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'Speed plus range'

101st Airborne
incorporates
Marine Osprey
into training
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Soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division conduct an air assault operation out of an MV-22 Osprey during training at Fort Campbell, Ky., on Jan. 23.

COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

COVER STORY

Airborne troops train for tilt-rotor future

101st to be first unit to receive MV-75

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — The Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey touched down gently on the long, thick vegetation in a clearing on Fort Campbell's training grounds, sending debris flying across the field as soldiers stormed out the back of the tilt-rotor aircraft.

The 101st Airborne Division soldiers raced forward and dove into the grass, turning away from the hulking airframe to protect them from the hurricane-strength winds the Osprey produces with its twin rotors in helicopter mode. It marked a first for the historic division — a long-range air assault of infantry forces with a tilt-rotor aircraft. And it marked the first step to prepare the division to receive its own tilt-rotor aircraft — the MV-75 that Bell Helicopter is building for the service — in the coming years.

"We cooked that flight," said Army Staff Sgt. Peyton Porter, an infantry squad leader in the 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment of the 101st's 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team. A veteran of the Iraq War who has completed dozens of air assault operations on traditional Army UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters, Porter said he was struck by the speed of the Osprey in his first time flying in a tilt-rotor aircraft.

"It was pretty smooth, especially considering how fast it was," Porter said immediately after conducting the air assault operation during a major training exercise dubbed Operation Lethal Eagle on Jan. 23. "It was very fast. Very nice. A lot faster than any Chinook ride that I've been on."

Operation Lethal Eagle is the 101st's primary annual divisionwide home station training exercise, which brought together about 7,000 Fort Campbell soldiers to test the 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team's lethality. After the Army announced last year the 101st would be the service's first unit to receive the MV-75 aircraft, division planners sought to include Ospreys in Lethal Eagle to help develop the Army's doctrine for fighting with its coming tilt-rotor capability.



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers with the 101 Airborne Division train with an MV-22 Osprey at Fort Campbell, Ky., on Jan. 23.



Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team load an Infantry Squad Vehicle and prepare for a nighttime assault.

"We don't want [the MV-75] to arrive here with a learning curve," said Brig. Gen. Travis McIntosh, the 101st Airborne's deputy commander for operations and a longtime Army aviator. "We want it to arrive as a warfight-

ing capability ready to go in this division. So, getting the MV-22 tilt-rotor experience today allows us to inform how we will fight with the MV-75 tomorrow."

The 101st Airborne Division has

spent recent months planning for the eventual arrival of the MV-75, currently slated for 2028, but last month was the first time it got its hands on an Osprey to see firsthand the difference a tilt-rotor aircraft could make.

The MV-75, once completed, will be slightly smaller than the Osprey, but it will bring "a new world" of capability to the 101st Airborne and the Army, according to McIntosh. Leaders at Fort Campbell have begun referring to those coming capabilities as "Air Assault 2.0," he said.

"We've never been able to really get large-scale and long-range together, and that's the relevance," the general said. "We think speed plus range equals relevance. ... In this division, we only have half the equation right now, I can either give you speed or range, not both, and with the tilt-rotor capability that we will be fielding soon, we will have that relevance and bring Air Assault 2.0 into the future fight."

Though the Osprey can serve for now as a stand-in for the MV-75, the

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MILITARY



PHOTOS BY COREY DICKSTEIN/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team take cover during an air assault operation as a CH-47 Chinook departs during a training event at Fort Campbell, Ky., on Jan. 22.

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comparison of the tilt-rotor aircraft is not apples-to-apples, said Douglas Englen, a retired legendary Army aviator who is now a military sales and strategy manager for Bell Helicopter.

He said that Bell — which worked with Boeing to build the Osprey — has taken many design and capability cues from the Osprey, but the MV-22 was purpose-built for the Marines. Bell has designed the MV-75 from scratch specifically for the Army's needs, Englen said.

