



# RIGA DIALOGUE AFTERTHOUGHTS 2016

BUILDING BRIDGES  
FOR  
EURO-ATLANTIC  
SECURITY

EDITORS:  
ANDRIS SPRŪDS  
DIĀNA POTJOMKINA



LATVIAN INSTITUTE OF  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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## **RIGA DIALOGUE AFTERTHOUGHTS 2016: BUILDING BRIDGES FOR EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY**

This is a follow-up publication to the annual Riga Dialogue conference that endeavours to reflect the recognisable diversity of perceptions and interests among a variety of stakeholders in the Euro-Atlantic area, and offer insights for increasing mutual trust and outlining common efforts. This year's Afterthoughts continue the tradition of providing these insights by leading international experts on Euro-Atlantic and regional security developments, as well as challenges and opportunities for the dialogue. The Afterthoughts also include the summary of opinions and ideas debated during the Riga Dialogue Conference that took place in Riga, in May 2016.

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# Introductory Remarks: Building Bridges in Times of Uncertainty

ANDRIS SPRŪDS\*

A dialogue is indispensable for global and regional stability and security. The annual *Riga Dialogue* conference in Riga has become a solid platform for discussing topical security issues, and promoting mutual understanding among a variety of stakeholders in the Euro-Atlantic area. The follow-up publication *The Riga Dialogue Afterthoughts 2016: Building Bridges for Euro-Atlantic Security* endeavours to reflect the recognisable diversity of perceptions and interests, and offer insights for increasing mutual trust and outlining common efforts. This year's *Afterthoughts* continues the tradition of providing these insights by leading international experts on Euro-Atlantic and regional security developments, as well as challenges and opportunities for the dialogue. The *Afterthoughts* also include the summary of opinions and ideas debated during the *Riga Dialogue* Conference that took place in Riga, in May 2016.

The participants of the conference and contributors to this volume have repeatedly recognised a wide spectrum of existing challenges and the need for cooperative efforts and mutual understanding. This is a complicated task in times of uncertainty, insecurity and crisis. We have seen transformative shifts of the tectonic plates of international politics and economics for years. However, now we are experiencing and observing signs of incipient world disorder and protracted instability. The bloody turmoil in the Middle East, expansion of the radical ideas advocated by the Islamic State beyond Iraq and Syria,

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\* Andris Sprūds is Director of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs.

and shocking terrorist attacks have created feelings of vulnerability and insecurity among societies worldwide. The return of geopolitical tensions and rivalries complicate matters even further.

The European Union and NATO have largely remained a like-minded community but the diversity of the national interests, perceptions and diverging strategies have already created negative implications. Refugee crises have demonstrated substantial differences and disagreements among the Member States. The British vote in favour of leaving the European Union is unprecedented and immensely consequential. Brexit is also symptomatic of the estrangement and disaffection of large segments of societies about European projects and globalisation at large. Although other European “exits” have been avoided so far, the questions of the Community’s long-term economic, social and institutional sustainability, global effectiveness, credibility and relevance, and ability to speak with a common voice remain. The upcoming elections in a number of core countries of the Trans-Atlantic community will be an important litmus test for the future direction of the West as we know it.

This takes place in the context of complicated geopolitical trends in a wider Euro-Atlantic area. Fragmented security landscapes and diverging perceptions, rather than a common security architecture, are present in Europe and beyond. Russia’s assertiveness in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea and bloody conflict in the Donbas region became an important “game-changer” and created lingering repercussions for regional and global politics. The protracted sanctions between the West and Russia, the perceived continuous zero-sum game of integration projects in the post-Soviet space and existing tensions have undermined the opportunities and attempts to build a lasting and stable security architecture in the wider Euro-Atlantic area. The instability, however, is motivation for the efforts to avoid entrapment into self-fulfilling prophecy of the worst-case scenarios, to limit the weaponisation of mass and social media, and to search for solutions for the crisis management mechanisms, cooperative regional frameworks and confidence-building measures. This also necessitates the efforts for the dialogue in Western-Russian relations.



The Baltic Sea region is the area where the EU and NATO borders meet and members directly interact with Russia. The region has been one of relative stability and engagement for the last two decades. Twenty-five years after regaining independence, the three Baltic countries have established themselves as fully-fledged democracies and growing economies. The membership of the Baltic countries in a like-minded community of the EU and NATO has reduced concerns over previously existing geopolitical grey zones, and extended windows of opportunities for further growth, confidence-building and dialogue. The Euro-Atlantic integration has facilitated political and economic engagement and contributed to the creation of multilateral institutional frameworks in the Baltic Sea region, which also include Russia. Russia's assertiveness in the neighbourhood, particularly in Ukraine, however, has once more invoked ghosts of the tragic past, perceptions of insecurity, and apprehension about Russian ambitions in its neighbourhood. The NATO Summits in Wales and Warsaw have been instrumental in demonstrating the credibility of the Alliance. The deployment of multinational military units in the Baltic countries and Poland has reaffirmed solidarity to the members of the Eastern flank in times of uncertainty.

The concerns of mutual misperception and miscalculation between the West and Russia remain, however. The necessity for the deterrence strategies by NATO is reminiscent of the tensions of the Cold War years. We see a significant discord between NATO and Russia, both nuclear powers. The risks of destabilisation, escalatory measures, mutual coercive diplomacy and entrapment in a vicious cycle of action-reaction exist. The stakes are high and the dialogue is imperative. The endeavours to search for the mechanisms and measures for conflict prevention and arms control could alleviate the existing tensions. Trust-building and the return to a constructive partnership may yet be a far-fetched ambition, but an increased mutual transparency and frank debate is instrumental for the normalisation of relationships. The building of bridges in times of uncertainty is a complicated, and even risky, task but it remains the only alternative to avoid global and regional disorders and instabilities.

*The Riga Dialogue Afterthoughts 2016* aims to contribute to the assessment and understanding of those challenges and opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. The partnerships are always instrumental in achieving a successful result. *The Riga Dialogue* conference and publication are manifestations of the significance of partnerships, as it benefited considerably from the willingness of Latvian and foreign experts to share their insights and advice. The conference and publication has been the result of a long and productive cooperation between the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and its respectable international partner institutions. The generous support and active involvement of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Nuclear Threat Initiative, European Leadership Network and the Black Sea Trust of German Marshall Fund has been indispensable and essential for ensuring the successful *Riga Dialogue* process. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation has repeatedly demonstrated its leadership in promoting intellectual engagement and a thorough exchange of thoughts at national and regional levels. This has been an indispensable contribution to an invigorating and informed debate among the decision-making and expert communities, and the general public in Latvia and beyond. The Nuclear Threat Initiative has strongly and consistently contributed to raising awareness on the importance of arms control and confidence-building measures, especially among the nuclear powers. The Black Sea Trust of German Marshall Fund has strengthened the engagement among a variety of regional stakeholders. The European Leadership Network has played a vital role in bringing together a number of influential participants who generate and shape important decisions. The committed partnership creates a strong platform for a continued dialogue and intellectual engagement on stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic space. *The Riga Dialogue* process is an important step in the direction towards building bridges of understanding and dialogue.

# Traversing the Delusional Frontier: The Search for Engagement between Russia and the West\*

IAN KEARNS\*\*

## Context

We all know that Russia-West relations are in a difficult place. The question is what to do about it. Some argue that deterrence is the only required response to Russian behaviour and that there can be no return to business as usual after the Russian annexation of Crimea. Others argue for engagement. The reality, it seems to me, is that a combination of the two positions is inescapable. Russia and the West need each other, as a recent paper by the European Leadership Network makes clear.<sup>1</sup> Both sides need to recognise this and grapple with its implications.

Obviously, this will not be easy since there is delusional thinking on both sides.

In Russia, this delusional thinking consists in the belief that Russia is strong and can get by well enough without the West. Russia has assets, it is true, such as its energy resources, its modernised military and a large stockpile of nuclear weapons. But it also has fundamental weaknesses. Its economy is stagnant or shrinking and it is over dependent on energy exports in a global energy market where prices have collapsed. It suffers poor levels of investment in research and development, has low productivity and a falling population. Its education system lags behind the best in the world, with only 2 Russian universities making it into the top 500 globally, compared

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\* This text is based on a contribution to an LIIA Seminar on this theme in May 2016.

\*\* Ian Kearns is Co-Founder and Board Member of the European Leadership Network.

to 192 from the EU. Russia has security challenges in its southern border areas, is exposed to Chinese social and economic penetration and despite the rhetoric, is a less attractive market to rising powers than the more established markets of the EU and the US. Russia is headed for a steep decline in its global power position if it continues on its current trajectory.

The West, however, suffers from three serious delusions of its own.

The first of these, prevalent I think in some parts of eastern Europe and even in parts of the US establishment, is that we don't need Russia. We do. We needed Russia to secure the Iran nuclear deal and to get most of the chemical weapons out of Syria. We still need Russia if we are to successfully pursue peace in Syria. And we need Russia to help with cooperation on nuclear materials security, on counter-terrorism efforts, on securing the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and on climate change. Whenever the West says it is not going to do business with Russia the Russians know this is hubristic nonsense. They sit back and wait for the phone to ring in Moscow with Western requests for Russian help.

The second delusion in parts of the West is that the future of Europe is going to consist in the rolling eastward of Western institutions like the EU and NATO. With the exception of some modest enlargement deeper into the Balkans, the enlargement agenda is dead. It is not that Turkey, Ukraine and Georgia cannot legitimately aspire to deeper integration in the Western club but that, in the wake of the Brexit vote, the Dutch referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, and the post failed coup purge in Turkey, the existing members of both the EU and NATO cannot and will not support further membership growth. The EU, especially, is currently involved in a fight with populist Eurosceptic movements that threatens its very existence, and it has yet to finally resolve the dormant Euro crisis.

The final delusion is that the international politics of Europe is shaped by legal principle alone and not by power politics. This argument is most often articulated in claims that Russia broke international law when it annexed Crimea and that relations between Russia and the West cannot return to business as usual until Russia

complies with international law. There are several problems with this argument.

It is not that the annexation of Crimea was legal. It clearly was illegal. The problem is that some of the Western powers now claiming that international law is sacrosanct are the same powers that have themselves flouted international law outside of Europe, not least in the invasion of Iraq. Some like to claim that Europe is different and that it is shaped by legal principles in ways that other regions are not. This is true within the European Union but it is not and has never been true for wider Europe.

The process by which Germany was reunified involved a political deal between Western leaders and Gorbachev on the one hand and a deal between Germany and France aimed at binding a re-unified Germany deeper into the European integration project on the other. Both of these agreements had everything to do with politics and nothing at all to do with law. It is not even true, as is often implied, that Russia is the only island of dissonance in what is otherwise a sea of European agreement on what international law says and what its application means in European practice. Some EU member states, for example, recognised the independence of Kosovo and some did not. Comforting though it might be to assume that the point of difference was one of legal principle, again it is clear that it was politics. Does anyone seriously doubt the real political reasons for Spain's reluctance to formally acknowledge that Kosovo should be an independent state?

## **Four scenarios for the future of the Russia-West relationship**

When one is considering the possibility of further engagement between Russia and the West one has to take all of these delusions, on both sides, into account. Engagement is, in many ways, an exercise in traversing the delusional frontier.

Given that, it seems to me that there are 4 possible scenarios for the future shape of engagement between Russia and the West.

The first, and least realistic, would be the development of a strategic partnership. This was the aim a few years ago, of course, but in the short to medium term it is a non-starter. There is no common vision between the two sides on the future of the greater European area and without one a genuine partnership cannot develop.

The second, attractive I think to some in Russia, would be a Concert of European Powers in which Russia and the other major European powers agree to some rules of the game between them while the wishes of smaller countries are largely ignored. Again, there is no chance of this developing in practice. While there must be space for politics, and not only appeals to international law, to influence the future direction of relations and indeed of the continent, a Concert would imply Western recognition of a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. This is highly unlikely to happen. Russia may be able to impose a sphere of influence – the West has made it clear that it will not intervene militarily to defend Ukraine, after all – but if it does so then the West will continue to exact a price through sanctions and other restrictions on relations. It is also unlikely that Russia could sustain a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe in the medium term even if it imposes one. It would be unpopular with neighbours, economically costly and be a drain on the country's military capability at a time when Russia is not as strong as some policy makers in Moscow would like to believe.

But even more fundamentally, Russia needs to understand that for much of the European continent, the process of political and economic integration since World War II has been a welcome escape from a tragic and extremely violent history. That integration process has delivered the best seven decades of human advancement in European history. It may have over-reached and it may ultimately collapse but it will not be negotiated away in some grand bargain with Russia that many fear would make Europe's future too much like its past.

If no strategic partnership is possible and no Concert either, that leaves us for the foreseeable future with a tense stand-off between Trans-Atlantic institutions on the one hand and Russia on the other rather than with an agreed order covering the whole of the Euro-

Atlantic area, including Russia. In that tense stand-off, the realistic choice is between two further scenarios. The first is an unmanaged confrontation and the second, a managed confrontation.

It seems to me that an unmanaged confrontation is where we are currently headed. There have been increased military exercises on both sides, more deployments in the common border areas, many dangerous close military incidents and little or no discussion about how to avoid them. Russia has for the most part been in denial about the risks inherent to the situation and some inside NATO are saying we shouldn't discuss a stabilisation of the military situation with the Russians until deterrence is much stronger. This is because they fear the Russians will take such discussions as a reward for their recent aggressive and unreasonable behaviour and will therefore continue it.

This is a dangerous situation. My point is not that NATO shouldn't strengthen deterrence and provide reassurance to allies in the East. It should do so. My point is that it is precisely because we are doing that and the Russians are also engaged in additional and sometimes provocative military actions that a dialogue to manage the situation is so necessary. Those who say we should wait before dialogue takes place have learned little from the history of international crises and their management. A fundamental but common mistake by leaders in crisis situations is to assume that they can maintain control over events. The "waiters" on both sides of the current divide run a significant risk that they will wake up one morning to find themselves on the brink of a war that neither side intended.

Too many people also dismiss the wider relevance of Cold War lessons to the current context. I have lost count of the number of times I've heard people say this is not another Cold War because it is not global in reach or about competing ideological visions. That is, of course, true. But the new confrontation is a confrontation, as was the Cold War, between a nuclear armed state and a nuclear armed alliance and the primary question to ask about the Cold War is not how do its characteristics compare to today's confrontation but how and why did the Cold War stay cold? The answer, as scholars of this period know all too well is that it did not happen by deterrence alone. Particularly

in the post Cuba crisis phase of the Cold War, the superpowers put in place a number of conflict prevention and crisis management measures to ensure they would never come so close to the brink again.

It is by returning to those measures that we can move the current confrontation from an unmanaged to a managed state. Initially, that management should consist in the following:

- Preventing the relationship from worsening further still through the development of new Incidents at Sea Agreements and other confidence-building and arms control measures;
- A willingness to gradually phase out sanctions in return for the gradual implementation of the Minsk agreements;
- Selective engagement on issues of mutual self-interest, such as a peace process for Syria, implementation of the Iran nuclear deal, counter-terrorism, climate change, space and the Arctic;
- Increased people to people contacts and;
- The commencement of a more fundamental dialogue on what has gone wrong in the relationship to see if we can get beyond the parallel monologues that the current competing narratives represent.

It is only if both sides pursue an agenda of this kind that we will be able to introduce some management to what will otherwise be an unmanaged and highly unstable confrontation.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dobbs and Ian Kearns, *The Strategic Case for EU-Russia Cooperation* (European Leadership Network, 2016).



# Transatlantic Community and Russia: Elements of Dialogue 2016

IMANTS LIEĢIS\*

The 3rd series of “Rīga Dialogue” took place a couple of months before NATO’s Warsaw Summit and this publication sees the light of day post-Warsaw.

It seems pertinent to recall the *raison d’être* of our meetings in Rīga, before tackling some of the issues that were addressed this time round. I have been privileged together with colleagues from the European Leadership Network, Nuclear Threat Initiative, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and other partners to have participated from the outset in these informal meetings.

The format has encouraged off the record and below the radar discussions between participants from the USA, Russia and Europe on crucial defence and security issues. The first two meetings in Rīga brought together young Ukrainians and Russians which helped them discuss their differences in a more conducive environment than that offered in either of their home countries. Participants from the meetings have also been given the chance to have an open dialogue with members of the Latvian public. Whilst agreeing with the assertion that “dialogue is not a policy” – a point forcefully made during the 2015 Riga Dialogue – it is also the case that dialogue can be of value.

