
TRANSATLANTIC FUTURES: TOWARDS #NATO2030

EDITORS: Andris Sprūds, Mārtiņš Vargulis



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The publication “Transatlantic Futures: Towards #NATO2030” offers a collection of articles that reflect on the topical security issues of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Authors from the region and beyond discuss transforming regional security policies and realities towards NATO2030. Particular attention is devoted to the transatlantic link, Baltic defence, the NATO–Russia relationship, as well as the role of other emerging elements and actors. Issues beyond traditional regional security challenges are also addressed.

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Note by the Director of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia are delighted to share a collection of essays on NATO and security developments across transatlantic area. The debate comes at a time when the world is facing an unprecedented challenge: obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has changed not only the daily life of each individual, but also the way in which countries operate in terms of their domestic and foreign/security policy. It has been a game-changer for the transatlantic community in many fields and dimensions.

The publication "Transatlantic Futures: Towards #NATO2030" continues to build on the accomplishments of previous annual publications of the Rīga Conference. The publication provides an assessment of challenges and transforming realities and outlines prospects and scenarios from regional security perspectives. An outstanding group of distinguished international experts offer their opinions on NATO and the evolving transatlantic link, the changing security policies, the role of Russia, China, and the US, and issues beyond traditional security.

We acknowledge the generous support provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. As this volume of articles demonstrates, solidarity and solid partnerships remain indispensable in order to efficiently navigate through times of uncertainty and shape regional and national security strategies in a wider transatlantic framework. We hope you will enjoy reading our publication!

Andris Sprūds

Director, Latvian Institute of International Affairs

Address to the Participants of the Rīga Conference and Readers of the “Transatlantic Futures: towards #NATO2030”

Dear Rīga Conference Participants, Dear Readers,

In 2020, in spite of the challenges and the identification of new risks which have not been thoroughly interpreted and answered yet, we also have reason for some degree of optimism. This two-fold reality is reflected in the *Rīga Conference Papers*, in the views of experts and journalists on current developments and trends. This publication is not an attempt to encapsulate, to explain in depth or pontificate at length; it is rather an effort to describe moving targets which we all have been watching as diplomats, political scientists and politicians, from whatever job or project that engages us each day.

2020 will be remembered for the impact of the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic; it was a kind of crossing over a boundary or across a threshold for the international community as a whole, a venture into unknown territory. No country or territory was left totally unscathed; we have all had to adapt. And while the efforts to overcome the crisis are well underway, it is still a bit early to proclaim that we made the crossing together successfully and that we will emerge stronger and better prepared.

Internationally, we see the pressure to be nimble, to change and adapt, especially in the increasing frictions and disagreements, and the general disarray in the relations between the United States and China. This tension can be seen in uncertainties haunting the economy and international trade, fundamental values, technological edges to ensure superiority and dominance in the field of security in the very widest sense, and this tension has a ripple effect.

Attempts to achieve predominance in the technological and digital area can be seen in powerful disinformation and influence campaigns actively pursued by a number of countries, with the driving of wedges and spreading of polarization in places where such problems would not otherwise be present.

In light of these uncertainties and tensions, NATO and the transatlantic partnership remain the bedrock for security in the Euro-Atlantic area. As highlighted by the NATO 2030 reflection process, the Alliance needs to continue adapting to remain strong and effective.

EU adjusted its agenda to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we can divide the challenges into three categories: decision-making and appropriate actions in the new circumstances; internal coordination to limit the spread of the virus, and ensuring that economic recovery will follow the crisis. This year, key decisions were made on the multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 and financial measures favouring recovery and a return to economic health. Latvia has been actively involved in the negotiation process, in working for and reaching compromises, so that decisions important for both Latvia and the EU were actually made. Similarly, Latvia will be watching and participating in the intensive discussions on questions of climate change, migration, digitalisation, development of the single market, as well as on rule of law and protecting the democratic values.

This is a special year for the Rīga Conference as it marks its 15th anniversary, and it is held online. This year, amongst other issues, the relevance of NATO on both sides of the Atlantic, a post-pandemic global order in the light of US–China relations, EU resilience in crisis, as well as Russia’s foreign policy, rapid technological development and *Infodemic*, and United Nations future are discussed.

The contributors to this annual edition of *Rīga Conference Papers* have taken on an important mission – to give their personal perspectives on international processes. Their analysis covers a wide spectrum as they look at the latest challenges in the context of security policy in the transatlantic area. The articles in this collection go into the question of NATO’s future including the Alliance’s relations with Russia and China’s role in global affairs. Encountering these standpoints and considering them, the reader will find themselves presented with insights into what is happening on the world stage and offered chances to better understand why the topic of security in itself has once again thrust itself to the forefront and become the central focus for policy-making in all fields of human endeavour.

Sincerely,

Edgars Rinkēvičs

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

NATO:
PAST AND
FUTURE

The Two Pillars of NATO's Past are its Future

Alexander Moens and Harleen Atwal

Introduction

The transatlantic alliance derives its relevance from being a central part of the configuration of power in the international system. NATO has played a role in international politics for 70 plus years because it has allocated military power within the logic of the global distribution of power and has shifted accordingly when the global distribution of power shifted. A future NATO that does not align with the global configuration of power is bound to be marginalized.

NATO has a second dimension. The alliance not only aligns with international power but is also an embodiment of the principles and norms of liberal democratic countries in the transatlantic region. Liberal democracies have always formed the vast majority of NATO members, and they have always led the alliance in terms of both policy and resource allocation. It is difficult for constitutionally based representative democracies to speak and act only in terms of politico-military power. Freedom of information and representative governments at home require that there be a purpose in foreign affairs as well, and the purpose has to have normative content. Transatlantic democratic governments also bequeathed on NATO normative goals and ends. Hence, by and large, NATO combined to become a liberal-democratic defence alliance, though it is defined in a specific geographic space. As a liberal-democratic instrument of foreign policy, the alliance represents norms and values not only amongst most of its member states but also when it acts beyond its boundaries. A future NATO that is only instrumental in the configuration of global power but otherwise is void of normative goals will struggle and eventually fail to represent the foreign and security policies of liberal democracies. Liberal-constitutional democracies cannot simply pursue their national interests based on military or

economic power: they also require a defence arrangement that articulates shared political values.

The argument we make below is that NATO must remain part of the power equation in the international system that really matters – i.e., where the largest and most decisive competition of power takes place. And while so doing, it must give voice to the values and norms that representative democracies embody.

We argue this by means of classical realist logic. This does not fall under the genre of structural or neo-realism, which argues that the international structure of power alone determines policy. Nor is it of the liberal-internationalist view, which suggests that shared norms and values will drive states to ever more cooperation. Classical realism is not given to such determinism. Agency, including leadership and domestic politics, does play a role in how world powers set or don't set their policy. Being impervious to the logic of the configuration of international power and the logic of shared democratic norms, the Trump administration has for four years stagnated the policy and operations of the alliance. It simply coasted on institutional momentum and the discipline of military operations. However, 2020 may open the door for new American leadership, and in so doing, channel the potential the alliance has to offer to American interests and values.

The Two Pillars in a Historical and Recent Perspective

The number of great powers and the nature of power resources, including military power, is the overarching reason that a defence alliance between European and North American states came into being in 1949, why it altered course dramatically after 1991, and why it has again adjusted its purpose after 2014.¹

In the aftermath of World War II, the international system bifurcated. NATO was formed to offer the strength of an alliance to the West in a bipolar world in which Soviet conventional military strength initially dominated Central and Eastern Europe. NATO became the vehicle for transatlantic nuclear deterrence and conventional defence. After

¹ For a discussion of the concepts of an international system and the distribution of power, see Ole R. Holsti et al., *Change in the International System*, Westview Press, 1980, especially Part I.

Russia acquired its own arsenal of nuclear weapons, including ballistic missiles, both superpowers realised that their ultimate national interest was to avert a nuclear war and find some form of peaceful coexistence. The structure of power did not change, but the nature of power shifted towards deterrence.

In 1991, the Soviet empire folded, and the underlying bipolar order faded away. The number of world powers went from two to one.² Relative American power surged and the international structure of power transitioned into a so-called “unipolar moment” in world politics.³ NATO adjusted to this change in the balance of forces. NATO and European Union membership spread eastward.

The values and norms embodied in NATO’s preamble had a great awakening in the 1990s. Why was NATO enlarging and adding multiple layers of partner countries? And why was it bringing stability to the Balkans and attempting to bring stability even to far-away Afghanistan? The answer is as the preamble stated: to advance the “...principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law”.⁴ These actions required new expeditionary capabilities and mixed military and humanitarian missions.

For NATO to reflect the new unipolar configuration of power in international politics, it had to become complementary to American world power goals and abilities. Hence, NATO made crisis-management outside of its borders its main function. It adapted in order to assist America in international crisis resolution. The focus turned from America assisting Europe in deterrence and defence to Europe and Canada assisting America in a shared vision of international peace and security. In NATO parlance, the most utilised role of NATO became “non-Article 5 missions”, or missions *not* in response to the collective defence of NATO members. The first of these was in the Balkans in the mid-1990s, starting in Bosnia and a few years later in Kosovo. Subsequent non-Article 5 missions were launched in Afghanistan in December 2001, as well as a brief operation in Libya in 2011.

² Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Leicester, Penguin for Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1979), chapter 4.

³ The term was coined by Charles Krauthammer. See Charles Krauthammer. “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990): 23–33.

⁴ NATO, “The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C. – 4 April 1949,” Last modified April 10, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

The next reconfiguration of power in international politics presented itself in 2014. This can best be explained as the return of Russia to European power politics. Liberalism had failed to gain a foothold in Russia, while high oil prices had allowed Russia to rebuild its military. Russia doubled its military spending between 2005 and 2018.⁵ A new strongman in Moscow began to assert Russian power. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and directly aided separatist military operations against Kiev in the Donbas region of Ukraine, NATO allies realised that the era of NATO and EU enlargement had come to an end and that the conventional defence of members of both organisations on the eastern flank would again become the primary task of their defence policy. ISAF scaled down dramatically and turned into a training and capacity-building mission. Arguments for NATO to intervene in Syrian crisis management came to nought, as the United States did not take the lead and most NATO members were reluctant to commit resources. Moreover, NATO's actions in Libya, though mandated by the UN Security Council, were widely considered as a failure of its crisis-resolution efforts.

Culminating at the Warsaw summit in 2016, NATO created a set of reassurance policies to confront revanchist Russia. These were meant to reassure member states bordering Russia or under pressure from Russia's "Near Abroad" policy that NATO would indeed honour its commitment to collective defence. NATO designed, and its members deployed, enhanced and tailored forward presence missions; they also improved NATO's response forces to reinforce exposed areas of the alliance. By 2020 one could see that the line from the Baltics to the Black Sea did indeed show more defence and reinforcement capacity, and thus NATO's deterrence of possible further Russian covert or overt incursions into the transatlantic space was enhanced.

NATO's post-2014 reconfiguration towards reassurance missions can be understood as a form of "containment-lite". It came about through American leadership, including the allocation of military resources to Europe, just as the new configuration of power in the world would suggest. But NATO's actions have been modest. It can be considered "containment-lite" for at least three reasons. First, Russia today is not

⁵ "Putin's New Model Army: Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform," *The Economist*, November 3, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/11/02/russian-military-forces-dazzle-after-a-decade-of-reform>.

the Soviet Union of the early 1960s. It is a world power in terms of its nuclear arsenal and in cyber and information operations, but in other dimensions, it finds its relative power diminished. Second, the United States began a pivot or re-balance to the Asia-Pacific region a few years before Moscow's actions in Ukraine. The United States was beginning to focus on the rise of the next dominant power, China, which has the capacity to become its main global rival. Third, the political leadership of the United States floundered in terms of alliance relations after the election of Donald Trump as president. The budgetary build-up and the military implementation of America's leading role continued, including in bolstering Poland's long-term defence capacity. However, with ample American criticism of its European allies and no new political leadership, the alliance became rudderless.⁶

The Twin Pillars and NATO 2030

NATO 2030 begins in 2020 with the American election. If the Trump administration's logic were to continue for four more years, keeping NATO's twin pillars in play will be near to impossible. Given that the fast-developing great power rivalry between the United States and China will eventually put the United States at a disadvantage in terms of national power resources, even the United States under Trump will likely look for more allies to help boost its place in the power equation. But finding allies here and there on various manipulative bases is not the same as the continuation of NATO.

The logic of norms and values suggests that a new presidency under Joe Biden will want to again empower some of the shared values with European democracies.

The logic of power politics and the configuration of power in the international system suggests that the United States will see increasing benefits in alliance relationships. It will do so out of its own national interest. It needs the additional power. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic looks set to further boost China's economic power relative to both the United States and Europe.⁷ The

⁶ See Alexander Moens, "How NATO's Values and Functions Influence its Policy and Action," *NATO Defense College, Research Division*, no. 7 (May 2016): 31–39.

⁷ "Economic Rebound: A Big Splash." *The Economist* 437, no. 9217 (October 24, 2020): 56.

contention between China and the United States is sharper and is spreading to more and more areas, such as trade, technology, foreign influence, politics, and military competition. Beyond the well-known Belt and Road Initiative, China already has trade and infrastructure ties in place in large areas of Africa, Latin America and to some extent in Europe. Both rivals are global powers with global interests, and therefore, the stakes and potential clash points between the two are not confined to one region of the world. A clear implication is that now, even more so than during the Cold War, this power struggle could more holistically affect most areas of the world, including South America. In addition, there are more domains where such competition will take place, such as cyber, space, and the application of artificial intelligence to warfare.

Given current trends in technological innovation, education, and infrastructure development, it is likely that China's economy will become more than double the size of that of the United States. Even if America and China can avoid war, they are not likely to avert an intense struggle for influence and power in many domains and in most areas of the world. Given that the United States will be the smaller rival in the long-run, Washington's interest in having allies will increase.

It is reasonable to expect that a new presidency under Joe Biden will try to act quickly to repair relations with NATO and EU allies across the board, even as domestic politics will dominate the agenda. The immediate impact of such a return to alliance leadership will be to enhance the deterrence value of the reassurance actions undertaken by NATO after 2014. After all, the threat from Russia remains acute.

But it is unlikely that Biden's NATO policy will change from "containment-lite" to something more robust in the transatlantic region. The reason, simply put, is the rise of China in economic, political and military power. A Joe Biden administration will want to leverage its commitment to NATO in Europe, with a NATO commitment to the early contours of what can best be described as a global "league of democracies", something that has hitherto been considered unhelpful and possibly counter-productive but has been raised by a long-time Biden foreign policy advisor.⁸

⁸ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The three pillars of US foreign policy under Biden," *Financial Times*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/6f85ae61-2e16-4272-8974-a38123ed994f>

There is nothing easy or automatic about applying NATO values and norms in other parts of the world. Or for NATO to take on a security role in the Indo-Pacific region. Hitherto, the United States has been content working through multiple bilateral hub-and-spokes alliances in Asia. The configuration of global power is NATO's flagship, and both the United States and NATO members must appreciate that a closer alignment between Asian and European democracies would benefit the global balance of power.

The obstacles to NATO doing anything in the Indo-Pacific area or morphing into something along the lines of a "global NATO" are too many to mention. Arguably, the following form part of the top of such a list. First, the Pacific Ocean is vast, and few NATO allies are able to generate, deploy, and sustain military forces in that part of the world. The lack of significant fighting forces composed of NATO members other than the United States remains NATO's primary military challenge in Europe itself, let alone on the other side of the world. Second, such a league would be quite heterogenous, to put it mildly, and managing to agree and act on policy and military action, as well as shared norms and values, will be complex and arduous. Third, anything reciprocal in terms of security cooperation between Asia and Europe is bound to raise obstacles for Asian democracies.

Nevertheless, the amount of shared interest among democracies in Asia, Europe, and North America on security and defence *and* on protecting the integrity of democratic governance are growing. Thus, we again see a strategic alignment of NATO's two pillars of being.

Previously, under what was then seen as a more benevolent China (such as the years from Deng Xiaoping through Hu Jintao), the bigger states in Europe and the EU itself could possibly choose a more independent policy path (from the United States) towards China. During the Trump presidency, European governments had to consider the same option as a necessity, given the absence of common ground pursued by the White House.

China under Xi Jinping is moving decisively towards an authoritarian-totalitarian domestic governance system. In other words, the growth of China's economic and military capacity is occurring alongside a rejection of the liberal global order. China's governing elites, and arguably the majority of its population, see China's governing institutions as superior to anything Western. For most Chinese, the 2008

financial crisis and now the COVID-19 mishandling in the West, illustrate their point. Thus the gap between domestic and institutional logic between liberal-constitutional democracies on the one hand and China on the other is widening. This point must not be taken to a simplistic conclusion. The record over the last 10 years strongly indicates that China does not intend to change the domestic governance of any third state. It is not fomenting foreign regime change. Instead, China puts a great deal of pressure on third parties not to condemn China's domestic or foreign actions.

A Biden presidency would be able to present Europe with a favourable balance of shared interests, including on climate change policies, fighting the pandemic, human rights, and trade. The language used in recent Quad meetings in Asia is also the language of European democracies. India's Narendra Modi and Japan's new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga called for a "free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region".⁹

Canada and European allies of NATO would be well-advised to engage constructively with any Biden initiative to design ways and means to enhance the compatibility and inter-operability of Indo-Pacific and transatlantic democracies in international security and defence. In 1998, NATO cautiously reached out to its so-called "partners across the globe". Relations with Australia and Japan have deepened a great deal since. At that time, the mandate was to explore synergies in the framework of cooperative security. The doctrine of cooperative security fit the crisis-resolution role that NATO assumed in the 1990s. Today, NATO must consider both the new lines of the configuration of power, which are centred on a new bipolar rivalry, and the global remit of NATO's values and norms. Both pillars call for deeper cooperation amongst constitutional democracies on hard and sharp security.

⁹ Prashu Verma, "In Wake of Recent India-China Conflict, U.S. Sees Opportunity," *New York Times*, Last modified October 5, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/03/world/asia/india-china-trump.html>

Why NATO Needs a New Strategic Concept, What It Should Say, and How to Achieve It

Daniel S. Hamilton

Why NATO Needs a New Strategic Concept

NATO is the most successful alliance in history. It is the preeminent institutional expression of the transatlantic bond and our common commitment to shared values. One reason for its success is its ability to adapt to evolving challenges and dangers.

Our alliance is again under pressure. NATO faces simultaneous dangers to its east, to its south, and from a series of security challenges unbounded by geography, all at a time when the four-year legacy of Donald Trump has cast doubt on US reliability, when our societies and our economies have been sickened by the coronavirus pandemic, and as some allies have stepped away from their own commitments to democracy and to each other. These internal tensions may be as consequential as external dangers to NATO's cohesion and effectiveness.

Whenever NATO allies have faced critical junctures in the past, they have sought a new consensus on the changing strategic environment and how to address it together by crafting a guidance document that is called the alliance's "Strategic Concept".

NATO's current Strategic Concept, its sixth over the past sixty years, was adopted in 2010, before:

- Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, its military intervention in eastern Ukraine, and its continued characterisation of NATO as a "threat" to Russia;
- terrorist attacks in a number of Western cities and the rise of the so-called Islamic State;
- the Syrian civil war, the continued conflict in Libya, and the 2015–2016 migration crisis;

- the systematic use of hybrid operations and unconventional warfare in both Europe's east and south;
- continuous cyber attacks and intrusions on allied and partner societies and institutions, including widespread interferences and disinformation campaigns;
- the erosion of arms control and an array of confidence-building measures intended to regulate nuclear and conventional competition, avoid accidents and prevent incidents;
- China's military modernisation, its aggressive stance on Taiwan and maritime claims, its involvement in militarising space and commercial activities in the Arctic, its purchases of strategic ports in Europe, its involvement in defence-related supply chains, and its joint exercises with Russia;
- fundamental internal challenges to allied cohesion – from democratic backsliding in a number of allied countries, including the United States, to the Trump administration's consistent attacks on NATO and NATO allies – which have frayed alliance unity and cohesion;
- the COVID pandemic and increased concern about climate change.

The 2010 Strategic Concept shows its age in other areas. It declares that "the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low". It says little about unconventional warfare tactics, makes only passing reference to the importance of enhancing resilience in the face of growing disruptions to critical societal functions, is silent with regard to growing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) dangers, and devotes little attention to the need to generate a strategy for the vast and turbulent area to the alliance's south, as well as to its east.

The 2010 Concept mentions the need to use resources efficiently and to sustain necessary levels of defence spending, but it does not adequately describe the extent of Europe's defence spending deficit and the need to correct it quickly. It is silent on the risk of having no plans or models for returning to full mobilisation, if necessary, should a contingency arise in which allies may need to make good on their mutual defence commitments under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. It says little about the need for NATO to build the defence and security capabilities of vulnerable but critically important non-NATO members. It places inadequate stress on the need for better shared

intelligence, accurate situational awareness, rapid decision-making, and the defence of NATO's eastern flank. It is inadequate when it comes to addressing the implications of revolutionary technological innovation for the alliance.

In sum, NATO's Strategic Concept is not only woefully out of date, it has also become something of an embarrassment. This is recognised throughout the alliance. Yet while Donald Trump was in office, allies were fearful about opening up the Strategic Concept to a new review, concerned with what might happen. Instead, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg skilfully invoked a "Reflection Group" of former senior officials to propose ways forward for the alliance. As of this writing, the Reflection Group has not yet issued its recommendations, which will come later this year. The lone US participant, however, is a former Trump political appointee. However well-meaning the Reflection Group's recommendations may be, they are not likely to reflect the priorities of a new US administration.

With a new US administration led by a president who has called NATO a "sacred duty", allies have an opportunity to use a Strategic Concept review to reaffirm their mutual commitments, generate new unity, and update NATO's tasks and tools within a narrative that explains why the alliance is as relevant for our future as it has been in our past. Such a review can usefully prod allies to reinvent NATO as an alliance continuously adapting to future threats. It can also be a means to engage a new generation of citizens and leaders who do not view the alliance through the twin lenses of the Cold War or the "endless war" in Afghanistan. They want to know why NATO is relevant for the future, not why it was important in the past. They deserve an answer.

What a New Strategic Concept Should Say

Given current fissures, alliance cohesion must be the central strategic underpinning of a new Strategic Concept. NATO must shore up its foundation as an effective defensive alliance of nations bound by common values. Reaffirming our common commitment to this foundational purpose as the basis upon which NATO must conduct its activities will be the most important element of a new Strategic Concept.

The preamble to the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty that established NATO states that the signatories “are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law”.¹ Article II declares that signatories “will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions”.

During the Cold War, geopolitical realities led NATO to overlook the questionable democratic credentials of some of its member states. Today, the alliance can no longer afford to look the other way. In this new world of dangers, democracies that are not robust are more vulnerable to subversion through corruption, information warfare, and blackmail. Moreover, malign influences within such states could mean that non-NATO countries could influence internal NATO decision-making.