Englen describes the new helicopter as a jump to a third generation in tilt-rotor aviation. Among the key concepts of the design is an all-digital platform that can be rapidly updated and equipped with the most modern software and hardware capabilities to allow the Army to adjust practically on the fly to emerging enemy capabilities.

The MV-75 is designed to carry 14 troops and a crew of four, according to the Army. It has a cruise speed of 320 mph — much faster than the Black Hawk's operating speed of 183 mph. And it will boast a range of up to 920 miles, which dwarfs the Black Hawk's

“Can you shoot, move, communicate? We’re getting a ton of technology. It enables us. It doesn’t replace those core skill sets.”

Army Col. Ryan Bell
3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team

367-mile top range.

Fort Campbell officials expect to begin receiving MV-75s around 2028. Since it was chosen to build the new tilt-rotor aircraft in 2022, Bell has sped efforts to produce the new airframe, moving its goal for production up about 30 months from its initial plans, Englen said. The Army wants to further speed production, Gen. Randy George, Army chief of staff, said last month. Army officials said last week they could not immediately provide an updated time frame for MV-75 production.

Army officials believe the new capability will allow the 101st Airborne to



A soldier prepares for a nighttime assault on an enemy position.

deploy its forces as far as Europe with just MV-75s, instead of needing to load troops and helicopters on planes or ships to reach the Continent.

Army Col. Ryan Bell, the commander of the 101st's 3rd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, described that coming capability as “extending our legs.”

Bell watched closely as the MV-22 from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 774 at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., conducted a handful of air assault flights with his Easy Company soldiers, who had held as his reserve force for the exercise.

The colonel, an infantry officer and

veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, joked that he wished he would have put himself on one of the Osprey flights to experience just how much faster it was than the Black Hawks and Chinooks he has flown on for years.

But the operation was an opportunity to learn. Bell was impressed with the Osprey's ability to rapidly load up squads of his soldiers at a location miles away from the training fight and deliver them into an engagement.

“We can move forces from much farther away, whether we're fighting in Europe or the Pacific — from a different island, for example,” Bell said. “It lets me change the geometry of the battlefield because of those speed and legs — the distance it can cover so quickly.

“It's going to make us much more lethal.”

But Bell also said it was critical his troops spent Lethal Eagle focusing on basic infantry tactics while they worked to incorporate all the Army's latest technology and the tilt-rotor Ospreys. His units employed the Army's new M7 rifles, its latest night vision goggles and the new Infantry Squad Vehicle during its Lethal Eagle fight.

“We're infantry. It's all about being really good at the fundamentals,” he said. “Can you shoot, move, communicate? We're getting a ton of technology. It enables us. It doesn't replace those core skill sets.”

It was not lost on Bell or McIntosh the significance of placing the 2-506th's legendary Easy Company — of “Band of Brothers” fame — in the Osprey for the 101st Airborne's first-ever tilt-rotor air assault. One of the Army's first airborne units that jumped into combat on World War II's D-Day, Easy Company will now help pave the way for the next revolution in Army air-based operations, McIntosh said.

The division plans to include Ospreys in all its major training events going forward until the MV-75 arrives at Fort Campbell — so long as the Marines or another of the Army's sister services has one available, McIntosh said.

“We've often said we're not an innovation division, but we are a division that has a history of innovating, and this fits right in our profile,” the general said. “This is the division that will innovate appropriately and tell our Army how to properly execute [MV-75] air assaults.”

MILITARY

Navy expands meaning of spiritual support

Innovation includes community, yoga, canine therapy

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy marked Spiritual Awareness Month on a global scale for the first time, an initiative aimed at supporting sailors of all beliefs, including those who find meaning through community rather than organized religion.

The observance was intended to strengthen sailors' "spiritual wellbeing" through religious services, confidential counseling and other connections to community, according to Navy Installations Command.

"Naval service is incredibly demanding which requires our warriors to remain ready, both physically and spiritually," command spokeswoman Destiny Sibert said by email on Jan. 27. "This month is dedicated to creating a supportive environment for our Sailors and their families."

