



# STRATEGIC FILE

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## Trends in Force Posture in Europe

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*Two opposite trends in force posture in Europe became evident in the last decade. Out of the six biggest military spenders among the OSCE participating States, four—France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom—have been on a downward trend in regard to their force posture: reducing the number of personnel, downscaling high-end capabilities and decreasing force readiness; the same is true for the U.S. military presence in Europe. The outlier was Russia. While the Russian armed forces were shrinking and disposing of large quantities of legacy equipment, the military capabilities required for high-intensity conventional operations were revamped, force readiness improved, and scenarios involving a large-scale conflict in the OSCE area practiced.*

Between 2007 and 2016, force posture in Europe underwent rapid evolution, testifying to a profound change in OSCE participating States' thinking about the most likely scenarios for military force. This paper aims to identify the leading trends in the force posture of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom and United States, which together represent over 85% of the military expenditures of the 57 OSCE participating States, and an overwhelming portion of the military capabilities in Europe. Hence, the trends in their force posture will reflect to a large extent the situation across the OSCE area in that regard, and also carry major implications for OSCE instruments related to transparency in military activities and arms control.

The six analytical categories proposed in this paper are intended to enable structured and comprehensive analysis of the force posture concepts, and are: size of military expenditures; number of armed forces personnel; type and quantity of weapons; level of force readiness; type and scale of exercises; and structure of deployments abroad. Research along these categories was based on widely recognised and methodologically comparable references.<sup>1</sup>

### Military Expenditures

The analysis of the military expenditures of the six selected states in 2007–2016 does not reveal a unifying trend. While France, Germany, Italy, the UK and U.S. largely followed a downward trend, Russia's was upward.

<sup>1</sup> For military expenditure data, see: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Military Expenditures Database 1949–2016*. Data and estimates for military personnel, capabilities and forces deployed abroad are extracted from: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance*, Taylor & Francis, London 2008-2017. Reporting on the level of force readiness, exercises and other issues taken from "Military Balance" and Jane's IHS Inc. electronic database for subscribers (if not marked otherwise).

The contraction of military expenditures of the U.S. and the four Western European states is to a great extent the result of the fiscal crisis that started in 2009 and which forced European governments to introduce severe austerity measures. The effects of these decisions, however, came a bit later: cuts in military expenditures began between 2009 and 2011, depending on the economic situation of individual states. Consequently, the downward trend becomes clearly visible looking back from 2016 to various peak years (see Figure 1, p. 10).

The U.S. started cutting its military expenditures in 2011 after years of growth, mostly because of “sequestration,” a budget control mechanism, and also due to the winding-down of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2016, U.S. military expenditures had fallen by more than 20% from the record high of 2010. The UK initiated cuts earlier, in 2010, so in 2009–2016, British military expenditures dropped by 17.4%. Italy’s were 18.5% lower in 2016 than in 2008, the last time it increased. French military expenditures decreased by 2.7% from 2009 to 2016, while Germany’s fell by 1% from 2010 to 2016, indicating that in real terms, both countries kept their military expenditures at roughly the same level throughout the entire analysed period. The scale of the decrease, however, would be higher if the comparison year were earlier than 2016, when some of the very first steps were taken by the five countries to start increasing their military expenditures.<sup>2</sup>

The relative level of defence expenditures to GDP also decreased for all five: the U.S. from 4.2% in 2007 to 3.3% in 2016, the UK from 2.55% to 2.2%, France from 2.4% to 1.8%, Germany from 1.3% to 1.2%, and Italy from 1.4% to 1.1%.<sup>3</sup>

The outlier again here was Russia, steadily increased its military expenditures throughout the entire examined period. In 2016, the country almost doubled its military expenditures, from around \$37.7 billion to \$70.3 billion. Those figures equalled, respectively, 3.4% and 5.3% of Russia’s GDP, again starkly different to the five other countries, both in the dynamics and the figures themselves.

## **Military Personnel**

Unlike military expenditures, the trend in the number of military personnel was the same for all the analysed states: they all have been downsizing their forces. The deepest cuts involved the U.S. troops permanently stationed in Europe – by 37%. Since 2014, however, the U.S. has been increasing the number of troops on rotation to Europe to partially offset earlier cuts. Altogether, almost 70,000 U.S. troops will be present in Europe for most of 2017.<sup>4</sup>

The trim of the overall U. S. active troop level was less significant, amounting to a 10% cut in the same period, excluding an increase in 2007-2011 resulting from the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. Germany reduced the size of the Bundeswehr by a 28%, a direct effect of budgetary pressure and larger reform that moved the Bundeswehr to a fully professional force (2011). France reduced its active troops by almost 25%. Its motivation was primarily to adapt its military posture to crisis-management operations and generate funding for needed investments, but in 2013, additional cuts were introduced as a result of the financial crisis. Russia reduced its military by almost 20%. However, it was a temporary consequence of structural reform aimed to create a 1,135,000-strong, combat-ready military force. A presidential decree in July 2016 changed this target to 1 million uniformed soldiers. Substantial cuts were also introduced by the UK, which, under fiscal pressure, reduced its military by 15%. The least affected by the cuts were the Italian Armed Forces, which saw a modest reduction of 6% (for absolute numbers, see Figure 2, p. 10).

## **Capabilities**

There is a general trend in major categories of capabilities deployed by the armed forces of the analysed states between 2007 and 2016: all have largely reduced the quantities of military equipment. Legacy platforms have been withdrawn from service and replaced with fewer more-modern weapons or systems. The reductions were particularly significant for five categories of military equipment covered by the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE): battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles,

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<sup>2</sup> All calculations in U.S. dollars and constant prices (2015), based on *SIPRI Military Expenditures Database, 1949–2016*.