A Strategic Concept review can provide an avenue through which allies can assess mechanisms to uphold their mutual commitment to strengthen their “free institutions”. A regular review of allied commitments to democratic principles enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty preamble could be an important outcome of an updated Strategic Concept. Various proposals have been suggested in this regard. Achieving consensus on these elements could be difficult. Nonetheless, we must do so.

With this foundational affirmation in place, NATO will be well-positioned to update its three existing core tasks – collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security – and take on a new fourth core task: building comprehensive resilience to disruptive threats to our societies. The alliance must be able to perform each of these core tasks by incorporating military tools into a broader array of diplomatic, political and economic instruments.

Collective defence and deterrence remain central to NATO’s purpose. Allies must enhance deterrence, including through new military technologies, greater readiness, improved military mobility, more effective and rapid decision-making, and the continued need for arms control and incident management. They must do what is necessary to counter an aggressive Russia. Together with its allies, the United

¹ The North Atlantic Treaty, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

States will need to undertake a strategic force posture review that considers optimal levels and positioning of forces needed to achieve these tasks. That is likely to mean a reconsideration of the Trump tweet announcing the removal of US forces from key bases and commands in Europe.

Advancing the alliance's ability to deter and defend also means prioritising ways to deal with unconventional conflicts such as cyber attacks, energy intimidation, election interference and disinformation campaigns.

Allies should pair these efforts with a consideration of dialogue mechanisms that can make NATO intent and consequences clear to Moscow and address common issues, increase transparency, de-escalate and deconflict.

Crisis management is a second core task of the alliance worth preserving and updating. NATO must continue to be able to reduce threats, prevent and respond to crises in its immediate neighbourhood, and help address crises outside its area of responsibility that could affect alliance interests. This core task has dominated the business of the alliance for most of the past two decades. It focuses primarily on a range of diffuse challenges from NATO's south. In some situations, NATO will do best by acting as a supporting organisation rather than as a leading institution. It is a difficult set of challenges. Eastern European NATO members are well advised to take such challenges seriously, however, if they expect solidarity regarding their concerns from allies to their south.

Cooperative security is the alliance's third core task that remains relevant yet has evolved over time. The alliance has defined cooperative security primarily in terms of working on common security challenges together with other partners. This task remains important. NATO has more partners than members. Partners provide significant political support to the alliance and can also contribute substantial military forces. Today, however, cooperative security must focus on addressing challenges to the global commons. The alliance is an important actor in at least four dimensions of the global commons: protecting freedom of the seas; upholding the global information commons; ensuring security and norms of peaceful behaviour in space; and protecting alliance equities in Arctic security. China's activities pose challenges in all four areas. Such challenges can only be addressed cooperatively with a

range of non-NATO state and non-state actors. In some areas, NATO will not be the lead institution, but it can offer specialised capabilities. In other areas, for instance protecting freedom of navigation, it needs to be equipped to play a leading role.

Under the umbrella of cooperative security, a new Strategic Concept has the potential to anchor an operational partnership with the European Union that will leverage additional resources for the alliance, help it deal with a range of civil-military and unconventional challenges, shore up democratic standards and shared resilience, and perhaps even lead to a “military Schengen” easing cross-border movements, mirroring the EU’s own civilian Schengen zone. Other forward-looking NATO partnerships may also be worth considering, for instance inviting Japan and the Republic of Korea to become NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partners, and creating an Indo-Pacific/NATO Council or Commission as a forum in which the alliance and close partners from the region can identify cooperative activities and share assessments about evolving security challenges, including from China.

Where the alliance can be most innovative is in agreeing to a new core task of comprehensive resilience. The growing need to implement the concept of resilience – the ability to anticipate, prevent and, if necessary, protect against and bounce forward from disruptions to critical functions of our societies – has become a challenge on par with NATO’s other core tasks, and is in fact essential to the other three, yet it has not been adequately integrated into allied planning or operational activities beyond country-by-country baseline requirements. Corrosive cyber operations, disruptions to defence-relevant supply chains, and the COVID-19 pandemic have each underscored the need for the alliance to more effectively address unconventional challenges to human security. Comprehensive resilience would also include efforts to withstand hybrid attacks on NATO societies and political will. While NATO scrambled to offer support to communities affected by the pandemic, allies should engage proactively to anticipate and be positioned more effectively to address such challenges should they arise in the future. NATO will also be impacted by global warming, and efforts to deal with it may eventually require the capabilities of NATO militaries for things like emergency rescue and logistics support. This is also an area to which a more effective NATO-EU partnership can contribute.

A new Strategic Concept that generates attention to a diverse range of external dangers, including the need to address resilience and human security needs, could offer NATO a way to tune its long-standing burden-sharing debate to new circumstances, including by adding resilience expenditures to calculations regarding how much each ally contributes to alliance efforts.

How to Achieve It

A NATO Summit no later than late spring/early summer 2021 can set the stage with allied heads of state and government affirming their mutual commitments to each other under the North Atlantic Treaty. At that summit, leaders should initiate a process leading to a new Strategic Concept to be unveiled at a bookend summit within 12 months. A new Strategic Concept is an opportunity to get all allies back on track in a NATO that is more cohesive politically, more capable militarily, more balanced between North American and European contributions, and more resilient in the face of disruptive dangers to our societies.

Overcoming Two Crises – in Europe and the Transatlantic Area

Sandis Šrāders

In the past, transatlantic cooperation has been the remedy for any crisis in Europe and European solidarity has enhanced transatlantic ties. The United States united the European states through Marshall Plan cooperation (America's idea for cooperation in Europe), and Britain's request for the grand security cooperation came in 1949 (Europe's idea for cooperation with the United States).

This American enhancement of European unity endured through German unification - then European unification in the substantial and almost simultaneous enlargement of the European Union and NATO that has been ongoing since the beginning of 1990s. Even at the outset, Americans seemed to be more enthusiastic about European unity – often more than Europeans themselves – because they had a vision of a “United States of Europe”.¹ Moreover, such united Europe for them was an equal cooperation partner for the shared challenges, especially in the field of security cooperation.

Additionally, a consolidated Europe has always enhanced the United States' international influence, from the containment of communist expansion in the Korean peninsula in 1950s, to the Gulf War in 1990s, to the nuclear agreement with Iran, where the European Union and major European powers decisively shaped the conclusion of this multilateral agreement.² Europe's efforts and ability to build broader coalitions and alliances beyond those of NATO and the EU have always allowed for efficiently not only winning and, but ending wars by delivering stability.³

¹ Stanley Hoffman, “The European Community and 1992” (*Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1989), 2.

² See interview with Iran's Foreign Minister Javid Zarif, “US stance on Iran nuclear deal is a threat to Europe — Zarif” (*Euronews*, accessed on 28.10.2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh1pl-a6jtw>)

³ Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 166-179.

Conversely, the revival of hegemonic compulsions by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan after the attacks of 9/11 enhanced a global trend of anti-American sentiment.⁴ The result of America's follies of power was "Finlandization-Eurocommunism", which in turn resulted in the replacement of the United States by a coalition of the unwilling partners in Europe (France, Germany and the Russian Federation). Only the United Kingdom and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe remained American allies.

The absence of solidarity in Europe and transatlantic relations, and the obstruction of liberal democratic cooperation, bolsters Moscow's ambitions. By parting ways from Europe, the United States can lose its dominant position in Europe, Eurasia or and elsewhere. Furthermore, Europe would be destined to become Russia's fragmented playground without its American institutional unifier and security pacifier. Putin did not hide these objectives during his 2007 speech in Munich or thereafter.

The methods to achieve these policy objectives are not new, as is evident from the long telegram George F. Kennan wrote in 1949. The Western countries' capitalist system, or even moderate social democracy, feeds Russia's sense of insecurity – such a community is alien and is seen as a menace in Russia. As a result, Moscow is building a fortress out of Russia. In the realm of foreign relations, it compounds its economic and military influence with distortive and malign informational campaigns all over the world for the benefit of their regime. This is a state where the democratically shared truths are losing out to authoritarian conspiracies and lies.

Russia is just one of many factors that may cause the already forgotten jungle to grow back, possibly resulting in as much devastation as prior to 1945, which the United States has averted.⁵ The absence of solidarity in Europe and with the United States will lead to anarchy: hegemonic struggles, power transitions, competition for security, spheres of influence, and reactionary nationalism.⁶ To avert such

⁴ David P. Calleo, *Follies of Power: America's Unipolar Fantasy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6–8, 22, 40.

⁵ Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (Knopf, First Edition, September 18, 2018), 161.

⁶ G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less." (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2020, accessed on 23.10.2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order>).

trends, the United States and Europe must revert from the “America first” type policies present in European states such as France and the United Kingdom. The key to European solidarity must come from Germany, with more emphasis on leadership and partnerships with the United States. It is necessary to reach these objectives to tame Russia’s revisionism.

Russia Revises

Today, Russia declares every foreign country to be its enemy, unless their offer of becoming a vassal is accepted. Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 serve as vivid examples. Only a few, like the Baltic States, have managed to escape this under the EU and NATO umbrella, the only deterrent proven by history thus far. Academic circles close to the Kremlin overtly state that they want to build a new order, possibly together with China, where all states are welcome to join a Greater Eurasian Union, and that the European Union and NATO must not stand in the way of such plans.⁷

Russia says it has never received the respect and attention it is due. It is true, there might be arguments to be made about a lack of dialogue, cooperation, and diplomacy with Russia from the West.⁸ First, when Russia ascends (and as a result becomes an influential power), it might be irreversibly lost as a cooperation partner for Europe (through the European Union) or the United States (through NATO). Nevertheless, despite the fact that all international challenges are easier to resolve with Russia on board, Moscow has not always joined alliances with the West.

Second, if Russia descends and disintegrates (owing to authoritarian governance, economic deficiencies and appalling demographic trends amounting to an exodus), as a result it becomes a challenge for the international community, as in the Soviet or Imperial Russian collapse. Now Russia is experiencing a decline economically (owing to a drop of the oil price) and socially (due to demographic trends and an exodus).

⁷ Sergey Karaganov and Dmitry Suslov, “A new world order: A view from Russia,” (*Russia in Global Affairs*, October 4, 2018, accessed on 31.10.2020, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/A-new-world-order-A-view-from-Russia--19782>).

⁸ See Dmitri Trenin, *Should We Fear Russia* (Wiley, November, 2016).

In both cases, it has been and will continue to be rather difficult to find common ground with Russia.

There are only a few, short-lived cases when Russia has managed to build substantial relations with Europe or the United States. When there was warm leadership during America's hegemonic fantasies, France, Germany and Russia could forge closer relations. The same was true with Bush Sr.-Gorbachev, Yeltsin-Clinton, Putin-Bush Jr., and Obama-Putin. For Gorbachev, the low point in relations was the collapse of the Soviet Union, for Yeltsin it was the Kosovo affair, for Putin (vis a vis Bush Jr.) it was the invasion in Georgia, and following an initial reset of relations, Obama left office shortly after Putin seized Crimea. High hopes at the beginning always led to the failure in the end.

Despite the fact that there has always been political will, multiple intrinsic factors have always undermined potentially beneficial bilateral or multilateral ties. A willingness to forge better relations with Russia exists everywhere, even in the Baltic States, but to this day, no state or institution has ever succeeded.

There is little (or nothing at all) that the Baltic States, Georgia, or Ukraine could offer to Russia to change its political course or remove its historical and ideological curse to grow like a restless empire.⁹ Russia's history and ideology has made it uncomfortable for states from Central or Eastern Europe, but its top adversaries are the liberal democratic Western countries.¹⁰ With Russia on the doorstep of European and transatlantic communities, this trend is worth considering by major European powers as well as the United States.

France's and the United Kingdom's "America First" Policies

Donald J. Trump shortly after his election as the President of the United States, announced the "America first" policy. He said that from the moment he takes office, the United States would at all times prioritize American national interests over others. The outcome of this doctrine

⁹ See Ian Barnes and Dominic Lieven, *Restless Empire: A Historical Atlas of Russia* (Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, May 11, 2015).

¹⁰ Sandis Sraders, *Small Baltic States and the Euro-Atlantic Security Community* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 181.

has been four years of American foreign policy where at the conclusion of Trump's first term, the international community is living in less-regulated times and with a weaker world order –one closer to the law of the jungle. This condition is the result of the United States' abrogation of multiple treaties and the abandonment of international organizations and alliances.

Moreover, these trends are accelerated by the shrinking appeal of US leadership. The result of this on the global stage especially if Trump wins a second term is a "sea change for the United States' relationship with the rest of the world where American power is but a thing of the past."¹¹ We might think the United States' approach to international structures, a liberal world order and multilateral cooperation is exclusive, but it is not. The United Kingdom and France portray policy choices that reflect and are reminiscent of such crucial aspects of Trump's doctrine.

France's Emmanuel Macron has angered the most adamant transatlantic allies, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe who are ready to embrace any type of US leadership, by announcing that NATO is "brain dead". Even if many would agree that Europe is living in exceptionally fragile times, these structures will not disappear because of the United States or its failure to think of itself as a global power.¹² It would, however, disintegrate because Emmanuel Macron fails to understand he is not Charles De Gaulle and France is not living in the De Gaulle's era and conditions anymore. Such French exceptionalism ended when *François* Mitterrand adjusted the course of the European federation, Jacques Chirac enlarged the political project, and Germany foot the French bill to reunite all of Europe when the Berlin Wall fell.

Instead of trying to test France's capacity to forge a strategic partnership with Russia alone, at the potential expense of European unity, Macron should learn from Nicholas Sarkozy's attempts to negotiate over Georgia in 2008. Then, the Kremlin's press announcement forced Sarkozy to acknowledge "that Georgia is not

¹¹ Eliot A.Cohen, "The End of American Power: Trump's Reelection Would Usher in Permanent Decline," (*Foreign Affairs*, October 27, 2020, accessed on 28.10.2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-10-27/end-american-power>)

¹² The Editorial Board, "Emmanuel Macron has issued a wake-up call to Europe," (*Financial Times*, November 10, 2019, accessed on 28.10.2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/7e7e1bb8-0223-11ea-be59-e49b2a136b8d>)

a member of the EU” and that France is facing its power limits with Russia. Then Russian President (who was considered modern and democratic) Dmitry Medvedev was saving France’s reputation and teaching a lesson to Europe when he said that as a whole, “Europe should not be discredited.”¹³

Sarkozy’s policy and visit was a failure, ending with the twenty percent of Georgia being occupied until this day. Instead of constructing plans for Europe’s strategic autonomy, France should embrace Germany’s strategic patience or Poland’s strategic embrace of US leadership and the priority of European solidarity coming first. France’s emphasis on European autonomy has always separated the United States from the European Union, while the position of the United States has contributed to European consolidation over national interests.

Many decades ago, the Marshall Plan created the conditions for the European cooperation. When the United States, in cooperation with France and Germany, pursued the creation of European Union institutions, London still looked at Europe with ambivalence. Even after the embarrassing foreign affairs affair in Suez in 1956, the absence of any serious representation at the signing of the Rome Treaty in 1957 (besides a low-ranking British observer) vividly showed Westminster’s approach to Europe.¹⁴ Conversely, France, in London’s stead, was building Europe in cooperation with Germany. The United Kingdom was still dreaming of being an empire then, but only its special relationship with the United States allowed for some dreaming and for its reputation.¹⁵

The United Kingdom saw the repercussions of its dissent ten years after the Treaty of Rome. Then, Charles De Gaulle denied the United Kingdom EU membership by explaining “for a beautiful creature nakedness was natural enough – for those around her, it was satisfying enough.”¹⁶ In the 1960s, France could afford to enhance Europe by

¹³ See the President of Russia Press Statement, “Press Statement following Negotiations with French President Nicolas Sarkozy” (*The Kremlin*, August 11, 2008, accessed on 28.10.2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1072>)

¹⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (Penguin Books, 2006), 302.

¹⁵ Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 118.

¹⁶ Nesta Roberts, “Emphatic ‘No’ by de Gaulle: The General gives his reasons,” (*The Guardian*, November 28, 1967, accessed on 31.10.2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1967/nov/28/eu.france>)

shouting “no” three times – to Britain joining Europe, to the United States and NATO, and to the dollar as the world currency. The country’s international status and conditions allowed De Gaulle to leverage affairs, set priorities, and choose partners in European and transatlantic relations.

The conditions for the Atlantic alliance and the European project at that time were not much different than for Brexit today. The United States suffers a domestic crisis now, whereas then the crisis resulted from a defeat in Vietnam internationally and from Nixon facing impeachment over Watergate scandal at home. As a result, the argument went, Europe must rely on its own resources, without American leadership.

Thus, in Britain, a Conservative Margaret Thatcher called for “a massive Yes” to European common super-market with plenty of choice just around the corner. With wartime memories still vivid in the minds of older British generations, the saying went that it is “better lose a little of some national sovereignty than a son or daughter.”¹⁷ London embraced European cooperation to balance the crisis in transatlantic relations. As a result, Britain voted by a margin of two-to-one to stay in the European Economic Community, as the European Union was then known, in the first Brexit referendum, in 1975.¹⁸

The first lesson from 1975 is the following: good reforms are more possible with partners rather than without them. Secondly, without betraying France and Europe politically, the future for the United Kingdom is bright within European structures. Margaret Thatcher was getting the famous UK rebate in 1984, approved by German and French leadership. It was the French European Union Presidency under François Mitterrand that allowed for such luxury. Mitterrand approved the British request and told the Iron Lady Thatcher “Of course Madame Prime Minister, you must have it.”

This agreement allowed the United Kingdom to have its payments to the European budget reduced by two-thirds to compensate for

¹⁷ Robert Saunders, “Britain decides: the first European referendum” (*The official website for BBC History Magazine, BBC History Revealed and BBC World Histories Magazine*, June 2016), accessed on 31.10.2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/modern/britain-decides-the-first-european-referendum/>

¹⁸ Brian Wheeler, “EU referendum: Did 1975 predictions come true?” (*BBC News*, June 6, 2016), accessed on 31.10.2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36367246>

the ostensible common agricultural policy inefficiencies and fiscal mismatches imposed on Britain. Since then, and up until the war in Iraq in 2003, Britain was on a European path, inching closer to the European Union to achieve more influence and to punch with its full weight politically, even by introducing the euro.¹⁹

This pro-European direction has been shifting since 2003, up to the point that Britain announced a second Brexit referendum. One, which resulted positively for exit supporters. In multiple European capitals, this is seen as a betrayal of the European project as well as possibly being anathema to Britain itself. With Europe, it can remain an unofficial member, like Norway. In Europe, the United Kingdom can enjoy the benefits of the common market without membership payments (and without the rebate), but it will have significantly less political advantages over European affairs.

In its relations with the United States, it can become like Mexico. When Brexit, with or without a deal, is complete, the United Kingdom will rush into a strategic partnership with America, first. As the conceiver of NATO, but just one of its members and too small for a genuine strategic partnership, the answer from Washington will be a "no". With its institutional advantage over the European Union lost, this will be the moment when the United Kingdom will strategically descend to the level of Mexico. Notwithstanding how the relationship ends up, a reset of EU-UK relations is strategically essential to sustaining a balanced transatlantic partnership.

Germany Leading

Owing to the old American idea about postwar reconstruction and European cooperation enshrined into the Marshall Plan, Germany has surged faster economically (and continues growing today) when compared with other major European powers. Not all manufacturing capabilities were lost in the war then, and economically Berlin commands the European powerhouse today.

¹⁹ Dinan Desmond, *Europe Recast: A History of European Union* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 304.

Furthermore, the indefinite postwar American military and political presence allowed Germany to transfer its military production to civilian production without invoking nationalist sentiments in Europe.²⁰ These preconditions allowed Germany to reunite Europe and itself –the result of the United States’ foreign policy objective to rebuild Europe, whole and free. Because the United States politically supported European – and importantly German – unification in the face of fears in the United Kingdom or France, Berlin has a debt to support transatlantic relations, which in the past were key for European solidarity and unity.

This time, it is not enough for Germany to act as reluctant leader. In fact, to avoid the terror of nationalism in or against Europe, the retreat of the liberal and democratic world order and the rise of the rule of the jungle, Germany must do more, politically and militarily. With France’s ambivalence over transatlantic cooperation and Britain’s abrupt exit from the European community, Germany is the only one left to ensure the conditions for the enhancement of transatlantic relations and European solidarity. Such a policy would strongly uphold shared interests in Paris and London, despite the fact that both capitals have been looking in different directions. Moreover, such a policy would be strongly welcome in the United States, notwithstanding the November 2020 election results.

At the moment, Europe’s primary security challenge stems from revisionist Russia. Whatever happens, it will be a form of aggression – if Putin, older and increasingly boring to the Russian electorate, fails to rationally weigh the risks of aggression, or if Russia collapses and disintegrates.²¹ To address either of these two challenges, Europe must be well-prepared. To uphold shared European security interests, Germany must adapt its military planning to the present risks by immediately increasing defense spending to the two percent level (instead of the “15 years” promise that Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer gave during the Riga Conference 2019). Already now, US leadership acknowledges the need to shift, modernize and

²⁰ Paul Krugman, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (Knopf; First Edition, September 18, 2018), 40.

²¹ See Dmitri Trenin’s book, *Should We Fear Russia* (Polity, 1st edition, December 12, 2016), where he warns about the dangers of Russia’s collapse being more profound than ostensible aggression attempts.

enhance presently shortsighted defense capabilities to match the coming challenges “beyond the vision of the operation officer”.²² Such a shared approach would underscore the reciprocal security interests in the United States and Europe.

Moreover, Germany should contribute to the building of ever-shifting novel military capabilities, such as technological advancement, to tame China’s and Russia’s undermining of democratic electoral processes and malicious information campaigns in the West. Any departure from the two percent measurement or arguments that it is irrelevant (as recently suggested by the German security leadership) compared to the other forms of capabilities measurement only contributes to Europe’s overall sense of irresponsibility in terms of defense when compared the attitudes of NATO’s non-EU members.²³

A rapid embrace by Germany of the two percent spending rule would dismiss any ambivalence towards military spending in Europe, but more importantly, such a decision would enhance cooperation with the United States. Such a move would bridge the power asymmetry and deflate the growth of multiyear tensions.²⁴ Moreover, Europe could also support converging interests to contain not just Russia, but three revisionist powers at once –revolutionary Iran, revisionist Russia, and authoritarian-communist China.²⁵

This is of the utmost interest not only for small states in Europe such as the Baltic States, but also for international allies (India, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and Turkey, among many others who support the liberal world order). By doing so, Germany would enhance not only its own standing, but the complete political standing of Europe as the partner of choice for the United States. Therefore, Germany can shift all political responsibility to the shoulders of European institutions.

²² Hillary Clinton, “A National Security Reckoning: How Washington Should Think About Power” (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2020), 89-99.

²³ See “NATO spending rules need revising due to coronavirus, German defense chief says,” (*Deutsche Welle*, accessed on 08.10.2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-spending-rules-need-revising-due-to-coronavirus-german-defense-chief-says/a-54214272>)

²⁴ Alina Polyakova, “What Comes After the Transatlantic Alliance” (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2019, accessed on 30.10.2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1124371>).

²⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, “The New Containment - Handling Russia, China, and Iran” (*Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2019, accessed on 30.10.2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-02-12/new-containment>)

Conversely, Europe will eventually have to cope with the need to re-forged transatlantic cooperation, which is the backbone of its security and stability, if it fails to offer itself as equal partner to the United States soon. The loss of the United States' security blanket could lead to the end of the EU. Furthermore, the United States alone would become more assertive and tempted to cherry-pick trade partners and cooperation partners of strategic importance.²⁶ Without a solidarity in Europe, each European state on their own would be tempted to compete for better relations with the United States.

Conclusion

Even though Trump's appearances do not resonate well in Europe or elsewhere, we would never call his continued containment of Russia or his novel approach to a surging China as the reasons behind the gradual and progressive erosion of ties, or the collapse of international orders inherited from the past. Nevertheless, we are increasingly experiencing a trend in which transatlantic partners, or European partners, are starting to lose faith in their own allies and alliances.

In the event that such trends continue, an age of undemocratic contagion and illiberal world order will push Europe and the transatlantic partners deep back into the last century, where nationalistic interests and approaches pushed Europe into two wars. Modern liberal forces that ostensibly called for the "end of history" are now modernizing tools in the hands of adversaries who mean to divide and rule Europe and America. This coming ideological challenge and technological-informational contagion demands more internationalism and cooperation, not less.²⁷

Influential Russian pundits argue that the collapse of the present world order will open up the possibility for the creation of a new world order – hopefully, a fairer, more stable, and more peaceful order than has been previously experienced by Russia or its potential partners.

²⁶ Michael Beckley, "Rogue Superpower: Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century" (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2020), 84.

²⁷ G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less" (*Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2020, accessed on 30.10.2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1126086>)

None of these statements resonate well around Central and Eastern Europe, which are the frontline against the expansion of Eurasianist ideas and policies.²⁸

Furthermore, there is a need for more European and US cooperation to contain these revolutionary ideas – and even the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. A nuclear Iran, to uphold Tehran’s regime objectives, could transfer such weapons not only to Venezuela, but also to other terrorist groups with shared policy goals.²⁹ In the event of such a crisis, we would experience the expedited collapse of the rules-based order.

Finally yet importantly, China’s Belt and Road Initiative is not only a road for the economic cooperation. It bears political costs for Europe and the United States since China’s technology, economy, and society support the communist regime’s authoritarian interests abroad. Beijing is becoming more interested in destabilizing democratic processes, institutions, values, social trust, and leadership in the United States, and its partners, from within.³⁰

In the past, the objectives in Europe were to keep Russia out and let the United States in, and to hold Germany down. Now, there is a need for Germany to step up in order to keep the United States closer to Europe. The key to such cooperation resides in Berlin and upholds the common objective of simultaneously deterring and containing revisionist Russia, revolutionary Iran, and a surging China. Only strong cooperation in Europe and across the Atlantic would make such a policy viable.

²⁸ Sandis Sraders, *Small Baltic States and the Euro-Atlantic Security Community* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 178.

²⁹ Matthew Kroenig, *Time to Attack: The Looming Iranian Nuclear Threat* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 163, 124.

³⁰ See report by Reuters in Washington D.C., “US security adviser claims China has taken ‘most active role’ in election meddling” (*The Guardian*, Accessed on 21.10.2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/04/us-security-adviser-china-elections-meddling>)

NATO AND RUSSIA

Between War and Integration: NATO and Russia Towards 2030

Marek Menkiszak

NATO-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War have had their ups and downs, mirroring the trajectory of the wider relationship between the West and Russia. However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 brought relations to their worst level since the end of the Cold War. And although Russia and NATO, while no longer calling themselves partners, still have not formally recognised each other as their main military adversaries, either in the sphere of rhetoric or operational policy, there is no doubt (especially on the Russian side) that this is the case. This raises a question about the causes of this situation, the factors determining its development and scenarios for the future.

The Sources and Nature of the Russian Challenge for NATO

According to the author, there are three main, mutually reinforcing factors that have determined the systemic nature of the present challenge to NATO posed by Russia and led to the current crisis in relations: the authoritarian nature of the Russian political regime, the peculiar perception of the international reality by members of the Russian ruling group, and Russia's specifically defined interests.

After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia in 2000, an **authoritarian system of government**¹ gradually developed, characterised by a high level of centralisation and the personalisation of power, centred around Vladimir Putin and associates chosen by him. The fact that a significant number of them come from the Soviet (and then Russian) secret services is of great importance, because it affects

¹ Cf. Maria Domańska, *Putinism after Putin. The deep structures of Russian authoritarianism*, OSW Studies No. 78, 25 October 2019, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/OSW-Studies_Putinism-after-Putin_net.pdf

their perception of reality, the functioning of the decision-making process, the definition of goals and the choice of policy methods. President Vladimir Putin, supported by the presidential administration and the Security Council (and its apparatus), is the key decision-maker on important political issues, especially those concerning broadly understood security and foreign policy. In this situation, the importance of Putin's personal views, preferences and character traits increases. He is prone to conspiratorial thinking, to distrust, and to taking (calculated) risks. His views include a deep attachment to the idea of Russia's great power status, a strong state, a lack of faith in the subjectivity of society, a deep aversion to pro-democratic social movements, and anti-Western (especially anti-American) resentments.

The main and most trusted source of information for the presidential centre that commands the state are reports from the secret services, especially the Federal Security Service. Due to the nature and tasks of the services, they are dominated by perspectives of threats to the security of the state and members of government. Thus, this strengthens Putin and his associates' tendencies towards political paranoia. It can be presumed that a mechanism has been created to filter information, and analyse and create it, for assumed theses that correspond to the imagined needs of the recipient.

There are many indications that the ruling group in Russia is dominated by a peculiar **perception of international reality**²: belief in the Darwinian nature of international relations, whereby nations and states are constantly fighting for survival, and only strong states and those determined to use aggressive methods to defend their interests have a chance. Another element of this vision is belief in the natural hierarchy of states, dominated by great powers – the only truly sovereigns who dictate the rules of the game and behaviour to others. In this vision, Russia is one of the countries that is historically, culturally and geographically predestined for a great power role, some inherent features of which are having its own sphere of influence (usually defined as the post-Soviet area), having a presence and interests in key regions of the world, and conducting global politics. The main threat to Russia in this worldview is Western policy, especially that of the US,

² Cf. Maria Domańska, *Conflict-dependent Russia. The domestic determinants of the Kremlin's anti-western policy*, Point of View No.67, 6 November 2017, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_67_conflict-dependent_net.pdf

whose efforts to (ineffectively) defend its global hegemony also include attempts to weaken, surround and even destroy Russia, or at least to lessen its influence in key regions and change its regime through subversive actions.

In this worldview, NATO is perceived by members of the Russian ruling group as a US-dominated structure, the main instrument of the US's presence and influence in Europe, with a blade aimed at Russia. NATO's enlargement policy (especially to the east) is seen as a unilateral action that took advantage of Russia's temporary weakness, upsets the strategic balance and geopolitical status quo in Europe, and threatens Russia's vital interests. Russia is also hostile to strengthening the so-called "eastern flank" of the alliance, deploying allied forces here and creating new military installations. It treats NATO's tightening of cooperation with its Nordic and Eastern European partners in a similar way.

The above perception of the international reality determines a specific **definition of the interests** and goals for Russia's policy. As a consequence, it is the survival of the present political regime in Russia that is equated with the vital interest of the state, and this is in fact the most important goal of Russia's policy, both domestic and foreign, in security and defence. In the European area, the author believes that the above goal is related to Russia's unchanging strategic goals³, which include:

- regaining strategic control over the countries of the post-Soviet area (with the temporary exclusion of the Baltic States);
- transforming Central Europe (the former Soviet bloc states, including the Baltic States) into a buffer zone within NATO – to this can be added the desire to maintain the geopolitical *status quo* in Nordic Europe;
- minimising and, if possible, completely eliminating the presence (especially military) and influence of the US in Europe, especially including the weakening and (optimally) collapse of NATO;
- maximising Russia's presence and political influence in Europe, ideally in the form of creating a new security architecture that would grant Russia a formal or *de facto* veto right, especially in matters of European security.

³ Cf. Marek Menkiszak, *A strategic continuation, a tactical change. Russia's European security policy*, Point of View No. 76, 8 November 2019, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/PW_76_A%20strategic%20continuation_net.pdf

Although Russia has not managed to achieve any of the above goals, there are no indications that it will give up efforts to try, even partially, to achieve them. This is an important source of the crisis in NATO's relations with Russia, as these goals have been and continue to be contrary to the interests of the alliance as a whole, or at least a significant number of its member states.

The Russian authorities are taking systematic steps to strengthen and defend the authoritarian political system against perceived enemies, both internal (Russian civil society) and external (the West, led by the US). In Russia's activity abroad, it is possible to observe repeated aggressive actions against many NATO member and partner countries, including cyber attacks, chemical attacks, subversive activities and information warfare. These activities cover various spheres and are **comprehensive** in nature. The intense militarisation of Russia's western and southern military districts, massive snap military exercises with aggressive scenarios, and new capabilities in the field of strategic weapons leave no doubt that Russia is preparing its war machine – primarily for a large-scale conflict scenario involving Europe. The above actions by Russia fit in with Russian concepts about the nature of contemporary armed conflicts and the role of non-linear actions in them. Therefore, they should not be treated as incidental and isolated actions, but rather as manifestations of systematic Russian policies that fit in with the image of a kind of war with the West (and especially with the US), which dominates Russia's ruling group.

As long as there is no profound change in the existing political regime in Russia, either institutionally or personally, there is no reason to believe that such a change of perception and policy is possible. It can therefore be concluded that the Russian challenge to NATO is **persistent**.

Contours of the Future: the Main Factors

As the nature of the development of future relations between NATO and Russia depends largely on the evolution of Russia's situation and policy, it is worth briefly outlining the most important challenges and trends affecting the country. There are both short-term (from several

months to several years) and long-term (from several to several dozen years) trends, although the boundary between them often remains conventional.⁴

1. Factors in the Economic Sphere

Russia remains a resource state. Despite its significant scientific and technical potential, it is not able to implement plans to diversify its economy or significantly increase its technological level. Russia's technological advantages are of a niche nature and mainly concern certain types of weapons and nuclear technologies. This situation raises the problem of the dependence of the Russian economy on highly unstable global commodity markets, as well as the long-term challenge of the widening technological gap between Russia and the most highly developed countries. In the longer term, threats to the Russian economic model include, in particular: a possible reduction in demand for fossil fuels (especially crude oil) resulting from energy transformation, increased competition on the LNG market, and new energy technologies. The consequences of climate change, especially the melting of permafrost (causing infrastructural and ecological threats) are also serious long-term challenges. The economy is also plagued by the consequences of demographic problems, in particular the aging of the population, generating a labour deficit and financial burden. Although Russia has its own large state and private business sector, the latter is reluctant to invest in Russia. This also applies to foreign investors. The basis for this is the bad investment climate, which is largely due to the limited legal security of investments, which is itself related to the lack of independence of the judiciary, corruption and excessive state control and interference in the economy. Putin's state capitalism is not an economically efficient system and does not create conditions for sustainable economic growth. Recurring economic crises, interspersed with periods of stagnation, dominate both the present and the short- and medium-term outlooks. This has potentially negative consequences for Russia's socio-political stability.

⁴ Cf. *Putin for the fourth time. The state of and prospects for Russia (2018–2024)*, OSW Report, 20 March 2018, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/report_putin-for-the-fourth_net.pdf

2. Factors in the Socio-Political Sphere

Russia's socio-political stability remains fragile. A bad public mood persists. The authorities are no longer able to maintain the previous informal social contract: society accepts authoritarian political practices in return for a systematic improvement of social conditions. Also, the policy of compensation in the sphere of "foreign successes" (the main example being the annexation of Crimea), it seems, has ceased to bring political dividends for the Kremlin. In this situation, the deficit in the political legitimacy of Putin's rule is growing. Russian society is growing weary and irritated by the ruling elite's arrogance, corruption and ostentatious consumption. This situation contributes to an increase in the potential for the outbreak of social protests, both economically and politically-motivated, although these are still not of a mass nature and are usually dispersed. The feeling of frustration over the perceived inadequacy of the current political model, as well as the personal composition of the authorities and their policies, is shared by the wider Russian political elite, whose members compete for the state's dwindling financial resources and economic assets. However, there are still no signs of the emergence of a critical mass within the elite that could revise the current policy and start systemic reforms. The extensive state apparatus of repression still remains consistent and has the ability to operate effectively, and the authorities increasingly control the internet as an important communication tool.

3. Factors in the Sphere of Foreign and Security Policy

Russia's foreign and security policy, despite Moscow's global ambitions, actually focuses primarily on three key actors: the US, China and Europe (the EU). The **United States** is seen by Putin's elite as a key opponent whose foreign and security policy challenges Russia's vital interests, especially the survival of its political regime. Russia is actively contesting the US's global leadership and regional influence, and Russia sees its nuclear potential as the main tool to contain it. Potentially the greatest threat to Putin's Russia is a situation in which the new US administration, after taking power in 2021, overcomes the crisis in transatlantic relations, strengthens NATO, increases US involvement in key regions, including Europe, and at the same time does not give up pressure on Russia in the form of political and economic sanctions and the formation of an international coalition to counter challenges

posed by authoritarian states and to promote democratic values, including in Russia and its neighbourhood. In turn, the best outcomes for Moscow would be for the US to continue its policy of antagonising its allies (including European ones), limiting its involvement and military presence in key regions (including Europe), escalating its conflict with China and (partly for this reason) attempting to normalise relations with Russia, alleviating sanctions pressure on Moscow, and expressing readiness to take into account some of Russia's demands regarding European security.

Although not all Russian interests coincide with Chinese ones, Putin's Russia sees **China** as an emerging superpower – the only country able to challenge the US's global hegemony and oppose the liberal order promoted by Western states. For this reason, it consistently implements a policy of strengthening cooperation with China in the political, economic and military spheres, taking the form of an informal alliance. Russia's current interests would be matched by an escalation of the conflict between China and the US, which would increase Russia's attractiveness to Beijing and in turn would reduce the asymmetry in Russian-Chinese relations that has been growing in recent years to the detriment of Moscow. Russia would be satisfied with the growth of China's potential as far as it hinders US and EU policy, but not to the extent that it would lead to Beijing's global hegemony. Moscow is also interested in implementing the idea of connectivity between Asia (especially China) and Europe, as it sees in this the potential for an increase in its transit role.

Europe (especially the EU) remains (and will remain for a long time) the main market for Russian exports (mainly raw materials) and a source of imports. Due to its geographical proximity, NATO in Europe remains, in Russia's perception, an important source of security challenges, especially in terms of America's military presence on the continent. In this situation, Putin's Russia has an interest in weakening European structures (including the EU and NATO) at the expense of key member states, as well as in the growing influence of populist, nationalist and anti-American political forces on the continent, which are usually in favour of a pragmatic or friendly policy towards Moscow. Russia also wants to defend, and if possible strengthen, its position as a key supplier of energy resources – and convert this into political influence. Moscow's goal also remains to bring about a collapse of

the EU's consensus on sanctions against Russia, as well as to increase transatlantic tensions and build a European "strategic autonomy" (from the US), which would optimally lead to the collapse of NATO. A negative scenario for Moscow would be: overcoming political, social and economic crises in Europe, easing transatlantic tensions, strengthening NATO and building European defence capabilities in cooperation with (and not in opposition to) the US, continuing the process of European integration and gradual EU enlargement, active involvement of the EU and European countries in the successful transformation of the Eastern neighbourhood countries in line with European standards, and continuing the EU's critical policy towards Russia, including in the form of sanctions.

NATO and Russia: the Way Ahead

When focusing on Russia, four main scenarios can be outlined: decaying authoritarianism, authoritarian consolidation, democratic change, and chaos⁵. Each of these corresponds to different, though sometimes repetitive, types of Russian attitudes towards NATO and possible responses from the alliance.

1. Scenarios: Rotting Authoritarianism and Authoritarian Consolidation

The rotting authoritarianism (most likely) and authoritarian consolidation (less likely) scenarios, although different, could lead to similar attitudes towards NATO from Russia, as well as trigger similar actions on the part of the alliance. For this reason, they can be considered together.

The **decaying authoritarianism scenario** assumes that the Russian economy will be stagnant, interrupted by periodic crises related mainly to downturns in raw materials prices on international markets. This will generate increasing social tensions and political instability, but in the foreseeable future it will not threaten the existence of the authoritarian system, which, however, will gradually decrease in effectiveness despite

⁵ For other scenarios for Russia cf. Sinikukka Sari, Stanislav Secrieru (eds.), *Russian Futures 2030. The shape of things to come*, Chaillot Papers No. 159, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 22 September 2020, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_159.pdf

the policy of repression. Russia's position in the international arena will systematically weaken, the conflict between Russia and the West (led by the US) will continue, and the country will further tighten its cooperation with China, becoming increasingly dependent, especially economically, on them.

The **authoritarian consolidation scenario** assumes that the Russian economy, although it won't develop dynamically, will remain stable, supported by relatively high prices for energy commodities (most likely caused by regional and local armed conflicts in the Middle East or East Asia). Russia may acquire new niche technological capabilities (e.g. in the field of hydrogen energy or biotechnology). The authoritarian system will strengthen itself by making extensive use of digital methods of social control (mimicking Chinese systems). Russia's international position will be relatively strengthened due to the Western world (especially the US and the EU) plunging into crises and suffering internal and inter-state conflicts (e.g. the US with China). Russia's position *vis-à-vis* China will also be strengthened, and they will closely cooperate on more even terms.

In both scenarios, if NATO remains fairly consolidated – if the US's presence, including its military presence, in Europe, and the allied presence on the eastern flank ,are maintained – Russia will most likely be limited to its current level of aggressiveness towards the alliance (which can be described as moderate). An increase in Russia's aggressiveness in such scenarios may be caused by four kinds of factors.

First, this could happen if the level of political instability in Russia increases and the Kremlin deems that there is a significant threat to the regime's survival (with a misperception about the West's attempts to change it by force). In such a situation, Moscow may try to provoke a conflict with neighbouring countries (e.g. Ukraine), including NATO members (especially in the case of the Baltic States), in order to channel social discontent and try to consolidate society against an external enemy.

Second, this could happen if there is a crisis within NATO, especially as a result of disputes between the US and its important European members or amongst European members themselves, which will put a question mark over the effective activation of Article 5 and the US's response to an external threat to the alliance. In such a situation,

Moscow may consider a window of opportunity for its geopolitical success to have been created, as the risks and potential costs of aggressive actions have decreased.

Thirdly, a somewhat similar situation may arise if there is no crisis within the alliance, but as a result of the outbreak of a serious conflict in a theatre of operations distant from Europe, involving political attention and significant US armed forces (e.g. between China and the US in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait), which will lead to the withdrawal of most of the US forces from Europe (especially the eastern flank of the alliance).

Fourth, an increase in Russia's aggressiveness and a (rather limited) armed conflict with a NATO country/countries may take place in the event of an uncontrolled escalation of an incident (e.g. an airspace violation, accident or fire exchange during exercises or air or sea patrols, etc.).

In practice, more aggressive actions by Russia could consist, for example, of serious cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure and/or the state management systems of individual NATO member states, military provocations involving border violations, the organisation of subversion operations and/or attempts to destabilise the situation in their territories, or deliberately provoking military incidents with their Russian-controlled escalation, including through the limited use of tactical nuclear weapons. The Baltic States are potentially the most vulnerable to this type of action by Moscow. Russia could also, for example, carry out a large-scale military aggression against Ukraine.

NATO's attitude towards Russia in both of the above scenarios will depend on the specific situation, especially the level of aggressiveness on the part of Russia. Generally, the alliance should operate with the same types of activities it has used so far. If Russia maintains a level of aggressiveness similar to the present one, NATO should focus primarily on **effective deterrence** and demonstrating the coherence and effectiveness of the alliance's operations and the internal resilience of its member states. In this context, it is worth emphasising the need for a gradual increase in the allied presence on the eastern flank (the Baltic States, Poland and Romania) and an enhancement of the capabilities of the deployed and local forces (including in the field of rapid response, reconnaissance, missile systems and air defence, and combat aviation). The key is to increase the ability to quickly deploy and move forces

and to expand the storage of military equipment. Building resilience should focus on protecting critical infrastructure and communication networks, civil defence and health care, and improving road, rail and airport infrastructure. The effort to build public awareness of the mechanisms of disinformation and how to defend against it should also be systematic, including as part of school curricula. An element of both deterrence and the building of the alliance's defence capabilities would be the regular organisation of significant collective defence (Article 5) exercises.

To prevent the escalation of incidents, it is first of all worth conducting regular **political dialogue** at a lower level, especially through military channels, striving to develop gentlemen's' agreements on interaction between NATO and the Russian armed forces in the air and at sea. Attempts to conclude formal agreements on this subject face technical (in terms of system incompatibility) and political (including the potential risk of an unjustified restriction of local military activity) obstacles but may be considered as long as they ensure a balance of interests.

The broadly understood concept of **risk reduction** may also be served through attempts to deepen the catalogue of confidence- and security-building measures via the adaptation of the Vienna Document proposed by NATO countries. In a situation featuring the progressive erosion of the arms control systems in Europe, caused by Russia's violation or circumvention of existing agreements (such as the CFE, INF, and Open Skies), the need to increase the transparency of military potentials and activity becomes increasingly important. In practice, however, this has met with stiff resistance from Russia, which considers its lack of transparency and unpredictability as an important element of its deterrence policy. In the current situation, it is worth especially focusing on attempts at dialogue aimed at eliminating violations on the Russian side, as well as on gaps in the applicable provisions. In particular, this concerns regulating the so-called snap exercises and large, multi-element exercises (which are artificially divided by the Russian side) into smaller events in order to avoid their notification. However, one should not be overly optimistic about the effects of such dialogue.

Arms control agreements could also help reduce the risk of a conflict. Some of them (e.g. the CFE and INF) have ceased to apply, and

any attempt to restore them does not seem realistic until a fundamental change in Russia's policy takes place, which is actually dependent on a change of the country's political regime. This does not mean, however, that both sides should not seek restraint in their defence policies in line with the spirit of the above-mentioned agreements, provided that they are reciprocal. However, the situation in which there is a unilateral advantage for the Russian side over NATO in terms of missile systems deployed in Europe is unacceptable. A prerequisite for NATO's effective deterrence is that this balance be re-established, not necessarily through symmetrical actions. An element of such activities should be the systematic rotational presence in Europe (including on the eastern flank) of medium-range sea-based and airborne missile systems. There should also be the possibility for the rapid deployment of land systems, for example by storing missiles in warehouses, and a mechanism for the rapid conversion of the Aegis Ashore systems in Romania and Poland for offensive purposes.