The value of this year’s dialogue in Rīga was that it illustrated a status quo in approaches to the disturbing developments surrounding Euro-Atlantic security. At the same time, it also pointed to two aspects that Russian participants emphasised in particular. Given the

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\* Imants Lieģis is Latvia’s Ambassador to France, Former Minister of Defence. This article reflects the personal position of the author.

seriousness of one of them and the implications of the other, I want to focus in particular on these two issues.

The first is that NATO is making preparations to attack Russia. The second relates to those permanent residents of Latvia (mainly of Russian origin) who have opted out of applying for citizenship. Although both questions could be categorised as being part of Russia's information war and useful for internal consumption, their wider context needs to be addressed.

## **NATO preparing to attack Russia**

NATO remains one of the strongest military alliances that has ever existed, and its foundations are based on collective defence. It was and remains an organisation whose primary concerns are the territorial defence of its members. The rationale for establishing the Alliance was based on the threat posed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Whereas some thought that its mission had been accomplished with the demise of the Soviet Empire, its enlargement allowed those countries that subsequently joined (including the former East Germany) to return to the European and Euro-Atlantic fold to which they had unwillingly been denied access for the preceding half century.

Russian sensitivities about being on the losing side were essentially accommodated by consistent efforts by NATO to engage with Russia. Russia was given a voice, but not a veto on the enlargement issue. When the NATO – Russia Founding Act was signed in 1997 (at the time, I had recently taken on responsibility as Latvia's Ambassador to NATO) there were genuine concerns in Latvia about the implications of NATO's rapprochement with Russia for our membership aspirations. These concerns were allayed when we joined NATO in 2004. The NATO-Russia Council was set up in 2002. Despite being given a status of privileged relations and access to the Brussels HQ, our Russian partner consistently tried to obtain more by insisting on a right to take part in the decision making process of NATO without being a member.

Anne Applebaum succinctly describes the developments as follows:

“When the slow, cautious expansion eventually took place, constant efforts were made to reassure Russia. No NATO bases were placed in the new member states, and until 2013 no exercises were conducted there. A Russia-NATO agreement in 1997 promised no movement of nuclear installations...In response to Russian objections, Ukraine and Georgia were, in fact, denied NATO membership plans in 2008.”<sup>1</sup>

It could be added that the new NATO membership for the Baltic States in 2004 was arguably “NATO – lite”, as there were certain deficiencies on the planning side which were only properly addressed at a later stage. At the same time, NATO’s Air Policing Mission of NATO Air Space in the Baltics came into effect immediately on accession, with important contributions by way of aircraft being made by Allies on a rotational basis.

Reassuring Russia about NATO’s intentions in an open and forthcoming way was a policy approach vigorously pursued by the Allies. Cooperation endeavours were maintained with some limited success. For example, Latvia was able to benefit from the rail transit of member states’ non-military equipment via the port of Rīga across Russian territory to the NATO operation ISAF in Afghanistan.

Regrettably, the endeavours to engage positively with Russia came to no avail. Warning signs about a departure from the “comfort zone” of relations with Russia appeared already with President Putin’s statement in 2005 describing the collapse of the Soviet Union as the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which left tens of millions of Russians outside the Russian Federation.<sup>2</sup>

Military action against Georgia in 2008 followed by cyber-attacks against Estonia and exercises with distinctly anti NATO aggressive scenarios in 2009 and 2013 (“Zapad”) set alarm bells ringing. The tipping point in NATO-Russian relations was reached in 2014 when, using hybrid war methods, Russia flouted post-Cold War accepted norms by annexing Crimea and engaging in military actions in Eastern Ukraine. This tipping point was sparked by Ukraine’s endeavours to move closer to the European Union, not explicitly NATO.

A united Euro-Atlantic response has held good for the past two years whilst in parallel endeavours have continued, primarily linked to the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, to find a way how to move the relations ahead. This year the NATO-Russia Council has again met twice at Ambassadors' level after a suspension of its work.

President Putin essentially remains unpredictable and ready to use force in an agile manner with a speedy decision making process reflecting the "power vertical". Snap military exercises on a very large scale together with regular Russian military aircraft approaches near to NATO airspace with transponders turned off, have encouraged the sense of regional insecurity.

Against this backdrop it would be folly for NATO to fail to take defensive and deterrence measures to protect its member states. Hence the decisions at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales based on re-assurance measures are being built upon so as to focus specifically on deterrence and defence. Russia's actions are currently perceived as likely to continue along the same lines for the long term. For this reason NATO decided to place four multinational battalions in the Eastern flank of the Alliance in view of the perceived level of a potential threat from Russia having increased. Details of these deterrent forces consisting of some 1,000 troops per battalion were announced at the Warsaw Summit.

These actions taken by NATO are commensurate to the threat assessment and avoid giving the perception of offensive intent. They are of a necessarily robust and deterrent nature and are being implemented as a direct response to Russia's behaviour. In addition to various "frozen conflicts" in Europe's neighbourhood in which Russia has played a role (South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia; Transnistria in Moldova) a sense of instability and insecurity has evolved because of Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Endeavours to ignore this linkage and to engage with Russia on the basis of a sort of *tabula rasa* would be in nobody's interests. Hence the ongoing need to continue with the policy of linking the imposition of sanctions against Russia to the implementation, by both sides, of the Minsk Agreements.

NATO as a defensive Alliance is not in the business of carrying out unwarranted attacks on third countries. So it seems all the more surprising that Russia is exploiting NATO's defensive and deterrent measures to conjure up images of a potential NATO attack on Russia. These contentions which were proffered by Russian participants at the May meeting in Riga have, unsurprisingly, also appeared elsewhere. For example, the EU East Stratcom Task Force Report of 21 June 2016, which monitors Russia controlled media outlets mentioned the following:

Numerous stories talked about NATO's plans to attack, or at least intimidate Russia<sup>3</sup>; during Dmitry Kiselyov's TV show, the German blockade of Leningrad from World War II was even recalled.<sup>4</sup> A Czech outlet informed that the exercises aim at provoking a nuclear apocalypse.<sup>5</sup>

What wasn't mentioned: Russia's intervention in two sovereign countries; violent changes to the borders in Europe for the first time since World War II; the kidnap of an EU citizen from an EU country<sup>6</sup>; the repeated violation of the airspace of EU countries and NATO allies; and a readiness to use nuclear weapons if required<sup>7</sup>.

Unfounded, exaggerated and provocative assertions about NATO preparing to invade Russia do nothing to improve efforts to find a common ground for dialogue. It is important that they should be refuted in the strongest terms.

## **Russians in Latvia**

Since regaining independence 25 years ago, Latvia has taken a forward leaning and inclusive approach to one of the most challenging legacies of Soviet rule. It is important to recall that the objective of the Soviet Union was to suppress the "nationalities issue" by creating *homo sovieticus* – a species without nationality but speaking only Russian. To encourage this policy, the mechanical transfer of populations took place within Soviet borders. Latvia's population of 75% ethnic Latvians in 1939 was, as a result of Sovietisation, reduced to almost 50% by 1989.

Of course many individuals who had moved to Latvia during the Soviet occupation probably felt very vulnerable finding themselves in a country that had regained its freedom and in doing so, perhaps even contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Hence, by closely cooperating with numerous international organisations (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe), successive Latvian governments handled the treatment of this sector of society in Latvia in a sensitive manner. Irrespective of nationality, descendants of those people whose family had been Latvian citizens in 1940 at the time of occupation, had their citizenship automatically restored. The others, who included some 80,000 retired Soviet military officers and their family members, were allowed to remain and encouraged to apply for citizenship.

Although a large proportion decided to do that and learn to speak the language of the country in which they lived, others refused to apply for citizenship. One of the main factors influencing their decision is the fact that to travel to Russia with a Latvian passport, a visa is required. So this sector of Latvia's population today prefers to have the benefits of living in an EU country as a permanent resident with full consular protection when travelling abroad. Their formal status is referred to as "non-citizen". By choosing not to become Latvian citizens they inevitably forfeit the right to vote, but otherwise for the main part enjoy all the rights of citizens, including full consular protection by Latvian Embassies when they travel abroad. They numbered around 250,000 at the beginning of 2016 as opposed to some 730,000 in 1995 when the process for applying for citizenship began. The numbers, which reflect a post-Soviet legacy, will continue to decline.

At around the time of the Rīga Dialogue Conference in May, a leader of Latvia's Harmony Party, Jānis Urbanovičs, addressed a letter to President Obama seeking his support to "resolve" this issue. Perhaps with a view to expressing solidarity, or perhaps even through a coordinated approach, Russian participants at the meeting also raised this question, as did some of the local so called "Human Rights Defenders" during the open public discussions with participants of our meeting.

Concerns about the integration of all ethnic groups into Latvian society has constantly been on the agenda of successive Latvian governments. There remains a prevailing recognition that these questions need to be discussed openly bearing in mind both the historical aspect and the potential security challenges which are often mentioned by sometimes ill-informed foreign observers.

A recent study by the National Defence Academy of Latvia looked at the possibility of destabilising Latvian society and whether such possibilities present a threat to Latvia's security.<sup>8</sup>

Given the amount of attention that is devoted to this issue outside of Latvia, it is worth focussing on some of the findings of this extensive study, which was carried out between January 2015 and March 2016. The main aim was to clarify what are the prospects of using non-military means in Latvia to attain a goal which would be against the interests of the state in the context of hybrid warfare. In other words – what is the potential to manipulate with the “protest element” within Latvian society as a tool for new generation warfare.

Concerning a potential polarisation of views, the study disclosed that about half of Latvia's ethnic Russian population does not support messages coming from Russia and over 80 percent of this group indicated a sense of belonging to Latvia. In spite of the wide availability of Russia's media in Latvia, conclusions of the study indicated that there were little prospects of mass demonstrations being incited within Latvia, not least because of the low level of participation in political activities amongst the population. Given the lack of any type of ethnic conflicts within Latvia during the last 25 years, it is probably also no surprise to learn that the study concluded that irrespective of ethnic origins, there is a consensus that economic and personal safety issues are the main concerns within society.

Challenges relating to radicalism and extremism causing a destabilisation of society are widespread throughout Europe and beyond its borders. These challenges will of course remain on the radar screen of Latvia's government. However, a liberal and open approach which has in general prevailed in the past, indicates that Latvia's leadership is well prepared for these ongoing challenges

and increasingly recognises the importance of monitoring attempts from the outside to destabilise the country. The role of strategic communications as a security factor also prompted Latvia to establish the NATO Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communication in Rīga.

This monitoring function of course drew substantial lessons from the rhetoric and disinformation campaign used by Russia during the annexation of Crimea and subsequent military involvement in Eastern Ukraine. It was not lost on Latvians that the so called “pretext” for annexing Crimea related to the right of Russia to “protect” its nationals – despite the fact that there was no serious evidence produced to support allegations of “abuse” or “discrimination” which would warrant military intervention. Again, it is worth re-calling the Putin quote already mentioned above about the collapse of the Soviet Union being the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century which left tens of millions of Russians outside the Russian Federation. Whilst every country clearly has legitimate concerns about its nationals living abroad, their presence should not be used as an excuse for military intervention and unilateral annexation of sovereign territory.

## **Conclusion**

Promoting and maintaining dialogue with Russia at a time when revisionism, aggression and power politics are emanating from Moscow, is a challenging task. NATO’s Warsaw Summit Communique, explicit in its reference towards Russia’s actions (par. 10), also makes reference to “a periodic, focused and meaningful dialogue with a Russia willing to engage on the basis of reciprocity” (par. 12). The decisions taken by Heads of State and Government at Warsaw indicate that this openness towards dialogue is offered from a position of strength, based on the Alliance upholding a strong policy of defence and deterrence towards Member States in the Eastern flank. This approach is balanced and welcome.

Despite the instability created by both Russia’s actions in Ukraine and, more recently, the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, the need for dialogue with Russia remains. It should



not be perceived as an end in itself, but part of ongoing endeavours to search for confidence building measures.

The “Riga Dialogue” meeting in May 2016 illustrated that Latvia’s capital has an ongoing role in promoting dialogue between a variety of contributors from Russia and Euro-Atlantic countries. The broad mesh of partners and supporters gives a particular value to this role, which helps test the waters in this stormy period of relations.

Given the broader context of Euro-Atlantic relations with Russia, assertions about NATO supposedly making preparations to attack Russia and biased accounts of the so called “mistreatment” of Russians in Latvia were both indicators of fundamental differences of views. NATO addressed this first issue head on at the subsequent Warsaw Summit by explaining how it poses no threat to Russia, but is prepared to seek opportunities to engage. Latvia also pursues opportunities to engage, whilst continuing to address important issues relating to the integration of all ethnic groups living in the country.

Without succumbing to a sense of routine or inevitability about potential outcome, there still remains scope for “Riga Dialogue 2017” to offer some new elements towards ongoing dialogue. A new US Administration will be in place next year. Canada will have deployed troops to Latvia as part of NATO’s forward deterrence. Both factors will no doubt have an impact on our dialogue with Russia and offer opportunities to meet again and discuss in a conducive, frank and open environment in Riga.

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# Russia and the Euro-Atlantic Partners

KARSTEN D. VOIGT\*

During the first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation had completely different priorities in foreign policy from the ones the country has today.

At that time, the Russian Federation wanted to become part of the Euro-Atlantic West. Today, it sees the West and especially the US as a threat. Back then, it saw the rule of law, democracy and human rights as common European values. Now, it takes a set of specifically Russian values that oppose these. These values distinguish Russia from the supposedly decadent West. Back then, the Russian leadership wanted to establish close cooperation and partnership with the EU and NATO. Today, it calls for integration in the Eurasian Union, to compete with the EU.

During those first years, it feared the separatist movements that appeared in the Russian Federation after the fall of the Soviet Union. For this reason, Russia was an opponent to any separatist movements in Europe in general. Today, it supports such movements at the expense of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. At the beginning of the 1990's, the Russian leadership took up the obligations of the Charter of Paris and committed in agreements with Ukraine to the inviolability of its current national borders. Now, it defends its annexation of the Crimea.

At the beginning of the 1990's all Western observers assessed the Russian security policy as defensive and risk-averse. The actions of the Russian government first in Georgia, but then, undoubtedly, in East Ukraine and Syria reflect its readiness for military offensives in limited

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regional conflicts. This also suggests a higher, in comparison to earlier years, risk tolerance. Since the beginning of the *détente* policy in the early 1970's, one of the most important goals of the Soviet government at the time was to secure its status in Europe. The current Russian leadership is not satisfied with the current status of Russia in Europe and in the rest of the world. It wants to become a greater power than it currently is. This is one of the most important reasons for concern for Russia's smaller neighbours.

There are differing opinions as to the causes of these fundamental changes in the policy of the Russian government. Russia justifies this as a reaction to the destructive attitude of the West, and particularly the US, which dismisses this accusation, pointing out that after the end of the Cold War, the US and the EU member states accepted Russia as an equal by expanding G7 to G8, admitting Russia into the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, and forming the NATO-Russia Council, including into the international system that, until then, was limited to the West. Some Western analysts thus see the changes in the Russian foreign policy to be primarily an effect of changes in the Russian domestic policy. Others see here a failure of the West to interact with the Russian Federation.

In this article, I do not intend to add anything to the discussion as to the causes of these changes in the Russian policy. What is important to me within the context of this article is the fundamental idea that a policy that has changed can change again in the future: it could deteriorate even further, with less regard to international law and European regulations and agreements than before. It could compromise international stability with further unexpected and risky actions. However, it could also – albeit probably only in certain areas at first – change constructively, contributing to the resolution of conflicts. Within a relatively short period of time, Russia has set a course for cooperation with Turkey via an appropriate policy, with signs of such cooperation re-emerging. Other similar policy changes cannot be excluded in the future.

Stronger cohesion among the Euro-Atlantic Partners in the EU and NATO helps against negative developments in Russia's foreign policy.

Such cohesion requires stronger defensive and deterrence capability. The decisions of the NATO summit in Warsaw, and the agreements between the EU and NATO served this purpose. They were necessary and useful.