<sup>3</sup> According to *Information on defence expenditures of NATO countries 2008-2015; 2009-2016*, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>4</sup> See: *Deputy Commander Lt. Gen. Tim Ray Welcomes 3rd Brigade Arrival*, EUCOM, 9 January 2017, [www.eucom.mil](http://www.eucom.mil).

artillery, helicopters and combat aircraft.<sup>5</sup> The scope of the cuts, however, was different among the six states and their investments in qualitative improvements of high-end military capabilities varied. This makes the overarching trend actually visible as two on closer inspection: while capabilities for high-intensity conventional operations of four Western European states and the U.S. declined, they have relatively improved in Russia.

The sharpest cuts in five categories of military equipment were made by Germany, Italy, France, and the UK. Cuts made in the number of main battle tanks ranged from 41% in the UK to 85% in Germany; in artillery, from 32% in the UK to 84% in Germany; in armoured combat vehicles, from 21% in Italy to 61% in the UK; and in attack helicopters, from 25% in the UK to 80% in France. Changes in combat-capable aircraft were less dramatic but varied—from an 5% increase in France to a 29% decrease in Germany (for absolute numbers, see Tables 2 and 3, pp. 12–13).

Russia and the U.S. made less radical reductions in their total inventories (active and in storage/reserve) of main battle tanks, artillery and armoured combat vehicles. Bigger cuts affected attack helicopters (U.S., by 36%; Russia, by 48,5%) and Russia made the most significant reductions in combat-capable aircraft among the six states (44% decrease). Despite these reductions, the inventories of the U.S. and Russia of each of the five categories of military equipment are larger than those of France, Germany, Italy and the UK taken together. Russia's total inventory of main battle tanks and artillery is also larger than the five Western European countries together with the U.S.

Overall, Russia possessed more than half of the total amount of the five categories of military equipment of the six states, and increased its share from 53% in 2007 to 57% in 2016. While the U.S. share also increased, from 30% to 33%, the percentage declined for five Western European countries, from 17% to 10% (see Figure 3, p. 11).

U.S. retains superiority in heavy and medium transport capability, with more than four times as many aircraft as Russia. The number of transport aircraft held by Russia decreased by around 10% from 2010 to 2016. During the same period, Italy retained largely the same number while the UK and French fleets were reduced by about 20%, and Germany's by 40%.

In terms of reductions of naval forces, cuts by the major OSCE military powers were relatively small compared to cuts in land forces equipment. Although Germany withdrew legacy submarines constituting half its undersea force, all other countries largely retained their number of tactical submarines. Russia made the biggest cuts in the number of principal surface combatants (by 47%). The U.S. and Germany retained roughly the same size of their principal surface combatant fleets in the period. France and the UK reduced such fleets by about 30% while Italy cut about 25%. A significant step was made by the UK, which decommissioned three older aircraft carriers while it was still constructing two new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, thereby creating a time-gap in this capability (for absolute numbers, see Table 4, p. 13).

Analysis of qualitative improvements made over the last decade by the six states in their capabilities confirms a divergence of trends between Russia and the other states. Russia not only made fewer cuts to traditional categories of high-end capabilities than the other states, but over the last decade it recorded the most significant investment in upgrading them. It also introduced new capabilities, significantly augmenting its capacity to engage in high-intensity conventional operations. This comes from a 2011–2020 rearmament programme which assumes that by the end of the period, 70% of all weapons and systems will be of a “modern standard.” According to official data from 2016, the average level of modern equipment in all types of forces had reached 58%. Russia's ambitious modernisation programme has included upgrading main battle tanks (T-72B3); introduction of improved versions of infantry fighting vehicles (BTR-82A), attack helicopters (Mi-28N, Ka-52), and combat aircraft (Su-34, Su-35S, Su-30SM/M2); and limited pre-production in 2016 of the Armata and Kurganets-25 universal combat platforms and Bumerang combat vehicle.

Further, Russia was the only state to augment its force posture with sophisticated Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities, deployed in the OSCE area, including in the Black Sea (Crimea) and Baltic Sea (Kaliningrad Oblast) regions. These assets include the S-300 and S-400 anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems, K-300 Bastion (SSC-5) and Bal (SSC-6) coastal defence, and Iskander ground-based surface-to-

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<sup>5</sup> For purposes of the research, the following categories included in “Military Balance” are taken into account: main battle tanks (MBT), armoured combat vehicles represented by infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), armoured personal carriers (APC) and assault vehicles (ASLT), artillery (ARTY), attack helicopters (ATK), and combat-capable aircraft (excluding strategic bombers). These categories of equipment are related to but do not necessarily meet the definitions of Treaty Limited Equipment from the CFE treaty.

surface missiles, which replace the aging Tochka missiles. Russia's investments in naval capabilities also augmented its ground-attack capabilities. In particular, Russia has deployed and demonstrated its capability to attack ground targets using Kalibr-NK long-range cruise missiles launched from surface ships and submarines.

