

The Framework Nations' Concept and NATO: Game-Changer for a New Strategic Era or Missed Opportunity?

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The rapid rise of diverse, hybrid threats on the Atlantic Alliance's eastern and southern periphery in the first half of this decade² has signaled the passing of a more benign security environment in and around Europe and the emergence for NATO of a new strategic era characterized by systemic uncertainty. These changed circumstances have also brought into sharper focus the need for NATO to develop and agree a 'military strategy,'³ to underpin the Strategic Concept adopted in 2010. This strategy would translate the commitment to collective defense that lies at the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty into a predictable and reliable deterrence and defense posture that assures all Allies, irrespective of their geographic location.⁴ Predictability and reliability are key ingredients of credible and effective deterrence and defense. Predictability informs what form of mutual support each Ally can reliably expect from the other Allies, as part of a collective response, if confronted with the threats of coercion or aggression, or with those stemming from growing instability along the NATO area's southern border and its associated spill-over effects.⁵

The proposed military strategy would articulate the relationship between deterrence and defense and the complementary contributions of various

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² *NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats*, Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen (editors), Forum Paper No. 24, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, December 2015.

³ The author of this *Research Paper* is indebted to Stephan Frühling for having articulated persuasively in his own *Research Paper* the requirement for NATO to develop and adopt a "Military Strategy" below the Strategic Concept. See Stephan Frühling, *Political Consensus and Defence Preparations: Why NATO Needs a 'Military Strategy'*, Research Paper No. 125, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, December 2015.

⁴ *Active Engagement, Modern Defence* - Strategic Concept for the defence and security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, adopted on 19-20 November 2010.

⁵ The North Atlantic Treaty area is defined in Article 6 of the Washington Treaty in relation to the Treaty's Article 5, which sets-out the Allies' collective defense obligations.

forces, assets and capabilities to each. It would also set-out the aim and means of achieving ‘*coherent forces*,’ in support of deterrence and defense, through greater convergence of purpose between the NATO Defense Planning Process, NATO’s Command and Force Structures, and NATO’s operations planning and force generation procedures. Such a strategy would consolidate the decisions taken at the Wales Summit in September 2014, in the form of a Readiness Action Plan (RAP), to enhance Allied forces’ readiness, responsiveness and combat capacity, into a single conceptual framework with 360 degree, Alliance-wide applicability.⁶ Developing and agreeing a military strategy would also help ensure that the Strategic Concept’s commitment to a ‘*modern defense*’ retains its relevance, despite changed strategic circumstances.

Many of the components of a transformed deterrence and defense posture in Europe are gradually falling into place, principally by means of the RAP’s implementation, which was an important focus of attention and source of satisfaction at NATO’s Warsaw Summit earlier this month. These include, notably, visible assurance and deterrence measures in the form of a persistent forward military presence on NATO’s Eastern “flank”; an enhanced and expanded NATO Response Force (NRF); a new NRF rapid deployment echelon – the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) – and NATO Force Integration Units located on the territories of East European Allies to facilitate the rapid reception of external reinforcements and their seamless integration with local home defense forces. It has become increasingly clear since the Wales Summit, however, that the high degree of operational responsiveness and synergy that is necessary to deter and defend credibly and effectively in Europe, against a range of real and potential conventional and unconventional threats, will require a higher level of strategic interdependence and operational coherence among all of the Allies than envisaged originally in the RAP.

The RAP was the shorter-term, necessary stepping stone and it performed its purpose admirably on short notice. However, a more structured, longer-lasting level of military adaptation of the Alliance is now needed. The attainment

of the requisite level of Alliance-wide operational coherence and synergy mandated by the changed strategic circumstances in and around Europe, including a rapidly emerging, robust Russian anti-access and area denial capacity, will require, in turn, devising new ways of executing NATO’s deterrence and defense mission at a higher level of political ambition.⁷ Leading this necessary adaptation will place a particular responsibility on the larger Allies. To win support and be effective, innovative multinational arrangements that aim for this higher threshold will need to balance the military capacity limitations and enduring resource constraints that afflict many European Allies, despite gradually brightening prospects regarding defense spending,⁸ with attractive opportunities for larger and smaller Allies to optimize, in structured ways, the distinct capabilities and contributions of each.

The Framework Nations’ Concept (FNC) proposed by Germany in 2013 and adopted by NATO in 2014, in the run-up to the Wales Summit, represents a particularly compelling, although still evolving, construct to achieve these important goals in inclusive ways. The FNC’s combination of flexible participation and structured cooperation balances finely the concurrent, sometimes competing, requirements to protect or promote sovereignty, autonomy, cooperation, competitive advantage, division-of-labor, reasonable challenge, burden-sharing, operational effectiveness and resource efficiency.

Neither attempts to rationalize the use of resources or the employment of capabilities, through “pooling-and-sharing” and “division-of-labor” schemes, nor framework nation arrangements, are new. NATO’s Framework Nations’ Concept, however, represents probably the most evolved form to date of matching the capabilities and contributions of larger and smaller European Allies, within the framework of increasingly structured “groupings” of nations, for the purposes of developing new military capabilities or standing up new combat formations, or both. FNC arrangements for capacity development enable smaller Allies to shape their future capability profile in a way that is coherent and complementary with the capabilities pursued by the other FNC grouping participating nations.

⁶ *Readiness Action Plan*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, updated 8 February 2016.

⁷ See Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, “NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge,” *Survival*, volume 58, n°2, April-May 2016, pp. 95-116; and Luis Simon, “The ‘Third’ US Offset Strategy and Europe’s ‘Anti-Access’ Challenge,” *Journal of Strategies Studies*, April 2016.

⁸ Jens Stoltenberg, *NATO Secretary General’s Annual Report*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, 28 January 2016, pp. 27-29.



For operations, FNC arrangements enable smaller Allies to participate and contribute substantive capabilities. The FNC construct provides a pragmatic mechanism to make regional or functional cooperative frameworks among larger and smaller Allies work in ways that strengthen the Alliance, by linking them to NATO, rather than undermine its cohesion.

Against the background of the desirability of developing and agreeing a NATO military strategy below the Strategic Concept that matches Europe's changed security environment, this Research Paper discusses the potential of NATO's Framework Nations' Concept to be a game-changer in NATO's military adaptation. By implication, it also aims to alert of the risks of a missed opportunity, if this initiative is not leveraged properly and fully. Accordingly, the paper addresses, successively, Germany's original FNC proposal; the overriding objective of achieving "coherent forces"; the FNC's sometimes unsuspected historical roots in past NATO practice; the FNC's anticipated "game-changer" role, against the backdrop of earlier initiatives to enhance and optimize the contribution of European Allies to the Alliance; the current status of FNC implementation; and, lastly, prospects for a full realization of the FNC's potential in NATO.

Germany's original Framework Nation Concept proposal

In June 2013, on the occasion of the spring meeting of NATO Defense Ministers, Germany introduced into NATO a "Framework Nation Concept" (FNC),⁹ as a new construct to facilitate capability development, on a multinational basis, among interested Allies, particularly among the Alliance's European member nations.¹⁰ This initiative aimed at forming functional groupings around

a larger Ally, with the objective of ensuring that, together, the participating Allies would possess, in the mid- to long term, an entire military capability, as identified in the NATO Defence Planning Process, which the larger Ally would not be able to field, *in toto*, on its own. Such arrangements would give smaller Allies an opportunity to contribute their smaller, often specialized, but important capabilities. Several FNC groupings could be expected, in combination, to generate a continuum of complementary capabilities across the Alliance. Capabilities developed through FNC arrangements would be made available to NATO by the participating Allies, thereby helping meet capability targets agreed multilaterally through the NATO Defense Planning Process.¹¹

Germany's intent in proposing the Framework Nations' Concept was that this novel approach (although, as will be seen below, one with a long pedigree) would help ensure, at the same time, that new or enduring NATO capability gaps would be addressed resolutely by different clusters of European Allies, with the firm intent of eliminating them; that the benefit, as well as the effort of developing an entire capability (technology; financial resources; and the associated administrative burden) would be shared among participating nations, large and small; and that European Allies would attain a higher and more satisfactory level of burden-sharing among themselves and with the United States.¹² The structured approach embedded in the FNC construct – that of Allies clustering around a suite of high-priority, complementary capability requirements identified in the NATO Defense Planning Process – was also meant to overcome the excessively informal philosophy underpinning the "Smart Defence" and "Pooling-and-Sharing" initiatives in NATO and the European Union, respectively, where Allies and EU Member States can cluster together, but in a somewhat haphazard way, around individual, loosely connected military requirements.¹³ By

⁹ The original proposal by Germany only referred to the concept of Framework Nation in the singular. The final version of the FNC concept agreed by NATO refers to Framework Nations in the plural form, in recognition that FNC groupings could be led by several Allies together.