It is understandable that politicians in the Baltic States, due to their past and their geostrategic position, focus primarily on the readiness of NATO and the EU to establish protection against negative developments in the Russian foreign policy. At the same time, due to its experience in the latest decades, Germany – and not Germany alone – considers seeking possibilities to cooperate in resolving conflicts to be at least as important: the deterrence could protect the freedom of West Berlin. However, only the détente policy made it transparent. It made a decisive contribution to overcoming the Cold War. The supporters of peaceful revolutions in East Europe could justifiably appeal to the OSCE final acts. They questioned the status quo of confrontation between the systems. However, it was only Gorbachev who decided against the policy of protecting the barriers on the Hungarian border and the Berlin Wall with force, thus overcoming the prevalent logic of the Cold War, on the power-political level.

Despite the conflicts in Europe, there is currently successful cooperation with Russia in conflicts outside Europe, such as in Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and – as an example of a UN Security Council resolution – in Libya. With the Minsk Process it was attempted similarly – although to limited success – to find a solution to the conflicts in East Ukraine in cooperation with Russia. In many cases, Russia is part of the problem in these regional, East and South European conflicts. And it is not always possible to recognise clearly, if and under what conditions it would be ready to contribute to resolving these problems instead.

Critics of concepts of cooperative security in Europe are right: confidence-building and armaments-control political agreements have not been able to prevent Russia from acting in violation of international law in East Ukraine. Furthermore, there has been no change in Russia's foreign policy with respect to recognising the OSCE Final Acts and the Charter of Paris. However, Western sanctions have also not been able to produce such changes in the Russian foreign

policy. There are many reasons to believe that the fundamental changes in the Russian foreign policy has less to do with any changes in the foreign policy of the West, and far more to do with changes in Russia's domestic policy.

This, however, is not a reason to stop confronting the Russian government again and again with proposals for confidence-building measures and for conventional and nuclear armaments control. It could be a long time before the Russian government recognises that its policies do not improve security and stability on Russia's western borders, but such recognition is in no way impossible. On the contrary! The adverse economic effect of such tensions between Russia on the one side, and the EU and NATO on the other, is becoming obvious already.

With respect to the annexation of the Crimea, I believe that there will, for a long time, be no chance for fundamental changes in the current Russian policy. Concerning East Ukraine, greater flexibility of Russian policy decisively depends on how high the political, military and economic costs of the current policy will be estimated. Every step towards a political and economic consolidation of Ukraine, will at the same time improve overall, the chances for reaching cooperative conflict solutions in East Ukraine. The conflict in Transnistria also depends greatly on the progress in establishing a democratic, constitutional and less corrupt policy in Moldova.

In Syria, the agreements between the US and Russia lower the risk of a direct confrontation between the two powers. At the same time, the chances for cooperative solutions – including partial solutions – in Syria increase. Such agreements are still not a sign of conformity between the US and Russia with respect to the situation in Syria, or to their strategic goals in that region. However, these are useful intermediate steps towards such agreements.

This is similar in North-East Europe: When it comes to agreements there that reduce the risk of incidents on the land, in the air or in the sea, this will not be a sign of political convergence between the US and Russia, but Russia and the Euro-Atlantic West in general. Nevertheless, prevention of incidents is an unconditional requirement for reducing tension.

For all the uncertainty over the future development of Russia's foreign policy, its current priorities are obvious in certain points.

Russia wants to be recognised by the US as an equal power. This is understandable and also justified: Russia has veto power in the UN Security Council. Its nuclear weapons have the same destructive potential as those of the US. This is the largest country in the world, comprising big parts of Europe and Asia. This is why its regional role is at the same time relevant for the development of larger parts of the world.

However, compared to the US, the Russian population is smaller, older and poorer. Russia's attractiveness in terms of the economy, politics and culture is significantly lower than that of the US. Although Russia is militarily superior to its smaller neighbours, this is not the case against the US, and even less so – against all the NATO states.

For Germany, Russia is the most important challenge, a source of opportunities and, at the same time, the greatest risk east of the EU and NATO borders. However, Russia is not more important to Germany than Germany's relationships with its partners and allies in the EU and NATO. It is for this reason that Germany must always try to take into account the interests and opinions of its European and Transatlantic partners in its bilateral contacts with Russia.

The relationships between the US and Russia are asymmetrical: the Russian foreign policy is fixated on the US, both positively and negatively. The opposite is not true for the US: for this country China holds a significantly higher priority than Russia. Due to its actions in violation of the international law in East Ukraine and its military intervention in Syria, Russia has made the US pay more attention to it than in previous years. From the American viewpoint, this attention regards Russia primarily as a disruptive factor and not as a partner.

Russia sees itself, the US and China to be independent, fully sovereign great powers, in a multipolar world order. The EU and NATO are viewed as entities dependent on the US. It is difficult for the Russian government to acknowledge appropriately the influence of smaller states on the EU and NATO, preferring a "concert of powers" between the larger states, even if it means that the interests of smaller and medium states will be overlooked.

Such “concert of powers” is unacceptable for German politics. Should Germany agree to this approach, the foundations for the friendly relations with its European neighbours would be threatened. Such “concert of powers” would also violate the principles and regulations of the EU. The sometimes very complicated rules, principles and voting procedures used in the EU serve the goal of substituting the century-old “concerts of power” with “European governance”. For Germany, the reconciliation of interests between smaller and larger states compromises cooperation, and the concentration of traditional national state sovereignty via its integration on the European level are an essential element of “European governance” and European stability.

Meanwhile, Russia wants the Euro-Atlantic West to recognise Russia’s interests in the area of the former Soviet Union where, in the event of a conflict, it cannot be the EU – and much less so NATO – that sets the rules. Such a claim cannot be accepted by the Euro-Atlantic partners without violating the basic CSCE agreements and the Charter of Paris.

Which means that the disagreement with the Russian government, over the basic principles of European order, will probably persist for a longer time. However, regardless of this disagreement, the EU and NATO, and all their member states must always try to reach mutual conflict solutions with Russia. As many areas for cooperation as possible should be identified. Such cooperative political efforts can lead to a reduction in conflicts and to a pragmatic mutual alignment. These would be small, but important steps towards the “Europe of good neighbours”.

A “common European home” can, however, only exist if Russia returns to the goals and principles of the 1990 basic Paris agreements. This primarily includes: the inviolability of borders, the equality of large and smaller states, the right of all states to decide on their own foreign and domestic political alignment, as well as the goal of the rule of law and democracy. Over the past years, Russia has far diverged from these objectives.



# Russia and the West: An Information War?

IVAN TIMOFEEV\*

Since 2013, when the crisis in Ukraine broke out, the notion of information warfare has been widely used in Russia, in the West and, of course, in Ukraine. However, the term itself provides little, if any, insight into what is happening in the information space, and is as broad and vague as “hybrid warfare.”

By definition, war is mainly characterised by targeted hostile actions carried out by centralised groups. While it is true that information flows may include substantial amounts of hostile content, intentionally produced by professionals, the problem is that today’s media can hardly match the centralisation criteria. Even for state-owned media the relationship between a directive to promote a specific hostile agenda and its content is factitious. Adding the explosive development of social media to the equation, where every user can operate as a media outlet in each user’s own right, the link between the assumed general quarters and the assumed soldiers in information warfare becomes even less obvious.

So why are independent media and blogs often much more aggressive than state-owned networks? Why are people eager to spread propaganda at their own free will without any coercion, producing a multiplier effect?

To answer this question, we should look deep into our collective subconscious to the depth that goes beyond the ongoing political developments. The inner self we need to examine can be linked to what was named by Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm and, later,

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David Riesman as “conscience” – a mindset shaped by culture and education, as if some kind of public subconscious planted specific value systems into an individual’s subconscious and, in turn, individuals view these values as their own. The success for a propaganda specialist lies in the ability to identify these mindsets and target them with a relevant media message, thereby strengthening the pre-existing mindset. Politicians have seen their role change from manipulating public perception to that of being its hostage and find it extremely challenging to adapt their message to the existing plethora of ideas, especially considering that these have a very long underlying history.

It is striking to see how information flows are perceived in a similar fashion. In fact, both Russia and the Western countries, not to mention Ukraine, view themselves as victims of information warfare. Each party insists that it is on the defensive in terms of information policy, seeking merely to counter the distribution of hostile information. All sides tend to significantly overstate the possibilities of their neighbours in terms of information warfare and its outcome, trying to politicise developments with no apparent political dimension, or to exaggerate them.

Of course, this should be examined from a broader perspective, as a combination of intentional efforts to promote a political agenda, and a manifestation of a collective subconscious. As far as politics are concerned, the issues to keep in mind are the unresolved issues of Russia and the West in the post-Soviet space. This relationship is still marked by competition, a zero-sum game and a security dilemma. The developments in the information space are reminiscent of the issues related to the European security architecture. As for the collective subconscious, it is important to be mindful of the serious shocks sustained by Russia and its neighbours in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in the post-Soviet space.

In the case of Eastern and Central Europe, almost all the countries in one way or another sustained shocks in their relationship with Russia or the Soviet Union. The fact that the local political elite is trying to manipulate these experiences, reinvigorate and mythologise them does not mean that they do not exist. This further complicates

the EU's communication policy, where Western Europe's responsible approach coexists with the sensitive and fragile identities of the Central and Eastern European countries. In addition, a "victim" mentality has spilled over into Georgia and Ukraine.

It is also important to understand that Russia has also had shocks or experiences that were as painful, if not more so. With respect to its Eastern European neighbours, this is about being a victim in the grand scheme of the major players, in which Eastern Europe's role was confined to serving as a buffer zone separating the West from Russia. In the post-Soviet period, this notion was aptly transformed into a driver of national consolidation within these countries.

The pain Russia feels is of a different nature. First, it is related to the deep scars left by repression and other instances of crippling overreach by the state. This resulted in a deep-rooted feeling of mistrust toward the state system in Russia itself, combined with an almost sacred fear and ritual submission to it. The second aspect is the downfall of the leviathan, and nostalgia for its greatness, along with the loss of any intelligible reference points and attempts to rediscover them. This all blends together with the instinct that urges people to love their motherland, portraying it as an ideal that goes far beyond the institutional dimension of the state, and makes Russia's recovery from the hardest blows possible. However, there is still a long way to go before the pain from these two traumas dissipates, and it will no doubt linger in the future. In fact, the information impulses coming from within Russia and from abroad could lead to the most unpredictable consequences.

Against this background, it is interesting to consider the general structure of the message coming from Russia and from the West. The notion of information warfare implies that this structure should be similar – the parties of the conflict exchange cohesive ideological messages, aimed at winning the support of as many people as possible. But this is not the case. The "Russian" message and the "Western" message are very different in terms of their structure.

The Western message has not changed much since the Cold War: democracy and a consistent nation state, the market, the rule

of law, freedom as equality before law, etc. Tolerance and trans-border mobility have recently been added to this mix. Overall, this is an ideology of emancipation. The countries of Eastern and Central Europe have been much more vigorous in promoting this vision than the US and Old Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War. This message sounds different in every country. In practice, emancipation coexists with less individual freedom and stronger surveillance on the part of a state. This vision has been a major factor for the post-Soviet space.

Interestingly, Russia, unlike the USSR, does not offer an alternative (and on closer examination, the Soviet experiment was also intrinsically Western, since it promoted emancipation and enlightenment). In fact, Russia lacks a mature democratic tradition, since a well-established rule of law is a prerequisite for developing a market economy. And Russia has not disavowed a single Western-inspired value. Even patriotism, that is now officially regarded as a bedrock of Russian identity, is a Western value rooted in the Western idea of a nation state and a nation as a political, not ethnic, community.

The Russian message seems to revolve around the notion of the West playing unfairly by spreading chaos while calling for order. This idea permeates the debate on the Ukrainian and the Syrian crises. Just as the Soviet Union did before, Russia accuses the West of acting in bad faith without, however, posing an existential threat to the West.

On the other hand, a force has emerged that can offer a radically different alternative to the Western project and openly challenges it. Radical Islam promotes a different vision of justice, state, freedom and other fundamental values. The tragedy for Russia and the collective West is that they continue to fight the wars of the past against one another, while underestimating the ideological strength of radical Islam.

This struggle between Russia and the West is a phantom that is leading nowhere. But phantoms can have a serious impact on real politics. The “Russian threat” is likely to remain a consolidating force for Ukraine, Georgia and many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe for years to come. And Russia will continue to view them as marionettes of a certain Western “core” or “centre”, where

anti-Russian conspiracies originate. All this ensures more votes for politicians and larger audiences with higher ratings for the media.

Incidentally, another paradox of the current interaction on the informational front is that it is capitalist by nature. Even state-owned media are motivated, not so much by political orders or directives coming from above, as they are by the eagerness to strike a chord with the political elite and a larger audience. Changes in terms of supply and demand could put an end to this “Phony War” of information, which could also spell the end of capitalism. It is clear that neither Russia, nor the West, want this.

In the current political environment, it would be naïve to urge the media in Russia and the West to show restraint, and indeed, to do so might also resemble a campaign of propaganda. By calling on the opposing side to dampen their ardor in the war of propaganda, Russia and Western nations seem to say to each other: we are not aggressors and call upon you (the opposing side) to mitigate the information pressure, thus arguing by default that the calling party (Russian or Western, respectively) is *a priori* restrained, that we are not waging a propaganda campaign and merely wish for the other side to follow our example. Meanwhile, both sides have already stepped up the war of propaganda to formidable proportions. It will be extremely difficult to rein in its momentum, even if we consider the positive changes happening at political level.

Nevertheless, the damage inflicted by the war of propaganda can, and ought to be, diminished. In the first instance, the sides should refrain from mutual criticism in those areas where the interests of Russia, USA and EU dovetail. The priority should be the fight against radical Islamism – ISIS and other terrorist groups. Today Russia is positioned in the West as almost hostile to the USA and its allies in addressing the Syrian stalemate. At the very least it is looked upon as the “spoiler” of the Western effort in reaching peace and fighting the radicals. This idea is clearly expressed in the final communiqué of the NATO summit recently held in Warsaw, as one example.

Russia and the US-led coalition indeed have different visions of the future of Syrian statehood. However, both sides maintain a

constant dialogue and, what is more, they share common security concerns. Instead of demonising each other, therefore, the media could try analysing the success (even if tactical) achieved by the Russians and Americans. The response of the Western media to the seizure of Palmira (that had been under control of ISIS), by the Syrian government forces supported by Russian aviation, is quite indicative: it fluctuated from muted mutterings to outright hostility. On the other hand, the strikes of the US and their allies against ISIS, often successful, are not positively covered by the Russian media either. If we proceed from the assumption that radical Islamism is our common threat, this practice should be reconsidered, at least on the level of official media reports.

This challenge could be met by establishing a joint group of journalists for constant team-based coverage of the current events in Syria and in the Middle East as a whole, with the appointed group keeping in touch with official political structures, leading news agencies and media.

A similar joint group could be created for covering the conflict in Donbas. In this case, producing impartial reports would be a more daunting challenge. Unlike the Middle East, the sides hold discordant views on Ukraine, so there is a high risk that each of the sides would try to use the presence of their colleagues from the opposing camp to legitimise their political position. Nevertheless, mutual alienation seems to be the worst possible scenario; hence the need for a permanent communication channel. Even if initially the sides exchange their official positions, such communication channels could later be instrumental in nurturing, at the very least, minimum trust.

A special field of effort is the interaction between think tanks, which have recently tended towards explicit radicalisation. The institutes requested to perform thorough research and elicit as unbiased information as possible actually reproduce the ideological clichés of their nations in pseudoscientific form. Yet their engagement appears essential, since it removes the participants of this dialogue from their “ivory towers”, makes them listen to each other and receive alternative information.

One of the recent examples of this work is the network of Russian and EU think tanks, which has already organised several meetings. For now the success of this effort should not be overestimated, however, as during several meetings, their participants used the opportunity to exchange a series of scathing comments. Nevertheless, a number of joint proposals on the mechanisms of interaction between

Russia and EU in the current situation were developed, as part of the preparations for the seminars and the fact that some positive results were achieved is already a step forward in the current political environment. The joint effort within a higher ranking group and a group of young leaders with support from the ELN, NTI, RIAC and other partners should also be highly appreciated.

The joint work of assessing the common past also appears important. Using the historic wounds for political consolidation is a favourite ploy of propaganda warlords. This should be countered with a frank and consistent dialogue between historians, a scrupulous joint review of historic events and recognition of mistakes on both sides. The Russian-Polish group led by Anatoly Torkunov and Adam Rotfeld exemplifies this effort, as it investigates difficult matters. The dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian scholars will be most challenging, but sooner or later the sides will have to start discussing their common past.

