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NATO Force Integration Units: Are NFIUs a Valuable Element of NATO Deterrence and Defense Posture?

NATO Force Integration Units: Jsou NFIU přínosem při odstrašení a obraně NATO?

Martin Botík, Jan Mazal

Abstract: Russian aggressions against Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) led NATO into unprecedented changes in the NATO deterrence and defense posture at its eastern flank. The establishment of NATO Force Integration Units with their mission to facilitate high readiness forces deployment was one of the measures taken. The role and tasks of NATO Force Integration Units are very complex. They include a variety of different tasks across all levels: strategic, operational and tactical from peacetime up to activation of Article 4 or 5 of the Washington Treaty. Besides the main mission, these tasks consist of: assurance, deterrence, planning, information sharing, situational awareness, and liaison to Host Nation including contribution to strategic communication.

Abstrakt: Ruské agrese proti Gruzii (2008) a Ukrajině (2014) vedly NATO k bezprecedentním změnám v koncepci odstrašení a rozmístění NATO na východním křídle. Jedním z přijatých opatření v reakci na změněné bezpečnostní prostředí bylo zřízení NATO Force Integration Units s hlavním úkolem usnadnit rozmístění jednotek rychlé reakce na východním křídle. NATO Force Integration Units plní komplexní úkoly na všech úrovních: strategické, operační a taktické, a to v době míru i v průběhu aktivace článku 4 nebo 5 Washingtonské smlouvy. Mimo hlavní úkol dále plní tyto úkoly: odstrašení, plánování, sdílení informací, situační přehled, styk a komunikaci s hostitelskou zemí, včetně účasti na strategické komunikaci.

Key words: NATO Eastern Flank; Deterrence and Defense Posture; NFIUs; Host Nation; RSOM&I.

Klíčová slova: Východní křídlo NATO; odstrašení a obrané postavení; NFIU; hostitelská země; RSOM&I.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian aggression against Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014, respectively, followed by the subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea present the most challenging threat against European security in the modern history. The speed and military execution of annexation of Crimea caught NATO surprised. The Russian aggression fundamentally changed the security situation on NATO's eastern flank and the perception of the Russian threat intensified mainly among NATO countries that directly border with Russia and Belarus.¹ NATO dealt with new situation at the Wales Summit on 4-5 September 2015 and the Warsaw Summit on 8-9 July 2016. One of the conclusions of the Wales Summit was the approval of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO's borders.²

RAP set framework and conditions for the NATO deterrence and defense posture. RAP covers the military activity on the eastern flank of NATO, the "Assurance Measures", and longer-term changes to NATO's force posture, the "Adaptation Measures", which changes the Alliance's long-term military posture and capabilities to enable it to respond more quickly to crisis whenever and wherever on the eastern flank they emerge.³ The Adaptation Measures consist of two major pillars: the transformation of NATO Response Force (NRF) into a more responsive and capable force including the creation of a "spearhead force" - Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the NRF, and the establishment of NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania (activated in 2015), Slovakia and Hungary (activated in 2016).⁴ The article is focused on the second main pillar of the Adaptation Measures – the establishment of NFIUs and their contribution to the NATO deterrence and defense posture.

1 ARTICLE OBJECTIVE

The objective of the article is to evaluate and determine the role of NFIUs in the NATO deterrence and defense posture and to assess the NFIUs' contribution. The following research questions were defined, in order to achieve desirable objective: What are NFIUs: NFIUs' organization, manning, position in command and control structure (C2), NFIUs'

1 Warsaw Summit Communiqué. *www.nato.int* [online]. Warsaw: North Atlantic Council, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm

2 Wales Summit Declaration. *www.nato.int* [online]. Wales: North Atlantic Council, 2014 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

3 NATO's Readiness Action Plan. *www.nato.int* [online]. Brussels: Public Diplomacy Division (PDD), 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-rap-en.pdf

4 Ibid.

location, NFIUs mission? What are the NFIUs' role and tasks at the strategic, operational and tactical levels in relation to assurance, deterrence, planning, and information sharing, strategic communication, liaison with different entities, situational awareness and Reception, Staging, Onward Movement & Integration (RSOM&I)?