In the event of Russian actions becoming increasingly aggressive against NATO member states and/or neighbouring partner countries, it would be necessary for NATO and its member states to take **additional actions**. These may include a significant, permanent deployment of allied forces and platforms to increase deterrence capabilities on the eastern flank and in its adjacent lands (including in Germany). This could be associated with the formal NATO declaration on the renouncement of the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act, (the document is *de facto* already dead as a result of flagrant violations by Russia). The next step could be the permanent deployment of medium-range missiles in Central Europe and the inclusion of the eastern flank countries in the nuclear sharing programme, as well as the systematic organisation of significant (including unannounced) military exercises in maritime areas adjacent to Russia (the Barents, Baltic and Black Seas). In such a situation, NATO and its member states should also launch cyber counterattacks on targets in Russia, demonstrating their potential for harm.

2. Chaos Scenario

Chaos (in Russian: *smuta*) is an unlikely, but not excluded, scenario. The socio-political situation in Russia may deteriorate as a result of another serious economic crisis, probably associated with a significant drop in energy commodity prices. There is also the possibility of a political crisis

not directly related to an economic crisis (e.g. due to an uncontrolled escalation of local protests), as a result of which social protests will spread to many parts of the country. This may trigger a conflict within the ruling elite and lead to a loss of control by central authorities. In the event of an escalation of the crisis, representatives of local elites in individual Russian regions may take control and start pursuing policies that ignore the federal centre, and local authoritarian regimes could be created. Ethnic conflicts and territorial disputes could also arise. In the most extreme variant, this may lead to a partial disintegration of the Russian Federation.

In this situation, Russia will be unable to pursue an active external policy (aggressive or not) and potential threats from Russia to neighbouring countries, including NATO countries, will concern primarily soft security – waves of refugees and an increased risk of cross-border crime. A potentially very dangerous situation in the most extreme development of scenarios will be the disintegration of the structures of force, including the armed forces, and even the loss of central government control over part of the arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons (especially tactical nuclear weapons warehouses).

If threats to NATO and member states remain limited, the role of the alliance will be limited to coordinating support for member states in dealing with the consequences of a possible humanitarian disaster – i.e. in the field of civil defence and crisis response. It will be important to strengthen the intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities of the alliance and its member states. In such a situation, conducting a political dialogue with Russia would probably be extremely difficult or even impossible, although the use of the so-called “hotlines” could be useful. Perhaps the preventive deployment of allied forces in member states (possibly also in partner states, at their invitation) adjacent to Russia will be necessary. The greatest potential challenge for the alliance in this scenario would be the threat of the uncontrolled use of or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction from Russian territory. In this situation, proliferation-control measures should be strengthened, and allied forces should consider carrying out a special operation on Russian territory to secure or extract weapons of mass destruction (preferably in agreement with local forces) to safe places.

3. Democratic Change Scenario

Likewise, the collapse of the authoritarian system in Russia and the creation of a regime that falls within the category of a liberal democracy, while maintaining Russian specifics, is an equally, if not more, unlikely scenario for the development of the situation in the next 10 years. Such a situation could take place when, as a result of an economic and/or political crisis, there is a split in the elites and an agreement between some of the elites and the opposition and/or protest movements, which would result in the establishment of a new democratic government. The challenge in such a situation would be to maintain full control of the federal authorities and effective control over the entire territory of the state. If this succeeded, after a period of some weakening, Russia's position in the international arena would be relatively stronger. Most likely, Russia's relations with the West would normalise, initiating an intensive dialogue between them and a return to attempts to cooperate, while Moscow's relations with Beijing would cool down (perhaps temporarily) and their cooperation would decrease in intensity. Russia's new government would probably reduce its global involvement, focusing its attention on strategic partners, especially the EU and the US.

Depending on the pace and depth of changes in Russia and its policy, such a scenario could lead to intensified dialogue with NATO, and to Russia taking steps to reduce the militarisation of the state, especially in the Western theatre of operations. This would create conditions for starting a discussions on cooperation and on reconstructing the arms control system, including in Europe. In the most optimistic scenario, a democratic Russia would undertake systemic internal reforms and start applying for membership in political, and possibly military, NATO structures.

NATO's reaction to such developments must be cautious and would depend primarily on the scale of changes in Russia's attitude. Political dialogue would come to the fore and would be intensified. If Russia was ready to undertake détente measures, including giving up the aggressive manifestations of its current policy (including a reduction and redeployment of troops, refraining from provocative military actions, proposing confidence- and security-building measures, and disarmament measures), there would be a chance to normalise relations. This should not be completed, however, unless Russia is

ready to withdraw its regular and paramilitary forces from the Ukrainian Donbas region and from Georgia (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Moldova (Transnistria), and to engage in a serious dialogue with Ukraine on the regulation of the Crimean problem, leading to its gradual de-occupation. It is Russia's attitude towards its neighbours, especially those previously regarded by Moscow as within its sphere of influence, that will be the litmus test of Russia's real intentions. Without recognition and actual confirmation of their territorial integrity, Russia cannot be recognised as a democratic state that does not threaten its neighbours.

The gradual normalisation of NATO-Russia relations is likely to bring back talks on confidence- and security-building measures and arms control. Conditions may then arise for an adaptation of the Vienna Document and a return to negotiations on the ratification and implementation of the adapted CFE treaty (probably after some corrections have been made to it). In such a situation, the US and Russia may perhaps be able to return to talks about the possible restoration of the INF regime and an extension of arms control measures to include non-strategic nuclear weapons and new strategic capabilities (including hypersonic weapons). NATO could be actively involved in this process, perhaps as a party to some agreements. However, it is very important that within this framework the balance of interests of the parties is maintained and that it does not create areas of unequal security in Europe, which would asymmetrically and unjustifiably restrict the means of ensuring security by individual NATO member states, or in any way restrict the right to participate in alliances or non-alignment *vis-à-vis* countries that have hitherto remained outside NATO. A normalisation of NATO's relations Russia would also revisit the issue of possible cooperation between the parties outside the treaty area of the alliance, including in the field of peacekeeping operations and crisis response, or in the field of cooperation between missile defence systems.

In the event of the most optimistic development of the situation, if Russia undertakes deep systemic reforms (including those concerning the armed forces) and fundamentally changes its foreign and security policy in the spirit of positive engagement and good neighbourliness, NATO could respond positively to Moscow's possible application for membership in the alliance. However, this should be preceded by the admission to NATO of countries neighbouring Russia (e.g. Ukraine and

Georgia) that wish to join, and it should be dependent on Moscow's positive stance towards such accessions.

* * *

After the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation, established on the ruins of the USSR, became NATO's partner. However, over time, due to its aggressive policy, it started to be regarded as the main threat to the security of NATO member states. Recent history shows that no scenario regarding the development of the situation is impossible or inevitable. In this situation, NATO's task is to follow the well-known maxim of "hope for the best, prepare for the worst".

Should Russia Opt for Tactical Escalation or for Strategic De-escalation in the Baltic States and Kaliningrad?

Viljar Veebel

Introduction

Russia has acted with agility and decisiveness in several local conflicts, from Ukraine, to Syria, Libya or Belarus. Outwardly, it portrays them with a reserved demeanour, putting emphasis on actual gains. However, in the Baltic region, the activities that Russia conducts appear to be mostly symbolic. The atmosphere is full of threats, the armies are ready, and the stakes are high. And yet, the author of this article claims that despite all the pomp and circumstance, the theatre around the Baltic Sea has a little chance of witnessing an actual conflict. At least, as long as the West does not take Russian provocations and escalation exercises too seriously. Curiously, such a conflict is also not what Putin may want – however, this does not mean that he could be neglected, or that his aims are trivial.

At the most fundamental level, this game of escalations is another glorious confrontation to console Russian souls about the post-imperialist reality. Of course, it is likewise intended to boost the president's image at home and with the "siloviky", who are the trustees of the imperialist moral capital. If the impact of escalation and dominance ambitions with regards to domestic and regional affairs remains mainly symbolic, any tangible outcome would concern the global dimension.

For this game is also intended to fracture the Western coalition and to shake the stability of their international regime. These are the immediate aims of the game. But what makes the game compelling is its character and its more hidden goals. First, the Kremlin hardly hopes to achieve its aims by means of a hot war. It needs the West to

become entangled in the local low-stakes escalation game – a game with strategic aims hidden behind it. Indeed, in this regional setting, with its non-linear logic, it is possible to detect the presence of the infamous “escalate-to-de-escalate” brinkmanship formula¹ proclaimed by the Kremlin. This logic is far from a simple deterrence recipe: its ingredients are far too explosive for that. It appears to be a powerful tool for an otherwise declining power, such as a receding empire, as it attempts to maintain influence in its lost satellite states and colonial regions – and beyond that, a possible important aspect of the game is prestige. But the game is not without its risks, not least of which for the aggressor. Such a high-stakes game has its own agenda and character. This character can be understood by way of seeing it in terms of securitisation and applying game theory to its workings.

The situation in the Baltic region depends particularly on the question of Kaliningrad and the Suwalki gap. These regions are good examples for demonstrating how theoretical models could help in terms of damage control. Specifically, what seem at first glance to be rational and morally impeccable options may eventually lead to a painful and costly security dilemma², where paradoxically the main options on the table have become both too costly and publicly unacceptable. In order to grasp the inner workings of the “escalate-to-de-escalate” brinkmanship game, it is best to interpret this phenomenon through the lens of a particular game theory model called “dollar auction”. This model explains how rational bids can achieve altogether irrational heights. To capture the general spirit of the game, the concept of securitisation is also applied. According to this concept, an area is ascribed a special value, thereby justifying the use of special means in thwarting a potential or imagined threat. Finally, to model its functioning and unlock its potentiality, it is necessary to demonstrate that this idiosyncratic securitisation game can best be understood by seeing it as being composed of two balancing sides. The first step in the game is a measured over-reaction that motivates aggressive rhetoric and concomitant actions of escalation, presented as deterrence. The second step presumes that “an enemy” will be perceivably engaged

¹ Tertrais, B. (2018) ‘Russia’ s Nuclear Policy: Worrying for the Wrong Reasons’, *Survival*, 60:2.

² Veebel, V. and Ploom, I. (2018).The Deterrence Credibility of NATO and the Readiness of the Baltic States to Employ the Deterrence Instruments. Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review, 16(1).

and drawn into the escalation game. While this entanglement strategy works to the benefit of the initiator, it also bears conceivable risks of the game getting out of hand.

Yet none of this would have meaning without a backdrop. There exist several important contextual aspects that need to be understood and put into context. Putin sees that the West is in disarray, its socio-economic stability and values are shaking. Its political system is experiencing intense turmoil. It would be foolish not to exploit these factors to his advantage. There exist relevant abilities in Russia – and a permissive conscience in terms of domestic support – to pave the way for that. Russia as the Third Rome and the saviour of Western values is obligated to act in this crucial moment. Additionally, this offers a chance to take revenge on the West for what it has arguably done to Russia (i.e., the Gherasimov vision of the Western hybrid attack on Russia³ and its interests). Yet it is important to realise that the Kremlin could, in rational terms, have no actual intent to go into open conflict with the West, provided that the West also does not wish to escalate. Putin could perhaps only consider this course of action necessary when he perceives the West as collapsing internally and morally and sees a welcome opportunity to deliver a final, or simply a potentially decisive, blow.

This is not meant to downplay the potential strategic importance of these events in the region for both Russia and the West. For Russia, the game in the Baltic region has the potential to change the international order⁴. Indeed, the Kremlin's interest is not constructive: it would be pleased with the dissolution of the old regime. For that, it needs the West to be inherently divided. Hence, its success does not depend as much on Russia's ability to calculate and make its moves as it does on the inadequacy of the West in making of its own counter-moves in the region. Especially if this results in inaction due to internal friction. This – the Kremlin obviously hopes – would have an impact on a global scale.

There is one particularly important local dimension to be taken seriously. The Kremlin appears to need the Baltic region to be kept in

³ McDermott, R. 2016b. Gerasimov Calls for New Strategy to Counter Color Revolution. – Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 13, Issue 46, 8 March 2016.

⁴ McLellan, E.A. (2017), Russia's Strategic Beliefs Today; the Risk of War in the Future, *Orbis* 61(2), 255–268

an atmosphere of insecurity, not only for domestic political reasons but also to deter the West from making any bold moves to enhance Baltic security, or indeed to suppress Russia's possible activities in the ex-Soviet space. According to this logic, NATO will be forced to make small moves that bear mostly symbolic meaning in terms of boosting internal (re)assurance for the three Baltic States. Whilst the alliance could hope for more, the clever logic inherent to the game ensures that Russia will continue to hold the upper hand in the game. Even when a deal is broken, it is hard to see the situation resulting in a road to radically improved Baltic security. As the current trends suggest, in the long run there will most likely arise factors, such as economic or technological change, that will alter the context for the benefit of the West, but these are yet to be seen. These factors would still have a limited effect on Baltic conventional security – however, by that time the international order might be drawn apart.

Thus, it is vital to understand what Russia is actually feeling, aiming at, and doing. Then it could be easier for the West to remain inherently united and focus on providing real security in the West, including the Baltic States. The following will be a consideration of the situation from a game theory standpoint. As will be argued, Russia will have every chance to see the Western coalition – and especially NATO – break up internally over the responses to its moves in the region should the escalation ladder be engaged. Even if the US stays in the game for the sake of the Baltic States, whether it stays active alone or with a diminished coalition, Russia would still have won a major battle.

Russian Motivation: the Imperial Regalia

As was argued above, the easiest way to grasp the problems initiated during the last decade by Russia at its western borders is to think of them in terms of a securitisation game. It will be shown that this can be seen as a version of the Russian “escalate-to-de-escalate” brinkmanship strategy. There exist several relevant contexts that can be used as backdrops, which are vital to understand and take into account when one wishes to appreciate the complex nature of wider developments in the region. At this juncture, it is important to draw attention to the

inherent logic of the immediate actions and events as they appear in the most important context: the Kremlin's project of regaining Russia's territorial reach and its symbolic status as a global power.

In a nutshell, Russia appears to be motivated systematically (albeit within the limits of its budget) to raising tensions in areas near its mainland with historical and symbolic importance, using the justification of "responding to the imperialistic actions of NATO and the US". And with an aim to maintain and grow intrastate support. Exploiting its advantage in the area, every possible deployment can thus be responded to with a double or triple countermove, with the hope that the West is the first to lose its nerves and proposes negotiations. This can then be presented as a success, both in terms of intrastate popularity and international reputation.

In this project, the West and its actions play an absolutely vital role. Following a Soviet-style narrative, the West – and particularly the US – is pictured as an arch-enemy that wishes to subdue Russia, minimise its global role and make it a part of the Western economic and cultural empire. The elegance of this scheme is in its self-perpetuation as a promotor of Russia's grandness⁵. Merely by retelling the story, it ties the present-day Russia to the great Soviet project, which depicted a grand global ideological fight between good and evil forces, but also assumed a special role for Russia in carrying through with the project. By putting an emphasis on the imperial aspect instead of the ideological one, it also re-frames the Soviet story⁶. But be that as it may, the most important development for this article is to see the West as being drawn into the game. Indeed, the West has been lured into an active role without it ever needing to do anything beyond responding to the situation.

The Kremlin could and did make its own bold military moves with regards to the former member states of the Soviet Union that had not integrated to Western political and security networks, such as Georgia and Ukraine. However, with the better-integrated members of Western networks, such as the Baltic States, it does not necessarily need to make such moves to achieve what it has set as its goal.

⁵ Duke, S. and Gebhard, C. (2017). The EU and NATO's dilemmas with Russia and the prospects for deconfliction, *European Security*, 26:3, 379-397

⁶ Veebel, V. (2017). Russia's Neo-Imperial dependence model: Experiences of former Soviet republics. *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, 17 (1), 4–34.

While with Ukraine, the role of the West in dealing with Russia is still somewhat implicit, the Baltic States present a unique case of being both inherently and formally westernised countries, forcing themselves and their allies to make their own military moves in response to Russia. Here, the Cold War-style story comes true in all important aspects. Russia is perceived as a real potential threat to the Baltic States, and by implication – the Baltic States being integrated members of the West – the latter enters the story as a player of equal rank. Russia does not necessarily have to (re)conquer the Baltic States to accomplish its goals, because it necessarily retains its conventional advantage in the area. Doing that would even be counter-productive. In terms of global status, as long as NATO dominates the global security system, for Russia the three Baltic States are best left untouched by any bold moves (other than some hybrid scenarios) and simply harassed instead. This way, the status of Russia as an equal player remains intact. Indeed, should Georgia become a member of NATO, a similar opportunity opens up there for Russia. Maintaining its status in this case would be even still simpler, since Russia would *de facto* occupy part of NATO's territory.

Now, in order to be successful in these objectives, Russia, having less economic resources, needs constant adaptation to and constant feedback from the reactions of the West. In other words, by way of harassing the West, the Kremlin can determine the area with the largest impact. Once such an area is found, to cause ever stronger pain, all its resources will be focused on this vulnerable area. Should the West complain, more pain will be inflicted. This is an example of Russia's version of the "escalate-to-de-escalate" model⁷.

Should the West intend to take the initiative in this process, an understanding of the rational basis of the Kremlin's action is needed. The area of Kaliningrad and Suwalki is key to the military security of the Baltic States and offers an excellent case to test models. The present argument leads to a discussion of whether the West should continue its own securitisation process, or if it should de-escalate.

⁷ Zysk, K. (2018). Escalation and Nuclear Weapons in Russia's Military Strategy, The RUSI Journal, DOI: 10.1080/03071847.2018.1469267

Game Theory: the Dollar Auction

The way that the Kremlin has historically made its moves in the Baltic region demonstrates that it has found motivation, agility and advantage in a regional balance-of-power game, embedded in a symbolic and strategic motivation narrative. In this section, this logic will be illuminated by applying to it game theory, more precisely the “dollar auction” game. From this viewpoint, the rational importance of an area is only the first part of what could be seen as “bidding”, while symbolic and strategic relevance is the second part of it. Third, commitments that have already been made with bidding, creating an ever-growing inertia to bid again to win the regional power competition. Considering open source data, so far, the Western calculation consists of mainly linear and rational regional scenarios. As will be explained in more detail below, the West responds with countermeasures that are easy for Russia to respond to and predict. These measures are bound to remain insufficient, since Russia’s conventional advantage and the A2AD bubble will not be broken by the West. Indeed, the reaction of the West is predictably limited because it cannot know for sure whether Russia’s motivation is one of a “predator” or a “defender”⁸. While Russia is playing at a level of non-linear logic, the West is finding itself in a thoroughly reactive role. The West only moves when the Kremlin has already moved – they mostly know how the West will respond, as the latter is also limited by public control and moral limitations. And Russia will respond in a way that puts the West in an ever more complicated situation. Here, the nuanced logic of Russia’s “escalate-to-de-escalate” brinkmanship is exposed: it is not the linear logic of making the opponent withdraw from the game, but a way to engage the opponent in a bidding game where control over the situation remains with the initiator. As will be argued, while this is not entirely risk-free for Russia, on top of thwarting the West from making any bold moves in the ex-Soviet space, it is used to bring symbolic dividends.

The intentionally simplified account above demonstrates that game theory – and in particular the dollar auction game – could be a useful device in explaining the game and providing some potentially useful

⁸ Lanoszka, A. & Hunzeker, M.A. (2018) Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe, The U.S. Army War College.

tools of prediction. The dollar auction game describes behavioural patterns in a situation where the “loser” faces significant costs and strategic defeat by making tactically rational decisions at the start of the game. A dollar banknote is auctioned off: it goes to the highest bidder, but the second-highest bidder also has to pay the amount of their last bid. Thus, the second-highest bidder has to pay but gets nothing in return⁹. This game shows that under rational circumstances, where there exists a potential profit and players are not forced to make a bid, the outcome of the game could turn out to be completely irrational. The fastest and cheapest way to win is to convince your opponent that you are not limited by rational considerations or foreseeable restrictions.

The conflict’s actual trajectory clearly illustrates this logic. Starting from the infamous Zürich speech, through the country’s more-or-less covert actions in Georgia and Ukraine, through the long and ever more significant series of Zapad exercises, and eventually to Kaliningrad, Suwalki, and the wider Baltic game, one can see how both parties raise their bids without taking into account the actual value or costs of the wider Baltic region. Indeed, one can easily see how the bids have raised the costs to a disproportionate level. Eventually, the costs will fall on both sides, with one being lucky enough to pay a little less, being “the winner” of the game.

Obviously, both players must have realised that, and they are still bidding. But the motivation has changed as well, and this is exactly what the theory predicts. From a certain point onwards, instead of winning, the rational motivation (next to damage limitation) is to see the other party losing. The irrationality threshold of the dollar auction game arrives at a one-dollar offer, where player A’s motivation becomes primarily seeing player B lose 80 cents. The game’s character is transformed: instead of a real prize, a symbolic public victory and the humiliation of an opponent becomes the focus. Here, the idea is to see the other side lose. This is especially true for player that is 10 times wealthier (as with the US compared with Russia, a 10% loss would accordingly feel 10 times smaller), and losing 10% of its resources might be advantageous when there is an option that the opponent will lose the equivalent of 100% of their available assets. Yet in rational terms,

⁹ Shubik, M. (2003). The Dollar Auction Game: A Paradox in Noncooperative Behaviour and Escalation, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, pp. 109–111.

the winner is bound to lose as well. Thus, there is a point where both players will ultimately lose, but they are still motivated to raise the bids despite a certainty of losing money.

There are further aspects worth consideration. The farther the bids go from the nominal one-dollar level, comparatively smaller bids will guarantee staying in the game. In short, not only will it be ever more difficult to leave the game, but it will also be relatively cheaper to stay in the game. For the further the offers go, the smaller the bids become relative to the total sum. Once again, when one opponent is visibly more resourceful, and when the additional bids are growing increasingly smaller compared to the bids already on the table, the inertia to stay in the game by moving new assets into play grows.

Furthermore, the longer the game lasts, the bigger is the impact of “path dependence” compared to the actual value of an object (which necessarily stays constant). The rationality of every single decision begins to be determined more from damage-control needs than from a consideration of the actual value of an object. This will eventually be devastating for both players, as one of them has to pay a very high “exit cost from the game” in economic terms as well as receive the reputation of being the loser, while the other player, even when winning, pays an extreme price for an object worth much less in objective terms.

The Securitisation Game and the Kremlin’s Advantage

First of all, when speaking about strategy, securitisation is a prevalent method that Russia appears to use when it sees its strategic interests involved. Thus, enclaves such as Kaliningrad, which are regionally and economically of rather minor¹⁰ relevance, are all of a sudden attached disproportionate importance. It is likewise important to realise that some games that are overly costly in regional terms may be considered strategically profitable (even only if serving as a means of distraction). Similarly, the local sacrifice of an asset may be important to gaining strategic initiative.

