

## Euro-Atlantic Area

### Western countries and the Ukrainian Conflict

British Defence Secretary [Michael Fallon said](#) that the UK would send non-lethal aid worth £850 000 to Ukraine. He also mentioned that his country would continue its support Ukraine's integrity and sovereignty. Despite strong voices from Republicans and Democrats, president Barack Obama is still [undecided](#) whether to supply Ukraine with arms. Unlike the politicians, [Lt. Gen. Hodges stands against](#) arming Ukraine. He pointed out the importance of diplomatic tools in order to solve the conflict. Regardless of lethal aid question, the U.S. will provide another kind of support. [Ukraine will receive military gear](#) including 230 HMMWV vehicles, ambulance vehicles and small recon drones worth \$75 million.



HMMWV vehicle (source: [Wikimedia](#)).

### Iraqi Crisis and the Islamic State

The situation in Iraq and Syria concerning fighting and spreading of the Islamic state did not get much better even last month. On the contrary, Russia warned that [ISIS had spread to Afghanistan](#), therefore, Moscow urged the UN Security Council to stop the expansion of jihadists. Afghanistan has been since Soviet Union's invasion during the Cold War an unstable state controlled

by warlords who were once fighters against Soviet soldiers. This security environment thus represents perfect conditions for ISIS operations. Moreover, the ISIS was accused by the UN Human Right Council of committing [genocide on Yazidi](#) minority group in Northern Iraq. The not improving conditions regarding ISIS is also underlined by statements of the U.S. Joint Chiefs who stated that they could not rule out the [possibility of deployment](#) of the U.S. ground troops alongside with Syrian rebels against ISIS. According to them, it would make easier to identify the targets precisely. What's more, the support of U.S. citizens for this step has been [the highest so far](#) - 62 % in the contrast to only 47 % in the last month. Surprisingly, also [Vatican expressed its approval](#) to similar step. However, until the decision about this deployment will be made, coalition relies on the training for Syrian militants. The first 1,800 rebels have been screened and [400 have already been approved for training](#) in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan. The screening comprises of collecting biometrics data to identify the chosen rebels and find out whether they are in the international database of wanted terrorists. The U.S. aims to train 5,000 militants over the next three years.

There is also ongoing training of Iraqi forces. Nevertheless, [a scandal occurred](#) when controversial photos of non-uniformed Iraqi troops showing torturing, murdering or executing prisoners were posted in the social media. The Iraqi government still investigates the authenticity of photos.

In the meantime, [Canadian premier Harper approved extended mandate](#) for its troops in the Middle East. Alongside with the U.S., Canada is the only NATO member that is willing to launch air strikes against ISIS in Syria. Harper was, however,

[criticized by opposition that he is leading Canada in a war](#) without any specific aim.

### North America

There has been [a suggestion](#) that the operation *Atlantic Resolve* might be extended to countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Georgia. *Atlantic Resolve* which represents military exercises in Poland, Baltic states, Bulgaria and Romania and shows the U.S. commitment of support to its NATO allies could connect troops from the Baltic Sea all across Europe to the Black Sea. [In the meantime](#), the U.S. sent another 750 tanks and other military vehicles to the Baltics as a contribution to the planned three-month exercise after which the troops and equipment will be re-deployed in a number of European countries. In the second half of this month, some U.S. troops stationed in Europe took part in a convoy called *„Dragoon Ride“* which should have demonstrated the U.S. commitment to European partners. The convoy consisted of soldiers and vehicles, including Strykers, from *2nd Cavalry Regiment* that were deployed in the Baltics, and supported by members of *18th Military Police Brigade* and *16th Sustainment Brigade*. *Dragoons* headed back to their home base in Vilseck, Germany, across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic. [They were warmly welcomed](#) by citizens of these countries who could meet those soldiers and see their equipment. Although there were some worries about planned demonstrations in the Czech Republic, the protests were marginal and did not influence the ride.

The U.S. Navy has been dealing with possible future [shortfall of its strike fighters](#) F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet which should have been replaced in the near future by the new

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aircraft F-35C. However, due to delays in procurement of F-35s, the first of them are not scheduled to reach initial operating capability until 2018 and full production of 20 aircraft per year and their entrance into service will take another 2-4 years after that. Therefore, the Navy has two options - extend the service life of existing aircraft or other more of them. The Navy operates with 'legacy' F/A-18C Hornet and newer types F/A-18E/F a EA-18G Growler whose increased operating tempos due to combat operations against the Islamic State slice their flying hours faster than it was expected. Thus there should be [a study](#) by this summer setting whether the extension of service life from 6,000 to 10,000 flying hours would be even possible. According to the Chief of Naval Operations adm. Jonathan Greenert, the shortfall will be 36 fast jets. It can be assumed that new Super Hornet could be purchased, however, the question is whether the Congress will be willing to provide requested funding.



The U.S. F/A-18 Super Hornet (source: [Wikimedia](#)).

In the context of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, president Barack Obama with his Afghan counterpart Ashraf Ghani [reaffirmed](#) the bilateral security deal and agreed to slow the U.S. troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. This step is the result of Ghani's concerns that his country could end up in the same security collapse which has been seen in Iraq after the U.S. troops withdrawal. Therefore, there will be 10, 000 U.S.

troops in Afghanistan at the end of this year instead of reducing their numbers into half. Obama, however, holds still firm to his long-term plan of sustaining a small contingent of 1,000 troops to protect the U.S. embassy and advise the Afghan government and military after 2016.