The effort began in 2022 as a regional observance at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. Vice Adm. Scott Gray, head of the installations command, expanded it into a global program beginning this year.

At Yokosuka — home to the U.S. 7th Fleet and the Navy's largest overseas installation — January featured a range of activities, many adapted from existing programs.

Events included all-hands emails, relationship workshops, yoga classes, canine therapy and mindfulness seminars, said Chaplain (Cmdr.) Daniel Clark, the base's command chaplain.

"This doesn't even necessarily have to pertain to religion itself — it's spirituality, it's the anchor," he said during a Jan. 20 interview at Yokosuka.

Outside organized religion, spirituality may include family, shared values, fellow sailors or devotion to country, Clark said.

"It could be along the lines of patriotism — a connection with, say in the United States, the Constitution and the values that it portrays," he said. "Rooting yourself in that, that's one



JONATHAN BAEZ/Stars and Stripes

Petty Officer 3rd Class Issuaha Townes interacts with Penny, a therapy dog that regularly participates in the USO's Therapy Tails program at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Jan. 19.



Chaplain (Cmdr.) Daniel Clark discusses the Navy's Spiritual Awareness Month initiative at the Chapel of Hope on Yokosuka Naval Base.

example of a non-religious but spiritual connection.

"Some people may not use the world 'spirituality,' but that really is, in fact, what it is — it's that thing that grounds us and roots us."

Clark said the observance was organized before Defense Secretary Pete

"Some people may not use the world 'spirituality,' but that really is, in fact, what it is — it's that thing that grounds us and roots us."

Chaplain (Cmdr.) Daniel Clark

Hegseth announced plans to "make the Chaplain Corps great again."

Hegseth announced in a Dec. 17 video posted to X that he intends to pursue a "top-down cultural shift putting spiritual wellbeing on the same footing as mental and physical health." He also said he plans to reinvigorate the chaplain's role, which he described as having been "degraded in an atmosphere of political correctness and secular humanism."

Clark said Navy Installations Command already emphasizes mental and physical health, making spiritual

awareness a natural extension.

He and his team coordinated events with such organizations as the Red Cross, Fleet and Family Services and the USO.

At the USO, that included Therapy Tails, a program allowing sailors to spend time with therapy dogs. Jacee Maldonado, a military spouse, and her dog, Penny, are regular volunteers.

"I really think it just helps them spiritually, and just gives them, you know, kind of offloading the bad and just feeling a little bit of joy, even if it's only for a couple of minutes," she said at the Jan. 19 event.

For Petty Officer 3rd Class Issuaha Townes, of Jacksonville, Fla., Therapy Tails and the communities at the USO and Yokosuka's Liberty Center have been important support networks during his time in Japan.

"I can honestly say, as far as me trying to stay grounded, just interacting with people here has helped a lot," he said Jan. 19 at the USO.

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MILITARY

New carrier begins sea trials in Atlantic

USS John F. Kennedy crew gets chance to test crucial systems

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The USS John F. Kennedy sailed into the Atlantic last month for sea trials, the ship's builder said.

The second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier under construction departed Newport News Shipbuilding, in Virginia, on Jan. 28, according to Huntington Ingalls Industries, the parent company of the shipyard.

The sea trials will give the Navy and HII workers a chance to operate crucial systems and components at sea for the first time — a key test of the new ship's readiness for its scheduled commissioning in March 2027.

The new carrier, to be designated CVN-79, is the second named for the 35th president, a World War II Navy hero who was assassinated in 1963.

The first USS John F. Kennedy was a modified Kitty Hawk-class carrier laid down in 1964. It retired in 2007 as the Navy's last conventionally-powered carrier.

The new USS John F. Kennedy is a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier with



Huntington Ingalls Industries

The USS John F. Kennedy leaves Newport News, Va., for sea trials on Jan. 28.

a displacement of around 100,000 tons. The ship is about two years behind its original construction schedule, with delays due to the COVID pandemic and problems with electromagnetic systems needed to move and launch aircraft.

