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Joint Task Force East and Shared Military Basing in Romania and Bulgaria

By Dorinel Moldovan, Plamen Pantev, and Matthew Rhodes



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Joint Task Force East and Shared Military Basing In Romania and Bulgaria*

By

Dorinel Moldovan, Plamen Pantev, and Matthew Rhodes**

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I. Introduction

Joint Task Force East (JTFE), the framework for shared use of select military bases in Romania and Bulgaria, marks a major milestone in America's military presence in Central and Southeast Europe. Following previous, more limited deployments across the region, U.S. forces are poised to become long-term fixtures in both countries under renewable, ten-year agreements signed in late 2005 and early 2006. The arrangements potentially serve as representative models for similar efforts in other countries.

All three governments have hailed their new cooperation as of great strategic, even historic, significance. For the U.S., it exemplifies the broader transformation of defense capabilities and relationships. For Romania and Bulgaria, it manifests integration into the Euroatlantic West.

However, translating the original hopes and vision for JTFE into reality has proven slower and more difficult than expected. Further internal and external challenges remain. In the face of a certain loss of momentum, the ultimate success and durability of the initiative rests on maintaining realistic expectations, adapting to evolving security realities, improving intra-governmental coordination, and integrating U.S. presence within multilateral frameworks.

II. America Comes Knocking

After World War II, the United States developed a far-flung network of foreign military bases. Four decades later, the end of the Cold War significantly reduced U.S. forces overseas. As part of an overall military drawdown, the number of American troops stationed within the borders of other NATO allies in Europe declined by two-thirds, from over 300,000 in the 1980s to roughly 110,000 by the year 2000. A proportional number of facilities closed.

At the same time, the new strategic environment offered a previously unthinkable mix of pressures and opportunities for engagement in the formerly communist East. From the early 1990s, the U.S. military became involved in a variety of programs for training, educating, and equipping the armed forces of former foes. Common exercises brought U.S. troops in direct contact with host nation counterparts. Many multinational events were conducted under NATO's Partnership for Peace program. One bilateral "in the spirit of PfP" initiative, the State Partnership program, paired partner countries with American state National Guards for recurring exercises and exchanges.

Less frequently, U.S. forces also made temporary operational use of regional bases. Several such cases have been part of NATO missions in and around the former Yugoslavia. For instance, from 1995 to 2004 the U.S. utilized Taszar airbase in southern Hungary as an "intermediate staging base" to supply SFOR and IFOR peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹ Camp Able Sentry in Macedonia played a similar role for a variety of UN and NATO missions during the same period. After 1999, the U.S. army built up a larger new facility, Camp Bondsteel, as its KFOR headquarters in Kosovo.

More recently, the U.S. also used regional facilities to support operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bulgaria opened its Burgas airfield to U.S. tanker aircraft during the campaign against Afghanistan's Taliban regime in late 2001. In early 2003, Hungary permitted the U.S. to train several dozen Iraqi exiles at Taszar. After Turkey's parliament subsequently refused use of that country's territory for operations in Iraq, Bulgaria agreed to re-open the airfield at Burgas and nearby Camp Sarafovo (already site of a small U.S. task force arranging transport of supplies to Macedonia and Kosovo) as a refueling base and Romania allowed U.S. forces to use its Black

¹ See Maj. James McDonnell, "Lessons Learned from the Taszar Staging Base," *Army Logistician*, March/April 2002.

Sea port of Constanta and nearby Mihail Kogalniceanu airbase as logistical centers for U.S. forces flowing to the Middle East.

These regional deployments proceeded in tandem with further evaluation of U.S. global basing. Then-Texas Governor George W. Bush had made a call for fundamental military transformation, to include “an immediate review of overseas deployments,” a centerpiece of his 2000 presidential campaign.² Already prior to 9/11, the August 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review had estimated a quarter of existing overseas bases were unneeded, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had tasked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a thorough review of foreign basing by March 2003.³

The Global War on Terror and the particular “political and logistical limitations” for deploying U.S. forces to Iraq from other NATO countries further heightened interest in longer-term basing in Central and Southeast Europe.⁴ In early March 2003, U.S. Marine General James Jones, the new leader of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) as well as NATO’s Allied Command Operations, told reporters EUCOM needed to move beyond its static “20th century basing strategy” to gain greater agility and flexibility “to engage in more areas...to the east and to the south.”⁵ The following month in testimony before Congress, Jones added that rising asymmetric threats, growing restrictions on training within heavily urbanized Western Europe, and NATO’s continuing enlargement called for “new basing paradigms:”

Our new bases should have a transformational footprint, be geo-strategically placed in areas where presence yields the highest return on investment, be able to both contract and expand as required and should ... take advantage of our developing ability to rotationally base our forces.⁶

Jones’s ideas fit well with those of Secretary Rumsfeld and other civilian leaders at the Pentagon. Over the coming year and a half, proposals for revamping basing in Europe were further developed as part of the Pentagon’s broader Global Defense Posture Review. Secretary Rumsfeld termed the process “a readjustment to fit the 21st century.”⁷ President Bush outlined the review’s general findings in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) in mid-August 2004. Background briefings as well as a written report and testimony to Congress the following month provided further details.

Arguing that deployments in Europe and East Asia in particular were still too reflective of outdated Cold War legacies, the administration pointed to further reductions of troop levels in both theaters. Forces in Europe could be cut by more than half. At the same time, “diversification” of facilities would aim at developing more austere, smaller-scale “foreign operating sites” (FOS) and “cooperative security locations” (CSL). Informally dubbed “lily pads,” such sites would allow rotational or periodic access for training purposes while also providing readily “expandable” facilities with pre-positioned equipment. These types of facilities would help build enhanced partnerships and host nation capacity while simultaneously providing

² See “A Period of Consequences,” speech at the Citadel military academy in September 23, 1999; http://www.cita.del.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html.

³ Zdzislaw Lachowski, “Foreign Military Bases in Eurasia,” *SIPRI Policy Paper* No. 18, June 2007, pp. 6-7.

