



Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: NATO Response

February 24, 2022

The 30-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, describing it as the “[most dangerous moment in European security in a generation](#).” In the lead-up to the invasion, NATO joined the United States in stating it would not deploy forces to defend Ukraine, which is not a NATO member. NATO has, however, enhanced its defensive force posture in the eastern part of the alliance and reiterated its solidarity with Ukraine.

Russia's invasion follows almost a decade of deteriorating relations between NATO and Russia, during which NATO suspended most cooperation with Russia following Russia's 2014 occupation of Ukraine's Crimea region and parts of eastern Ukraine. In 2021, NATO [declared](#), “there can be no return to ‘business as usual’ until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities.” Noting an end-goal of improved relations, NATO continued to express openness to political dialogue with Russia as part of a dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue. NATO officials stress, however, that by invading Ukraine, “[Russia has shut the door on a political solution](#)” to the crisis.

Enhanced Deterrence

Since 2014, NATO has renewed its focus on territorial defense and [detering Russian aggression](#), including by deploying battlegroups, increasing military exercises and training, and enhancing air policing over the Baltic States and Bulgaria and Romania. The cornerstone of these efforts is an [Enhanced Forward Presence](#) (EFP) of four multinational battle groups stationed in the three Baltic States and Poland. The battle groups, which as of early February 2022 collectively totaled about 5,000 soldiers, are led by the United Kingdom (Estonia), Canada (Latvia), Germany (Lithuania), and the United States (Poland). NATO also has established a Multinational Division Southeast headquartered in Romania to coordinate a [Tailored Forward Presence](#) (TFP) in the Black Sea Region.

Several allies—including Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom—have announced [additional deployments](#) to bolster NATO's forward presence. France offered to lead a new battlegroup in Romania, but plans have yet to be finalized. According to [NATO officials](#), as of February 24, 2022, more than 100 allied fighter jets were on high alert in the eastern part of the alliance and more than 120 allied ships were at sea, from the Arctic region to the Mediterranean.

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On February 24, 2022, [NATO announced](#) that the alliance had activated defense plans that would allow military commanders to deploy elements of the [NATO Response Force](#) (NRF), a multinational rapid-reaction force of 40,000 personnel with land, air, maritime, and special operations components. In January 2022, the Biden Administration [announced](#) that 8,500 U.S. soldiers would be placed on high readiness for possible deployment to the NRF.

NATO officials say the allies will further bolster deterrence and defense deployments in response to Russia's invasion. The sustainability and effectiveness of NATO's efforts remain an open question, however, especially given the size and scope of Russia's military mobilization. Even prior to Russia's invasion, some studies of NATO's force posture concluded that NATO forces would [struggle to defend](#) NATO's most vulnerable allies—for example, the Baltic States—from a Russian attack.

U.S. Deterrence Deployments

Following Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea, the Obama Administration increased the U.S. military presence in Europe under the European Reassurance Initiative, later renamed the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). The cornerstone of EDI has been [Operation Atlantic Resolve](#), the rotational deployment of approximately 7,000 U.S. armed forces in Europe, including an Armored Brigade Combat Team (BCT) in Central and Eastern Europe. In early February 2022, the Biden Administration [announced](#) the deployment of an additional 6,000 soldiers to Central and Eastern Europe. The new deployment brings the total U.S. military presence in Poland to about 9,500—including 800 soldiers deployed to the U.S.-led NATO battlegroup—and in Romania to about 1,900. Additional U.S. forces rotate throughout the region, including about 500 who have been stationed in Lithuania since 2019.

On February 22, 2022, the Department of Defense [announced](#) that 800 U.S. soldiers and 20 attack helicopters would be deployed to the Baltic region, along with 8 F-35 joint strike fighters being deployed to NATO's eastern flank. On February 24, the Administration [announced](#) that an additional 7,000 U.S. soldiers, including a BCT, would deploy to Germany to reinforce deterrence efforts.

Considerations for Congress

Members of Congress have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and expressed support for NATO's deterrence posture in Central and Eastern Europe. The evolving crisis raises a number of questions Congress may wish to consider regarding NATO's immediate response to Russia's actions and the longer-term implications for NATO and U.S. defense policy in Europe. Key considerations include the following:

- **NATO and U.S. Force Posture in Europe.** Russia's invasion could heighten longer-standing questions about NATO's capacity to deter and defend NATO member states, particularly the Baltic States, from a possible Russian military attack. Key factors to consider could include the willingness and capacity of European allies to increase and sustain contributions to NATO's deterrence posture. These questions could inform congressional decisions on U.S. force posture in Europe, including through the EDI.
- **Future of NATO-Russia Relations.** NATO's current Strategic Concept, adopted in 2010, outlines a desire for "strategic partnership" with Russia. As the alliance prepares to adopt a new Strategic Concept in June 2022, U.S. policymakers could consider advocating a new NATO approach to Russia, possibly emphasizing defense and deterrence over cooperation. This may include reassessing NATO's prior willingness to negotiate with Russia on European security arrangements, including arms control and the alliance's nuclear force posture.

- **NATO Enlargement and Relations with Aspirant States.** With support from Congress, NATO has consistently rejected Russian demands for a halt to NATO enlargement, underscoring that NATO's door is open to all European states that aspire to membership and meet the requisite qualifications. Russia's invasion of a NATO aspirant that borders four NATO members could prompt discussions within the alliance on NATO's obligations to Ukraine; its relations with other aspirants, such as Georgia; and the future of NATO enlargement.

Author Information

Paul Belkin
Analyst in European Affairs

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