

New quality in Finland's co-operation with NATO

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On 8–9 October, Finland joined the Czech Republic, the USA and the Baltic states in the Baltic Regional Training Event XIII (BRTE) for the second time. BRTE is a series of NATO air force exercises in which partner states are also allowed to participate. BRTE is mainly aimed at preparing NATO member states to perform the Baltic Air Policing mission. The Finnish Air Force delegated two F/A-18 Hornet multirole fighters to participate in BRTE XIII along with staff personnel (including to NATO Combined Air Operations Centre in Uedem). Finland took part in BRTE for the first time in March this year.

Commentary

- Finland's participation in BRTE is symptomatic of the changes taking place in Finnish defence policy, including relations with NATO. Finland defines itself as a country remaining outside any military alliances. Since the 1990s, it has been developing co-operation with NATO as part of Partnership for Peace programme through participation in NATO's crisis management operations and PfP exercises. It has thus not only been enhancing its political and military co-operation and national security after a period of 'Finlandisation' but also interoperability with the armed forces of NATO member states, Finland's partners in international crisis management. However, until recently Finland did not move as far as taking part in activities related to collective defence (article 5 of the Washington Treaty) in its co-operation with NATO. The participation in BRTE this year and (albeit to a limited extent) in NATO's crisis management exercises CMX (based on the scenario envisaged in article 5) in Norway in autumn 2011 has gone beyond the previous framework of Finnish co-operation with NATO.
- The fact that Finland has embarked on this co-operation is linked to the analysis of the security environment. The perception of Russia being the greatest challenge to the security of Finland, the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic has gained in importance since the Russian-Georgian war. Furthermore, as with the other Nordic states, Finland is increasingly anxious about Russia's increasing expenses on defence and about its military reform. Although Finland has adhered to the principle of protecting its territory by itself, it probably does not rule out asking NATO for assistance should it become involved directly in a crisis/conflict. Furthermore, Finland's co-operation with NATO may turn out to be necessary in the case of crisis/conflict in this part of the Baltic Sea region.

- By participating in BRTE, Finland wants to improve the interoperability of its armed forces in the region (in this case of the air force, which is of key significance in responding to crises and conflicts in the region) through enhancing co-operation with NATO command structures, practicing communication, procedures and actions necessary for air policing, intercepting hostile aircraft, etc. The participation in BRTE does not mean that Finland wants to take part in NATO's Baltic Air Policing. Furthermore, Finland is guided by the priority of ensuring its own security and emphasises its right to take sovereign decisions in defence policy in the occurrence of crises and conflicts in the region.