

# The Evolution of the Military Personnel in the NATO Member States

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the number of military personnel and related topics in the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) member states between 2014 and 2020. These two years are taken as a result of the NATO decisions at the Wales summit in 2014 to increase the defence expenditures against 2024 to 2% of the national GDP in every member and also to invest at least 20% of the national military budget in new material for the different army parts.

**Keywords:** NATO – Military Personnel; Military Budgets; Wales Summit

## INTRODUCTION

This article researches the evolution of the military personnel in the NATO member states, based at the NATO reports and communications. This study is based at the NATO reports and communications as well as the respective used methodology by the NATO (NATO report 2020, p. 141).

The following research questions are the base of this study:

- What's the evolution of the military personnel in the NATO member states between 2014-2020?;
- Is there a relation with the level of the defence expenditures (D.E.) in this period as a consequence of the Wales summit decisions?

### Wales summit

The NATO Wales summit, which was held in Cardiff at September 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, contains in point 14 of the declaration the budget agreement for the next years. The text says: "We agree to reserve the trend of declining defence budgets, to make the most effective use of our funds and to further a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities." This fourteenth point also underlines the importance of our security and the need for a stronger defence industry across the Atlantic. Therefore this NATO summit taking current commitments into account by the following considerations: [1-5].

- Allies currently meeting the NATO guidelines to spend a minimum of 2% of their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on defence will aim to continue to do so. Likewise, allies spending more than 20% of their defence budgets on major

equipment, including related research and development, will continue to do so;

- Allies whose current proportion of GDP spent on defence is below this level will: halt any decline in defence expenditures and aim to increase defence expenditures in real terms as their GDP grows. Even the declaration says for this second point the aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade with a view to meet their NATO capability targets and filling NATO capability shortfalls.

In other words this NATO declaration speaks about a 'decade' from the summit year or the members have to achieve these guidelines in their budget 2024! There is also a third resolution concerning a better balance.

### Territory of the NATO

#### The NATO treaty of 4 April 1949 says in article six:

"For the purpose of an armed attack on one or more of the parties is deemed to include an armed attack:

- On the territory of any of the parties in Europe and North America, on the territory of Turkey or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer;
- On the forces vessels or aircrafts of any of the parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the parties were stationed on the date when the treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or The North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer."

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This article of the NATO Treaty limits the military assistance, as written in article five, the Atlantic area of the members and this North of the Tropic of Cancer included Turkey.

### This means that the present territories of several member states are not a part of this treaty:

- The Western, the middle and the pacific parts of the USA as well as the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands;
- The western and the middle parts of Canada;
- The French possessions in the Atlantic ocean south of this Tropic of Cancer (f.e. Caribbean Islands), in the Pacific ocean (f.e. Nouvelle Calédonie) and the Indian Ocean (f.e. la Réunion);
- The British possessions in the Caribbean Sea (f.e. Cayman Islands) and in the south Atlantic (f.e. Falklands) in the Indian ocean (f.e. Diego Garcia) and in the Pacific ocean (f.e. Pitcairn);
- The Dutch Islands in the Caribbean Sea (f.e. Sint Maarten and Aruba).

But the French Islands situated east of Canada's Labrador are covered by the NATO treaty as well as British Bermuda. Also the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands of Spain and Portugal are subject of the NATO treaty. Even the British possessions at Cyprus, a non-NATO state, are covered by these treaty prescriptions.

This article six definition means that not all the territory of the members are covered by the NATO treaty. This situation involves that parts of the armies of the United States, Canada, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are located outside the NATO appropriate territory. But this geographical situation doesn't mean that these forces cannot be moved to the intended territory.

### Military personnel

The first table of this study gives an overview of the number of military personnel between 2014 and 2020, as published in the NATO annual reports. There are no numbers for an Icelandic army. This Island only contains a coast guard of nearly 200 persons [6].

The first row gives the place of the NATO member in the list of personnel, going from high to low. After the country name, between brackets, the respective place in the year 2014. The next line mentions the number of military personnel and the country share in the NATO total amount [7] (Table 1).

Over these years 15 members have an army of less than 25.000 persons. The US army has increased the total number of personnel to a limited extend. The main countries with a growing army are Canada, FRG, Lithuania, Poland and Turkey. Comparing with 2014 ten countries does have more personnel in 2020.

Several countries know a relative status quo in their number of armed men. It concerns in total thirteen members (f.e. France, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain etc.). In total six members decreased their number (f.e. Belgium, Italy, UK etc.) of military personnel.

With a share of more than 40% is the US army the leading NATO force. If this study doesn't include the armies of the USA, UK, Canada, Turkey etc. and limited to the EU countries the intended share is related to approximately 35% over the NATO total! In 2020 only ten armies have a share of more than 2% of the NATO total of military personnel (Table 1a).