¹⁰ Framework nation arrangements assume that one or more nations will provide the functional or institutional framework – a project; a force; a headquarters; etc. – that will underpin the foreseen cooperation between this/these framework nation(s) and other participating nations. For a framework nation arrangement to exist as such there must be a clear differentiation, in roles and contributions, although not in status, between framework and non-framework nations. Framework nation arrangements involve some degree of multinational integration around the framework nation(s). Framework nation arrangements are generally governed by a multilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). However, not all MoUs involve a framework nation arrangement.

¹¹ The NATO Defence Planning Process designates the cycle and associated procedures that enable Allies to identify and agree collectively capability development targets apportioned among, and addressed to, them. See Alexander Mattelaer, "Preparing NATO for the Next Defence-Planning Cycle," *RUSI Journal*, July 2014; pp. 30-35.

¹² For an early analysis of the motivations behind Germany's FNC proposal see Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, *The Framework Nations Concept: Germany's Contribution to a Capable European Defence*, SWP Comments, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, December 2014.

tying FNC groupings to the development of an entire suite of complementary capabilities and to the standing up of multinational combat formations, the Framework Nations' Concept provides a tangible operational context, without which initiatives, such as Smart Defense and Pooling and Sharing, struggled to maintain momentum and to generate lasting transformational change.

In pursuing these aims, the FNC construct seeks to combine “breadth” and “depth” (with the larger Allies addressing with their own forces a wide warfare spectrum – breadth – and the smaller Allies providing depth by contributing additional and/or specialized capabilities), as well as enhanced operational effectiveness and optimized resource efficiency. In this way, the provision of capabilities by smaller Allies could be significantly more valuable to the Alliance than a small enhancement to the overwhelming scale of capabilities provided by larger nations. Perhaps the most ground-breaking aspect of the FNC initiative is that, for the first time, framework nation arrangements are being pursued at the national, rather than single-service or force structure levels. They aim to address the development of future capabilities and/or facilitate the provision of forces in a broad-based, multinational framework that matches the contributions of larger and smaller Allies, in a synergistic way, against a wide set of shared NATO requirements. This scale of ambition is unprecedented and its consideration is, in itself, revolutionary and worthy of support by all Allies.¹⁴ If pursued resolutely by European Allies, in support of the notion of “coherent forces,” the Framework Nation Concept has the potential to be truly transformational and, possibly, a game changer for the way capabilities are developed and forces provided.¹⁵

The Alliance formally accepted and agreed the Framework Nations' Concept at the June 2014 Defense Ministers' meeting, following a year-long staffing process at NATO Headquarters in Brussels and in allied capitals, thereby opening the way to the launching of two FNC groupings led by Germany and the United Kingdom at NATO's Wales Summit in September 2014. Whereas the initial impetus behind Germany's FNC proposal had been on facilitating structured, multinational capability development, the focus of the FNC grouping led by the United Kingdom was on generating forces in support of UK-led joint and combined operations. A third FNC grouping led by Italy was initiated at a meeting held in Venice in October 2014, following the Wales Summit, with a dual capability development and force provision dimension. In the meantime, the RAP's implementation prompted Germany to propose that the focus of its FNC Grouping be expanded to include cooperation for the standing up of “Follow-on Forces” (FoF), thereby helping ensure that the Framework Nation Concept kept pace with evolving NATO deterrence and defense requirements after Wales.¹⁶ These FoF might involve combined-arms, maneuver formations at the brigade and division levels for land forces and composite expeditionary air wings for air forces.¹⁷

Coherent Forces

Alliance forces are undergoing currently their third round of transformation, but also in several cases down-sizing, since the end of the Cold War.¹⁸ In the 1990s, they shed their relatively static Cold War posture along the Iron Curtain to adapt to the emerging requirement for

¹³ On the “Smart Defence” and “Pooling-and-Sharing” initiatives, see Jakob Henius and Jacopo Leone MacDonald, *Smart Defense: A Critical Appraisal*, NDC Forum Paper N°21, NATO Defense College, Rome, March 2012; Christian Mölling, *Pooling and Sharing in the EU and NATO*, SWP Comments n°18, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, June 2012; and *EDA's Pooling and Sharing*, Fact Sheet, European Defence Agency, January 2013.

¹⁴ The foreseen beneficial “gravitational pull” effect of the FNC initiative is noted in Martin Michelot, *NATO's Moving Goalposts Between Wales and Warsaw*, Policy Brief, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Paris, May 2015, p.3. For an official and up-to-date statement on Germany's views and approach to the implementation of the Framework Nations' Concept, see *2016 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr*, The Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin, July 2016, pp. 67-69 and 98.

¹⁵ The provision of forces has been a perennial challenge for the initiation and conduct of NATO operations and missions. See, *Reforming NATO Force Generation*, RUSI, London, October 2005. This should not disguise, however, NATO's remarkable record of achievement in leading over 36 operations and missions over the last two decades. See Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, “Two decades of NATO operations: Taking stock, looking ahead,” *NATO Review*, May 2012, p.8.

¹⁶ Germany's pro-active role in helping create a momentum among the Allies which participate in its FNC grouping towards the generation of pre-planned Follow-on Forces complements the pro-active stance that it also took, in cooperation with The Netherlands and Norway, in leading the first rotation, in 2015, of the prototype VJTF, based on the 1 German/Netherlands Corps as the parent headquarters of the VJTF's land component.

¹⁷ “Composite” air force formations combine complementary types of aircraft – reconnaissance aircraft; aircraft specialized in the stand-off jamming or suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) roles; escort fighters; and fighter-bombers – flying as part of an integrated force package, with the support of airborne early warning and air-to-air refueling aircraft.

¹⁸ Terry Terriff, Frans Osinga and Theo Farrell (eds.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Military Changes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Rem Korteney, *The Superpower, the Bridge-Builder and the Hesitant Ally: How Defense Transformation Divided NATO (1991-2008)*, Leiden University Press, 2011; and Anthony King, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



deployable and sustainable forces and capabilities oriented to the conduct of long-lasting operational engagements on the periphery of the North Atlantic Treaty area, such as in the Balkans, or well beyond. These were designated generically as “operations-other-than-war,” or, in NATO terminology, “crisis response operations” aimed at helping bring conflicts to a close and underpin a return to stability. In the 2000s decade, the particular challenges of counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan and, for the Allies concerned, in Iraq, imposed important changes in doctrine; tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs); training;¹⁹ and equipment, resulting, in effect, in another round of military transformation.²⁰

Anticipating the completion of NATO’s operational engagement in Afghanistan and the resulting dissolution of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the end of 2014, Alliance Heads of State and Government approved at the Chicago Summit, held in spring 2012, a new blueprint – “*NATO Forces 2020*” – to guide Allied forces’ post-ISAF transformation during this decade.²¹ The Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) was approved at Chicago as a means to preserve the gains in interoperability achieved over two decades of operations, through expanded training and exercising opportunities.²² Together, the RAP, CFI and the NATO Defense Planning Process could today be seen to represent the three key enabling mechanisms to reach the aims of forces with improved readiness and responsiveness, and capable of conducting the full spectrum of Alliance missions, notably large-scale, high-intensity operations.

The confluence of the decisions taken at the Chicago, Wales and Warsaw summits, as well as the enduring need to optimize the allocation of resources, will make achieving

coherent forces the Alliance’s overriding priority. Coherent forces must be understood as forces that are *compatible* and *complementary*, as well as *capable*, by design, both among European Allies and on a transatlantic basis. Compatibility *by design* involves structuring forces and their associated capabilities in such a way that they can be naturally integrated, as required, on both a joint (inter-service) and a combined (multinational) basis, promptly and with as little friction as possible. The speed with which Russia illegally annexed Crimea in March 2014 and with which the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria expanded its influence across the Middle East a few months later, illustrates the advisability of military postures that emphasize readiness and responsiveness on a broad basis and facilitate the prompt execution of measures aimed at preventing crises from escalating into conflicts. Implementation of the RAP offers the opportunity to translate a NATO commitment to enhance the readiness and responsiveness of Allied forces, in support of deterrence and defense, for instance by shortening their notice-to-move,²³ into a deeper and longer-term effort to strengthen the Alliance’s overall capacity to counter a sudden and threatening concentration of forces and systems, both in regular warfare and asymmetric environments, on its periphery.²⁴

Complementarity *by design*, in turn, aims at a distribution of roles and responsibilities across the Alliance, in such a way that a combination of optimization and specialization can leverage the unique capabilities and skill sets of each Ally. Neither compatibility, nor complementarity, *by design* are incompatible with the sovereignty of Allies and their freedom to organize and engage their forces as they see fit, for instance within the framework of NATO, as part of an ad hoc coalition, or, for those Allies which are Member States of the European Union, in a EU context;

¹⁹ Two examples of the impact of COIN requirements on training are the training conducted by the United States Army at its 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command at Hohenfels, Germany, for U.S. and other nations’ deploying fighting formations, as well as Operational Liaison and Mentoring Teams, and the training in the provision of close-air-support, as well as strike coordination and reconnaissance, dispensed by the French Air Force to French and other allied air crews during regular *Serpentex* exercises. See Jan Kraak, “Serpentex 2014,” *Air Forces Monthly*, December 2014, pp. 66-68; and Jan Kraak, “Serpentex 2016,” *Air International*, May 2016, pp. 92-98.