Naysayers may argue that all of the steps mentioned would be pointless if the current political environment remains unchanged, or even deteriorates further. Indeed, it is hard to counter the prevalent trend, especially if the proposed narrative runs contrary to the general media wave. But the truth is that, in the absence of this dialogue, any political warming could be very shaky. Policymakers may take a step towards each other, while the society, press and intellectuals continue releasing traditional content to keep up with momentum. And sooner or later this “phantom curve” will make itself felt again, creating fertile ground for new political crises.

# NATO in a World of Disorder: Three Trends That Will Define the Alliance the Most

BRUNO LÉTÉ\*

NATO may well be the most formidable military alliance in history. Originally founded in 1949, to deter Stalin from attacking Western Europe, the Alliance was then little more than a US promise of protection to a Europe devastated and demoralised by war. But today, nearly seven decades later, NATO still demonstrates the undiminished vitality of the transatlantic relationship in a world that has entered a phase of disorder. The frozen certainties of the Cold War's threat to Europe have now given way to an entirely new set of challenges, much different, but no less menacing than those of the past. As the heads of state put it in a declaration, at their fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington D.C. in 1999, NATO must continuously be adapted to ensure it is as efficient in meeting the threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was in fighting the Cold War.

## **The Warsaw Summit put NATO on track for a new security era**

Since the 1990s, NATO has systematically sought to adapt itself to rapid changes in the security environment. It is no coincidence that NATO's three strategic concepts were preceded by major geopolitical events: the end of the Cold War in 1991, the Kosovo war in 1999, and the highest level of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan, in 2010. The

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year 2014 again heralded a wind of change. The illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula by Russia and the self-proclamation of the Islamic State as a new worldwide caliphate left NATO with no choice but to seek a far broader spectrum of capabilities – from traditional conventional defence tools, such as heavy armour, fighter jets, and frigates, to contemporary intelligence-driven, cyber-assisted, special forces and networked interventions.

The Wales Summit, in September 2014, provided the first step toward this new strategy. In Newport, the Alliance succeeded in realigning its priorities by providing an initial military response to some of the challenges in the east, and, in the wake of Russian escalation, strategies to reinforce its deterrent potential in the region. Alliance leaders also began to think in earnest about the question of a strategy toward the south. Mediterranean security – long since a part of the NATO calculus, but rarely at the forefront – suddenly became a pressing concern in light of the risks emanating from North Africa and the Levant.

With no amelioration in sight to the deteriorating security situation in and outside Europe, the stakes for NATO at the most recent Warsaw Summit, in June 2016, were therefore high. Warsaw had to consolidate and apply the Alliance's military transformation based on the blueprint laid out in Wales, while also generating the political will and unity to implement new and expanded forms of cooperation among NATO Member States, to face a new generation of unconventional threats, ranging from terrorism to disinformation and propaganda to cyber warfare. As with such ambitious agendas some objectives were met better than others. But the Warsaw Summit has certainly placed NATO in a better position to face what is arguably the most difficult security environment in its 67-year history.

By rotating combat-ready military battalions in the Baltics and in Poland, NATO effectively bolstered its deterrence on the eastern flank, and pushed its traditional first line of defence in central Germany forward – creating a new front stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea. Five years after the mixed results of the 2011 Libya campaign, the Warsaw Summit also signifies a confident return of NATO to the

Mediterranean, where the Alliance is now set to play a more active role in regional training, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance missions. Concrete steps have also been taken to strengthen NATO's capacity in non-traditional threat domains, and to better protect allies against terrorist, cyber, or hybrid attacks.

But NATO's transformation should not end here. Post-Warsaw Summit, threats from both inside and outside Europe, as well as from the east and the south are likely to continue to test NATO's adaptability for a foreseeable period of time. The issues for the near future will be how the Allies will want to address these threats, will they be able to tackle them politically, will they have the economic and military capability to tackle them effectively, and, ultimately, what will NATO's role be in addressing these?

## **Looking ahead: A rapidly evolving security landscape and implications for NATO**

For now, the North-Atlantic space still enjoys a relative degree of prosperity, security, and freedom unprecedented in its history. The violence of the first half of the 20th century and the end of the Cold War have given way to nearly three decades of peace and stability. Increasingly open borders, globalised trade and investment flows, new technologies, and the rise of non-state groups in international affairs are likely to continue to shape our post-Cold War era, while at the same time increasing our dependence – and therefore our vulnerability – on an interconnected infrastructure in transport, energy, information, and other fields. In this complex environment, NATO's members and partners will need to work together more than ever if the Alliance is to stay relevant in the management of future security problems.

Indeed, from the Holy League to the Triple Entente to the Warsaw Pact, history shows us that there is nothing sacred about the durability of an alliance, no matter how successful or long-lived it has been. NATO, perhaps, will not be an exception to that rule. Alliances deteriorate and dissolve for several reasons. Most often

failure stems from the inability of the original association to adapt to the changing nature of the threat it is expecting to counter – an obvious risk that could well become NATO's very own Achilles Heel. And while NATO has traditionally been good at adopting short-term concepts that react to evolutionary geopolitics, the Alliance has found it much harder to develop longer term strategic visions inside which the Alliance can develop further.

Subsequent to the Warsaw Summit, NATO should therefore assess the shifts taking place in its geographic and digital environment of interest, and undertake a future-orientated audit of existing capabilities and capacities across the Alliance. Moreover, the question of how NATO should transform itself to meet the 21st century challenges, should be turned on its head by asking what is it that unifies NATO Member States in the 21st century? While the answer to that question remains ambiguous, one thing is clear: the world's major crises are located on Europe's periphery, from Syria and Iraq, to the Sahel, to the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe. It is in this context that three trends are likely to effectively shape the future of the Alliance in the next 5 to 10 years from now.

#### ▪ NATO AND RUSSIA WILL NEED MORE POLITICAL DIALOGUE

For many obvious reasons, Russia will continue to be considered a principal threat for European security in the next years and beyond. For NATO, this threat crystallises in the scenario of a “strong” Russia, as well as a “weak” Russia. In the case of a strong Russia, Moscow will succeed in bringing the country along a path to economic recovery and is likely to continue to fuel the crisis in Ukraine and Syria, and the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, in order to consolidate a more or less predictable military build-up of army, air, and naval capabilities in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the Arctic. Under the “weak” Russia scenario, plunging oil prices, international disinvestment in the Russian economy, and the evaporation of Moscow's once-mighty sovereign wealth fund will destabilise the country. The risk for NATO in this scenario is the prospect of Russian leaders feeling encouraged to engage in

illogical adventurism abroad to distract audiences at home from their deteriorating living standards.

In either scenario, Russian antagonism is likely to remain aimed at NATO and Western democracies, and the negative spillovers of the post-Cold War period will keep the current state of play going for some time. In this regard, it is certain that NATO will continue to face a conundrum vis-à-vis Russia in the coming years. On one hand, the Alliance will need to offer a strong military response to the Russian escalation strategy. On the other, it will also need to de-escalate tensions with Moscow at political level. The way out of this deadlock can only be found with a more constructive dialogue within NATO, and between NATO and Russia, on what a new European security landscape should be.

The current military trends are worrying, and NATO needs new channels to avoid further escalation with Russia. Incident avoidance and incident management are key issues. There is today no agreement between NATO and Russia on how to manage close military encounters. Instead, both parties still base their thinking on a patchwork of bilateral or multilateral (post-) Cold War era agreements, many of them no longer responding to present-day realities, including the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty or the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. These agreements are today insufficient to manage the ongoing close military encounters in the Euro-Atlantic area. A modernised rulebook of European security, undersubscribed both by NATO and Russia, will therefore become increasingly necessary.

But with the current stalemate in Ukraine or Syria, and the lack, for the time being, of any significant security dialogue between Brussels and Moscow, such a long-term perspective seems out of reach. The challenge for NATO will be to avoid a situation where it finds it increasingly difficult to balance the imperative for defence and deterrence with a sense of détente and dialogue. The most realistic expectation could then be the resumption of a gradual dialogue with Russia on the common challenges both sides already face, and

will continue to face in the future, for instance, fighting terrorism or extremist Islam. In this light, could NATO accept a transactional relationship with Russia that balances strategic competition in Eastern Europe with cooperation elsewhere, say in Iran, Syria or Libya? Here the Alliance will need a clearer and more convincing vision for the future.

#### ▪ THE SOUTH WILL BE A KEY TEST FOR ALLIANCE ADAPTATION

The instability on NATO's southern flank is likely to continue to shape the internal security environment in Europe and North America, and security in the Mediterranean Sea itself for the next decade. Terrorism linked to Islamic extremism in the Middle East, Africa, and the sub-continent, including the phenomenon of foreign fighters, will head the list of "intermestic" challenges facing NATO in the years ahead. Human security and the criminal trafficking in migrants will also be part of this equation, with significant social and political implications for Europe. Clearly, these concerns are not limited to southern Europe, but are being felt across the European security space. The United States and Canada are stakeholders in these problems, even if the principal responsibility for their management continues to reside at national level in Europe. Publics within the Alliance will rightly expect NATO to assist in the management of these challenges.

For some time NATO has been struggling to find itself a defined role in Mediterranean security, but is now moving rapidly to fill this gap. Following the Warsaw Summit, NATO AWACS will support the Counter-ISIL Coalition to monitor airspace and coordinate bombing raids and other air operations in Iraq and Syria. The launch of Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean, in close cooperation with the EU's Operation Sophia, is another important NATO asset. It could well become critical if ISIS or ISIS-inspired networks attempt to launch future terrorist attacks on shipping or targets in southern Europe from bases in Libya or elsewhere in North Africa and the Levant. The decision in February 2016 to deploy a limited NATO naval force to the Aegean to assist Greece and Turkey in the monitoring of illegal migration was another highly symbolic step.

The security environment in the south will continue to be strongly affected by the growing role of regional and external actors, acting directly or through proxies. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt have all been militarily engaged in the region's ongoing conflicts, including Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. Without a lasting peace scenario for Syria, Turkey will continue to be deeply affected by the wars on its southern and eastern borders, and will be increasingly drawn into a struggle closely tied to its own internal security. Russia is likely to consolidate its return as a Mediterranean security actor, in Syria and in less visible, but still meaningful, ways in Egypt and Algeria. One consequence of this will be the spread of NATO-Russia military risks southward to the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

China, already an economic and political stakeholder in Africa and the Mediterranean, is likely to emerge as a more prominent player in regional security over the next decade. The May 2015 Chinese-Russian naval exercises in the Mediterranean may be a harbinger of greater activism to come. At the extent to which China is progressing with its ambitious "One Belt, One Road" initiative for new continental and maritime links westward, this will likely reinforce China's interest and presence in Mediterranean security in the years ahead. Ten years hence, it may be hard to avoid the Chinese factor in Mediterranean security and the Alliance's strategy.

Finally, strategy southwards will be the key test of NATO's approach to regional and global partnerships. The Alliance has had a formal partnership arrangement with most southern Mediterranean countries since 1996. After 20 years, NATO's seven-country Mediterranean Dialogue remains a valuable instrument for security cooperation and political dialogue, alongside the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with the Arab Gulf states. Despite tremendous political change across the region in recent years, no partners have pulled out of these frameworks, and there remains a critical mass of interest in cooperation with the Alliance. Each of these partners has negotiated individual cooperation programs with NATO, and in general, there is an appetite for doing more, despite the complex public diplomacy surrounding cooperation in the south. In all of

these relationships, including the training and assistance partnership with Iraq, defence capacity building will continue to be a core task. In this context, NATO allies can also do more to coordinate, and place within an Alliance framework, the wide range of bilateral assistance and capacity-building efforts underway in the south. Cooperative frameworks in the south will become more and more useful for mobilising regional contributions to potential NATO operations in the Middle East and North Africa.

#### ▪ **US AND EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP WILL MOSTLY DEFINE THE FUTURE OF NATO**

In its own way, the dynamics of the relationship with the United States will increasingly represent the traditional challenge for the Alliance and European security. While Russia's intervention in Ukraine may have extended a strong US leadership in NATO and Europe for the foreseeable future, history tells us that the transatlantic partnership needs to be revisited at regular intervals, and the time for such a review could be in the next coming years.

In the long run, the transatlantic relationship has to change. The US's insistence that Europeans become more serious about increasing their contribution to Western military efforts, and the gradual changes entailed by Washington's "Asian rebalance" in Europe's security environment, is clear evidence that Europeans must look seriously on their own doorstep. Moreover, the US hegemony may be the strongest the world has ever seen, but it is still bound by certain limits. Washington cannot indefinitely support the burden of reassurance in Europe or its periphery, nor account for 73 percent of the total allied defence budgets. It can neither be the sole source of many strategic enablers, nor spend nearly four times as much per soldier as the European average.

European allies need to adapt to the reality that Washington will now be more likely to provide military assistance without taking the actual political lead of any military intervention. At the same time, the misperception in Washington that the less the United States does in Europe's neighbourhoods, the more Europeans will get their

act together and assume their security responsibilities, needs to be reversed. What we are actually seeing is quite the opposite trend, i.e. a “less for less” scenario, whereby the less the United States does, the less the EU also does.

The United States is drawn into increasingly extensive strategic entanglements that force it to disperse its military forces across the globe and to spend a large share of its GDP on defence. The risk here is that the United States’ political and military influence around the globe becomes unsustainable once the cost of its international commitments necessitates domestic underinvestment. Certainly, we should expect the United States to remain an indispensable nation for another generation to come, perhaps even two, but will US hegemony still stand in three generations? Whatever the answer to this question may be, the outcome will have a dramatic but unavoidable impact on the future of the transatlantic alliance.

Finally, we do not yet know how the European Union will respond to the rapid changes in its security environment, but its response will be a defining element for the future of NATO and the European security architecture. The Union has been struggling for some time regarding its role in the defence field when it talks about being an effective security provider: genuine commitment for a fully-fledged European defence, full reliance on NATO, or a new division of labour with NATO on the security engagements both organisations are ready to take on.

But the current multiplication of crises in Europe’s neighbourhood makes it necessary for the EU and NATO to have a serious discussion about their strategic objectives on this issue. The problem, however, is that NATO needs to engage with a European Union that is facing many uncertainties in the coming years – anti-EU populism, migration crisis, terrorism upsurge, and economic underperformance. The simultaneous accumulation of these problems has the potential to bring formidable changes to the shape and future of the EU, and to prevent the EU from creating ground fertile enough to support a cooperative approach in its security policy. It looks therefore likely that the next few years of NATO-EU relations will continue to be bound by the EU’s own internal struggles.



## **Conclusion**

NATO must continue to reinvent and reassert itself as a strong, even formidable, military machine in the eyes of its members, its partners – and its adversaries if the Alliance is to stay relevant in the wake of a new security era. To achieve this result, NATO will need to continue to improve its force-multiplying functions, its effective command structures, and the enhanced interoperability between allies and partners. In comparison to the past, the security challenges of tomorrow will require quick responses, necessitating flexible political frameworks in which coercive reactions can be decided upon among networked actors. But the value of the Alliance should not only be measured in terms of available military equipment, in newly built infrastructure, or in whether or not Member States contribute 2 percent of their GDP to defence spending. The true relevance of the Alliance, in fact, has not much changed since 1949. It is based on its ability to unite liberal democracies in a volatile world and to assure the stability and well-being of the North Atlantic area. Today is only the beginning of the long-term adaptation of NATO in a world that faces disorder for the foreseeable future.

# Nuclear Weapons and NATO: After Warsaw and Turkey, Now What?

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## Introduction

NATO's nuclear policy and posture – including the question of whether or not to continue to store US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe – has long been a source of internal debate and sometimes contention within the Alliance. US nuclear weapons based in Europe continue to be considered as vital by some allies, and an increasing burden and unnecessary risk by others. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the issue has rarely been a subject of public discussion. Today, however, the traditional reluctance of NATO – in particular, basing countries – to draw attention to the nuclear component may be giving way to renewed political debate in some countries, and troubling events in others, that will inevitably give it a higher profile in 2017.

Over the past seven years, NATO summit statements have been carefully phrased to allow for the reduction – or removal of all – US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. In particular, the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) has no explicit reference to ensuring the “broadest possible participation in peacetime basing of nuclear forces” – in effect recognizing that NATO's status as

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a nuclear alliance need not be dependent on the peacetime basing of US nuclear weapons around Europe.

The 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, however, took place at a time when the security and cohesion of Europe has been badly shaken by numerous destabilizing factors. These include terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris and a continuous influx of refugees; questions from the United States, including by a major-party candidate for president, about the value and cost of the transatlantic link; and a deteriorating relationship with Russia that has increased the perceived, if not potential, threat of nuclear weapons.

