



Finnish army special operations soldiers with Utti Jaeger Regiment posture on a helicopter landing zone alongside U.S. Army Green Berets with 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Lapland, Finland, 15 March 2023. The Utti Jaeger Regiment hosted Exercise Talvikotka 23 from 12 to 16 March 2023 inside the Arctic Circle to enhance and exchange winter warfare tactics and techniques. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Anthony Bryant, U.S. Army; this photo has been altered for security purposes)

Who in NATO Is Ready for War?

Curtis L. Fox

On 24 February 2022, large numbers of Russian ground forces invaded Ukraine. The mass assault included almost two hundred thousand soldiers and constituted the bulk of Russia's military expeditionary potential. A shockwave rolled through Europe as nations began

to grapple with their own capacities to resist such overwhelming military force. The traditional great powers of Europe (France, the UK, and Germany) and regional powers like Poland all realized that they could not put equivalent forces in the field of any potential future battle.

Europe has been under joint Anglo-American protection since 1941. Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill convened a council of war as the United States geared up for its entry into World War II. They negotiated the creation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, which was a joint Anglo-American high command that would write grand strategy, negotiate implementation, and manage day-to-day operations in all theaters of war.¹ The Americans benefited from hard-won British combat experience and know-how, while the British benefited from American resources and manpower. The Combined Chiefs of Staff demonstrated to both Washington and London that they were better together and often checked each other's excesses and incompetence. The successful D-Day invasion of 6 June 1944 further proved the efficacy of an Anglo-American invasion of Europe from the sea, establishing the framework for how the Americans would understand their role in European security for the next ninety years.

Following World War II, American and British leaders watched with alarm as the Soviet Union established socialist puppet governments across the Eastern Bloc. On 4 April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded to check Soviet-Communist expansion in Europe. Amongst the founding members were the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. Additionally, three of the four occupation zones of postwar Germany were administered by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.² In May 1949, these western occupation zones were combined, founding the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany).

The United States has always occupied a pre-eminent position in NATO due to its vast military and financial resources (the table provides a useful comparison). Apart from the United States, the bulk of NATO combat power was historically provided by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. But much has changed in recent decades. Are Germany, France, and the United Kingdom capable of deploying heavy ground forces in a timely response to the eruption of a major military confrontation with Russia? Are there other important hard power contributors to NATO?³

Germany

Germany is a unique country in many regards. Its geography, climate, inland waterways, and industrious population ensure Germany will always be a powerhouse economy.⁴ Unfortunately, the *Bundeswehr* (the German armed forces) is in moribund condition. The *Deutsche Heer* (German army) is not ready for a real fight—certainly not against a more than two hundred thousand-strong invading army.

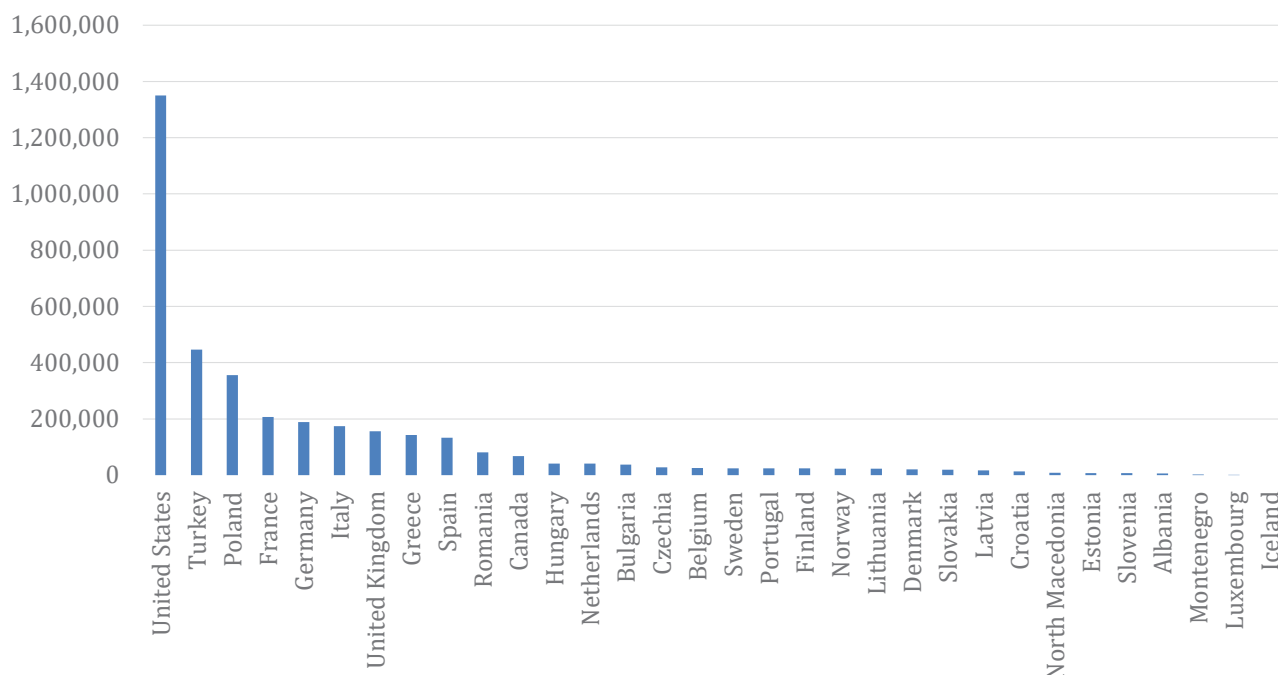
The Heer began transitioning from a force of more than 100,000 conscripts into a volunteer force in 2011.⁵ By 2022 the Heer had shrunk to a total of about 60,000 soldiers. Its combat forces are organized into the 1st and 10th Panzer Divisions, the Rapid Forces Division (light deployable forces), and assorted smaller specialist and support units. German forces measure combat strength in battalions of approximately 1,000 soldiers (twice the size of American battalions), which maneuver as a part of a brigade.⁶