The two armies with more than 400 thousand military personnel are still the USA and Turkey. France was and is the only country with an army between 200-400 thousand persons. Therefore is the French army the largest army in European Union and this across the French status quo over these years, Germany increased their number to an evident second place. Poland has joined the 100.000 club with Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and the UK. Through these Polish upgrade only two NATO member states have an army with more than 50 thousand personnel: Canada and Romania. The 25.000 club (Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Bulgaria) gets the company of the Czech Republic. Remarkable is the fact that about half of the countries don't have achieved an army of 25.000 persons.

### The USA has an enormous share in the total of NATO military personnel.

Together with Turkey these two states reach already nearly 55% of the total of troops.

Table 1: Number and share military personnel (in thousands of men).

			2014	2020	2014	2020
1.	USA	(1)	1.338	1.346	41,4%	41,1%
2.	Turkey	(2)	426	437	13,2%	13,3%
3.	France	(3)	207	208	6,4%	6,3%
4.	FRG	(5)	178	187	5,5%	5,7%
5.	Italy	(4)	183	175	5,6%	5,3%
6.	UK	(6)	168	156	5,2%	4,8%
7.	Spain	(7)	121	122	3,7%	3,7%
8.	Poland	(9)	99	120	3,0%	3,6%
9.	Greece	(8)	107	107	3,3%	3,3%
10.	Canada	(10)	66	71	2,0%	2,2%
11.	Romania	(11)	65	64	2,0%	1,9%
12.	The Netherlands	(12)	41	40	1,2%	1,2%
13.	Portugal	(13)	31	29	0,9%	0,8%
14.	Bulgaria	(15)	27	26	0,8%	0,7%
15.	Belgium	(14)	30	25	0,9%	0,7%

In the next table the total number of military personnel is indicated over all the NATO members (Table 2).

Already before the year 2013 the total number of military personnel was decreasing. Over the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 this total was continuing to decrease. The lowest point was reached in 2016 with a total number of 3.090.000 military personnel. The 2014 level was back reached in 2019. But even in 2020 the total of military personnel is still below the 2013 figure. Based at the 2020 figures the total number of military personnel over all the 22 European Union (EU) member states of the NATO 1.232.500.

Comparing with the US army the number of military personnel in the EU/NATO members is more or less the same. In this case a US surplus of 115.000 men. Six EU countries are not a member of the NATO (Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Finland, Malta and Sweden) and four (Albania, Iceland, Northern Macedonia and Norway) European NATO members are not a member of the European Union [8].

If the UK troops (156.2 thousand) will be calculated with the EU/NATO figure the European army should have a strength of 1.388,7 thousand or a higher number than the USA.

If the EU/NATO figure (1.232,5 thousand) would be raised with the four NATO members, which are not in the EU (33,6 thousand) that should bring an EU army to 1.266,1 thousand men or still below the USA military personnel level. The next table classifies the members in categories in relation to their share concerning the personnel cost in the total defence budget (Table 3).

The best scored countries in 2014 were Estonia, the United Kingdom and the United States. This group (+ 30%) is increased over the studied years to seven countries in 2020: the three mentioned NATO members with Norway, Latvia, Hungary and the best performing country: Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (29.9%).

The plus 80% group started in 2014 with Portugal and Slovenia. Since the year 2018 are there no members anymore with a military budget in which more than 80% went to personnel outlays. The plus 70% group existed in 2014 of eight countries and reduced to

two (Croatia, Greece) in 2020. The Hellenic republic is one of the greatest defence spenders in relation to the GDP (2014:2.23% and 2020: 2.68%), but is one of the worst NATO members concerning the investment rule.

#### The following countries are related to the group in 2020:

- 70 plus: Croatia and Portugal;
- 60 plus: Belgium, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal and Romania;
- 50 plus: Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Slovak rep. and Turkey,
- 40 plus: Canada, Denmark, France, FRG, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia;
- 30 plus: already mentioned (total seven).

During this period several countries decreased their personnel costs in the national military budgets. The next list gives an overview of all the countries with more than 15% reduction over the 2014-2020 years.

