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## Leveraging the eFP: Future Multilateral Cooperation

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### Introduction

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Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 stimulated greater defence cooperation throughout the Baltic littoral. Concerns about Russian aggression have once again made deterrence and territorial defence a priority for NATO and member states located along the so-called northeastern flank. In July 2016 at the Warsaw Summit, NATO member states sought to adjust the Alliance's force posture, building on the deterrence and assurance measures it had adopted two years prior at the Wales Summit; it agreed to deploy the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). Since early 2017, the Allies have been implementing this initiative across the Baltic states and Poland, which consists of four multinational battalion-sized battlegroups, to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, led respectively by the four Framework Nations of Great Britain, Canada, Germany, and the United States. Contemporaneously, the three Baltic countries have built upon existing cooperation frameworks like Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT), Baltic Airspace Surveillance Network (BALTNET), and Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) to strengthen ties among their defence establishments. Poland, too, has joined these efforts, contributing forces not only to the Canadian-led eFP battlegroup in Latvia but also to a brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) that features staff members, battalions, and other units from Lithuania and Ukraine. The Nordic countries of Finland, Norway, and Sweden are also bolstering their defence ties: Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF-CO) has been revitalized, while Sweden and Finland have been reaching out to the United States and NATO.<sup>1</sup>

Still, regional defence cooperation remains fragmented and falls short of realizing its full potential. A recent report by an Estonian think tank observes: "there is a distinct impression that none of the three Baltic states regard trilateral military cooperation as an absolute priority, and that they only invoke its ideals as a matter of political ritual."<sup>2</sup> Each Baltic country's priority is to work bilaterally with the United States. Much to the chagrin of some of its NATO partners, Poland has been petitioning the United States to station permanent military forces on its territory.

Absent a more robust effort at multilateralism the security architecture in the Baltic region risks assuming a hub-and-spokes character whereby the United States has strong linkages with local partners, which in turn have weak ties among themselves. Even the eFP battalions deployed in the Baltic region may ironically be complicit in encouraging bilateralism at the expense of multilateralism: by way of example, Canada's own defence relations with Latvia and each of the member states that contribute to the eFP in Latvia take on a bilateral character.

In this short essay, we argue that Canada and its eFP partners must take a broader view of the eFP deployment. To be sure, the immediate deterrence mission is essential: Russia is an antagonistic international actor that flaunts international norms and rules while its intentions cause much anxiety amongst its western neighbors. However, the eFP is slated to be operational until 2023, at least in Latvia, and Russia is not going anywhere. Political succession will be a key question in Russia's next presidential election, scheduled for 2024, which will generate even more uncertainty over Russia's future international behaviour. Concomitantly, transatlantic relations have grown tense since the United States has called into question its reliability as a security partner, whether as a function of its changing strategic goals or the idiosyncrasies of President Donald Trump.<sup>3</sup> In the medium term, then, Canada and its partners in the eFP battlegroup should come to see the mission not merely as a tactical deployment but more so as an opportunity to develop cohesion and collective competencies that will enable NATO missions elsewhere and to forge an operational partnership within the Alliance with proven synergies that its partners can leverage to exert influence at the NATO negotiating table.

### **The eFP in the Short-Term**

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The multifaceted purpose of the eFP battlegroups is well known: an army mission to reassure those members most alarmed about Russia, to strengthen local deterrence and defence measures, and to signal to Russia the Alliance's resolve and unity. Each of these missions is deceptively simple. How much reassurance is necessary depends on the threat assessment. A greater military threat needs a more robust response. Strong deterrence measures could be a source of reassurance, but they could also be provocative if the threat assessment mistakes defensive intentions for revisionist intentions. A weak deployment could inadvertently signal irresolution, but a strong deployment could stoke fears of encirclement.<sup>4</sup>

NATO's members have sought to square these circles by carefully designing the eFP Battlegroups: two nuclear-armed countries are implicated as Framework Nations (Great Britain and the United States), the economic powerhouse of continental Europe (Germany) is another. That 23 NATO members are involved conveys a respectable degree of cohesion. The size and placement of the eFP Battlegroups in their Host Countries indicate their lack of wherewithal to undertake offensive operations against Russia. Having become operational in early 2017, the troops that make up national contributions to the battlegroups deploy on a rotational basis.<sup>5</sup>