The John F. Kennedy is to operate with F-35C Lightning II aircraft. It will replace the USS Nimitz, the Navy's oldest carrier, which was commissioned in 1975. A total of 10 Nimitz carriers were built, with the final carrier, USS George H.W. Bush, commis-

sioned in 2009. That same year, the USS Gerald R. Ford began a new class of carriers when it was laid down at Newport News.

USS John F. Kennedy's commissioning would be followed by its sailing to its homeport of Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., just west of Seattle. The base is undergoing a nearly \$150 million electrical and infrastructure upgrade to accommodate the new carrier, which is expected to have in-port electrical needs far greater than those of the Nimitz-class carriers

it was designed to handle.

The USS Nimitz is scheduled to depart Kitsap early this year and arrive at Naval Station Norfolk, Va., by April to begin a lengthy decommissioning process that would see the ship retired after it is stripped of usable weapons and other components.

Newport News Shipbuilding also is building the next Ford-class carrier, USS Enterprise. It is slated for commissioning in 2030.

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Pentagon urged to reconsider Stars and Stripes overhaul

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The National Military Family Association implored the Pentagon to ensure Stars and Stripes' long-standing editorial independence is maintained in a recent letter sent to the Defense Department's top spokesman, who vowed to "refocus" the publication's content.

NMFA CEO Besa Pinchotti wrote that the organization and the military families it has represented for some 57 years were "deeply concerned" about the plans Sean Parnell, the top Pentagon spokesman, outlined in a Jan. 15 social media post. Parnell wrote the Pentagon would overhaul Stars and Stripes and rid it of "woke distractions that syphon morale, and adapt it to serve a new generation of service members."

"I urge you to reconsider any actions

that would compromise the independence or core mission of Stars and Stripes," Pinchotti wrote in the letter. "Protecting its editorial independence honors its history and ensures it can continue to serve service members and their families with integrity."

Pinchotti said she was compelled to write to the Defense Department because the military families NMFA supports rely on independent reporting on the issues that are unique to their lives — issues Stars and Stripes has long covered such as housing, military moves and hyperlocal issues in the communities around overseas U.S. military bases.

"I don't know that it's even fully hit the families yet to understand the impact of this," she said in an interview. "It's one of those things that I think

[military families] will miss when it's not there and they're wondering why you don't know things, and then realize, 'Oh, that's where I was learning about that.'"

"For a lot of military families, it's not just a paper. It's a lifeline."

The NMFA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping U.S. military families navigate and solve "the unique challenges of military life," according to its mission statement. For more than five decades, the organization has advocated for military families, studied the issues that impact them and, when needed, provided financial and other support for those families.

Parnell's brief announcement about Stars and Stripes' editorial future came as a surprise to the news organization's leadership, who have said no one at the

Pentagon has communicated with them about any potential changes. Pentagon officials have declined on multiple occasions to provide Stars and Stripes reporters additional details about Parnell's plans.

The House Armed Services Committee last month sent two bipartisan requests to the Pentagon seeking answers on how it would ensure the Stars and Stripes editorial independence Congress intended.

Eight Senate Democrats and independents — most members of the Senate Armed Services Committee — have also sent a letter to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth demanding answers about plans that could challenge Stars and Stripes' independence.

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MILITARY



YAMIL CASARREAL/U.S. Marine Corps

A Marine Corps all-weather coat is tailored at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C.

Marines ban sale, issue of coat because of flaws

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is making its all-weather coat unavailable due to a defect that can cast an unsightly hue, according to a memo from the service.

The fabric of some of the trench coat-style garments bleeds a noticeable orange substance when exposed to water or rain, resulting in an “unprofessional appearance,” the Marine Corps said in the message Jan. 26. Such exposure also can stain and damage uniforms.

The manufacturing defect was identified in a specific production lot of the gray double-breasted coat, the message said.

Typically, the coat is worn to protect a Marine’s dress uniform and ribbons from inclement weather.

