

The Origins of Atlantic Resolve: U.S. Army Europe's Continued Forward Presence and Deterrence in Eastern Europe

The year 2014 was a pivotal year in the history of U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union on 26 December 1991 seemingly marked the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Army presence in Europe steadily decreased, from 216,709 soldiers in 1989, to 115,459 in 1992, to 57,393 in 2005 and to 43,324 five years later.¹ By 2013, after the inactivation of the V Corps Headquarters and 170th and 172nd Infantry Brigades, the USAREUR military strength dipped to about 30,000 soldiers.² Concurrently, and even more dramatically, the last twenty-two M-1 Abrams main battle tanks in USAREUR were returned to the United States in March 2013. This was particularly significant and symbolic, since at the height of the superpower confrontation in Europe, NATO armored units included some 6,000 tanks.³ This ended the U.S. Army's sixty-nine-year history of maintaining main battle tanks in Germany. It also closed a chapter in the long history of USAREUR's preparations to meet – and defeat – a conventional near-peer military foe on the battlefields of Germany and altered the strategic environment in Europe.

In this murky security situation, the Russian Federation violated Ukrainian sovereignty when it annexed the Crimean Peninsula and provided military support to separatist factions in eastern Ukraine in February and March 2014. These saber-rattling acts of destabilization were met by prompt condemnation by the international and European communities – and caused a reversal of the USAREUR troop reduction plans.

¹ AEAGS-MH, "US Army Active Duty Personnel Stationed in Europe, 1980-2010," 15 August 2011, Historians files, Command History Office, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), Lucius D. Clay Kaserne, Wiesbaden, Germany.

² U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, "U.S. Army Europe announces newest transformation action," 1 March 2013, accessed 4 March 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/May/02/2001911367/-1/-1/0/03012013%20U.S.%20ARMY%20EUROPE%20ANNOUNCES%20NEWEST%20TRANSFORMATION%20ACTIONS.PDF>. See also LTG Donald M. Campbell, Jr., "USAREUR 'Continues to Develop Trust' Across Europe," *Army* 63, no. 10 (October 2013): 103-106, and Harold E. Raugh, Jr., "A History of the U.S. Army V Corps: Born in Battle in France to the Crucible of Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Journal of America's Military Past* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 21-38.

³ John Vandiver, "US Army's last tanks depart from Germany," *Stars and Stripes*, 4 April 2013, accessed 4 March 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977>.

Within days, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen unequivocally declared on 19 March 2014 that, “Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine is in blatant breach of its international commitments and it is a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”⁴ The United Nations General Assembly passed on 27 March 2014 a non-binding resolution, 68/262, entitled "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine," that was supported by 100 members, with 11 opposing it (and 58 abstentions and 24 absences), out of a body of 193 members.⁵ On 1 April 2014, the foreign ministers of NATO assured allies in eastern Europe that they would be protected, and agreed to “suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia.”⁶

The United States was particularly quick to react to these wanton Russian provocations and took numerous specific efforts to underline its steadfast commitment to NATO and the security and territorial integrity of its members, and to demonstrate solidarity with its NATO allies. The U.S. response in Europe was coordinated by and executed under the command of the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), “one of the United States’ two forward-deployed Geographic Combatant Commands whose area of focus covers almost one-fifth of the planet, including all of Europe, large portions of Asia, parts of the Middle East and the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans” and is responsible for “military relations with NATO.”⁷ This was a component of the EUCOM Theater Strategy.

USAREUR is the operational-level Army force, the Army Service Component Command, assigned to EUCOM, with a 51-nation area of responsibility (AOR) corresponding to EUCOM’s. USAREUR “set[s] the theater and the joint operations area for the employment of

⁴ NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, quoted in Fred Dews, “NATO Secretary-General: Russia’s Annexation of Crimea Is Illegal and Illegitimate,” *Brookings*, 19 March 2014, accessed 1 March 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/03/19/nato-secretary-general-russias-annexation-of-crimea-is-illegal-and-illegitimate/>.

⁵ “Backing Ukraine’s territorial integrity, UN Assembly declares Crimea referendum invalid,” *UN News*, 27 March 2017, accessed 1 March 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464812-backing-ukraines-territorial-integrity-un-assembly-declares-crimea-referendum#.UzgPNqLRUdw>.

⁶ Quoted in Adrian Croft, “NATO Suspends Cooperation With Russia Over Crimea Annexation,” *Huffington Post*, 1 April 2014, accessed 1 March 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/01/nato-russia-cooperation_n_5069887.html.

⁷ U.S. European Command “is one of the United States’ two forward-deployed Geographic Combatant Commands whose area of focus covers almost one-fifth of the planet, including all of Europe, large portions of Asia, parts of the Middle East and the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. The command is responsible for military relations with NATO and 51 countries with a total population of close to a billion people.” Headquarters, United States European Command, “U.S. Commitment ‘Galvanized’ in ERI Implementation Plans,” News Release 17-37-A, 24 May 2017, accessed 7 March 2019, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2014/0514_atlanticresolve/docs/EUCOM-Release-ERI-release-Corrected.pdf.