- Belgium:	77% (2014)	-	62% (2020)
- Bulgaria:	72%	-	55%
- Latvia:	52%	-	36%
- Luxembourg:	49%	-	29%
- Romania:	71%	-	53%
- Slovak rep.:	69%	-	42%
- Slovenia:	82%	-	66%
- Spain:	67%	-	52%

#### There is no example of the NATO member state in the opposite case.

In the year 2014 seven countries (30 plus: Estonia, UK and the

**Table 1a:** Over the studies years the division per category of the number of military personnel is as follows.

	2014	2020
+ 400.000	2	2
+ 200.000	1	1
+ 100.000	5	6
+ 50.000	3	2
+ 25.000	4	5
+ 12.500	4	4
+ 0	10	9

**Table 2:** Total military personnel (1000x).

2013:	3.312	
2014:	3.229	(minus 83.000 comparing with 2013)
2015:	3.125	(minus 104.000 comparing with 2014)
2016:	3.090	(minus 95.000 comparing with 2015)
2017:	3.163	(minus 27.000 comparing with 2016)
2018:	3.210	(plus 47.000 comparing with 2017)
2019:	3.245	(plus 35.000 comparing with 2018)
2020:	3.276	(plus 31.000 comparing with 2019)

USA) (40 plus: France, Hungary, Luxembourg and Norway) spent less than 50% of their budget in personnel costs. This figure is increased to fifteen countries in 2020 (see supra). Which is already half of the countries? The global conclusion is that the personnel costs are decreasing in all the NATO countries and since 2019 more than half of the members have a personnel share in their budget which is less than 50%.

### The defence expenditures

In the fourth table the members of the NATO are classified in alphabetic order with their "Defence Expenditures" (DE) in US

dollar. It gives the nominal figures for the year 2014 and 2020 of the national military budgets, as accepted in the NATO yearly reports. In the third row the reader finds the evolution in percentage. The two last lines are indicating if the countries have reached the Wales summit guidelines in 2020 (Table 4).

Over these years (2014-2020) the total D.E. increased with 64 billion US dollars or about 6.7%. In mostly all the member states the defence budget went higher with exception of five: Croatia, Greece, Norway, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Except the Balkan Republic of Croatia the other four NATO members are complete or partly in accordance with the Wales summit decisions

Table 3: Personnel share (in %).

	+ 80%	+ 70%	+ 60%	+ 50%	+ 40%	+ 30%
2014	2	8	4	8	4	3
2015	2	8	2	7	6	4
2016	1	8	4	4	9	3
2017	2	5	4	7	5	6
2018	0	8	2	6	5	8
2019	0	5	5	2	9	8
2020	0	2	6	6	8	7

Table 4: The DE evolution (in million us dollar).

	2014	2020		2% GDP	20% Invest
Albania	178	182	+ 2,2%	-	-
Belgium	5.199	5.436	+ 4,4%	-	-
Bulgaria	747	1.077	+ 44,1%	-	-
Canada	18.172	22.869	+ 25,8%	-	-
Croatia	1.064	1.033	- 2,9%	-	-
Czech rep.	1.975	3.266	+ 65,3%	-	-
Denmark	4.057	4.969	+ 22,4%	-	OK
Estonia	513	703	+ 37%	OK	OK
France	52.009	52.814	+ 1,5%	OK	OK
FRG	46.164	58.999	+ 27,8%	-	-
Greece	5.232	5.027	- 3,9%	OK	-
Hungary	1.210	2.827	+ 233%	-	OK
Italy	24.481	26.114	+ 6,6%	-	OK
Latvia	294	759	+ 258%	OK	OK
Lithuania	428	1.176	+ 274%	OK	OK
Luxembourg	253	407	+ 60,8%	-	OK
Montenegro	69	84	+ 21,7%	-	OK
Netherlands	10.346	13.146	+ 27%	-	OK
North-Macedonia	124	154	+ 24,2%	-	-
Norway	7.722	7.231	- 6,3%	OK	OK
Poland	10.104	13.527	+ 33,8%	OK	OK
Portugal	3.007	3.648	+ 21,3%	-	-
Romania	2.691	5.073	+ 88,6%	OK	OK
Slovakia	998	2.053	+ 206%	OK	OK
Slovenia	487	576	+ 18,3%	-	-
Spain	12.631	14.783	+ 17%	-	OK
Turkey	13.583	12.930	- 4,2%	-	OK
UK	65.658	61.847	- 5,6%	OK	OK
USA	653.942	784.952	+ 20%	OK	OK
Total	943.145	1.107.622	+ 6,7%	-	-

**Table 5:** Top ten military budgets – 2020 (in million us dollar).

(I) – USA:	784.952 (was nr. 1 in 2014) or 70,86%
(II) – UK:	61.847 (was nr. 2) or 5,58%
(III) – FRG:	58.999 (was nr. 4) or 5,32%
(IV) – France:	52.814 (was nr. 3) or 4,76%
(V) – Italy:	26.114 (was nr. 5) or 2,35%
(VI) – Canada:	22.869 (was nr. 6) or 2,06%
(VII) – Spain:	14.783 (was nr. 8) or 1,33%
(VIII) – Poland:	13.527 (was nr. 10) or 1,22%
(IX) – Netherlands:	13.146 (was nr. 9) or 1,18%
(X) – Turkey:	12.930 (was nr. 7) or 1,16%

concerning the D.E. The average of the increase, over those years, is 6.7% with extreme differences from a few percentages till over the 200% and higher.