¹⁰ European Parliament (2013). Delegation to Kaliningrad in the context of economic and financial impact for the Union by having a Russian enclave within the Union’s border. Background note. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201306/20130627ATT68722/20130627ATT68722EN.pdf>

Another layer in this dynamic is the motivational one. Drawing on its strategic needs, Russia feels that it needs an escalation point with NATO, for which it is ready to take significant risks¹¹. What Russia needs is a specific place where its capability to mobilise and escalate in peace time is more substantial than NATO's. In other words, the Kremlin needs regions where it can respond to each added NATO brigade with overwhelming force. The conclusion can be made that under these circumstances, Russia has the advantage in any such escalation game. An exception to this model would be a hot war, as this enables NATO to initiate their superior resources and their slow but large and effective mobilisation model.

Additionally, what the Kremlin needs is a theatre of limited scope, so that the conflict will stay financially manageable. At the same time, the theatre has to be of relevance to NATO in order for the latter not to ignore the opportunity to gamble. What one notices is that the Suwalki Gap, Kaliningrad and the Baltic States suit these conditions well, being a limited theatre that is dear to NATO but financially manageable for Russia. In general, for Russia, any theoretical solution that means engagement for the opponent, and thus path dependence, is fitting, as it makes further mobilisation rational. These aspects are a cover for the "object" itself, for which the realistic value was exceeded some time ago.

It is worth noticing that there are very few ways for Russia to lose this escalation game. Due to its already existing and visible conventional advantage in this theatre, and due to historical and economic ties, Russia is massively favoured to accomplish some of their key objectives in the Baltic region¹². If the West steps back, Russia can present this outcome as a victory. However, if the West goes along with and escalates the situation, it provides Russia many opportunities to escalate further in some sub-theatres – such as Belarus, by subjecting it to annexation, as they did in Crimea¹³. It seems to be useful to divide Russia's "near abroad" into two regions: with non-NATO/

¹¹ Pynnöniemi, K. (2018). Russia's National Security Strategy: Analysis of Conceptual Evolution, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 31:2, 240–256

¹² Shlapak, D. A., Johnson, M. W. (2016). Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank. RAND Corporation. Available: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf

¹³ Veebel, V. (2018). NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in Baltic States. *Defence Studies*, 18(2), 229–251

EU states its target is to bring under its control as much territory as possible, whereas NATO/EU member states are there to be internally fragmented, to either divert them from their democratic course or to create persistent divides between those nations.

Behind the Kremlin's hybrid actions, a further calculation exists. Even if, in absolute economic terms, during a hot war the West would easily outlast Russia; when the war stays cold in relative terms, the West may be less able to dominate. As can be inferred from the remarkable array of hybrid activities launched by Russia in the West, in all likelihood Putin has realised that not only is Russia economically "at a dead end", but so is the West. The Russian people are used to hard economic conditions due to their experience and would not want or even have the ability to supplant their political regime. Drawing on the support the Kremlin has given to radical parties in the West, Putin is probably hoping to witness Western regimes losing their resilience and global impact (via Brexit, the global financial crisis, including the euro crisis, the success of radical parties in European elections, etc.). A possible calculation behind Russia's hybrid actions in the West might show that even if Russia is losing in absolute terms, in relative terms Russia's problems are minor with regards to its political system's stability, while the West's problems are undermining their regimes' legitimacy in the eyes of voters. Despite the fact that the West will remain economically far superior, it does not have the consolidated will to stand against fast and agile autocratic regimes like Russia. Russia might also follow along Huntingtonian lines and expect long-term developments to favour "managed democracies" (like China, Russia, etc.) rather than democracies proper. Sorting things out at home – i.e. in terms of its global and regional financial and economic accounts – would also lessen Russia's zeal to try go for a jackpot. Indeed, while otherwise a strength, in times of large socio-economic transitions, slow democratic procedures may hinder the West in getting on track again and rather favour populist solutions. Hence, the key for the West to avoiding the impact of Kremlin funding for its radical populist parties is to sort out its domestic problems and stabilise its societies. This would make Putin's funds powerless.

What is more, the Baltic region is an ideal playground for Russia due to its weight class. While the Baltic States are morally and culturally part of the West, they are tiny and – despite their success in creating

their narrative – relatively unimportant. In military terms, they lack strategic depth and are difficult to defend. Any such plan would need disproportionate resources. This makes the Baltic States to an ideal victim, the poking of which has the potential to create an internal quarrel in the West¹⁴. Besides, the Baltics have fears, reflexes and weak points that are easy to press upon, such as their fear that history will repeat itself, their difficulties in integrating large post-colonial Russophone minorities, etc.

On top of that, Russia has made the West believe that it needs to stay in the escalation game. The lock-in mechanism (as in the dollar auction game) is founded on the belief that if the West ignores the Kremlin's threats towards the Baltic States, the outcome would be similar to Georgia and Ukraine. Russia would *de facto* occupy some regions. The question is whether this is indeed unavoidable.

What is more, when Russia prefers almost all scenarios that lie between stability and actual conflict, the choice of which is nearly fully under its control in the Baltic area, while for NATO all scenarios between a secure regional one and an actual conventional mobilisation are complicated. Additional deployments are costly and institutionally complicated – bringing a single brigade to Poland may cause a hot international debate, if not public disappointment, while it does not contribute much to the regional conventional balance. This would require an additional 18 brigades, which would then give Russia the moral upper hand and the ability to go for additional deployments, as NATO seems aggressive. While Russia has a maximum of three armies available in its Western Military District, it has a clear advantage in peacetime of the possible deployment of up to 20 additional brigades. Russia can also contribute from a bigger territorial depth, with a wider range of alternative of logistical lines, than NATO forces in the Baltic States and around Suwalki¹⁵.

¹⁴ Veebel, V. and Ploom, I. (2019). Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35:4, 406–422, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2019.1675947

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Costs of the Game: Russia's Weaknesses

Of course, Russia has its weaknesses. From a game theory perspective, the main problem for Russia is the size of the bid it placed on the table (as the Russian GDP is in the size of Spanish GDP). This bid far exceeds any normal proportions considering Russia's budgetary capabilities and the regional and economic importance of Kaliningrad. And this places Putin in a tricky position. As it were, he has placed a 20-dollar bid for a 10-dollar bill, and now must choose between the loss of the bid or staying in the game and entertaining hopes of winning. Yet the potential loss will grow as well, even when there is no threat of losing Kaliningrad but only assets spent to control the Baltic States. Here it obviously switches from symbolic value to real value. Yet, taking into account the moral and symbolic capital he has put in the game, staying in the game may still be a better option for staying in power than folding. With all probability, the latter would result in an unfriendly domestic reaction.

The above means that it is not only the West that has been locked in the game. It is also the Kremlin that lacks a suitable exit strategy that still saves its face. Nonetheless, Putin could possibly exit should the West offer him something that would compensate his loss in the eyes of major interest groups. This could have to do with his status or could be a strategic advantage conceded in another region. In these circumstances, one positive aspect is undoubtedly the near impossibility of either side of benefitting from a 3B conflict. Likewise, earlier practices between the adversaries has been rather cooperative. Hence, all it takes is to forget the bids already placed. For Russia, it is more complicated.

Drawing on the above considerations, the general strategic situation for Russia is not that complicated to model. It has limited resources and a limited willingness to go into a conflict. While the weakness of the West is in its agility and mobilisation in peace time, Russia's weakness is to be found in its economic survivability and willingness to go into an open conflict with NATO. The main risk is its inability to keep bidding in economic terms or deterring NATO from actual conflict situations and initiating Article 5 with all mobilisation capabilities and sanctions levered against Russia¹⁶.

¹⁶ Ploom, I., Sliwa, Z., and Veebel, V. (2020). The NATO "Defender 2020" exercise in the Baltic States: Will measured escalation lead to credible deterrence or provoke an escalation? *Comparative Strategy*, 39(4), 368–384. doi:10.1080/01495933.2020.1772626

Altogether, the Kremlin's greatest strength in securitising its nearby regions is also its greatest weakness. As alluded to above, alongside other similar layers of meaning, the Kremlin's rhetoric has placed its domestic prestige – and thereby the entire existence of its regime – under risk. And all this for a region that when rationally considered is of marginal importance. While NATO capturing the Kaliningrad region would otherwise seem absurd, the Kremlin's actions and rhetoric has made this possible for two reasons. First, through its threatening actions in creating precedence in Georgia and Ukraine by biting off regions. Second, through its rhetoric, which places all bids on Kaliningrad. This means that in some Western discussions¹⁷ and most probably in the military plans, there has appeared the idea of capturing of Kaliningrad in order to counter a Russian attack in the Baltic theatre¹⁸. Similarly, the ever more probable welcoming of Georgia among NATO partners seems to be the price the Kremlin has to pay for its over-eagerness. If that comes true, and other similar trends appear, Russia has managed to legitimise Western activities in its neighbouring countries. If Russia may grasp territories from its neighbours, so may NATO overstep previously tacitly assumed red lines.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Economic restrictions have forced Russia into a highly focused and concentrated security and defence policy where hesitation, morals and questionable efficiency have no space. On the other hand, the extreme concentration of political power, with the possibility for aggressive, agile and decisive solutions, offers numerous options to delegitimise NATO or even challenge the current international order and aim to replace it with one where Russia is one among the main privileged actors. To challenge NATO's economic and military superiority in the most painful way, Russia needs constant feedback about which models are the most effective and produce the greatest concerns and pain. In case it finds a region or a question that is important for NATO and affordable to

¹⁷ Lanoszka, A. and Hunzeker, M.A. (2016) Confronting the AntiAccess/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region, *The RUSI Journal*, 161:5

¹⁸ Zapfe, M. (2017). Deterrence from the Ground Up: Understanding NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, *Survival*, 59:3, 147-160

escalate for Russia, additional resources are allocated to cause as much pain and destruction as possible, with eventual aim to force NATO into a public willingness to accept Russia's demands. To understand and prevent Russian actions, it is necessary to understand their basis for rationality, and on a secondary level, to pre-test the impact of various actions when responding to analytical choices from the Russian side. Understanding Russia's motives will make it possible to avoid unwanted regional escalation scenarios which cause great costs and lead to Russia's internal instability and tensions.

It is of the utmost importance to realise that controlling or occupying the three Baltic States is not the Grand Prix of this game. Indeed, the solution is not to be found in the region, especially by the small Baltic nations. To counter Russia's Western District's three armies, the West should be able to set up at least eight NATO brigades. But this is very far from the reality, either presently or conceivably in the future. The solution is embedded in Russia's bosom: all the West needs to do is to eliminate Russia's will to gamble by raising the entrance threshold or the withdrawal price, or by showing it the hopelessness of getting what it wants.

Taking into account the relative decline in Russia's defence budget and the deterioration of its army equipment, the goal for the Baltic States should be to buy time at any price. For in five years, the balance is bound to be better for the latter. Moreover, the Baltic States should avoid bringing the nuclear dimension into the game, since Russia has also avoided that.

Of particular relevance would be lessening the value of Suwalki and the Baltic States as strategic prizes, especially by tying the fate of the latter to the existence of NATO. This remains the case even if it would turn out to be true. All in all, the rhetoric prioritising the region should be put aside. At the same time, all effort needs to go into enhancing local capabilities and cooperation for a regional scenario. The current rhetoric signals that NATO is afraid, tends to blame Russia, and is unable to replace loud rhetoric with tangible solutions.

A welcome strategy would be to convince Russia to pinpoint its resources in some other area, away from the Baltic region. An available solution would be strategizing Norwegian arctic ambitions. This means that NATO could try pull Russia into a A2/AD game at the Norway-Russia border. The obvious prize should be control of

the Arctic. Considering the fact that Norway is itself a producer of air defence systems and has gotten a hold of F35 aircraft, the idea looks logistically and financially much more feasible than balancing the Baltic situation. Indeed, it would be fooling Russia by poking it with the its own favourite model. At a point like the Norway-Russia border, Norway as an owner of technology and territory would have an advantage in setting up a regional armament rally. At the same time, Russia would be bound to resettle its limited resources into a completely new escalation area.

In this sense, one cannot but agree with Ben Hodges¹⁹ concerning the creation of the US military base in Poland. It would not make the regional situation better, nor would it have a beneficial impact in terms of a wider NATO-Russia game. But it would legitimise further mobilisation by Russia and thus raise tensions and the motivation for conflict in the region. Put bluntly, a single US brigade next to 17 Polish and 5 Baltic brigades would mainly have psychological meaning, while motivating Russia to raise its bid by bringing 3–4 new brigades into play. However, at the Norway-Russia border, this game could have different development trajectories, since bringing in additional forces is much more expensive, if not altogether impossible.

Thus, the case of Kaliningrad makes it clear that NATO's readiness to escalate and deploy in peacetime, even in terms of securitisation, is lower than Putin's willingness to show Kaliningrad as a symbolic and strategic victory, especially while additional deployments are available and affordable.

Hence, the West needs to understand what its strategic aims in the region are and behave accordingly. If it is securing the region without growing risks and costs, then additional deployments on a small scale with "concerned" rhetoric might not be the preferred model. If it is teasing Russia into a local arms-race that leads both sides to growing costs and escalation levels, resulting in a conflict or public surrendering, then yes.

It is important to understand that the West has a role in the game. Russia is trying to translate Western signals, and thus it has to choose which conflicts to select for escalation and how quickly and how far it

¹⁹ Hodges, B. (2018). Don't put US bases in Poland. *Politico.06.06. 2018. Available: <https://www.politico.eu/article/dont-put-us-bases-in-poland/>*

must escalate to gain what is needed (the delegitimisation of NATO and the securing of Russia's special role in the region) and to avoid what is not (a public conventional conflict with NATO).

Who is driving the conflict and escalation? Strangely, both Russian and Baltic military leadership are enjoying additional funds and importance as the region finally has strategic importance. However, the only endgame options will be an over-boiling and conflict or a public surrendering to the opponent.

Drawing on the above discussion, there are only two winning regional strategies for NATO in the 3B and Kaliningrad. First, to go to the last line of escalation and force Russia into an economic surrendering or an actual conflict, both of which will lead to the end of the Putin regime and other inevitable consequences. Second, ignore Russian escalation attempts around Kaliningrad, Suwalki and the Baltic States, and de-strategise the region with the assistance of a new escalation in some other area (Libya or the Arctic) where Russia can be lured into putting in all its effort and to forgetting the "unimportant and non-prospectus Baltic theatre".

It is important to make a choice and commit as early as possible, as any changes later will be very costly. So, if NATO is committed to going "all in", it should decisively deploy to the area without paying much attention to complaints from Moscow. The more unexpected and disproportionate the deployments are, the faster the game reaches its end. Convincing A2AD capabilities and more should be deployed.

If NATO is not aiming to go into a strategic confrontation with Russia in 3B and Kaliningrad, there is no point in deploying additional assets there or in paying any attention to Russia's rhetoric. On the contrary, the stakes should be made lower and lower while tensions on bids in other regions should grow, forcing Russia to think they have missed something. Russia should be convinced that real action and strategic gains are somewhere else: in the Arctic area or Libya and Syria.

NATO should prevent Russia at all costs from putting new bids on the table in the Baltic area, because this makes leaving the game ever more complicated. The regional conflict, which at a certain moment grew to a strategic confrontation, should be scaled back to the regional level, where risks and rationality are calculated based on the value of regional assets and not on a global confrontation.

Brittle Balance and the Illusion of Stability After the Nagorno-Karabakh War: Time to Abandon the Term “Frozen Conflicts”

Annamaria Kiss and András Rácz

By the time of writing,¹ the full-fledged warfare that started over Nagorno-Karabakh on 27 September 2020 appears to be coming to its end by a ceasefire signed on 10 November.² After inflicting serious losses on Armenian forces, the advancing Azerbaijani army has reached the city of Shusha/Shushi³ and stopped just outside of Khankendi/Stepanakert, the capital of the self-declared Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). This appears to be the first case where one of the so-called “frozen conflicts” of the post-Soviet region got close to being settled by military means in the interest of the original parental state of the territory in question. The developments, however, also highlight a more fundamental issue. The persistent notion of “frozen conflicts” creates an illusion of stability and provides a convenient cover for political impotence. The events in Karabakh demonstrate the dangers of such illusions. For at least a decade, analysts argued that the classification of this and other Eurasian conflicts as “frozen” is misleading but politically convenient.⁴ Semantics

¹ Background research for the present study has been conducted with the support of the research grant No. 129243., titled *Tradition and Flexibility in Russia's Security and Defense Policy*, provided by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary.

² The ceasefire agreement is available here: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>

³ The settlements located in and around Nagorno-Karabakh are mentioned here on their official Azerbaijani names first, while their Armenian names are mentioned for the sake of easier identification for non-expert readers.

⁴ Morar, F (2010): *Frozen Conflicts: Transcending Illusive Dilemmas*. Per Concordiam 1 (2): 10–17.

De Waal, T – von Twickel, N – Emerson, M (2020): *Beyond frozen conflict. Scenarios for the Separatist Disputes in Eastern Europe*. CEPS, Brussels
Rowman & Littlefield International, London

matter. Accurately classifying such conflicts can help bringing them from “the periphery of international interest”⁵ to more appropriate attention.

Hence, this paper argues that the recent war over Nagorno-Karabakh urgently reaffirms that perceptions of conflicts as “frozen” need to be adjusted. We proceed in four sections. Following this brief introduction, we first outline the definitional debates regarding the term “frozen conflicts” and the impact of semantics on political decision-making. Second, we show how Nagorno-Karabakh challenged the traditional understanding of, and validated the critiques of, this term. In the third section, we summarise the similarities and differences between this and other Eurasian protracted conflicts that are also widely understood to be “frozen”. In doing so, we seek to investigate in how far the lessons of Karabakh, and the resulting risks, might apply there as well. Fourth, we argue in conclusion that a scenario similar to the recent events in Karabakh is unlikely to evolve in other in Eurasian conflicts, because for the moment, key contributing factors are absent there. What Nagorno-Karabakh should nevertheless teach us for these other Eurasian conflicts is that they are far from settled – they require ongoing attention to allow for the timely identification of a failing equilibrium.

Semantics Matter

The problems that arise from understanding conflicts as “frozen” have been widely debated by analysts and academics for years.⁶ The reality of these problems has now caught up with policymakers across the international community who are faced with the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is therefore worthwhile to systematically outline what kind of decision-making traps such misperceptions lay. Ultimately, we find ourselves in a situation immortalised in the British political satire *Yes, Prime Minister!* in its four-stage strategy to dealing with international conflicts.

⁵ Klimenko, E (2018): Protracted Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space and their Impact on Black Sea Security, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, No 2018/8, December 2018.

⁶ Morar (2010): The myth of ‘frozen conflicts’

Broers, L. (2015). From “frozen conflict” to enduring rivalry: Reassessing the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. *Nationalities Papers*, 43(4), 556–576.

Pegg, S (2017): Twenty Years of De Facto State Studies: Progress, Problems, and Prospects. In: *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed.: Thompson, William. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

De Waal – von Twickel – Emerson (2020): Beyond frozen conflicts

The “frozen” adjective is understood as the absence of large-scale hostilities, with a mutually agreed ceasefire but no durable solution.⁷ Together with such common descriptions as “no war, no peace”, this leads to a false sense of stability.⁸ In other words, the first stage: “Nothing is going to happen”. With this understanding there is no political urgency. Notably, such assessments are also present in Russian academic discourse.⁹ However, even a “frozen conflict” remains a conflict. We can see this in the regular instances of skirmishes and other low-intensity warfare breaking out. Despite such episodes, the “frozen” notion leads to an indefinite postponement of any final resolution while consolidating the existing non-settlements.¹⁰ As other cases show, but particularly that of Nagorno-Karabakh, the timeframe is not explicitly indefinite but is rather framed as “waiting for the right time or better circumstances” in terms of defining when the “final status” of the territory in question will be possible.¹¹ The abovementioned intermittent hostilities are not expected to unravel the *status quo*. This is stage two: “Something is maybe going to happen, but we should do nothing about it”. This reinforces a vicious circle, creating a further sense of apparent stability. It is also politically convenient, but in reality, it means a failure to acknowledge that all solutions so far have failed and that the right circumstances are highly unlikely to emerge in a hypothetical future.

⁷ Bolshakov, A (2008): ‘Zamorozhenniye konflikti’ postsovetskogo prostranstva: tupiki mezhdunarodnogo mirotvorchestva. *Politia*, N° 1 (48) 2008.

⁸ Walker, E (1998): No peace, no war in the Caucasus: Secessionist conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Occasional Paper, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

De Waal, T-Matveeva, A (2007): Central Asia and the Caucasus: A Vulnerable Crescent. International Peace Academy, Coping with crisis Working Papers.

Caspersen, N (2008): From Kosovo to Karabakh: International Responses to De Facto States. *SÜDOSTEUROPA*, 56 (2008) 1.

⁹ Rastolytsev, S (2018): Tri mifa o ‘zamorozhennih konfliktah’ na postsovetskom prostranstve i Evrope: kriticheskiy analiz. *Mezhdunorodniye Otnosheniya* 2018-4. p. 82–94.

Devyatkov, A (2010): Zamorozhenniye konflikti kak predmet dialoga o evropeyskoy bezopasnosti. *Indeks Bezopasnosti* No 4 (95)

¹⁰ De Waal-von Twickel-Emerson (2020): Beyond frozen conflicts, p. 48

Morar (2010): The myth of “frozen conflicts”

¹¹ Postponed resolution or “postponed status”

International Crisis Group (2019): Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh. Europe Report N°255 | 20 December 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/255-digging-out-deadlock-nagorno-karabakh>

Markedonov, S (2010): Turbulentnaya Yevraaziya. *Mezhetnicheskiye, grazhdanskiye konflikti, ksenofobia v novih nezavisimih gosudarstvah postsovetskogo prostranstva*. Moskovskoye byuro po pravam cheloveka, Academia. http://pravorf.org/doc/Markedonov_2010.pdf

The full-fledged war in Karabakh, however, has upset the existing equilibrium. Two major factors contributed to this. One, Azerbaijan has not only clearly outgunned Armenia but was also willing to use its military advantage. Previous intermittent low-intensity violence was not a sign of the conflict being “frozen”, but rather a constant testing of the adversary with military means.¹² Two, Azerbaijan received unexpected outside political and military support from Turkey. Together, this suggests that Azerbaijan did not believe in the “frozen” notion, and neither did Turkey, having provided support for Azerbaijan’s actions. For the international community, which did believe it, this means stage three: “Something is happening, but there is nothing we can do”.

