

GLOBAL WARFARE: The Worldwide Deployment of NATO's Global Expeditionary Force

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In the past seventeen years millions of troops from approximately 60 nations have served under NATO command in wars and post-war zones in several countries outside of the military bloc's territory.

The NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia had 60,000 troops in 1995, the Kosovo Force 50,000 in 1999, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan 140,000 at peak strength and smaller detachments have served with Operation Unified Protector in Libya, Operation Allied Harmony in Macedonia, Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean Sea and Operation Ocean Shield in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.

With rotations, the number of troops serving under the alliance's command in Southeastern Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East is likely in the millions. In 2010 the American commander of the Transit Center at Manas in Kyrgyzstan said that 55,000 NATO troops had been airlifted through that base to Afghanistan in May of that year, an annual rate of two-thirds of a million at a time when an estimated 140,000 of 152,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan were serving under NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

NATO forces have also been stationed in Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over the past decade.

Alliance naval forces conducted a six-month blockade of Libya last year and have participated in Active Endeavor since 2011 and in Ocean Shield (and its predecessor, Operation Allied Protector) since 2009.

Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 and Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 have participated in NATO operations and war games throughout the Mediterranean, have circumnavigated the African continent, sailed down the Atlantic coast of Canada and the U.S. and into the Caribbean Sea, held exercises in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Guinea, participated in NATO drills in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, and planned to cross the strategic Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea in 2009.

NATO has had from 1995 to the present day the opportunity to build an integrated international military force for ground, naval and air operations in current and future operations.

Last week NATO's top military commander (Supreme Allied Commander Europe), U.S. Admiral James Stavridis, said the bloc has "140,000 troops around the world" engaged in ongoing operations in South and Central Asia, the Balkans, off the Horn of Africa and,

residually, in North Africa.

Stavridis' second-in-command at his other post, as chief of United States European Command – EUCOM's deputy commander Navy Vice Admiral Charles Martoglio – stated the following to the Pentagon's news agency on May 4:

"We have been alongside NATO, or NATO has been alongside us, for 10 years in Afghanistan and Iraq, We have a combat edge that has been honed by 10 years of working together in very challenging circumstances. "

Although not a formal NATO operation, the war and occupation in Iraq received assistance from the alliance beforehand – deployment of Patriot interceptor missiles and AWACS surveillance aircraft to Turkey – and afterward, with NATO supporting the Multi-National Force – Iraq and operations in the Polish-led South Central zone and running the NATO Training Mission-Iraq. The first commander of the latter was current Central Intelligence Agency director and former ISAF commander David Petraeus.

Three-quarters of current NATO members states supplied troops for the Iraq war, all except for Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg and Turkey, which in most instances compensated by increasing their troop commitments to NATO in Afghanistan. Over a dozen NATO partnership program nations also sent troops to Iraq.

EUCOM's deputy commander elaborated on his above-cited comments in stating:

"So as we come out of Iraq and Afghanistan, how do we sustain that combat edge over time, particularly when everybody's budgets are being significantly constrained? Our job here [in Europe] is to sustain the strategic partnership, the NATO alliance – that most successful coalition in history – across these difficult financial times."

Navy Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery, EUCOM's deputy commander for plans, policy and strategy, spoke in a similar vein:

"The question is how do we preserve all the investment that's been made over the last eight to 10 years – an investment of not just money, but blood and sweat, working together in both Iraq and Afghanistan?"

Admiral Martoglio placed emphasis of continuing exercises and other training with nations that have provided troops for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to consolidate integration and operational cohesiveness for future military actions. According to American Forces Press Service, he particularly stressed the need "to take new strategic partnerships forged with Eastern European nations to the next level, and to maintain other ISAF contributors' high-end capabilities. "

In his own words, "We have to look toward ensuring interoperability of those forces and routinely training together so that if we have to conduct high-end operations, we have the ability to work together from a technical perspective, and the skills to work together from a training perspective."

For high-end operations read wars.

As the U.S. moves into new bases in the Asia-Pacific region and deploys more warships and warplanes to the Middle East, it can count on NATO to police Europe, the Mediterranean –

North Africa and the western Middle East – the Horn of Africa and the South Caucasus on its behalf.

NATO has secured a mobile, integrated, combat-tested global expeditionary force for the West.

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