All sales and initial issuance of the coat are suspended until further notice, and the Defense Logistics Agency was directed to notify the Marine Corps once it had identified the contracts and lot numbers of the affected coats.

The service also ordered recruitment depots to issue guidance on “de-issuing” the coats and track affected Marines, among other requirements.

Additional guidance to include replacing defective coats would be issued to all Marines, the message states.

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Prescription costs waived for families living far from base

BY MARC CASTANEDA
Stars and Stripes

Prescription copayments paid by some military families living far from military health facilities will soon be waived under a change to the Tricare insurance program.

Starting Feb. 28, active-duty family members enrolled in Tricare Prime Remote in the United States will no longer pay copayments for covered prescription medications filled at retail pharmacies, according to a Jan. 27 Tricare news release.

Roughly 58,000 Tricare Prime Remote dependents are expected to benefit from the change, saving military families an estimated \$5 million annually in eliminated pharmacy copayments, Defense Health Agency spokesman Peter Graves said via email.

The waiver applies to dependents who live more than 50 miles or a one-hour drive from a military treatment facility pharmacy, where prescriptions are typically provided at no cost.

The policy change — part of the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act — addresses “long-standing concerns raised by military families and service advocates about the inequity of requiring remote duty

families to pay for prescriptions while families near installations receive them free,” Graves said.

Before the change, families enrolled in Tricare Prime Remote were required to pay copayments for prescriptions filled at retail pharmacies or through home delivery.

“The waiver is funded within DHA’s existing pharmacy operations budget,” Graves said. “DHA is absorbing this cost to eliminate the financial disparity for families at remote duty locations.”

On average, beneficiaries are expected to save about \$85 per year, though actual savings will vary depending on prescription needs, Graves said. Families managing chronic conditions that require multiple medications could see savings of several hundred dollars annually.

The waiver does not apply to those enrolled in Tricare Prime Remote Overseas, according to the release.

Eligible families do not need to take any action to receive the benefit. The copayment waiver will be applied automatically at the pharmacy counter beginning on the effective date, Tricare said.

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Washington state-based Stryker brigade arrives in S. Korea

BY YOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A Stryker brigade from Washington state has begun arriving in South Korea to assume the U.S. Army’s latest rotational mission on the peninsula, reinforcing U.S.-South Korea defenses amid ongoing regional tensions.

The 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division — known as the Lancer Brigade — will serve about eight months on the peninsula,

according to a Jan. 30 email from 2nd ID spokesman Maj. Steven Modugno.

Some of the Lancer troops arrived Jan. 27 at Osan Air Base, 35 miles south of Seoul, according to information posted on the Defense Visual Information Distribution System.

The brigade is permanently stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., according to the Army.

Modugno would not disclose exactly how many troops are coming to South Korea but said a Stryker combat team

typically consists of more than 3,000 soldiers.

The team will replace the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division — known as the Raider Brigade — from Fort Carson, Colo., which has served in South Korea since June.

The transition is a “routine event and part of the U.S. Army’s continued commitment to provide heel-to-toe rotational support to the robust combined defense posture protecting [South Korea],” Modugno said.

About 1,500 U.S. military vehicles, including Strykers, are prepositioned in South Korea for use by rotational units.

The armored, eight-wheeled vehicles can carry up to 11 troops and their equipment.

Rotational brigades in South Korea previously consisted of armored units equipped with tanks.

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MILITARY

2026 Guard deployments may cost \$1.1B

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's deployment of the National Guard to American cities cost \$496 million last year and could cost \$1.1 billion this year, according to an analysis released Jan. 28 by the Congressional Budget Office.

The estimates cover the cost of deployments to Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Memphis, Tenn.; Portland, Ore.; and Chicago as well as the mobilization of 200 National Guard personnel who were put on standby in Texas after leaving Chicago.

The deployments to Los Angeles, Chicago and Portland have ended, but the National Guard presence is continuing in Washington, D.C., Memphis and New Orleans, where troops were deployed in late December. The standby force in Texas also remains.