The Heer maintains a goal of having 10,000 deployable soldiers with the ability to sustain 4,000 soldiers (essentially a brigade) in the field indefinitely and the ability to provide 1,000 soldiers for crisis response or as a German contribution to the NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).⁷ It's doubtful that the Heer can meet these minimal requirements—requirements that collectively fall far short of its NATO spending obligations.

On paper, Germany has six armored battalions. Five of these battalions are equipped with forty-four Leopard II main battle tanks each. A single combined German/Dutch armored battalion is equipped with forty-eight Leopard II. Of Germany's twelve mechanized infantry battalions, ten are equipped with forty-four Puma infantry fighting vehicles each.

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Table. Total Army Personnel (Active Duty, Reserves)



Total military personnel for countries within NATO. Of note, only the United States, Türkiye (Turkey), Poland, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Greece, and Spain have forces larger than one hundred thousand personnel (active duty and reserve forces). The following nations have armies below twenty-five thousand personnel: Belgium, Sweden, Portugal, Finland, Norway, Lithuania, Denmark, Slovakia, Latvia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Estonia, Slovenia, Albania, Montenegro, Luxembourg, and Iceland. (Table by author)

Two combined German/Dutch battalions are equipped with CV90 infantry fighting vehicles.⁸

In a 2015 interview, a former parliamentary commissioner of the German armed forces, Hans-Peter Bartels, revealed that despite each German artillery battalion having twenty-four howitzers on paper, in most batteries, only a small proportion of the artillery pieces were actually operational.⁹ Bartels further elaborated that only two battalions in the Heer had what could be considered fully “modern” combat equipment on hand.¹⁰ Antiquated and undermaintained equipment plague German forces.

The *Division Schnelle Kräfte* (Rapid Forces Division) is meant to be Germany’s contribution to the VJTF, but it is constituted of light infantry and special operations forces. The VJTF is a medium-weight mechanized infantry and artillery formation. In a fight against heavy Russian ground forces, Germany’s Rapid Forces Division contribution to the VJTF would likely be shattered.¹¹

The 9th *Panzerlehr* Brigade of the 1st Panzer Division has a reputation as Germany’s premier heavy

combat formation and offers combined arms capability through organic panzer battalions (Leopard II), mechanized infantry battalions, and artillery batteries.¹² The 9th *Panzerlehr* Brigade is often used as a showpiece for German and NATO dignitaries and a training ground for junior leaders. It’s unclear how well the brigade would perform off the parade field.

Germany would require approximately ten days to deploy a single medium-weight battalion to combat within German borders but over a month to deploy a brigade.¹³ The 9th *Panzerlehr* Brigade would most likely be the first heavy combat unit to respond in the outbreak of a real war, but it would likely need to parasitically subsume combat equipment and replacement parts from the rest of the 1st Panzer Division to be fully combat ready.

Three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave his famous *Zeitenwende* speech. He declared that Vladimir Putin had committed Russia to war, ushering in a new era for Europe, and Scholz committed Germany to a €100 billion military modernization program to confront the threat.¹⁴ Germany has made little progress in modernization



The lead man protects the group with a flexible shield during training for the French counterterrorism and hostage release group of the 1st Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment. The training occurred from 9 to 16 May 2019 in Bayonne, France. The unit's mission of freeing hostages in hostile zones requires extraordinary daily training so their actions are reflexive. (Photo courtesy of France's Ministry for Armed Forces)

and rearmament since February 2022, and it's likely that despite the €100 billion commitment, Berlin will not meet its NATO defense spending requirements (2 percent of GDP—equivalent to approximately \$85 billion annually) until 2025.¹⁵

To get ready for a real fight, the new defense minister, Boris Pistorius, would need to straighten out Germany's fraught politics with defense industry partners, fix byzantine procurement processes, retrain the force in basic combat skills, and restore munitions stockpiles. But the German people are acutely aware of their history. Germany will likely remain reluctant to build a real military expeditionary capability. Berlin is much more comfortable in managing the Bundeswehr with a degree of intentional incompetence.

