



Interview with Brigadier General Richard Rossmanith, Chairman Deployable Forces Coordination Group SHAPE, conducted on the occasion of his lecture on deployability and NATO Response Force, which took place at the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast.

Anna Galyga: Sir, deployability seems to be a very military term. Can you explain it in simple words?

BrigGen Rossmanith: Deployability is one of the crucial issues for NATO as we changed our strategy already in 1999. Nowadays NATO does not restrict itself only to the territory of its members but NATO is a global actor. We no longer simply defend our countries at the borders but we try to defend against risks and threats in this world. That means we have to go to places where the origins of those risks and threats are, like Afghanistan and other places. This requires deployability, which means that we have to get our forces, our headquarters there.

What abilities is deployability related to?

If you want to deploy to any place, you have to simply move your forces – your equipment and personnel over thousands of kilometres into another region or country. This strategic deployability is one of the most important features. It requires specific capabilities. In the past we used for example rail or road transport – that was tactical deployability. Nowadays we have to move across the oceans, across large distances into far-away regions. One of the aspects is strategic air mobility, strategic airlift capabilities and huge long-distance aircrafts. And this is something only a few nations have at the moment.

You need to have other elements, too – for example strategic communication, assets that can link forces deployed with their home bases. The forces also have to demonstrate the ability to survive and operate in such an environment like Afghanistan or other places. That is what we call expeditionary capabilities – they are capabilities, which enable to operate in an area of operation where you do not have sufficient host nations support, where you have extreme climate or other geographical circumstances. These are only a couple of capabilities.

Does deployability refer mostly to logistic and communication issues?

I think it refers to everything – it is logistics, it is Communication Information Systems (CIS), but it is also the mindset. As I said, in the past NATO was to defend our countries. Nowadays, we have to defend our interests and fight against security risks. I think that also requires different understanding, attitude, and different mindset of those who direct, but also those who conduct operations. Members of this Headquarters have been to Afghanistan and I have been on operations myself. I think it is also something you need to be psychologically adapted – to be away for a couple of months, to face risks and to operate in such environment.

Does the approach towards deployability evolve in any way within NATO?

Well, it has been evolving but we are still on the way to develop deployability. At the moment a lot of forces are still more related to the old kind of operations, they are more static and usable for defending their own countries rather than being able to be deployed into far-away regions. Nevertheless, we did a lot of work in force planning and I am responsible at our Headquarters in SHAPE for the NATO Response Force. NATO Response Force was created in 2002 to support that idea of expeditionary operation, of deployability. It is the force of roughly 25,000 troops, which are organised on a rotational basis. All NATO nations contribute their force packages in order to create that Force and to make it available. This Force can be used for operations but it is also a transformational effect to support nations in developing exactly those capabilities, which are required.

Talking about deployment – what is the way of a corps or a headquarters to be sent on operation?

Whether it is a NATO Command Structure or a NATO Force Structure, the respective troops principally have to show certain capabilities – the equipment and the training to be deployable. That is the precondition. From a purely procedural point of view, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) agrees on the deployment of forces. It is the highest political authority in NATO where all 26 NATO nations are represented with their ambassadors and only by unanimous vote of the

NATO Council we can start an operation. Then some planning is done. During that process nations are asked to contribute to an operation with their forces, this is what we call force generation. Then plans are made to move these forces into the joint operations area where they finally operate. That is being done in close cooperation with various NATO headquarters, SHAPE, other operational headquarters and the nations. However, the deployment of forces is still national responsibility.

Can you tell me more about these requirements that forces have to fulfill?

We have the Allied Command Operations Forces Standards – that is a set of rules, standards and requirements, which not only headquarters but all forces have to meet. I would say it is like a guideline or a benchmark. It describes a lot of standards – readiness standards, equipment, training and a lot of other aspects, which are to be fulfilled before we can consider such a force as being deployable.

Can you give me an example?

For example they have to fulfill certain manning rules, have the right equipment and the right communications systems. But there are more of these standards and criteria.

You are Chairman of the Deployable Forces Coordination Group. What is the role of this group?

It is a small group, which was established in 2003 at SHAPE to take care of the NATO Response Force (NRF). The heads of states and governments at the NATO Summit in Prague in November 2002 decided to establish the NATO Response Force. This is a relatively complex and huge project within NATO. We see the requirement to have a specific focus on this issue from a SHAPE perspective. This Group was chaired by Norwegian Brigadier General until 2006 and then I took over.

As the name states, it is the Coordination Group, what is being coordinated then?

The NATO Response Force is something like the core of NATO's deployability but as we also take care of a couple of other things – the more general term "deployable forces" has been used for that Group. I coordinate all the staff work, policy and conceptual work but also the implementation. I work together with other elements of our own Headquarters and with the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. The development of NRF capabilities is also being coordinating with the Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk and with subordinate commands.

I am also "advertising" the NRF and explaining the concept in sessions like we had here, at the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast, even though this Headquarters is not involved directly in NRF. In principle, there is interest in what we are doing and what this is all about, as deployability is not limited to NRF only. The implications coming from the lessons we learnt from the NRF are also of interest to others, like this Headquarters.

Talking about the lecture that you have delivered at our Headquarters – is it a part of a bigger programme?

I am travelling regularly to corps headquarters or other headquarters to give lectures as there is a need to know about these things and, as I said, the NRF is considered to be a transformational tool within NATO towards more expeditionary capabilities and towards more deployability.

Sir, what were the most important ideas presented in your lecture?

The main message was that we have an instrument like the NRF for two purposes. First of all, we have an operational tool for NATO to act in a crisis as the first response and a tool available for the transformation of NATO Command Structure, NATO Force Structure and NATO forces. Secondly, I was referring to the review of the Command Structure going on in NATO. There are some lines of development as we have drawn a couple of lessons from the NRF, which can be implemented or at least worked on.