The Allied Mobile Force was created in 1961 as a flexible, highly mobile instrument for intervention on the NATO flanks in case of crises or provocations from the East. The Allied Mobile Force was to serve as a psychological ‘stiffener’. When a danger was recognized (e.g. troup concentrations or aggressive exercises beyond the borders of NATO in combination with an explosive political crisis) the AMF should be sent at sensitive points (e.g. North Norway, Greek or Turkish Thrace or East Anatolia) to demonstrate the will of the NATO not to tolerate any violation of its territory. The AMF was explicitly composed of combat units from as many as possible non-flank-alliance members to demonstrate solidarity. An attack on the AMF would, according to Art. 5 NAT, be an attack on the alliance as a whole as well as on every single member of it.

For the historian, the Allied Mobile Force serves as a very good indicator and example of the disparities between the planning and the realities of a military alliance. The operational plans and the structure of the force were created very fast and dynamically. The contributors earmarked one bataillon or/and a squadron of tactical fighter-bombers to the force which was commanded by a common headquarter in Germany. In the end the force was composed of six bataillons and six squadrons (three each for every flank).

Very soon, however, problems occurred. There were mainly three controversial points which laid and, in fact, today still lay at the heart of the alliance. First, the member states began to struggle on finance, especially on the common tasks. Especially the question of transportation (very expensive airlift) was at the core of in part embittered
discussions. Second, the national egoisms manifested themselves in the direct planning for the combat units. The character of the Allied Mobile Force made it necessary to earmark highly trained soldiers with special capabilities (e.g. paratroopers). These were a scarce resource and desperately needed in other contexts, e.g. in Northern Ireland by the British. So some member states employed the units in focal points outside the NATO without supplying adequate substitutes. Thirdly, in actual crises the leaders of the alliance refrained from the employment of the AMF because they were concerned that this would provoke the East and start an escalation – a situation which rather should be avoided by the AMF.

On the other hand, the force was created and actually ‘employed’ in a very efficient manner (over 100 exercises until 1989). It was constantly reviewed and streamlined in order to avoid unnecessary waste of effort or duplication.

The AMF is a very good example and an excellent indicator for the strengths and weaknesses of the North Atlantic Alliance – not the least for the complex decision structure of NATO, especially the contradictions between the claim of alliance solidarity, the organizational and financial problems of creating a supranational force and the national interests.

It is clear that the strategical context has totally changed since the end of the Cold War. But NATO has lived on and so have its basic structures, although changes have been initiated according to the new requirements. The paper argues that, despite these changes, major patterns of the alliance have survived, here especially the contradiction between the claims on solidarity and the national egoisms, the financial question and the complicated administrative structures. The successor of the AMF, the NATO Response Force (NRF), acts within the same framework as its historical template.