France

The French *Armée de Terre* (land army) is in many ways the good news story of European defense. The *Armée de Terre* is 105,000 strong, and it has proven

that, unlike the Heer, it has a true expeditionary capability.¹⁶ Following the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, Paris ordered *Opération Sentinelle*, and 10,000 French soldiers were deployed to patrol within France itself. From 2015 to the present, these troops have guarded special infrastructure, synagogues, Jewish schools, and restaurants from terrorist attacks. In 2016, France was simultaneously able to deploy 3,500 troops (roughly a brigade) to the Sahel in *Opération Barkhane* while deploying an additional several hundred troops to the Central African Republic under *Opération Sangaris*. Other former French colonies like Senegal and Gabon garrison thousands of additional French troops.¹⁷

Paris maintains a high readiness "immediate reaction joint force" that is tasked to deploy within seven days to meet a crisis. This force is based on 2,300 soldiers (1,500 of whom are ground forces), drawn from a national emergency retainer of five thousand high-readiness troops.¹⁸ In practice, this means that the French have a heavy battalion task force and a light



A Hunter unmanned aerial vehicle captured a target unmanned aircraft with a net during Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems Technical Interoperability Exercise 23, which brought together civilian and military specialists and over sixty industry participants 12–22 September 2023 in the Netherlands to test counterdrone technologies and validate communication and interoperability among different systems. (Photo courtesy of NATO)

battalion task force (known as a combined arms tactical group or *groupements tactiques interarmes* [GTIA]) ready to deploy within a week. As a combined arms formation, a French GTIA may include a combination of infantry, armor, or artillery—similar to a U.S. Marine expeditionary unit.

Following *Opération Sentinelle*, the French surprised many analysts by reviving the much larger and more expensive division-level combat formation.¹⁹ Paris has created two expeditionary divisions that are each made up of smaller line brigades. These two divisions are supported by several combat support and combat sustainment support regiments that were reorganized into four functional support brigades (intelligence, logistics, etc.).

France's 1st Division has four line brigades, including the 7th Armored Brigade (equipped with fifty-two Leclerc main battle tanks), 9th Marine Brigade (light infantry), 27th Mountain Infantry Brigade (light infantry), and the combined Franco-German Brigade

(mechanized infantry). The 3rd Division has three brigades, including the 2nd Armored Brigade (equipped with fifty-two Leclerc main battle tanks), 6th Light Armored Brigade, and the 11th Parachute Brigade.²⁰ Each of France's five infantry regiments (subordinate to the brigade echelon) are equipped with sixty-four infantry fighting vehicles.

France's legendary Foreign Legion allows foreign-born men to enlist for a term of military service to France in exchange for a salary and citizenship. It has gained renown in numerous conflicts as an elite force. The 1st Foreign Regiment is the Foreign Legion's headquarters unit and includes three companies that administrate the Legion. However, in the modern era, *Légionnaire* combat units operate as a part of larger formations in the *Armée de Terre*.²¹

Légionnaire units in the *Armée de Terre* include the 1st Foreign Cavalry Regiment, 1st Foreign Engineer Regiment, and 2nd Foreign Infantry Regiment of the 6th Light Armored Brigade, as well



T-38C Talon jet trainers break away during a training flight at the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program on 29 March 2023, which hosts students and instructors from fourteen NATO allies at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. (Photo courtesy of NATO)

as the 2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment of the 11th Parachute Brigade, and the 2nd Foreign Engineer Regiment of the 27th Mountain Brigade.²² There are also smaller assorted Légionnaire garrison units stationed both in France and abroad.

The trouble with French combat power is that it is threadbare. French forces have been deploying to the Sahel and other hot combat zones across Africa for over a decade. Paris has had to make cuts in painful places like training and maintenance to meet budget austerity requirements while sustaining combat troops in the field.²³ Many French combat vehicles are overused and past their expected service life, and outside of France's premiere combat units, soldiers are behind in training on basic combat skills.

In a real war against a near-peer adversary, the French could reliably field up to two combined arms battalions (GTIA) within a week, followed by a full heavy brigade within a month. However, Paris would have difficulty retrieving combat equipment

and vehicles from the myriad sites where French troops have been deployed for the last decade.²⁴ But despite any deployment challenges, France's recent engagements in Africa have demonstrated a sophisticated and deadly combat capability in the Armée de Terre.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been forced to make serious cuts to the British army over the last decade, and much of the force was tuned for the Global War on Terrorism, emphasizing light infantry and special operations forces.²⁵ As of 1 July 2023, the British army comprises 76,000 regular full-time personnel and 4,150 Royal Gurkhas.²⁶

While the British army has been repeatedly downsized over the last decade, it maintains a high state of readiness, its equipment is mission-ready, and it has sufficient munitions stockpiles for a real fight. Constituent units within British divisions are organized into self-supporting and maneuverable brigade combat



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teams (following the American model). British brigade combat teams typically include four infantry line battalions, an artillery regiment, light cavalry, combat engineers, signals and communications battalion, a medical regiment, and a wide array of logistics and support assets.²⁷