²⁰ *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, Richard D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph J. Collins (eds.) (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, September 2015).

²¹ *Towards NATO Forces 2020*, Chicago Summit Declaration, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 2012.

²² *Connected Forces Initiative*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, updated 31 August 2015.

²³ The “notice-to-move” is the advance alerting time that a military unit needs to assemble its personnel, materiel and supplies before it is able to initiate its first movement out-of-garrison and start to deploy.

²⁴ Since 2013, Russia has demonstrated a new capacity to concentrate large numbers of forces and systems on short notice and over extended distances, notably by means of regular “snap-alert” exercises of varying scale. ISIL’s take-over of the Iraqi city of Mosul in June 2014 also demonstrated its unsuspected capacity, as a non-state actor with state-like capabilities, to concentrate military means promptly.

on the contrary, it is precisely because NATO is an alliance of sovereign nations that the pursuit of coherence is so necessary and important. And here is where the Framework Nations' Concept fits in.

The FNC's historical antecedents

The Cold War

Applications of framework nation arrangements among the Allies are almost as old as NATO itself. Following the activation in Paris of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), under a Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), in spring 1951, framework nation arrangements came into being around NATO's two leading military powers at the time, the United Kingdom and the United States, as a means to jump-start the Alliance's new integrated command structure (the opening of the NATO Defense College in Paris in autumn 1951 to educate Allied officers in a spirit of Allied cooperation closely followed the activation of SHAPE) and to start building a combined defense of West Germany. Britain led the standing-up of a Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) and a 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF) in Germany's northern half,²⁵ while the United States established a Central Army Group (CENTAG) and a 4th ATAF in Germany's southern half. NORTHAG brought together corps headquarters and subordinate formations contributed by Belgium, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom around a central core represented by the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), whereas CENTAG brought together corps headquarters and subordinate formations contributed by France (until France's withdrawal from the Alliance's military structure in 1966) and the United States around a

central core represented by the 7th U.S. Army and the 1st French Army. The composition of the 2nd and 4th ATAFs mirrored these land force arrangements.

Once the *Bundeswehr* came into being in 1955, Germany contributed corps-size formations to NORTHAG as well as CENTAG, and air wings to both ATAFs. The leadership role of the United Kingdom and the United States as framework nations extended from the harmonization of doctrine to the agreement of common TTPs, as well as war plans, among the respective contributing nations. Large live exercises were staged in West Germany, to ensure that, as national contingents were built-up, they could deploy and fight together.²⁶ The framework nation arrangements set in place for West Germany were replicated, in a revised form, in southern Europe, with the U.S. Army activating a Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Italy, in 1955, to provide tactical nuclear support to the Italian Army.²⁷ By 1960, all the Allies concerned had agreed that framework nation arrangements for defending West Germany had achieved their purpose in developing increasingly coherent allied forces, including by integrating successfully the new *Bundeswehr* in their midst, and that the headquarters of army groups, as well as ATAFs, should assume a formal NATO status as international military headquarters funded commonly by all Allies.²⁸

Framework nation arrangements were also relied upon at sea. The U.S. Navy's 2nd Fleet, home-ported at Norfolk, Virginia, became in 1952 the nucleus of a newly-created Striking Fleet, Atlantic (STRIKFLTANT) under the command of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic (SACLANT). STRIKFLTANT brought together the navies of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United

²⁵ NORTHAG excluded the defense of West Germany's territory located between the Elbe River, in the vicinity of Hamburg, and the border with Denmark, which was the responsibility of a special, bilateral command arrangement between the two adjacent Allies, in the form of a joint corps headquarters. This headquarters was known by its acronym LANDJUT, of which Denmark and Germany were the framework nations, each contributing a mechanized infantry division. Throughout the Cold War, LANDJUT was NATO's only standing multinational corps. A Canadian brigade was also a part of NORTHAG in the 1950s and 1960s and of CENTAG in the 1970s and 1980s, and a large Canadian air division/group a part of the 4th ATAF through-out the Cold War.

²⁶ One such exercise, planned on behalf of NORTHAG by Headquarters, BAOR, in its framework nation role, was *Battle Royal* in autumn 1954. Lieutenant Colonel I.R. Graeme, "Northern Army Group Exercise BATTLE ROYAL," *British Army Review*, n°2, March 1955, pp. 9-22.

²⁷ During the Cold War, SETAF included a U.S. staff nucleus, as the framework nation, with Italian staff officers embedded in it, and subordinated U.S. Army and Italian Army field artillery battalions equipped with nuclear-capable surface-to-surface missiles operating side-by-side in support of NATO's Allied Land Forces, Southern Europe (LANDSOUTH) command. Donald J. Hickman, "The Southern European Task Force," *The United States Army in Europe, 1953-1963*, USAREUR HS USAE c.2, classified Secret (Heidelberg, Germany: Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe, November 1964), declassified and released to the public on 17 May 1979, pp. 32-34.

²⁸ NATO Standing Group documents SG 70/41, 70/42, 70/43 and SG/44 (Final Decision), classified NATO Confidential and dated 19 June 1958, 21 January 1959, 2 September 1959 and 15 September 1960, respectively, recording the approval by the North Atlantic Council of the recommendation to transform the Headquarters of the 4th Allied Tactical Air Force, 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force, Northern Army Group and Central Army Group, from a framework nation arrangement into integrated allied headquarters, International Military Staff records, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, declassified and disclosed to the public on 26 October 1999.

Kingdom and the United States.²⁹ While the U.S. Navy, and to a lesser degree, the Royal Navy provided the nucleus of STRIKFLTANT's carrier and amphibious task forces, the other Allies contributed an important share of the Fleet's anti-submarine warfare capabilities, in the form of surface action groups, escort ships, attack submarines and land-based maritime patrol and strike aircraft.³⁰ For the four decades of the Cold War, under the impulse of the U.S. Navy and until its disbandment in 2005,³¹ STRIKFLTANT set the world's gold standard in terms of multinational, blue water naval skills and maritime capacity, notably through the conduct of large, complex, high-end maritime warfare exercises.³²

Cold War Insights

A comparison among these Cold War NATO framework nation arrangements holds some important insights for the implementation and further development of today's Framework Nations' Concept within the Alliance:

- (i) There was a strong synergy between framework nations, the other contributing Allies, and NATO. Framework nation arrangements had a clear, NATO-oriented aim and strong links with the NATO Command Structure, through standing operational relationships and Transfer-of-Authority agreements, and often provided a helpful interface between national and NATO doctrine and standard operating procedures.
- (ii) Land and naval forces stood at opposite ends of a spectrum that ranged from compatibility to complementarity. For land forces, the over-riding aim of framework nation arrangements was to achieve an optimal level of operational *compatibility* among adjacent corps-size formations of similar characteristics, but varying strength, in order to conduct a genuine combined battle. At the other end of the spectrum, framework nation arrangements in the maritime domain aimed to generate the most optimal combination of disparate, but *complementary* capabilities, in order to achieve a well-rounded, overall capacity, with no blind spots left in any of the naval warfare areas. Air forces stood between these two extremes, with framework nation arrangements, through the numbered ATAF headquarters, aiming to balance sufficient *compatibility* among various allied forces in the execution of standard missions, such as offensive counter-air or battlefield air interdiction, with optimized *complementarity*, for instance by leveraging the specialized close-air-support capabilities and skills embedded in the German Air Force and in the Royal Air Force stationed in West Germany.
- (iii) Although capability development was not an explicit aim of framework nation arrangements, it was often an implied outcome of the painstaking staff work of harmonizing national TTPs and war plans among the contributing nations and aligning them with NATO's Emergency Defense Plans at the Army Group and ATAF levels. Capability gaps identified through this work, as well as during exercises, were often translated into inputs into NATO's force planning process and national acquisition programs.
- (iv) In all cases, the role of the framework nation in each "cluster" was essential in promoting new ideas, in generating political support from, and galvanizing military and resource efforts by, the other contributing nations, and, when necessary, in mediating divergences, while ensuring that the end result was the result of a genuinely collective endeavor.
- (v) Framework nation arrangements were beneficial to the larger Allies, as framework nations, and the smaller Allies, as contributing nations, and to the Alliance as a whole. They were indispensable for enabling the larger Allies to secure and orient the contributions of the smaller Allies in ways that had political and operational impact from a deterrence, as well as a

²⁹ France withdrew its contribution to STRIKFLTANT in the mid-1960s, as part of its gradual withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure, and Spain added its own in the 1980s, following its entry into NATO.

³⁰ Within STRIKFLTANT, the European contribution to the Fleet's amphibious force took the form of a bilateral UK-Netherlands amphibious force, with the United Kingdom acting as the framework nation and the Royal Navy's 3rd Commando Brigade providing the nucleus.

³¹ *NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic to deactivate*, press release, Commander, 2nd U.S. Fleet Public Affairs, 23 June 2005, Norfolk, Virginia.

³² Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "A Maritime Renaissance: Naval power in NATO's future," Joachim Krause and Sebastian Bruns, editors, *Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security*, London, 2015, pp. 364-380.

defense, standpoint. For the latter Allies, framework nation arrangements were the pathway to ensuring that their necessarily limited operational contributions made enough of a genuine difference, militarily and politically, to influence NATO as a whole. There is little doubt that the United Kingdom, when faced recurrently with balance-of-payments' challenges in the 1950s and 1960s, would not have been able to keep its BAOR force levels as high as it did, had it not been for its essential leadership of NORTHAG in the area of West Germany most vulnerable to attack.³³ Nor would it have been possible, without NORTHAG and the British role, for a smaller Ally like Belgium to maintain a full, if under-strength, corps in West Germany for four decades, often against domestic pressures. For the Federal Republic of Germany, NATO's early framework nation arrangements were essential in helping plant the seeds for gradually achieving a genuinely coherent "forward defense" strategy in the early 1960s and keeping it in place over the next three decades, through the ebbs and flows of NATO Cold War planning.³⁴

Without doubt, framework nation arrangements were an indispensable component of NATO's cohesion and successful record of deterrence during the Cold War.

The post-Cold War

Following the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany, framework nation arrangements among the Allies

gradually became the norm for organizing multinational headquarters and force structures, as a means to ensure that the Cold War's legacy of cooperation would endure in Europe's new security environment. The various national corps headquarters that had been the backbone of NATO's "forward defense" posture in Central and Southern Europe were either transformed into a multinational, rapid reaction land headquarters, or disbanded. The 1st British Corps led the way, becoming the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in 1994, soon followed by the activation of the IIInd German-U.S. Corps, the Vth U.S.-German Corps, the Eurocorps, the 1st German-Netherlands and the Multinational Corps-Northeast. Of note, Germany was and remains an important player, as a framework nation, in many of these multinational headquarters arrangements.³⁵ In a second wave, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey established an additional five multinational, rapid reaction land corps headquarters based on the framework nation construct.³⁶ Sometimes, "affiliated" formations also reflect framework nation arrangements.³⁷ For example, the British Army's 3rd Division, when employed in the ARRC framework, can include the Italian Army's 132nd Armored Brigade *Ariete*. The Danish Division may incorporate, as its third brigade, a brigade generated by any of the three Baltic Allies. And, in 2014, the Royal Netherlands Army's 11th Airmobile Brigade was incorporated into the German Army's new Rapid Reaction Forces Division, while in 2019, its 43rd Mechanized Infantry Brigade will join Germany's 1st Armored Division.³⁸ Framework nation arrangements led by Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States were also agreed upon at the Warsaw Summit to anchor a multinational, enhanced forward presence of

³³ The United Kingdom's contribution to the common defense in West Germany, unlike that of other Allies, was regulated by treaty in the framework of the Western European Union (WEU). For an assessment of the United Kingdom's evolving policy regarding its military presence in West Germany during the Cold War, see Michael Chichester and John Wilkinson, *The Uncertain Ally: British Defence Policy, 1960-1990* (Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing Company Ltd., 1982), pp. 4-5, 26 and 86-89; and Michael Dockrill, *British Defence since 1945* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), pp. 76-77, 105 and 109.

³⁴ See General Leopold Chalupa, German Army, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Central Europe, "The Defence of Central Europe: Implications of Change," *RUSI Journal*, March 1985, p. 16; and Simon O'Dwyer Russell, "Forward Defence vital to West Germany," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 24 May 1986, p. 915.

³⁵ Germany acts as framework nation, together with The Netherlands, in relation to the 1st German-Netherlands; with Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain in regard to the Eurocorps; and with Denmark and Poland in the case of the Multinational Corps-Northeast.

³⁶ These nine high-readiness (land) headquarters can operate as either a traditional corps headquarters or as a land component command (LCC) of the NRF. They are currently also in the process of qualifying as joint task force (JTF) headquarters for leading land-centric, "small joint operations," and are being configured, trained, evaluated and certified by NATO to that end. However, looking ahead, finding the proper balance between these three roles, in terms of headquarters structure and staff skills, as well as augmentation and training, will certainly be a challenge.

³⁷ During the Cold War, national army corps had standing, hierarchical relationships with their subordinated divisions and brigades. Today's multinational army corps headquarters, based on framework nation arrangements, exercise command and control, during exercises and operations, over "affiliated" formations, which are divisions and brigades that have been identified by contributing nations as potentially available to those headquarters.

³⁸ *Airmobile Brigade incorporated into Division Schnelle Kräfte*, Ministry of Defence, The Hague, The Netherlands, 12 June 2014; Nicholas Fiorenza, "Dutch mechanized brigade to be integrated into German panzer division," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 18 September 2015.

allied land forces on the territories of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In addition, Romania is leading the development of a multinational framework brigade.³⁹

Navies and air forces have followed suit, with France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom all standing-up multinational, task-force-level maritime force (MARFOR) headquarters and France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom establishing a Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) staff, all on a framework nation basis. The air forces of Spain and Turkey are also in the process of creating their own multinational JFACC headquarters. Lastly, the United States has stood-up three multinational entities in the maritime expeditionary, special operations, and intelligence domains that support NATO and operate on the basis of the framework nation concept.⁴⁰

Typically, the framework nation hosts the headquarters on its territory and provides its peacetime command facilities, as well as contributes approximately two thirds of the headquarters' peacetime establishment and operating budget. It also often provides the communications and information systems and logistical support, which are critical to the headquarters' deployability to, and sustainment at, remote locations.⁴¹

Excluding the NATO Intelligence Fusion Center, which is not strictly-speaking a force headquarters, NATO's Force Structure, therefore, includes currently 19 land, maritime, air, and special operations forces (SOF) headquarters that operate on the basis of a framework nation arrangement. These 19 headquarters provide, on rotation, the land, maritime, air and SOF component commands of the NATO Response Force (NRF), for a standby period lasting a year. With their subordinate formations, they are, in effect, the NRF's flesh. In addition, NATO's Force Structure now also includes a Multinational Division-Southeast stationed in Romania.

Lastly, although not formally part of NATO's Force Structure, Germany also leads, as framework nation, a deployable multinational joint headquarters (*Multinationales Kommando Operative Führung*) which is located at Ulm, in Bavaria. Over 20 centers of excellence located in Europe and North America also operate on the basis of framework nation arrangements, with one or more Allies hosting them and assuming framework nation responsibilities.

Again, several insights of strategic importance can be derived from NATO's post-Cold War experience with framework nation arrangements:

- (i) The establishment of multinational, land, air and maritime, rapid reaction headquarters by mostly European Allies following the end of the Cold War was a stroke of genius. These arrangements prevented deeper cuts into Allied force structures that would inevitably have followed once the strategic necessity of NATO's "forward defense" strategy vanished following Germany's reunification. The preparation of expeditionary operations became for these newly-deployable headquarters their new, defining, if often challenging, horizon. For some smaller Allies, such as Belgium, Denmark and The Netherlands, a multinational headquarters arrangement, based on the framework nation construct, also allowed them to make a smaller, but still recognizable, contribution to NATO and to give their general officers an opportunity to exercise demanding command responsibilities at the 3-star level. For NATO's newer Allies, these multinational framework nation arrangements facilitate their familiarization with Allied tactics, techniques and procedures.
- (ii) The establishment of the NRF created, through rotation, a unifying mechanism and operational ethos among these 20 headquarters⁴² and gave them a common sense of purpose that was missing. At the same time, the NRF would not have been viable without the framework nation arrangements that link Allied force headquarters

³⁹ Julian E. Barnes and Anton Troianovski, "NATO Allies Preparing to Put Four Battalions at Eastern Border with Russia," *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2016.

⁴⁰ These three headquarters are: Naval Striking and Support Forces, NATO (STRIKFORNATO), in Lisbon, Portugal; the NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters at Mons, Belgium; and the NATO Intelligence Fusion Center at RAF Molesworth air station, United Kingdom. The STRIKFORNATO commander position is held, on a dual-hatted basis, by the commander of the U.S. Sixth Fleet.

⁴¹ NATO's Allied Joint Publication 3 (AJP-3) *Allied Joint Operations* defines framework nation arrangements as follows: « Forces based on a framework nation are commanded by an officer of that nation. A significant proportion of the staff and the headquarters support will come from that framework nation; its working language is of that nation. Staff procedures, although based on Alliance standards, will also reflect those of the framework nation." In practice, English is the shared language and staff procedures are largely standardized across headquarters.

⁴² Here, Germany's multinational joint headquarters at Ulm has been added, although not formally a part of NATO's Force Structure.

across Europe. In effect, the implementation of the framework nation arrangements over the last two decades has given European Allies an increasingly salient and leading role in the post-Cold War transformation of NATO, a new and welcome collective responsibility that will likely require constant political attention and a sustained investment in resources in order to endure.