⁴ Todd Fields, “Eastward Bound: The Strategy and Politics of Repositioning U.S. Military Bases in Europe,” *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, Spring 2004, pp. 82-83. Together with political opposition from Belgium, France, and Germany, these included Austrian denial of rail access, Austrian and Swiss denial of overflight rights, the previously mentioned Turkish refusal for use of its territory, and Italian delays in permission for deployment from Aviano airbase.

⁵ USEUCOM Defense Information Group Press Briefing, March 3, 2003.

⁶ Transcript of Gen. Jones’s Opening Statement before the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Senate Committee on Appropriation April 29, 2003.

⁷ Quoted in Vance Serchuk and Thomas Donnelly, “Toward a Global Cavalry: Overseas Rebased and Defense Transformation,” American Enterprise Institute *National Security Outlook*, June 20, 2003.

the U.S. with low-cost, flexible platforms for responding to future crises.⁸

Romania and Bulgaria emerged as prime “FOS” candidates early on. Both were proven, willing hosts for U.S. forces. In addition, their strategic location within the Balkan and Black Sea areas and in close proximity to the Greater Middle East made them advantageous sites from which to address core post-9/11 security issues such as international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, transnational organized crime, weak states and “frozen conflicts,” and energy security.⁹ As training locations, they offered fewer restrictions as well as increased opportunities for including forces from other PfP countries further east in exercises. Finally, in comparison to other countries who might have been equally willing and/or located even closer to potential flashpoints, Romania and Bulgaria had already been through the Membership Action Plan process and (from November 2002) had been formally invited into NATO. In addition, they were more readily accessible and politically stable, and would be less likely seen to upset a global strategic balance or otherwise complicate relations with Russia. Pursuing basing arrangements with *both* Romania and Bulgaria carried the additional advantage of a kind of insurance should a strongly anti-American government come to power in either one.

Within the United States, the international base proposals drew limited attention beyond a small circle of specialists. One prominent critic warned that the “Pentagon’s obsession” with shifting bases eastward in Europe could lower troop morale and retention and fail to deliver the advertised cost savings or improvements in mobility.¹⁰ Another lamented fresh extension of America’s “empire of bases.”¹¹ More common, however, was qualified endorsement of the general principle of force realignment, provided careful diplomacy prevented misunderstandings or further strains in relations with countries such as Germany that American troops would be leaving.¹²

The issue surfaced briefly in national electoral politics in August 2004 following President Bush’s speech to the VFW. In a statement on behalf of the opposition Democratic party, General Jones’s predecessor, retired General Wesley Clark, termed the administration’s plans “ill-conceived” and “politically motivated.”¹³ Democratic Presidential candidate Senator John Kerry also characterized the shifts as “reckless and costly.” However, commentators suggested the candidates’ substantive differences were more matters of nuance, and that the war in Iraq had “sucked all the air out” of more intense debate over other basing questions.¹⁴ In any case, President Bush would win re-election to a second four-year term that November.

Support, acceptance, or indifference also prevailed within the Congress, where President Bush’s Republican Party held majorities in both houses. House and Senate committee hearings on the plans pressed administration officials on details and featured some of the critiques noted above. However, Congress’s most significant contribution was its prior establishment of an independent Overseas Basing Commission composed of retired senior officers to review the Pentagon’s recommendations.

⁸ “Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture,” Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Defense, September 2004.

⁹ On this last point General Tom Hobbins, Commander U.S. Air Forces Europe, would emphasize the significance of Romania and Bulgaria’s location “on the Black Sea, where 25 percent of Europe’s energy needs transit each day.” (“Interdependence: Key to Our Common Success,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, Fall 2006.)

¹⁰ Lawrence Korb, “The Pentagon’s Eastern Obsession,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2003.

¹¹ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, (New York : Metropolitan Books, 2004).

¹² See, for example, Kurt Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward, “New Battle Stations?” *Foreign Affairs* September/ October 2003, and Michael O’Hanlon, “America’s Welcome Military Rethink,” *Financial Times*, June 24, 2004.

¹³ Gary Younge and Jamie Wilson, “US to Pull Troops from Asia and Europe,” *Guardian* August 17, 2004.

¹⁴ James Sterngold, “Kerry, Bush on Same Page Militarily; Minor Differences Pale in Comparison to Their Similarities,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 2004.

The group's preliminary and final reports, issued in May and August 2005, respectively, provided qualified endorsement of the basic thrust of administration plans along with some specific reservations. Along with reiterating the calls for careful consultations with partner nations, the Commission elaborated on the practical need for gradualism in implementing rebasing, called for greater interagency and Congressional involvement, and expressed "caution about reliance on new allies," especially those in Central Asia, whose weak democratic credentials made future receptiveness to U.S. presence unpredictable.¹⁵ It called for an additional full brigade (approximately 3500 soldiers) to be kept within Europe designated for deployments to new bases in Eastern Europe.¹⁶

III. Romanian and Bulgarian Reception

Neither Romania nor Bulgaria seemed a likely host for U.S. forces at the outset of the 1990s. However, discussions within those countries shadowed the evolution of U.S. planning. Both had spent the Cold War inside the Warsaw Pact as rigid Communist dictatorships. While Romania developed a reputation as a foreign policy maverick, Bulgaria's strict fidelity to Moscow earned it the nickname the "16th Soviet republic." Bulgaria's greater affinity for Russia reflected close similarities in language and religion as well as gratitude for liberation from Ottoman Turkish rule. In contrast, though, to the massive Soviet troop presence in the "northern tier" satellites, after the 1950s neither Romania nor Bulgaria had sizeable Red Army units or bases on their territory.¹⁷

After 1989, the countries' "transitions" proceeded slowly and unevenly. In April 1991, Romania's first post-communist President, Ion Iliescu, signed a bilateral treaty with the Soviet Union that would have effectively barred future membership in NATO.¹⁸ Despite this initial move, Romania was the first country to sign up for Partnership for Peace in January 1994, with all major political parties expressing their support for NATO integration. The center-right president and government elected in late 1996 were disappointed not to be included in the invitations for full membership issued to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary by NATO at the Madrid summit in July 1997. Nonetheless, following the summit, President Emil Constantinescu and U.S. President Bill Clinton initiated a bilateral strategic partnership initiative to boost cooperation on security issues and military reform as well as economic relations and law enforcement.¹⁹

Bulgaria's hesitation on strategic direction was slightly more prolonged. It did not take up Russian President Boris Yeltsin's invitation to join the new Commonwealth of Independent States in December 1991. However, as late as 1996, "after three rounds of discussions" with NATO officials, Bulgaria's Socialist government "concluded that it did *not* want to pursue NATO membership. Only after a February 1997 change in government did Bulgaria formally announce an aspiration" to join the alliance.²⁰

¹⁵ Report of the Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States, August 15, 2005. The final point was also stressed by Alexander Cooley, who pointed to Bulgaria and Romania as more positive contrasts. ("Base Politics," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2005).)

