

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific geographical locations.

Managing the Divide

East-West Security beyond the Ukrainian Crisis

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- Soon after the Ukrainian crisis began to unfold in 2014 it became clear that returning to the *status quo ante* as enshrined in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe was no longer feasible in the short- or medium-term. The concept of the ›Common European Home‹ has been replaced by a real-world confrontation between Russia and the West reminiscent of the Cold War. This time around, both the experience of and mechanisms for managing such a confrontational relationship are lacking.
- Despite the absence of many essential traits of the Cold War, such as ideological antagonism, a global reach and nuclear stand-off, the current situation may be even more dangerous. In light of this, it is hardly accidental that ›peaceful coexistence‹, the catchword of *détente*, is gaining currency. Given the current circumstances, peaceful coexistence could imply a strategy to reconcile the competing prescriptions of ›containment‹ and ›engagement‹ – or ›conengagement‹.
- Conengagement is meant to address both concerns raised by the continuous deterioration of East-West relations, which call for containment and should provide reassurance against revisionism, and aspirations that the trend can be reversed. The latter, along with calls for engagement and incentives to reward compliance, ensure that the potential for political change is not thwarted by mutual antagonisms.

As the Ukrainian crisis unfolded in 2014, there was broad consensus that Europe should – and could – avoid being divided again.¹ Since then, it has become clear that a return to the *status quo ante* as enshrined in the »Charter of Paris for a New Europe« (the Paris Charter) of 1990 is not feasible in the short or medium term. US President George H.W. Bush's notion of a »Europe whole and free« and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's concept of a »Common European Home« have been replaced by a Western-Russian confrontation reminiscent of the Cold War. Unfortunately, this time around both the experience of and mechanisms for managing such a confrontational relationship are lacking. Despite the absence of many traits of the Cold War, such as ideological antagonism, a global reach and nuclear stand-off, the current situation may be even more dangerous than the last 20 years of the Cold War.² »Peaceful coexistence«, the catchword of *détente*, is gaining currency.

What does peaceful coexistence mean in the current circumstances? What requirements does it have, and how can it be transformed into a more amicable relationship in the not-too-distant future? Originally the term meant competition without war – competing political systems living side by side without undue interference, but also without convergence. It did, however, entail the *rapprochement* of the enemy blocs: Egon Bahr's 1963 proposal for »change through *rapprochement*« essentially meant that trust was needed to engineer change in the opponent's confrontational attitude (and to help alleviate the human burden caused by the confrontation).³ There are lessons to be derived from the Cold-War experience,

which are all the more necessary since it is not possible to discern even the contours of a replacement for the Common European Home. Before turning to the remedy, however, a few words are needed about two aspects of the diagnosis: the competing explanations of the origins of the current crisis and the implications of the competing academic concepts with regard to international relations.

Competing Narratives

Current similarities in the relationship between Russia and the West to that during the Cold War are revealed by the official discourse that unequivocally blames the other side. A case in point is US President Obama's speech at the UN General Assembly in 2014 in which he listed Russia as among the greatest international threats, along with the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the »Islamic State«. For his part, Vladimir Putin bashes the US time and again.

Whilst public and academic debates are more nuanced than politicians' speeches, the West generally perceives events in Ukraine, especially Russia's actions in Crimea and the Donbas, as having triggered the crisis. Conversely, the dominant Russian view is that the Ukraine crisis results from a relationship that had been degenerating for quite some time, and for which the West bears responsibility – through NATO (and EU) expansion, uncalled-for democratic lecturing and Western attempts to contain the global shift toward newly emerging powers.

The two main explanatory narratives that have emerged in the West regarding the crisis and Putin's Russia reflect these perceptions. The first narrative describes Western misbehaviour (or missed opportunities) and how the West does not regard Russia as an equal in international affairs, whilst Moscow's political class and the president himself repeatedly invoke Western disregard for Russia's vital interests, as well as the military alliance that is approaching Russian borders. They claim that Russia merely acted (albeit perhaps disproportionately) in self-defence in Ukraine. Most academics of the realist school, notably John Mearsheimer, share this view. The other narrative refers to the authoritarian transformation of the Russian polity that started around 2005 and has gathered speed since 24 September 2011, when Dmitri Medvedev suggested that Putin be nominated for president and Putin stated that he would like to have Medvedev as prime