- (iii) In addition to their role as the organizing construct for the multinational headquarters of the NATO Force Structure, framework nation arrangements were also relied upon to structure forces deploying into a theater of operations. NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the mid-1990s was composed of three multinational divisions led by France, the United Kingdom and the United States as framework nations, while the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in the late 1990s and into the 2000s decade comprised five multinational brigades led by these three same nations, as well as by Germany and Italy. In Afghanistan, ISAF's Regional Commands and Provincial Reconstruction Teams also relied in virtually all cases on framework nation arrangements and the lessons from this operational experience were an important trigger for Germany's FNC initiative.

The experience of two decades of implementing framework nation arrangements among European Allies' land, air and maritime force structures and during operations gradually helped create the conditions for a bolder, more ambitious approach – encapsulated in the Framework Nations' Concept proposed by Germany and adopted by NATO – to rationalizing European defense investments and optimizing European *capabilities* in the direction of a more effective, aggregate defense *capacity*. Again, beyond any doubt, multinational framework nation arrangements after the end of the Cold War, by promoting interoperability, have been an essential and irreplaceable component of NATO's enduring capacity to initiate and conduct operations

successfully, despite recurrent operational challenges in various engagements and persisting resource constraints.

NATO's quest for an enabling construct for a greater European role and contribution

NATO agreed three strategic concepts during the Cold War (in 1952, 1957 and 1967) and another three after the end of the Cold War (in 1991, 1999 and 2010). The Cold War strategic concepts addressed mostly the complex and evolving relationship between nuclear and conventional forces in deterrence and defense, while the three post-Cold War concepts endeavored to strike a satisfactory balance between what the Strategic Concept of 2010 has set-out as NATO's core tasks of collective defense, crisis-management and cooperative security.⁴³ Through these periodic strategic adaptations, the Allies were able to harmonize often competing political priorities. This difficult exercise was facilitated by an enduring unity of views on how *grand strategy* should be translated at the *operational* level: during the Cold War, NATO's guiding operational paradigm was Forward Defense, from northern Norway, across West Germany, to eastern Turkey; in the post-Cold War era, extending through the Russian illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and the disbandment of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in 2014, the operational paradigm became NATO's capacity to conduct expeditionary operations of varying purpose and scale.⁴⁴

An important dimension of the political and operational attractiveness of forward defense during the Cold War, as well as expeditionary operations after the end of the Cold War, was that these operational constructs helped facilitate force contributions from a wide segment of Allies, large and small. This burden-sharing impulse, oriented to achieve a high degree of operational effectiveness, as much as an optimized level of resource efficiency, has been nearly a constant in successive NATO capability development initiatives over the last half century.⁴⁵ It has also been

⁴³ *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, op.cit.

⁴⁴ Nothing could capture more visibly NATO's post-Cold War strategic reorientation away from the vanishing requirement to deter and defend in Europe, until the resurgence of an assertive Russia, than the renaming of Allied Command Europe (ACE) as Allied Command Operations (ACO) in 2002.

⁴⁵ NATO's first, focused capability development initiative of the Cold War was *Allied Defence in the 1970s*, approved in 1972, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium.

the subtext of several successive initiatives at NATO Headquarters over the last five years, to anchor capability development on a grander scheme that would leverage and optimize the capabilities, assets and skills of each Ally, particularly among European Allies. The Framework Nation Concept that emerged in 2013 can also be seen, therefore, as the natural outcome, if not a pre-ordained one, of this enduring quest, with its focus being, however, on *structured*, multinational cooperation.

Core Essential Capabilities

In 2012, concurrently with the adoption of the “*NATO Forces 2020*” goal, an attempt was made by an Ally at generating support for the development of a limited number of “core essential capabilities.” These capabilities could be considered as being essential for meeting a minimum military requirement, from a capability development standpoint, and should enjoy particular priority. They could provide the “backbone” necessary to enable NATO to initiate military operations, upon direction of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Either way, NATO would be assured of having a core of essential enablers onto which Allies could attach their individual capabilities and force contributions.

Consensus on the scope of these capabilities, however, could not be found because the majority of Allies raised two over-lapping objections:

- (i) The NATO Defense Planning Process already included the definition of a set of “minimum military requirements” (MMR) for NATO. Agreeing a “core essential capability” requirement within the MMRs risked diluting them and, possibly, providing an excuse for some Allies not to contribute sufficiently to meeting the MMRs; and
- (ii) NATO being an alliance of sovereign nations, approving the concept of a larger pool of essential capabilities, possibly commonly-funded and “NATO-owned and operated,” risked weakening the resolve of

Allies to acquire, on a national or multinational basis, the capabilities identified in the MMRs.

The initiative to agree a set of core essential capabilities was, ultimately, unsuccessful.

European Full-Spectrum Capability

A second effort, initiated in 2013, focused on the notion that a more balanced Alliance could be achieved by developing two distinct, but complementary, capabilities for “full-spectrum operations,” one provided by the United States, the other by the European Allies collectively.⁴⁶ These two sets of capabilities would not need to be symmetrical – actually, symmetry is unattainable, give the much larger resources devoted to defense by, as well as the much larger military capabilities of, the United States, several of which are unique and cannot be duplicated⁴⁷ – nor would they be designed to be entirely substitutable for one another. Instead, an essential aspect of the proposal was that the two “full-spectrum capabilities” would be interactive and complementary, giving NATO as a whole a wide latitude to mix components from both. Combinations could vary according to the political priorities and operational requirements of different engagements, while giving the European Allies a greater opportunity to exercise leadership within NATO, when desirable and agreed collectively within the NAC.

Moreover, the development by European Allies, within NATO, of a “full-spectrum capability” – actually, a capacity – would have been expected to contribute to a fairer sharing of the burden on a transatlantic basis and act as a powerful magnet for the continuing engagement of the United States in Europe. However, although supported by the United States, that notion, paradoxically, did not gain wide support among the European Allies. The objection was leveled that, rather than meet a concern over European Allies assuming a greater share of the aggregate NATO defense burden, pursuing a European full-spectrum capability would sow the seeds of transatlantic separation and could lead to a disjointed Alliance, with two competing

⁴⁶ Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, NATO Deputy Secretary General, *Closing the gap: Keeping NATO strong in an era of austerity*, speech at the 48th Annual Security Conference of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 11 February 2013, Oslo, Norway, page 4.

⁴⁷ Examples of unique capabilities that the United States has made available to NATO, as a distinct contribution to the Alliance’s deterrence and defense posture, have included nuclear-tipped, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, large aircraft-carriers, and very high altitude, high-speed, airborne reconnaissance aircraft.

and increasingly incompatible defense postures.⁴⁸

The 50 percent guideline

Lastly, a third proposal to achieve a more satisfactory sharing of the burden and division-of-labor was pursued more recently, on an experimental basis, through the NATO Defense Planning Process, according to which no single Ally would be expected to provide more than 50 percent of the assets associated with any single NATO capability.⁴⁹

This construct gained gradual acceptance as a reasonable basis to apportion scales of effort between the United States and European Allies in particular, but not before concerns were dispelled that one or more Allies could be invited to develop unnecessarily capabilities that another Ally already had in its inventory and had shown to be ready to make available to NATO. Furthermore, in its quest of seeking a more equitable sharing of the burden on a transatlantic basis, it was feared that an overly strict application of the 50 percent principle for each capability could have had the unintended and perverse effect of creating a requirement for some European Allies to develop or acquire, *ex nihilo*, a capability that could have represented an unprecedented and unreasonable economic and/or operational challenge. To balance these risks and ensure that the challenge implicit in fulfilling the 50 percent guideline remains reasonable, the Allies have also agreed that investment in the development of capabilities should reflect the “relative wealth of each Ally,” expressed as a share of the Alliance’s aggregate Gross Domestic Product.

While Allies agreed that the principle that no single Ally should be expected to provide more than 50 percent of any single NATO capability is a reasonable proposition, devising ways to generate collectively and apportion equitably the other 50 percent among the remaining Allies, in the absence of a compelling organizing construct, has proven more difficult and elusive to achieve. The FNC

proposed by Germany is, in effect, that missing construct.

The Framework Nations’ Concept

What should make the FNC concept more attractive to Allies than any of the earlier schemes, such as Core Essential Capabilities and European Full-Spectrum Capability, is its flexible application, which relies on a bottom-up mechanism of “coalitions of the willing” among interested nations, rather than on a single, NATO-wide, grand design that has to be applied, at once, by all Allies. Smaller Allies have the opportunity to step forward voluntarily and cluster around a larger Ally, in the expectation that the cooperative pursuit of clearly-defined NATO capability targets, or the standing up of capable multinational formations, will yield tangible returns on investment that are either beyond their reach individually or unattainable without the structured cooperation embedded in the Concept. This approach is in consonance with the conclusions of a report approved by NATO Defense Ministers nearly three decades ago, which stated, under the heading *Rationalisation and Division of Labour: Enhancing Output by Better Co-ordination of National Efforts*: “In the past, rationalisation and the resulting recommendations for a division of labour have usually been considered from a central and very broad perspective. A more incremental and ‘bottom-up’ approach might be examined (...). The ultimate objectives should be a better co-ordination of national efforts and, in particular, an optimal use of the unique capabilities and strengths of individual Allies.”⁵⁰ The Framework Nations’ Concept is aligned with that pragmatic, bottom-up philosophy, while ensuring adherence to Alliance capability requirements agreed through the NATO Defence Planning Process. In addition, the FNC also benefits, as seen earlier, from the experience of over six decades of framework nation arrangements among the Allies.