In this context, the Warsaw Summit took no steps in the direction of altering the nuclear status quo within NATO – and indeed, took a significant step back from its most recent summit statements, at least temporarily re-cementing the status quo. But within less than a week of the Summit's conclusion, the attempted coup in Turkey again reopened a debate, this time very public, about the wisdom of storing US tactical nuclear weapons anywhere in Europe.

A renewed focus on the security of nuclear weapons, combined with the persistent pressure of political and financial considerations, suggest that NATO's nuclear policies and posture will persist as an issue for Washington, NATO basing countries, and the alliance as a whole. NATO would be wise to get out ahead of this issue beginning with a new US administration in Washington and the next NATO summit in 2017, rather than be driven by events.

## **The Warsaw Summit**

NATO leaders met in Warsaw on July 8-9 for the 2016 Summit. The meeting took place just after the vote by the United Kingdom to exit the European Union – which many experts perceive as a serious blow to the future of the UK and to NATO – and when the relationship with Russia has increased the perceived, if not potential, threat of nuclear weapons to European security.

In the lead up to Warsaw, it became clear that some allies might seek to include language in the alliance communiqué that would place

a greater emphasis on the role of nuclear weapons in NATO security policy. This could have included a push to selectively highlight language from the 2010 Strategic Concept or the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR).<sup>1</sup> For example, adding back the reference in the 2010 Strategic Concept to “peacetime basing” (of US tactical nuclear weapons) that was dropped from the 2012 DDPR and avoiding mention of the possibility of further cuts in tactical nuclear weapons, as endorsed in both the Strategic Concept and the DDPR. Some allies were also thought to be looking to increase the readiness of alliance nuclear forces, coincident with increasing the readiness of conventional forces.

So what happened in Warsaw? The communique clearly demonstrated how firmly the “deterrence first” narrative – coupled with “no business as usual” with Moscow – is now established within NATO and supersedes concerns about any possible consequences. Given likely Russian reactions, this could add to ratcheting up near-term tensions between NATO and Russia and be difficult to dislodge in the longer term. Taken in its totality, the nuclear language in the 2016 Summit Communiqué (see relevant excerpts at the end of this essay) is a significant step back from the 2010 Strategic Concept and 2012 DDPR:

**PEACETIME BASING.** It explicitly underscores that NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture “relies, in part” on US nuclear weapons “forward deployed in Europe.” (The other part being alliance strategic forces). So while the 2012 DDPR had dropped the reference to “peacetime basing of nuclear forces,” the 2016 Communiqué now explicitly reintroduces the need for forward based nuclear weapons in Europe.

**DUAL-CAPABLE AIRCRAFT.** Perhaps due to basing country sensitivities, there is no explicit reference to NATO dual capable aircraft (DCA) – the rest of the “relies” sentence refers to “capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned.” Perhaps for the same reason, the language relating to nuclear burden-sharing is also somewhat vague (and closer to the 2012 DDPR language): “The

Alliance will ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned in their agreed nuclear burden-sharing arrangements.”

**READINESS OF NATO'S NUCLEAR FORCES.** There is nothing explicit in the 2016 Summit Communiqué on readiness. The requirement for “planning guidance aligned with 21st century requirements” is the same phrase used in the 2012 DDPR. The explanation at that time was that this language referred to the need to develop and agree on the principles and parameters that would guide a decision to “use,” i.e. a necessary review and possible revision to the considerations developed for that purpose during the Cold War. It is unclear where this currently stands within NATO, but in today’s context, it could foreshadow an increase in DCA readiness levels and at face value represents a further step in the direction of those who look for more credible deterrence through usability.

**STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES.** The language relating to the US, UK and France is consistent with the 2010 / 2012 NATO documents, with an interesting addition: “These Allies’ separate centers of decision-making contribute to deterrence by complicating the calculations of potential adversaries.”

**ROLE OR IMPORTANCE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (OR NUCLEAR USE).** Here too, there would appear to be a ratcheting up. The 2010 Strategic Concept noted that “the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote.” In the 2016 Summit Communiqué, after noting that any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict, the statement removes contemplation from the equation, more directly stating that: “the circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote.” Moreover, in what could be read as an underlining of the possibility of nuclear use, the statement then reads: “If the fundamental security of any of its members were to be threatened however, NATO has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs

on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that an adversary could hope to achieve.”

**ARMS CONTROL.** The Summit Communiqué gives the distinct impression that NATO isn’t putting much stock in – or doing much work on – the arms control account. The statement reaffirms NATO’s “resolve” to seek to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, and states NATO is committed to “contribute to creating the conditions for further reductions in the future” (in tactical nuclear weapons) “on the basis of reciprocity.” However, the statement then notes: “We regret that the conditions for achieving disarmament are not favorable today.”

All in all, Warsaw has provided further momentum to a cycle of “action-reaction” between NATO and Russia, which in light of current conditions and attitudes will be difficult to turn around anytime in the near future. The Communiqué does contain several mentions of the need for engagement with Russia but this will become increasingly difficult as NATO proceeds with implementing and enhancing its forward presence and Russia responds. Moreover, it is clear that there are some allies who continue to question the advisability of engagement with Putin’s Russia in the first place.

## **Turkey**

For years, concerns have been raised regarding the security of NATO bases and nuclear-related sites – including in countries (still not identified by NATO) that could host nuclear weapons storage facilities. Just one week after the NATO summit in July, we saw the Turkish commanding officer at Incirlik arrested for his alleged role in the Turkish coup plot. If reports are accurate – that Incirlik is a major NATO installation hosting US forces that control one of the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons in Europe – this shows just how quickly “expert” assumptions about the safety and security of US nuclear weapons stored abroad can change literally within minutes.

Questions about the political stability of countries that could potentially host US nuclear weapons add another layer of security concern at a time when terrorist threats are evolving across Europe. In March 2016, the Pentagon reportedly ordered military families out of southern Turkey, primarily from Incirlik Air Base, due to ISIS-related security concerns.<sup>2</sup> This report came shortly after the Brussels terrorist attacks and what appears to have been a credible threat to Belgian nuclear power plants.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of the security of US nuclear weapons stored in Europe is not new; indeed, deficiencies were cited a few years ago in a study by the US Air Force.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, former senior NATO officials, including a former US Air Force General Robertus C.N. Remkes who commanded the 39th wing at Incirlik Air Base and later J5 EUCOM, wrote in 2011 of the ongoing security risks associated with storing tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and the severity of the political and security consequences of any infiltration of a site for the alliance, whether or not the attackers gained access to the weapons themselves.<sup>5</sup>

At each of these sites, a combined force of US and European NATO personnel are assigned to retain the custody and provide security of US nuclear weapons. The weapons are stored in underground hardened storage bunkers at undisclosed locations around each storage site. Custody, repair and improvements to the weapons and the storage bunkers are the responsibility of the US Air Force. Perimeter security (fences, monitors, and motion detectors) and access to the storage sites is the responsibility of the host nation.

Locating nuclear weapons at locations throughout Europe to reassure some allies comes with the increasing risk of vulnerability to an evolving and more deadly terrorist threat. It should be even clearer now that tactical nuclear weapons stored in Europe are potential targets for terrorist attacks. Added to this, recent events in Turkey demonstrate how rapidly unforeseen political events can turn rock-solid security assumptions into sand.

## Now what?

Prior to the Turkish coup, it was clear that – in the absence of a serious review of alternatives to NATO’s current nuclear posture, one that could be sustained without the peacetime basing of forward deployed tactical nuclear weapons in Europe – discussions within NATO will almost inevitably have to return to the issue of DCA sustainment and modernization in NATO basing countries, perhaps as soon as in 2017.

The issue of nuclear modernization will not be a welcome topic in most basing countries who are likely to face serious opposition from their parliaments – whose approval will be needed for any new nuclear-related investments – and publics; indeed, this is already happening in some countries. In April and May of 2016, the Dutch parliament considered several motions relating to nuclear weapons and disarmament, with four receiving majority support, including a proposal to disclose “secret” treaties providing for the storage of nuclear weapons in the Netherlands, and a call for the Dutch government to reject its nuclear task in consultation with the United States.

Ironically, the prospect of a debate over DCA modernization – and the continuing need to fund conventional reassurance initiatives – could provide the impetus for NATO to do what it has failed to do for years: think seriously about establishing a safer, more credible nuclear posture with updated nuclear sharing arrangements with allies – and without the need for US nuclear bombs stored in Europe.

Events in Turkey provide added urgency to this issue. The question is: can Washington take steps to reduce threats posed by political instability or terrorism by removing tactical nuclear weapons from Europe before an incident occurs and leaders are asked why they didn’t do more sooner? In the wake of a successful terrorist attack – or domestic unrest involving a NATO nuclear storage site – it will be difficult to explain that vulnerable and potentially lethal targets were left in place due to a perceived need to provide added political reassurance to NATO allies.<sup>6</sup>



NATO's nuclear deterrence posture can be maintained – and NATO will be safer and more secure – without basing tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Achieving this outcome, however, will require both Washington and key NATO allies, in particular basing countries that have so far taken great pains to avoid a public discussion of anything relating to NATO nuclear policy, to take the bull by the horns – before the next NATO summit in 2017. Otherwise, there is a risk that the inertia of the past 8 years will again settle over the nuclear issue in NATO.

If concerns over the security of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, and the domestic politics of DCA modernization, are not sufficient to motivate NATO to rethink its current nuclear posture, financial pressures may tip the balance. Looking beyond Warsaw, the alliance should be assessing all capabilities and resources based on existing and emerging threats and still-declining defense budgets in many countries. This must include the financial considerations relating to maintaining the current nuclear arrangement, including the opportunity costs relating to conventional forces.

In view of current trends and the emphasis on strengthening conventional capabilities, there is a strong case to be made for continuing conventional reassurance requirements beyond what is now budgeted in the United States. New resources from Washington and Europe will be needed to pay for increasing and then sustaining the American military presence in Europe, providing more exercises and training, and building partner capacity. Washington and NATO allies will need to consider redirecting the large amounts associated with modernizing the B61 and extending the life of existing DCA or replacement aircraft to decisively alter the nuclear component of NATO's defense posture and use these savings to capitalize various conventional reassurance initiatives over at least the next five years.

Finally, even with arms control on the back burner, any discussion within NATO of the role of tactical nuclear weapons will inevitably bring back the question of reciprocity with Russia – and the impasse on alliance tactics that was reached when members attempted to develop an agreed approach on nuclear confidence building measures during 2013.

## **Conclusion**

A re-examination by the next US administration and NATO allies of how best to provide for a safer, more secure, and more credible extended nuclear deterrence for NATO members is necessary – one which challenges some of the assumptions underpinning current policy. This should include a thorough examination of the range of threats facing the alliance, the tools and resources available to NATO to address these challenges, the ongoing priority for conventional reassurance, and a balanced assessment of what Russian doctrine, statements and activities say about their attitudes to the role of nuclear weapons.

### **Nuclear excerpts from Warsaw Summit Statement<sup>7</sup>**

Copied below the three most relevant nuclear-related paragraphs (Paragraphs 52, 53 and 54) – along with the relevant paragraphs on arms control (Paragraphs 64 and 65) – from the Warsaw Summit Communiqué.

52. As a means to prevent conflict and war, credible deterrence and defense is essential. Therefore, deterrence and defense, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy. A robust deterrence and defense posture strengthens Alliance cohesion, including the transatlantic link, through an equitable and sustainable distribution of roles, responsibilities, and burdens. NATO must continue to adapt its strategy in line with trends in the security environment – including with respect to capabilities and other measures required – to ensure that NATO's overall deterrence and defense posture is capable of addressing potential adversaries' doctrine and capabilities, and that it remains credible, flexible, resilient, and adaptable.
53. Allies' goal is to bolster deterrence as a core element of our collective defense and to contribute to the indivisible security

of the Alliance. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. The strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute to the overall security of the Alliance. These Allies' separate centers of decision-making contribute to deterrence by complicating the calculations of potential adversaries. NATO's nuclear deterrence posture also relies, in part, on United States' nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe and on capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned. These Allies will ensure that all components of NATO's nuclear deterrent remain safe, secure, and effective. That requires sustained leadership focus and institutional excellence for the nuclear deterrence mission and planning guidance aligned with 21st century requirements. The Alliance will ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned in their agreed nuclear burden-sharing arrangements.

54. The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. Nuclear weapons are unique. Any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote. If the fundamental security of any of its members were to be threatened however, NATO has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that an adversary could hope to achieve.
64. Allies emphasize their strong commitment to full implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Alliance reaffirms its resolve to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons in full accordance with all provisions of the NPT, including Article VI, in a step-by-step and verifiable way that promotes international stability, and

is based on the principle of undiminished security for all. Allies reiterate their commitment to progress towards the goals and objectives of the NPT in its mutually reinforcing three pillars: nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

65. After the end of the Cold War, NATO dramatically reduced the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and its reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy. We remain committed to contribute to creating the conditions for further reductions in the future on the basis of reciprocity, recognizing that progress on arms control and disarmament must take into account the prevailing international security environment. We regret that the conditions for achieving disarmament are not favorable today.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For an assessment of the discussion of the role of nuclear weapons in the development of the DDPR, see Simon Lunn, “The Role and Place of Nuclear Weapons – A NATO Perspective” in *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO*, eds. Tom Nichols, Douglas Stuart, and Jeffrey D. McCausland (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> Barbara Starr, Ryan Browne and Elise Labott, “Pentagon Orders Military Families Out of Turkey Due to ISIS threat,” *CNN.com*, [www.cnn.com/2016/03/29/politics/pentagon-orders-military-families-to-leave-southern-turkey/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/29/politics/pentagon-orders-military-families-to-leave-southern-turkey/index.html)  
A U.S. defense official told CNN that the base had been placed under Force Protection Condition Delta for weeks, the highest level of force protection for U.S. military bases. Delta level means that either a terrorist attack has just taken place in the immediate vicinity or “intelligence has been received that terrorist action against a specific location or person is imminent,” according to military guidelines.
- <sup>3</sup> Alissa J. Rubin and Milan Schreuer, “Belgium Fears Nuclear Plants Are Vulnerable,” *New York Times*, 25 March 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/03/26/world/europe/belgium-fears-nuclear-plants-are-vulnerable.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/26/world/europe/belgium-fears-nuclear-plants-are-vulnerable.html)
- <sup>4</sup> Hans M. Kristensen, “USAF Report: ‘Most’ Nuclear Weapon Sites in Europe Do Not Meet U.S. Security Requirements,” *FAS Strategic Security Blog*, 19 June 2008, <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2008/06/usaf-report-most-nuclear-weapon-sites-in-europe-do-not-meet-us-security-requirements/#>
- <sup>5</sup> Robertus C.N. Remkes, “The Security of NATO Nuclear Weapons: Issues and Implications” in *Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe*, eds. Steve Andreassen and Isabelle Williams (Washington, DC: Nuclear Threat Initiative, November 2011), [www.nti.org/analysis/articles/reducing-nuclear-risks-europe-framework-action-full-report/](http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/reducing-nuclear-risks-europe-framework-action-full-report/)

<sup>6</sup> Steve Andreasen, “Let’s Get Our Nuclear Weapons out of Turkey,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-andreasen-nuclear-weapons-turkey-20160811-snap-story.html>

<sup>7</sup> Warsaw Summit Communique, 9 July 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm)

# NATO's Ballistic Missile Defence System and Dialogue with Russia: From "Talking Past Each Other" to Facing down a Bully?