¹⁶ Controversy briefly followed release of the May version of the report, which the Defense Department complained improperly included classified material. See Allen, Mike. "Report Critical of Rumsfeld is Pulled After DoD Protest," *Washington Post*, May 16, 2005.

¹⁷ See J.F. Brown, *Eastern Europe And Communist Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 33-38.

¹⁸ See Vladimir Socor, "The Romanian-Soviet Friendship Treaty and its Regional Implications," *Report on Eastern Europe* (May 3, 1991).

¹⁹ For a critical view of Romania's progress in such areas up to this time, see Larry Watts, "The Crisis in Romanian Civil-Military Relations," *Problems of Post-Communism* 48:4, pp. 14-27.

²⁰ Jeffrey Simon, "Bulgaria and NATO: 7 Lost Years," *Strategic Forum* No. 142, May 1998.

Such political-diplomatic steps bolstered participation in the types of Partnership for Peace and “spirit of PfP” activities discussed above, and Romanian and Bulgarian armed forces’ interaction with Americans expanded steadily from the mid-1990s. By the latter part of the decade, each country was participating in multiple land, air, and/or naval exercises with the U.S. and other NATO partners each year. Some of these took place at bases later included under the shared use agreements.²¹ It was against this background that ideas concerning foreign military bases were first raised informally.

In this respect, the crisis over Kosovo served as a kind of philosophical threshold. Despite broad popular sympathy for Serbia, Romanian and Bulgarian leaders clearly aligned their countries’ values and security interests with those of the North Atlantic Alliance. During the Operation Allied Force bombing campaign in spring 1999, both countries gave permission to NATO aircraft to cross their airspace while refusing the same to Russian aircraft seeking to deliver supplies to Serbia. Romania allowed NATO soldiers to install a radar unit at Craiova airport to aid control of flights over that country.²² Bulgaria reacted calmly when several NATO missiles overshot their targets to land on its territory. Both also supported assistance to Kosovar Albanian refugees. They were encouraged in turn by inclusion in NATO’s new Membership Action Plan process, announced at the alliance’s Washington summit in April.

The terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001 presented another watershed for closer ties with the United States, even outside of NATO. Initial doubts as to whether to take sides in what became known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT) quickly gave way to a new sense of obligation to act as devoted members of the U.S.-led anti-terrorist coalition. Bulgaria’s logistic and infrastructure support to the U.S. forces during the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan in fall 2001 illustrated the potential the countries’ geopolitical and geo-strategic position held in this fight. It was followed by significant Romanian and Bulgarian troop contributions to NATO’s ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan. Later, both would sign the letter of the Vilnius Ten and otherwise lend diplomatic support to the U.S. case for intervention in Iraq. As previously mentioned, their military support included U.S. use of airfields and ports at Burgas and Constanta and would later also entail battalion-size contributions of stabilization troops.

Accordingly, when General Jones and other U.S. officials began publicly promoting force structure realignment, top officials from both countries responded with enthusiasm. Spokesman Lubomir Todorov of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry expressed his country’s “readiness” for “American bases.”²³ Romanian President Ion Iliescu, who had opposed support for NATO during Allied Force, now publicly touted the virtues of the country’s “five star” facilities for further U.S. use. Prime Minister Adrian Nastase also assured the U.S. Romania would “respond positively” to requests for further operations at Constanta.²⁴ In anticipation of new security requirements and commitments, Romania also amended its Fundamental Law, Constituția, to lower the hurdles for foreign military troops to transit, train, or deploy in the country.

Both governments conceived the establishment of bilateral, shared military bases on their territory as advancing overlapping interests from national, regional, and global perspectives. By

²¹ For example, the rotating PfP “Cooperative Key” exercise took place at Romania’s Mihail Kolganiceanu airbase in fall 2000 and at Bulgaria’s Graf Ignatievo airbase in fall 2001 and fall 2003

²² Lt. Col. Donald Falls, “NATO Enlargement: Is Romania Ready to Join the Alliance?” MIT Security Studies Program Paper 00-3, May 2000, p. 23, fn. 93. Falls also notes reports that a separate U.S. and U.K. team operated during this period out of Timisoara. British journalist Robert Fisk reported Serbian claims of additional NATO operations out of Kustendil, Bulgaria (“How Fake Guns and Painting the Road Fooled NATO,” *Independent*, June 21, 1999).

²³ Traynor, Ian. “Payback Time for America’s Allies as GIs Set Up Camp in the New Europe,” *Guardian*, March 4, 2003.

²⁴ Thomas Fuller, “Romania Dangles Use of Sea Base to Woo U.S.,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 18, 2003.

drawing links across these levels, the proposed basing agreements offered additional assurance of the nations' core interests within the new security environment, characterized by the acronym "VUCA:" volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. At a philosophical level, the foundation for the agreements was the countries' acceptance that their own national security was essentially linked to that of their neighbors and even the world as a whole. Adequate protection against present and potential future dangers could only be achieved via proactive cooperation and networking.

Differences existed in details and relative emphasis in the two countries' motivations. In general, however, support in both rested on the following, mutually reinforcing points: First, enduring U.S. military presence would further affirm the countries' integration into the Euroatlantic community. It thus represented a natural continuation and logical next step in the evolution of their foreign, security and defense policies over the preceding 17 to 18 years. Naturally, shared bases would most directly advance bilateral relations with the United States. America's objective position as a unipolar power, which at the same time was strongly committed to democratic values and development, placed it high in the hierarchy of priority allies for both Romania and Bulgaria. America's involvement in stabilization of the Balkans in the difficult and dangerous period after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s as well as its crucial support for the process of NATO enlargement were seen to have provided the necessary conditions for the countries' successful transitions from totalitarianism and central planning to democracy and market economy. After 9/11, the U.S. took the lead in global action against terrorism.