At the same time, the FNC is not just a more formal version of these pre-existing framework nation arrangements, of which there have been dozens in NATO’s

⁴⁸ This objection is not far removed from the objections leveled against the notion of “separable, but non-separate NATO structures and capabilities” during the aborted consideration of developing a “European security and defense identity (ESDI) within NATO” in the second half of the 1990s. See Philip Gordon, *The United States and the European Security and Defence Identity in the New NATO*, les notes de l’IFRI n°4, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Paris, 1998; and Peter Schmidt, “ESDI: “Separable but not separate,” *NATO Review*, summer 2000.

⁴⁹ Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, NATO Deputy Secretary General, *Closing the gap: Keeping NATO strong in an era of austerity*, op.cit., page 3.

⁵⁰ *Enhancing Alliance Collective Security: Shared Roles, Risks and Responsibilities in the Alliance*, a Report by NATO’s Defence Planning Committee, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Brussels, Belgium, December 1988, p. 69.

complex institutional and operational history. Its level of ambition and potential scope are far broader and more far-reaching because it extends, in the case of the grouping led by Germany, beyond a narrow capability or a single headquarters, and addresses, in a structured way, a broad spectrum of complementary capabilities and an entire pool of follow-on formations.

The FNC's record of implementation

Following the signing by Defense Ministers of multilateral “Letters of Intent” among participating Allies in the two FNC groupings led by Germany and the United Kingdom aboard the Royal Navy frigate HMS *Duncan* during the Wales Summit, the standing-up of the groupings has progressed steadily, although on dissimilar paths, given their different scale and focus.

(i) The UK-led grouping

In the case of the grouping led by the United Kingdom, the aim is to permit the other participating nations – Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Norway – to contribute assets and capabilities to the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). The JEF is the United Kingdom's scalable construct to plan and conduct high-responsiveness, expeditionary operations on a national, combined (with any or all of the six JEF “participating nations”) or British-French basis (the latter variant is known as the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force or CJEF). High readiness forces drawn from the JEF force pool would provide the basis for a UK contribution to operations of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the NRF's rapid reaction echelon, the VJTF.⁵¹ The UK core of the JEF reached initial operational capability in 2014. The British-French CJEF reached full operational capability this spring and the multinational JEF (with Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Norway) is scheduled to reach its own full operational capability in 2018. In many ways, the bilateral CJEF with France and the multinational JEF within the UK-led FNC grouping reflect the ties between British and other Allied forces forged during operations in Libya in 2011 and in Afghanistan during the period 2004-2014.

The JEF construct envisages the United Kingdom providing the operational headquarters that would direct a JEF engagement, as well as the deployable joint force headquarters and logistics component. Each of the other six JEF participating nations has been invited to provide staff officers to the UK Standing Joint Force Headquarters located at Northwood, near London, as well as assign headquarters elements, force elements and support functions to the Force. Each JEF participating nation, however, retains its sovereign right to contribute forces to, and participate in, a JEF operation led by the United Kingdom as the framework nation (unless the operation is conducted strictly on a national basis). Cooperation towards standing up the multinational JEF is guided by a JEF Development Board, a Senior Policy Working Group and other specialized working groups dealing with intelligence, communications and information systems, and other such matters, based on a so-called Foundational Memorandum of Understanding signed in London on 30 November 2015. Although not a NATO structure, the JEF has a clear NATO orientation, reflected notably in the compliance of JEF tactics, techniques and procedures with the applicable NATO standards.

(ii) The grouping led by Germany

By contrast, the scale and focus of Germany's FNC grouping is broader, encompassing the participation of as many as another 15 Allies – several of which also participate in the grouping led by the UK – and a dual focus on capability development and the delivery of usable forces. The grouping led by Germany includes Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Bringing together such a large and diverse group of Allies is not the least of the FNC's achievements. To manage this ambitious undertaking, Germany has set in place an elaborate multi-tiered structure that combines supervisory bodies “at 16” and working-level “clusters” focused on discrete capability areas and involving interested participants, as well as observer nations.

At the top, broad policy guidance is formulated by Defense Ministers and amplified by a High-Level Group (HLG)

⁵¹ The British-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) was established by the November 2010 Lancaster House Treaty. CJEF reached its full operational capability earlier this spring on the occasion of exercise *Griffin Strike*, following building-block exercises *Corsican Lion* in 2012 and *Rochambeau* in 2014.

at the Ministry of Defense Policy Director-level from all participating nations. Such meetings of Defense Ministers and of Policy Directors take place generally once a year. The first three meetings of Defense Ministers took place on the occasion of the signing of the FNC Letter of Intent on the sidelines of the Wales Summit in September 2014 and on the occasion of the spring 2015 and winter 2016 meetings of NATO Defense Ministers. The first HLG meeting took place in Berlin in September 2015, bringing all participating nations to take stock of initial progress and agree on the way ahead for each subordinate capability cluster within this grouping. Regular oversight is exercised by a Steering Board that met a first time at NATO Headquarters in Brussels in December 2015. Steering Board meetings give all participants an opportunity to review all cooperative areas under consideration in an open-ended way, before commitments by individual nations are formalized ahead of the next HLG meeting, the most recent of which took place in May of this year. Representatives of NATO's International Staff and Allied Command Transformation responsible for the management of the NATO Defense Planning Process are invited to attend these meetings.

Lastly, working-level meetings of subject matter experts in the framework of individual capability clusters are facilitated by the German Ministry of Defense and take place periodically, each driven by a specific agenda and schedule. For each foreseen capability development collaborative effort, the scope for cooperation is determined by, in the first place, agreeing the operational mission area to which the capability will be developed and, thereafter, defining the "end-state" being sought; the subordinate objectives to attain the end state; the "effects" to be achieved; and, lastly, the actions to be taken in order to achieve the desired effects. Together, these steps are translated into a roadmap.

Currently, activities supporting capability development are structured into four broad headline categories:

- (i) Deployable Headquarters;
- (ii) Joint Fires;
- (iii) Air and Missile Defense; and
- (iv) Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.

In turn, these categories break down into discrete clusters, such as Mission Networks; Logistics; Civil-Military Cooperation; and Anti-Submarine Warfare, bringing together various combinations of the 16 Allies. In some instances, the pace of cooperation is geared to a particular milestone, experiment or validating event, such as an exercise. In other cases, work within the FNC grouping will complement or supplement an earlier effort. Such examples include building upon earlier cooperation led by Italy on Deployable Air Activation Modules under the aegis of NATO's "Smart Defense" initiative, or leveraging efforts undertaken in other frameworks, such as the European Air Group, which will sponsor the *VOLCANEX 2016* deployment exercise at Lechfeld air base in Germany in October 2016 to test procedures and capabilities for activating a fully operational airfield at a simulated remote location.⁵²

Building upon the initial momentum to meet NATO capability requirements cooperatively, the focus of the FNC grouping led by Germany was expanded following the Wales Summit to encompass the standing up of multinational formations. These "follow-on forces" would be built up according to the concept of "flags-to-modules." Under this scheme, nations in the FNC grouping other than Germany would be invited to contribute up to brigade strength combat formations, as well as smaller specialized units, such as engineers, air defense, etc. The incorporation of Dutch formations into German divisions is representative of this approach. This noteworthy broadening of the Germany's original FNC approach is revealing of Germany's assessment that in Europe's changed security environment, following Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, deterrence and defense cannot be assured through capability development alone – they also have to be underpinned by a new, tangible capacity for high-end, combined-arms maneuver.

(iii) *The grouping led by Italy*

The FNC grouping led by Italy has focused on two areas: on the one hand, consolidating mission-specific capabilities for post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction operations, with a particular focus on implementation of NATO's "Security Force Assistance" concept; and, on the other, developing further high-readiness, multinational force structures. The former strand foresees creating a

⁵² European Air Group, "Deployable Air Activation Modules," www.euroairgroups.org/project/deployable-air-activation-modules, accessed on 15 May 2016.

cooperation cluster around the Multinational Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Group at Motta di Livenza and the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units at Vicenza, while the latter would build upon the operational experience gained to date with the Multinational Land Force (MLF) established in 1998 with Hungary and Slovenia, on the basis of the Italian Army's *Julia* mountain infantry brigade at Udine. This FNC grouping also builds upon the ties established between Italy and Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia in the framework of the "Defence Cooperation Initiative" (DECI).

Following an initial meeting in Venice in October 2014, a Letter of Intent was signed in March 2015 by Italy, Albania, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia, as well as Austria, and a first Coordination Board at the Ministry of Defense Deputy Policy Director-level convened in Rome in July 2015. Subject-matter experts met in Rome in January 2016 to define further specific cooperative activities within the two focus areas and a further Coordination Board meeting took place in May. Three working groups have been established in the fields of training, exercises, and stability policing, and they held a first meeting in June. An explicit aim of the foreseen multinational cooperation is to facilitate the fulfilment by the Allies concerned of capability targets addressed to them in the framework of the NATO Defence Planning Process. The grouping led by Italy represents, therefore, a helpful FNC anchor in southern Europe and a potential path for linking more closely multinational efforts and force structures in the region with their northern European counterparts and with NATO.