TOMAS JERMALAVIČIUS\*

Development of the ballistic missile defence (BMD) system by the United States and NATO has always been a contentious issue in the relations with Russia, as well as with China. The fundamental concern of Russia is that the system is directed against its nuclear deterrent and undermines strategic stability between the nuclear powers. The logic is simple: by insulating themselves from the threat of a nuclear retaliation, the United States and their allies would acquire the ability to employ nuclear threats, or even actual nuclear strikes, to coerce Russia without fearing its retaliation. Thus, in this perspective, "deterrence by punishment" underpinning the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD) ceases to work. The counter-argument of the United States has been continuously consistent: the system is defensive and is not directed against Russia, since it is aimed at a far more limited, yet more acute, ballistic missiles' threat from the "rogue regimes" such as Iran and North Korea. In this line of argument, Russia's massive nuclear arsenal retains the capacity to overwhelm the limited defences which are being deployed in Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup>

This has failed to assuage Moscow, and the abrogation of the ABM Treaty of 1972 by the administration of President George W. Bush in 2001, or NATO's rejection of the proposed joint missile defence

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system with Russia to defend against the “rogue regimes”, served only to reinforce the perception that it has indeed been an anti-Russian project all along. Nor did Moscow feel reassured by the limitations put on the European part of the global BMD system (i.e. cancellation of the 4th phase in the European Phased Adaptive Approach, EPAA) by President Obama’s administration. Indeed, the so-called “Aegis Afloat” (based on a fleet of the US Navy’s missile destroyers), which is part of the EPAA phases implemented by the United States, came to be seen by Moscow as an even greater threat to its nuclear deterrent based on the ICBMs than the fixed installations in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Russia has been observing the exponential growth of the capability of the BMD system and probably concluded that one day it would move well beyond its current technical limitations and become capable of overturning MAD altogether. Given Russia’s reliance on the nuclear deterrent to offset its relative conventional weakness, this is not a prospect that Moscow relishes. Washington’s “Global Prompt Strike” programme further reinforces the fear that one day Russia will find itself deeply exposed to military coercion.

The dialogue between NATO and Russia on the BMD stalled even before the dire events of 2014, when Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimea and launched a clandestine invasion of Ukraine’s eastern provinces. By 2013, both sides realised they had been talking past each other. NATO insisted that Russia’s proposal to create a joint system and give Russia the responsibility for one of its sectors over Europe violated the Alliance’s principle that collective defence – a core task of NATO – could not be “outsourced” to a third party. Russia kept insisting that the emerging NATO BMD system is being developed against Russia’s nuclear deterrent rather than the “rogue regimes”. As one NATO official remarked in a conversation with the author of this paper, “we could not even agree on the physics, let alone policy; apparently, the laws of physics in their textbooks work differently to ours”. By the time of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, all discussions between NATO and Russia on this topic had reached a dead-end, and the working group set up as a forum for conducting the dialogue has already been put into “deep freeze”.

It is no great secret, however, that for NATO Allies on the Alliance's eastern flank, deployment of the US BMD system's elements – ground-based interceptors for mid-course ballistic missile defence and an early warning and tracking radar (the so-called “Aegis Ashore”) – has never been a project solely for countering the “rogue states” of Iran or North Korea. Even if the officials had some friendly spats as to which NATO capital – Vilnius or Tallinn – was closest to North Korea (it is Tallinn), the threat perception was not as acute. A fundamental political and strategic consideration was to maintain the US military presence in Europe. Given that the US military “footprint” on the continent was steadily shrinking at that time (reaching a nadir with President Obama's “pivot” to Asia), the BMD was one of the few projects which could still “tie” the United States militarily to Europe. The small US military contingents, including the deployment of PAC3 batteries to protect “Aegis Ashore” sites, had great symbolic and political value to the host nations and the entire region – value which even Russia's threats to enact retaliatory measures, such as deployment of short-range ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad, could not offset. Indeed, the basing of “Aegis Afloat” assets in Rota, Spain, did not have such value. The much touted mobility and flexibility of the naval assets, while a great military characteristic, politically is a flaw since it makes untethering military presence easy from the continent, should political circumstances require. The “bricks and mortar” of “Aegis Ashore” have a whiff of permanence that “Aegis Afloat” distinctly lacks.

However, the activation of the “Aegis Ashore” site in Romania and beginning of the construction of a similar site in Poland – both part of the EPAA implementation – took place in 2016, in a radically different environment of threat. While North Korea still poses a threat to the United States and its allies in the Pacific, the nuclear deal with Iran has somewhat blunted (or at least delayed) this threat vector in Europe's direction. At the same time, the threat posed by Russia to NATO's eastern flank members has taken a front-seat ever since the start of its aggression against Ukraine. Vulnerability of the Allies on the Alliance's eastern flank and the imperative of upholding Article 5



commitments turned Washington's thinking around and prompted the United States to bolster its military presence in the continent. BMD and EPAA no longer serve as almost the sole anchors of this presence – the US European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and NATO's readiness measures agreed upon in Wales and Warsaw do, however. The US tanks, the last of which were withdrawn from Europe in 2013, have returned.

This raises the question as to why NATO and the United States should continue with an expensive and, in the eyes of Moscow, strategically destabilising project. Would it not be reasonable to pull the plug on it and thereby take the steam out of a major strand of Moscow's critique toward the West? NATO's answer is an unequivocal "no". The communique of the Warsaw Summit states that: "The threat to NATO populations, territory, and forces posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles continues to increase, and missile defence forms part of a broader response to counter it."<sup>3</sup> It is clear though that the Alliance as a whole still seems to be focused on a more generic threat of ballistic missiles' proliferation, developing the BMD system as an "insurance policy", and seeks to reassure Moscow by stating that "NATO missile defence is not directed against Russia and will not undermine Russia's strategic deterrence capabilities. NATO missile defence is intended to defend against potential threats emanating from outside the Euro-Atlantic area. We have explained to Russia many times that the BMD system is not capable against Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent and there is no intention to redesign this system to have such a capability in the future."<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the above reassurances, the rationale of NATO BMD system for the European NATO Allies on the eastern flank has clearly evolved beyond just political symbolism. Militarily, deployable theatre BMD systems should form an essential component of countering some of the "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) capabilities fielded by Russia, which include short-range tactical ballistic missiles and by means of which Moscow is now able to isolate some of the most vulnerable members of NATO from the rest of the Alliance or significantly encumber the movement of the Allied forces in those countries (e.g.

the Baltic States)<sup>5</sup>. More importantly, it has also become a strategic necessity in order to close off one of the avenues of intimidation and coercion available to the Kremlin, which is apparent in the context of Moscow's very loose talk about the "nukes" and its doctrine of nuclear "first strike" with non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW), in order to de-escalate the high-stakes conventional conflict.<sup>6</sup> It seems that, quite contrary to the Alliance's reassuring gestures in its Warsaw Summit communique, Russia's insistence that the BMD development is directed against it should actually be given credence if NATO is to disabuse Moscow of an increasingly wide-spread perception (or, rather, delusion) that it can achieve some political objectives by limited first use of nuclear weapons. The threat of NATO's nuclear retaliation may not be sufficient given Moscow's current mindset and penchant for bold risk-taking, and the BMD must step into this potential breach in the chain of deterrence.

Missile defence – or, rather integrated air and missile defence (IAMD) system if properly configured to also address other threats via the air domain (e.g. cruise missiles) – brings to the table "deterrence by denial" in relation to a limited nuclear strike scenario and thus supplements the "deterrence by punishment" approach. It pushes back the imperative to exercise a nuclear response option should Moscow decide to pursue its "nuclear de-escalation" strategy in the event of a conflict. Instead of responding with a nuclear strike – even if most carefully calibrated – and thus opening a Pandora's Box of ever-escalating nuclear exchanges leading to an all-out nuclear war, the Alliance would have the time and possibility to consider a range of other measures – kinetic and non-kinetic – of managing a crisis. Non-use of nuclear weapons in response to an attempted (and successfully countered by the IAMD assets) single "de-escalatory" shot from Russia's side would not be a result of the Alliance's paralysis, collapse of consensus and disintegration – something which the Kremlin certainly counts on in its doctrine of "nuclear de-escalation" – but a result of confidence that the Alliance's forces, populations and infrastructure remain relatively immune to this form of coercion thanks to the IAMD. At the very least, it shifts the onus of further

nuclear escalation back onto Moscow, which would have to upscale its nuclear attacks to overwhelm the ballistic missile defences and thus carry its actions into the zone where the logic of “deterrence of punishment” kicks back in.

The existing BMD capabilities, and even those which are envisaged and slowly emerging, are ill-suited to counter a massive nuclear attack. Many technologies underpinning them are still far from mature, especially in the mid-course missile defence tasks. Russia has taken multiple measures to modernise its nuclear capabilities and maintain its ability to overwhelm limited BMD systems (e.g. by deploying MIRV on its new generation of the ICBMs<sup>7</sup>). The strategic stability and MAD between the United States and Russia remain intact in this regard. Even in a more limited scenario, the BMD system is not geared to cope with the NSNWs being delivered to the targets by other means than ballistic missiles, unless it is turned into a more comprehensive IAMD system and reconfigured to deal with Russia’s threat. Yet, it is a necessary solution in protecting troops, installations and populations against Russia’s A2/AD capabilities and against its “single shot” approach designed to signal high stakes of a conflict and protect its military gains, such as a military *fait accompli* it is capable of swiftly establishing, for instance, in the Baltics. In this context, NATO Allies on the eastern flank have already come to appreciate the political and military value of flexibility and responsiveness conferred by “Aegis Afloat” systems, and are also asking for a persistent forward presence of the land-based terminal phase integrated air and missile defence systems, such as PAC3 in the frontline states. (The latter issue has been recently brought up by a senior German military official as a possibility in the framework of a joint German-Dutch concept<sup>8</sup>.) When Phase 3 of the EPAA is implemented, the deployed ground-based interceptors of a new generation will also be capable of dealing with the threat of intermediate range ballistic missiles<sup>9</sup> – something which will be highly pertinent should Russia walk out of the INF Treaty.<sup>10</sup>

There is no doubt that Moscow will continue its efforts to halt the development of NATO’s BMD system. Its rhetoric about the undermined strategic stability will remain a staple of statements by

Russia's officials, even though the BMD systems which are being fielded are dwarfed by the capabilities of Russia's strategic nuclear forces. Its threats that host nations of the BMD system's elements will become targets of Russia's nuclear and conventional strikes will persist, even though it has been quite obvious to those particular nations – and quite a few more – that they serve as targets in Russia's war planning and exercises, whether they host the BMD or not. And, should Russia decide to walk out of the INF Treaty, its accusations of the United States being in breach, due to the "Aegis Ashore" site in Romania,<sup>11</sup> will only be an excuse rather than a true cause: Moscow has been very consistent in dismantling or eroding the architecture of treaties and agreements underlying the existing European security order, and the INF Treaty is just another element awaiting its turn.

## Conclusions

Conducting dialogue with Russia on the issues of strategic stability, arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation and confidence and security building measures is indeed necessary for the sake of security in Europe. However, a process where one side can hold a spectre of a nuclear strike as a way to divide, intimidate and paralyse, or to dictate its terms to the other side is not dialogue – it is coercion. Moscow clearly expects that its nuclear blackmail and abrasive risk-taking might work to protect any potential gains of military aggression and *fait accompli* – that some NATO Allies would not see it reasonable to risk a nuclear war for "a suburb of St. Petersburg"<sup>12</sup> and would not want to see the Alliance retaliate with nuclear means to Russia's "de-escalatory strike". NATO's BMD (or IAMD) system capable – in conjunction with other defensive systems and measures – of protecting against such a threat, and thus ensuring "deterrence by denial", would render such an approach by Moscow as rather futile, and would go a long way towards laying the ground for a balanced dialogue between NATO and Russia in the long-term. The major challenge is to develop and deploy such a robust and reliable system soon enough in order to contain Moscow's aggressive stance and irresponsible nuclear

posturing. This lies in the realm of science, technology and industrial development, as much as political will and military planning, and there are plenty of sceptics questioning the technical ability to deliver even upon the current vision of the limited BMD system.<sup>13</sup> Yet, in the times of acute threat and lingering doubts about the reliability of collective defence and deterrence, when confronted with a bold and abrasive foe in the Kremlin who interprets compromise as a sign of weakness to be exploited in a “zero sum” geopolitical game, it would be irresponsible and self-defeating to pull the plug on NATO’s BMD system’s development. If anything, the effort must be greatly stepped up, with the European Allies – including on the eastern flank – contributing to a much greater degree towards sharing the burden of maintaining a continuum of credible deterrence. Last, but not least, the Alliance’s rhetoric must change and, instead of wasting time and paper on reassuring Russia, it should communicate to Moscow that the BMD will have a significant role in deterring and containing Russia if its strategic behaviour towards the Alliance and the entire European security architecture does not change.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a good overview of the arguments and counter-arguments, see Nicholas Khoo and Reuben Steff, “This Program Will Not be a Threat to Them’: Ballistic Missile Defence and US relations with Russia and China”, *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 30, Iss. 1 (2014), 17-28, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2013.864869.

<sup>2</sup> See Glenn Diesen and Conor Keane, “Constraining Missile Defence”, *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 32, Iss. 2 (2016), 128-143, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2016.1160487.

<sup>3</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Warsaw Summit Communiqué, Press release 2016 (100), 9 July 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm)

<sup>4</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the A2/AD threat in the Baltic theatre, see Wesley Clark, Jüri Luik, Egon Ramms and Richard Shirreff, *Closing NATO’s Baltic Gap* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2016), [http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/ICDS\\_Report-Closing\\_NATO\\_s\\_Baltic\\_Gap.pdf](http://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/failid/ICDS_Report-Closing_NATO_s_Baltic_Gap.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> For more on the role on the NSNW in the Russian doctrine, see Stephen Cimbala and Roger N. McDermott, “A New Cold War? Missile Defenses, Nuclear Arms Reductions and Cyber War”, *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 34, Iss. 1 (2015), 95-111, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2015.994405.

<sup>7</sup> See Cimbala & McDermott, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Shalal, "Germany, Netherlands to Test Joint Missile Defense Operations for Possible Eastern Deployment", *Reuters*, 8 August 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-netherlands-security-idUSKCN10J1AP>

<sup>9</sup> See Stephen J. Cimbala, "Unblocking Inertia: US-Russian Nuclear Arms Control and Missile Defences", *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 32, Iss. 2 (2016), 115-128, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2016.1160485.

<sup>10</sup> For more concerning the situation surrounding the INF Treaty, see Richard Weitz, "Russia and the INF Treaty", *Diplomaatia*, No. 145 (2015), <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/russia-and-the-inf-treaty/>

<sup>11</sup> According to Moscow's argument, Vertical Launch System (VLS) MK41 for the SM-3 Block IB interceptors which are currently being deployed to "Aegis Ashore" site in Romania might also be used for launching land-based inter-mediate range missiles. Such versatility, in this view, puts the United States in violation of the INF Treaty, but Washington insists that the system has been modified so that it is not possible to launch any offensive strike missiles from it and that the United States was completely transparent about this.

<sup>12</sup> This was a metaphor used by Newt Gingrich in relation to Estonia when speaking about the collective defence guarantees, implying that the Allies close to Russia are "second class" members of NATO over whom it is not worth starting a war with Russia. See Reena Flores, "Newt Gingrich: NATO Countries 'Ought to Worry' about U.S. Commitment", *CBS News*, 21 July 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/newt-gingrich-trump-would-reconsider-his-obligation-to-nato/>

<sup>13</sup> For a very useful overview of the technological challenges of missile defence which reflects the views of the system's sceptics, see *The Economist*, "The Unsheltering Sky", 6 September 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/technology-quarterly/21615068-even-new-technology-americas-multi-billion-dollar-efforts-build-shield>

# **A Shared European Home: The European Union, Russia and the Eastern Partnership\***

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In 2014, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung invited twenty experts from twelve European countries to jointly develop scenarios for the future of relations between the European Union, the Russian Federation and their Common Neighbourhood.

The Scenario Group came up with four equally plausible scenarios of how relations between “the EU and the East” might develop between now and 2030.<sup>1</sup> The scenarios proposed four different types of “home”, as metaphors for the kind of circumstances all Europeans from Lisbon to Vladivostok might experience in 2030:

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1. A Shared Home, in which pragmatic cooperation characterizes relations between the EU, Russia and the six countries “in-between”. A commonality of interests, but not of values, leads to a gradual rapprochement among all concerned after the deep crisis of 2013–16.
2. A Common Home characterized by interest-driven cooperation and a commonality of values.
3. A Broken Home, where a European Home as such no longer exists. Instead, by 2030 Europe is back to a Cold War-like situation with confrontation instead of cooperation, without common interests, and clearly without common values.
4. A Divided Home, also called the Cold Peace, where the current status quo continues, with a few common interests, some conflict and increasing divergence in values.

In the course of 2015, these four scenarios were presented to experts and policymakers in thirteen capitals throughout Europe and North America. All in all, the scenarios were discussed with over nine hundred researchers, diplomats, politicians, students and journalists in various settings, from one-to-one conversations to expert workshops and larger conferences. Debates centred around the question of what kind of scenario Europe is currently heading for, how one scenario could evolve into another, which scenario would be preferable, which should be avoided, and how to act today to pave the way for the most preferable scenario to materialize by 2030.