Core Similarities but Underlying Differences

Before moving onto the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is useful to put this conflict into the context of other “frozen” conflicts in the post-Soviet region. The literature on conflicts in Eurasia seems to treat the two separatist entities in Eastern Ukraine similarly to “frozen” conflicts. This is not the case with Crimea – first of all, the outcome is different. Russia has unilaterally defined the status of the entity similarly to the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008. However, the road taken in 2014 was one of incorporating Crimea into Russia and not simply one of recognition. Second, all other entities emerging from protracted conflicts in Eurasia are classified as *de facto* states. They are, in short, defined as state-like entities that seek widespread international recognition as a sovereign state.¹³ This is hardly what happened with Crimea in 2014. There was no self-declaration of independence, no agreed ceasefire and no resolution mechanisms in place. Also, its status was not in limbo. Some researchers distinguish between a “first generation” of conflicts – those that erupted with the dissolution of the Soviet Union (for example in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh) – and a “second generation” of conflicts, including Crimea and Donbas, which broke out long after the fall of the USSR.¹⁴

¹² Markedonov, S (2020): Armeniya-Azerbaydzhan: staryy konflikt i novaya eskalatsiya. Russian International Affairs Council. https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/armeniya-azerbaydzhan-staryy-konflikt-i-novaya-eskalatsiya/?sphrase_id=61043308

¹³ Pegg, S (1998): De facto states in the international system. Working Paper No. 21, Institute of International Relations, The University of British Columbia.

¹⁴ Kazantsev, A- Rutland, P- Medvedeva, S & Safranchuk, I (2020): Russia’s policy in the “frozen conflicts” of the post-Soviet space: from ethno-politics to geopolitics, *Caucasus Survey*, 8:2, 142–162,

Ethnic Dimension

Protracted conflicts in the post-Soviet region share some commonalities, but in many aspects, they are different from each other. The presence or absence of ethnic animosity is one key distinction. There is a strong ethnic component in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. Ethnicity is also the primary defining factor in Nagorno-Karabakh. Although after the collapse of the Soviet Union Crimea also had the potential to pose a serious ethno-regional challenge to the Ukrainian state due to its secessionist aspirations, it was temporarily accommodated by constitutional means.¹⁵ Crimea constitutes a special case: in addition to the above-mentioned reasons, the events unfolded at such speed that existing ethnic differences had no time or potential to unfold. Following these events, the Crimean Tatars, the sole ethnic group on the peninsula that could have posed any serious danger, have been suppressed with an iron fist.¹⁶ This ranged from disappearances, show trials, imprisonment, and closing down practically all Crimean Tatar media channels, to banning the parliament, the *Mejlis*, by accusing it of extremism.

Meanwhile, the conflict in Transnistria has no ethnic character. According to data from the 2015 census held by the separatist authorities, 29.1% of Transnistria's population declared themselves to be Russian, 28.5 % Moldovan and 22.9% Ukrainian.¹⁷ The separatist entity is indeed multi-ethnic, and so is Moldova itself. According to the 2014 census, 73.7% of the population defined themselves as Moldovans, 8.4% as Ukrainians, 6.9% as Romanians, 6% as Russians and 4.5% as Gagauzians.¹⁸ That data illustrates that the separatist conflict that

¹⁵ Hughes, S, Sasse, G (2001): Comparing Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Transition States, *Regional & Federal Studies*, 11:3, 1–35

¹⁶ Gorbunova, Y (2020): Russian Repression a Persistent Reality in Crimea. Another Unjust Verdict Against Crimean Tatars, Human Rights Watch, September 22, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/22/russian-repression-persistent-reality-crimea>

RFE/RL (2020): Abductions, Torture, 'Hybrid Deportation': Crimean Tatar Activist Describes Six Years Under Russian Rule, March 17, 2020: <https://www.rferl.org/a/abductions-torture-hybrid-deportation-crimean-tatar-activist-describes-six-years-under-russian-rule/30493504.html>

¹⁷ IA Novosti Pridnestrovya (2017): V Pridnestrovye prozhivayet okolo 80 bolshih i malih etnicheskikh obshnostey. March 1, 2017. <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/17-03-01-v-pridnestrove-prozhivaet-okolo-80-bolshih-i-malyh-etnicheskikh>

¹⁸ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova: 2014 Census. <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?!=ro&idc=479>

culminated in a war in 1992 – and has remained unresolved since then – did not result in the displacement or cleansing of any ethnic groups. The situation in the Donbas region is similar in the sense that ethnicity is not the defining element of the conflict. Rather, it is cultural (language and religious identification).¹⁹ Conducting research within the separatist entities of the so-called “Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics” (in Donbas) is difficult due to access issues. However, analysts do have some comparable data on ethnic composition.²⁰ Based on a survey conducted by ZOIS in 2019 about the ethnic identity of the Donbas population, 4.5% defined themselves as ethnic Ukrainians, 12.2% as ethnic Russians, 21% as mixed ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, and 17.9 % as Donbas residents, while several smaller fractions described their identities based on citizenship or native language.²¹ However, the survey also pointed out that there is no clear connection between Russian identity and a separatist attitude.

Conflict Intensity

Intensity constitutes another difference. Since the ceasefire in 1992, the conflict in Transnistria never had any serious escalation potential or military solution in sight, due to the unwillingness of the parties involved and their lack of required capabilities. Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been much more turbulent throughout the years. Both regions witnessed several minor flare-ups, as well as a full-scale escalation during the so-called “Five-Days War” in 2008. Since then, the potential of any armed solution has been reduced practically to zero due to mutual defence agreements Russia signed with both entities. Hard borders were created between Georgia and the breakaway republics – curiously, initially without physical barriers. Since then, analysts have witnessed what is known as “borderisation”: the ongoing construction of a physical border along the “administrative boundary line” (ABL),

¹⁹ Ivanov, O. (2016): Social Background of the Military Conflict in Ukraine: Regional cleavages and geopolitical orientations. *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal*, 2(1), 52–73.

²⁰ Centre for East European and International Studies: <https://www.zois-berlin.de/>

²¹ Sasse, G, Lackner, A (2019): Attitudes and identities across the Donbas front line: What has changed from 2016 to 2019? No. 3/2019 ZOIS Report. https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOIS_Reports/ZOIS_Report_3_2019.pdf p.9.

involving the use of military force to gain territory, but predominantly in a non-violent manner.²²

The possibility of the Crimean conflict being resolved by military means is unlikely. Russia not only annexed the territory, but also heavily militarised it.²³ This means that any armed attack on Crimea would mean a full-scale war with Russia, the costs of which Ukraine is likely unwilling to bear. The other end on the scale of intensity is constituted by the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Donbas. The “line of contact” (LOC) along Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan has never been uneventful. Most recently, the daily skirmishes escalated into a four-day war in 2016. Another significant flare-up happened in July 2020, most probably in direct relation to the events that unfolded on September 27, 2020. Meanwhile, the war in Donbas since 2014 has also never fully come to a stalemate. Analysts refer to this type of fighting as a “limited war”, meaning that none of the belligerents fight with their full capacity and the conflict does not expand in space, however, the military confrontation is ongoing.²⁴

Legal Status

Separatist entities also differ in their acquired legal status. Analysts use “unrecognised”,²⁵ “partially-recognised”²⁶ and other adjectives when referring to a lack of sovereignty. Crimea is mostly being referred to as unrecognised, as it was annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014,

²² Toal, G (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) & Merabishvili, G (2019): Borderization theatre: geopolitical entrepreneurship on the South Ossetia boundary line, 2008–2018, *Caucasus Survey*, 7:2, 110–133.

²³ Klymenko, A (2015): The Militarization of Crimea under Russian Occupation. Atlantic Council. Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/The_Militarization_of_Crimea_under_Russian_Occupation.pdf

²⁴ Lawrence Freedman (2014) Ukraine and the Art of Limited War, *Survival*, 56:6, 7-38.

²⁵ King, C (2001): The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia’s Unrecognized States. *World Politics*, Volume 53, Issue 4 July 2001, pp. 524–552.

Cooley, A – Mitchell, LA (2010): Engagement without Recognition: A New Strategy toward Abkhazia and Eurasia’s Unrecognized States, *The Washington Quarterly*, 33:4, 59–73.

²⁶ Minakov, M (2019): Post-Soviet Eastern Europe. Achievements in post-Soviet development in six Eastern European nations, 1991–2020. *Ideology and Politics*, No. 3 (14) 2019, 171–193. <https://www.ideopol.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ENG.-2019-3.-10.-Minakov-fin-.pdf>

Beacháin, D (2015): Elections without recognition: presidential and parliamentary contests in Abkhazia and Nagorny Karabakh, *Caucasus Survey*, 3:3, 239–257.

although no other UN member states have recognised this move. The territory has been administered by Moscow since then. Abkhazia and South Ossetia both have a status of limited recognition. Their secession from Georgia has been recognised by the Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Venezuela and a handful of other countries, but far from the majority of UN member states. Meanwhile, neither the independence of the so-called Transnistrian Moldovan Republic nor Nagorno-Karabakh have been recognised by any international actors. Not even those countries which *de facto* maintain the separatisms in Transnistria and Karabakh – Russia and Armenia, respectively – have recognised these entities as sovereign. While these separatist entities mutually recognise each other, this is more of an interesting particularity of their quasi-statehood than a factor of any real international relevance.

De facto jurisdiction over these territories constitutes an additional difference. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and the two separatist entities in Eastern Ukraine are all state-like formations and do have all the necessary attributes of statehood except for recognition.²⁷ This includes functioning legal systems and institutions. As these territories are *de facto* not under the jurisdiction of any UN member state, they constitute legal “black holes”.²⁸ However, Crimea diverges once more in this regard as it has been under the *de facto* jurisdiction of the Russian Federation since 2014.

The Role of Russia

Russia has played a dominant role in creating and maintaining these unresolved conflicts, with the partial exception of the one in Nagorno-Karabakh. Crimea has been incorporated into Russia. The Donbas

²⁷ Iskandaryan, A: In quest of the state in unrecognised states p 17–34 and also Markedonov, S : De facto statehood in Eurasia: a political and security phenomenon p. 35–54. Both in: Broers, L – Iskandaryan, A – Minasyan, S eds (2015): The unrecognised politics of de facto states in the post-Soviet space. Caucasus Institute (Yerevan) and International Association for the Study of the Caucasus.

²⁸ Popescu, N, Bielawski, M (2007): Human rights and frozen conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood, Briefing Paper, European Parliament Policy Department External Policies. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/Join/2007/385538/EXPOJOIN_ET\(2007\)385538_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/Join/2007/385538/EXPOJOIN_ET(2007)385538_EN.pdf),

separatist movement has been ignited, maintained and supported by Russia through political, economic, military and other means. Moscow officially keeps denying the presence of regular Russian troops in the region based on the principle of “plausible deniability”.²⁹ The conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria have all been actively facilitated by the Russian Federation, where Russia’s involvement has played a decisive role in maintaining the separatism of these regions ever since. Russia has been an integral part of every existing conflict-settlement mechanism. Without constant Russian economic and political support, neither Transnistria, nor Abkhazia, nor South Ossetia nor Donbas separatists could have prevailed. There are Russian troops stationed in all of these conflict regions, with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh (so far).³⁰ This is not to say that there is no more to these conflicts than a regional aspect and their relationship with the “patron state”. It has been noted by scholars studying these *de facto* states that their relationship with the “patron state” is far from being one-sided, but rather it creates tensions between the unavoidable external support and internal sovereignty.³¹ In addition to that, we should also concentrate on internal developments, not only international and regional ones.³²

International Presence on the Ground

These conflicts also differ in the presence of international organisations on the disputed territories. Transnistria is the most internationalised of them all. This internationalisation includes the UN and its agencies, the OSCE, the European Union, as well as a number of international NGOs actively working in Moldova, including access to the separatist region. Breakaway regions of Eastern Ukraine can largely be accessed by the OSCE monitors, as well as by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), while the UN Refugee Agency is monitoring checkpoints

²⁹ Kragh, M, Asberg, S (2017): ‘Russia’s strategy for influence through diplomacy and active measures: the Swedish case’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40: 6, 2017.

³⁰ The November 10 ceasefire involves the deployment of Russian peacekeepers along the line of contact.

³¹ Caspersen, N (2009): *Playing the Recognition Game: External Actors and De Facto States*, *The International Spectator*, 44:4, 47–60.

³² Arbatova, N (2010): *FROZEN CONFLICTS AND EUROPEAN SECURITY*, *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security*, 16:3, 51–59.

and contributing to the management of refugees and IDPs residing on the territories controlled by Ukraine.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are much less open, as the presence of the OSCE in Georgia ended in 2009. The EU maintains a monitoring mission, but it does not have access to the separatist regions, and neither do UN personnel. Only the International Red Cross and a few other NGOs have access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia – albeit the latter is much harder to enter. Crimea is not open to an international presence. A Council of Europe human rights mission that managed to access Crimea in early 2016 was the last international presence on the ground.³³

Probably the least internationalised of all post-Soviet “frozen conflicts” has been Nagorno-Karabakh. The UN had not been involved in conflict settlement in the region since 1993. Although the OSCE Minsk Group has been responsible for conflict resolution, over the past 20 years it has lost its ability to substantially influence the conflict settlement and can only lag behind political developments.³⁴ Although once there were six unarmed OSCE observers on the ground to monitor the situation, this did not translate into a long-term presence on the ground.³⁵ Additionally, there have been no peacekeepers from the EU or Russia. Suggestions by Russian peacekeepers kept re-emerging but were opposed by both sides of the conflict, at least until the recent ceasefire agreement. The only international NGOs that had a long-term presence on the ground was the Halo Trust, responsible for demining, and the ICRC, which has been engaged in managing prisoner exchanges and information exchange about the fates of disappeared or missing persons.

³³ Council of Europe(2016): Council of Europe human rights mission starts in Crimea today. Secretary General Jagland sends Swiss diplomat Gérard Stoudmann to lead delegation. January 25, 2016

https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/news-2016/-/asset_publisher/StEVosr24HJ2/content/council-of-europe-human-rights-mission-starts-in-crimea-today?

³⁴ De Waal, T (2016): Prisoners of the Caucasus. Resolving the Karabakh Security Dilemma. Carnegie Europe Center. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/06/16/prisoners-of-caucasus-resolving-karabakh-security-dilemma-pub-63825>

³⁵ Ibid.

How the War in Nagorno-Karabakh has Changed the Picture of “Frozen” Conflicts

There are several components of why the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes a special case among post-Soviet protracted conflicts. First, as already stated above, the recent war demonstrated that it is indeed possible to rapidly escalate the conflict by military means if one of the sides does not only outgun the other but is also willing to use its military superiority once it considers the circumstances to be favourable. Second, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, international circumstances must have been perceived as ideal for Baku for it to change the status quo by starting a (presumably short) war. The presidential election campaign kept the United States occupied, while Russia has been busy coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic protests in the far east of the country, and the crisis in Belarus all at once. The attention of the European Union has also been diverted by the Brexit negotiations and by the long process of elaborating its new seven-year budget. Hence, the Azerbaijani leadership could assume that it could create a *fait accompli* by the time the international community is able to (or is willing to) react substantially. The key factor, however, is the active military and diplomatic involvement of Turkey on the side of Azerbaijan. This has proven to be decisive and changed the equilibrium of the conflict from a low-intensity conflict to a full-fledged war. Ankara contributed to Baku’s war efforts by delivering state-of-the-art unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, including Bayraktar TB-2 attack drones, which had already performed spectacularly against Russian-made air defence systems in Syria and Libya.³⁶ According to news reports, control over these UAV assets was exercised by Turkish specialists during the war, meaning that Ankara not only supported, but directly contributed to Baku’s military successes.³⁷ Turkish intelligence services have also been reportedly involved in supporting Azerbaijan with information, while Turkish military advisors contributed to the training of Azerbaijani forces. Turkish F-16 fighter jets were stationed in Azerbaijan during the conflict and contributed to securing Azerbaijan’s

³⁶ Defence World (2020): Some 23 Russian Pantsir Air Defense Systems Destroyed in Syria, Libya: Reports. https://www.defenseworld.net/news/27161/Some_23_Russian_Pantsir_Air_Defense_Systems_Destroyed_in_Syria__Libya__Reports#.X6mdq2hKi70

³⁷ Chernenko, E (2020): Prinuzhdeniye k konfliktu. Kommersant, October 16, 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4537733>

air space.³⁸ The presence of Turkish soldiers on Azerbaijani soil has also been admitted to by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev himself.³⁹ In addition to these factors, Turkey has deployed thousands of mercenaries to Azerbaijan from Syria to fight against Armenian forces.⁴⁰

Turkey's involvement altered not only the military balance, but also the political context. During the previous major flare-up of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in April 2016, concerted international pressure from all major regional powers, including Turkey, played a key role in making Azerbaijan stop the fighting after four days. However, in the autumn of 2020, Turkey wholeheartedly supported Azerbaijan's political and military efforts. Meanwhile, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs were unsuccessful in making Azerbaijan end its offensive operations, nor could they make Ankara terminate its support for Baku. In other words, the equilibrium was changed by the involvement of a strong and determined third party and by the inability of the existing settlement mechanism to counterbalance the power of this new player.

Another novelty of the present war has been the inability of Russia to dominate the negotiation process, unlike in the case of all other conflicts in Eurasia. This lends credence to what has been often repeated by experts: contrary to popular belief, Russia is not pulling all the strings.⁴¹ Russia has been in a delicate position from the onset of this rivalry, as Armenia is a *strategic ally* and is a member of both the Eurasian Economic Union and of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). The devil is in the detail: the collective defence guarantee of the latter does not apply to Nagorno-Karabakh but only to Armenia proper. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is far from being Moscow's enemy.⁴² On the contrary, it is a *strategic partner*. Baku has long been a major buyer of modern Russian arms, an important partner in preserving stability in the North Caucasus, and a key ally in Russia's politics towards Iran and the Caspian region. The presence

³⁸ Trend News Agency (2020): If Azerbaijan is attacked from outside, F-16s will be used, President Aliyev says. October 27, 2020. <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3324236.html>

³⁹ Panarmenian.net (2020): Erdogan admits military presence in Azerbaijan. November 9, 2020. <https://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/287541/>

⁴⁰ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (2020): Nagorno-Karabakh battles | Fatalities among Turkish-backed Syrian mercenaries jump to 250, and more bodies arrive in Syria. November 6, 2020. <https://www.syriaohr.com/en/191389/>

⁴¹ De Waal, von Twickel, Emerson (2020): Beyond frozen conflicts

⁴² Baunov (2020): Why Russia Is Biding Its Time on Nagorno-Karabakh. Carnegie Moscow Center. September 10, 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/82933>

of sizeable Azerbaijani and Armenian immigrant communities within the Russian Federation further complicates Moscow's position.

The fact that – unlike all other post-Soviet protracted conflicts – there were no Russian troops stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh turned out to be decisive from the very start of the most recent war in two ways. First, it enabled Azerbaijan to use military force against the separatists without endangering Russian military personnel. Second, it considerably weakened Russia's position on the ground, because it made it impossible for Moscow to provide immediate overt or covert support to the Karabakhi side, even if the Kremlin would have been inclined to do so. Though Russia was able to facilitate a ceasefire agreement as early as October 10, it has never been observed.⁴³

However, the November 10 ceasefire involves the deployment of Russian peacekeepers along the line of contact, thus it *de facto* cements the territorial gains Azerbaijan has achieved since September 27. Besides, according to the agreement, Armenia needs to cede these territories to the seven regions adjacent to Karabakh. What is left of Karabakh under Armenian control will be connected to Armenia only via the Lachin corridor, which will be secured by Russian peacekeepers. Hence, the agreement empowered Russia with a lasting military presence on the ground, and thus important leverage over both Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, even if this new effort turns out to be successful, this does not change the fact that Russia has not been able to resolve the conflict alone but has had to coordinate and cooperate with its problematic partner, Turkey.

Conclusions

Recent developments in Nagorno-Karabakh have demonstrated that it is possible not only to rapidly escalate a Eurasian conflict by military means if sufficient political and military capabilities are in place, but also for a “parent state” to change the status quo to its favour substantially.

However, when it comes to Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh probably constitutes a unique case that is hardly applicable to other post-Soviet

⁴³ Statement by the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. October 10, 2020. https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4377004

de facto states. The main reason for this is that everywhere else there are Russian troops stationed in the contested territories, guaranteeing that any attack from the side of a “parental state” would immediately involve Russia, similarly to what happened to Georgia in August 2008. From the November 10 ceasefire onwards, this will also be the case in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nevertheless, one needs to conclude that as of 2020 the term “frozen conflict” is even less accurate than it was in the 1990s and early 2000s. Some of these conflicts are *de facto* not peaceful since there are both ongoing wars (in Donbas) and periodic tensions (in Abkhazia and South-Ossetia). Moreover, the case of Nagorno-Karabakh had demonstrated that an earlier equilibrium can indeed be altered by military power, and thus the illusion of stability gets dispelled by force. Instead, the collective term “protracted conflict” is probably more applicable, because it reflects durability, the potential re-activation of armed hostilities, as well as the strongly varying levels of conflict intensity.

Finally, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes an example that arises after 2014, which was when the *status quo* and the strategic situation in Europe’s Eastern neighbourhood was changed by military means, even if internationally recognised borders might not get changed in this case. By decisively contributing to the changing dynamic of the enduring Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry,⁴⁴ Turkey managed to expand its regional influence into the post-Soviet regional security space, and by that challenge Russia’s earlier dominant position.

The fast-paced changes on the ground, the imminent threat of a humanitarian catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the absence of the international community all convey a renewed urgency to erase the term “frozen conflict” from the vocabulary of the current political discourse. That might help the international community to avoid finding itself once more in the infamous fourth stage set out by Yes, *Prime Minister!*: “Maybe there is something we could have done, but it’s too late now”.

⁴⁴ Broers, L (2014): From “frozen conflict” to enduring rivalry: reassessing the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. *Nationalities Papers* Volume 43, Issue 4/July 2015, pp. 556–576.

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READINESS,
RESPONSIVENESS,
REINFORCEMENT

The Importance of National Resilience in Deterrence

Elisabeth Braw

With greyzone aggression toward liberal democracies increasing, it is no longer enough for such countries to rely on their armed forces and related government agencies for their defence. On the contrary, all parts of society can and must now play a part in keeping countries safe. Indeed, societal resilience can play a vital role in deterring modern threats. Without societal resilience, military excellence is useless.

This autumn, RUSI's Modern Deterrence project – then led by this author – hosted not just one but two events featuring Latvia's new national security curriculum. The attention given to Latvia was well-deserved: Latvia is one of a small number of countries that give serious attention to societal resilience. In 2018, the country's government announced its Comprehensive Defence approach, a whole-of-society strategy that includes military capabilities, public-private cooperation, the education of society, civil defence, strategic communications, economic resilience and psychological resilience.¹

One part of the Comprehensive Defence approach is a national security curriculum, which started being rolled out at Latvian secondary schools in the 2018–2019 academic year; by 2025, all schools will be teaching the curriculum to their 10th and 11th-grade pupils. Crucially, ethnic Russian students will also study the curriculum. Pupils are taught a range of theoretical and practical skills, including:

- situational awareness (the ability to act appropriately in critical situations);
- understanding the role of citizens in the defence of Latvia, including different threats against the country and the defence of it;

¹ Ministry of Defence of Latvia, *Comprehensive Defence*, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/nozares-politika/comprehensive-defence>

- basic military and defence skills (including physical training, military discipline and communications);
- civic engagement, leadership and teamwork.²

Latvia's Comprehensive Defence comprises not just the armed forces and wider government capabilities, but civil society resilience as well. This article will discuss the importance of such societal resilience in liberal democracies' deterrence posture.