For most of the past decade the U.S. prioritised procuring air and naval capabilities (such as the F-35 multi-role fighter, Gerald Ford-class aircraft carriers, Virginia-class submarines). The bulk of purchases of equipment for land forces between 2007 and 2011 included assets for missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. After 2011, U.S. Army modernisation programmes suffered largely from financial constraints and competing efforts to maintain sufficient readiness during significant downsizing of force structure. The U.S. Army refocused on high-end land combat only after 2014 and is now strengthening its capabilities for manoeuvre warfare. These efforts follow a broader American intention to regain a multi-domain edge over near-peer and regional competitors under the "Third Offset Strategy" unveiled in 2014. It emphasises use of state-of-the art technologies and will build on U.S. investments in theatre ballistic missile defence (THAAD, Patriot), UAVs, and precision-strike missiles. On the latter, the U.S. in recent decades introduced two variants of air-to-ground AGM-158 JASSM missiles, modernised the sea-launched BMG-109 Tomahawk, and started to upgrade land-based MGM-140 ATACMS.

Key investments of the four Western European states in the past decade included fixed- and rotary-wing air assets (such as the Typhoon and F-35; airlifters such as the A400M and C-17); and maritime assets (naval surface combatants, submarines). Cuts made by these states in heavy land capabilities resulted from an assumption that short-term "out of area" interventions or low-intensity stabilising missions were much more likely than high-intensity conventional operations in the OSCE area. Consequently, land forces were shifted towards lighter, more deployable troops tailored mostly to military operations of an asymmetric character outside of Europe.

The procurement priorities of these four countries over the past decade largely confirm this trend. Major upgrades in military equipment over the last decade have been mainly focused on replacing or modernising armoured combat vehicles or armoured reconnaissance vehicles (such as the Boxer and Puma in Germany; Puma in Italy; VBCI and Griffon in France; Ajax in the UK). Investments in medium-weight, high-tech armoured vehicles resulted from the need to deploy capabilities that could support the broadest possible spectrum of contingencies.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, heavy capabilities remained underinvested: main battle tanks appeared to be the lowest priority, with minor upgrades undertaken by France and Germany and planned by the UK. This approach created an increasing gap between the requirements of modern armoured warfare and aging battle tanks.

## Force Readiness

As with capabilities, the general trend regarding force readiness on closer view reveals two opposite trends. While all the states focused on developing rapid reaction, deployable forces, over the last decade, the majority either cut the number of units able to be mobilised and deployed on short notice or left it unchanged. Russia, however, revamped its entire armed forces structure to enable rapid reaction to a full spectrum of contingencies.

In 2007, Germany was aiming to maintain 35,000 soldiers for the NATO Response Force (NRF), EU Battle Groups or other multinational units, but reduced the number of deployable troops to 10,000, which includes up to 1,000 in very-high readiness mode. As of 2016, it is estimated that Germany would be able to muster a full brigade for deployment within 30 days. The UK maintains the ability to deploy a brigade-size force anywhere around the world and sustain it indefinitely. The highest readiness force is provided by two Task Force units (of different size, depending on the mission but probably the equivalent of one or two battalions each), with different elements ready from days to a month.<sup>7</sup> The other part of operational forces is maintained at lower readiness. In 2010, Britain's ambition to generate 40,000–45,000 troops in six months' notice was replaced with a goal of 30,000 troops in 12

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<sup>6</sup> For more, see: M. Shurkin, *Setting Priorities in the Age of Austerity: British, French, and German Experiences*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010; Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*; M. Shurkin, *The Abilities of the British, French and German Armies to Generate and Sustain Armored Brigades in the Baltics*, RAND Corporation 2017.

months. In 2015, it reversed the downward trend and decided that by 2025, it should be able to generate a 50,000-strong force, with a division deployable with six months' notice.

Despite significant cuts in troop levels, France maintained its ability to deploy 30,000 soldiers for up to three crisis-management operations. This pool includes 5,000 troops on permanent alert, with 2,300 able to be deployed within seven days.<sup>8</sup> However, deployment of a full armoured brigade would take several weeks.<sup>9</sup> Italy has maintained the readiness of its troops at a relatively unchanged level. The core of its deployable troops consists of three brigades with 2,500–3,800 troops at high readiness.

The U.S. ability to respond to contingencies in continental Europe has significantly declined over the last decade. By 2013, the U.S. withdrew its two remaining armoured brigade combat teams (ABCTs) and all tanks, limiting its presence to two operational brigades (one airborne and one mechanised). To partially offset these cuts, in 2016 the U.S. decided to begin continuous rotations of one ABCT to Europe in 2017. Since 2014, the U.S. has also reinstated prepositioned equipment stocks for one additional ABCT (compared to stocks for the three units in Europe in 2007). The U.S. has also resupplied and bolstered prepositioned stocks in Norway to enable rapid deployment of at least 4,500 Marines.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. can also swiftly reinforce Europe with its Global Response Force, consisting of one airborne brigade based in the United States, with the first battalion deployable on 18 hours' notice. Permanent U.S. Navy forces in Europe consist of four Aegis ballistic missile defence destroyers, which arrived in 2011–2015, and one command ship. The number of U.S. fighter aircraft based in Europe shrank in 2007–2016 from about 175 to about 136.

Again the outlier, Russia has revamped the entire structure of its military according to an assumption to establish a permanent readiness force, which it eventually implemented. Compared to 2007 when only 20% of its forces were on combat readiness level, now almost the entire armed force is there. Further, Russia started to switch from a division-based structure to a brigade-based approach, but the direction of the reform was modified to prepare the armed forces to engage in high-intensity conventional operations and the division structure was reinstated. In the Western and Central Military Districts, a tank army and two tank divisions were formed and remain at permanent readiness. The decision was made in 2016 to form three new tank divisions at permanent readiness. The overall Russian force consists of the equivalent of about 80 land brigades/regiments with about 60 (75% of the total number) deployed in the European part of Russia, some of which have been moved close to the western borders of the country. Of those 60 units, 14 are offensive by design—airborne or air assault brigades.