Army forces for both contingencies and campaigns,” and to achieve this goal, “must anticipate, plan, request, receive, train, sustain, and support redeployment of land power within its AOR or joint operations area (JOA).” The bottom line is that USAREUR “is the Army’s representative in Europe and advances the U.S. interests as a visible symbol of commitment to security,” and one of USAREUR’s primary missions is to “train and prepare capable forces for global engagements while working to strengthen alliances [and] build partner capacity and capabilities.”⁸

The U.S. enumerated further responsive measures for all NATO members to take, including:

- A demonstration of NATO’s visible resolve to ensure collective defense of all allied territory through enhanced deployment of air, land, and sea assets for training and exercises;
- Continued review and updating of NATO plans for collective defense; and
- Increased readiness and exercising of the NATO Response Force.⁹

In addition to deploying twelve F-16 jet fighters with support crewmen to participate in a training rotation in Poland, 13-14 March 2014, the U.S. conducted – at Ukraine’s request – an Open Skies observation flight mission over Ukraine. Other preplanned measures were enhanced, and other steady state measures continued as planned. Of the greatest relevance to USAREUR, the U.S. continued its force presence in Europe and pledged several thousand soldiers to the NATO Response Force and to sending battalion-sized units from the U.S. to Europe on a rotational basis. Moreover, other multinational training exercises focusing on maritime interoperability and security were to be held in the Baltic Sea and Poland, and Exercise SABER GUARDIAN, “a pre-planned consequence management and peace support operation,”¹⁰ was to be conducted in Bulgaria, 21 March-4 April 2014.

Later that same month, on 22 April 2014, Lt. Gen. Donald M. Campbell, Jr., Commanding General, USAREUR, was in Estonia to give a speech at a charity dinner at the Maritime Museum in Tallinn. He had been invited by the president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, and the commander of the Estonian Defense Forces, Maj. Gen. Riho Terras, ahead of a planned

⁸ The four quotes in this paragraph are from Scott Znamenacek, et al., *Strategic Landpower in Europe*, Special Study No. 18-05 (Fort Leavenworth, Ks.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2017), 10.

⁹ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners,” 26 March 2014, p. 2, accessed 1 March 2019, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/fact-sheet-us-efforts-support-nato-allies-and-partners>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

deployment of U.S. Army paratroopers to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. They were among the few people knowledgeable about the ongoing planning that would culminate in a U.S. military troop movement to the Baltics in forty-eight hours. The subsequent vignette is worth recording:

Before Campbell got up to deliver his remarks, President Ilves pulled him aside and asked that he divulge to the audience the U.S. plans to send troops to Estonia. As he addressed those in attendance, Campbell departed from his scripted remarks to confirm to the crowd that American forces were inbound to their country, to stay and train with their Estonian counterparts for an indefinite period. The audience expressed relief as they stood in applause of the general. Some in the crowd openly wept.¹¹

The very next day, 23 April 2014, 150 paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade based in Italy landed in Poland. This was followed by similar company-sized elements of Sky Soldiers landing in Latvia (24 April 2014),¹² Lithuania (26 April 2014),¹³ and Estonia (28 April 2014).¹⁴ These landings were part of an unscheduled Land Forces Assurance Exercise and, as the first in a series of expanded land forces training activities in Poland and the Baltic region, mark the beginning of Atlantic Resolve.¹⁵

The behind-the-scenes planning and decision-making process again highlighted the agility, proficiency, and professionalism of the USAREUR staff. On 7 April 2014, the USAREUR G3/3 Future Operations Branch received the mission to conduct Crisis Action Planning to deploy forces to Poland and the Baltic states for what was then called Persistent Presence, “America’s continued commitment to European security.”¹⁶ USAREUR G3/5 Plans

¹¹ Jesse Granger, “Operation Atlantic Resolve: A Case Study in Effective Communication Strategy,” *Military Review* 95, no. 1 (January-February 2015): 117.

¹² Jesse Granger, “173rd conducts unscheduled training with Latvian Army,” U.S. Army Europe, 25 April 2014, accessed 8 March 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/124667>.

¹³ U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, “173rd conducts unscheduled training with Lithuania Army,” U.S. Army Europe, 26 April 2014, accessed 20 May 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/124783/>.

¹⁴ U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, “173rd conducts unscheduled training with Estonian Army,” U.S. Army Europe, 28 April 2014, accessed 20 May 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/124827/>.

¹⁵ “Operation Atlantic Resolve,” GlobalSecurity.org, accessed 7 March 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/atlantic-resolve.htm>. See also U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, “173rd deploys to expand land force training in Baltic region,” U.S. Army Europe, 22 April 2014, accessed 8 March 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/124623/>, and Jesse M. Granger, “173rd paratroopers arrive in Poland,” U.S. Army Europe, 23 April 2014, accessed 8 March 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/124554/>.