2 METHODOLOGY

The article analyzes the complexity of the NFIUs' role, tasks and activities in the NATO deterrence and defense posture across all levels: strategic, operational and tactical, and determines the NFIUs' value within this concept. It can be reasonably stated that NFIUs are a valuable element of the NATO deterrence and defense posture. The article uses the outputs and some quotes from the open sources available mainly on official NATO websites and researcher papers available in journals. The functional analysis was used to analyze documents in order to link the NFIUs' role and tasks with the different levels (strategic, operational, tactical) and operational phases (shape, deter). Furthermore, in order to verify the open source analysis results, the interview with an expert, a former NFIU commander Col Jozef ZEKUCIA (ret.) was conducted. The conducted interview was performed in the form of semi-structured interview, and especially its analysis (the method of grounded theory) served to identify the key discrepancies and subsequently the starting point for the conclusion.

3 NFIU - WHAT IS IT?

NFIU is a small unit organized as a headquarter and predominantly acting as a liaison element, established upon the Host Nation (HN) invitation and military assessment followed by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) approval.⁵ NFIUs are located in capital cities (with two exceptions in Poland and Hungary) and near main national military headquarters.

The NFIUs' mission is to facilitate the rapid deployment of the VJTF and other elements of the NRF at a high readiness level to enhance the alliance's responsiveness.⁶ In other words, NFIUs facilitate cooperation between national forces and the NATO High Readiness Forces in times of crises. Specifically, NFIUs contribute to collective defense planning to ensure synergy between national and NATO plans in order to facilitate the

⁵ NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU). www.lc.nato.int [online]. Izmir: NATO Land Command, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://lc.nato.int/operations/current-operations>

⁶ Two years since NATO command element in Tallinn established. www.news.err.ee [online]. Tallinn: ERR, 2017 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/602763/two-years-since-nato-command-element-in-tallinn-established>

rapid deployment of allied forces to the NATO's eastern flank.⁷ Additionally, NFIUs identify infrastructure, logistic support, road network and other means necessary and available for smooth deployment of forces into respective NATO countries at the eastern flank. Furthermore, NFIUs maintain situational awareness and contribute to NATO's common operational picture (COP) with information relevant to the deployment of VJTF and assist in coordinating training and exercises.⁸

NFIUs are manned with 40 military personnel both from the HN and from contributing nations and "joint by nature" when every service member brings unique expertise necessary to make the NFIU a smart and agile unit organized in six branches: command group, personnel, intelligence, operations and planning, logistic, computer information system (CIS). The respective Joint Force Commands (JFCs) exercise the operational control (OPCON) over the NFIUs.⁹

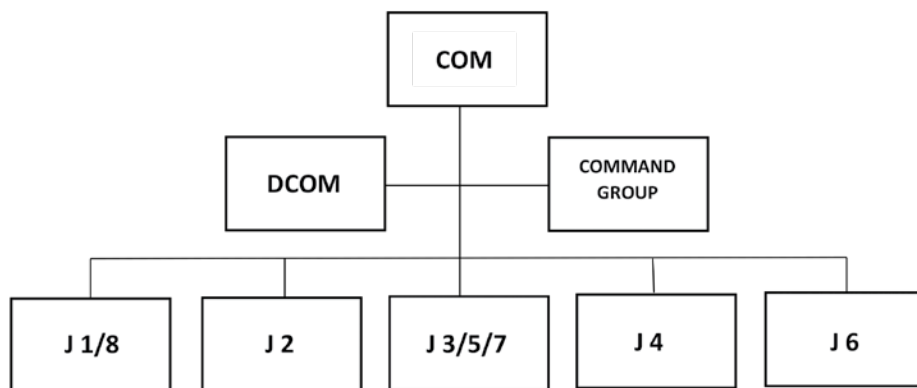


Figure 1: NFIUs' Generic Structure

Source: [9]

In summary, then, the OPCON over NFIUs, an organization structure, the personnel composition comprising half HN and half international staff as well as other aspects, for example, manning or staff experience, and the duration of personnel assignment¹⁰ to NFIUs fully correspond with the wide range of the NFIUs' tasks in connection with the deployment of the VJTF. Moreover, NFIUs' activation based on requests from nations, followed by the NAC endorsement, NFIUs' location in capital cities and in many cases