Strengthened strategic alliance with the United States thus represented a valuable asset to be cultivated. In the eyes of leading politicians, such a relationship would testify to their country's own geostrategic importance. On a more practical level, notwithstanding mistaken pre-war estimates of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, it would provide privileged access to intelligence from the most advanced and reliable sources, which could be crucial in guaranteeing national security, including in preventing terrorist acts against domestic targets. U.S. military assets at shared facilities would also represent supplemental resources for preventing or overcoming humanitarian disasters on the host countries' territory. Securing such benefits, however, required countries to prove themselves as serious, reliable allies able to offer things of value in return.

Romania and Bulgaria's sense of solidarity and responsibility as incoming members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization served as another, closely related factor for the basing agreements. Along with five other countries, both had been issued formal invitations at the alliance's Prague Summit in November 2002. Following the ratification process, their entry would take effect in late March 2004. Shared basing with the U.S. would help make the countries both productive contributors and positive agents of change within NATO. The lessons-learned in how to work with international partners and other national security sector institutions would transfer to their relations within NATO. They would be better prepared for future humanitarian, peacekeeping, post-conflict stabilization, and other types of operations in a period when acting far away from traditional areas of operation has become vital for the Alliance. Moreover, the shared basing cooperation would put into concrete practice the Alliance's concept of advancing members' security by further strengthening and extending stability through engagement.

Projection of such stability into the countries' immediate neighborhood, the unsettled Balkan and Black Sea regions, would most directly serve their interests. Both Romania and Bulgaria had suffered economically from the violence and embargoes of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. They continued to be concerned about the unresolved situation in Kosovo as well as "frozen conflicts" in Moldova and the Caucasus. The presence and activities of Russian military forces in those areas were further matters of concern. Controversies concerning Russian supplies of oil and gas to Europe as well as the planned construction of the AMBO and Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipelines across Bulgaria and the Constanta-Trieste pipeline across Romania added to the growing significance of energy security in the Black Sea basin. Other challenges and threats such

as organized criminality, environmental degradation, pandemics, and uncontrolled migration presented additional sources of uncertainty.

As soon-to-be frontier states for the European Union as well as NATO, Romania and Bulgaria viewed the possibility for attracting greater attention and shaping collective responses to the region by those institutions as key niche roles they could play. The basing arrangements with the U.S., which (more than other partners) shared their concern for Black Sea issues in particular, would raise their profile and support for doing so.

Finally, the U.S. basing presence promised to bolster the countries' own capabilities and resources. To begin with, successful implementation of the agreements would raise the host nation militaries' effectiveness in carrying out their full range of required tasks and missions. As expressed by Maj. Gen. Mircea Savu, Director of Operations at the Romanian Ministry of Defense, U.S.-funded upgrades of infrastructure as well as increased interaction in training and base management with the world's most advanced military represented an unprecedented opportunity to improve not only "interoperability" with international partners but also the quality of "installations...techniques, tactics, and procedures" used by national forces.²⁵ Shared bases would also provide access to advanced American technologies.

From an economic perspective, the bases promised to boost local growth and development. Some residents around Burgas had worried U.S. use of the airbase there in 2003 would negatively affect summer Black Sea tourism, but support by local communities where the bases were to be chosen has otherwise been especially strong. Indeed, in each country there was real competition among mayors and municipalities contending to host the shared facilities.

Although they would not be large-scale "main operating bases" with many thousands of military personnel, civilian employees, and family members in a specific location, the new "forward operating sites" offered the prospect of a return to vitality and importance for surrounding communities after years of neglect and degradation of their Cold War-era bases. Increased support from the state budget, upcoming U.S. military investments in civilian transportation and communication as well as military infrastructure, contracts and sub-contracts for support services, and U.S. troops' personal spending would all create jobs and otherwise improve social conditions in the regions surrounding shared facilities. Even if the relatively modest size of the U.S. presence limited direct economic gains, the impact would be multiplied by indirect stimulus to bilateral trade, private investment by American and international companies, and cultural and tourist relations.

The preceding points represented a rough consensus among the governments, major parliamentary parties, and nongovernmental experts in both countries. In Romania, this included the Social Democratic Party of President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Adrian Nastase, back in power from late 2000 through 2004. It also included the Justice and Truth Alliance of President Traian Basescu (who famously proposed a "Bucharest-London-Washington axis" in security policy) and Prime Minister Calin Tariceanu, both elected at the end of 2004. The smaller ethnic Hungarian Democratic Union of Magyars, part of governing coalitions throughout this period, also supported the basing deals.

In Bulgaria, backing came from the National Movement Simeon II of Prime Minister Simeon Saxecoburggotski, who had been the country's last reigning monarch as a child in the 1940s and served as Prime Minister 2001-2005, as well as from the Socialist Party of President Georgi Parvanov and Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev, who led a coalition government that still included the Movement for Tsar Simeon II as well as the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms from summer 2005. The so-called "blue" opposition, the diminished liberal United Democratic Front, also supported the agreements.

²⁵ News Briefing with U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at the 10th annual South Eastern Europe Defense Ministerial, December 6, 2005.

Notwithstanding this elite near-consensus, the basing issue generated considerably greater political controversy in the intended host nations than in the United States. Apart from the mentioned local hopes for economic benefit, at the outset of discussion, public support was weak, especially in Bulgaria. Some small-scale demonstrations took place in capitals and near base sites. In both countries, leaders of the Socialist parties had previously opposed their governments' support for U.S. security policy (over Kosovo in Romania and over Iraq in Bulgaria), and elements from the left wings of each continued to do so on the question of bases. However, the most vocal, organized opposition emanated from the far-right, radical nationalist Ataka Party in Bulgaria and its counterpart Greater Romania Party.