Continuing those deployments at their year-end size would cost \$93 million per month, according to the nonpartisan agency's analysis, which was requested by Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, the top Democrat on the Senate Budget Committee.

Nearly a dozen other Senate Democrats signed on to the request for a formal probe in October.

"The American people deserve to



JEREMY FARSON/U.S. National Guard

Members of the Georgia National Guard patrol the Anacostia Metro Station in Washington, D.C., last month.

know how many hundreds of millions of their hard-earned dollars have been and are being wasted on Trump's reckless and haphazard deployment of National Guard troops to Portland and cities across the country," Merkley said in a statement.

The agency said it was difficult to predict future costs, partly because many of the deployments have been

challenged in court. Generally, deploying 1,000 National Guard personnel to a U.S. city in 2026 would cost \$18 million to \$21 million per month, depending on living costs.

The ongoing deployment of more than 2,690 troops to Washington, D.C., which the Trump administration has indicated will continue at least through the end of 2026, will cost \$55 million

per month, or \$660 million for the year, according to the analysis.

The agency said it calculated expenses by tallying costs for military pay and benefits when National Guard personnel are mobilized, costs for housing and food, and transportation costs for moving personnel from their home stations and back. Those total expenses range from \$522 to \$607 per service member per day.

Trump began the deployments in June in Los Angeles in response to protests stemming from immigration enforcement efforts. Pentagon officials at the time said the mission, which also included the deployment of 700 active-duty Marines, would cost \$134 million.

The Congressional Budget Office said the mobilization actually cost \$193 million last year. Deployments cost \$223 million in Washington, D.C.; \$33 million in Memphis; \$26 million in Portland; and \$21 million in Chicago.

Trump has defended his decision to send National Guard troops to American cities, arguing they have lowered crime and made cities safer.

"Can't imagine why governors wouldn't want us to help," he said in a news conference last month.

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US armor unit to be deployed to Romania, official says

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A U.S. armor unit will be deployed to Romania to enhance the "quality and lethality" of the American military presence there, a top defense official from that country said.

The plan was on the agenda during a recent visit to the country by U.S. European Command's Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, Defense Chief Gen. Gheorghita Vlad said in an interview with Romanian public television.

"The United States has agreed to maintain the same level of force contribution and, moreover, to improve the quality and lethality of the forces deployed in Romania," Vlad told the network on Jan. 25.

The "best example" of the U.S. commitment to Romania was provided by

Grynkeiwich, who told his Romanian counterpart that "a detachment of U.S. soldiers equipped with Abrams tanks will be deployed in Romania," Vlad said.

It wasn't clear when or how many soldiers might be involved in the Romania deployment. Vlad said the plan is not expected to add to the overall number of American soldiers in Romania but rather serve as an improvement on the types of forces in the country.

Any tank unit pegged for setting up a mission in Romania could be drawn from other Army ground forces already on rotational missions in other parts of Europe.

Still, adding U.S. battle tanks in Romania is likely to send a reassuring signal to allies on the eastern flank, who have worried about the durability



DOMINIQUE WASHINGTON/U.S. Army

Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division participate in an exercise in 2020 in Smerdan, Romania.

of the future American force posture in the region.

Vlad's remarks come on the heels of a U.S. troop reduction in Romania and several other countries.

In October, the Pentagon announced

that it was ending the rotation of a U.S. Army brigade to Romania that was part of an increased force presence set up in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The decision involved about 3,000 soldiers, 700 of whom were based in Romania.

Other elements from the brigade were dispersed to different countries on NATO's eastern flank, including Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia. The U.S. still has about 1,000 troops in Romania.

Putting a contingent of U.S. tankers in Romania could present an opportunity to better coordinate training opportunities with their Romanian counterparts.

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MILITARY

Study: US, allies need more focus on Arctic

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The United States and its allies in Europe and the Pacific should join forces to build a joint Arctic fighting concept aimed at countering the growing Russia-China alliance in the High North, a new think tank report contends.

Russia has spent the past decade adding firepower in the Arctic with assistance from China, but allies aren't keeping pace, the Hudson Institute said in a new study that calls for a new approach to close security gaps.