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One consensus that emerged from all these debates was that – against the backdrop of the deep crisis in EU-Russia relations – the Common Home scenario was unlikely to materialize by 2030. It could, however, serve as a vision to guide policymakers in the EU in their long-term strategy. As one participant in the Bucharest debate remarked: “The Common Home is like the North Star – it can show us the way, but at the same time we know we will never reach it.”

The actual developments unfolding in Ukraine, and between the EU and Russia, seemed to point in quite a different direction: At times, wider Europe seemed firmly on track towards the Broken Home scenario, or in other words, towards a new cold war. By autumn 2015, with the ceasefire in Ukraine’s Donbas area more or less holding, and media and political attention turning towards Syria and the refugee crisis, the Divided Home scenario seemed increasingly likely to many interlocutors. Yet both scenarios were generally regarded as inherently unattractive to all sides concerned, not least because they bear the danger of turning from bad to worse: the Divided Home is inherently unstable and might easily turn into a Broken Home, while the new cold war described by the latter might turn hot.

The conclusion of all these debates is the following: If the Common Home seems out of reach for the moment, then the EU should avoid the Broken Home, stabilize the Divided Home we currently seem to be heading for, and try to achieve the Shared Home as a medium-term policy goal.

## **The Shared Home as medium-term policy goal**

If the Shared Home scenario were to become a medium-term policy goal for the European Union, what would its defining features be? The aim for the next five to ten years would be to return to pragmatic cooperation not only with Russia, but also with all the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), based primarily on shared interests. The underlying assumption is that pragmatic cooperation would stabilize the relationship and make relations more predictable, to

the benefit of all countries concerned. In a European Shared Home, conflicts of interest and serious differences in internal political set-up, world view and foreign policy approach would continue to exist, but they would not hinder pragmatic cooperation in areas where interests coincide. The crucial immediate goal is to move attention away from existing conflicts as the driving force of relations, and instead to focus on searching for a basis for pragmatic cooperation. One important component of this approach is to reduce competition over integration of the six countries in the shared neighbourhood between Moscow and Brussels, creating conditions for the compatibility of two integration projects and improving possibilities for the shared neighbourhood countries to participate in both arrangements.

Three essential conditions need to be fulfilled in order to establish pragmatic cooperation:

1. The EU must be clearly aware of and agree on its own interests and objectives, and must acquire a deeper understanding of the interests and objectives of the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia.
2. The EU must be able to see its own policy through the eyes of public and civil society representatives of the target countries, in order to be able to anticipate reactions, conflict and counter-measures. Of course, this also pertains to Russia, whose sensitivities have to be taken into account, but not at the price of granting a *droit de regard*.
3. EU member states must be willing to prioritize long-term and common interests in relations with Eastern neighbours over short-term and domestic interests.

Firstly, the EU's primary interest in the East is security at its borders, including the absence of "hard" military and "softer" threats originating from conflicts, terrorism, migration, possible disruptions of energy supplies, cybercrime, climate change and other sources. Economic growth, social development: prosperity and improved living standards for the vast majority in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and in Russia should be another aim of the EU's policy – for its own best interest.

Secondly, for the EU to be able to pursue its interests and anticipate the effects of its policies, analytical capabilities and constant dialogue are key. Information collected by EU member states, including relevant intelligence, needs to be made available not only to all EU members but also to the EU institutions in charge of EU external relations. Strengthening the European External Action Service (EEAS) – which is, to date, de facto still alarmingly detached from the EU member states’ resources and decision-making – is imperative. Moreover, the EU needs to be transparent in communicating its policy objectives. It should refrain from presenting *faits accomplis* – whether in the political or military arena – as ideally Russia and the other Eastern neighbours should too. Trust should be re-established by intense communication in all ranks and levels.

The third condition is a lesson learned from the past, when the EU’s relations with countries to its east were sometimes seen as a playground for scoring points with the domestic electorate by certain politicians both inside and outside the EU. The events of 2013-15 have shown that this relationship is too crucial for the EU to treat it lightly; this is a point that could be stressed more often by EU representatives in the context of the dialogue with the United States and Canada.

Finally, while focussing on the Shared Home scenario as the preferred outcome, EU policymakers should not forget about the other scenarios. If the past three years have taught us anything, it is that one should always be prepared for the unexpected. Not all developments have to be negative; the EU should also be quick to seize positive openings, should they arise. For that, preparedness, flexibility and responsiveness (as opposed to slow bureaucratic turns) are essential.

## **Preventing the worst: Interdependence as an insurance policy**

What can be done, then, to prevent developments that would further damage relations between the EU, Russia and the Eastern Partnership? The EU should make use of an “insurance policy” that decreases the

likelihood of negative scenarios: It should try to preserve economic interdependence.

Fundamentally, economic exchange based on mutually accepted rules contributes to increasing prosperity and improving socio-economic development in wider Europe, which can help to prevent social instability as a trigger of conflict. On the one hand, the crisis in EU-Russia relations shows, contrary to what some EU policymakers might have expected before 2013, that strong trade and investment relations are no absolute safeguard against relations spiralling into crisis. On the other hand, the strong economic ties that connect the EU and Russia might have played their part in containing the crisis, and preventing its further escalation. In other words: The conflict might have become much worse without the economic interdependence that can be described schematically as the EU's dependence on imports of Russian energy, and Moscow's dependence on the EU countries as its main source of revenue and high technology and consumer goods. Finally, the EU's response to Russia's military actions vis-à-vis Ukraine – to choose diplomatic and economic sanctions, but not to resort to military means – was only possible because of economic interdependence. Without such economic interdependence, economic sanctions would not have yielded any effect.

The EU should not give up economic interdependence too easily. While not a guarantee against a deterioration of relations, it renders a termination more costly and thus more unlikely. In its relations with Russia, the EU should therefore try to preserve as many trade and investment links as possible, and in the mid- to long-term should aim to increase them. Sanctions should therefore always be linked to clear and attainable goals, and should always come with an exit strategy. They should in no way be seen as an end in itself. Moreover proliferation of sanctions and their long duration might decrease the EU's political leverage in future.

The Eastern Partnership countries should be encouraged to develop their economic relations with the EU. At the same time, this should not in itself be an encouragement to decrease economic exchange with Russia, which is not only vital for economic stability in the region, but

would also ensure that at least some costs are entailed when relations go from cooperation to conflict.

The biggest problem here lies in the asymmetry of economic interdependence between small nations such as Latvia or Georgia on the one side, and Russia on the other. Inside the EU, Brussels can devise compensating mechanisms by increasing intra-EU solidarity, most notably in the energy sphere. The goal should not be to gain complete independence from Russia or to eliminate market mechanisms, but to reach symmetrical interdependence between the EU as a whole and Russia.

In the case of the Eastern Partnership countries, this is more difficult. The countries that seek closer relations with the EU and successfully implement required reforms should benefit from greater competitiveness and diversification of trade in the longer term, leading to increased prosperity and foreign policy independence. However, an honest analysis shows that the EU in its current state would not be able to compensate any EaP state for the complete loss of the Russian market, so keeping economic links intact becomes a matter of preserving social stability and a precondition for any positive development. What the EU could aim for is not to replace Russia as a trading partner for the EaP states, but to be helpful in expanding the alternatives at hand. The goal would be to enable all the EaP states to diversify their economic relations. The EU's policy should also aim at facilitating economic interaction between the EaP countries, as this would help them to become less dependent on rival cooperation options and make them less vulnerable to external economic pressure.

While the EaP states are dependent on arrangements that Moscow and Brussels will work out between them, EU policy should aim to empower them in order to avoid them becoming mere objects of the EU-Russia relationship. This, however, implies that political elites in the Eastern Partnership countries must assume political and economic responsibility for the decisions they take and the policies they formulate.

## **Recommendations: Making the Shared Home more likely**

What can be done to make the “Shared Home” more likely by 2030?

### **1. DEALING WITH THE CONFLICT IN AND AROUND UKRAINE**

The EU will have to find a lasting solution to the conflict in and around Ukraine. The immediate goal should be to **ensure implementation of the Minsk agreement**, first and foremost by putting an end to all hostilities and thus preventing further bloodshed. To achieve this goal, it might be necessary to turn the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission into a fully-fledged peacekeeping force equipped with a UN mandate, or at the very least to agree to boost the OSCE observation mission at the line between separatist-controlled territories and the territory under the control of Kiev authorities. Moreover, placing an OSCE observation mission at the border with Russia should also be considered.

In parallel, EU policymakers should prepare for a situation where it becomes impossible to fully implement the agreement, be it for reasons attributable to Russia, to the separatists or to the Ukrainian side. Since neither side is likely to be in full compliance for some time, the EU response should be proportional to the breach and aimed not primarily at punishment, but at reaching compliance. Therefore, the EU should not let Russia pull back from its commitments, but at the same time be cautious not to link too many issues to full implementation of the agreement. Kiev should also be held accountable for non-compliance with the Minsk agreements. The sequence of implementation of Minsk provisions should also be clarified. The list of concrete doable and verifiable steps for each side should be elaborated and approved by all parties. Simultaneously, the EU should invest in a dialogue to develop a post-Minsk vision for the Donbas area, which would also take place on an expert or civil society level. Most importantly, the reconstruction of economic ties and people-to-people contacts between the separatist territories and Ukraine should be encouraged. For this, setting up a **Donbas Reconstruction Fund** with contributions from the EU, Ukraine and possibly Russia could be worth considering.

## 2. DEFINING COMMON INTERESTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Economic cooperation has, naturally, not only the function to prevent the worst, but could also serve to achieve the better. If shared interests form the basis for pragmatic cooperation in line with the vision of a Shared Home, they should first and foremost be sought in the economic sphere.

One format in which to search for these interests would be an **institutionalized form of dialogue between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)**. This would be advantageous for at least three reasons: The EEU channel could be an important way to reach out to Belarus and Armenia, which in the current state of affairs are not accessible for the more traditional elements of EU neighbourhood policy or Eastern Partnership. Moreover, taking the EEU seriously as a supranational body would enable leaving disagreements between Moscow and Brussels aside in this particular instance, and focus on shared interests instead. Russia's promotion of the EEU increases the chances of productive dialogue in this forum. Finally, the format could also be used to establish new trade relations between the EEU and the countries that have concluded Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the EU – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan should be used as test cases for **developing alternatives to the Association Agreements (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA)**. Current negotiations with Armenia should result in a thorough verification of technical compatibility between components of the DCFTA and the Eurasian Economic Union. The resulting EU-Armenia agreement should be deep, comprehensive and conditional, but not marketed as a full alternative to the AA with DCFTA. Azerbaijan's wish for a "modernisation partnership" should be considered, with the eventual goal to replace or complement the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), even if with something far less ambitious than an AA. In particular, the EU could focus on improving conditions for much-needed economic diversification in Azerbaijan.

The EU should also seek ways to increase positive economic interdependence not only with Russia, but also with the EaP states and – in the best case – between all three sides concerned. One idea to support in this regard would be to **create a trilateral gas transport consortium with Ukrainian, Russian and EU stakeholders to run and modernize the Ukrainian pipeline system.** If this project were to succeed, it could depoliticize the EU-Russia gas trade, guarantee future transit revenues for Ukraine, and take off the agenda controversial projects such as Nord Stream II that cause conflict within the EU.

In the energy field, the EU should engage in a **technical dialogue with Russia and the Eastern Partnership on renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and fighting climate change in line with the Paris agreement.** The potential to interconnect and modernize the national electricity grids should also be considered. A visionary pan-European electricity grid extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok could balance out the excess capacities and shortages associated with power generation using sun and wind. A technical dialogue on the feasibility of this vision could lay the groundwork for future political initiatives.

The general idea of the EU's approach in the economic sphere should be to **expand economic cooperation and increase positive linkages.** Possible areas for projects of interest to stakeholders from the EU, Russia and the Eastern Partnership include the aerospace industries and the health sector. The EU should also support dialogue on industrial policy, discussing potential development paths and opportunities for joint projects as well as further and deeper alignment of standards for goods and services and their production methods.

If the EU wants primarily to support the stability and economic development of the EaP countries, it should be prepared to **refocus its European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument on economic reforms and infrastructure projects.** Direct financial support for infrastructure projects should be made available to all the EaP countries and possibly Russia, giving preference to projects that increase interconnections between all parties in the region.



### 3. MAINTAINING A SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

One precondition for identifying interests shared by all parties concerned – the EU, Russia and the EaP countries – is **to engage in sustained dialogue with governments and societies**. A crisis in relations on the intergovernmental level should be countered – sometimes counterintuitively – by increasing dialogue, not by reducing it. Speeding up the process of visa liberalization for all Eastern neighbours, including Russia, would contribute to strengthening dialogue at the societal level. Visa liberalization should not be linked to other policy matters, and should not be treated as a reward for government policies in other areas. Civil societies cannot be held hostage to government policies, as this only encourages conspiracy theories. The same applies to all forms of societal links, including educational exchanges. A positive vision for the future would be the inclusion of the whole Eastern Neighbourhood into the Erasmus+ program.

### 4. GLOBAL POLITICS: FOCUSING ON COMMON CHALLENGES

The formula “**let us agree to disagree on some issues, but still try to find common ground on others**” should be a guiding principle for EU policy vis-à-vis Russia, also when confronting global policy challenges. This principle should be one cornerstone of the attempt to build the Shared European Home. It would prove its value especially if the EU and Russia were able to create – smaller or bigger – “success stories” of cooperation despite the current, deep disagreements over Crimea and eastern Ukraine. One example at hand is the Iranian nuclear programme; constructive cooperation resolving the conflict in Syria could become another. Weakening resilience of some of the countries in Central Asia may turn into instability in the region, forming another common challenge. Scaling up the scientific and expert dialogue on climate change and its consequences especially for Eastern Europe would also prepare the ground for increased political cooperation in the future.

## 5. RECONFIRMING HOUSE RULES FOR THE SHARED EUROPEAN HOME

In a Shared European Home based on pragmatic cooperation between all neighbours, there should be a shared understanding of the house rules upon which the cooperation is based. The year 2016 should be used to start a dialogue on these rules, based on the central OSCE principles of 1975 and 1990. However, it might be necessary to have a **dialogue on the differing interpretations and the essence of those principles**: What do we mean when we talk of “sovereignty”, what constitutes an “intervention in internal affairs” under the conditions of the twenty-first century, what are the limits of self-expression and how should a referendum be prepared if there is a need? Such a dialogue, be it on an expert or a political level, might serve as milestone towards reaffirming the house rules.

In parallel, the EU should encourage the United Nations to form a consultative body of widely acknowledged international lawyers, experienced diplomats and conflict mediators from all continents mandated to issue independent expert verdicts on disputed cases of international law, such as Crimea or Kosovo, or suggest solutions for the status of these territories.

### **Conclusion: Know your limits**

The events unfolding in Eastern Europe after the Vilnius Summit in November 2013 have shown that there is little reason to be optimistic about the region, and every reason to be cautious when trying to describe a vision for relations with these countries. This paper attempts to outline a cautious, pragmatic vision that could guide policymakers: the Shared Home is not a happy place for a jolly family of European nations. It resembles more a big block of flats, where neighbours get along with each other not because they like each other so much, but because they have to. And that we have to get along with each other for our own good is another lesson that can be learned from the events of 2014 and 2015.

When working to construct relations with its neighbours to the east, the EU should be well aware that many of the influencing factors are beyond its reach. The dynamics of US-Russian, US-Chinese and Russian-Chinese relations are just three cases in point. A good policy should, therefore, always be aware of its own limitations and also take a balanced and systemic perspective. This also concerns the ability to influence domestic policies in neighbouring countries – be it Macedonia, Ukraine, or Russia. The challenge of the coming months and years will be to get a clear picture of who wants what and to formulate shared interests on that basis – and to convince policymakers in the EU, Russia and the EaP states alike that it is in their own best interest to return to pragmatic, interest-driven relations.

## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The scenarios are described in detail in: Scenario Group EU + East 2030 (2014), *The EU and the East in 2030: Four Scenarios for Relations between the EU, the Russian Federation, and the Common Neighbourhood* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016), <http://www.fes.de/lnk/eueast2030>

# **Main Theses from the “Riga Dialogue 2016: Building Bridges for Euro-Atlantic Security”**

DIĀNA POTJOMKINA\*

The *Riga Dialogue 2016* that took place in Riga, Latvia on 17 May 2016 turned out to be a heated and thought-provoking debate that touched on both conceptual and practical issues. This summary reviews the main points of contention and the participants’ rationales for these, as well as some common recommendations that emerged. It demonstrates that while the diversity of views in the Euro-Atlantic space – between and within countries – is significant, there is a demand for dialogue, and such circumstances facilitate working towards a better mutual understanding.