Under the *Future Soldier* integrated defense review in 2021, the British army was reorganized to increase lethality and agility as an expeditionary force.²⁸ The goal was to ensure that the British army could operate in the “gray zone”—political conflicts that resemble undeclared wars. The 1st Division was redesignated as an adaptable light infantry division. It now includes the 4th Light Brigade Combat Team, 7th Light Mechanized Brigade Combat Team, 11th Security Force Assistance Brigade, and 16th Air Assault Brigade Combat Team.²⁹

The 16th Air Assault Brigade Combat Team is Britain’s vanguard rapid response formation.³⁰ Its principal combat power includes three airborne infantry battalions, one air assault battalion, one light recce strike infantry battalion, and an artillery regiment. The aviation element of the brigade includes three regiments of Apache and Wildcat attack helicopters, Chinook and Puma support helicopters, and Merlin support helicopters. This gives the brigade both high operational mobility and a powerful counterpunch to enemy armored formations. The 16th Air Assault Brigade Combat Team is the largest brigade in the British army and maintains the highest state of readiness in the British army. Its constituent battalions form the backbone of an “air assault task force.”

The 3rd Division now comprises Britain’s heavy combat formations. It includes the 12th and 20th Armored Brigade Combat Teams and the 1st Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team.³¹ Each armored infantry brigade includes an armored regiment (equipped with fifty-six Challenger II main battle tanks), an armored cavalry regiment, two armored infantry battalions (equipped with Warrior infantry fighting vehicles), and one light infantry battalion (equipped with the Mastiff infantry fighting vehicle).³²

British policy is to keep the 3rd Division’s constituent brigades ready to respond to near-peer threats. The

British can rapidly deploy one or two combined arms infantry battalions complimented with a wide array of armored vehicles (tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and armored personnel carriers). This formation would likely include a squadron of the formidable Apache helicopter, which is designed to wreak havoc on large tank formations. Studies indicate that the first few infantry echelons of this armored task force can deploy within a few days, but the whole formation would take approximately thirty days. Deploying a full armored brigade would take two or three months.³³

The British 6th Division is a specialist force. It includes the 77th Brigade and the Army Special Operations Brigade. The 77th Brigade is responsible for operations in the information environment. The Army Special Operations Brigade was formed in 2021 as a British equivalent to the U.S. Army Special Forces (the famous Green Berets) and is responsible for training, organizing, and leading indigenous personnel to conduct offensive actions in hostile or denied environments.³⁴ The Army Special Operations Brigade is planned to achieve full strength by 2030, and it will include four special operations capable line battalions and two Royal Gurkha light infantry companies to provide additional firepower.

The United Kingdom is the only European power that retains its own heavy lift air transport capabilities. The British have a fleet of American C-17 heavy transport planes. Each C-17 can transport 170,000 pounds. Weight and space capacities allow the C-17 to transport main battle tanks, multiple infantry fighting vehicles, or even an entire infantry company. This means that unlike France or Germany, once a UK Brigade Combat Team is in the field, the UK has the capacity to sustain it indefinitely.

Poland

Though Poland was formerly part of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact (an Eastern Bloc military alliance meant to counterbalance NATO), Poland is quickly emerging as a regional leader in military spending to counter Russian aggression. The Polish national identity first emerged in the tenth century when Mieszko I, ruler of the Polans tribe, united several neighboring tribes

Previous page: A team of Norwegian special forces accesses the upper levels of a building in the city of Daugavpils, Latvia, during Exercise Flaming Sword, 28 May 2015. (Photo courtesy of NATO)

in the basins of the Vistula and Oder River basins. The Poles have fought numerous wars with their neighbors throughout history, but following Germany's attempt to exterminate them in World War II, and then fifty years of slavery under Soviet communism, the Poles place extraordinary value on their national identity—especially in comparison to their globalist-internationalist European peers. They will never allow themselves to be dominated by Berlin or Moscow again. Polish defense modernization was already underway in 2019, well before Russia's invasion of Ukraine; however, Moscow's regional aggression was the impetus of an even wider expansion of Polish military capacity.

Prior to 2022, Polish land forces included 150,000 soldiers and four primary combat divisions: 12th Mechanized Division, 16th Mechanized Division, 18th Mechanized Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Division. Polish land forces' offensive capability also included the 6th Airborne Brigade (light infantry) and three reconnaissance regiments.³⁵

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, National Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak announced a plan to expand the land forces to 250,000 professional soldiers. Warsaw has ordered 180 Korean K2 Black Panther main battle tanks in a package to be delivered through 2025.³⁶ Poland will have a contractual option to build up to 820 additional K2s under domestic license from 2026 onward. Poland also ordered 116 used American M1A1FEP Abrams main battle tanks and ordered 250 new M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams.³⁷

Artillery and rocket artillery is also a very high priority for Poland. Over the summer of 2022, Poland ordered 212 Korean K9 self-propelled howitzers, and in February 2023, Poland reached an agreement for eighteen American HIMARS as well as 218 Korean K239 Chunmoo multiple launch rocket systems. Other procurements include modern infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), helicopters, and air defense artillery systems to phase out Poland's remaining Soviet-era inventory.³⁸