Absent a permanent stationing of forces in these relatively newer members of the Alliance, NATO can claim compliance with the *NATO-Russia Founding Act* (1997), which provides for no "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" to be placed on the territory of NATO's newest members.<sup>6</sup>

But insistence on the *NATO-Russia Founding Act* by some NATO Allies may actually undermine the security and stability of Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to divide the Transatlantic Alliance by exploiting disagreement within the Alliance. Rotational eFP deployments by member states have thus continued apace since Trump won the 2016 U.S. presidential election, months after the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Concern over Trump as regards to the eFP deployment has been twofold. On the one hand, over the course of the campaign he opined that NATO was outmoded. He chided treaty Allies for not doing their fair share in shouldering the common defence burden, even warning that not spending more on their defence burden would discourage the United States to come to their defence.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, he has been reluctant to criticize the Russian leadership and has repeatedly articulated a desire to seek Russian cooperation in international matters. This reticence has been especially worrying in light of Russian interference in U.S. domestic politics. Fears abound that Trump might seek a grand bargain with Russia at the expense of NATO and its member states. The worst fears have yet to materialize: NATO still exists, U.S. deployments in Europe have remained intact and even expanded, while U.S. armed forces continue to participate in military exercises throughout the Baltic region and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

### **The eFP in the Medium Term**

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“**After blows to U.S. credibility as the guarantor of the global financial system in 2008, free trade, and the liberal multilateral order, such U.S. behaviour further calls into question the reliability of the United States as a security guarantor and a politically reliable partner.**”

destabilizes transatlantic relations. After blows to U.S. credibility as the guarantor of the global financial system in 2008, free trade, and the liberal multilateral order, such U.S. behaviour further calls into question the reliability of the United States as a security guarantor and a politically reliable partner.

Transatlantic relations thus remain in crisis. The Trump administration has imposed trade tariffs on the European Union, warned against defence initiatives that do not fall under the auspices of NATO, continued to criticize supposedly unsatisfactory burden-sharing, and prefers to engage European countries bilaterally, as if to divide-and-conquer the continent, which plays right into Russian hands. The Trump administration’s aversion to being constrained by arms control arrangements further

Against this backdrop we make a case for leveraging eFP deployments more strategically, beyond the short-term tactical needs of deterring and defending against potential Russian revisionism.

eFP battlegroups enable NATO countries to learn to work together militarily and to strengthen operational synergies. These benefits in turn allow them to act as a more cohesive bloc that is less dependent on, and potentially more assertive against, the United States. Acute collective action problems abound across the Baltic region, which has key gaps in regional defence cooperation. As several analysts observe, “the Baltic states became very focused on cultivating, on a bilateral basis, relations with the lead nations and key partners of the eFP battlegroups deployed on their soil.”<sup>9</sup> Although intuitive and understandable, these hub-and-spoke arrangements may actually exacerbate fragmentation of NATO: Lithuania purchases major weapons systems from Germany; Poland petitions the United States for permanent military basing; and Estonia builds on its legacy of defence cooperation with Great Britain left from their collective experience in Afghanistan.

In the meantime, joint procurement remains under-developed as do joint intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to monitor Russian activity together and develop collective early warning mechanisms. Poland's contribution of forces to the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia enhances intra-regional connections, but not among the Baltic states themselves. Gains over the last five years cannot be taken for granted: the Battlegroups must be leveraged beyond simply improving ties between Framework Nations and Host Countries.

In effect, the eFP deployments in the Baltic region could serve as an experiment for wider defence co-operation amongst clusters of NATO countries, the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia being first and foremost among them. This Battlegroup is the quaintest of them all. Canada is not a European power and thus has less obvious interests at stake in the Baltic region than other Framework Nations.<sup>10</sup> As a percentage of its gross domestic product, it spends about as much (or as little) as Germany on defence. Yet its political heft in the region and economic interests are much smaller. Still, Canada is a credible champion of liberal internationalist values that are broadly shared in the Baltic region. The Canadian Armed Forces has a robust record of demonstrating its operational utility.<sup>11</sup> The participation of two apparently willing and able south European countries –Italy and Spain—makes the battlegroup in Latvia a good testbed for developing not only transatlantic, but also trans-European operational cooperation in practice. The latter is far from obvious, given the different perceptions of Russia as a threat actor among allies, which largely follows an east versus south divide in Europe.