¹⁶ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners,” 3 June 2014, accessed 26 June 2019, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support->

Branch took the lead on the long-term Persistent Presence planning and future rotational units. G3/3 Future Operations led the planning effort and produced the initial operations order (OPORDER) to deploy the 173rd Airborne Brigade to the Baltic states later in April 2014.

As part of this process, G3/3 Future Operations produced USAREUR Message #1405004, 18 April 2014, USAREUR OPORDER 003414, subject: Airborne Demonstration in Poland and the Baltic States and modified this order twice. On 18 April 2014, G3/3 Future Operations completed OPORD 0038-14, subject: Deployment of Forces to Poland and the Baltic States, and modified this order ten times based on changes in the operations.¹⁷ These modifications covered the deployment of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade; the provision of USAREUR liaison officers to relevant embassies; the establishment of the Operations Logistics Synchronization series of meetings; training/agreement workshops with host nations; and support for future site surveys of rotational units.¹⁸

The intent of these 173rd Airborne Brigade actions, according to the relevant 18 April 2014 operations order, was “to assure Allies of U.S. commitment and demonstrated resolve to support the Baltic States and Poland,” one of the key tasks being to “integrate into the EUCOM persistent presence plans in Baltics and Poland.”¹⁹ The declared end state of these four USAREUR land force assurance exercises was the “U.S. demonstrates its airborne capability and resolve to defend NATO Allies and partner nations. The U.S. is prepared for future training, exercises, and operations. Key audiences are informed of U.S. commitment to our Allies and partner nations without provoking undesired Russian response.”²⁰ Thus, the Persistent Presence mission evolved into Atlantic Resolve.

At this time, the overarching EUCOM definition of Atlantic Resolve was:

- Operation Atlantic Resolve is a demonstration of our continued commitment to the collective security of NATO and dedication to the enduring peace and stability in the region, in light of the Russian intervention in Ukraine specifically.
- U.S. commitment to the security of every NATO ally is resolute and uniform. In meeting our global security commitments, the United States must have strong, committed and capable allies, which is why we have fought, exercised and trained

¹⁷ “G3/3 Future Operations Branch,” USAREUR 2014 Annual Command History submission, n.d., p. 2, Historians files, Command History Office, USAREUR.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹ Granger, “Operation Atlantic Resolve,” 118. See also “USAREUR's Persistent Presence,” *Stand To! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army*, 7 May 2014, accessed 28 June 2019, https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2014-05-07/.

²⁰ Granger, “Operation Atlantic Resolve,” 118.

with our European allies for the past 70 years. The U.S.-European strategic partnership is built on a foundation of shared values, experiences and vision.

- The U.S. took several immediate steps to demonstrate solidarity with our NATO allies, such as augmenting the air, ground and naval presence in the region, and enhancing previously scheduled exercises.
- Russia's aggressive actions have already led many to call for reinforcing NATO's readiness through Article 5-related planning training and adjustments to force posture.
- Operation Atlantic Resolve will remain in place as long as the need exists to reassure our allies and deter Russia from regional hegemony.²¹

This definition and intent of Atlantic Resolve has remained relatively constant since the mission began.

The original plan called for four simultaneous night airborne jumps into Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The plan was changed from nighttime parachute jumps to daytime aircraft landings and welcoming ceremonies, to “create conditions that would maximize opportunities for the media to get imagery that reinforced the message: U.S. and host-nation forces standing shoulder to shoulder.”²² Moreover, instead of being conducted concurrently, these daytime aircraft landings were staggered over a six-day period, which provided additional visibility and emphasis to these strategic messaging efforts. They also reinforced the concept that the “most important element of deterrence is the adversary’s perception of the credibility of the defender’s commitment.”²³ Maj. Gen. Richard C. Longo, Deputy Commanding General, USAREUR, along with key host nation military officials, met and ceremonially welcomed each of the four initial entry companies from the 173rd Airborne Brigade.²⁴ By doing so, the United States demonstrated on the ground its unwavering commitment to peace, allies, and partners.

Exercise SABER GUARDIAN 2014, planned the previous year and largely a scenario-driven, computer-based command post exercise, was conducted at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, from 21 March-4 April 2014. The exercise directors were Maj. Gen. Longo and Brig.

²¹ U.S. European Command, Communication and Engagement Directorate, Media Operations Division, “[Fact Sheet:] Operation Atlantic Resolve (2014),” 29 January 2015, accessed 29 June 2019, https://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0514_atlanticresolve/Operation_Atlantic_Resolve_Fact_Sheet_2014.pdf.

²² *Ibid.*, 120.

²³ Kathleen H. Hicks, et al., *Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe, Phase I Report* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, February 2016), 4.

²⁴ Lt. Gen. Donald M. Campbell, Jr., and Maj. Michael T. Whitney, “Assurance in Europe: Why Relationships Matter,” *Military Review* 94, no. 6 (November-December 2014): 6.