## Exercises

With regards to exercises, a general trend is clear: all analysed states increased the number, scale and complexity of exercises in this period. Once again, this overarching trend reveals two on closer look: from 2008 onward, Russia has mostly practised high-intensity conventional scenarios focused on the OSCE area while up to 2014, France, Germany, Italy, UK and the U.S. exercised (mostly in NATO-led and NATO-linked drills) crisis-management contingencies likely in regions outside Europe. Further, unlike NATO, Russia conducted unannounced (“snap”) exercises and involved many civilian components (such as the Russian Ministry for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters). Finally, the Russian exercises involved much higher numbers of troops (up to around 155,000) than Allied drills (up to around 36,000, but usually less than 13,000).

NATO started to significantly ramp up its exercises and shift its focus more towards collective defence only in 2014. Before that, “Steadfast Jazz 2013” was the first NATO collective defence exercise since 2002 and the largest live NATO exercise since 2006. Held in Poland and Lithuania, it involved around 6,000 troops (half of them participated in the command phase). Yet, even this exercise was largely focused on improving the interoperability of Allied forces. In 2014, the number of initially planned NATO and NATO-linked exercises was doubled to 162, while another 40 national exercises were conducted in the context of assurance of Central and Eastern European NATO members. The number

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<sup>8</sup> *French White Paper on Defence and National Security 2013*, [www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr).

<sup>9</sup> M. Shurkin, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> See: U.S. GAO, *Prepositioned Stocks: Marine Corps Needs to Improve Cost Estimate Reliability and Oversight of Inventory Systems for Equipment in Norway*, Report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, Washington D.C., September 2015.

of NATO-led and NATO-linked exercises grew to 297 in 2015 and to 246 in 2016, with around 38% and 33%, respectively, of them in support of assurance measures.<sup>11</sup>

While NATO has been increasingly focusing on rapid reinforcement and manoeuvre warfare, it also has continued to rehearse crisis-management scenarios and out-of-area operations. An example is the largest NATO exercise since 2002, “Trident Juncture 2015,” which involved around 36,000 troops and took place in Spain, Portugal and Italy.

Second in order of scale was “Anakonda 2016,” a Polish-led exercise with 31,000 participating troops, focused on territorial defence. In 2007–2016, the U.S., UK, France, Germany and Italy were among the key contributors to the NATO exercises. In most cases, however, the biggest number of troops came from either host nations or countries whose units would be certified as joint NATO forces, such as NRF (as in the case of “Steadfast Jazz 2013” and “Trident Juncture 2015”) or a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).

Since 2008, Russia boosted the number of exercises conducted by all branches of its armed forces across the whole country, since one of the main goals of its military reform was to increase the combat readiness of its troops. According to official data provided by the Russian Ministry of Defence, in 2013 the main test of combat readiness were the “West ’13” drills, in which 10,000 soldiers from Belarus and 2,000 from Russia participated; in 2014, was “East ’14” (at the same time, largest ever exercises of their kind in the Asian part of Russia), attended by 155,000 troops; in 2016, “Centre ’15,” in which 95,000 soldiers took part; and in 2016, “Kavkaz ’16,” with 12,500 troops. However, according to many sources, Russia regularly understates the number of exercising troops to stay below the Vienna Document (VD) thresholds for notification of drills (above 9,000 troops) or required invitation of observers (above 13,000 troops). Russia has reportedly circumvented these provisions by splitting exercises into several smaller drills conducted under a joint command or through a series of exercises in short sequence.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, in 2013 Russia started to organise (for the first time in 20 years) “snap” exercises, which are not subject to the VD observation provisions unless they last longer than 72 hours. In 2013, Russia conducted five snap exercises, 12 in 2014, 13 in 2015, and in January-August 2016, 14 of them. Snap exercises may be an element of preparations for imminent combat operations. For instance, such exercises took place in the Western and Central Military Districts during the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and at various stages of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

In 2016, the Russian Ministry of Defence conducted at least five sudden, complex inspections of the combat readiness of troops. These involved all military districts and branches of the armed forces. Moreover, the scale of the Russian exercises in the analysed years (such as “East ’14” and “West ’13” and drills in the Arctic) implies that Russia has significantly increased its overall mobilisation capacity and improved procedures for the deployment of forces, thus increasing its ability to conduct expeditionary operations or reinforce various parts of Russian territory in case of a conflict.

## Deployments Abroad

In deployments abroad, there is a clear general trend and one outlier. The number of forces deployed outside their borders—both in and out of the OSCE area—was cut by five of the analysed states while Russia more than doubled it.

In the first half of the analysed period, about 30% of U.S. forces in Europe, including usually two out of four Europe-based brigades, were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Following the withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and reduction of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, its forces in Europe continued to support (mainly logistically and by enhancing interoperability with Allies) operations in the Middle East, albeit on a much smaller scale and without the use of major ground forces. As the U.S. began combat operations against ISIS in 2014, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) began to provide command and control, enablers and strike aircraft. Moreover, in 2008 the U.S. established the African Command,

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<sup>11</sup> Numbers based on data from NATO website and NATO Secretary General’s annual reports, 2014-2016.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the “Kavkaz ’16” exercise was reported to involve 120,000 troops instead of the 12,500 declared by Russia.

