

The NATO Response Force



At the centre of NATO transformation

The NATO Response Force (NRF) is a highly ready and technologically advanced multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and special forces components that the Alliance can deploy quickly wherever needed. The NRF will become even more important post-2014, after the NATO-led International Assistance Force (ISAF) has completed its mission in Afghanistan. It will provide a vehicle to demonstrate operational readiness, as well as a “testbed” for Alliance transformation.

On 21 February 2013, defence ministers agreed that the NATO Response Force will be at the core of the Connected Forces Initiative which aims at maintaining NATO’s readiness and combat-effectiveness through expanded education and training, increased exercises and a better use of technology.

As part of the initiative, ministers agreed that the Alliance should hold a major live exercise in 2015 that will include the NRF and draw up a comprehensive programme of training and exercises for the period 2015-2020.

The NRF is comprised of three parts: a command and control element from the NATO Command Structure; the Immediate Response Force, a joint force of about 13 000 high-readiness troops provided by Allies; and a Response Forces Pool, which can supplement the Immediate Response Force when necessary.

Purpose

The NRF’s overarching purpose is to provide a rapid military response to an emerging crisis, whether for collective defence purposes or for other crisis response operations.

The force gives NATO the means to respond swiftly to various types of crises anywhere in the world. It is also a driving engine of NATO’s military transformation.

A rotational force

The NATO Response Force is based on a rotational system; nations commit land, air, naval or special forces units to the Immediate Response Force for a twelve-month period.

The NRF is also open to partner countries, once approved by the North Atlantic Council. Once the forces designated by those countries for NRF participation meet the required NATO standards laid down by the Alliance’s Supreme Commander Europe (SACEUR), they can be offered as a partner contribution to a deployment of the NRF. They thus reinforce the contribution of NATO Allies to the NRF, but do not replace them.

Participation in the Immediate Response Force is preceded by national preparation, followed by training with other participants in the multinational force. As units rotate through the NRF, the associated high standards, concepts and technologies are gradually spread throughout the Alliance, thereby fulfilling one of the key purposes the NRF – the further transformation of Allied forces.

Operational command of the NRF currently alternates between NATO’s Joint Force Commands in Brunssum and Naples.



A powerful package

The Immediate Response Force has:

- a brigade-sized land component based on three Battle Groups and their supporting elements;
- a maritime component based on NATO's Standing Naval Maritime Groups and Standing Naval Mine Counter Measures Groups;
- a combat air and air support component;
- special forces; and
- a CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) defence task force.

Before use, the force will be tailored (adjusted in size and capability) to match the demands of any specific operation to which it is committed.

Any mission, anywhere

The NATO Response Force provides a visible assurance of NATO's cohesion and commitment to deterrence and collective defence. Each rotation of the force has to prepare itself for a wide range of tasks – for example, contributing to the preservation of territorial integrity, making a demonstration of force, peace support operations, disaster relief, protection of critical infrastructure, security operations and, as part of a larger force, conducting initial entry operations.

Elements of the NRF helped protect the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, and were deployed to support the Afghan presidential elections in September 2004.

- The NRF has also been used in disaster relief. In September and October 2005, aircraft from the NATO Response Force delivered relief supplies donated by NATO member and Partner countries to the US, to assist in dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
- From October 2005 to February 2006, elements of the NATO Response Force were used in the disaster relief effort in Pakistan, following the devastating 8 October earthquake. Aircraft from the NRF were used in an air bridge that delivered almost 3500 tons of urgently needed supplies to Pakistan, while engineers and medical personnel from the NATO Response Force were deployed to Pakistan to assist in the relief effort.

Authority

Any decision to use the NATO Response Force is a consensual political decision, taken on a case-by-case basis by all 28 Allies in the North Atlantic Council, NATO's principal decision-making body.



Public diplomacy division (PDD) - press and media section

Tel.: +32(0)2 707 1010/1002

Email: moc@hq.nato.int

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