⁷ NATO FORCE INTEGRATION UNITS (NFIU). *www.shape.nato.int* [online]. Mons: SHAPE, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://shape.nato.int/operations/nato-force-integration-units>

⁸ NFIU ESTONIA. *www.jfcs.nato.int* [online]. Brunssum: JFC Brunssum, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://jfcs.nato.int/page5725819/nato-force-integration-units/nfiu-estonia>

⁹ WEIDENHAMMER, Hanspeter. *Seminár: Quo vadis, Democracy?* [online]. Bratislava: INEKO, 2017 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://www.ineko.sk/projekty/quo-vadis-democracy>

¹⁰ The duration of assignment to NATO Force structure is usually 3 years.

collocation with the main HN military headquarters underlines the NFIUs' importance for the deployment of the VJTF and provides NFIUs with a robust mandate to represent NATO on the HN territory.

3.1 The role of NFIUs on the strategic level

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea as the flagrant violation of international law by Russia have raised concerns, especially in the Baltic States, which demanded an immediate and visible response from NATO. NATO's response came at the Wales Summit where it was decided to establish in-place enablers (NFIUs) on the territories of eastern allies at all times,¹¹ among other things. The political decision taken was of strategic importance reaffirming NATO's collective defense commitments and reassuring the allies on the eastern flank of NATO.¹² The installation of NFIUs immediately became NATO's Strategic Communication (STRATCOM) subject, supported by achievement of Full Operational Capabilities (FOC) two years after the Wales Summit. NFIUs have become the largest reinforcement of NATO's collective defense since the end of the Cold War and represent persistent visible NATO presence on the eastern flank.¹³

In short, it can be stated that NFIUs have their role at the strategic level, especially in demonstrating NATO's cohesion, when NATO, through its political decision and its subsequent military implementation, set up its physical presence on the eastern flank in record time. Such swift action assured the nations on the eastern flank and sent a clear deterrence message to Russia that NATO is ready to take an appropriate action to defend the allies. Furthermore, NFIUs play an important role in the implementation of STRATCOM through their outreach to local population. Based on the NFIUs' social media activity, it is evident that NFIUs have become an indisputable part of STRATCOM and are active through various seminars, conferences and briefings among the public, to suppress anti-NATO-oriented disinformation campaigns.¹⁴

¹¹ Wales Summit Declaration. *www.nato.int* [online]. Wales: North Atlantic Council, 2014 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

¹² NATO Force Integration Units. *www.nato.int* [online]. Brussels: Public Diplomacy Division (PDD), 2015 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_09/20150901_150901-factsheet-nfiu_en.pdf

¹³ NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU). *www.lc.nato.int* [online]. Izmir: NATO Land Command, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://lc.nato.int/operations/current-operations>

¹⁴ For more details see NFIUs' Facebook profiles.

3.2 The role of NFIUs on the operational level

The operational level represented by JFCs is distinguished by planning and execution of operational plans for the purpose of maintaining peace and territorial integrity of the alliance's member states throughout the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SA-CEUR) Area of Responsibility (AOR) and beyond. Thus, the implied task of JFCs is to prepare and execute operational plans focused on deterrence and defense.¹⁵ An absence of such a plan would mean that the units could not train specific tasks related to deterrence and defense. It would result in dissolving the deterrence effect. Therefore, NATO developed several Graduated Response Plans (GRPs) focused on deterrence and defense in accordance with the eastern flank's geographical disposition. There are more specific and detailed plans for the VJTF deployment and broader and less detailed ones for NRF and Follow-on Forces (FoF).¹⁶ Besides, states' own protection of their territorial integrity and security is the primary responsibility of all NATO member states.¹⁷ Therefore, accordingly, each NATO member has its own National Defense Plan (NDP). It implies that two types of plans exist for deterrence and defense: NATO GRPs and NDPs. This requires ensuring synergy among GRPs and NDPs. NFIUs, due to their mission and organization structure, emerge as an element of natural information fusion and sharing place between NATO and HNs. Hence, NFIUs are involved in the GRP planning process.