The most basic counter-argument was that hosting U.S. forces would endanger rather than aid host nation security. Stated bluntly, it would make the countries priority targets for international terrorists and others opposed to America's global role. Furthermore, accepting "U.S. bases" would mean a loss of sovereignty and blind obedience to a new "big brother." Lack of legal jurisdiction and disciplinary control over deployed American troops was one specific worry. Perceptions of an excessively lenient U.S. military court sentence for the U.S. Marine embassy guard involved in a car accident that killed the popular Romanian rock singer Teo Peter in December 2004 exacerbated these concerns. Later reports by the media, Human Rights Watch, and the Council of Europe indicating the American Central Intelligence Agency had operated secret prisons at Romania's Mikhail Kogalniceanu airbase and elsewhere in the region further stoked such fears, as did speculation about preemptive U.S. strikes against Iran or other third countries.

Third, hosting American forces would damage relations with other regional powers. Russian officials, including former Foreign Minister Yevgenii Primakov, protested that the new arrangements would threaten Russian interests and "completely violate" U.S. and NATO promises from the 1990s not to move permanent forces into the former Soviet sphere after German unification and NATO enlargement.²⁶ Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov added that "the expansion of...military installations up to Russia's borders calls into question the future of the CFE treaty."²⁷ Russian diplomats in both countries also spoke against the initiative. Russia's role as the major external supplier of oil and natural gas to both Romania and Bulgaria amplified concerns of negative reaction.

Relations with the European Union were also seen at risk. Romania and Bulgaria had already been subject to cross-pressure from the United States and leading EU members such as France and Germany on issues such as the International Criminal Court and military action in Iraq.²⁸ The base proposals came at a time during which the diplomatic wounds from the latter issue were still fresh and the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands on the EU constitution were attributed in part to "enlargement fatigue." Further actions that, in the words of French international affairs analyst Dominique Moisi, would show Secretary Rumsfeld's notion of a U.S.-loyalist "New Europe is real"²⁹ could threaten support for economic assistance and membership prospects within the EU.

²⁶ *RFE/RL Newslines*, December 23, 2005.

²⁷ John Shimkus, "Changes in U.S. Forward Deployment and its Effects on Europe," NATO Parliamentary Assembly Committee Report 169 DSCTC 06 E, 2006.

²⁸ See Ronald Linden, "Twin Peaks: Romania and Bulgaria Between the EU and the United States," *Problems of Post-Communism*, September/October 2004.

²⁹ "Romania, U.S. Sign Military Base Agreement," Deutsche Welle (DW-World), December 2005.

IV. Negotiations

As noted, informal discussions between U.S. officials and their Romanian and Bulgarian counterparts concerning long-term basing began as early as the 1990s. These intensified in level and frequency following the United States' announcements in 2003-04 of its intention to transform its European and global military postures. In addition to regular talks among embassy personnel and host nation contacts in the three capitals, several senior officials engaged in dedicated trips to pursue basing arrangements. In December 2003, for example, U.S. Undersecretaries for Policy from the Departments of State and Defense, Marc Grossman and Douglas Feith, included both Romania and Bulgaria as stops in tours of the region. EUCOM Commander General Jones's visit to the countries to view potential base sites in January 2005 represented another milestone, as did the visits to Washington of Bulgarian Defense Minister Nikolai Svinarov and of Romanian President Basecu, Foreign Minister Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, and Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu in February and March 2005.

With such exchanges having laid the basic groundwork, the time was ripe for formal negotiations. The process would consist of a hierarchy of agreements. At the top would be Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) that laid out general purposes and parameters of shared base use. These would be negotiated between Foreign Ministry-led interagency teams headed respectively by Ambassadors Robert Loftis, the U.S. State Department's Senior Advisor for Security Negotiations and Agreements; Teodor Baconschi, State Secretary for Global Affairs in the Romanian Foreign Ministry; and Lyubomir Ivanov, Bulgaria's Ambassador to NATO.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed these foundational framework agreements with Romanian Foreign Minister Ungureanu in Bucharest in December 2005 and with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivaylo Kalfin in Sofia in April 2006. The documents' major provisions authorized the U.S. military to deploy up to 2,500 soldiers to either country at a time, with the possibility two such groups could overlap for a total of 5,000 for up to 90 days; specified the military installations where such deployments could take place (Mihail Kogalniceanu airbase, and Cincu, Smardan, and Babadag training ranges in Romania; Bezmer and Graf Ignatievo air bases as well as Novo Selo training range and its associated Aytos logistics center in Bulgaria); and set an initial time-frame for the agreements of ten years with automatic renewal and one year's notice required for termination. In line with the coordinated public information campaigns that accompanied talks, the documents stressed the sites involved would not become "U.S. bases"; rather they would be "agreed facilities and areas," still under host-nation command, to which U.S. forces would have regularized access. Parliamentary ratification followed, with Bulgaria's unicameral National Assembly leapfrogging its Romanian counterparts to approve its country's agreement in May 2006. Romania's Chamber of Deputies and Senate had affirmed the terms regulating U.S. forces' in-country activities in February and June 2006, respectively, but a required vote in joint session to approve those forces' entry came only in May 2007.

Greater specificity as to how the DCAs' general principles were to be translated into practice would be supplied in follow-up Implementing Arrangements and (furtherly subordinate Technical Agreements) across a diverse range of functional areas. In accord with the DCAs' designation of Ministries of Defense as "executive agents," these assumed the leading role in this phase. Romania had concluded 16 of 19 Implementing Arrangements with the U.S. by late October 2007, and an additional two by early 2008. In November 2007, U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria, John Beyrle, also suggested that country's talks would wrap up early in the new year,³⁰ and indeed a "Big Bang" package of 11 Agreements was signed the following February. The originally foreseen additional area for prepositioning equipment remained unopened, but the respective documents put in place the essential foundation for JTFE operations in both countries.

³⁰ "Remarks by Ambassador John Beyrle," Public Information Forum, Bourgas, November 16, 2007.