Italy's geostrategic priority, for instance, is the Euro-Mediterranean area (the Mediterranean basin), which bears directly on its willingness and ability to contribute to NATO's three core tasks: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. Italy has a marked preference for the crisis management pillar, an expertise honed over more than twenty years of involvement across many international missions.<sup>12</sup> However, Italy's activism in missions is tempered by a reluctance to commit to collective defence since Italians generally do not regard Russia as a primary threat to their security.<sup>13</sup> Italy's approach towards Moscow has been softer than that of the majority of European allies; the election of the Giuseppe Conte's government reinforced Italy's stance: the ruling coalition expressed pro-Russian sentiments with a stated preference for rapprochement with the Kremlin.<sup>14</sup> Italy and other allies on the southern flank had sought to counter-balance NATO's increased engagement on the eastern flank with a sustained commitment to the southern flank. During a NATO Ministerial meeting in 2017, member states decided to establish NATO's Strategic Direction South Hub in Naples, an information-sharing organization with the aim "to better understand challenges and threats emanating from Africa and the Middle East."<sup>15</sup>

That Italy's geopolitical interests differ from collective defence needs in the Baltic states and Poland makes the battlegroup in Latvia an interesting case of a cluster composed by NATO states that do not share common priorities. The eFP initiative in Latvia encourages the participating states to overcome geographic divides, to exchange lessons learned, and to develop new skills and expertise by learning from each other, thereby increasing common understanding and interoperability. The presence of medium-sized allies in the battlegroup, with advanced capabilities (Spain) and robust experience in missions (Italy), stands to enhance information exchange and learning with other smaller countries, thus enhancing cooperation among a larger group of allies, beyond mere bilateral relations between the Host Country and the Framework Nation.

Among the four Framework Nations, the Canadian-led battlegroup is uniquely positioned to leverage its diversity to develop connections between—and among—NATO members that might otherwise have little incentive to strengthen security and operational ties. Improved operational synergies and efficiencies among medium-size and smaller allies provides collective military and political leverage for these member states within the Alliance whose return on investment for countries such as Italy over the medium term might include newer allies such as Latvia eventually being able to contribute to initiatives such as NATO's Strategic Direction South Hub.

With the security of its members through collective defence as NATO's core mandate, the only way of assuring the security of a North Atlantic region from conventional and non-conventional threats is by means of the capacity and capability of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Establishing NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) as part of the Forward Presence framework represents a visible and persistent presence wherever NATO is being challenged. NFIUs foster collaboration with domestic armed forces and facilitate the rapid deployment of the NATO VJTF in times of crisis.<sup>16</sup> Forging a political consensus among 29 NATO member states takes patience, effort, and time. In cases where consensus exists despite no willingness to have a full NATO mission, the eFP deployment model could be used. For even the most basic task of territorial defence and deterrence, NATO may need to revert to what former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called "coalitions of the willing" should it fail to prepare adequately for what is its *raison d'être*.<sup>17</sup> Enhanced readiness, deterrence, and collective defence initiatives conducted by NATO aside, smaller coalitions of willing NATO member states can improve overall readiness, interoperability, and effectiveness of the NATO force structure. Close cooperation entailed within a coalition of the willing "is underpinned by a mutual understanding of political intent, decision-making and authorization; secure capital-to-capital communications; and familiarity established through political-level training and exercises;" all of which increases procedural readiness and political agility.<sup>18</sup> This notion of cooperation in limited partnerships and coalitions under a Forward Presence framework is "borne out of pragmatic necessity, for efficiency or out of operational demand" in response to a regional security crisis in which the member state confronted by such a threat is militarily and/or politically unwilling or unable to intervene.<sup>19</sup>

Within this deployment model, NATO member states still leverage the operating framework of the Alliance—its institutions, resources, and command structure—while unwilling member states have the option to abstain from such actions or to oppose the operation as a whole (but not veto it). Akin to the eFP as a deployment model, the concept of select states resolving to act in concert and to intervene with greater speed, depth, and efficiency than the Alliance as a whole is not new per se.<sup>20</sup> For example, "NATO operations in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan have forged small groupings of allies and partners, comfortable working together and with similar political appetites for military intervention."<sup>21</sup> Deploying a coalition of the willing under a Forward Presence model pays considerable dividend insofar as "[l]ike-minded partners often share strategic and regional interests and can be more agile in terms of political consensus and decision-making, let alone military deployment. They have a willingness and capability to.... [r]each with the 'speed of relevance' as former US Defence Secretary Mattis put it."<sup>22</sup> Together, a Forward Presence deployment model assembling a coalition of the willing would be relatively low-risk while developing NATO member states' capability, interoperability, training, and readiness.