Some of the major themes touched upon in this debate relate to the future scenarios for Russia-West relations; the goals and interests of all parties; the nature and preconditions for dialogue between Russia and other members of the Euro-Atlantic space; various regional cooperation and dialogue formats; as well as the role of international law, the possibilities to strengthen existing agreements and develop new ones. What follows is a synthesised and anonymised review of the debate, which may not reflect each individual participant’s viewpoint but, hopefully, gives a useful general overview.

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## 1. Future of Russia-West relations: broad outlines

Participants of the seminar jointly identified several scenarios for the development of Russia-West relations: **strategic partnership** (or, as an alternative classification, common home), **concert of powers** (shared home), **managed confrontation** (divided home), and **unmanaged confrontation** (broken home).

- 1.1. There is overall agreement that in the long term, both Russia and the West would benefit from a **strategic partnership** based on mutual respect and common interests, which could be sufficient to outweigh any contradictions. Some common definitions have already been reached in the NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997) and at the Lisbon NATO Summit (2010). Areas of common interest include, among other things, China, Middle East (especially Afghanistan, Iran, Syria), North Korea, combatting proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. At present, some practical cooperation, such as trade in energy, is not affected by sanctions and continues to take place. There is also recognition that in the long term, European security should include Russia. Collective defence within the Western community could gradually be complemented by an element of collective security in the framework of the OSCE, and cooperative security in NATO-Russia relations (consultations and joint-decision-making on certain issues). Regarding the Russian side, it has been noted that its leadership's current anti-Western stance is not primordial but instrumental, and could be reversed in the future.
- 1.2. However, currently mutual trust has been undermined and the possibility of a strategic partnership remains distant. It has yet to be seen which scenario ultimately prevails.
- 1.3. A **concert of powers** would imply a weakening of NATO and the EU in favour of bilateral arrangements, Realpolitik, as well as the emergence, or strengthening, of spheres of influence. It seems that at least the current Western leadership – including larger and more influential countries – will be strongly opposed to such a scenario as undermining the basic principles on

which Europe has been built, namely peaceful coexistence and respect for international law, and thus their own national interests. Russian attempts to impose a sphere of influence in the neighbourhood might be successful in the short-term, but will likely be resisted by non-military means, like economic sanctions and aiding successful development and reforms in the partnership countries. However, this scenario cannot be excluded in the future, subsequent to leadership changes in some key Euro-Atlantic players after the elections, or if the internal stability of the European Union is undermined.

- 1.4. At the moment, as many experts concurred, it seems that relations between Russia and the West are drifting towards **unmanaged confrontation** – a development implying significant risk. Confrontation becomes unmanaged when there are no credible mechanisms to prevent it from spiralling out of control. Eroding or antiquated international agreements, a lack of trust and perfunctory dialogue are important markers.
- 1.5. **Managed confrontation** has been recognised as the most desirable scenario under the present circumstances. This means that deterrence goes hand in hand with dialogue and agreements enabling greater transparency, to prevent dangerous incidents from resulting in full-scale conflict, possibly involving the use of nuclear weapons. (Admittedly, this model also does not exclude the development of spheres of influence.)

## 2. Deterrence and/or dialogue

**Deterrence and defence** is widely recognised as a necessary strategy for the West in the present circumstances, not only by countries that feel most directly threatened by Russia, but also their allies. It is a marked difference from several years ago, when the focus was on developing a strategic partnership with Russia, and discussing deterrence inside NATO was not popular or even desirable. However, while the possibility of a Russian attack on NATO is considered highly unlikely, it is no longer unthinkable. In the words of one participant,

deterrence currently helps vulnerable NATO members feel safer and thus increases their confidence about the possibility of constructive dialogue with Russia: thus, no dialogue without deterrence. At the same time, deterrence has possible downsides.

- 2.1. Among Eastern European NATO allies, there is a demand for an increased and long-term presence of NATO forces, as well as stronger NATO response forces to counter any possible conventional threats from the Russian side. The Alliance has already enhanced its Forward Presence in Eastern Europe by stationing **rotating forces** there – “continuous rotation”.
- 2.2. **Russian leadership**, however, does not distinguish between a rotational and permanent presence; it also considers that NATO’s presence qualifies as “substantial” and thus believes NATO is violating the NATO-Russia Founding Act.
- 2.3. Overall, with increased deployments to the common border area and military build-up on both sides, we can observe an **action-reaction dynamic** of increasing military tension which is not managed to a sufficient extent. For the West, deterrence is purely defensive, and the official policy of Russia states the same. However, in order to be credible, deterrence must be realistic; and while it is realistic, this instils a sense of fear on the other side, that could lead to uncooperative behaviour. During the Cold War, such a dynamic ended in the possibility of mutual assured destruction. In the last years, there have also been a number of military incidents involving Russia and the West. Accidents and miscalculations could trigger a full-scale crisis if not moderated by diplomacy.
- 2.4. A “**nuclear shadow**” is hanging over West-Russia relations. There are players within NATO who are interested in credible nuclear reassurance and raising the profile of this issue on NATO’s agenda. NATO indeed remains a nuclear alliance and would retaliate for a nuclear attack. However, there are also calls to approach this debate extremely responsibly, since a nuclear conflict, once started, cannot be controlled. More internal discussions are needed; policy-makers should seriously consider the scenario, challenges and possible reactions.

- 2.5. Thus, while it is necessary to develop Western deterrence, the West as well as Russia should also realise the implied risks and work on managing them through **conversation**.

### 3. Interests and expediency

In the West, there are notable differences of opinion when discussing the role of **international law and political expediency** in relations with Russia. While some players (representing both more influential and smaller countries) stress the fundamental importance of international law and deny the possibility to enter into a compromise with Russia if the annexation of Crimea is not resolved, others maintain that the West itself has also committed violations of international law, for instance in the case of Iraq, and that many issues are ultimately decided by political arguments, as shown by the case of Kosovo. Some experts have even called for replacing Western “ethics of morals” (normative / legalistic) with “ethics of responsibility” (result-oriented approach).

- 3.1. The differences in Russian and Western **positions on sovereignty, territorial integrity, self-determination and the right to intervene in the affairs of other states** are a major inhibitor of dialogue, and will eventually have to be considered.
- 3.2. A similarly contentious issue is Russia’s **legitimate interests**. There is currently no agreement, or even attempts at a clear definition of what may be considered Russia’s legitimate interests as opposed to illegitimate claims, and no clarity as to how Russia could develop its relations with the countries concerned.
- 3.3. Some experts have also mentioned that the West should define its **own interests** more clearly, moving beyond generally reactive policies.



## 4. Fine-tuning dialogue between Russia and the West

The seminar demonstrated significant differences of opinion on the issue of dialogue between Russia and the West, understood primarily as NATO and the European Union. Some of these differences were related to the definition of dialogue. While some understood it as “business as usual” involving, for instance, economic cooperation and political trade-offs, for others the definition was more restricted: dialogue as a mechanism for crisis prevention and management. As seen from the discussion on scenarios, the former definition of dialogue is perceived as possible only in the long term; however, the latter is seen as crucial to maintaining current relations in the realm of managed, as opposed to unmanaged, confrontation.

- 4.1. **Trust** is fundamental to the constructive development of the West-Russia relations. Currently, there is not much, if any, trust remaining. The EU and NATO members and their partners in the Euro-Atlantic space are concerned about the violations of international agreements and norms committed by Russia with regards to Ukraine, as well as other Russian military and political moves and unfriendly rhetoric. There is also bitterness about Russia’s frequent lack of desire to fruitfully engage in the many opportunities for dialogue and practical cooperation open since the end of the Cold War, to cooperate with smaller and more vulnerable states, and to acknowledge past wrongdoings. On the Russian side there is mistrust towards Western policies they see as bigoted, arrogant and ignoring the legitimate interests of Russia. Additionally, both sides are harbouring **misperceptions** of the other: for instance, Russian leadership does not think that it needs the West and can reach its goals by acting assertively and unilaterally, while some in the West think Russia is not an important player in global politics and may be allowed to isolate itself.
- 4.2. Existing **dialogue mechanisms** are generally perceived as ineffective and insufficient; both the West and Russia also complain about each other’s attitude in dialogue.

- 4.3. **Crisis dialogue** mechanisms must be expanded. In the **short term**, Russia and the West need to combine political and military security and to engage in military dialogue, including **arms control** negotiations. Managed confrontation requires conflict prevention mechanisms and conversation. (There should be no illusions as to this being a difficult endeavour.) Specific topics to be discussed by Russia and the West could include increased transparency on the Russian side; new confidence-building measures; limitation of the scope of military exercises; existing and new agreements. It would also be worthwhile discussing implementation of the Minsk agreements and some areas of mutual interest such as Syria, Iran, and relations between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union.
- 4.4. Negotiating an **agreement on military incidents** has been highlighted as an essential task. The 1972 US-Soviet Incidents at Sea agreement could be modernised or complemented to also include incidents in the air, and to bind not only the US but NATO as a whole.
- 4.5. It is important to review the status of existing agreements, such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. At the same time, some experts suggest the West and Russia could look beyond security agreements and architectures dating back to the 1990s and develop **new arrangements**.
- 4.6. There are different views on the future of the **NATO-Russia Council**. While some view the resumption of regular meetings as a currently unjustified return to “business as usual”, there seems to be a strong demand for increased, permanent interaction in this format. NATO-Russia council meetings may not produce tangible results, but they allow for a regular exchange of opinions and complement interaction taking place at lower levels. These meetings should address urgent issues such as Ukraine, confidence-building, and information exchange.
- 4.7. Feasibility of **other dialogue formats**, such as Track 1.5 or parliamentary dialogue, should be explored further. In particular,

there are different positions on dialogue in the framework of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly: while some experts believe exclusion of Russian representatives was unjustified, especially in the light of Western countries having parliamentary contacts with other authoritarian regimes, others note that the Russian parliament does not play a significant role in the Russian political system.

## 5. People-to-people dialogue and media

Seminar participants overwhelmingly agreed that political and military dialogue should be complemented by engagement with societies and people-to-people relations. Propaganda has been one major point of contention in this debate.

5.1. Improving **people-to-people relations** is a task which can be started immediately, even if the Russian leadership is against this sort of dialogue. Youth / student exchanges and reaching out to Russian publics through the media are just some of the ways to provide a first-hand view of the West and win back the “hearts and minds” of the Russian population. Diversity of the latter should be taken into account.

5.2. Relations with **Russophone communities** in the EU / NATO and partner states is an issue that merits further attention; as some experts remarked, inclusive nation-building processes engaging this group are important for the successful and secure development of host countries. There is a two-way link between Russophones’ susceptibility to Russian propaganda and their integration. Attractive Russian-language media are an important mechanism for reaching local communities and helping them to integrate. The socioeconomic situation is another major factor affecting loyalty and feelings of belonging to the state. Adjustments to previous integration policies are already being discussed in Europe.

As seen in practice, even far-reaching concessions in the sphere of minorities’ rights do not guarantee the cessation of

criticism from the Russian leadership. At the same time, local Russophone communities should not be seen as a Russian fifth column, but rather as groups having their own identities and dynamics.

- 5.3. **Propaganda** distributed through Russian media, as well as other modern channels, is a major concern for the West and partner states, and some describe it as an obvious information war. Some experts have argued that the West engages in similar **media behaviour** as Russia, including excessive self-victimisation, overestimating each other's abilities and securitising the foreign media presence. In their opinion, management of confrontation in the information sphere could be considered. This view is countered by noting that Western politicians are accountable to society and legally prohibited from carrying out information and psychological operations without a strong political mandate, and that even Western media expressing more radical views are privately owned. Yet others point out that Russian media are a complex phenomenon that, to an extent, acts independently from the state.
- 5.4. The general consensus is that **propaganda** should not be tackled with counterpropaganda; rather, it is necessary to raise journalistic excellence and awareness, enable media to produce quality content, teach media literacy and critical thinking, and ensure the position of Western governments is articulate and accessible to the media when they are interested in hearing it. Thus, the governments serve as arbiters while respecting media independence. There have also been discussions as to whether the European Union has a coherent **own story** and whether it is necessary; however, this relates not to counterpropaganda but to the ability to present its own position in an appealing and understandable way.
- 5.5. However, in the European Union there is still no overarching agreement on an independent **Russian-language** TV service that is seen by some as a propaganda instrument, and no support has been provided to the authors of this initiative.

- 5.6. Technical communication or even cooperation between **Western and Russian media** might prove beneficial. Additionally, when convergence of positions has been reached on an issue, communicating it through the media could be a desirable positive signal.

## 6. The West's "homework"

There are multiple internal tasks for the West, some of which have been highlighted as especially relevant in the context of relations with Russia.

- 6.1. Internal **cohesion and solidarity** are important when jointly defining threats and responses, strengthening own capacities, and maintaining dialogue with Russia. Some Western European experts have doubts about the readiness of Eastern European NATO allies to serve as credible partners in dialogue with Russia, while smaller and more vulnerable countries are interested in credible deterrence and would not like to see, in their opinion, essential international law principles sacrificed for political expediency. However, there is already overall recognition of the importance of both dialogue and deterrence.
- 6.2. **European capacities** become increasingly important in the light of confrontation with Russia and alarming trends in the US presidential election campaign, which open up the possibility of decreased US commitment to the region.
- 6.3. The **European Union** is an increasingly active player, and the new European Global Strategy attests to this. While the idea of a European army does not meet general support, there is widespread recognition that the EU is an important partner for NATO on such issues as hybrid threats and strategic communications, and that it can contribute significantly to stabilisation of the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood. There is also growing focus on European NATO members' own defence capabilities and budgets. The EU should continue to strengthen its internal and external actions in the face of adverse trends, such as the rise of radical

political movements and Brexit. A united Europe will be a better partner for the United States.

- 6.4. Strengthening **own expertise** on Russian affairs and in-depth analysis of Russian policies is an important task for the West.

## 7. Regional partners

In discussions on the future of Euro-Atlantic security, partners (here: countries that are not EU and / or NATO members) play a key role. The neighbourhood, and especially the Eastern Partnership region, clearly emerges as the main area of contention, and progress on this issue will be vital for overall Russia-West relations.

- 7.1. The West is not prepared to engage in military confrontation with Russia over **Eastern Partnership** countries such as Ukraine; nor is the EU or NATO willing to extend a membership offer to any of them in the near future. EU and NATO expansion is currently seen as a provocation by Russia. However, this does not mean ignoring the region. There is overall consensus on the importance of building strong, democratic, economically stable countries that are naturally resistant to unwelcome outside pressure. In the absence of a foreseeable membership perspective that could motivate these countries to proceed with reforms, the West, however, should use “smart power”, to step up and streamline its assistance and to maintain the possibility to join as a general principle. Eastern Partnership countries need it to break out of the vicious circle of “weak membership prospects – no motivation for implementing costly reforms – even weaker membership prospects”.
- 7.2. The West has very **limited leverage** in the Eastern Neighbourhood. It is not prepared to engage in a military conflict with Russia, and as some experts have argued, Russia mentally decouples Western sanctions from its policy towards Ukraine and is not willing to modify its policy because of them.
- 7.3. **Turkey** is currently facing numerous challenges in its relations both with Russia and with the Middle East. It needs assistance

in defending its Eastern borders and reinforced mechanisms of managing relations in the Black Sea Region. Additionally, engagement of Turkey in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy might serve as a mechanism for unblocking EU-NATO relations.

- 7.4. The challenges coming from the **South** – Middle East and the Mediterranean – should also be reappraised and tackled. It is a challenge to the Western community to respond to threats from both the East and South simultaneously and effectively; some experts believe NATO should not, and will not, be actively engaged in this region as it was in Afghanistan, but instead should find a more political way to assist with stabilisation.
- 7.5. **Central Asia** has been highlighted as an important, but frequently under-prioritised region; the situation there is closely linked with developments elsewhere in the neighbourhood, and it could become destabilised by spillover in case of growing instability in Afghanistan.
- 7.6. The membership of **Sweden** and **Finland** in NATO is a subject of keen interest to some of their neighbours in the Baltic Sea Region, who would like to see increased NATO cooperation with these two countries, taking into account the overall polarisation of the West-Russia relationship.

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