Gen. Krasimir Kanev, Bulgarian Land Force Deputy Commander. It was designed to “strengthen international agency and military partnering, and to foster trust while improving interoperability between NATO and partner nations involved in foreign humanitarian assistance operations with U.S. forces.”²⁵ About 700 military personnel, from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Turkey, and the U.S. (173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team and 7th Civil Support Command²⁶), participating in this multinational exercise. NATO also sent participating representatives.²⁷

Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh visited the USAREUR Headquarters in Wiesbaden on 16 May 2014 to visit soldiers and to receive from Lt. Gen. Campbell an update on USAREUR’s strategic capabilities, future force structure, and persistent land force presence in Poland and the Baltics. “The importance of USAREUR’s persistent presence in Poland and the Baltics, and what it means to these countries, cannot be overstated,” noted McHugh, who continued, “The USAREUR team should be proud of its key role in demonstrating U.S. commitment to our allies in the region. The speed with which the 173rd Airborne Brigade and other U.S. Army Europe Soldiers deployed, demonstrates the importance of maintaining relationships and interoperability with NATO and strategic access to the European theater.”²⁸ Lt. Gen Campbell also highlighted the USAREUR strategic objective of preserving and enhancing NATO interoperability and actively demonstrating the United States’ continuing commitment to regional allies.

Building upon the momentum of these initial strategic and messaging successes, and understanding the indispensable need to instill confidence and assure NATO Allies and partners of the United States’ unwavering commitment to the security and territorial integrity of Europe, U.S. President Barack Obama on 3 June 2014 in Warsaw, Poland, proposed the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The focus of the proposed ERI was: “A persistent U.S. air, land, and sea presence in the region, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, is a necessary and

²⁵ Sgt. Brooks Fletcher, “Saber Guardian 2014: Forces from 12 nations cap exercise in Bulgaria.” U.S. Army Europe, 8 April 2014, accessed 8 March 2019,

https://www.army.mil/article/123565/saber_guardian_2014_forces_from_12_nations_cap_exercise_in_bulgaria.

²⁶ “U.S. Army Europe, “7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command: Joint Multinational Simulation Center,” USAREUR 2014 Annual Command History submission, n.d., Historians files, Command History Office, USAREUR.

²⁷ Sgt. Brooks Fletcher, “Saber Guardian kicks off in Bulgaria,” U.S. Army Europe, 21 March 2014, accessed 8 March 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/122342/Saber_Guardian_2014_kicks_off_in_Bulgaria/.

²⁸ McHugh, quoted in Sgt. Daniel Cole, “SecArmy McHugh discusses strategic capabilities with U.S. Army Europe,” U.S. Army Europe, 19 May 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/126151>.

appropriate show of support to allies who have contributed robustly and bravely to [NATO] Alliance operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere and who are now deeply concerned by Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and other provocative actions in Ukraine.”²⁹ The President requested Congress support the ERI of up to \$1 billion to:

- Increase exercises, training, and rotational presence across Europe but especially on the territory of our newer allies. Many of the U.S. air and ground forces participating in these activities would rotate from the United States. Increased readiness and exercising of the NATO Response Force.
- As we have done in Poland, deploy detachments of U.S. planners to augment the capability of our allies to design and host a broad range of training and exercise opportunities.
- Increase the responsiveness of U.S. forces to reinforce NATO by exploring initiatives such as the prepositioning of equipment and improvements to other reception facilities and infrastructure in Europe.
- Increase participation by the U.S. Navy in NATO naval force deployments, including more persistent deployments to the Black and Baltic seas.
- Build the partner capacity of close friends such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine so they can better work alongside the United States and NATO, as well as provide for their own defense.³⁰

The 173rd Airborne Brigade landings in the Baltics in April 2014, as part of an unscheduled Land Forces Assurance Exercise, were mentioned, “as part of a series of expanded American land force training activities with European partners that are scheduled to take place over the next few months and beyond.”³¹

Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, the NATO Supreme Allied Commander and EUCOM Commander, emphasized to reporters at the Pentagon on 30 June 2014 the importance of maintaining a forward presence in Europe to reassure American allies and partners of their collective security responsibilities. He also noted the ERI goal to, “[I]ncrease exercises, training, and rotational presence across Europe,” and that these new training efforts would fall under Atlantic Resolve. “In this operation,” Breedlove highlighted, “we will continue to demonstrate

²⁹ White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners,” 3 June 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

our continued commitment to the collective security of NATO and dedication to the enduring peace and stability in the region, in light of the Russian intervention in Ukraine specifically.”³²

Exercise SABER STRIKE 14, part of an ongoing cooperative training effort and exercise series that actually started in 2011, led by USAREUR, began on 9 June 2014 at the Adazi Training Area, Latvia. Initially focusing on the Baltic states, this exercise expanded to include, in addition to numerous USAREUR units,³³ elements of U.S. Air Forces in Europe; Air National Guard units from Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Washington; Army National Guard units from Louisiana, Michigan, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Utah; and forces from Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and United Kingdom, totaling about 4,500 military personnel. This exercise was designed to promote regional stability, strengthen international military partnerships, enhance multinational interoperability, and prepare participants for worldwide contingency operations. Consisting mainly of a brigade-level command post exercise and computer-assisted exercise, it also included battalion-level training and company-level field and situational training exercises.

