

# *NATO Plans 10-fold Boost of European Rapid Response Force*

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Brussels, June 23 (RHC)-- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is contemplating to boost its rapid response force in Europe to up to 40,000 troops, a 10-fold rise from the initial 4,000-strong force deployed in 2014, which will mostly be stationed near Russian borders.

"NATO defense ministers ... [will] make a decision to further increase the strength and capacity of the 13,000-strong NATO Response Force (NRF) to 30,000 or 40,000 troops," RT quoted the military alliance's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as saying on Monday.

The troops for the so-called Spearhead Force, which will include special forces and rapid response teams, are due to fall under the command of six headquarters that will be based in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

According to the report, NATO's decision on the shape of the military force will be formally announced during the alliance's defense ministers meeting due to be held on June 24-25 in Brussels.

The Spearhead Force, the report added, has already held its first war games, code-named Noble Jump, in Poland. Stoltenberg stated that the military drills became "the biggest reinforcement" of defense since Cold War times, insisting that NATO is facing challenges from "the behavior of a more assertive" Russia.

The development came following Stoltenberg's harsh criticism of the Kremlin for declaring plans to add 40 newly-built intercontinental ballistic missiles to its nuclear arsenal in 2015.

This is while Russian President Vladimir Putin said his decision on the further development of the country's strategic nuclear armed forces came in response to a report that Washington was seriously considering to deploy heavy weapons to new NATO member states near the Russian border on a permanent basis.

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