

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: NATO Response

Updated March 21, 2022

The 30-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO; see **Figure 1**) has condemned Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which it has characterized as the "[most dangerous moment in European security in a generation](#)." Underscoring its role as a defensive alliance, NATO has joined the United States in declaring that it would not deploy forces to Ukraine, which is not a NATO member. NATO has, however, significantly enhanced its defensive force posture in the eastern part of the alliance and reiterated its solidarity with Ukraine.

NATO officials also have [expressed support](#) for substantial bilateral assistance, including arms transfers, provided to Ukraine by NATO members since the invasion. According to some [reports](#), as of early March, arms transfers from NATO allies to Ukraine had [included](#) more than 17,000 anti-tank missiles and 2,000 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

Enhanced Deterrence

Since Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, NATO has renewed its focus on territorial defense and [detering Russian aggression](#), including through an [Enhanced Forward Presence](#) (EFP) of four multinational battle groups stationed in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and Poland. The battle groups, which have more than doubled in size since early February—from about 5,000 troops to [16,400](#) in mid-March—are led by the United Kingdom (Estonia), Canada (Latvia), Germany (Lithuania), and the United States (Poland). NATO also has established a Multinational Division Southeast headquartered in Romania to coordinate a [Tailored Forward Presence](#) (TFP) in the Black Sea region.

According to NATO, [40,000 allied troops](#) are now under direct NATO command in the eastern part of the alliance, along with more than [130 allied fighter jets](#) on high alert and more than 200 allied ships at sea in the region. In addition to U.S. deployments (see below), new NATO deployments include more than 1,000 soldiers from the UK to Estonia and Poland; 800 French and Belgian troops to Romania; 350 additional German troops to Lithuania and a German-Dutch Patriot air defense system as part of a new NATO battlegroup in Slovakia; and additional fighter jets, ships, and troops from numerous allies.

On February 24, [NATO announced](#) that the alliance had activated defense plans that would allow military commanders to deploy elements of the [NATO Response Force](#) (NRF), a multinational rapid-reaction force

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN11866

of 40,000 personnel with land, air, maritime, and special operations components. In January 2022, the Biden Administration [announced](#) that 8,500 U.S. soldiers would be placed on high readiness for possible deployment to the NRF.

Despite these measures, NATO members remain concerned about the potential for a wider conflict. Even prior to Russia's invasion, some studies of NATO's force posture concluded that NATO forces would [struggle to defend](#) NATO's most vulnerable allies—for example, the Baltic states—from a Russian attack. Ahead of NATO's June 2022 [summit](#) in Madrid, Spain, NATO leaders are expected to consider more substantive enhancements to NATO's force posture, including permanently stationing troops in Eastern Europe. Until now, NATO's military presence in the region has been portrayed as rotational, reflecting some allies' reluctance to endorse a permanent presence that could be perceived as provoking Russia.

U.S. Deterrence Deployments

Following Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea, the Obama Administration increased the U.S. military presence in Europe under the European Reassurance Initiative, later renamed the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). The cornerstone of EDI has been [Operation Atlantic Resolve](#), the rotational deployment of approximately 7,000 U.S. armed forces in Europe, including an Armored Brigade Combat Team (BCT) in Central and Eastern Europe. According to the Department of Defense, an additional [15,000 U.S. soldiers](#) have deployed to Europe since early February 2022 to augment defense and deterrence efforts, bringing the total U.S. force posture in Europe, including permanently stationed forces, to approximately [100,000 military personnel](#). The new deployments bring the total U.S. military presence in Poland to about 9,500—including 800 soldiers deployed to the U.S.-led NATO battlegroup—and in Romania to about 1,900. In addition, about [800 U.S. soldiers and 20 attack helicopters](#) have been deployed to the Baltic region, along with eight F-35 joint strike fighters deployed to NATO's eastern flank. An additional 7,000 U.S. soldiers, including a BCT, have [deployed](#) to Germany to reinforce deterrence efforts, including as part of the NRF.

