioned officer training and unit training. The proposal for consideration by defence ministers in June is for a mission of several hundred personnel to train Iraqi instructors and develop Iraqi military schools. If approved by defence ministers, the proposal will move to the NATO summit in July. “We would anticipate that once the new Iraqi government is seated, NATO will make a formal offer to Iraq”, Dunford said.

During a [question and answer session](#) at the press conference, French air force Gen. Denis Mercier, the NATO supreme allied commander for transformation, said that “We have developed very recently a Concept for Counter-Terrorism which goes beyond as you mentioned Afghanistan and Iraq with three main chapters regarding assessments, engagements and the capabilities we need”. This ‘concept’ was first endorsed at the NATO Chicago Summit in 2012, but the [NATO Military Concept for Counter -Terrorism](#) only became a public document in 2016. During the press

conference the emphasis was put on enhanced intelligence sharing and NATO’s coordination and participation in the [Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS](#).

The chiefs of defence also discussed gaps in service personnel needs in Afghanistan. The NATO force generation meeting is later this month, and Dunford said he was encouraged by the responses from his fellow chiefs during the Military Committee meeting. The United Kingdom is one member state that is [reported](#) to be considering more troops to Afghanistan. UK Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson is believed to have asked Prime Minister Theresa May for 400 more soldiers to be sent to help fight the Taliban, adding to the 600 already training Afghan forces. President Trump announced in 2017 that the US would send an additional 3,500 troops to secure areas that had fallen under Taliban control. Although Williamson was [asked by the UK Defence Committee](#) on 22 May to provide further details about these reports, the defence secretary said he was not in a position to go into more detail.

The Taliban have made significant territorial gains in Afghanistan, with the group now [a threat in 70 per cent of the country](#). Afghan military forces, meanwhile, are taking casualties at a record level. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani continues to [canvass support](#) for a peace initiative that would bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, but so far a breakthrough appears remote.

### **Deterrence and defence: the importance of exercises**

US Army Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, the NATO supreme allied commander – Europe and commander of US European Command, and Gen. Denis Mercier briefed the meeting on the exercises that the alliance is planning. “This is an important element in alliance readiness and adaptation to new security challenges,” Scaparrotti [said](#). “They ensure our troops are ready to respond to challenges from any direction and demonstrates the alliance stands ready to defend all allies and is committed that

our alliance is committed to defending our values”.

Mercier [said](#) Trident Junction 2018 is designed to ensure that NATO forces are trained and ready. The exercise will encompass 40,000 service members and be held in and around Norway in November 2018. Scaparrotti said [Trident Juncture](#) is part of the deterrence of Russia. “It’s a demonstration of our capability and how we see the world and what we’re able to do,” the general said. “It’s a deterrent message. If you look at our exercise versus what Russia does, our exercise is focused on defence of the sovereign nations that are a part of NATO. That’s what we do, and that is what this will represent, as well.”

NATO has been highly critical of similar Russian exercises, such as Zapad 2017 (see [this analysis](#) of the misinformation and exaggeration

surrounding Russian and NATO military exercises).

### **Alliance modernisation: two new commands**

Two new NATO commands have been under discussion for some time and were confirmed by [defence ministers meeting in February](#) this year. One of the proposed command changes involves the [newly re-established](#) US 2nd Fleet in Norfolk, Virginia. If approved at the NATO Summit in July—purely a formality—the command would become a NATO joint force command to safeguard the transatlantic link among the NATO allies. The chiefs of defence also discussed a German offer to host a NATO joint force command for logistics in Ulm, Germany. Scaparrotti and Mercier briefed the chiefs of defence on the recommended options.