<sup>13</sup> K. Hicks, H. Conley *et al.*, *Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe: Phase II Report*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC, June 2016, pp. 16–17.

located in Europe but separate from EUCOM and responsible for operations in Africa.<sup>14</sup> In 2011, Europe-based U.S. forces contributed to the NATO air campaign in Libya, together with forces from France, Italy and the UK.

Between 2007 and 2016, the UK also reduced its deployments and operations outside the OSCE area following the scaling back of the British presence in Afghanistan (from 7,400 in ISAF to 450 troops in 2016 in RSM) and full withdrawal from Iraq (over 6,300 troops in 2007). In 2016, 550 UK troops were conducting counter-terrorist operations against ISIL. The UK also cut the number of its troops deployed in Europe: it continued the process of withdrawing from Germany (from over 21,000 troops in 2007 to 4,400 in 2016) and reduced contributions to operations such as KFOR in Kosovo (from around 150 to 1).

France reduced the number of troops abroad from 26,500 to 17,000, also due to the start of a homeland deployment in 2015 (up to 10,000 troops in response to the terrorist threat). Like the UK, France also withdrew its troops from missions in the Balkans (mostly from KFOR) and decreased troops stationed in Germany. In 2016, the biggest French deployment abroad was in the Sahel, where it sent up to 3,500 troops and 400 armoured personnel carriers. France also contributes to anti-ISIL operations with about 1,000 troops and 12 fighter aircraft.

By 2016, Italian deployments had shrunk from 7,500 troops in a number of international operations (the major ones were UNIFIL, KFOR, ISAF) to a much lower level of 4,100 troops (anti-ISIL operation, UNIFIL, RSM). Germany reduced its foreign, mainly peacekeeping deployments by two-thirds, from about 7,000 (3,000 in ISAF alone, as well as from KFOR) to 2,500 (RSM, remaining KFOR). Since 2015, Germany also has been contributing to the anti-ISIL coalition and in 2016 deployed six Tornado ECRs to Turkey and 123 trainers to Iraq.

In 2007–2016, the Russian military presence abroad increased significantly. In 2007, Russia deployed 24,370 troops, mainly in permanent bases abroad and, at the same time, contributed observers to 11 UN missions. The main Russian deployments in that year were inside the OSCE area: to Ukraine (13,000 to bases in Crimea), Tajikistan (5,500), Armenia (3,170), Moldova (1,200), Georgia (1,000) and Kyrgyzstan (500). Russian Armed Forces engaged in 2008 in a conflict with Georgia, and since 2014 with Ukraine. The Russian deployments expanded by 2016, when Russia more than doubled its forces abroad to up to 55,300 troops while also deploying observers in seven UN and two OSCE missions. By 2016, the number of Russian troops had almost tripled in Ukraine (34,000).<sup>15</sup> That same year, the number of Russian troops in Georgia was seven times higher than in 2007, or 7,000, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Also in 2016, the Russian presence in Armenia slightly increased (to 3,300), while its presence in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan remained at the same level. In 2015, Russia began its first operation outside the OSCE-area, in Syria, where it put 4,000 troops (2016).

A separate trend started only in 2014, when NATO countries began continuous rotations to Central and Eastern Europe. They initially focused on reassurance of Allies in the region and exercises, and shifted towards deterrence after 2016. The U.S. has been the biggest contributor and further increased its presence in 2017, mostly by deploying a 4,000-strong ABCT and contributing another 1,000 troops to a NATO battalion-size battle group in Poland. This marks a steep change: before 2014, the American presence in the region was limited mainly to periodic training deployments in Bulgaria and Romania (since 2008) and Poland (since 2010). Separately, the U.S. has been contributing to the NATO ballistic missile defence system, under the European Phased Adaptive Approach, announced in 2009 (an Aegis Ashore site in Romania was completed in 2015 and a second one in Poland will be ready in 2018).

Western European states have supported the NATO initiatives on the Eastern Flank, too. Starting in 2015, the UK contributed a regular deployment of company-size units to Poland and the Baltic states. In 2017, a UK-led NATO battalion-size battle group was deployed to Estonia with 800 troops, augmented by France with a company-size unit (300 troops). In May 2017, 160 Italian troops will join the NATO battle group in Latvia, and Germany contributes 450 troops to a similar group in Lithuania, while the UK sends a company-size element to Poland (150 troops).<sup>16</sup> In the period 2014–2016, all these countries, as well as the U.S., continued to support NATO's "Baltic Air Policing" (BAP) mission.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in 2013 the U.S. established a task force in Spain and Italy with up to 1,000 Marines for crisis response, training and exercises in Africa.

<sup>15</sup> The number for 2013 is reported to stand at 13,000, for 2014—at 20,000 and for 2015—at 28,000; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance*, Taylor & Francis, London 2014–2016.

<sup>16</sup> Data according to *NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Factsheet*, May 2017, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/144032.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/144032.htm).

## Conclusions

There is one clear conclusion from this study: while a unifying trend can be identified for each analytical category, closer analysis shows the Russian force posture tends to be opposite to trends involving the U.S. and Western European states. The contrast between the divergence could not be starker. While Russia has demonstrated consistency and commitment in shaping its force posture towards high-intensity conventional operations inside the OSCE area, the evolution of the other analysed states' force posture was uneven and largely guided by an urgent need to balance fiscal pressure with investments required to effectively engage in crisis-management operations. Only since 2014 has this approach started to change and more attention paid to territorial defence.

