

“Fictitious Enemies” and “Combat Scenarios”: The Pentagon and NATO Rehearse for War against Russia?

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Last month was a busy one for U.S.-NATO military exercises in the Baltic Sea. Three major multinational training exercises, including naval maneuvers, amphibious landings and preparation for deployment to Afghanistan, occurred in the region in June, in one case overlapping.

From June 10-22 the U.S. Seventh Army's Joint Multinational Training Command (JMTC), based in Grafenwöhr, Germany, conducted this year's Saber Strike, the largest multinational military exercise in the area. Approximately 2,000 troops from seven NATO nations – the U.S., Britain, France, Canada, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – participated in training to “engage the enemy, as they overcome challenges in interoperability,” according to the JMTC's account of the drills in Estonia and Latvia.

The former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are the rotating sites for Saber Strike exercises and “share resources and capabilities to meet the training requirements of organic units and elements, who may deploy in support of contingency operations in Afghanistan.”

JMTC's lead exercise planner, Tony Bonarti, said of the training: “In pursuing operational cohesiveness, these nations expect to achieve vast improvements in their respective defense and host-nation governments that allow them to be prepared to address both national and international crisis events.”

Live-fire and field training exercises were conducted at the Ādaži Training Area in Latvia and other events were held at facilities in Estonia. The scenario employed for the live-fire exercise was “defending a Forward Operating Base.” A U.S. Army Europe website report of a war game simulation held at the Tapa Training facility said: “Working cooperatively with allied partners, the Estonian forces are exercising a combat action scenario in a fictitious country that is undergoing civil unrest and facing an invasion by neighboring foreign forces sympathetic to the civil unrest.”

During an exercise in Estonia, a local brigade was joined by multinational forces from several NATO and NATO partner nations. The Ämari Air Base in Estonia, recently upgraded to accommodate NATO warplanes, hosted airmen from the Michigan Air National Guard who operated fighter and aerial refueling aircraft.

American units participating in the war games were personnel from the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, the Pennsylvania Army National Guard,

the Michigan Air Guard and the 4th Marine Division as well as a Joint Terminal Air Controller (in charge of directing air combat operations) team from the Washington Air Guard.

During Saber Strike 2012 the website of the JMTC, the only U.S. Army training command that regularly trains U.S. and multinational forces jointly, disclosed that its Joint Multinational Simulation Center conducts approximately 40 NATO exercises annually.

From June 1-16 the U.S.-led annual Baltic Operations (BALTOPS), the largest multinational maritime exercise held in the Baltic Sea, occurred in the territorial waters of Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Poland. Thirty warships, as many aircraft and an estimated 1,500 marines and sailors from the U.S., Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and Sweden participated.

For the first time in the exercise's 40-year history a major amphibious landing operation was conducted in this year's host nation, Lithuania (in Palanga). It involved the U.S. Marine Corps (including its Black Sea Rotational Force 12), Lithuanian Special Operations Force troops, personnel from Lithuania's Iron Wolf Motorised Infantry Brigade, the USS Normandy guided missile cruiser, two B-52 strategic bombers, two German Panavia Tornados, two Lithuanian Mi-8 helicopters, a joint battalion of the Estonian-Latvian-Lithuanian Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON), a Dutch diving team and two Polish Lublin class amphibious warfare ships.

The scenario used for the exercise was described as a crisis in a fictitious nation named Arcadia which "affects the entire region of the Blue Sea." Acting on a United Nations Security Council mandate, international forces are deployed to the imaginary (or only slightly disguised) Blue Sea region which enforce an arms embargo, a blockade, a stabilization operation in Arcadia and "assistance in counter-terrorism actions."

Though separated from the Baltic Sea by Lithuania, Belarus could well be the scenario's Arcadia.

An amphibious landing operation was also held in Estonia on the coast of Paldiski. Estonian Defense Forces Chief of Staff Peeter Hoppe said before the event that "Paldiski's southern harbor will have a pre-positioning exercise, where a large array of various allied military vehicles will be brought ashore."

The exercise was observed and led by the U.S. Marine Corps' Lieutenant General Richard Tryon, Lieutenant General Frank Panter, Jr., Brigadier General Charles G. Chiarotti and Brigadier General Roger Machut as well as Britain's Rear Admiral Russell Harding.

Estonian Public Broadcasting published a report on June 4 which said of the exercise that "The aim is to practice bringing an over 1,000-strong battalion battle group to Estonia and readying it for combat."

Estonia's Hoppe further spoke specifically on his nation's armed forces working with U.S. Marines:

"They will learn survival skills from us, as we have a special climate, wetland landscape, which cannot be found everywhere. In return, we will learn from them patrolling, an ability that we do have, but which they are extremely skilled at."

“The common denominator is [the] receiving of allies, cooperation between units, combined effort of civilian authorities and [the] private sector. All this strengthens Baltic cooperation with America and [other] allies. Naturally it also strengthens regional partnership in the northern region of the Baltic Sea and allows cooperation procedures to be tested.”

The integrated U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Expeditionary Strike Group Two website stated this year’s BALTOPS was “designed to promote regional cooperation and foster multinational interoperability to train for joint combat of regional and transnational threats.”

Vice Admiral Frank Pandolfe, commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet and of Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (“a rapidly deployable Maritime Headquarters to plan, command and control maritime operations including if necessary a Maritime Expanded Task Force for larger scale operations”) , stated:

“BALTOPS has one common goal – to improve maritime security in the Baltic Sea through increased interoperability and collaboration among regional allies.

“As in past years, our sailors and Marines will be working side-by-side with their colleagues from partner nations, both on land and at sea, becoming familiar with each other’s military operating procedures and practices. That partnership – that collaboration – leads to increased understanding and increased interoperability.”

On June 28 the Baltic Host 12 NATO Host Nation Support exercise began simultaneously in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the involvement of military personnel from Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, U.S. European Command and Naval Striking and Support Force NATO.

The fourth annual Baltic Host exercise is providing the U.S. and NATO the opportunity to increase military interoperability with the armed forces of the three Baltic nations and to prepare those nations for hosting NATO forces for assorted missions, including armed conflicts. That is, war. War close to home is the most likely prospect.

This year’s exercise will prepare for a NATO Response Force exercise codenamed Steadfast Jazz to be conducted in 2013.

The Baltic Sea region is an expanding theater for Pentagon and NATO operations. From regular ground, air and sea exercises to the training of multinational forces for deployment to Afghanistan and the beginning of the Northern Distribution Network to move supplies and equipment to that nation. From the eight-year-old NATO Baltic air patrol to the opening of a NATO cyber warfare center of excellence in Estonia and the upgrading of air bases in Estonia and Lithuania. From the deployment of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor missiles to Poland two years ago to the scheduled stationing of Standard Missile-3 interceptors there in 2018.

USS Normandy, which participated in this year’s BALTOPS, is equipped to fire Standard Missile-3s, and may well join other American guided missile cruisers and destroyers in the Baltic Sea as part of the U.S.’s global missile interception system.

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