"As strategic competition heats up, the US alliance system may be unprepared to credibly counter military challenges from Moscow and Beijing," the report said. "One concern is that Russia is seeking to expand its submarine operations to maintain credible targeting of the US homeland with submarine-launched nuclear weapons."

Over the past several years, the region has steadily become more of a focal point for the United States and its two main rivals, Russia and China. As sea ice melts, new sea lanes are opening in the area, which also is home to vast amounts of valuable resources.

While the United States is the only NATO country with strategic interests that span the entire Arctic, from the Barents Sea to the Bering Sea, Washington needs allies to help secure those interests, the report said.

The strategy calls for integration of

U.S. and allied naval warfare operations across the Arctic and into the Baltics and northern Pacific Ocean.

"This effort would counter Russian and Russian-Chinese operational plans by coupling the Arctic with the two theaters," according to the report, which noted that northern European allies along with Canada, Japan and South Korea would need to coordinate their efforts.

The concept, which calls for allies to invest in a wide range of new manned and unmanned systems to increase the alliance's reach, comes at a tense time in the High North and in NATO itself.

In recent weeks, the United States has been at odds with several allies over President Donald Trump's push to take control of Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of fellow NATO member Denmark.

Leaders in Denmark and other key NATO countries — such as France, the U.K. and Germany — have opposed Trump's insistence that Greenland be transferred to American control.

But at the World Economic Forum annual gathering in Davos, Switzerland, last month, the strain on relations started to show signs of easing, as Trump ruled out the use of military force to annex the strategic island.

Trump also announced an agreement related to Greenland that would be supported across the alliance.

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CHRISTOPHER BOKUM/U.S. Coast Guard

USCGC Polar Star escorts an Australian-owned cruise ship out of pack ice in the Ross Sea in Antarctica after the vessel requested assistance on Jan. 17.

Polar Star icebreaker marks 50 years with Coast Guard

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The granddaddy of the U.S. Coast Guard fleet is marking its 50th anniversary of service by doing what it does best — breaking ice.

The Polar Star, the Coast Guard's only heavy icebreaker, arrived in January at McMurdo Sound, in Antarctica, for its annual mission in Operation Deep Freeze to clear channels for supply ships to reach scientific stations at the bottom of the planet.

According to the Coast Guard, the Polar Star can cut through 6-foot-thick ice at a speed of 3 knots. It can break up ice to 21 feet thick by continuously ramming, backing up, then ramming again.

Commissioned on Jan. 17, 1976, the Polar Star becomes one of three fully operational ships in the U.S. military that are more than a half-century old. The USS Blue Ridge, an amphibious command ship homeported at the United States Fleet Activities Yokosuka in Japan, was commissioned in November 1970. The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, homeported at Naval Base Kitsap in Washington state, was commissioned in April 1975.

The 13,500-ton Polar Star left its home port at Coast Guard Base Seattle on Nov. 20.

Capt. Jeff Rasnake, the ship's commander, said during an interview just before the Polar Star's departure that he hoped to mark the ship's "birthday"



CHRISTOPHER BOKUM/U.S. Coast Guard

USCGC Polar Star's crew enjoys an "ice liberty" on the frozen Ross Sea on Jan. 12.

off Cape Polar Star. The landmark, named for the ship in the 1980s, is on the southwestern tip of Coulman Island, in Antarctica's Ross Sea.

"If all goes well, we'll celebrate," Rasnake said, adding, "She's an old ship, but she's a good ship."

The Polar Star is one of only three oceangoing icebreakers operated by the U.S. government. In addition to the Polar Star, the Coast Guard operates two medium icebreakers, the USCGC Healy and the USCGC Storis, which can cut through up to 8 feet of ice using the ramming method.

The Coast Guard commissioned two heavy icebreakers in the 1970s: the Polar Star in 1976 and its sister ship, the Polar Sea, in 1978. The Polar Sea was retired in 2010 due to severe engine wear.

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