1. This was officially declared on both sides: by Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov (»We hope the »safety net« that has been created over the years will prove strong enough and will enable us not only to restore the pre-conflict status quo, but also to move forward.«) Interview in *El País*, 17 September 2014, <http://on-planet.ru/policy/2400-tochka-nevozvratno-otnosheniyah-s-zapadomesche-ne-proydena.html>, accessed on 10 April 2015) and by Germany's Foreign Minister Steinmeier (»Die Krise ist tief, das Risiko einer neuen Spaltung Europas alles andere als gebannt. Ich kann nur davon abraten, unsere historischen Erfahrungen über Bord zu werfen. [...] Die gegenwärtige Krise zeigt, dass eine in Jahrzehnten aufgebaute und scheinbar tragfähige Sicherheitsarchitektur der ständigen Absicherung und Erneuerung bedarf. [This is a deep crisis. The risk of a new division of Europe still exists. I can only urge that we not disregard our historical experience. [...] The current crisis shows that an apparently robust security architecture that took decades to build requires constant protection and renovation.«) Interview in *Die Zeit*, 17/2014, www.zeit.de/2014/17/russland-ostukraine-frank-walter-steinmeier/seite-3. Accessed on 10 April 2015)

2. This is said despite the perception at that time that the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons and the advent of Ronald Reagan led to a Cold War within the Cold War, i.e. a marked rise in tensions after *détente* in the 1970s.

3. It did not, however, entail regime change the way ill-informed pundits misconstrued his concept after the Cold War.

minister. The Russian opposition and many Westerners (including academics with liberal and constructivist approaches) feel frustrated, viewing the Russian regime as using its inherent aggressiveness to generate public consent and secure its hold on power. They see Russia's intervention in Ukraine as an attempt to prevent the »EuroMaidan virus« spreading east or to ensure that Russia's renewed domination of former Soviet Union territory is not derailed by Ukraine's defection to the West.

Both narratives point to corroborating evidence, and both are somewhat plausible. Yet their political consequences differ greatly. The latter narrative advocates containment and deterrence and insists that Russia reverse its interventionist course in Ukraine as a condition for meaningful dialogue and *rapprochement*, whilst the former addresses the need to devise a new European security order and calls for engagement and cooperative efforts from both sides. A sensible response to the crisis would combine these seemingly incompatible prescriptions.

Congagement

A Western strategy to reconcile the competing remedies of »containment« versus »engagement« could be »conagement«.⁴ This assumes that the pan-European post-Cold-War order as enshrined in the Paris Charter of 1990 no longer provides direction for how to jointly devise a common European space. The growing estrangement of East and West must be cleverly managed: the concept of conagement addresses concerns raised by the continuously deteriorating relations as well as hopes that this trend can ultimately be reversed. The element of containment can guard against revisionism by sanctioning transgressions. Congagement also calls for engagement and incentives to reward compliance and ensure that the potential for political change is not thwarted by mutual antagonisms.

Three fundamental issues must be addressed:

(1) The Ukraine crisis has once again demonstrated the explosiveness of uncontrolled competition for power and influence in what Friedrich Naumann called »Zwischen-neuropa« – the uncharted territory between Russia and

Germany. The countries in this area must not merely be the trophies of great-power struggles. However, Russia's brute force has shown that those more or less failing states can easily be torn apart.

One undisputed lesson of the Cold War is that moving from outright confrontation to *détente* requires clearly delineating the respective spheres of influence. This happened after Soviet tanks had crushed the Prague Spring in 1968 because it was unfeasible to overthrow, dismantle or dismember the respective camps. Today, no such demarcation exists: With the dividing line running straight through Ukraine, the temptation to shift it further east or west keeps both sides on permanent alert and risks more far-reaching (military) repercussions.

(2) The gulf between Russian autocracy and European liberal universalism calls for a *modus operandi* to control the competition without forcing either side to renounce its claims. This implies acknowledging the plural character of political regimes provided they observe basic human and civil rights. Such an approach neither sacrifices values for interests nor questions each side's values; rather, it aims to strengthen them by setting a good example and engaging in all-encompassing dialogue. Political conditionalities are unhelpful. However, it is important to recall that the demise of the Soviet system ended the Cold War.

(3) Deficiencies in the European security architecture have been the subject of Russian grievances for more than two decades. Throughout the post-Cold-War era, Russia's prime concern has been the West's »NATO-centrism« which gave it the impression of being marginalized and cut down to size well before the »near abroad« in the post-Soviet space became an issue. Although there are no ready-made institutional designs and current circumstances make weakening NATO unthinkable for the West, these Russian complaints should be addressed.