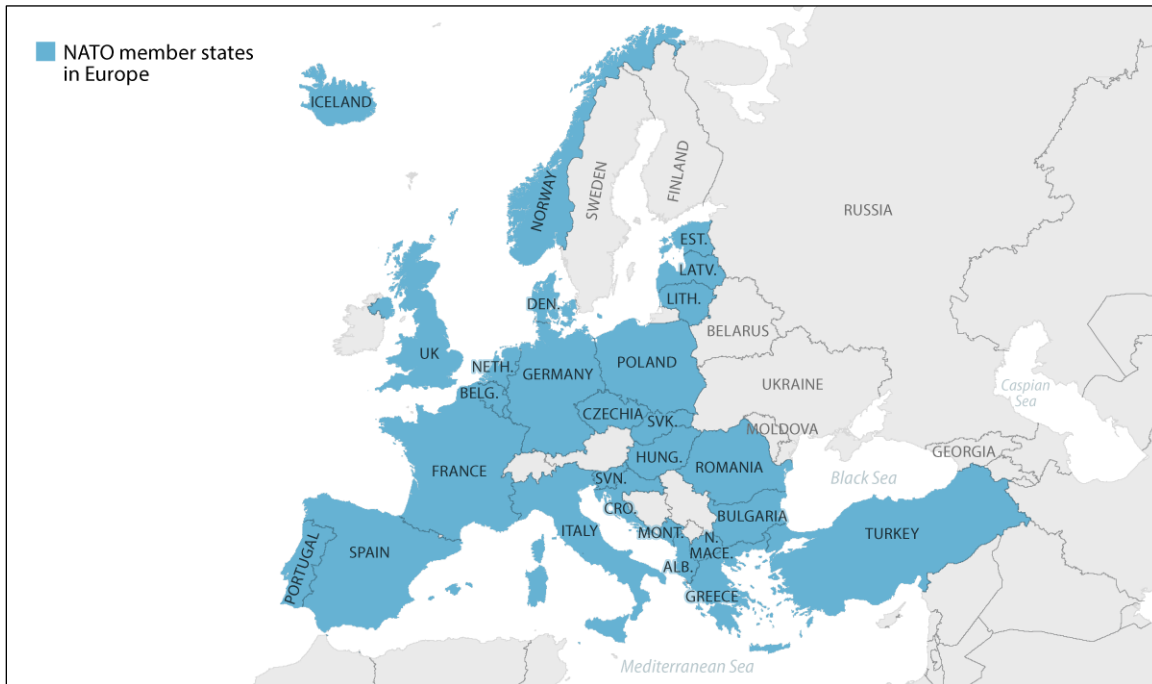
Considerations for Congress

Many Members of Congress have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and are considering numerous policy responses, including with respect to NATO's role. Key considerations include the following:

- **NATO and U.S. Force Posture in Europe.** Russia's invasion has heightened concerns about NATO's capacity to defend NATO member states, particularly the Baltic states, from a possible Russian military attack. Key factors to consider could include NATO member states' willingness and capacity to respond to an intentional or inadvertent attack on NATO member states, and what form that response may take; the U.S. role in responding to a possible attack; sustaining alliance cohesion regarding the appropriate response to a potential attack; and the appropriate U.S. and NATO force posture in the region.
- **Future of NATO-Russia Relations.** NATO's current Strategic Concept, adopted in 2010, outlines a desire for "strategic partnership" with Russia. As the alliance prepares to adopt a new Strategic Concept in June 2022, U.S. policymakers could advocate fundamental changes to NATO's approach to Russia, including a more robust allied force posture in Eastern Europe. Policymakers may also reassess NATO's prior willingness to negotiate with Russia on European security arrangements, including arms control and NATO's nuclear force posture.
- **NATO's Role in Supporting Ukraine.** With support from Congress, NATO has consistently rejected Russian demands for a halt to NATO's "open door" enlargement policy. Russia's invasion of a NATO aspirant that borders four NATO members could

raise questions about NATO's obligations to Ukraine; NATO's relations with other aspirants, such as Georgia; and the future of NATO enlargement. With respect to Ukraine, some Members of Congress have called for more direct support to counter Russia and defend Ukraine. Others, including the Administration, remain cautious about options that they believe could escalate the conflict.

Figure I. NATO Europe



Source: Map created by CRS.

Notes: NATO members Canada and the United States are not depicted.

Author Information

Paul Belkin
Analyst in European Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However,

as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.