3.3 The role of NFIUs on the tactical level

The NFIUs' mission is to facilitate the rapid deployment of the VJTF and other elements of the NRF, as already mentioned above. Actually, it means to facilitate RSOM&I of 6000 troops, which concerns VJTF in the respective Area of Operation (AOO).

The reception phase is characterized by receiving, unloading, marshalling and withdrawal of VJTF force elements and material from strategic or tactical lift through sea, air, or land transportation Points of Disembarkation (POD). The phase commences with the arrival of the VJTF elements, equipment and material into designated PODs and it is completed with the relocation of forces into Staging Areas (SA) or their Final Destinations (FD), depending on plan.¹⁸ This phase has two sub-phases: preparation for and execution of reception operations. NFIUs are participating in both sub-phases. NFIUs

¹⁵ MISSION. www.jfcnaples.nato.int [online]. Naples: JFC Naples, 2012 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/page631257>

¹⁶ RYNNING, Sten. The future of NATO's conventional deterrence. *Atlantisch Perspectief* [online]. 2017, 3(41), 19–22. [cit. 2022-06-21]. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581341>.

¹⁷ *The North Atlantic Treaty*. Washington: NATO, 1949. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

¹⁸ *EEAS 00787/12. EU CONCEPT FOR RECEPTION, STAGING, ONWARD MOVEMENT & INTEGRATION (RSOI) FOR EU-LED MILITARY OPERATIONS*. Brussels: European External Action Service, 2012.

are predominantly involved in the preparation for reception operations, especially in planning and sharing information. The NFIUs' participation in the execution of reception operations consists in the presence of NFIUs' elements in PODs and monitoring and reporting of activities connected with the disembarkation of VJTF.

The staging phase is dedicated to assembling, temporary holding and organizing of the arriving VJTF troops and equipment material into the formed units, as they get ready for onward movement and further activities. VJTF units might have limited fighting and mission capabilities and may not be self-sustainable during this phase. The phase consists of: VJTF force elements, equipment and material arrival into location where the unit is further consolidated, maintenance and equipment functionality check to be prepared for onward movement, and unit training and force preparation. The phase starts with the arrival of VJTF force elements, equipment and material into the SA, where the effort is focused on achieving Initial Operational Capability (IOC). The phase ends with onward movement.¹⁹ NFIUs play mainly coordination role during this phase. The NFIUs' main effort is concentrated on gathering information about the arriving VJTF force elements, monitoring the situation in the SA and reporting through respective chains of command in order to facilitate the Host Nation Support (HNS) and to use scarce resources, such as warehouses for storage of material, effectively.

The onward movement phase is a complex process of moving VJTF units and material from the SA to the respective FD. The onward movement may be multimodal and may require unit reassembly in the FD. The phase demands a balanced integrated system of terminal transfer operations, cargo transfer operations, movement control, and clear C2 delegated authority in order to ensure seamless flow of units including real-time visibility in transit information. This phase encompasses HNS with large logistic support. The following elements are necessary to ensure success of this phase: movement control, transportation network planning, communication/information, logistic support, medical support, and force protection. This phase starts when the VJTF units leave the SA and ends when they reach the FD.²⁰ NFIUs play key liaison role and participate in information sharing during in this phase. This phase is the most demanding phase on the NFIUs' manpower. NFIUs have professional members of the staff who also become experts on the host nation country with necessary knowledge, as mentioned before. Therefore, the NFIUs' staff are assigned to the different coordination and fusion cells to provide real-time information on movement control, transportation network planning, logistic support, medical support, and force protection to the designated C2.

The integration phase concerns synchronized transfer of operationally ready VJTF units into the combined joint forces. The objective of this phase is to ensure that the VJTF unit is operationally ready and integrated into a higher echelon. This phase starts with the VJTF unit arrival into its FD and ends when the designated commander has established C2 over the arriving VJTF unit and the unit has achieved FOC.²¹ NFIUs play marginal role in this phase because C2 has been already established. NFIUs mainly provide

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

liaison between the VJTF unit and higher echelon if deemed to be necessary. Furthermore, NFIUs continue reporting to the respective C2 and monitoring the situation in connection with the integration of the VJTF unit into C2.