Congagement, therefore, is not only meant to address the most salient issues in East-West relations to help facilitate compromise, but also must be translated into practical measures. This entails procedural questions such as proper sequencing, as well as institutional issues such as appropriate mechanisms, rules, procedures and institutions. Because the opposing sides have drifted so far apart, gradual *rapprochement* is needed.

4. Read more detail about this in: Matthias Dembinski, Hans-Joachim Schmidt, Hans-Joachim Spanger, *Einhegung: Die Ukraine, Russland und die europäische Sicherheitsordnung*, Frankfurt (HSFK-Report, Nr. 3) 2014.

Confidence-Building

In light of the shattered trust – for the West because of Russia's undercover warfare in Ukraine, and in Russia from Western arrogant negligence – the most urgent political task is to reverse the slide toward ever-greater antagonism. A process of confidence-building must be started, which will not be easy given the confrontational dynamics: it took many years of *détente* to begin negotiations on militarily meaningful confidence-building measures. Any such effort requires communication, preferably in a more formalized setting instead of the phone calls and emergency meetings that have become the norm. Risk-taking is the most convincing way to signal benign intentions and the absence of aggressive goals.

With regard to security, a couple of measures could gradually pave the way. The most urgent yet least demanding of these is a mechanism for avoiding dangerous encounters during the military posturing – especially air patrolling with transponders switched off – which has become a popular pastime in the past year. That should be followed by increased transparency, primarily concerning the ongoing talks about adapting the Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures (reducing the thresholds for prior notification and observation of military exercises and unusual force deployments, increasing the number of evaluation visits and raising the inspection quota).

In this respect, Russia's decision to withdraw from the Joint Consultative Group on the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in March 2015, after it had already suspended implementation in 2007, was not encouraging. Military hardware, including ballistic missile defence, tactical nuclear weapons and the US's Prompt Global Strike conventional weapon system, has been a highly contentious issue for quite some time. Russia is also calling for an expanded list of CFE-Treaty-relevant items with categories of new weapons, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and carrier-based aircraft.

Congagement must provide reassurance and extended deterrence for eastern NATO allies who now feel much less secure. Confidence must gradually be built using the measures above, with reinforcement in light of real threats, not worst-case scenarios. The current military balance – or imbalance – between Russia and NATO is no reason for Western alarmism. NATO can limit itself to the

measures of reassurance in the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security that it signed with Russia in 1997. In this document NATO declared that it would refrain from deploying nuclear weapons and the »additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces« in its new member states. This provision should hold although »the current and foreseeable security environment« which is referred to as »facilitating restraint« in the Founding Act has substantially changed.

However, in light of a new security dilemma, which comes from unilaterally seeking security, it is normal for Russia to interpret any NATO reassurance as a worst-case scenario and respond accordingly. Military confidence-building and arms control are indispensable building blocks for any European security architecture and peaceful coexistence.

Remodelling the European Security Architecture

Although the West has not indicated a wish for an overhaul of the institutional security landscape, this has been Russia's main demand for quite some time. Moscow's political class viewed the Ukraine crisis as proof of the dysfunctional security architecture in Europe, whose instruments and mechanisms (except for the Warsaw Pact) hail from the Cold War. This dysfunctionism divided the issue of continental security between NATO members and non-members. Only Russia is concerned: most other NATO outsiders would clearly prefer to join the organization as soon as possible, whilst Russia has never seriously harboured such intentions.

The institutions that have briefs regarding security, crisis prevention and crisis management did not manage to prevent the Ukraine crisis. Neither the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which was suspended for a third time after the crisis began, nor the EU and its consultative bodies, nor the UN has played any significant role in preventing or managing the crisis. Only the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has done that, emerging from oblivion to become the most visible organization of all.

Trust in institutions is an unreasonable expectation. Many international events are never addressed by international organizations like the UN, NATO and the OSCE because

they react too slowly, whilst states who once were determined to act, simply do not care. The OSCE's relative success was due to its 2014 chairmanship who was able to bring many decisive elements to bear, not least the determination of the Chairperson-in-Office, Swiss Foreign Minister and Confederation President, Didier Burkhalter. The same was true during the war in Georgia in 2008, when then-French President Sarkozy used his EU Presidency for shuttle diplomacy between Moscow and Tbilisi.

The European continent's new division should also be reflected in its institutional landscape. This does not mean that existing organizations should become more inclusive or new all-encompassing organizations ought to be founded. Any institutional model that meets Russian demands would almost certainly have to have veto power – and that is clearly a non-starter.