The eFP deployment model is elastic and can still serve core functions. For example, in the case of a crisis in the Baltics and Poland, while member states are preoccupied with forging a NATO consensus on a NATO response, eFP Framework Nations and Contributing States can move on a decision to support a member state. The eFP deployment is synonymous with deterrence and collective defence. The modus operandi of the eFP, then, is enhanced deterrence, which entails a quicker and more agile response than waiting on the Alliance as a whole. For enhanced deterrence through a persistent military presence acting as a “tripwire” to be credible, the Alliance needs to be willing and capable of imposing unacceptable costs in response to adversarial aggression. To this end, the recent NATO Readiness Initiative, with its call for a “Four Thirties” reactive approach, “requiring the Allies to be able to deploy in the case of a crisis in Europe up to 30 battalion-sized battlegroups, 30 squadrons of aircraft and 30 warships in no more than 30 days” is meant to improve force readiness.<sup>23</sup> As Lindley-French contends, this approach comes “... to grips with the force levels and structures credible 21st century deterrence demands by enabling rapid reinforcement of forward deployed forces in an emergency.... It is vital that NATO forces are held at sufficient readiness in sufficient mass to plug the dangerous extant gap between spearhead forces, follow-on forces (NATO Response Force), and the bulk of the NATO force structure, much of which would take up to 120 days to mobilise in an emergency.”<sup>24</sup>

Enhanced cooperation offers a powerful rejoinder to the criticism that NATO countries are not doing enough to share the burden. Although European allies are increasing their defence budgets, the implementation of deterrence by denial—that is, complicating possible efforts by adversaries to fulfill operational goals on the battlefield—through the implementation of full conventional force structures is seen as too expensive and politically contentious.<sup>25</sup> Ringsmose and Rynning suggest that initiative fatigue is partly a function of threat perception: “[s]ome allies see Russia as an opportunistic power that can be deterred by an enhanced tripwire, while others see threats from NATO’s southern flank as being of far greater consequence to the Alliance’s security and well-being. The former fear an over-gearred policy towards Russia; the latter a geopolitical disequilibrium inside NATO if the east is allowed to trump the south.”<sup>26</sup> By contributing 166 and 300 troops respectively to the eFP in Latvia, southern allies such as Italy and Spain prove that concrete, operational and political cooperation is feasible, an east-south divide in geopolitical interests notwithstanding.<sup>27</sup> In the case of Italy, contributing to the collective defence of eastern allies is a way to show its overall commitment to NATO and deflect criticism of its stagnant defence budget, which bucks the current trend in defence spending across Europe.

Allied commitment to the Baltic states and Poland in particular is also meant to persuade the Trump administration that “NATO was neither obsolete nor a club of states free-riding on American largesse as a means of shoring up the alliance.”<sup>28</sup> U.S. support cannot be assumed. American presidents have long bemoaned allied burden-sharing. Under President Trump, such complaints have a new sense of political urgency. In light of President Trump’s early public castigations, the reaffirmation of transatlantic solidarity through the implementation and sustainment of the eFP continues to take on even greater significance as the failure to assure the security of the Baltic states could surely mark the failure of the Alliance itself. At the same time, NATO Allies have the collective military and economic capacity to increase their individual military expenditures and to invest in NATO’s policies and initiatives.



