

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Steadfast Jazz 2013: U.S. Lackluster Contribution Undermines U.S. Interests in Eastern Europe

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On November 2–9, NATO will conduct a military training exercise called Steadfast Jazz. The exercise will be held in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. According to NATO, the primary purpose of the exercise is to train and certify the NATO Response Force.

Many NATO partners view Steadfast Jazz as one of the most important NATO training events in recent memory. It is also seen as an opportunity for the U.S. to demonstrate its commitment to transatlantic security now that 10,000 U.S. troops will leave their permanent bases in Europe. The U.S. decision to send only 200 troops to Steadfast Jazz sends the wrong message to allies and potential adversaries alike and ultimately undermines U.S. interests in the region.

**Why Steadfast Jazz Matters.** Steadfast Jazz 2013 will be the final, and one of the largest, components of a series of 18 exercises, parts of which have taken place across 14 countries. Steadfast Jazz is important for three main reasons:

1. Steadfast Jazz 2013 is one of the largest NATO joint exercises since the end of the Cold War and the largest live-fire exercise since 2006. It will include over 6,000 personnel from NATO

members and non-NATO partners, such as Ukraine, Sweden, and Finland. In addition, the exercises are taking place in a region of Europe where there is a real fear of external aggression.

2. As its mission in Afghanistan comes to a close, NATO is at a crossroads. A recommitment toward collective defense of the member states should be the primary objective of NATO after its combat mission in Afghanistan ends. Steadfast Jazz will serve as a unifying force for the member states, orient the alliance toward the core purpose of collective defense, and test the military ability of the alliance to fulfill its Article 5 mission. As General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, stated, Steadfast Jazz “marks the start of our increased emphasis on readiness and collective training as NATO’s focus shifts from being deployed to being ready.”<sup>1</sup>
3. This is the first major NATO exercise since President Barack Obama announced the so-called Asian pivot and that the U.S. would significantly reduce its troop presence in Europe. Friend and adversary alike are reading the minimal contribution of the United States to the exercises as continued U.S. disengagement in transatlantic security.

**Testing the Rotational Force Concept.** When the decision was announced in 2011 to bring two brigade combat teams (BCTs) home from Europe, the Administration said that the reduction in capability would be replaced with a U.S.-based BCT that would rotate forces, normally at the battalion level, to

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Europe for training missions when necessary. This move has unsettled America's allies because, clearly, a rotational battalion does not offer the same capability as two permanently Europe-based BCTs.

Of the 200 soldiers the U.S. is sending to the Steadfast Jazz exercise, only approximately 40 are from the U.S.-based BCT earmarked to rotate forces to Europe. Needless to say, many of America's allies are questioning the rotational force concept that the Obama Administration has used to justify the reduction in U.S. forces in Europe.

**Why Russia Matters.** With the Cold War over, Russia no longer poses a direct military threat to Europe, but for some NATO members, Russia is still a force driver in military planning.

Estonia was the target of a cyber attack in 2007 that was thought to have originated in Russia. Lithuania has been the victim of natural gas price hikes by Russia. Russia has undertaken large training exercises in the west of the country in recent years, including Zapad 2009 and the most recent Zapad 2013. Both exercises took place in Belarus and the Western Military District of Russia. Zapad 2009 simulated a nuclear strike on Warsaw, and Zapad 2013 likely consisted of 70,000 troops when counting the Russian troops from other military districts indirectly participating in the exercise.

The Zapad 2013 exercise also highlighted the growing military and political partnership between Russia and Belarus, which is viewed as a particular concern for Lithuania. According to the Russians, the scenario of Zapad 2013 envisioned the "deterioration of relations between states due to inter-ethnic, and ethno-religious controversies, and territorial claims." The thin veneer of this scenario, however, barely masks the fact that NATO was the unstated adversary in Zapad 2013.

For many in the Baltic region, Russia's Zapad exercise is seen through the lens of five decades of Soviet occupation and the recent Russian invasion, and subsequent occupation, of 20 percent of the Republic of Georgia. This explains the apprehension in the Baltic states about Russia's motives.

**Time to Lead by Example.** NATO needs American leadership more than ever. Defense cuts on both sides of the Atlantic have only served to magnify the security challenges that face the alliance.

Unless the U.S. continues to take NATO seriously, it is unlikely that Europe will.

The U.S. should refocus NATO's primary mission around collective defense, and Steadfast Jazz 2013 is an important part of that refocus. After the Steadfast Jazz exercises, the U.S. should:

- **Make the rotational force concept work.** Deploying only 40 troops to Steadfast Jazz from the BCT that is earmarked to provide rotational forces to Europe sends the wrong message to friends and foes alike. The next opportunity for the U.S. to get this right will be next year's Saber Strike exercise in the Baltics.

- **Put America's national security interests ahead of defense cuts.** A strategic review of U.S. interests in Europe, not a desire to slash the defense budget, should guide important decisions, such as the number of bases and the distribution of troops in Europe.

- **Provide a vision for the future of NATO and lead by example.** Leading up to the 2014 NATO summit in the United Kingdom, the U.S. should provide a clear vision for the NATO alliance post-Afghanistan and lead by example, ensuring full funding for a strong military and actively engaging in Europe rather than turning away from it.

**Firm Commitment Needed.** After the NATO-led combat mission in Afghanistan comes to an end, collective defense should be at the heart of everything NATO does. By minimally participating in Steadfast Jazz 2013, the U.S. has missed an opportunity to reaffirm America's commitment to transatlantic security and the NATO alliance.

America's allies in Central and Eastern Europe deserve a stronger signal from Washington that their contributions to overseas military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were appreciated and that the U.S. is fully engaged in transatlantic security.

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1. Philip M. Breedlove, "The NATO Response Force: The Tip of the Spear," September 30, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pGHEAZsJJo&feature=youtu.be> (accessed October 16, 2013).