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Western countries and the Ukrainian conflict

Canada decided to join the UK and the U.S. and send about 200 military instructors to Ukraine to train its armed forces. The training will include explosive ordinance disposal, military police tactics, field medicine, flight safety and logistics. The deployment will start this summer and end on March 31, 2017. Canada has only engaged in sending non-lethal aid so far and sent its fast jets and warships in the Eastern Europe. This decision was immediately criticized by Russia that called this step "counterproductive and deplorable". In the middle of April, almost 300 U.S. paratroopers started training of 900 Ukrainian soldiers from the national guard as part of the six-month [Operation Fearless Guardian](#). Soldiers from both countries will hold joint exercises to boost capabilities of Ukrainian armed forces which are poorly trained and equipped. According to Russia, this operation could destabilise the peace talks with rebels in the east of the country. Last but not least, there has been growing pressure on U.S. president Barack Obama who is still reluctant to send lethal aid to Ukraine. Besides the U.S. Congress and many politicians across the international community, the former NATO commander [admiral James Stavridis](#) also supports this initiative. He said that if the Ukrainian government was not able to send their troops against the separatists, it would lose politically.

Iraqi crisis and the Islamic state

When the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State (ISIS) had won back up to 35 % [of ISIS controlled territories](#), Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi visited

Washington to settle down following steps in defeating the Islamic state. Nevertheless, jihadists meanwhile [seized three cities near Ramadi](#) in Anbar province along with [oil fields around Beiji city](#) and therefore attracted coalition's attention. It was also said that [Libya may become a new focus area of ISIS](#) as it has become basically a failed state after the end of NATO's airstrike mission against Gaddafi regime in 2011. Having two weak governments, the country is mostly controlled by warlords and faces hundreds of refugees every day. Moreover, Libya is also very attractive to ISIS due to its oilfields. Another example of potential ISIS focus area may be Syria, if Assad's regime fails to counter the pressure of rebels that are supported by the U.S.



Speaking of Syrian rebels, Turkey has pointed out [the U.S delay of training of the rebels](#) which was supposedly caused by the geographical distance. Furthermore, some of the rebels have decided to stay in their homeland to defend it against jihadists. There is also a concern about protection of the rebels - the U.S. ponders about deploying special protection forces, however, in the case of open fire between rebels and government forces, the U.S. could be pulled in the Syrian civil war. The latest news informs about the [training of the first 200 rebels](#) which should start in May in Turkey, despite the fact that Turkey does not agree with the U.S. about their deployment. According to Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, although the priority is fighting against ISIS, the rebels could be also used

against President Assad's regime. Finally, [4,000 Iraqi troops have been trained so far](#) by coalition's military instructors which also evolved a debate about [training Iraqi special forces](#) that could help to identify potential targets for more precious airstrikes. Critics oppose this initiative though and say that false identification could occur and the U.S. should back this plan up by extra personnel that would check the identified targets.

North America

[According to reports](#) by Der Spiegel and The Intercept, the Ramstein airbase in Germany has been serving as the centre of controversial U.S. drone strikes in Africa and the Middle East. This reports also refer to documents which reveal that the German government has known about expanding this programme on German territory since its start in 2011, although Germany has always claimed that it has "no confirmed knowledge" of these American activities. Magazines based their reports on information provided by an anonymous U.S. source who said that signals for drones were transmitted from Ramstein. Last year the airbase was also associated with receiving live pictures of the attacks which were analyzed and compared with information from intelligence agencies. The U.S. president Barack Obama, however, still claimed that the U.S. did not use Germany as a launching point for their drones used in counterterrorism operations. In the meantime, the U.S. and Japan have unveiled new rules for [their defence cooperation](#) which give Japanese armed forces greater global role as China rises its power and influence in the region. The cooperation includes defence against ballistic missiles, cyber and cosmic attacks or naval security. Based on these guidelines, Japan could, for example, help the U.S. forces

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threatened by a third country or deploy minesweeper ships to a mission in the Middle East. Therefore, these measures could allow Japan to take a considerable part in U.S. operations in which Japan has only had an indirect role so far. [This initiative](#) is based on a Japanese cabinet resolution from last July that aims to re-interpret its pacifist constitution which now newly includes so-called "collective defence".