Stretching over three years, this sequence of negotiations proved somewhat longer than initially expected. First among the reasons was the inherent range and complexity of issues at stake. One morbid but mundane example was the handling of corpses in the event of deaths during deployment. More protracted talks were required on procedures for administering value-added tax exemption for deployed forces and materiel. Most politically sensitive have been the previously noted questions of jurisdiction over U.S. personnel in cases of potential misconduct and U.S. freedom of action to use the facilities and forces deployed there to support external operations. Compromise wording has authorized host nations to invoke a right to return criminal cases to their national jurisdiction in regard to the first point and pledged the U.S. to consult with its partners in regard to the second. However, on these and some other issues U.S. officials expressed frustration that matters they considered already resolved in principle in the DCAs had been reopened by Romanian or Bulgarian negotiators during the subsequent talks on Implementing Arrangements.

Several additional factors exacerbated these challenges for one or both host countries. Romania had previously addressed some basic issues in its NATO Status of Forces Agreement in 2002, whereas Bulgaria's lack of such a prior agreement meant more issues (remained) to be addressed in its DCA. Language barriers also played a role, as a number of the best technical experts for Romania and Bulgaria were not fluent in English and American negotiators sometimes submitted draft language on key issues with insufficient time for translation. Finally, all agreements had to be confirmed as consistent with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union, which—despite critics' previous warnings—both Romania and Bulgaria would join as full members in January 2007.

The countries' internal bureaucratic coordination added further complications. On the U.S. side, the Overseas Basing Commission had criticized the lack of stronger role at the outset for the State Department. After some internal debate, the Office of Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon designated European Command to represent the U.S. in developing the Implementing Arrangements. However, officials involved in the process noted it was not always clear who was in charge of the process there or what the respective roles were between it and U.S. Army Europe (USAEUR) and U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE), which had responsibility for negotiating subordinate Technical Agreements.

Given their lesser experience in such matters as well as the greater impact on their countries as hosts, challenges were again greater for Romania and Bulgaria. The breadth of issues implied that the parties represented included not only Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense but also of Justice, Finance, Interior, Environment, Labor, State Security, and Trade. Some ministries reportedly demurred from offering input when first approached from colleagues from Foreign Affairs or Defense, only later to raise objections to provisionally agreed terms on the same points. Lack of prior internal consensus sometimes meant the countries' interministerial processes would unfold in front of the Americans during negotiations. Local base commanders were also dissatisfied with the level of information and opportunity for input they received from their capitals. The establishment of formalized coordination groups in spring 2007 only partially ameliorated such challenges.

Meanwhile, domestic politics also affected negotiations. Although, as noted, political elites in both Bulgaria and Romania have largely favored the agreements, turnover and strife among them still carried an impact. Most significantly, parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in June 2005 forced a pause in basing talks' progression as leaders' focus shifted to campaigning and new government formation. The results also put the victorious Socialists into place as new negotiating partners as the leading force in an ideologically diverse "rainbow coalition," which also included the National Movement for Simeon II and ethnic-Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms from the preceding government. Each of these parties had somewhat different priorities and concerns to be addressed. Such top-level turnover sometimes also brought personnel change and loss of

institutional knowledge further down within the professional bureaucracy, as well as a requirement for those career officials who remained to educate new superiors and colleagues on the key issues at stake.

At the same time, the steadily-deteriorating relations between President Basescu and Prime Minister Tariceanu indirectly cast a shadow over completion of Implementing Arrangements and hopes for U.S.-Romania strategic partnership in general. Bickering between the two leaders came to a head in June 2006, as Tariceanu abruptly called for withdrawal of Romania's 800-soldiers in Iraq by the end of the year. Basescu quickly attacked the idea and blocked its adoption within the country's Supreme Defense Council. Over the coming months, the two men continued to clash over authority for security-related Cabinet posts, producing a chaotic succession of three Defense and two Foreign Ministers by spring 2007. Finally in April 2007, Tariceanu partnered with the parliamentary opposition to impeach Basescu for alleged misuse of the secret police, temporarily suspending him from office. Basescu accused his rivals of seeking to stop his initiatives against corruption and investigation into the communist past, and he easily won reinstatement in a public referendum six weeks later. U.S. officials accepted these events to be internal matters, but taken together they raised doubts regarding Romania's political maturity and reliability as a partner.

V. Implementation

Parallel to the finalization of the Implementing Arrangements, some important progress has been made in advancing JTFE on the ground. For example, the U.S. has already committed approximately \$120 million for infrastructure projects. A nucleus of what will be a permanent U.S. staff of about 100 has taken up residence at the task force base camp at Mihail Kogalniceanu. Meanwhile, however, the shortage of available U.S. troops has emerged as the single biggest obstacle to realizing the envisioned scale of operations at JTFE facilities. As noted, the DCAs allowed for a combined ceiling of 5,000 U.S. troops across the two countries at a given time. Actual planning parameters into 2007 foresaw actual deployments of brigade-size deployments of 3,500 soldiers on successive six-month rotations.

Ongoing U.S. commitments in Afghanistan and especially Iraq, clear priorities in the Pentagon's global force generation process, would already have made repeated brigade rotations problematic. The announced "surge" of an additional 30,000 troops to Iraq in spring 2007 made the difficult task impossible. In March and May 2007, General Jones's successor as EUCOM and NATO Commander, General Bantz Craddock, testified to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees that wartime deployments left him without required forces for exercises or other security cooperation in his area. Echoing the analysis of the 2005 Overseas Basing Commission, he suggested three or four additional brigades be left in Europe to meet those tasks. Moving part way in that direction, later that year Secretary of Defense Robert Gates approved delay of the planned return of two army brigades from Germany to the U.S. until 2012.³¹

In the meantime, EUCOM planners managed to assemble a mixed battalion-sized force of roughly 900 troops for a series of "Proof of Principle" exercises in the two countries, which ran from August to October 2007. A similar number composed the first official rotational deployments from June to October 2008, concentrated for roughly two months in each country. Comparable packages are now expected to be the norm for main rotations over the next few years at least.³² Other smaller-scale deployments and shorter-term exercises also continue. Navy Seebee civil engineer units based at Mihail Kogalniceanu have repaired housing and schools in Romania. U.S. Air Force F-15 fighter jets deployed to Graf Ignatievo to contribute airspace

³¹ Shanker, Thom. "Gates Halts Cut in Army Force in Europe," *New York Times*, November 21, 2007.