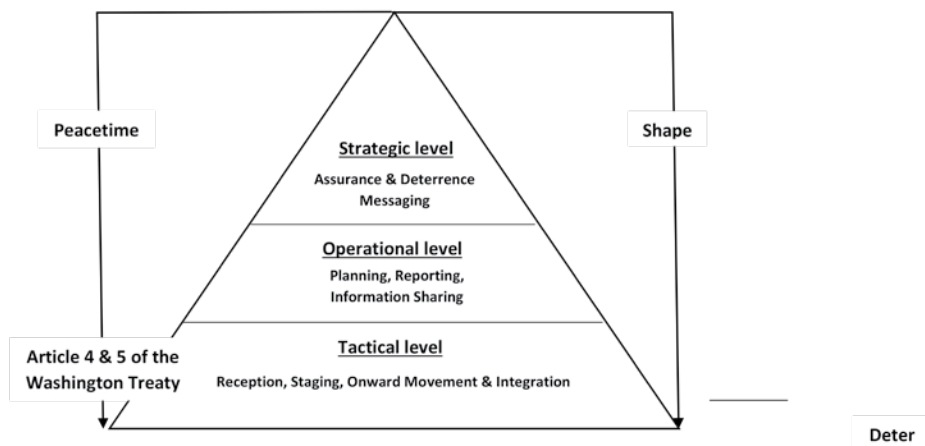


Figure 2: NFIUs' role and tasks

CONCLUSION

The Russian aggressive behavior and subsequent actions against Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) diametrically changed NATO's views on its eastern flank defense. NATO facing the new threat coming from Russia realized the necessity to change its deterrence and defense posture. Therefore, NATO approved RAP and adopted comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the new threats on its eastern flank. As the next step in consistency with the Wales Summit declaration, NATO and its eastern flank countries established NFIUs with their primarily mission to facilitate VJTF RSOM&I on the eastern flank. NFIUs are small units manned by 40 personnel, "joint by nature" and predominantly acting as liaison elements and information source for both NATO and HNs. The NFIUs' role and tasks in the NATO deterrence and defense posture are very complex and encompass task execution at all levels, strategic, operational and tactical from peacetime up to activation of Articles 4 or 5 of the Washington Treaty. The NFIUs' role and tasks at the strategic and operational level are largely associated with the shaping phase when the planning and preparation for a possible conflict take place - in peacetime. The tasks consist of: assurance, deterrence, planning, information sharing, situational awareness and liaison to HN including contribution to strategic communication through dissemination of key messages. The NFIUs' role and tasks at the tactical level are concentrated on the deterrence phase when the VJTF RSOM&I to defense posture takes place - Articles 4 or 5 of the Washington Treaty. The complexity of the tasks executed by NFIUs at different levels from strategic to tactical throughout the shape and

deter phases and the NFIUs' location in the capital cities make NFIUs an effective and valuable element in the NATO deterrence and defense posture.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|---|
| AOO | Area of Operation |
| AOR | Area of Responsibility |
| C2 | Command and Control Structure |
| CIS | Computer Information System |
| COP | Common Operational Picture |
| FD | Final Destinations |
| FOC | Full Operational Capabilities |
| FoF | Follow-on Forces |
| GRPs | Graduated Response Plans |
| HN | Host Nation |
| HNS | Host Nation Support |
| IOC | Initial Operational Capability |
| JFCs | Joint Force Commands |
| NAC | North Atlantic Council |
| NDPs | National Defense Plans |
| NFIUs | NATO Force Integration Units |
| NRF | NATO Response Force |
| OPCON | Operational Control |
| POD | Points of Disembarkation |
| RAP | Readiness Action Plan |
| RSOM&I | Reception, Staging, Onward Movement & Integration |
| SA | Staging Areas |
| SACEUR | Supreme Allied Commander Europe |
| STRATCOM | Strategic Communication |
| VJTF | Very High Readiness Joint Task Force |

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