The aim of deterrence, as Peter Roberts and Andrew Hardie note, is "to prevent certain actions by another actor – whether a leader, state, group or other body – from occurring. Deterrence can be considered as an act, or as a state, posture or structure".³ Dr Strangelove explains the concept in perhaps more accessible terms in the eponymous film by Stanley Kubrick: "Deterrence is the art of producing in the mind of the enemy the fear to attack". Throughout the centuries, deterrence has featured armed forces in different formations, culminating with Cold War armed forces' nuclear-equipped forces. Today, nuclear deterrence remains the best-known form of deterrence, and in many ways, it is the most trusted. All NATO member states commit to – and benefit from – the nuclear umbrella extended by the United States to the alliance's member states.

Nuclear arsenals, however, can do virtually nothing to deter non-kinetic forms of aggression such as cyber attacks. A nuclear strike would be a vastly disproportionate response to even an enormously devastating cyber attack. In 2017, a virus, subsequently identified under the name NotPetya, attacked Ukraine, bringing down, among other things, four hospitals, six power companies, two airports, more than twenty banks, card payment systems for retailers and transport, and nearly every government agency.⁴ NotPetya also struck A.P. Møller Maersk, the world's largest container-shipping company. Maersk, whose entire IT network was destroyed by the virus, could barely operate for several days; all told, NotPetya caused

² Elisabeth Braw, *From Schools to Total Defence Exercises: Best Practices in Greyzone Deterrence*, RUSI Newsbrief, 15 November 2019, <https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-newsbrief/schools-total-defence-exercises-best-practices-greyzone-deterrence>

³ Peter Roberts and Andrew Hardie, *The Validity of Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century*, RUSI Occasional Papers, 12 August.

⁴ Andy Greenberg, *The Untold Story of NotPetya, the Most Devastating Cyberattack in History*, *Wired*, 22 August 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/notpetya-cyberattack-ukraine-russia-code-crashed-the-world/>

the company losses of up to \$300 million.⁵ The US pharmaceutical giant Merck, too, was hit by NotPetya. The damage left it unable to fulfil orders for Gardasil 9, the leading vaccine against the human papillomavirus (HPV). It “had to borrow 1.8 million doses—the entire U.S. emergency supply—from the Pediatric National Stockpile”.⁶ In total, NotPetya caused Merck damage worth \$870 million. FedEx’s European subsidiary TNT Express was hit, too, as were the snack giant Mondelez, the French construction company Saint-Gobain and other multinationals. In total, NotPetya caused some \$10 billion worth of damage and losses.

If a country’s armed forces had bombed various countries’ companies, the necessary response would be clear: an armed counterattack. Without a clear posture signalling willingness to punish armed attacks, a country would *de facto* invite attacks. For that reason, any country’s armed forces are trained to punish an adversary, and this is communicated to the country’s adversaries. It is hardly surprising that NATO member states have not been attacked by a hostile state since the alliance’s foundation: its ability and willingness to strike back if attacked – that is, deterrence by punishment – has instilled in its adversaries, to use Dr Strangelove’s word, the fear to attack.

But as NotPetya demonstrated, adversaries can wreak havoc on other countries without a single soldier crossing a border or firing a shot. NotPetya is not just the world’s largest container-shipping company and a vital part of the globalised economy, where 80% of trade travels by sea, it is also Denmark’s largest company, occupying place 294 on Fortune’s 2019 list of the world’s 500 largest companies.⁷ An attack on Maersk is an attack on Denmark. How to respond to NotPetya was, however, far from clear. In 2019, Israel became the first democratic country to respond to a cyber attack with kinetic means; it carried out an air strike against a Hamas building in Gaza where the

⁵ Danny Palmer, Ransomware: The key lesson Maersk learned from battling the NotPetya attack, *ZDNet*, 29 April 2019, <https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-the-key-lesson-maersk-learned-from-battling-the-notpetya-attack/>

⁶ David Voreacos, Katherine Chiglinsky, Riley Griffin, Merck Cyberattack’s \$1.3 Billion Question: Was It an Act of War?, *Bloomberg*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-12-03/merck-cyberattack-s-1-3-billion-question-was-it-an-act-of-war>

⁷ <https://fortune.com/global500/2019/visualizations/>

Israeli Defence Forces claimed Hamas cyber operatives were based.⁸ NATO member states and other liberal democracies such as Sweden, Finland, Japan, South Korea and Australia have, meanwhile, refrained from kinetic responses to cyber attacks.

The logic behind this is twofold. Firstly, a kinetic response to a cyber attack is considered disproportionate. Even if the governments of liberal democracies wanted to pursue such a strategy, they would struggle to defend the decision to their voters. Secondly, a kinetic response to a non-kinetic attack carries a severe risk of escalation that may not be possible to contain. If Denmark had wanted to avenge the attack on Maersk – which was eventually traced to the Russian government⁹ – with, say, an air strike against a Russian factory, it would have risked a Russian kinetic response in return. Denmark would, of course, have been backed up by NATO, but nevertheless a kinetic strike would have presented an unacceptable risk of escalation.

In addition, non-kinetic aggression such as cyber attacks is often perpetrated by proxies, individuals or groups acting on behalf of governments. The US government has, for example, repeatedly indicted freelance hackers from Russia, China and other countries over cyber attacks conducted on behalf of the Russian or Chinese government.¹⁰ Proxies, in fact, pose a particular challenge in the deterrence of greyzone and hybrid aggression, as traditional deterrents – that is, armed forces and ultimately nuclear weapons – do not deter individuals for the simple reason that no country would punish an individual hacker by militarily attacking another country.

There are deterrent strategies liberal democracies can pursue. Together with Gary Brown of the National Defense University in Washington, the author has, for example, proposed an approach we call “personalised deterrence”. This strategy, which would signal to individual perpetrators that they will personally be punished for their

⁸ Catalin Cimpanu, In a first, Israel responds to Hamas hackers with an air strike, *Zero Day*, 5 May 2019, <https://www.zdnet.com/article/in-a-first-israel-responds-to-hamas-hackers-with-an-air-strike/>

⁹ *UK Government*, Russian military ‘almost certainly’ responsible for destructive 2017 cyber attack, 14 February 2018 <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/news/russian-military-almost-certainly-responsible-destructive-2017-cyber-attack>

¹⁰ See, for example, Kate Fazzini and Kevin Breuninger, Justice Department charges Chinese nationals in ‘extensive’ global hacking campaign, *CNBC*, 20 December 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/20/doj-china-national-security-law-enforcement-action.html>

acts of aggression, builds on the US government's Defend Forward strategy, which seeks to take the action to the perpetrators' side.¹¹ It also builds on the US strategy of charging individual perpetrators with crimes. Brown and I argue that criminal law should be used much more widely to hold perpetrators to account. While they will clearly not be extradited by the governments on whose behalf they have committed cyber aggression, the prospect of related punishments – such as a visa ban and bans on owning property and having banks accounts in the targeted country and allied countries – would form a powerful deterrent.¹²

The author has also proposed “second-strike communications”, advising that countries targeted by disinformation campaigns should retaliate by releasing publicly accessible, uncomfortable facts about leaders in the aggressor country. Such information could, for example, include property ownerships by such officials in the targeted country.¹³ Indeed, liberal democracies can, and should, respond to a range of greyzone attacks through asymmetry, which would give them time and manoeuvring space to respond. The uncertainty created on the attacker's side about the manner and timing in which the targeted country will respond strengthens the targeted country's deterrence.¹⁴

But such options for deterrence by punishment cannot work alone. To deter greyzone threats, targeted countries also need deterrence by resilience. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made this point at Globsec in Bratislava in October, signalling a significant NATO shift towards resilience. “Having a strong military is fundamental to our security. But our military cannot be strong if our societies are weak. So

¹¹ Terri Moon Cronk, DOD's Cyber Strategy of Past Year Outlined Before Congress, *DOD News*, 6 March 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2103843/dods-cyber-strategy-of-past-year-outlined-before-congress/#:~:text=The%202018%20Defense%20Department%20cyber,official%20said%20on%20Capitol%20Hill>.

¹² Elisabeth Braw and Gary Brown, Personalised Deterrence of Cyber Aggression, *RUSI Journal*, Issue 2, 2020, Pages 48-54, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2020.1740493>. See also Elisabeth Braw, What ‘The Godfather’ teaches us about fighting cyber attacks, *Financial Times*, 23 April 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/5e167af8-65bd-11e9-b809-6f0d2f5705f6>

¹³ Elisabeth Braw, *Second Strike Communications*, RUSI Newsbrief, 17 May 2019, <https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-newsbrief/second-strike-communications>

¹⁴ Elisabeth Braw, The West Is Surprisingly Well-Equipped for Gray-Zone Deterrence, *Defense One*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/10/west-surprisingly-well-equipped-gray-zone-deterrence/169612/>

our first line of defence must be strong societies,” Stoltenberg said.¹⁵ That makes Latvia’s Comprehensive Defence approach so important. In addition to the pioneering national security curriculum – the first of its kind among NATO member states – the Comprehensive Approach includes, among other components, planning and war-gaming with private companies. Given that modern liberal democracies have small governments with little government ownership of critical national infrastructure, such cooperation is vital.

Sweden, which is currently in the process of reinstating its highly effective Cold War Total Defence system and adapting it to current threats, is setting similar priorities. In its new defence proposition, presented in October 2020, the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition government plans a 40% increase in annual defence spending by 2025. Active-duty personnel will increase by 40%. The army will double in size, the navy will receive more vessels, and the air force will be given better weapons systems.¹⁶ Sweden’s highly selective military¹⁷ service will, in turn, expand from 4,000 to 8,000 young men and women each year. With some 100,000 Swedes born in 2003¹⁸ and thus eligible for the draft next year, military service will remain highly selective.

Equally important, however, is the Swedish government’s new investment in civil defence. As part of its October defence proposition, the government announced that it will double funding for civil defence.¹⁹ “This investment encompasses the whole of society and is focused at strengthening resilience in areas like healthcare, food, transportation and cyber security,” Interior Minister Mikael Damberg

¹⁵ NATO, *Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Global Security 2020 (GLOBSEC) Bratislava Forum*, 7 October 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_178605.htm

¹⁶ *Sveriges Radio*, Förstärkt försvar möter kritik, 15 October 2020, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7576040>

¹⁷ Elisabeth Braw, *Competitive National Service: How the Scandinavian Model Can Be Adapted by the UK*, RUSI Occasional Papers, 23 October 2019, <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/competitive-national-service-how-scandinavian-model-can-be-adapted-uk>

¹⁸ *Statistics Sweden*, Births in the year 2003, https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101H/FoddaK/table/tableViewLayout1/

¹⁹ Justitiedepartementet, *Civilt försvar berör hela samhället*, Faktablad, 20 October 2020, <https://www.regeringen.se/4a9235/contentassets/f13d8c61c7c847daa7caaf721a56d9b6/civilt-forsvar-beror-hela-samhallet.pdf>

explained in an announcement.²⁰ Indeed, without functioning healthcare, food provisions, transportation and cyber security, a country can quickly be brought to its knees, and such harm can be inflicted without a single soldier crossing the border. Without societal resilience, military excellence is of no use.

During the Cold War, Sweden's Total Defence formed extraordinarily thorough and well-organised deterrence by resilience. Operating on the principle that everybody has a role to play in keeping the country safe, successive Swedish governments built Total Defence into a system that included all parts of society – the armed forces and the government, of course, but also the private sector and civilian volunteers – with a sophisticated command-and-control structure. Total Defence's resilience component would have slowed down an adversary's invasion of the country and kept essential services operating even during a war.

The Cold War never saw an armed invasion of Sweden, but Total Defence was nonetheless vital. Through it, Sweden signalled to its adversaries – the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact partners – that while they may be able to invade Sweden and cause considerable harm, the Swedish armed forces were not alone and would be backed up by the rest of society. That meant any Soviet advance would be both slow and complicated. It is, of course, impossible to say whether the Soviet Union would have invaded Sweden had the country not had Total Defence, but the point is: resilience is not just a tool during conflict situations, but a deterrent in its own right. That is even more the case in an era of greyzone aggression, to which there may be no suitable deterrence by punishment. A credible deterrence posture includes deterrence by resilience.

It is thus a wise decision by the Swedish government to double spending on civil defence and a wise decision by the Latvian government to pursue a Comprehensive Defence model. Other countries, too, are beginning to take resilience more seriously. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has made governments realise the need for the public to be prepared and trained for crises. Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, and Norway all feature at least some aspect of resilience, while Finland has an expansive system that it has maintained

²⁰ Justitiedepartementet, Långsiktiga satsningar på det civila försvaret, 14 October 2020, <https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2020/10/langsiktiga-satsningar-pa-det-civila-forsvaret/>

since the Cold War. Even Germany has joined the trend, with Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer earlier this year launching a new initiative called Your Year for Germany, where a small number of young Germans will spend a year receiving homeland protection training, then practicing it. Upon completion of the year, they will enter what might be called a homeland protection reserve.

Unlike armed forces investments, investment in societal resilience does not involve major expenses. Indeed, it is primarily a matter of training citizens – both Sweden and Latvia, for example, have in the past couple of years published crisis preparedness leaflets²¹ – and establishing improved security and back-up plans for critical national infrastructure in the wider sense. That includes not just power plants and water provisions, but also, for example, food distribution and retail. These steps are not only cost-effective but can be taken swiftly as well. In addition, countries could organise voluntary resilience training for teenagers, which would take place in the summer breaks and educate teenagers in fundamental crisis preparedness and crisis-response skills.²² The Scottish National Party – which governs Scotland – has built on the idea (proposed by the author) for a Resilience Scotland proposal.²³

No country's civil defence model will, on its own, deter aggression. All, however, signal the respective country's intention to involve not just the armed forces but also civil society in keeping the country safe. That is a deterrent that has been lacking and that can now be built on.

²¹ Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, *If Crisis or War Comes*, 2018, <https://www.dinsakerhet.se/siteassets/dinsakerhet.se/broschyren-om-krisen-eller-kriget-kommer/om-krisen-eller-kriget-kommer---engelska-2.pdf> and Artis Pabriks, *How Latvia Accomplishes Comprehensive Defence*, RUSI Commentary, 25 June 2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/how-latvia-accomplishes-comprehensive-defence>

²² Elisabeth Braw, *The Case for National Resilience Training for Teenagers*, RUSI Occasional Papers, 2 March 2020, <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/case-national-resilience-training-teenagers>

²³ Chris Derrin, *Why Resilience Scotland is an idea worth taking seriously*, *New Statesman*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/scotland/2020/05/national-service-resilience-scotland-army-coronavirus-sweden>

Continuing to Build Credible Deterrence and Defence in the Baltic Region

Tony Lawrence

Organisational reviews are usually expected to recommend change. They are initiated on the understanding that something is amiss with an organisation's direction or functioning and anticipate proposals that will put things back on track. The #NATO2030 reflection process launched by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is no exception. With its emphasis on alliance unity and political consultation, it is first and foremost an acknowledgment that NATO faces challenges from within. Even in staunch transatlanticist states, there is widespread agreement that 70 years after its foundation, the alliance is not in the best of health.¹ The neglect and frequent outright hostility of the Trump administration has been a key factor, causing a crisis of leadership on a scale not before seen in NATO's history. But this is not NATO's sole problem. In the post-Crimea period, the allies have found their security increasingly threatened from multiple directions; at the same time, they have found it ever more difficult to agree on which of these threats they should respond to as an alliance, and on what form their collective responses should take.

The Stoltenberg review and the deliberations that follow will need to address this problem, not least because the allies' differing threat perceptions and priorities are themselves one source of the internal tension and division that currently endangers NATO. In their search for solutions, it will be tempting for the allies to look for new purposes and narratives to bring them back together. There is clearly a discussion to be had, for example, about NATO's role in dealing with a rising China. The allies might also put efforts into finding better ways to

¹ Michał Baranowski, Linas Kojala, Toms Rostoks and Kalev Stoicescu, *What Next for NATO? Views from the North-East Flank on Alliance Adaptation* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2020), 12–13.

reconcile the requirements of European strategic autonomy and stable transatlanticism. And the COVID-19 pandemic may stimulate a recasting of the alliance's core task of crisis management in a way that ensures that the allies are better able to respond to major crises within as well as beyond their own borders.

To the extent that such discussions can revive the allies' shared sense of purpose and set them on a fruitful course for the next 70 years – as well as inspire actions to address key security challenges – they are to be welcomed. But there is always a risk that reviews, in their determination to find new direction, to recalibrate and to purge the bad, can lose sight of what is currently valuable and good. While NATO has done much to renew its core mission of collective defence and deterrence since Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine, it would be a mistake to think that these efforts are complete, or that they can be downgraded in favour of more eye-catching initiatives. The allies on NATO's eastern periphery will need to continue to make the case for an allied presence in their regions and push for greater efforts to enhance NATO's deterrence and defence posture. This article focuses on the means for further enhancing NATO's collective defence and deterrence posture in the Baltic Sea region – NATO's north-east flank. Similar considerations, however, may also apply to NATO's posture in the Black Sea region.²

The Threat From the East

In view of the multiple threats to the alliance from the east and the south, and the differing threat perceptions of the allies, NATO has adopted a "360-degree approach" to security and defence.³ While the threats from the south – in particular, terrorism – are serious and require NATO's engagement, the allies have also acknowledged

² Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Ray Wojcik and Carsten Schmiedl, *One Flank, One Threat, One Presence. A Strategy for NATO's Eastern Flank* (Washington DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2020), 6.

³ NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016," Press Release (2016) 100, 9 July 2016, para 5, 81.

that their “greatest responsibility [...] is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.”⁴ Russia is the only nation that poses a potential military threat to Europe’s security and a possible existential threat to any of the allies. It has not only undertaken a deep and comprehensive modernisation of its military – the “new look” reforms initiated in 2008 – but has also demonstrated a willingness to use force to achieve political goals, most notably in Ukraine since 2014.

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has pursued a course of persistent confrontation with NATO and the West, including through malicious cyber actions, election interference and the dissemination of disinformation, approaches sometimes collectively known in the West as “hybrid” warfare. While Russia may so far have been deterred from military actions against the allies, it is certainly not deterred from hostile activity in these other fields. But even in the military domain, it has conducted large-scale exercises on NATO’s borders, accumulated military capability in sensitive or critical areas, and carried out continued low-level provocations such as the violation of allied airspace and the harassment of allied shipping. The Baltic region, which includes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and is widely regarded as NATO’s most vulnerable territory, has been a particular focus of this activity, raising the risk of military clashes. Russia’s quadrennial strategic exercise, Zapad, has rehearsed attacks against Baltic Sea states. The Kaliningrad exclave has been heavily militarised and has become a particular concern as it is host to the long-range weapon systems that might be used to implement an anti-access/area denial strategy. The Western Military District, adjacent to NATO’s eastern borders, has also been prioritised in Russia’s military reforms. Russian military aircraft frequently enter Baltic airspace or contravene flight rules, requiring a response from NATO’s Baltic Air Policing mission. While official assessments judge that a direct Russian military attack on a NATO ally remains unlikely, they also note that Russia’s ongoing military build-up, and increased exercising and other military activity in the Baltic Sea region, is

⁴ NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016,” Press Release (2016) 100, 9 July 2016, para 6.

destabilising and creates a growing risk of military incidents that may escalate into conflict.⁵

NATO's response to this threat has been to put in place a series of measures to enhance deterrence and defence. The most visible of these has been the deployment of four battalion-sized NATO battlegroups to the Baltic States and Poland under the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative, but NATO has also taken measures to augment its rapid response forces, enhance its command and control structures, and improve its readiness.⁶ While these measures have certainly strengthened deterrence and the capacity for defence, Russia retains significant military advantages in the Baltic Sea region. In part these arise from the size and capability of the armed forces that it has in its Western Military District, as compared to the relatively small and light forces that NATO and its partners have in the region.⁷ In part they arise from geography: the three Baltic States are connected by land to the rest of NATO territory by only the narrowest of corridors (the Suwałki corridor), and their small size means that they have little strategic depth, limiting military options for their defence. There is a risk that Russia could rapidly attack the Baltic States and gamble on its ability to subsequently deter the allies from responding by making conventional or nuclear threats, or by its ability to frustrate NATO's reinforcement operations. The most well-known analysis of this so-called *fait accompli* scenario estimates that in such circumstances Russian forces could be at the outskirts of Riga or Tallinn within 60 hours.⁸

⁵ For example: Välisluureamet (Foreign Intelligence Service (Estonia)), *International Security and Estonia 2020* (Tallinn: Välisluureamet, 2020), 4–6; Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Threat Assessment 2020* (Vilnius: Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020), 19–24; Militära Underrättelse- Och Säkerhetstjänsten (Military Intelligence and Security Service (MUST, Sweden)), "Summary by the Director of the Swedish Military Intelligence and Security Service," in *MUST Annual Review 2019* (Stockholm: Swedish Armed Forces, 2019), 78.

⁶ Heinrich Brauss, *NATO Beyond 70: Renewing a Culture of Readiness* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2018), 7–10.

⁷ Scott Boston, Michael Johnson, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Yvonne K. Crane, *Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority* (Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2018), 5–11.

⁸ David A. Shlapak, and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 4–5.

It is highly doubtful that the alliance would survive politically if it were to capitulate to Russia's forceful occupation of parts of its territory, but at the same time, the restoration of territory operations under Article 5 would be hugely costly and risk uncontrolled escalation. A prudent allied response to this threat from Russia, even if the probability is low, is thus to continue to enhance deterrence on the north-east flank with the aim of ensuring that Moscow would not (mis)calculate in this way. Building deterrence should be a multi-disciplinary process and must involve political, economic, informational and other measures. But there is also more that can be done in the military domain – for example, in addressing capability shortfalls, improving the prospects for successful reinforcement, and adjusting the allied presence in the Baltic region.

Capability Shortfalls

Credible deterrence requires that the deterred party recognise that its adversary has both the means and the resolve to inflict costs should it undertake the action that is to be deterred. In a military setting, costs are inflicted through the application of military capability, and thus a primary requirement of deterrence is the possession of the right sort of capability in sufficient quantity. On a global scale, NATO clearly has a substantial military advantage over Russia, but NATO's military strength is dispersed, much of it several thousand kilometres away in the US. It is important that the armed forces in the Baltic region – local forces supplemented by eFP – should also possess sufficient military capability of the right sort to raise the costs of an attempted *fait accompli*. At present, there are shortfalls.

The most pressing need is perhaps for air defence capability. A Russian attack would likely rely on surprise and the concentration of combat power with the aim of eradicating the defence. Airpower, which offers high speed, flexibility and lethality, would be a key component of such an attack, but the Baltic States have only very limited capacity for air defence – Lithuania is investing in a small number medium-range systems to supplement its existing short-range capability, while Estonia and Latvia have only short-range systems at present.