Of special significance, SABER STRIKE 14 included elements of the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (based at Fort Hood, Texas), the Army’s designated regionally aligned force (RAF) provider for Europe. SABER STRIKE 14 was seen to significantly expand the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division’s ability to execute the RAF mission of serving as the European Rotation Force and fulfilling U.S. requirements for the NATO Response Force.³⁴ “It is a great honor and responsibility to host Saber Strike and we strongly appreciate your contributions and willingness to boost training in the region,” affirmed Latvian Minister of Defense Raimonds Vejonis; “Persistent presence in the region is the best solution to bringing higher security.”³⁵

During the summer of 2014, USAREUR led a number of other multinational exercises. These included IMMEDIATE RESPONSE 14, held in Slovenia and Croatia with the intent to

³² Breedlove, quoted in Claudette Roulo, “Breedlove: Russian actions bring Europe to decisive point,” American Forces Press Service, 1 July 2014, accessed 14 September 2019, <https://www.af.mil/DesktopModules/ArticleCS/Print.aspx?PortalId=1&ModuleId=850&Article=485938>.

³³ USAREUR units participating in SABER STRIKE 14 included elements of the USAREUR headquarters, the Joint Multinational Simulation Center, the 15th Engineer Battalion, the 19th Battlefield Coordination Detachment, the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, the 5th Signal Command, and the 21st Theater Sustainment Command. U.S. Army Europe, “Exercise Saber Strike 14 demonstrates international cooperation,” 10 June 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/127664/Exercise_Saber_Strike_14_demonstrates_international_cooperation/

³⁴ “Exercise Saber Strike 14,” *Stand To! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army*, 10 June 2014, accessed 28 June 2019, https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2014-06-10/.

³⁵ Vejonis, quoted in U.S. Army Europe, “Exercise Saber Strike 14 demonstrates international cooperation,”

train a multinational force to respond to a disaster relief mission,³⁶ and SABER JUNCTION 14, designed to prepare U.S. and multinational soldiers for decisive and sustainable land operations.³⁷ The ultimate goal of each exercise was to demonstrate USAREUR's "commitment to the collective security of the nation's NATO allies, and support for the United States' partners in Europe."³⁸ Maj. Gen. Walter E. Piatt, Deputy Commanding General, USAREUR, observed, "When you come together in a crisis and you don't know one another[,] you're not effective[,] no matter how powerful your organization is[;] an agency alone is not effective when it operates in an interagency operation. This is absolutely critical that we do this."³⁹

RAPID TRIDENT 14, a part of the U.S. European Command Joint Exercise Program, was designed to promote regional stability and security and foster trust and interoperability between NATO and partner nations. This was conducted by soldiers of USAREUR and the Ukrainian Land Forces at the International Peacekeeping and Security Center, Yavoriv, Ukraine, 15-26 September 2014. About 1,300 soldiers from fifteen countries participated in this exercise, which was USAREUR-conducted and Ukrainian-led, "designed to enhance interoperability with allied and partner nations while promoting regional stability and security."⁴⁰ Secretary of the Army McHugh observed this important exercise, and lauded the Ukrainian armed forces for their efforts promoting peace and stability over the previous decade.⁴¹

Exercise COMBINED RESOLVE III was conducted at Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels Training Areas, Germany, in October-November 2014. This exercise included more than 4,000 participants from eighteen countries, with gunnery training initially conducted at the Grafenwoehr Training Area, followed by combat maneuver training at Hohenfels Training Area. The Army's designated regionally aligned force (RAF) provider for Europe, the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division (1-1 CAV), participated in this exercise for a second

³⁶ Sgt. Gregory Williams. "Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and multinationals kick off Immediate Response 14," U.S. Army Europe, 18 August 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/131989/>.

³⁷ U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, "U.S. Army Europe conducts exercise Saber Junction." 25 August 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/132332/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Piatt, quoted in Williams. "Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and multinationals kick off Immediate Response 14."

⁴⁰ Spc. Joshua Leonard, "Secretary of the Army John McHugh witnesses Rapid Trident 2014," U.S. Army Europe, 22 September 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/134099/>.