Beyond doubt, Russian force posture has been developed with an eye mostly on high-intensity conventional operations in the OSCE area. The steady growth of military expenditures allowed for the ambitious modernisation of its armed forces, as envisioned in the 2011-2020 rearmament programme. Despite some cuts, Russia has maintained the most military personnel in Europe. Although it is less than the number of overall U.S. personnel, it has more troops than France, Germany, Italy, UK and U.S. forces based in Europe altogether. Russia has made relatively the smallest reductions in the five core categories of equipment decisive in high-intensity military operations. What is more, it visibly upgraded its high-end capabilities, including a unique set of Anti-Access/Area Denial systems, which it has deployed in the heart of the OSCE area—the Baltic and Black Sea regions. Russia managed also to move the bulk of its conventional forces to high readiness, tested through regular, large-scale exercises, including “snap” drills, through which it has mastered the elements of high-intensity military operations, such as rapid mobilisation and movement of forces over large distances.

At the same time, the U.S. and Western European states analysed in this paper had a downward trend in their military expenditures while they were trying to recover from the fiscal crisis. Since they all were also engaged in costly crisis-management operations outside of the OSCE area (mostly in Afghanistan but also other theatres), hard choices regarding replacing legacy weapons systems with new ones had to be made. As a result, whole categories of capabilities were cut sometimes by half or more, or even completely withdrawn from service (such as the older British aircraft carriers, decommissioned before new vessels entered service). Exercises served mostly to keep the interoperability of forces within NATO and lacked significance as political messaging instruments. Only the developments of 2014 made France, Germany, Italy, the UK and U.S. revise their approach to shaping their force posture. Cuts in military expenditures were stopped in 2015 and first steps taken to regain some lost capabilities, mostly heavy land platforms; some NATO exercises were also refocused on territorial defence scenarios. So far, these changes do not alter the overall trend of reductions in the capacity of the U.S. and the analysed Western European states to engage in high-intensity conventional warfare in the OSCE area. For that, time is needed as well as consistency and commitment in investing in the relevant evolution of force posture. As of today, the new deployments in the Eastern Flank of NATO have little effect on the overall picture of force posture in the OSCE area.

The growing disparity between the two trends has negatively affected security in the OSCE area throughout the entire period of 2007–2016, and, at the end of the day, produced a vast imbalance in force posture in Europe. This observation is crucial for an understanding of both the sources and the implications of the current elevated concern about the likelihood of a military conflict in the OSCE area displayed by some OSCE participating States.

The decomposition of the security environment in the OSCE area did not begin with the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, the start of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, or, importantly, with the response of NATO members through deployments to the Eastern Flank. It has been a process with roots that can be traced back far earlier than 2014, probably to a period even before the analysed decade, when the two trends emerged. Further, the imbalance in force posture in Europe should be considered one harbinger of Russia's use of force against Ukraine in 2014, though to what extent remains a question outside the scope of this paper.

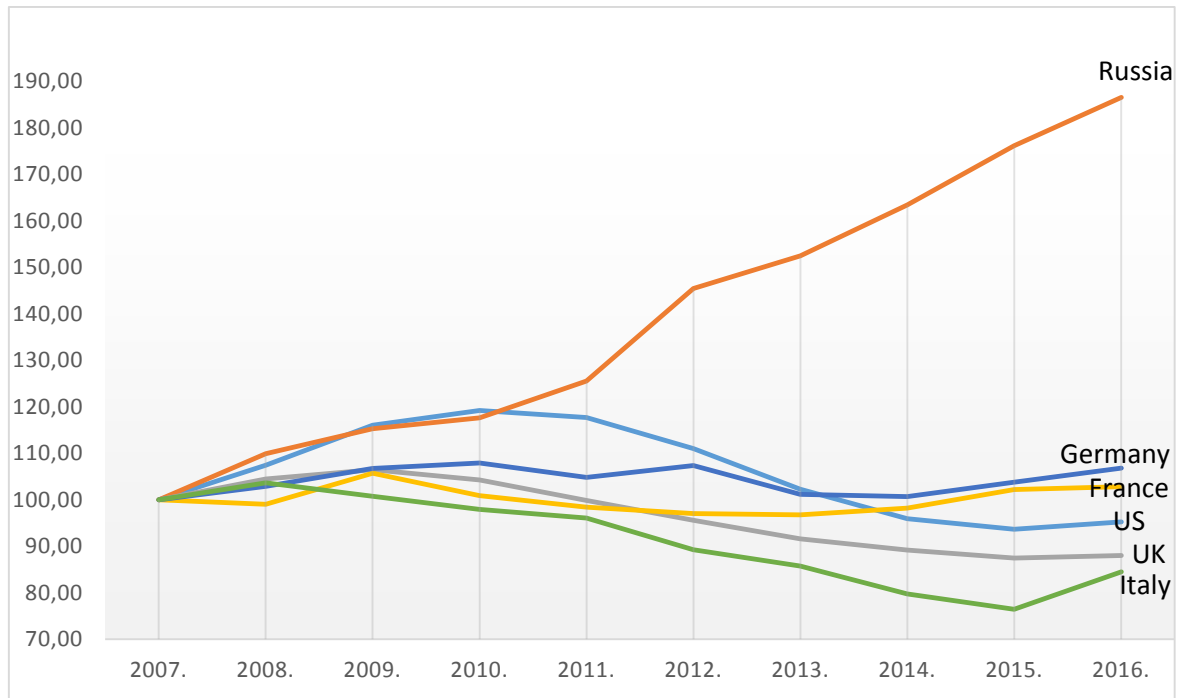
The two identified trends and the resulting imbalance exacerbates the problem of improperly functioning OSCE instruments, which were established to lower the risk of conventional conflict in Europe by military transparency and arms control. Most of these simply do not correspond to the current force posture in the OSCE area. While discussions about possible new instruments are required, they should not be conducted at the expense of more immediate needs, and any new treaty on conventional arms control in Europe would likely take years to negotiate. Hence, quick fixes are