The 11th Armored Cavalry Division is equipped with German Leopard II main battle tanks. The 12th Mechanized Division includes two mechanized brigades and an artillery regiment, mostly equipped with Soviet-era hardware. Although the 16th Mechanized Division already includes two mechanized brigades, an armored cavalry brigade, and an artillery regiment, the division is being enlarged—most likely

with new air defense and antitank capabilities. The 18th Mechanized Division was re-created in 2018 (equipped with the Leopard II), but now it will be further strengthened by the addition of the 19th Mechanized Brigade.³⁹

Poland is also creating two entirely new divisions, bringing land forces' total to six heavy divisions equipped for high-intensity combat.⁴⁰ 1st Infantry Division will consist of four mechanized brigades, each complete with three mechanized battalions, an artillery battalion, and other support assets. These mechanized brigades will be equipped with the Korean K2 Black Panther and American M1A2 Abrams. There are no available details regarding the other new division, but it's safe to assume that it will be a heavy division designed to stand up to a Russian tank army.⁴¹

There are two big differences between the Polish approach to military organization and the other major NATO players. First, Poland is not investing in indirect influence capabilities like security force assistance, civil affairs, or psychological operations brigades. Second, Poland doesn't have to concern itself with projecting power across Europe. Poland is geographically located adjacent to Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states—where a potential front with Russia would likely form. This simplifies Polish logistics and supply. Each Polish division has its own organic logistics regiment.⁴² For a country that is not trying to project power beyond its own borders, this is sufficient. It is likely that Poland will rely heavily on NATO allies for intelligence support and soft power projection.

Polish land forces are still under modernization, but Warsaw is emerging as the heavy hitter of Europe. Unfortunately, Poland does have an Achilles' heel. The Polish economy is much smaller than those of France, UK, or Germany, and habitual spending of 3–4 percent of GDP on the military places a great strain on Warsaw's tax base and finances.⁴³ Despite Warsaw's intention to continue high rates of military spending over the next decade, it is unclear whether these expenditures are sustainable.

Türkiye

Türkiye has the second largest army in NATO (after the United States), and it is well-trained, sophisticated, and capable of joint operations. Turkish land forces include 402,000 active-duty soldiers,



British Army soldiers train Ukrainian recruits 24 March 2023 on AS-90 self-propelled artillery guns, which were donated to Ukraine. The United Kingdom also ran a thirty-five-day training course for Ukrainian volunteer fighters, which taught them survival skills in a hostile environment. The instructors were from NATO allies, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway; NATO invitee Sweden; and partner countries Australia and New Zealand. (Photo courtesy of NATO)

with another 260,000 in reserve. Türkiye began reducing its use of the division as a unit of maneuver in the early 1990s and reorganized the force's primary combat power to be based on the brigade. In the land forces' current structure, several brigades are managed under a corps headquarters. The land forces have one armored division (consisting of three armored regiments) and seven armored brigades. Each armored brigade includes two armored battalions (forty-one tanks each), two mechanized infantry battalions, and two self-propelled artillery battalions. The land forces have two mechanized divisions (each consisting of three mechanized regiments) and fourteen mechanized brigades. Each mechanized brigade includes one armored battalion (forty-one tanks), two mechanized battalions, and one artillery battalion. The land forces have one infantry division consisting of three infantry regiments, and another seven infantry brigades that each include four infantry battalions and one artillery battalion.⁴⁴

On paper, Turkish land forces has approximately 3,000 tanks. The German Leopard IIA4 is Türkiye's most modern tank with 339 pieces in inventory. Türkiye also has another 392 German Leopard I tanks in various states of modernization, 1,200 antiquated American M60 tanks, and 1,200 obsolete American M48 Patton tanks (which entered service in 1953).⁴⁵ Turkish land forces has 1,100 self-propelled artillery pieces and another 1,800 towed artillery pieces. Türkiye has more than 293 pieces of American M-155 Firtina II and Firtina I self-propelled artillery systems, which are the most advanced in inventory and use the NATO-common 155 mm round. It also has 362 pieces of the M52 and M44 self-propelled artillery systems, both of which use 155 mm rounds as well.

Internal assessments reveal that Turkish leaders believe they could potentially deploy 50,000 soldiers in response to four simultaneous peacekeeping crises.⁴⁶ Türkiye has shown that it can project power through special operations forces and military assistance

missions far from home in places like Libya or Azerbaijan, but it is unclear how easily Türkiye could move heavy ground forces across the Bosphorus Strait, through Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, or Ukraine (presently under occupation by heavy Russian ground forces). However, Türkiye is certainly capable of moving heavy ground forces into the Caucasus region (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan).