NATO's resourcing scheme is essential to demonstrating that it remains steadfast and committed to the security of all its members. The reassurance measures of resource allocation and financial contributions convey this message to adversaries and NATO member states alike. Beyond investments required to address the security challenges that confront NATO, "the alliance also relies on all its members to maintain military capabilities that can be used for collective operations. Without these capabilities, the deterrent effect of NATO—specifically, its ability to dissuade others from threatening the security of alliance members—will erode."<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the eFP model has its challenges and so needs to be strengthened accordingly. In the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia, with forces drawn from eight contributing member states and thus more than twice the contributing states than the other three eFP country deployments, the inability to pre-position the VJTF equipment due to the diverse multinational structure of the eFP battlegroup in an area under imminent or pending threat could prove to be a liability: national forces have potentially conflicting rules of engagement and greater variation in military equipment. As several security analysts warn, "[t]he VJTF is not regionally aligned, so if a conflict in... one area erupts at the same time as another crisis requiring a NATO response, the VJTF might be unavailable."<sup>30</sup> The overall combat readiness and capacity of the battlegroups risks being compromised or relegated to "ineffective 'Frankenstein' battalions."<sup>31</sup> The eFP's efficacy thus hinges on its multinational components.

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Beyond the operational and tactical-level challenges associated with the eFP battlegroups, there remains a far more strategic question regarding the role of Framework Nations and their Contributing States. The battlegroups are best suited to deter by preparedness through the use of punishment should the most dangerous scenario occur: a Russian military incursion into eastern NATO member states' territory. However, the probability of such a crisis is low. Thus, where the aspirations of the eFP remain lacking is with regard to such battlegroups' response to crises that will fall below the threshold of Article 5. Such crises could be the result of

attributable cyberattacks, ethno-political discord instigated from abroad, and foreign disinformation campaigns.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as the 2017 Canadian defence policy review notes, the increasing use of hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, and emerging technologies by revisionist states within the "grey zone" has established a "more diffuse environment in which an increasing number of actors can exercise varying degree of influence."<sup>33</sup> These threats are obviously subtler than a major invasion force backed by nuclear weapons. As such, NATO members may have to develop the capacity to be resilient against a wider spectrum of contingencies than in the past. Fulfilling these needs may require strengthened cyber-defences of governmental agencies and military installations, improved biosecurity (as evidenced in the Skripal case), and even forging strong civil societies and civil contingency agencies to make them less susceptible to unconventional Russian aggression.

## **The eFP as a Deployment Model to Use Elsewhere**

After nearly two years of implementing its stated initiative, the eFP battlegroup demonstrates several key accomplishments and offers a robust model for NATO to use elsewhere. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly Defence and Security Committee notes that the necessary and sufficient conditions for which the eFP can be employed as a deployment model that addresses conventional threats beyond the northeastern flank revolve around four fundamental messages that can be drawn from its response to the Russian threat.<sup>34</sup> They are:

1. That the Alliance is solid;
2. That the Alliance possesses more robust capabilities and capacities in a particular region thanks to the sharing of resources and burden;
3. That a limited hostile incursion in a particular area of confrontation would be deterred in such a way as not to antagonize the adversary; and
4. That capabilities in military mobility are available in a crisis situation despite potential bureaucratic delays in the NATO command and control structure.

### ***Alliance solidarity***

The multinational character of the eFP battlegroups provides strategic depth in terms of military effectiveness. Although it demonstrates Alliance solidarity, it may be perceived as an Achilles' heel at the operational level. Nevertheless, by including the Framework Nations and Contributing States, the enhanced Forward Presence as a deployment model elsewhere spreads risk across multiple allies. Were an adversary to challenge the territorial integrity of a member state and to threaten the security of its people, NATO member states forwardly deployed in that particular region would likely incur casualties, catalyzing a quicker and a more unified response from the Alliance. Spreading risk is nothing new for NATO. Consider the multinational formations during the Cold War. Most notably, "the former Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force-Land was a brigade-sized force comprising fourteen of NATO's then fifteen member states. It was meant to be quickly deployed to an emerging crisis zone and to be a tangible manifestation of allied solidarity."<sup>35</sup> The eFP as deployed against Russian aggression plays a similar role along the Alliance's northeastern flank.

### ***Robust capabilities and interoperability***

The multinational character and interoperable capacity of the battlegroups is a key feature of the eFP concept. It signals allied solidarity and enables burden-sharing. Notably, 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 nations, as well as by Germany and Italy. In Afghanistan, ISAF's Regional Commands and Provincial Reconstruction Teams also relied virtually all cases on framework nation arrangements (...)."<sup>36</sup> Two decades of experience implementing a Framework Nation arrangement among European Allies' land, air, and maritime force structures and during operations conditioned a bolder, more robust, and responsive approach to threats against the Alliance's treasures, interests, and values.