what is needed to make the remaining confidence- and security-building instruments (mainly the Vienna Document) better reflect the situation in force posture to which they are related. Otherwise, the OSCE as such risks continuation of a stalemate and a further downgrade of its ability to ensure stability of the security situation in Europe. Meanwhile, any political initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue in the OSCE on security issues, such as Structured Dialogue, should take full account of the overall picture of force posture in the OSCE area, to which this paper is a humble contribution.

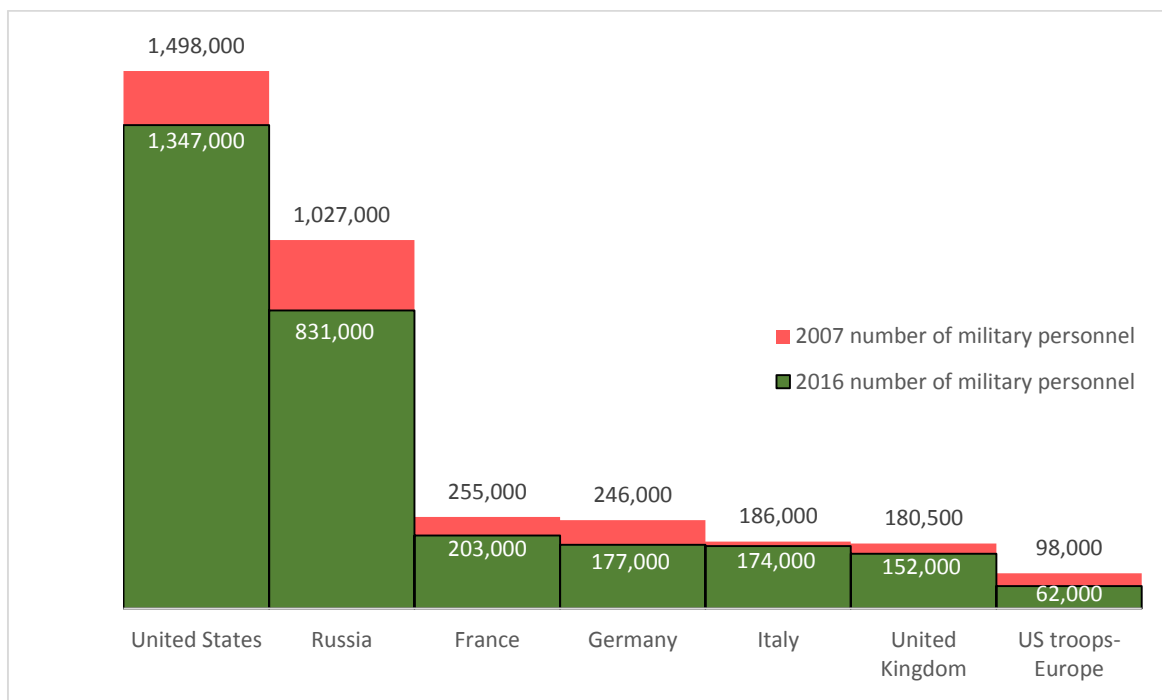
## Appendix

**Figure 1. Dynamics of military expenditures of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and the U.S. (2007=100, in constant prices, USD, 2015)**