⁴¹ Ibid. See also U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, "U.S. Army Europe announces U.S. participation in exercise Rapid Trident in Ukraine," 4 September 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/133063/>, and Spc. Joshua Leonard, "Rapid Trident 2014 begins in Ukraine," U.S. Army Europe, 16 September 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/133762/>.

time. They also replaced the soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade who had deployed to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in April 2014.⁴² COMBINED RESOLVE III also included use of the Army's European Activity Set (EAS), a group of combat equipment and vehicles prepositioned at the Grafenwoehr Training Area established to equip and support rotational forces when they arrive in Europe. The set, assembled from inactivating units and other Army Materiel Command sources, included the most updated versions of the Army's M1A2 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles. The EAS enables U.S. "regionally aligned forces and multinational partners in Europe to train and operate as the European [Rotational] Force [ERF] and NATO Response Force [NRF]."⁴³ The EAS and ERF/NRF readiness, according to the U.S. Army, are "the Army's demonstration of its continued commitment to NATO and our partner nations in the region, and will give U.S. and multinational forces greater opportunity to learn from each other side by side as they build interoperability, communication, tactics[,] and techniques."⁴⁴

The RAF concept had actually been announced by the U.S. Army in 2013, after the inactivation of the following USAREUR units: the 170th Infantry Brigade in October 2012; the 172nd Infantry Brigade in May 2013; and the V Corps Headquarters in September 2013.⁴⁵ USAREUR then contained only about 24,000 soldiers, with no armored units and no higher headquarters except USAREUR's, representing an 87 per cent reduction in troop strength in Europe since the late 1980s.⁴⁶ The alarmingly low troop strength and lack of flexibility of USAREUR, during the early stages of the "Global War on Terrorism," caused the Department of Defense to decide to rotate armored forces back to Europe, a program that complemented the RAF plans.⁴⁷

⁴² John R. Deni, "US Leadership and NATO: Modifying America's Forward Presence in Eastern Europe," *Parameters* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 36.

⁴³ "The European Activity Set," *Stand To! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army*, 27 January 2014, accessed 30 June 2019, https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2014-01-27/. See also 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command Public Affairs, "Combined Resolve III exercises Army's European Rotational Force," 2 October 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/135119/>.

⁴⁴ "The European Activity Set," *Stand To! The Official Focus of the U.S. Army*, 27 January 2014.

⁴⁵ Kathleen H. Hicks and Heather A. Conley, et al., *Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe, Phase II Report* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 16, and Raugh, "A History of the U.S. Army V Corps," 36.

⁴⁶ Hicks and Conley, *Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe, Phase II Report*, 16.

⁴⁷ Rose L. Thayer, "1st Cavalry gears up for regional alignments," *Fort Hood Herald*, 9 October 2013, accessed 27 June 2019, http://kdhnews.com/fort_hood_herald/across_the_fort/st-cavalry-gears-up-for-regional-alignments/article_0764cb74-3053-11e3-b256-0019bb30f31a.html.

The initial RAF concept required that, “the designated U.S.-based brigade to Europe, called the European Rotational Force (ERF), would deploy a battalion-sized task force (approximately 650 personnel) twice a year for two months at a time to participate in training and exercises primarily held at U.S. facilities in Germany.”⁴⁸ Elements of the 1-1 CAV (mainly the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment), designated the first RAF and ERF unit, coincidentally executed the first rotational deployment of forces to Europe in the spring of 2014, during the Ukraine “crisis,” to participate in the preplanned Exercise COMBINED RESOLVE II.⁴⁹ This major exercise focused on extensive live-fire exercises and basic interoperability and force-on-force maneuver training with participating soldiers from thirteen countries. Maj. Gen. Piatt observed that while, “We’ve done larger exercises in the past, . . . this is the first time all the forces will be together in one place under a single brigade task organization.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the propitious timing of this initial U.S. Army rotational deployment helped dispel any concerns felt by Baltic states regarding Russian intentions.

As noted previously, 1-1 CAV also deployed forces and participated in Exercise COMBINED RESOLVE III. USAREUR’s desired end state for the 1-1 CAV’s RAF deployment and participation in COMBINED RESOLVE III was that, “the U.S. demonstrates its resolve to defend NATO allies and partner nations. USAREUR postured to conduct combined, multi-echelon training, exercises, and operations in Poland and the Baltic States, and key audiences are informed of U.S. commitment to our allies and partner nations without provoking undesired Russian response.”⁵¹ This second deployment of a regionally-aligned and globally-engaged force was clearly successful.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 17. See also Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall, Jr., “DoD Announces Operation Atlantic Resolve Brigade Rotation,” DoD News/Defense Media Activity, 13 August 2014, accessed September 2019, [dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/603063](https://www.dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/603063).

⁴⁹ Michael S. Darnell, “NATO flexes muscles as Combined Resolve II unfolds in Hohenfels,” *Stars and Stripes*, 12 May 2014, accessed 14 September 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/europe/nato-flexes-muscles-as-combined-resolve-ii-unfolds-in-hohenfels-1.282650>.