In April the U.S. has also experienced [violent protests in Baltimore](#) as a reaction to the death of a young black man Freddie Gray who died due to injuries [during a police arrest](#). The head of local police department admitted later that Gray had not received quick medical care and this incident has been under investigation. Riots were unleashed after Gray's funeral who became the latest national symbol of police brutality which has been heavily discussed in the U.S. nowadays. Citizens of Baltimore attacked police officers by throwing battles and stones, set cars on fire and shattered store windows. Therefore, the Governor of Maryland [activated the National Guard](#) and Baltimore's mayor announced a curfew for all residents. These riots are considered to be the biggest ones since the protests in Ferguson last year where a police officer shot to death young black teenager Michael Brown.

Continental Europe

UK-led naval exercise called *Joint Warrior 15-1* took place in Scotland and in the sea off its coast on 11th to

24th April whose purpose was to strengthen interoperability between allies and their land, air and naval forces. In total, 55 warships and submarines from 14 NATO countries, 70 aircraft and 13,000 personnel participated in the exercise. [Its main training scenarios](#) were anti-submarine warfare, small-boat attacks or tactical maneuvers. NATO's Standing Naval Forces took part in *Joint Warrior 15-1* as well and tested their anti-air and anti-submarine warfare skills and conducted mine counter-measures training in advance of amphibious landings. [The exercise](#) which is held twice a year - in April and October - was considered as a successful one also thanks to its competitive essence due to a range of wargames. *Joint Warrior 15.1* was held during current tension in international affairs caused by Russian annexation of Crimea and followed by Ukrainian crisis. However, [NATO officials claim](#) that the exercise was not a deliberate response to the Russian military's increasingly assertive behaviour towards NATO allies. In the meantime, continuous airstrikes against Islamic state which are also conducted by the Royal Air Force, prompted British Ministry of Defence to open negotiations to procure more Paveway IV bombs for their Tornado GR.4 fighter jets. The potential quantity of these weapons has not been revealed, nevertheless, Raytheon UK which is their producer considers this demand as one of the potential business wins this year. Previously, the British government placed several Paveway IV orders in the aftermath of the NATO air campaign in Libya in 2011. April became a symbol of strengthening defence across a number of European countries. Alerted by aggressive Russian foreign policy, NORDEFCO countries pledged to [step up their military cooperation](#) in joint declaration signed by all of its members. NORDEFCO plans are, for

example, to hold joint military exercises or make joint arms procurements. [Sweden itself will boost its defence spending](#) by 1.2 billion USD in years 2016-2020. Meanwhile, Poland is about to buy eight missile batteries of Raytheon's air defence system Patriot by 2025. Two missile batteries as a part of 5 billion USD deal should be delivered within three years after the contract is signed. Poland takes also next step in another arms deal worth almost 3 billion USD. *Airbus helicopters* with its H225M Caracal is the only company left in the Polish tender for 50 multi-role helicopters. Caracals will now be a subject to military testing. [Slovakia also buys multi-role helicopters](#). Sikorski with its UH-60M Black Hawk sells 9 helicopters worth 261 million USD to Slovakia. Bratislava continues its way to lower its own dependence on Russian maintenance. Moreover, Slovakia is in talks with Sweden on leasing Gripen fighter jets as a possible replacement for its MiG-29s. [The Czech Republic will expand its military personnel](#) from current 16,000 troops to as much as 27,000 troops by 2025. This goes alongside with increasing budget that should be boosted from current 41 billion Czech crowns to 71.5 billion in 2020. Its neighbour, [Germany](#), has decided to buy back 100 used Leopard tanks from its defence industry. These tanks were kept in storage as surplus equipment. This 22 million euro contract includes their modernization up to the same standard version.