Such interoperability is encapsulated in the Framework Nations Concept proposed by Germany and adopted by NATO to rationalize European defence investments and optimize not only NATO's, but also European defence capabilities and capacities.<sup>37</sup>

Implementation of the Framework Nation model employed through the eFP framework offers an opportunity "to translate a NATO commitment to enhance the readiness and responsiveness of Allied forces, in support of deterrence and defense... by shortening their notice-to-move, into a deeper and longer-term effort to strength the Alliance's overall capacity to counter a sudden and threatening concertation of forces and systems, both in regular warfare and asymmetric environments, on its periphery."<sup>38</sup> The Framework Nation model within the eFP framework distributes 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."<sup>39</sup> When confronted with delays associated with the sometimes frustrating, but ultimately necessary form of seeking political consensus before undertaking major initiatives, long negotiations ensued before the inception of what would eventually become known as NATO's eFP framework.

### ***Deterring different types of aggression***

Mitigating the increasing security threats that challenge the interests and territorial integrity of the Alliance necessitates a substantive investment in more effective, efficient, and capable military deployment models and tools to provide a means of deterrence but avoid antagonizing the adversary. Two such tools can be leveraged. The first is an enhanced forward presence that would create serious costs for adversaries when it is prepared and deployed selectively "with clear responsibilities, pre-delegated authority and maximally harmonised rules of engagement."<sup>40</sup> The second is a conventional military engagement that can promote security and stability in a situation that is below the threshold of grey-zone conflict and, in turn, conflict short of major interstate war. Together, an enhanced forward presence and conventional military engagement can contribute to effective operational capacity and capability across a broad spectrum of military operations, up to and including interstate warfare. That is, an eFP deployment model has the ability to provide an efficient and effective means of achieving multiple objectives in accordance with NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Expeditious military mobility***

The eFP concept is premised on NATO and its member states reacting promptly with the 40,000-strong Response Force. Absent forward deployed combat troops, the core function of the eFP as a "mobile tripwire" requires a rapid response of the VJTF. On Europe's northeastern flank, this entails traversing the Suwałki Gap, as a heavy Russian military presence will likely interdict access to Baltic airspace and maritime lines. Rapid deployment of forces under a NATO command and control framework would encounter political and logistical hurdles. Politically, "NATO states would first have to consent to activation of the VJTF, which is anything but certain. Yet, even after a potential decision by the NATO Council on the deployment of the VJTF and early activation by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the alliance would quickly encounter logistical hurdles. It would struggle to field the necessary strategic transport aircraft vital for any such deployment."<sup>42</sup>

From a conventional operational posture, NATO's 'tripwire' deterrence, therefore, relies heavily on reinforcements being deployed on short notice from the centre to the periphery of the Alliance.<sup>43</sup> Notice-to-move and notice-to-effect timelines will need to improve to ensure that any adversary would not outmatch NATO's forces by denying them freedom of movement to or inside the targeted area of operation through Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) measures. NATO's collective response mechanisms will inevitably take time and political shirking. Confronted with an imminent threat, the eFP needs the capacity and ability to respond before a NATO-designated operation is launched. The eFP model can be employed as a response to a threat "[p]rior to the activation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, [and thus,] the military response will be an issue for individual Allies, especially those with troops on the ground. In this situation, the fullest possible integration of the eFP battlegroup... is important in ensuring coordinated joint action in the event of a crisis. It will also increase the overall credibility of the deterrence posture, as it demonstrates that the eFP will stand with..." NATO member states' forces and is prepared to take action if required.<sup>44</sup>