Italy

The Italian army is one of Europe's most sophisticated and has the third most troops abroad for peace-keeping operations (after the United States and United Kingdom). The Italian army's ground combat power is organized under three division-level commands. Beneath these commands, Italy has ten operational brigades: three light infantry brigades, one cavalry brigade, four mechanized brigades, and two tank brigades.⁴⁷

The Alpine Troops Command manages the Alpine Brigades "Taurinense" and "Julia." They both contain three light infantry battalions (which the Italians call regiments), one reconnaissance/scout battalion, one antitank battalion based on the Centauro tank-destroyer IFV, and one artillery battalion.⁴⁸

Under the Northern Operations Command are the Cavalry Brigade "Pozzuolo del Friuli," 132nd Armored Brigade "Ariete," and Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore." The Cavalry Brigade "Pozzuolo del Friuli" includes a cavalry battalion equipped with Centauro tank destroyer, one amphibious infantry battalion, and one artillery battalion. The 132nd Armored Brigade "Ariete" includes one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank-destroyers, two tank battalions with Ariete main battle tanks, one mechanized infantry battalion, and one field artillery battalion with self-propelled howitzers. The Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore" includes three light infantry battalions, one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank destroyers, and one light artillery battalion equipped with 120 mm mortars.⁴⁹

Under the Southern Operational Command are the Mechanized Brigade "Granatieri di Sardegna," Mechanized Brigade "Aosta," Mechanized Brigade "Pinerolo," Mechanized Brigade "Sassari," and Bersaglieri Brigade "Garibaldi." The Mechanized Brigade "Granatieri di Sardegna" includes one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank destroyers, one mechanized infantry battalion, and one light infantry

battalion. The Mechanized Brigade "Aosta" and Mechanized Brigade "Pinerolo" both include one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank destroyers, three light infantry battalions, and one field artillery battalion with towed howitzers.⁵⁰ The Mechanized Brigade "Sassari" includes one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank destroyers and three light infantry battalions. The Bersaglieri Brigade "Garibaldi" includes one cavalry battalion with Centauro tank destroyers, one tank battalion with Ariete main battle tanks, two mechanized infantry battalions, and one field artillery battalion with self-propelled howitzers.⁵¹

In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Italy has held a strong internal debate on military updates and modernizations. "The 2023 budget includes a total of €19.56 billion in spending by the Defence Ministry, up from the €18 billion spent in 2022."⁵² This is a €6.1 billion increase from 2022—a massive increase for Italy. In 2023, Italy approved a budget plan for new procurements that will include twenty-one high mobility artillery rocket systems and 133 Leopard IIA8 tanks. Italy will also spend €5.23 billion over fourteen years on a program for a new IFV to replace the aging Dardo IFV. It is unclear how long it would take for Italy to deploy significant ground forces to a front in eastern Europe, or how long it would take for those forces to assemble and move. Italy's Airmobile Brigade maintains a high state of readiness. It's reasonable to assume that Italy is capable of deploying an infantry regiment (equivalent to a battalion) within a week and a mechanized brigade within a month, similar to France or the UK.

NATO's Smaller Members

Most of the NATO alliance's smaller members can contribute light battalion-sized formations. Countries like Portugal, Montenegro, Iceland, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Albania, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, and Slovenia either have no real military expeditionary capacity to contribute regarding heavy ground forces, or they are too far from the front of a potential conflict in eastern Europe to matter. Whatever these countries could contribute in ground forces, they also certainly could not be first responders, and they would have to leverage NATO's common infrastructure, transport, logistics, and support functions which are sustained by the larger members.

As it is not only very small, but it also borders Russia, Estonia assumes that Russian ground forces will engulf the nation before sufficient forces can be mustered to repel the invasion.⁵³ Estonia plans to resist an invasion through insurgency and its army is organized accordingly. Latvian land forces consist of a signal mechanized infantry brigade, composed of three

to get combat power to the front. Romania is close to completing an eighteen-year long restructuring of its armed forces to meet NATO standards. This includes the recent procurement of the TR-85M1 “Bizon” main battle tank, the MLI-84M “Jder” IFV, the Piranha III IFV, and other systems to phase out antiquated Soviet-era platforms.⁵⁷

“Sweden is NATO’s newest member. Sweden long claimed neutrality both during and after the Cold War, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine precipitated a change in its strategic planning. Realizing the Moscow would prey on weaker neighbors, both Sweden and its Nordic neighbor Finland decided to abandon neutrality and embrace NATO.”

mechanized infantry battalions. In a crisis, Latvia can call up an additional four light infantry brigades, but like Estonia, their national defense strategy is based on an insurgency.⁵⁴ Lithuanian land forces include two mechanized infantry brigades, which each consist of three mechanized infantry battalions and one artillery battalion. Lithuania also has a third reserve infantry brigade and locally based national guard units.⁵⁵