## Continental Europe

The uncertain future of the British defence budget above the NATO recommended limit 2% of GDP has been lately discussed not only in the United Kingdom, but also by its partners. The U.S. Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno [expressed his concerns](#) that there might be a British brigade inside an American division, or even a British battalion inside an American brigade instead of working alongside. He added that both countries have to make sure they can still work together, also because the UK is the U.S. key ally with the same goals. NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also [made a comment](#) to the British Prime Minister that the Alliance is counting on the UK's leadership and issued a challenge to continue spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence if Cameron would be re-elected. According to the think tank RUSI director Malcolm Chalmers, British defence cuts will continue even after the May's general elections regardless what party will win. The most optimistic scenario is that the MoD might have to find about £35 billion in savings in the next 10 years whereas the most pessimistic scenario could see savings of £74 billion over the same period. [Moreover](#), gen. Nick Houghton, the Chief of the Defence Staff, warned late last year that failure to boost spending would damage force structures here. Cameron's government started those cuts in 2010 based on the strategic review (SDSR) whose purpose was to balance budget

rather than enhance capabilities of its armed forces.

Despite these cuts, the UK [plans to invest](#) £180 million into defence of Falkland Islands over the next 10 years. British defence minister Michael Fallon said the UK would deploy two Chinook helicopters in the area which should allow a swift and decisive response to any emerging incidents. Moreover, the UK will install an enhanced communications system at the military headquarters at *Mount Pleasant*, invest into infrastructure of *Mare Harbour* as well as replace the Rapier air defence missiles by a new system for which it started to look for a suitable [contractor](#). There will remain continuous naval patrolling, 1,200 currently deployed soldiers and four Typhoons. [Boosting defence](#) of Falkland Islands is the result of a review which came as a reaction to rumours that Argentina, which still lays claims to the islands, wants to buy Russian strike fighters Su-24.

In the meantime, [According to Finnish president Niinistö](#), possible Finnish membership in NATO could become a tool in Finland's upcoming elections. [Public surveys in Finland suggest that](#) a slightly more than half of the population is against it. On the other hand, 72 % Finns prefer to decide in referendum. Another defence matter has popped up in [Sweden that intends to buy](#) two submarines in order to improve its ASW capabilities. Sweden wants to learn from the last year incident when unknown submarine - possibly Russian one - entered its coastal waters. [According to Swedish intelligence SAPO](#), Russia is the biggest threat to Swedish national security. SAPO claims that one third of Russian diplomatic staff is intelligence officers. [Also Norway](#) wants to boost its defence capabilities. Government will speed up its modernization programme called *Smart Defence* with additional \$1,6 billion. The main goal is to build rapid response forces

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capable of operating in the north. It also aims to establish joint communications network in order to improve communication between each armed forces branches. Another Scandinavian country, Denmark has been a target to possible Russian threats. Eight months ago, Denmark announced it would join NATO's anti-missile defence program by installing special radar equipment on one or more of its frigates. Last month, [Russian ambassador Vanin said](#) that by this decision Danish frigates had become a legitimate target for Russian nuclear missiles. In the same month, [NATO fighters intercepted](#) Russian TU-22 bombers (capable of carrying nuclear weapons) with Su-27 fighters escort. They were spotted over Baltic heading towards Denmark with supersonic speed.



Russian strike fighter Su-27 (source: [Wikimedia](#)).

In response to recent security events, [German government has decided](#) to boost its defence spending by 6,2 % (€8 billion) over the next five years, starting in 2016. Additional money will be used for reform of German armed forces in order to provide possible much wider engagement within NATO. Another Alliance member, Poland, has been concerned about Russian assertive politics towards Europe. [According to Polish Gen. Koziej](#), Poland has become a hybrid war victim. He claims that Russian state media are bending Russian opinion about Poland by stating that Poland helped train Maidan extremists and sent its armed forces to Ukraine. Moscow is also

keeping the pressure on Poland by dislocating its Iskander missiles in Kalinigrad area.

To counter this behaviour, Poland continues to build its conventional deterrent. Last month, [Warsaw announced its intention](#) to arm its submarines with cruise missiles, possibly Tomahawks.

There was another crashed plane tragedy in Europe this month. Airbus A320 from Germanwings Company crashed on March 4<sup>th</sup> on its way from Barcelona to Dusseldorf. [According to black boxes](#), 27 years old co-pilot locked himself in cockpit and crashed the airplane intentionally, killing all 150 passengers. Investigators later found medical reports which proved that co-pilot Andreas Lubitz had suffered by depressions and that he were not fit to flight.

## North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

More than [half a dozen exercises](#) are going to be held during this year by NATO and they should involve 25,000 allied troops. One of the maritime exercises, [Standing NATO Maritime Group Two](#), was seen in the Black Sea and aimed to improve interoperability with Romanian and Bulgarian armed forces. The exercise also meant [reassurance of local allies](#) and NATO's commitment to the region.



Allied warships during the NATO's *Standing NATO Maritime Group Two* in the Baltic Sea (source: [NATO](#)).

In March, NATO also hold [the annual conference](#) focused current threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Participants from more than 50 countries changed their opinions in an informal forum that took place for the first time outside Europe - Dauha. Report from this conference is available [here](#).

Meanwhile, [Greece becomes closer to Russia than ever](#). Alliance warned that it could slow the decision process as Greece could veto any reaction to Russian aggression, for example in the Baltic area. The country is now governed by a far-left party and its prime minister Tsipras is going to visit Putin in April.

Finally, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasized that even a [cyber-attack could be understand as a trigger for Article 5](#) of the Washington Treaty concerning collective defence. Stoltenberg also warned that NATO needs a good early-warning system to recognize possible hybrid attacks and activate so-called spear-head forces as soon as possible.

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