³² Coon, Charlie. "Military Scales Back Romania Rotation Plans," *Stars and Stripes* (Europe), February 21, 2008, p. 3.

control during NATO's April 2008 summit in Bucharest. U.S. military medical teams have offered dental and optical care to local residents near the facilities in both countries.

VI. Assessment and Recommendations

Joint Task Force East's early stage of development necessarily renders current assessments provisional. On the one hand, its very existence represents a breakthrough with the potential to serve key interests of the participating countries for decades to come. On the other, its initial steps have simultaneously fallen short of supporters' original expectations and become a contentious factor in worsening Euroatlantic relations with Russia. Realizing JTFE's positive potential requires coming to terms with these dual downsides.

A. Expectations

On the U.S. side, the extended large-scale stability operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have triggered re-evaluation of the specific type of transformation for which JTFE was originally conceived. The Pentagon's updated June 2008 National Defense Strategy reiterates commitment to global defense posture realignment, but it also elevates counter-insurgency and other types of "irregular warfare" to importance equivalent to conventional missions. Here the relative value of large numbers of ground forces with linguistic skills and cultural understanding of the "human terrain" on which they operate receive renewed priority. Cutting-edge technology, global mobility, and precision weapons remain important, but Secretary Gates has termed excessive focus on them as "next-war-it-is."³³ From this standpoint, prospective use of sites such as those in Bulgaria and Romania as "lily pad" operational basing points declines in significance.

That still leaves the facilities as sites for training. However, despite the enthusiasm of senior commanders involved in their selection, subsequent assessments indicate several of the sites' small size, layout, and bare-bones infrastructure limit their utility in this regard as well. Inadequate compatibility between U.S. and host-nation forces regarding decision-making processes and norms has been another drawback. Moreover, the current pace of use limits the real value-added of the streamlined processes for organizing exercises and building relationships beyond what was already being done through existing procedures. Meanwhile, the more expansive visions of Romania and Bulgaria as model "New European" allies have also been revised. The countries' image in Washington as freedom-loving young democracies has been tarnished by the political in-fighting noted above, persistent questions surrounding their communist-era secret police files, and their disappointing progress against organized crime and corruption, as documented by the European Commission. On the military side, basic differences in decision-making processes and underlying strategy development have also hampered cooperation.

In external policy, the countries' contributions to counterterrorism and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been partly offset by divergence on other high-profile issues. Bulgarian President Parvanov has emphasized that close economic ties with Russia coexist with military cooperation with the United States as "part of [the country's] national interest."³⁴ At the commencement of "The Year of Russia" events in January 2008, he and other Bulgarian leaders signed agreements with counterparts headed by then still-President Vladimir Putin to participate in the Russia-sponsored Southstream gas pipeline (rival to the EU-backed and U.S.-favored Nabucco project), established a joint company to implement the separate Bourgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline agreement signed the previous year, and accepted Russian financing

³³ For a concise analysis of how the "Gates Transformation" differs from Rumsfeld's version, see Donnelly, Thomas, "A Transformer in Disguise," *Weekly Standard*, June 23, 2008.

³⁴ Hope, Kerry. "Interview: Careful Balancing at the Top," *Financial Times*, October 12, 2007.

and construction of a new nuclear power station.³⁵ U.S. experts warn such deals exacerbate the existing high dependence on Russian supplies as well as non-transparent business practices in the region.³⁶

In the interim, U.S. efforts to win broad backing for Kosovo's declaration of independence encountered strong opposition in Romania. President Basescu condemned Kosovo's move as "illegal," and a joint session of parliament voted 357-27 against recognition. On the other side, the delays, reduced scale, and limited duration of U.S. deployments have also surprised the host countries. In February 2008, Colonel Constantin Moisa of the Romanian Ministry of Defense termed it "too early" to assess whether the cutback in deployments "is disappointing or not."³⁷ However others involved in implementing the agreements have noted more directly that partner country leaders had "gone out on a political limb" to support the agreements and need to be able to show this was a rational decision.

Economically, the added investment into infrastructure upgrades to base facilities and surrounding transportation systems has certainly been welcome. Peak exercise months have also boosted demand for local goods and services. Nonetheless, many early contracts went to outside firms, and the anticipated opportunities for sustained supply contracts and off-base services have mostly failed to materialize. Some more eager local businesses who invested to expand their facilities may face substantial losses.

Politically, mirroring critiques of their own quality as allies, host-country officials have complained that controversial U.S. foreign policy actions have lessened their ability to present JTFE cooperation to their publics as part of a broader framework of support for democratic values. Hopes to serve as privileged allies have also collided with a perceived drop in U.S. attention subsequent to the signing of agreements. One official complained it had become difficult to find anyone in Washington "above lieutenant colonel" with real interest in their countries. Some Romanians, in particular, felt snubbed when President Bush did not include a stop in the country during a summer 2007 swing through the region.

B. External Reaction

As to indirect effects, some of the feared negative consequences of JTFE now seem exaggerated. The terrorist threat to Romania or Bulgaria has not visibly increased. The countries' accession to the European Union in January 2007 belied warnings that resentful "Old Europeans" would exclude them. JTFE may have reinforced low public support for NATO membership in parts of the Western Balkans and Ukraine. Local opponents point to it as evidence alliance membership entails foreign bases. Still, this did not prevent a country such as Croatia from accepting an accession invitation at the Bucharest summit.

Russia's reaction presents a more serious issue. As noted above JTFE has not blocked expanding economic ties with Bulgaria. However, Romanians ascribe the unusually high prices they pay for energy imports to Russian displeasure with the arrangements. At the same time, Russian leaders have amplified their initial critiques. Along with NATO enlargement and proposed U.S. missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, JTFE is routinely among the steps blamed for undermining partnership and trust with the West. Vladimir Putin denounced "the so-called flexible frontline American bases" during his unexpectedly confrontational speech at the Munich

³⁵ See Smith, Mark. "Russian Energy Interests in the Balkans," *Conflict Studies Research Center*, UK Defense Academy, Balkans Series 08/07, March 2008, [http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/balkan/08\(07\)MAS.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/balkan/08(07)MAS.pdf).