While each of the three FNC groupings led by Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom is distinct in its focus and composition, they all share four key characteristics:

- (i) The resolve to develop a framework that can accommodate and leverage flexibly, but in a structured way, the specific contributions of larger and smaller Allies;
- (ii) The unique role and responsibility assumed freely by the framework nation to lead and generate momentum within its grouping;
- (iii) The freedom of all participating nations to shape their involvement in any FNC grouping by interacting directly with the applicable framework nation, without being subjected

to a consensus rule involving all other participants; and

- (iv) The focus on meeting NATO capability requirements and delivering capable, ready and usable forces cooperatively.

These are important features that balance finely sovereignty, autonomy, cooperation, competitive advantage, division-of-labor, reasonable challenge, burden-sharing, operational effectiveness and resource efficiency.

The FNC's game-changing potential for NATO

The ambition and eventual reach of the three converging FNC undertakings can hardly be overstated, given the scale of the membership involved – up to 19 European NATO members between the three FNC groupings; the critical importance of many of the capability gaps being addressed for NATO's capacity to deter and defend, as well as ability to act in support of wider international crisis management efforts; and the potential for assembling and packaging, on a joint and combined basis, highly ready and capable combat forces. Furthermore, to a greater or lesser degree, all three groupings often build upon pre-existing cooperation mechanisms or structures, such as NATO "Smart Defense" cooperative groups; special collaborative arrangements, such as the European Air Group; and various multinational headquarters, such as the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, the 1st German-Netherlands Corps, the Multinational Corps Northeast and the Multinational Joint Headquarters in Ulm. Lastly, the overlap in membership between the FNC groupings led by Germany and the United Kingdom and that of several multinational headquarters, as well as that of the expanded format of the Nordic Defense Cooperation framework (NORDEFECO), is notable. Together, these overlapping arrangements form the core of Europe's most dynamic and extensive defense "hub" and act as a powerful antidote against the risk that regional and functional cooperation could lead to a fragmentation of the Alliance (*see Figure 1*). On the contrary, the Framework Nation Concept can be seen as a federating mechanism.

	Germany-led FNC	UK-led FNC/JEF	HQ ARRC ⁵³	HQ 1 st GE/NL Corps	HQ MNC-NE	Multinational Joint HQ Ulm	Enlarged NORDEFCO/“Northern Group” ⁵⁴
BE	✓						
BU	✓					✓	
CR	✓				✓	✓	
CZ	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
DA	✓	✓	✓	✓	●		●
ES	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
GE	●		✓	●	●	●	✓
HU	✓				✓	✓	
LU	✓					✓	
LA	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
LI	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
NL	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	✓	✓
NO	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	●
PL	✓		✓		●	✓	✓
RO	✓				✓	✓	
SK	✓				✓		
UK		●	●	✓	✓		✓

● Framework Nation ✓ Other participating nation

Figure 1. Overlap in membership among allied participants in the FNC groupings led by Germany and the United Kingdom and other framework nation arrangements.

For instance, Denmark is both a framework nation for the Multinational Corps-Northeast and an important force contributor to the ARRC, providing a strong conduit for the Danish Army to link-up with the German and British armies, respectively. The Netherlands has bilateral partnerships with Germany in the land force domain, thorough the 1st German/Netherlands Corps of which the two countries are the framework nations, in the air force domain through cooperation between the German JFACC and the Royal Netherlands Air Force, as well as through their combined Extended Air Defense Task Force,⁵⁵ and

with the United Kingdom in the maritime domain in the form of the UK-Netherlands Amphibious Force established in 1972. The Norwegian Army, in turn, has strong partnerships with the German and Dutch armies through its deepening involvement with the 1st German/Netherlands Corps. All three nations also cooperate with the United Kingdom in the JEF, leveraging their ties within the ARRC and the 1st German/Netherlands Corps. And the land forces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania can expect to make a distinct contribution to the JEF based on their work with the United Kingdom in the ARRC,

⁵³ The multinational headquarters displayed in this table often also include the participation of other European Allies, such as Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey.

⁵⁴ The other three nations that form the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) framework are Finland, Iceland and Sweden.

⁵⁵ The EADTF is a bilateral arrangement to facilitate joint training and mutual support in the deployment of *Patriot* surface-to-air missile batteries. The German and Royal Netherlands Air Forces also cooperate bilaterally, notably through mutual participation in the German *JAWTEX* (Joint Air Warfare Tactical Exercise) and Dutch *Frisian Flag* air exercises. See Jerry Gunner, “Frisian Flag 2013,” *Air Forces Monthly*, June 2013, page 92.

alongside Denmark, as well as the Estonian Army's own distinct operational experience fighting with the British Army in southern Afghanistan.

This over-lapping and expanding web of mutually-supporting, cross-institutional and functional ties, around Germany and the United Kingdom, among Allies that constitute approximately two thirds of NATO's European membership, represents a natural extension of an already impressive record of bilateral and multilateral partnerships that pre-dated Germany's FNC initiative. These now often provide the functional or operational frameworks, or complementary anchors, for implementing a variety of capability development or force integration measures. The British undertaking to build the JEF, through its FNC grouping, into a variable geometry, multinational formation, and Germany's parallel initiative, through its own FNC grouping, to develop scalable, multinational Follow-on Forces, in the framework of the NATO Defense Planning Process and the Readiness Action Plan, are notable in this regard.

At the same time, because of a fortuitous coincidence between the timing of the FNC initiative and NATO's new focus on high responsiveness and more effective defense investment at the Wales Summit, the process of bottom-up multinational defense cooperation unleashed by this initiative

is unprecedented, both in scale and ambition and in its momentum. It is now becoming increasingly likely that the Framework Nations' Concept and its various FNC Groupings could become a unifying framework and mechanism to seek greater interaction between capability development, the further adaptation of NATO's Force Structure, and the generation of tailored NRF force packages and Follow-on Forces.

A higher level of interaction between these three parallel NATO processes and structures, both at the national and NATO levels, would help bring greater coherence, convergence and unity of purpose across NATO as a whole (*see Figure 2 below*). By leveraging increasingly the Framework Nation Concept, as a means to facilitate greater *capability*; *compatibility*; and *complementarity* among their forces, European Allies could aim for higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency in: (a) orienting and developing future defense capabilities; (b) ensuring that NATO's Force Structure – both headquarters and formations – evolves and is transformed accordingly; and (c) shaping the political conditions and operational configuration of future NATO operations and missions. Today, a failure to make these three strands more interactive and coherent complicates Allies' collective capacity to deliver on the Alliance's three core tasks in a more effective and efficient way.

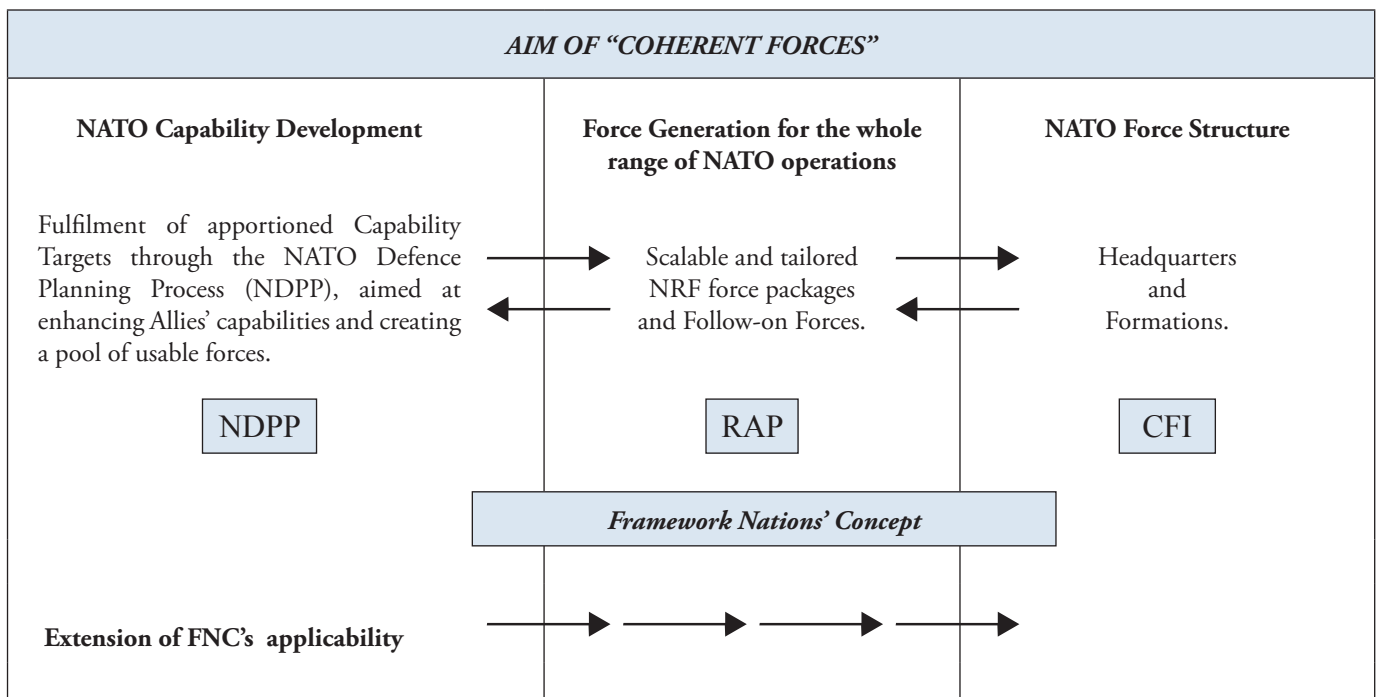


Figure 2. Pursuing the aim of "Coherent Forces": The role of the Framework Nations' Concept in facilitating greater, overall NATO coherence and effectiveness.