A first step could be reconfiguring existing institutions to reflect the demands of the new divide. This might mean cancelling Russia's membership in organizations who promote liberal-democratic values, such as the Council of Europe. At the same time, the elements of an institutional setting that secure stability and foster interest-based cooperation should be strengthened.

NATO

The Ukrainian crisis helped NATO by bringing the allies closer together – providing a clear new sense of direction and once again making collective defence its main mission. Apart from that, NATO's role and performance in the crisis has not been exceptional. Reassuring NATO's allies to the east meant reaffirming that NATO's area of responsibility is confined to the territory described in its treaty – leaving others to the mercy of more potent powers (Russia) and further reducing NATO's negligible impact on the course of events. NATO is clearly not the prime instrument of crisis management in those parts of the continent where such management capabilities are badly needed.

Modesty and restraint, which are still observable in NATO's rejuvenated collective defence, are required. They are also needed for NATO's eastward expansion. The 2008 declaration at the NATO Summit in Bucharest – that Georgia and Ukraine would not be admitted to the Membership Action Plan but could eventually become

members of the alliance – did not enhance their security (nor did it contribute to the development of reasonable security and military policies in those countries). Even worse, it raised Russian suspicions and encouraged contingency planning that helped Russia to draw a red line in that year's war in Georgia. Similar contingency planning was used when it came to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The NATO enlargement policy must be fundamentally reconceived, starting with Ukraine.

OSCE

The case of the OSCE could be said to show NATO what admitting Russia to the alliance would make of it: an emasculated organization for collective security. One such organization is enough. However, in Ukraine the OSCE proved to be a valuable tool for dispatching civilian monitors (although it does not have the means to enforce the peace), facilitating and mediating negotiations on the ground (although the political framework had to be negotiated elsewhere) and helping to secure democratic elections (despite being barred from parts of Ukraine). The OSCE may be the most important channel for East-West communication since others, such as the NRC, have been suspended.

The OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation is the only forum in Europe to discuss military-political issues of European security – not just the Vienna Document, but also the highly uncertain future of the CFE Treaty. Both sides are ignoring topics like tactical nukes, which probably need separate negotiating formats. The OSCE is clearly the best institution for emphasizing the importance of arms control and military confidence-building, which are essential building blocks in a divided European landscape. Implementing OSCE principles should do more than merely affirm past commitments, which is easily done one day and forgotten the next.

Packaging: Maintain Broad-Ranging Dialogue

From the start, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and later the OSCE complemented security with economic and humanitarian issues (which later developed into fostering democratic change). Originally, it was the West who insisted on incorporating these baskets into the negotiation process whereas the Soviet

Union and its allies were content with reaching a joint commitment to the territorial *status quo* and the relevant safeguards.

Congagement ensures the possibility of transformative options by keeping the channels of communication and exchange as wide open as possible (including in the face of Western tenacity regarding visas). It also refers to economic exchange, which should be shielded from political disruptions. Exporting arms to Russia is no longer advisable, and economic sanctions are a political tool, which, irrespective of controversies regarding their merits and limitations, must be imposed in some situations. Economic exchange, however, might be more helpful for stabilizing modes of cooperative behaviour and bringing about societal change.

Closer to the issue of security is the need to forge a common understanding of the normative basis of the European order. Russia has abandoned the common democratic denominator of the Paris Charter; for that reason its voting rights in the Council of Europe have been suspended. With regard to Ukraine, Russia has also turned the tables regarding international law: It used to uncompromisingly advocate everything ›Westphalian‹ (state sovereignty, territorial integrity, noninterference in internal affairs) and staunchly criticize everything ›post-Westphalian‹ (humanitarian intervention, peace building and democracy promotion). This is no longer true. After 2008, when Moscow justified its unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by citing the West's recognition of Kosovo, it went on to annex Crimea in the name of supporting national self-determination and returning it to the bosom of the Russian nation. Russia's sudden U-turn undermines trust and urgently requires (negotiated) clarification.

In sum: Nearly everything has been tried and tested, and many institutions are in a position to address the current crisis. It is not necessary to build more institutions, but it might be advisable to visit the early post-Cold-War era of the early 1990s and recall the »interlocking institutions«. Creativity, transparency and new modes of cooperation are needed to make the existing institutions collaborate productively. New issue-specific networks of separate but interconnected regimes could address common challenges. Whilst »interlocking« institutions often effectively »interblocked« each other in the past, fundamentally dif-

ferent circumstances and lots of lessons learnt should not allow such an opening to be squandered again.



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