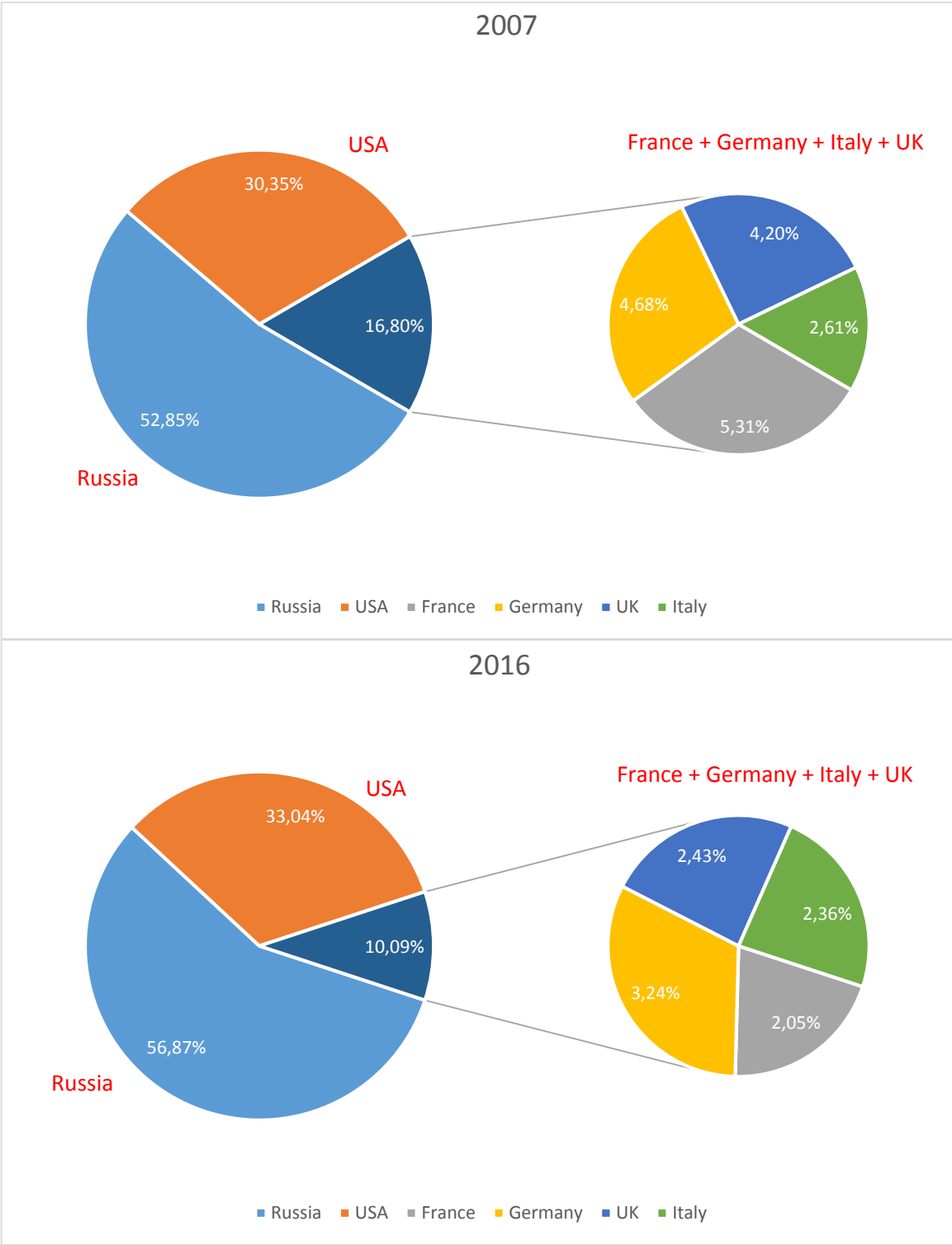
Source: own calculations based on SIPRI Military Expenditures Database 1949–2016.

**Figure 2. Overall military personnel for the six countries and U.S. troops permanently stationed in Europe, 2007 and 2016**



Source: own calculations based on "Military Balance," Taylor & Francis, London 2008–2017.

**Figure 3. Shares of the five categories of combat military equipment (main battle tanks, artillery, armoured combat vehicles, combat aircraft, attack helicopters) in 2007 and 2016**



Source: own calculations based on “Military Balance,” Taylor & Francis, London 2008–2017. These categories of equipment are related to but do not necessarily meet the definitions of Treaty Limited Equipment from the CFE treaty.

**Table 1. Military expenditures of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and the U.S.**

	Military expenditures, constant prices (2015), thousands of USD	
	2007	2016
France	54,164	55,681
Germany	38,364	40,985
Italy	33,114	27,966
Russia	37,698	70,345
United Kingdom	61,610	54,217
United States	636,674	606,233

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditures Database 1949–2016.

**Table 2. Number of main battle tanks, artillery and armoured combat vehicles of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and the U.S.**

	Main battle tanks			Artillery			Armoured combat vehicles (infantry fighting vehicles, armoured personnel carriers & assault vehicles)		
	2007	2016	change	2007	2016	change	2007	2016	change
France	968	200	-79,3%	787	262	-66,7%	5,000	3,191	-36,2%
Germany	2,035	306	-85,0%	1,364	223	-83,7%	4,518	1,821	-59,7%
Italy	320	160	-50,0%	1,562	994	-36,4%	1,932	1,528	-20,9%
Russia	23,341	20,450	-12,4%	30,776	28,382	-7,8%	26,810	21,632	-19,3%
UK	386	227	-41,2%	877	592	-32,5%	4,968	1,924	-61,3%
US	8023	6,331	-21,1%	8041	6,833	-15,0%	26,650	24,423	-8,4%

Source: own calculations based on "Military Balance," Taylor & Francis, London 2008–2017.

**Table 3. Number of combat capable aircraft, attack helicopters, transport aircraft of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and the U.S.**

	Combat capable aircraft			Attack helicopters			Transport aircraft (heavy, medium, tanker/transport)		
	2007	2016	change	2007	2016	change	2010	2016	change
France	376	394	4,8%	276	55	-80,1%	71	57	-19,7%
Germany	298	209	-29,9%	192	42	-78,1%	84	49	-41,7%
Italy	267	268	0,4%	60	43	-28,3%	38	37	-2,6%
Russia	2,105	1,175	-44,2%	676	348	-48,5%	199	178	-10,6%
UK	354	279	-21,2%	67	50	-25,4%	72	57	-20,8%
US	4,163	3,471	-16,6%	1,192	760	-36,2%	868	746	-14,1%

Source: own calculations based on "Military Balance," Taylor & Francis, London 2008–2017.

**Table 4. Number of principal surface combatants and tactical submarines of France, Germany, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and the U.S.**

	Principal surface combatants			Tactical submarines		
	2007	2016	change	2007	2016	change
France	35	24	-31,4%	6	6	0%
Germany	17	15	-11,8%	12	6	-50%
Italy	25	19	-24,0%	7	7	0%
Russia	62	33	-46,8%	52	49	-5,8%
UK	28	19	-32,1%	9	7	-22,2%
US	114	103	-9,6%	57	54	-5,2%

Source: own calculations based on "Military Balance," Taylor & Francis, London 2008–2017.