Despite its small economic heft, Romania’s land forces feature two division level combat commands. The 2nd Division includes the 2nd Mountain Hunter Brigade (consisting of three light infantry battalions), the 9th Mechanized Brigade (consisting of two tank battalions, two infantry battalions, and an artillery battalion), and the 282nd Armored Brigade (consisting of three mechanized battalions and one tank battalion). The 4th Division includes the 15th Mechanized Brigade (consisting of two tank battalions, two infantry battalions, and an artillery battalion), the 61st Mountain Hunter Brigade (consisting of three light infantry battalions and one artillery battalion), and the 81st Mechanized Brigade (consisting of four infantry battalions and one artillery battalion). While Romania does not have a significant expeditionary capability, it shares a border with Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland.⁵⁶

Similar to Poland, Romania would not have to significantly stretch existing military logistics capabilities

The Scandinavian NATO Members

The Norwegian army has always been very small. Given that Norway is a mountainous country in the Arctic, and it has excellent relations with its neighbors Sweden and Finland, Norway does not face many land-based threats. Brigade Nord (Northern Brigade) is the Norwegian army’s only major combat formation. The brigade includes the armored battalion (equipped with the Leopard II main battle tank and CV90 IFV), the Telemark Mechanized Infantry Battalion (also equipped with the Leopard II main battle tank and CV90 IFV), 2nd Light Infantry Battalion (equipped with the CV9030N IFV/APC), and one artillery battalion (equipped with the Korean K9 self-propelled howitzer).⁵⁸ The Norwegian army is presently undergoing a small reconfiguration into a heavier force. The 2nd Light Infantry Battalion is transforming into a mechanized battalion, and there are plans to procure new main battle tanks. The German Leopard IIA7 is the leading contender for the contract and Norway is targeting a procurement of at least seventy-two new tanks.⁵⁹

Sweden is NATO’s newest member. Sweden long claimed neutrality both during and after the Cold War, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine precipitated a change in its strategic planning. Realizing the Moscow would prey on weaker neighbors, both Sweden and its Nordic neighbor Finland decided to abandon neutrality and



Soldiers assigned to the 9th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, supporting NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland, join troops from Albania, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom for Exercise Verboom in Adazi, Latvia, 28 October 2023. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

embrace NATO. Swedish land forces bring to the table approximately fifty thousand soldiers (of which only approximately seven thousand are full-time active duty) organized into a principal combat power of eight regiments. Sweden is still undergoing a process of reorganization from a mass conscription model used during the Cold War to a professional force.⁶⁰

The Life Guards Regiment bring to the fight a single mechanized infantry battalion, as well as intelligence, security, and military police battalions. The Life Regiment Hussars is essentially a light infantry and reconnaissance unit that features both military intelligence capabilities and one Ranger light infantry battalion. The Norrland Dragoon Regiment is an arctic warfare specialist light infantry and special operations unit. The Skaraborg Regiment is a heavy combat unit that consists of two armored battalions (each with two tank companies and two mechanized infantry companies). The South Scanian Regiment features one mechanized infantry battalion and one armored battalion (two tank

companies equipped with the Stridsvagn 122 main battle tank and two companies equipped with the CV90 IFV). The Dalarna Regiment consists of two motorized infantry battalions, and the Gotland Regiment consists of one armored battalion. The Norrbotten Regiment consists of two armored battalions. The Västernorrland Regiment is a special light infantry unit based on the Jämtland Ranger Corps, which is essentially a light infantry battalion.⁶¹

Sweden's military has much to contribute to NATO, but at present the heavy combat power of its land forces is not on par with other members of similar economic size (like Poland). Like the United Kingdom, Sweden is also separated from most potential European battlefields by water. Potential conflicts involving Sweden will rely on NATO infrastructure, especially heavy lift transport aircraft, to deploy significant combat power to a crisis.

Finland has an 832-mile border with Russia that has always been a cause for concern with Moscow. Joseph

Stalin actually attempted to conquer Finland in the failed Winter War (1939–1940), and Finns were largely able to resist overwhelming Soviet numerical superiority through mastery of arctic warfare techniques, mobility, and light infantry tactics. Finland draws from these successes in how its army is structured today.⁶²

Finland has an active duty army of eighteen thousand conscripted soldiers that can be scaled to a force of 180,000 if the country is invaded. Finland's six combat brigades utilize subordinate regional offices to form provincial local battalions in time of war and answer to the regional brigade headquarters. Finland maintains three high readiness brigades that are each essentially one mechanized infantry battalion with a supporting artillery regiment and combat engineering battalion.⁶³

The United States and other leading NATO members all recognize Finnish prowess in arctic warfare, and they frequently send troops to train at Finnish combat schools to develop tactics, techniques, and procedures. However, the Finnish army is designed to defend Finland's borders. In its current configuration, the Finnish army is not capable of projecting power abroad.