The defence increase in several states is certainly related with the countries in the proximity of the Russian federation: the Baltic and east European countries. The fear of the past and the security threats from Moscow are the reasons why countries increased enormous their military budgets. Bulgaria is the lowest with 44,1% and Lithuania the highest with 277%! The next table gives an overview of the ten highest defence budgets in 2020 and comparing the country list place in 2014 as well the share of the national military in the NATO total of defence expenditures (Table 5).

Based on this list the US military budget is still and far away the most important military budget in figures with 70.86% of the NATO total. As underlined in this article (point 2, supra) not the complete military system of the USA is related with the NATO territory! The United Kingdom is still the second most important budget with a share of 5.58%, which is a lot lower than the American budget [9].

Remarkable is the position of the Federal Republic of Germany. This German defence budget went up with 27.8% but doesn't achieve the two Wales summit guidelines. Nevertheless Germany has the most important military budget in the European Union and climbed over France. Germany certainly has the financial means to increase the national defence expenditures. But an increasing role of Germany in the EU/NATO defence system, that's like a red rag to a bull for several countries with the knowledge of WW2.

The second European nuclear power, the French republic, has increased his military budget in limited terms over the studied year. For the first time since the end of the Second World War the FRG has a more important military budget than the French republic. But France reached the two "Wales summit" guidelines. The second North American NATO member is Canada and this federation increased his budget with more than 25%, which is in percentage more than the southern neighbour.

On the end of this top ten list is the reversion of Turkey! All the other members (20 of the 30) do have a budget share of less than 1% comparing with the total NATO military expenditures. The 22 members of the European Union in the NATO have together a military budget of 224.026 million US dollar or about 20% of the NATO total and the EU budget is 28,5% of the USA military budget.

The addition of this EU military financial means with the four non- EU members (Iceland, Montenegro, Norway and Northern Macedonia = 7.469 million dollar) brings this European budget in

2020 to the figure of 231.495 million dollar. The encloses of the British budget brings a European budget to 293.342 million US dollar. This European calculation has still as result an enormous difference with the US military budget. The remark made for the US territory is also applicable for France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Indeed, parts of their present military budget are related with non-NATO territories!

Based at the NATO yearly report 2020 eleven states have reached the 2% GDP rule: the three Baltic States, France, Greece, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the UK and the USA.

The 20% investment rule is reached by 18 members: The same as in the previous list with exception of Greece (10 countries) plus Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Spain and Turkey.

In both cases is this improvement comparing with 2014. Indeed, the investment rule was reached in 2014 by only seven states: Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 2% GDP budget rule concerning the defence outlays was achieved by three states in 2014, namely: Greece, the UK and the USA. The Hellenic republic is the only NATO member with a military budget over the 2% GDP, but can't achieve the 20% investment rule. The reason is the high share of personnel costs in the military budget of the south European NATO member.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Over the studied years for this article the number of military personnel decreased with as deepest point: the year 2016. Then the number raised again. The total figure in the year 2020 is situated between the years 2013-14. Over the NATO members the half has an army of more than 25 thousand persons and the part is below this figure. What also means that a lot of NATO members do have a small army? The US has the greatest army in number of military personnel with a share of 41% of the NATO total, followed by Turkey. The most important European army is France. The result of the evolution concerning the military personnel in this nuclear power is a status quo in numbers over the studied years. On the other hand Germany and Poland are countries with an increasing number of military personnel. The opposite is the fact in Italy and the United Kingdom. Only the joint sum of the military personnel in the EU members of the NATO with the United Kingdom gives a greater army then the US military.

The defence budgets also increased over the last years and that in most of the NATO members. An exception is the United Kingdom. This country delivers the second most important budget in the

NATO. But with 70% the United States has a huge preponderance in the defence expenditures of the NATO. Since two years the Federal Republic of Germany has a greater military budget as France and this fact can lead to political tensions in the European discussions concerning an own defence system. Nevertheless Germany don't achieve the two NATO guidelines of the Wales summit of the year 2014.

Over the studied years the military personnel is back at the level before the start of the personnel savings. Also the military expenditures are back increasing. But the share of the personnel costs in the national defence budgets went down over the last years. What means that there is more budget space to buy and to pay investments and operational invoices. There can be no doubt about the fact that the European defence will have to rely on NATO and his North American input and this for the next decades. The past WW2 period (1945-2020) was a historic long time of peace and prosperity for Western Europe and these facts are undoubtedly accomplished to a significant degree by the NATO.

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