The 2016 Warsaw Summit was a crossroads for NATO. It symbolized the ending of a geopolitical paradigm of unipolarity defined for decades by Western powers, a paradigm characterized by out-of-area operations and "the prominence of expeditionary warfare and by sizeable and enduring state-building enterprises..."<sup>45</sup> The Warsaw Summit did not fix all of NATO's shortfalls, but it did address a number of its security, functional, and organizational challenges, especially the changing security environment in Europe. In some ways, the Alliance has seen a rebirth as a result of Russia's provocations and aggression. The great irony of Russia's actions is that they have rejuvenated the Alliance in a way unfavourable to Moscow's perceived interests, including the rotational presence of Allied troops east of Germany and a new NATO emphasis on territorial defence through collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.<sup>46</sup> In overcoming the fallacy of composition, the eFP initiative represents an essential reinforcement of the Alliance's deterrence and reassurance posture through a recommitment to Article 5. From a strategic perspective, 23 of the 29 Allies involved brings collective defence back to the fore and has brought about a refocus and a recalibration of the Allies' military posture and operational planning. Moreover, by allowing the Alliance to deploy a persistent – but not permanent – modestly sized military presence, the eFP is able to deter Russia and reassure still-nervous Allies in the east without antagonizing Moscow.<sup>47</sup>

Just as alliances should not be ends onto themselves, but rather means to advance common objectives, fostering closer links can improve cohesion within NATO ranks. This in turn strengthens deterrence since Russia would be less able to pick off NATO members and play them against each other. By leveraging the eFP for better collaboration among participating countries in the Alliance, we can operate better together militarily, and we can also operate more effectively as a political cluster within NATO. Clusters of states within NATO can thus strengthen collective security in the form of robust territorial integrity as well as freedom from undue political interference and other forms of subversion, and not just on NATO's northeastern flank. By being able to act as a bloc that reflects a diverse subset of Allies, the eFP as a deployment model has the potential to exert leverage and influence in a way no participant state would be able to on its own. In light of Russia's permanent presence in the region, deepening such defence cooperation signals that member states are committed to the long game. Were Putin's possible succession in the 2024 presidential elections to open a window of opportunity to reduce tensions, eFP force cohesion may well encourage dialogue or reassurance measures, all the while allowing NATO to hedge.

By the same token, improved defence cooperation among local partners assures against the temptation of striking great power bargains at the expense of some member states. Thus, the eFP framework enables better coordination and optimization within the Alliance, but then translating these synergies as leverage at NATO. By doing so, this also permits greater burden-sharing despite the resource constraints that Allies commonly face.

## Conclusion

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Under the eFP framework there is to be no permanent NATO mission. Instead, NATO members are present with a battalion and headquarters. For better or for worse, multinational headquarters capability and leadership experience is hard to come by. Without NATO leadership and its institutional memory, each Framework Nation would end up leading the military operations within its designated area of operation and engaging their forces as it sees fit. In the words of a key member of the International Staff at NATO headquarters, “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.”<sup>48</sup> This speaks to the logic of deterrence: signal commitment to your adversary and credibly demonstrate the necessary capability and willingness to follow through.<sup>49</sup> Canada’s contribution is a function of this deep and continuing commitment to NATO – one that goes back to the very beginning of the Alliance, of which Canada was a founding member.<sup>50</sup> In Latvia, that also amounts to a commitment over the medium-term to overcoming the fallacy of composition among troop-contributing states to optimize inter-operational synergies for future collective deployments elsewhere: a military and political mini-Alliance within the Alliance.

**“ The eFP serves as an integral part of NATO’s framework for deterrence and defence along the Alliance’s northeastern flank. It demonstrates that the Alliance is resolute in aggression against its members. However, the eFP is not a deployment model for just one part of Europe. In the medium term, the eFP lends itself to maturing into a cornerstone of the Alliance’s conventional deterrence posture by developing a state of preparedness that embodies, symbolizes, and ensures allied capacity, capability, and interoperability. Canada’s contribution is a function of this deep and continuing commitment to NATO – one that goes back to the very beginning of the Alliance, of which Canada was a founding member. ”**

In a resource-strapped Alliance of 29 members that is confronted with myriad competing demands must be well rehearsed at working with a select subset of partners. Such a bloc of partners can exercise greater clout at the NATO table. It is a trust-, confidence-, and credibility-building measure among multinational headquarters and battlegroups to ensure that current security clients such as Latvia also add value as eventual suppliers of collective security elsewhere. The eFP is thus a quintessential commitment to collective, transatlantic and Euro-Atlantic security over the short- as well as the longer-term. It enables the Alliance to respond flexibly to changing threat environments in a manner useful for deterrence, assurance, collective defence, and burden-sharing.

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