³⁶ See Smith, Keith. "Corruption, Not Dependency is the Risk to Western Europe from Russian Energy Trade," Center for Strategic and International Studies report, July 2008; http://www.csis.org/index.php?option=com_csis_pubs&task=view&id=4564.

³⁷ Coon, Charlie. "Military Scales Back Romania Rotation Plans," *Stars and Stripes* (European Edition), February 21, 2008.

Security Conference in February 2007.³⁸ Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov later argued “U.S. bases in Romania and Bulgaria...only complicate arms control in Europe,” in justifying Russia’s suspension of participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty at the end of that year.³⁹

Such sentiment continued into 2008. In a televised address in February, Putin again highlighted JTFE as an example of the U.S. and NATO “muscle flexing” in Eastern Europe that had put Russia “in a situation where we have to react.”⁴⁰ Steps such as increased defense spending, airspace incursions by Russian bombers, and arms sales to countries such as Iran and Venezuela culminated in the August military intervention in Georgia. Putin’s successor as President, Dmitry Medvedev, deflected criticism of that move by arguing it was not Russia but NATO that was “broadening the borders of military presence” by “creating new bases.”⁴¹

Several observations are in order in regard to such statements. First, Russian claims that JTFE violates prior multilateral agreements appear overstated. The modest size of U.S. forces involved, their rotational nature, and the greater than required reductions in Romanian and Bulgarian national forces maintains compliance with territorial force ceilings for those countries under CFE.⁴² A serious case could be made the arrangements fall outside the spirit of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. However they remain within the letter of that Act’s foreswearance of “additional *permanent* stationing of *substantial* combat forces.” in new NATO states (emphasis added).⁴³

Second, Russian complaints may be motivated as much by political opportunism as genuine concern. For example, CFE suspension has allowed Russian leaders to maintain higher force levels in the Caucasus and Moldova and demonstrate external resolve to an approving public.⁴⁴ Even to the extent displeasure with JTFE is sincere, it seems to be on a considerably lower level than with NATO enlargement, missile defense, or other issues with which it is lumped.

Nevertheless, unless JTFE can overcome its own internal shortfalls, it risks ending up as a “pointless irritant.”⁴⁵ Without significantly advancing its countries’ strategic ties or capabilities, it would have it would have only consumed political and diplomatic capital while reinforcing other obstacles to cooperation with Russia on issues from Iran’s nuclear program to Kosovo’s status to relations with other former Soviet republics.

C. The Way Ahead

The basic decisions for JTFE have now been taken. The next step toward a more meaningful future for JTFE is recognizing the need to adapt it to prevailing realities. Some mutual disappointments can be corrected by self-aware adjustments in behavior. However other initial

³⁸ Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security, February 10, 2007; <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179>.

³⁹ RFE/RL Newslines, December 10, 2007.

⁴⁰ Putin continued: “We drew down our bases in Cuba and in Vietnam. What did we get? New American bases in Romania, Bulgaria. A new third missile defense region in Poland,” (“Russia’s Putin Lashes out at West’s Arms Race,” Reuters, February 8, 2008.)

⁴¹ Barry, Ellen. “Russia President Dismisses Georgia’s Leader as a ‘Political Corpse,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2008.

⁴² See Andres, Janet. “CFE: Will it Remain a ‘Cornerstone of European Security?’” *American Diplomacy*, September 25, 2007

⁴³ See the comments of former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Robert Hunter in Anderson, Jon, “Russia Pact may be Sticking Point in Shift,” *Stars and Stripes*, June 16, 2003.

⁴⁴ See Socor, Vladimir. “Moscow Confronts the West Over CFE Treaty at OSCE,” *Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 25, 2007. http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372188.

⁴⁵ Frances Fukuyama applied this term to U.S. European missile defense sites; “Russia and a New Democratic Realism,” *Financial Times*, September 2, 2008.

expectations were either never realistic or have been subsequently overtaken by events. Rather than lamenting or arguing over blame for changes, all sides should recognize the serious mutual commitments they have made are now best honored by adapting them to new circumstances.

As the most dramatic development, Russia's intervention in Georgia has increased attention in the Black Sea region. (To a lesser extent to the west, Kosovo's still-contested statehood and the Greek-Macedonian name dispute have done the same.) This needn't bring a sudden "show of force" via U.S. deployments at JTFE ceiling levels, for which troops remain in short-supply in any case. However, it reinforces the rationale for building on existing efforts to fill the calendar space between summer peak rotations with a mixture of smaller training events. Even modestly-expanded but more regular and predictable deployments, with invitations for training participation by Georgian, Ukrainian, and prospectively also Russian forces, would best bolster JTFE's utility at this time.

For the medium to longer-term, these rotations could be sustained and even augmented by meeting the recommendations of General Craddock and the Overseas Basing Commission to maintain additional U.S. forces in Europe. In addition to extending the current delay in the return of two brigades past 2012, at least another brigade could be kept stationed on the continent. The combination of anticipated drawdown in Iraq and authorized increases in strength of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps should make this possible. In the meantime, the U.S. should approach possible consideration of further sites elsewhere in the region, which would compete for available forces, with great caution.

Finally, participants should look for ways to deepen integration and synergy among JTFE's components. This could start with strengthened integration of the branches of the national armed services, which sometimes seems to lag even behind overall interagency coordination. As one critique has it, largely independent activities by USAEUR and USAFE have left JTFE as "neither joint nor a task force."

The process could continue by expanding beyond prevailing hub-and-spoke bilateral arrangements between the U.S. and respective host countries. In the first instance, this would involve greater trilateralization. It might also draw on broader multilateral frameworks such as the Southeast European Defense Ministerial (SEDM)⁴⁶ or even NATO as a whole. Efforts in this direction would simultaneously advance long-standing U.S. interest in promoting local ownership and regional cooperation as anchors of stability, foster a more unified response to destabilizing developments in the broader area, and diminish perceptions of America as a domineering "big brother."

Despite the challenges it has encountered, JTFE still holds promise as a unique manifestation of new security relations in Europe. Realizing that potential will require sober reevaluation and rededication to the project by each of its founding countries.

Joint Task Force East – Agreed Facilities

⁴⁶ SEDM consists of twelve member states (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States) and four observers (Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, and Serbia)



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