

Opinion

Military mobility yes, but what about A2AD?

Karlijn Jans

One can predict that headlines surrounding the upcoming NATO summit will be dominated by the discussion on 'burden sharing'. President Trump has been very vocal about European allies not spending enough on defence. The 2% GDP spending target, as pledged during the 2014 Wales Summit, is really just a political target. What actually matters is what that money is spent on. Increasing spending on new weapon systems does not equate to troops and equipment that are fit for purpose. What also is at stake here is the readiness and deployability of troops and equipment, in essence the ability of NATO to act and react as the situation demands. Feeding into this is deterrence in the form of military mobility; the ability to project military power by quickly moving forces into a theatre of action. Achieving military mobility, however, is complicated by the possession of *anti-access area denial (A2AD)* capabilities by a potential adversary.

During the past months there has been much focus on military mobility. Both political and military leaderships have acknowledged the need to act. The political will to improve the situation on the European continent has resulted in military mobility becoming one of the first collaborative Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects between EU member states. At the same time, the EU published its Action Plan on Military Mobility as part of its Defence Union efforts. Achieving effective military mobility would allow for soldiers and equipment to move quickly between and through countries in the event of a conflict as well as during periods of joint exercises (credibility, interoperability and readiness of military forces are in fact only achieved through exercises and training during peacetime, and it is therefore crucial to also make arrangements during peacetime). However, there have been multiple reports on the poor state of readiness and deployability of the troops and equipment of European allies. Large parts of the NATO allies' militaries are not operational and therefore not deployable. This problematic condition of European militaries impacts interoperability (their ability to deploy and act together) between militaries as well as cross border mobility. When transport, in the form of equipment and trained personnel, is not available, it will be difficult to actually project military power as an alliance.

One aspect of military mobility that has remained absent from the discussions is the complicating factor of *anti-access area denial (A2AD)* capabilities. A2AD would not only mean limitations to the physical ability to manoeuvre within a certain geographical theatre (the more traditional understanding of A2AD), but also the widespread use of electronic warfare (EW) and cyber-attacks by the adversary, which would complicate matters further. EW and cyber-attacks could include, for example, the jamming of communications and manipulation of logistical information. This could potentially result in a situation where NATO forces are seriously limited or even entirely cut off from reliable data and communication. Especially when the alliance has forward deployed troops, as it does currently with its Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in the Baltics, it is imperative to properly consider whether members and NATO will be able to actually provide reinforcements and equipment should the situation demand them. Besides having the opportunity or ability to apply A2AD in a more traditional way, by covering supply-routes

through strategically placed air defences, counter-maritime forces, and theatre offensive strike weapons, the use of EW and cyber-attack for A2AD is a complicating factor to military mobility. Hence, it is paramount to not just approach military mobility as an operational issue but also as a crucial strategic issue; with EW and cyber as a key part of the discussion. Military mobility, in all its aspects, is crucial to NATO's ability to project power when the situation demands it.

Karlijn Jans is a Strategic Analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Would you like to react? Mail the editor: redactie@atlcom.nl.