⁵⁰ Piatt, quoted in 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command Public Affairs, “Combined Resolve II to exercise Army’s European Rotational Force,” *Stars and Stripes*, 22 April 2014, accessed 14 September 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/124452/combined_resolve_ii_to_exercise_armys_european_rotational_force

⁵¹ 1st ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division (Ironhorse), “OPERATION IRONHORSE RESOLVE After Action Review – Period Covered: 01 AUG to 31 DEC 2014,” 19 December 2014, Historians files, Command History Office, USAREUR. See also Staff Sgt. Keith Anderson, “Cavalry Soldiers wrap up successful Atlantic Resolve rotation,” U.S. Army, 9 January 2015, accessed 27 June 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/140915/cavalry_soldiers_wrap_up_successful_atlantic_resolve_rotation.

On 5 November 2014, during the execution of Exercise COMBINED RESOLVE III, Lt. Gen. Campbell relinquished command of USAREUR to Lt. Gen. Frederick “Ben” Hodges in Wiesbaden. While Lt. Gen. Campbell generally avoided controversial topics and crises in his farewell speech, new Commanding General Lt. Gen. Hodges spoke of “USAREUR’s continual progress in building capable joint and combined forces in Europe,” adding that his three enduring priorities were “leader development, readiness and enabling partners and alliances.”⁵² Realistically highlighting the “pivotal time” in USAREUR and NATO history, Lt. Gen. Hodges addressed the threat from Russia. He concluded that the Russian menace would require a trained, ready, and resilient USAREUR “to assure our allies and to deter Russia from further encroachment.”⁵³ This was also an acknowledgement of the warfighting paradigm shift in Europe, in which the U.S. Army, after some sixteen years of primarily counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, would again focus on the complex combined arms skills necessary for combat in a high-intensity European environment. Lt. Gen. Hodges’ convictions and outspoken character set the tone for this entire tenure of command.

Upon assuming command, Lt. Gen. Hodges had numerous concerns about the force structure shortfalls and critical capability gaps in USAREUR. In 2016, Lt. Gen. Hodges stated, “Aviation is what keeps me up at night. There is just not enough of it.”⁵⁴ While anticipating the augmentation provided by rotating heavy armored brigades from the U.S., Lt. Gen. Hodges also highlighted “the need for more fire support assets, air defence [*sic*], engineers, specialised [*sic*] logistics, and a more robust command-and-control (C2) element at a level between his essentially administrative USAREUR headquarters and subordinate brigades and supporting units.”⁵⁵ Soldier strength was also a key concern in a theater that that once had, in June 1962, a peak

⁵² This and the preceding quote are from Sgt. Daniel Cole, “U.S. Army Europe welcomes new commander in Wiesbaden ceremony,” U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs, 5 November 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/137665/>. See also “New commander takes over at U.S. Army Europe,” *Army Times*, 5 November 2014, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2014/11/05/new-commander-takes-over-at-u-s-army-europe/>.

⁵³ Matt Millham, “Hodges targets Russia in 1st remarks as USAREUR commander,” *Stars and Stripes*, 5 November 2014, accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/hodges-targets-russia-in-1st-remarks-as-usareur-commander-1.312348>.

⁵⁴ Hodges, quoted in Jim Dorschner, “Ramping up: US Army Europe building forces and capability.” *Jane’s*, n.d. [2017], accessed 1 March 2019, https://www.janes.com/images/assets/344/74344/Ramping_up_US_Army_Europe_building_forces_and_capability.pdf.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

strength of 277,342 soldiers.⁵⁶ Alluding to that period, and comparing it with the dwindling number of soldiers in USAREUR since the end of the Cold War, Lt. Gen. Hodges' mantra was to "make 30,000 soldiers look like 300,000" in deterrence efforts against the Russians.⁵⁷ Lt. Gen. Hodges, moreover, reinvigorated the ethos of USAREUR forces, combining outstanding leadership, effective training, logistical sustainment, and rapidity of assembly, to be "ready to fight tonight."⁵⁸

2015: Ramping Up USAREUR's Assurance Efforts

In 2015, USAREUR continued and increased through Atlantic Resolve coordinated efforts "to reassure Allies of the U.S. commitment to NATO, deter aggression in Eastern Europe, increase interoperability among allies and partners, and demonstrate freedom of movement throughout the region."⁵⁹ These initiatives were reenergized through an Atlantic Resolve multinational exercise program that increased in complexity, magnitude, and number of participating soldiers and nations. RAF and other rotational troop deployments were increased to Central and Eastern Europe, with an expansion in size of vehicle and equipment storage sets. Of key significance, in the absence of any division or corps headquarters in USAREUR, the 4th Infantry Division had been designated the regionally aligned division headquarters for Europe. The Atlantic Resolve area was expanded to six countries with the addition of Romania and Bulgaria, a signal that Russia was unsuccessful at any attempts to fracture the NATO Alliance, as well as permitting NATO access to the Black Sea. Extensive high-visibility mounted road marches were conducted in Eastern Europe, to reconnoiter various roads and routes and to assess freedom and ease of movement throughout the area. At this time, Lt. Gen. Hodges declared:

⁵⁶ Alison Smale, "Storied U.S. Barracks Closes With Little Fanfare," *New York Times*, 7 September 2013, accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/world/europe/storied-us-barracks-closes-with-little-fanfare.html>.