No matter what contributions NATO's lesser members can make, it's unclear how long it would take for these small formations to assemble and deploy. However, most battalion-sized multinational formations are designed to attach to larger American, British, French, and German brigades or divisions. Regardless, Europe is sorely lacking in heavy ground forces.⁶⁴

The Combat Power of Russian Ground Forces

In comparison, Russian ground forces present NATO an enormous challenge in sheer size, mass, and firepower. The Russian expeditionary force that invaded Ukraine in February 2022 was over 200,000 soldiers. The force included battalion tactical groups of the 2nd, 25th, and 41st Combined Arms Armies from the Central Military District; 5th, 29th, 35th, 36th Combined Arms Armies, and 68th Army Corps from the Eastern Military District; 1st Guards Tanks Army, 6th and 20th Guards Combined Arms Armies, and 3rd, 11th, and 14th Army Corps from the Western Military District; and 8th, 49th, and 58th Combined Arms Armies from the Southern Military District.⁶⁵ A closer examination of the 41st Combined Arms Army alone puts the size and

firepower of Russian ground forces into context. The 41st Combined Arms Army includes three motorized infantry brigades, one tank division (three tank regiments, one motorized infantry regiment, and one artillery regiment), one rocket brigade, one rocket artillery brigade, and assorted command and control and support formations. On paper, the Russians were able to deploy twelve combined arms armies of similar configuration, one tank army, and four independent corps (which are functionally smaller armies).⁶⁶

On 1 April 2023, the Russian armed services went on a hard recruiting drive to sign 400,000 new recruits to the army.⁶⁷ Recruiters met 85 percent of their target recruitment goals. The Russian ground forces in Ukraine began 2023 as a highly disorganized force of 360,000 soldiers (still significantly larger than the initial invasion force). By June 2023, numbers had risen to 410,000 and organization was significantly improving. By January 2024, Russian ground forces in Ukraine and occupied territories included 470,000 soldiers.

Organization in the Russian ground forces has reverted to the traditional Soviet order of battle of regiment to division to combined arms army. However, the Russians appear to have dispensed with the battalion tactical group as a unit of maneuver. Instead, battalions are increasingly broken up into company level formations, often with attached combined arms assets (artillery, tanks, multiple launch rocket systems, etc.) from regiment. Many of the officers leading these companies were promoted from the ranks for bravery or competence. Russia lost over two hundred colonels (and their respective command staffs) in 2022. The promotion of junior officers from the ranks and the utilization of the company as a unit of maneuver reflects not only adaptation to the changing battlefield but also a dearth of officers who have the requisite training to successfully maneuver a larger formation (battalion, regiment, brigade, etc.).⁶⁸

Russian commanders are using these smaller formations to conduct smaller harassing attacks against the Ukrainian armed forces all along the line of contact. This strategy creates attrition for Ukrainian armed forces, is not very resource intensive to execute, and does not require sophisticated command and control measures or trained military leadership to plan and oversee. When Russian units have taken approximately 30 percent casualties, they are rotated out of the line,

retrained, and plussed up with replacement soldiers. These are great examples of Russia's remarkable practicality to "make it work."⁶⁹

To achieve strategic parity, NATO is relying on qualitative advantages in its ground force components, especially in technological superiority of NATO combat platforms, training regimes, education, military drill, and discipline. NATO can of course also rely on far more sophisticated air power to mitigate Russian numbers. The Russians have also demonstrated very poor operational planning and logistics management in Ukraine, which calls into question the readiness of Russian forces to truly challenge NATO. Nevertheless, the enormous firepower of Russia's ground forces should give Europe pause.

Germany, France, the UK, and Italy are each capable of putting a single brigade in the field (nominally eastern Europe) within a month or two.⁷⁰ Poland is capable of putting a few divisions in the field, provided they are deployed close to Polish borders. Türkiye is capable of dominating the Caucasus region, but it's unclear whether Turkish land forces could reenforce European allies. Europe's lesser NATO members will be able to contribute forces in small numbers to the fight, but their size, combat readiness, limited logistics

capabilities, and lack of military transport almost ensure they would be late arrivals to a crisis.

Ultimately, Putin's national security cadre is pursuing a grand strategy that has its origins in the old Russian Empire. Russia exists on the vast Eurasian steppe, with no natural barriers and hard geographic boundaries to anchor their borders. Luminaries like Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and even Vladimir Lenin all sought to expand Russia's borders until they could anchor against hard geographic barriers like the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Carpathian Mountains, or the Caucasus Mountains. Stalin reached the apogee of this grand strategy in 1945 when Soviet tank armies were able to forward stage in East Germany. Since the Soviet collapse, Russian leadership has been forced to grapple with how to regain some degree of this defense in-depth.⁷¹ That puts Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Romania, Hungary, Moldova, and Ukraine on Russia's path. Russia's conquest of Ukraine was largely inhibited by its own failure to gather intelligence, plan, and manage logistics for an extended campaign—mistakes that Moscow is working to remedy.⁷²

Without American strategic sponsorship, Europe does not have sufficient combat power to protect itself. ■

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Normandy Virtual Staff Ride



Normandy virtual staff ride products are available for download from the Army University Press website. This study focuses on the American side of the invasion to include the airborne assault, Omaha and Utah Beaches, Pointe du Hoc, and a study on sustainment and the artificial harbors. Materials include instructor notes, participant read aheads, and the virtual terrain. These products will enable organizations with access to Virtual Battlespace 3 to conduct their own virtual staff ride or to conduct their own professional development sessions without the terrain.



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