Despite these major strides, however, successful implementation of the Framework Nations' Concept will require additional efforts, internally as well as externally, to attain its full potential. Internally, desirable steps include:

- (i) Establishing informal bridges between the three FNC groupings, through the three framework nations, to exchange information and best practices and, whenever possible, achieve synergy of efforts;
- (ii) Reflecting increasingly within the NATO Defense Planning Process the capabilities developed through FNC-sponsored capability clusters, when the fielding of these capabilities involves various degrees of mutual support and, possibly, multinational force integration, in the form of larger formations. While sovereign nations are the ultimate arbiters of their international commitments, NATO, wherever sensible, should take a pro-active stance in support of FNC undertakings and reflect their progress in the NATO Defence Planning Process. In particular, capability targets apportioned to individual Allies should reflect FNC cooperative undertakings and underpin multinationality. Conversely, Allies involved in FNC groupings should endeavor to reflect more deliberately their FNC undertakings in their interactions with the NATO Defense Planning Process; and
- (iii) Clarifying the operational linkages between the UK-led JEF and the multinational follow-on formations being explored by the German-led FNC grouping and the relevant headquarters of the NATO Force Structure, notably the headquarters of the ARRC, the 1st German-Netherlands Corps and the Multinational Corps-Northeast, as well as the British and German JFACC staffs and the Multinational Joint Headquarters in Ulm. While FNC endeavors aim to facilitate the provision of forces and capabilities which are usable, they should also enable the quest for more satisfactory, effective and updated command and control and force structure arrangements within the Alliance, in an era of expanded deterrence and

defense requirements, as well as persistent resource constraints. In this context, the expanded focus of the FNC Grouping led by Germany on the standing up of pre-identified and properly balanced follow-on formations and the UK-led JEF can be major enablers in the implementation of the RAP and the further adaptation of the Alliance.

Externally, the FNC enterprise is also incomplete because, among European Allies, to date, France has not expressed an interest in acting as a framework nation for a fourth FNC grouping, and Spain has not joined any of the three existing FNC groupings. A possible starting point to remedy this gap would see France leading a FNC grouping built around a redesigned Eurocorps, with the aim of leveraging and deepening the experience of employing the Eurocorps headquarters in European Union training missions in Africa.⁵⁶ To that end, consideration might be given to combining the Eurocorps headquarters at Strasbourg⁵⁷ with the existing, national joint force and training staff – *Etat-Major Inter-Armées de Force et d'Entraînement* (EMIAFE) – located at Creil air base, to the north of Paris, into a scalable, multinational joint headquarters. Such a step would help provide NATO and the European Union with a second, deployable, genuinely joint standing headquarters, after the one in Ulm, to lead smaller joint operations, revitalize the Eurocorps, and give France an important role and stake in the FNC initiative. In any event, the FNC construct's emphasis on ownership by nations should make it particularly attractive to France.

Expanding the FNC initiative to a wider participation by the United States would also be highly desirable. In relation to land forces, Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe in Wiesbaden, Germany, has already assumed, *de facto*, an FNC cluster role through its 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command, in the training of multinational, brigade-scale force packages involving, principally, contingents from many smaller Allies and partner countries. This training takes the form of periodic combined-arms live fire and other exercises in the *Allied Spirit*, *Combined Resolve*, *Saber Junction* and *Swift Response* series. The notion of a "Connected Training Initiative" is rapidly taking shape

⁵⁶ Reform of the Eurocorps would not affect necessarily the French-German Brigade, which, for exercises and operations, could be placed under the authority of either the French Army's *1ère Division* or the German Army's 10th *Panzerdivision*.

⁵⁷ The Eurocorps' framework nations are Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain, an arrangement that brings together helpfully a diverse group of Allies and EU Member States.



in the form of the Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training (TACET) initiative launched jointly by the United States and Germany, and subsequently expanded to the participation of the United Kingdom, to facilitate implementation of the Readiness Action Plan, notably in support of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.⁵⁸ The initiative now also includes Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Norway and Poland. TACET borrows from the FNC construct the idea of a diverse group of Allies working together as a purpose-built team, with the aim of harmonizing training and exercising objectives focused on northeast Europe, as well as enhancing the capacity of the four beneficiary nations to enhance their defense capabilities and to receive external reinforcements.

In the maritime domain, Headquarters STRIKFORNATO in Lisbon provides an already existing building-block towards developing a collective NATO maritime expeditionary cluster that would associate the U.S. 6th Fleet and the powerful maritime forces of France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, on the model of the former Striking Fleet, Atlantic. Doing so, however, would require a more regular allocation of U.S. Navy carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups to the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea and the North Atlantic, to generate opportunities for periodic, high-end, live exercises with the larger European navies, involving various combinations of surface, sub-surface and airborne assets.⁵⁹ Building upon the FNC construct, the United States could help foster the build-up of an on-call, scalable, Maritime Response Force at the NATO Task Group and Task Force levels.⁶⁰ Over time, the Maritime Response Force could become a tangible expression of European Allies' resolve to assume a greater share of the common NATO burden in policing European waters, contributing to deterrence and defense, and projecting stability from the sea. Lastly, Headquarters, United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) could lead a third FNC cluster oriented to high-end aerospace operations involving, primarily but not exclusively, the European NATO forces that will fly the advanced F-35

fighter (Denmark, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Turkey and the United Kingdom).

While these FNC *clusters* would be narrower in scope than the FNC *grouping* led by Germany and closer to the one led by the United Kingdom, their focus on developing a broad capability – such as those necessary for the conduct of high-end maritime and aerospace operations – would be in line with the FNC's philosophy. Assumption by the United States of this FNC role would also have the distinct advantage, operationally and politically, of tying together in new ways transformational efforts on both sides of the Atlantic.

An opportunity not to be missed

Two years after Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, in a display of its new assertiveness, and of the completion of NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan, the Allies have a new opportunity to deliver on the commitment to what the Strategic Concept terms in its title *Modern Defense*. In Europe's more threatening security environment, "modern defense" means formulating and agreeing a military strategy for deterrence and defense in Europe, underpinning the Strategic Concept, to address the whole range of conventional and unconventional risks. It also means pursuing resolutely the goal of coherent forces, through greater synergy and convergence of purpose between the development of capabilities, the adaptation of command and force structures, and the preparation of future operations.

In aiming for this outcome, *all* European Allies bear a particular responsibility for assuming a greater share of the aggregate NATO burden and in doing so in ways that strengthen their collective role and weight in the Alliance, while establishing new operational links with United States and Canadian forces. The Framework Nations' Concept is ideally fit-for-purpose to deliver on these worthy objectives: it is a construct that balances well the

⁵⁸ Dr. James Derleth, "Enhancing Interoperability: the foundation for effective NATO operations," *NATO Review*, 2015; "Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training (TACET) Initiative: 'Common Training – Improved Interoperability – Enhanced Capabilities and Resilience – Credible Assurance'," Press Release – 10 February 2016 Defence Ministerial.

⁵⁹ The case for building up the U.S. Sixth Fleet is made in Seth Cropsey, "Restore the U.S. Sixth Fleet," *National Review*, 2 November 2015.

⁶⁰ The «Maritime Response Force» construct is explored in Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "A Maritime Renaissance: Naval power in NATO's Future," *op.cit.*, pp. 376-377.



respective, and all necessary, contributions of larger and smaller European Allies. It also combines, synergistically, the build-up and strengthening of operational formations and the development of new defense capabilities, by generating the necessary efforts of mass and momentum across broad groupings of Allies. Lastly, the Framework Nations' Concept is well suited to the necessity of embedding the Readiness Action Plan into an enduring and coherent framework, in the form of a 'military strategy' underpinning the Strategic Concept. Failure to leverage and develop further this opportunity would represent an important setback for efforts to rationalize capabilities and resources among European Allies, one that NATO can ill-afford in an increasingly uncertain security environment. It is an opportunity not to be missed.