France is another European country which in the context of the Ukrainian

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crisis and terrorist attacks in Paris plans to strengthen its defence. According to French President Francois Hollande, [France will increase its defence spending](#) in years 2016-2019 by nearly 4 billion euro in order to counter extremism. More than 7,000 troops which were deployed after the terrorist attacks to protect sensitive sites across France will stay on their positions permanently. [Greek Prime Minister Tsipiras was meanwhile negotiating possible purchase](#) of new missiles for their S-300 defence systems in Moscow. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Tsipiras, however, did not ask for money needed for the debt crisis that has been struggling Greece lately. In this case, [Greece demanded war reparations from Germany](#). It calls for 278 billion euro in war payments as a consequence of the Second World War events when Germany occupied Greece. Nevertheless, according to German finance Minister Gabriel, this matter was closed for good by treaties signed in 1960 and 1990. Another [humanitarian tragedy took place in the Mediterranean Sea](#). A ship with estimated 900 migrants sailing from northern Africa to Italy sank with almost everybody on board. Italian authorities managed to save only 27 passengers including crew members. The captain and his first mate will face charges for favouring illegal immigration and the captain will be extra charged for reckless multiple homicide. As a reaction to this catastrophe, the European Union called up an emergency meeting regarding immigration. The meeting also dealt with the end of Italian operation *Mare Nostrum* which should be replaced by the EU's operation *Triton* in the following months. Human trafficking across Mediterranean Sea is also included in [a new Italian White paper](#). This defence document calls for taking a leading maritime role in the region and Italy plans to use drones in

order to monitor smugglers movement and is willing to use its own fighter jets for striking these smugglers.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

The NATO-Russian relationship still remains cold after NATO released [a new guideline](#) for its partner states (currently 41 countries) which limits the number of delegates in the Brussels' headquarters to 30 people. Countries will have nine months to meet up the guideline, although this new rule affects only Russia due to their 50 delegates. This high number raises suspicions in NATO that those people might be agents. Russia has not reacted to the decision yet. Moreover, the relationship has become more strained when Russia claimed again that the NATO anti-missile defence system is directed against its territory. Therefore, Alliance released [an official statement](#) where it argues that the system acts as a protection against ballistic missiles, mainly from Iran. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former NATO Secretary General, [warned](#) against the Russian concept of so-called hybrid war which is according to him more dangerous than the previous tactics of Soviet Union. NATO should, therefore, re-evaluate its perception of aggression. Moreover, Rasmussen has stressed out that Russia uses financial connections to European political parties to manipulate with public opinion. The tension between Russia and NATO has launched a new concept of allied forces called *Spear-head forces* which are about to deploy in Baltic states. These forces underwent [Noble Jump exercise in April](#) to test their high readiness which set to 48 hours since announcement of movement. Alliance itself has launched other exercises two of which

were held in Estonia. The first one, [Trident Jaguar](#), lasted for a week and tested of Special operation forces. The second one, [Locked Shields](#), was an annual exercise focusing on cyber security. This year, sixteen nations participated in it. Meanwhile, Norway became the leading country of the [air policing mission in Baltic states](#). Norwegian pilots cooperate with their British counterparts while Belgium and Italy continue their mission. All four countries will remain in the area till August 2015.



European Union

The European Commission agreed on boosting cooperation between member states and EU agencies in combating terrorism and launched a [new five-year EU security strategy](#). Its key challenges are preventing terrorism and countering radicalisation, fighting organised crime and fighting cybercrime. Among the proposed measures are the establishment of a European counter-terrorist centre, the launch of an EU forum on IT to encourage greater cooperation between member states and the IT sector and increased funding for agencies such as the European Criminal Records Information System. [Due to](#) emerging mainly cross-border threats, the powers of Europol should also be enhanced.