⁵⁷ See, *inter alia*, Michael Abrams, "How US Army Europe's outgoing general got the Pentagon's attention," *Stars and Stripes*, 14 July 2017, accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/how-us-army-europe-s-outgoing-general-got-the-pentagon-s-attention-1.492865>.

⁵⁸ Staff Sgt. Tamika Dillard, "The 'Year of Execution': U.S. Army Europe rotational forces in action." U.S. Army Europe, 28 September 2014, accessed 15 September 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/194486/the_year_of_execution_us_army_europe_rotational_forces_in_action. See also C. Todd Lopez, "Deterrent forces ready to 'fight tonight' in Europe, general says." *Army News Service*, 3 May 2017, accessed 15 September 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/187084/deterrent_forces_ready_to_fight_tonight_in_europe_general_says.

⁵⁹ 4th Infantry Division, "4th Infantry Division Mission Command Element CY15," 2015, p. 1, Historians files, Command History Office, USAREUR.

“Think of Atlantic Resolve as a yearlong, continuous series of exercises from Estonia to Bulgaria”⁶⁰ – unaware at the time that Atlantic Resolve would serve as the overall umbrella for the continuing and increasing series of USAREUR’s assurance exercises in Central and Eastern Europe.

As a harbinger of future plans, Lt. Gen. Hodges stated, “I think of the Operation Atlantic Resolve area, from Estonia down to Bulgaria, as one big maneuver box.”⁶¹ Plans were then being considered to continue three-month battalion-sized troop deployments, augmented by aviation assets, the establishment of a 4,000-5,000-man NATO response force, and by the end of 2015, an armored brigade. There would be a corresponding increase in the pre-positioned European Activity Sets to include an additional 220 Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles.⁶² These massive efforts formed the foundation of “Strong Europe.” “Strong Europe is meant to convey the framework of what U.S. Army Europe, as a forward-stationed force, is able to provide on behalf of the Army to EUCOM and NATO,” Lt. Gen. Hodges said; “It’s about relationships, the training centers, the infrastructure, as well as the organizations that are here.”⁶³

The 4th Infantry Division, which had been designated the regionally aligned division headquarters for Europe on 16 September 2014, assumed mission command for Atlantic Resolve from USAREUR’s Contingency Command Post at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on 12 February 2015.⁶⁴ About 100 4th Infantry Division soldiers deployed to form the Mission Command Element (MCE) for USAREUR. The MCE, which moved to Baumholder, Germany, in October 2015, had division-level mission control responsibility of all U.S. ground forces conducting operations in support of Atlantic Resolve.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Hodges, quoted in Michelle Tan, “Army expands Operation Atlantic Resolve to six countries,” *Army Times*, 20 February 2015, accessed 15 September 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2015/02/20/army-expands-operation-atlantic-resolve-to-six-countries/>

⁶¹ Hodges, quoted in Michelle Tan, “Army to send even more troops, tanks to Europe,” *Army Times*, 5 January 2015, accessed 27 June 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/01/05/army-to-send-even-more-troops-tanks-to-europe/>

⁶² Tan, “Army expands Operation Atlantic Resolve to six countries.”

⁶³ Hodges, quoted in Ibid. See also David Vergun, “USAREUR commander: Eastern Europe troop rotations likely to continue,” *Army News Service*, 24 November 2014, accessed 16 September 2019, <https://www.army.mil/article/138877/>

⁶⁴ Media Operations Division, United States European Command, “4th Infantry Division to support Operation Atlantic Resolve,” EUCOM, 26 November 2014, accessed 16 September 2019, <https://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/30923/4th-infantry-division-to-support-operation-atlantic-resolve>

⁶⁵ 4th Infantry Division, “4th Infantry Division Mission Command Element CY15,” p. 2.

Atlantic Resolve was and remains the U.S. European Command and U.S. Army Europe's decisive and audacious response to Russian aggression in the Ukraine in February and March 2014. In less than one year, from the initial operation consisting of the deployment of U.S. Army paratroopers to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in April 2014, this reassurance and deterrent force executed an increasingly larger, more complex exercise program during the following year, as chronicled in this narrative. By early 2015, a regionally aligned division headquarters for Europe had been designated, battalion-size troop rotations had taken place, and plans were made to establish pre-positioned European Activity Sets that included hundreds of formidable Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles. Moreover, the Atlantic Resolve area was expanded to six countries with the addition of Romania and Bulgaria. As Atlantic Resolve continues to become more sophisticated, extensive, and effective, the exercise "builds readiness, increases interoperability and enhances the bond between ally and partner militaries using multinational training events."⁶⁶ Atlantic Resolve "deployments of ready, combat-credible U.S. forces to Europe in support of Atlantic Resolve is [continuing] evidence of the strong and unremitting U.S. commitment to NATO and Europe."

⁶⁶ This and the following quote are from Public Affairs Office, "U.S. Army Europe Book of Messages," November 2019, p.26 of 128.