Building the necessary integrated air defence system is beyond the financial means of the three Baltic States, but a more credible air defence – and hence a stronger deterrent effect – is achievable

through a combination of three approaches.⁹ First, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must show willingness to shoulder a share of the burden of addressing this capability shortfall. As a general point, as small, frontline states relying heavily on their allies for defence and deterrence, it is imperative that they demonstrate “good ally” behaviour by meeting their commitments under the Defence Investment Pledge to devote at least 2% of GDP to defence, and to spend at least 20% of that figure on defence investment.¹⁰ As regards air defence in particular, they must build the vital, if unglamorous, foundations of a multinational air defence solution – for example, by ensuring that they have the capability for effective air command and control – as well as continuing to invest in their own air defence missile systems.

Second, the three states must do more to cooperate on building defence capability. There are certainly gains in efficiency, interoperability and the acquisition of otherwise unachievable capability to be had by adopting Baltic solutions to capability shortfalls. The three states have benefitted substantially in the past from defence cooperation efforts, yet despite frequent political rhetoric in favour of cooperation, and despite the apparent similarities of the Baltic States’ strategic position and needs, little of practical value has been achieved in recent years.¹¹ This must change if limited resources are to be efficiently applied in enhancing deterrence and defence. It would, for example, be hard to justify the three states adopting separate national

⁹ Tony Lawrence, “Air Defence Challenges and Prospects of the Baltic States,” in *The Rīga Conference Papers 2019: NATO at 70 in the Baltic Sea Region*, ed. Andris Sprūds, Māris Andžāns and Sandis Šrāders (Rīga: The Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2019), 66–71.

¹⁰ At the 2014 Wales Summit, the allies committed to moving towards spending 2% of their GDP on defence and at least 20% of their defence budgets on major equipment within a decade. NATO, “Wales Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales,” Press Release (2014) 120, 5 September 2014, para 14. According to NATO’s latest estimates, in 2020, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will spend respectively 2.4%, 2.3% and 2.3% of their GDP on defence and 17.3%, 26% and 26.2% of those sums on equipment: NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013–2020),” Communiqué PR/CP(2020)104, 21 October 2020, 8, 13.

¹¹ Tomas Jermalavičius, Tony Lawrence, and Anna-Liisa Merilind, “The Potential for and Limitations of Military Cooperation Among the Baltic States,” in *Lithuania in the Global Context: National Security and Defence Policy Dilemmas*, ed. Irmīna Matonytė, Giedrius Česnakas and Nortautas Statkus (Vilnius: General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, 2020), 280–306.

solutions for the procurement, maintenance and training arrangements needed for the medium-range, ground-based air defence missile systems they all intend to acquire.

Third, NATO must also be part of the solution, as deterrence of Russia and avoidance of conflict in the Baltic region is clearly in the allies interests too: as one US analyst notes, “the defense of NATO’s eastern flank may be one of the most pressing national security issues of our time.”¹² Demonstrating the willingness and ability of the allies to deploy air defence assets to the Baltic region – for example, as components of eFP or in exercises such as the annual Tobruq Legacy – are significant contributions to deterrence and defence.¹³

More generally, combinations of these three approaches will be necessary to address other capability shortfalls and to build sufficient levels of military capability to assure deterrence in the Baltic region, although the mix of ingredients may vary. In the maritime domain, for example, another area of weakness for the Baltic States, deterrence may be enhanced by an increased allied presence in the Baltic Sea through participation in the Standing NATO Maritime Groups and in exercises. But it will also be necessary for the three Baltic States to invest, substantially and collaboratively, in the small multi-purpose warships and other capabilities such as mine-laying that are needed to advance their navies to the next stage of their development.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the joint air power and joint fires that will be required in a wartime scenario to defeat Russia’s long-range precision weapon systems and massed conventional forces – and are also required in peacetime to increase deterrence – are largely beyond the financial reach of the Baltic States. To address this type of capability shortfall, the three states must rely on their allies, whose arrangements to transition to a wartime footing to reinforce the defence of the Baltic region will need to be exercised in peacetime.¹⁵

¹² R.D. Hooker Jr., *How to Defend the Baltic States* (Washington DC, The Jamestown Foundation, 2019), 36.

¹³ Abraham Mahshie, “NATO aerial exercises test ‘vulnerable’ Baltic defense against Russian air assault,” *The Washington Examiner*, 24 September 2020.

¹⁴ Heinrich Lange, Bill Combes, Tomas Jermalavičius and Tony Lawrence, *To the Seas Again: Maritime Defence and Deterrence in the Baltic Region* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2019), 31-2.

¹⁵ Heinrich Brauss, Kalev Stoicescu and Tony Lawrence, *Capability and Resolve: Deterrence, Security and Stability in the Baltic Region* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2020), 16.

While capability shortfalls can be reduced through targeted and coherent efforts by the three Baltic States and their allies, it is unlikely that the Baltic region will see the concentration of forces that would be necessary to fully deter Russia. RAND analysts, for example, have estimated that a force of six or seven brigades, including three heavy brigades, supported by artillery, air defence and logistics capabilities, would be required for this – not necessarily forward deployed, but at least able to get to the region in good time.¹⁶ The Trump administration's unfortunate 2020 decision to withdraw one of four brigade-sized combat units from Europe (the 2nd Cavalry Regiment – a Stryker-equipped brigade of almost 4,500 personnel currently based in Vilseck, Germany) is a move in the opposite direction, increasing the challenge that NATO will face in deploying armed forces to the region at scale and speed in a crisis.

Military Movement

NATO leaders have recognised the importance of effective reinforcement to deterrence and defence on NATO's north-east flank, stating at Warsaw that eFP would demonstrate their "determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression" and would thus also need to be "underpinned by a viable reinforcement strategy."¹⁷ Part of this strategy involves measures to improve the readiness of NATO forces to respond to crises, most notably the threefold enlargement of the NATO Response Force and the adoption of the NATO Readiness Initiative.¹⁸ A second aspect of a viable reinforcement strategy concerns the practical aspects of moving armed forces, rapidly and in large numbers, into and across Europe. With the notable exception of the 2018 exercise Trident Juncture, NATO has barely rehearsed this type of movement for many decades. The US exercise Defender-Europe 20, which at division-scale was to be

¹⁶ Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 8.

¹⁷ NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," para 40.

¹⁸ Sometimes known as the 'Four Thirties', the NATO Readiness Initiative aims to ensure that by 2020, the Alliance has 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels available within 30 days or less: NATO, "NATO Readiness Initiative," Fact Sheet, June 2018.

the largest deployment of US troops to Europe in 25 years, had to be curtailed due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Broadly speaking, military movement across Europe will encounter three sets of challenges: various legal and procedural obstacles, the limited capacity of transport infrastructure, and issues related to coordination, command and control.¹⁹ Although, NATO and – especially – the EU have done a great deal to streamline procedures for moving armed forces across Europe, for example reducing and standardising the time required to process cross-border movement permissions and working towards common, digital EU and NATO customs forms, they are still numerous and complex. There has been little progress, for example, in harmonising requirements for the transportation of dangerous goods. Legal and procedural obstacles are likely to have the most serious impact if NATO needs to move forces rapidly to deter an aggressive military action. In these cases, the time needed to deal with the paperwork will be of the same magnitude as the time needed for the movement itself, risking situations in which bureaucratic requirements have adverse operational effects.

On the positive side, though, NATO and the EU are seized of these and other military mobility issues and have prioritised them as a “flagship” of their defence cooperation efforts.²⁰ Removing the legal and procedural obstacles to military movement is essentially a bureaucratic effort, but it is important that it continues to be given political attention and that leaders demand and track the implementation of the further practical steps that are needed to ensure that military movement is as smooth as possible.

Infrastructure limitations pose a more serious set of challenges that might severely constrain military movement during crisis. Part of the problem is physical. Roads are too small or bridges too weak to carry large volumes of heavy military equipment, and there are bottlenecks, such as at the Polish-Lithuanian border, where vehicles must be unloaded from trains running on the European rail gauge and reloaded

¹⁹ Ben Hodges, Tony Lawrence and Ray Wojcik, *Until Something Moves: Reinforcing the Baltic Region in Crisis and War* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2020), 2.

²⁰ NATO, EU, “Fourth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017,” 17 June 2019, 1.

onto trains running on the wider Russian gauge. These physical problems are compounded by the limited availability of the flatbed rail wagons and Heavy Equipment Transporters necessary to move military equipment, most of which are owned and operated by civilian contractors and not necessarily available to the military as a priority – it can take weeks or even months to order wagons for a military movement by rail. Furthermore, with a typical NATO battalion requiring about 10 convoys to move between locations, a lack of convoy escorts (or guard vans for rail movement) can also slow military movement.

NATO should look for opportunities to pre-position equipment and supplies, which can mitigate this challenge by reducing the volumes that need to be transported.²¹ It is also important for transit and receiving nations to reconsider the arrangements they have in place for host nation support, so that they are best able to facilitate efficient movement and allow incoming armed forces to prioritise combat capability over support capability.

Ultimately, though, investment is required to reduce the challenges posed by infrastructure limitations. Whether this is realistic in post-COVID-19 economies remains to be seen, but the slashing of the European Commission's proposed military mobility fund – originally €6.5 billion, now €1.5 billion pending the approval of the European Parliament – is not an encouraging sign. On the plus side, military ambitions for infrastructure improvements often coincide with civilian ones – Rail Baltic, which will allow uninhibited rail movement from central Europe through the Baltic States, is a good example. Governments must be creative in seeking opportunities to fund civilian transport network improvements that would also enhance military movement, including through programmes such as the Three Seas Initiative and in their efforts to stimulate economies in the wake of the pandemic.

While infrastructure challenges will require the most financial resources to address, solving issues of movement coordination, command and control will perhaps prove the most intellectually demanding task. There are a plethora of organisations involved in the business of military movement across Europe – in NATO at various

²¹ Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, and Peter B. Doran, *Securing the Suwałki Corridor. Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defense* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2018), 55.

command levels and in the moving, transit and host nations – and it is not obvious how these organisations would work together in a crisis, or how they would collectively prioritise movements to best serve the needs of the joint force commander. NATO's new Joint Logistic Support Group concept and Joint Support and Enabling Command in Germany are evidence that the alliance has recognised a problem and is looking for solutions. However, these are still works in progress, and it is not fully clear how they will fit into an already crowded field. Detailed table-top exercises or scenario-based discussions amongst key players would help in properly defining – and ensuring that everybody understands – concepts, roles and responsibilities when it comes to military movement.

Allied Presence

The allies are clearly heavily engaged in Baltic security through their participation in eFP – including the host nations, some 24 of 30 allies take part in these multinational battlegroups.²² This both enhances local military capability and provides a strong deterrent effect by sending a signal that, if the circumstances require it, the whole alliance would be involved militarily in a crisis in the Baltic region. Nonetheless, the eFP battlegroups are not the fully combined-arms formations equipped with all the necessary combat support and combat service support units envisaged at NATO's Warsaw Summit, and are thus not optimally configured to contribute to Baltic defence and deterrence.²³ The #NATO2030 process offers a good opportunity to learn lessons from the first few years of eFP deployment and to recalibrate if required – the allies should take it.

Furthermore, while the most powerful of the allies, the US, is present in the wider Baltic region in Poland, it is largely absent from the three

²² NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, "NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence," Factsheet, October 2020.

²³ The agreement that the eFP should be equipped with the necessary enablers does not appear in official NATO texts, but has been referenced, for example, by the Baltic prime ministers: "The Prime Ministers [...] emphasised the importance to fully implement decisions regarding the eFP, including joint enablement and credible reinforcement strategy," "Joint Statement. Prime Ministers' Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers," Tallinn, 18 December 2017.

Baltic States.²⁴ This risks sending to Moscow a message that NATO and US defence commitments to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are weaker. Meanwhile, Moscow's perennial claim that US presence in the Baltic region is destabilising compared to its relatively muted response to the deployment of the eFP offers good evidence that Russia is deterred more by US forces than it is by others.²⁵ Both defence leaders and analysts have thus argued for the return of US troops to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, a possibility that US defence leaders have at least considered as a sweetener for the proposed withdrawal of US forces from Germany.²⁶ While troop deployments are a national decision, the #NATO2030 process again offers a context to reconsider the balance of allied forces in the Baltic region; more consistent rotational deployments of US combat units to the Baltic States would be a good outcome of such deliberations.

Conclusion

As NATO embarks on another reflection process, it needs to balance the need for reinvention with the need to preserve and enhance its core strengths. Collective defence, as enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, is the very essence of the alliance. Despite the imperative for collective solutions to events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ever-present challenges created by insecurity to NATO's south, and the rise of competition from China, and the threat from the east have not diminished – indeed, Russia's increasingly brazen hostility, evident for example in its interference in the 2020 US elections, indicates its continued readiness to seek opportunities to challenge

²⁴ The US has increased its force presence in Eastern Europe overall, but withdrew the rotational company-sized presence it had established in the Baltic States in 2014 after the deployment of the eFP. Today, the US conducts special forces training deployments to Estonia and Lithuania, and rotates helicopter detachments through Latvia: Brauss, Stoicescu and Lawrence, *Capability and Resolve*, A-4.

²⁵ For example: "Russia warns NATO over US-Poland troop move," *Die Welle*, 13 June 2019. On Russian responses to eFP, see Kalev Stoicescu and Pauli Järvenpää, *Contemporary Deterrence: Insights and Lessons from Enhanced Forward Presence* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2019) 12-13.

²⁶ Jen Judson, "Do the Baltics need more US military support to deter Russia?" *Defense News*, 16 July 2019; Department of Defense (US), "Department of Defense Senior Leaders Brief Reporters on European Force Posture," 29 July 2020.

the West.²⁷ While the military threat to NATO allies, including those on the eastern flank, is low, actions to strengthen military deterrence and defence, including addressing capability shortfalls, ensuring crisis mobility and balancing NATO presence, are prudent responses to this risk.

Ultimately, though, the alliance is a political organisation. Its major strength is the solidarity and cohesion of its members. Today, with differing perceptions of threats, open disputes between allies and neglectful US leadership, the alliance is underperforming in this regard. Finding ways to repair this situation before it is too late will arguably be the most important, and most difficult, task of the NATO 2030 reflection process.

²⁷ Julian E. Barnes, Nicole Perlroth and David E. Sanger, "Russia Poses Greater Election Threat Than Iran, Many U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, 22 October 2020.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

European Allies Should Actively Assist in Restoring US Leadership Rather Than Waiting for It

Ramūnas Vilpišauskas

Uniting the United States

When US President-elect Joe Biden addressed the nation on November 7, 2020, his main message was one of a need for national unity to be able to deal with the most pressing challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and racial tensions, and to build prosperity. Framing his speech in a bipartisan manner, he pledged to “restore the soul of America” by seeing not red or blue states, but only the United States.

The main message of the need for unity is not surprising. In recent years, the US has often been described as a nation at war with itself, or as Joe Biden described it in his speech, as engaged in “a battle between our better angels and our darkest impulses”. The term “political polarisation” has been especially often used to characterise the state of the US, and this has been on display in recent elections not only in the streets of the country’s cities but also with elections results often split along urban/rural, educational, to some extent racial and other divides.

This state of affairs has become one of the key concerns for the US allies in Europe, including the Baltic States. Although in many respects – militarily, economically, in terms of innovations and research – the US remains the leading power globally and the only country capable of leading within the transatlantic alliance, it has become difficult to expect leadership in confronting common challenges and risks from a country which is at war with itself. Moreover, the conflicting and inconsistent policies of the US, especially in communications from President Donald Trump in reacting to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, further damaged the credibility and soft power of the US and its capacity to lead by example.

Therefore, it is also no surprise that many policymakers and analysts in European countries were relieved when, after several days of counting the votes, it became clear that Joe Biden won the elections. During the election campaign he pledged to win back the trust of America's allies. More consistent communication and better coordination of decisions within NATO and other international forums could be expected from the US when it is led by Joe Biden, which is indeed very positive news for allies in Europe. Some observers have been quick to describe Joe Biden as likely the most Atlanticist US president in a generation.

Return to a Different Transatlantic Future

However, it is quite clear that things will not return to the way they were before the election of Trump in 2016. Structural changes in the world, especially technological progress, often accompanied by labour market disruptions and other effects of "creative destruction", have been present for a while, making a mark on political polarisation, election outcomes and the politicisation of foreign policies. Partisan positions rather than evidence-based solutions have increasingly dominated policies – from international trade and climate change to membership in international organisations – that were previously based on elite consensus. Growing great power competition between the US and China, as well as rivalry between competing political economic systems, i.e. liberal capitalism and authoritarian state-capitalism, have further exacerbated tensions and spilled-over into trade wars, disputes over the transfer of technologies, and disengagement from cooperative solutions within established international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and UN institutions. The disengagement of the US from international participation opened up more space for authoritarian regimes such as Russia and NATO member Turkey to project their power in the European Union's neighbourhood, illustrating that in the background of contemporary challenges such as cyber threats, terrorism, energy insecurity and others, traditional security concerns such as territorial defence have not diminished in importance. EU's and NATO's Eastern and Southern periphery are cases in point. The election of Trump in 2016 and Brexit were symptoms of, rather than the origins of, those structural changes. America's "pivot to Asia" and the criticisms expressed by American

officials with regard to insufficient defence funding allocated by most European NATO allies predated Trump's era. Even so, the transactional style of Trump shocked many in Europe as he weaponised international economic relations and reduced the transatlantic alliance of values to a club where mutual support is dependent on financial contributions.

These recent technological, socio-economic and power rivalry trends have been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although international trade in goods, and especially international services such as air travel and tourism, experienced decline in 2020, international trade had already been affected negatively by trade wars, geopolitical rivalry and the resulting high uncertainty. At the same time, automation and digitisation trends have been accelerated further as businesses and people moved to methods of work and lifestyles with less social contacts. Although the cross-border movement of people and goods declined, digital globalisation, in particular e-commerce, distant teaching, conferencing and other web-based services, expanded. These structural changes are going to have long-lasting effects on some industries and professional activities, increasing the need for governments to not only control the pandemic and deal with health care issues, but also to assist with an economic and labour market transformation guided by the need to restore economic growth to levels that would allow for the servicing of fast-increasing debts and, in the case of the EU countries, support aging societies. Besides this, great power competition immediately affected political debates about the origins and successes of containing the pandemic, although there is no evidence that authoritarian countries have been doing better in this regard. Unfortunately, some democracies, including the US and the UK, so far have shown a poor crisis-management record as well.

Leadership in Times of Polarisation

This is the context within which Joe Biden is taking over the White House and becoming president of the global superpower. His leadership domestically in tackling the most pressing issues in the US will be a priority, and its success will be a significant factor in framing the resumption of US leadership within the transatlantic alliance. Leadership, as well as state capacity and legitimacy, are often mentioned as the most important

factors that determine the effectiveness of countries' responses to the pandemic. However, acts of leadership in deeply polarised societies are risky and extremely difficult. Moreover, a divided Senate without a clear majority might also become an obstacle to crisis management and structural reforms. Therefore, European allies of the US should have realistic expectations of the new US administration and the possibilities for it to prioritise common transatlantic issues. Although a change in the communication style of the US leadership and its more considerate and active efforts at coordination with transatlantic allies could be expected, the EU and its member states should take this window of opportunity to actively support the US leadership and increase their own contribution toward the renewal of the transatlantic alliance.

Recommitted Allies...

Under an optimistic scenario, one could expect several security, economic and broader political changes within the transatlantic alliance.

First, the US and other NATO allies would reaffirm their commitment to the key principles of the alliance and their commitments towards protecting its members, while its European members would accelerate increases of their contributions to defence. EU member states' investments in developing infrastructure links, including those that could be used for defence purposes, and other common projects that strengthen security of their members and increase their capabilities to contribute to NATO operations would be expanded. To be sure, COVID-19 induced economic decline and the need to support businesses and invest in economic transformation is constraining increases in military expenditures. However, the value of the transatlantic alliance and coordinated responses to common cross-border risks and security threats should be assessed as one of the long-term priorities crucial for the prosperity of each of its members and should figure prominently in national political debates on how best to use budgetary resources. At the same time, of course, national and EU-wide efforts at containing the pandemic and transforming the economy will also require capacity, legitimacy and leadership, which are important for guiding societies through important structural changes. Management of pandemic resulted in the growth of role of state which requires additional efforts to strengthen state capacity

and achieve sound economic recovery. Investments in defence require sufficient economic resources to reconcile such budgetary spending with other pressing societal needs. Otherwise such policies are likely to run into legitimacy problems. Only prosperous and resilient societies could provide their share of contribution to transatlantic alliance.

... Return to Improving Transatlantic Economic Relations...

Second, the US and EU talks on trade liberalisation would be resumed. Again, it should be remembered that it was not only the election of Trump that derailed negotiations on the transatlantic trade and investment partnership between the US and the EU. These negotiations were already experiencing difficulties in 2015–2016 due to the lobbying of protectionist interest groups such as farmers in France and popular disapproval in countries like Germany and Austria. Therefore, it would take more than just Biden leadership to return to this economically and strategically important transatlantic project, which was initiated by Barack Obama. It will be equally important for the EU and its member states and their policymakers to show leadership in trying to mobilise popular support for closer economic relations between the US and the EU by actively debating the need for and the impact of such a partnership. The Nordic countries and some other prosperous countries provide evidence that open economies combined with active education and training policies to assist people in adapting to changing economic and labour market structures are examples to be followed. Although consensus on open trade and investment policies has been challenged by state support practices in China and the disruptions of supply chains that followed the lockdowns around the world in March 2020, there are limits to the effectiveness of re-shoring and industrial policies when they contradict economic logic.

Within this reinforced economic transatlantic forum, EU and US relations with the UK could be more easily aligned, and common policies of transatlantic allies on issues such as foreign direct investments from China can be better coordinated. Before that, however, the US and the EU have to resolve outstanding disputes with respect to airline subsidies, US tariffs on European steel and aluminium (introduced on the basis

of the security clause) and taxation of tech giants. The EU and the UK should conclude negotiations on a future free trade agreement in good faith not only to be able to trade without customs duties and quantitative barriers but also to cooperate closely in other areas such as security, internal affairs, energy, education and science, and others. Finally, the constructive approach of the US administration towards WTO reform to enable it to continue providing a rule-based forum for trade and the resolution of disputes is important.

... And an Alliance of Values

Third, the election of Biden is likely to have a positive effect on popular support for the values of liberal democracy – such as the rule of law, political freedoms and human rights – in other countries of the world. This broader effect is likely to be defined by the success of his management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the effectiveness of his leadership efforts. In addition to such power by way of example, his more attentive approach towards the situation surrounding human rights and political freedoms in other countries is likely to constrain authoritarians. This could be facilitated if accompanied by more active engagement by the US in global affairs through a broader definition of the American interests and closer coordination in the pursuit of those interests alongside the country's other allies.

It should be reiterated that the likelihood of this positive scenario will depend on the capacity, legitimacy and leadership of the US administration and its allies in confronting the worsening pandemic situation, restoring economic growth, and guiding economic transformation. Domestic successes are likely to increase the willingness and ability for cooperative international solutions. These successes, however, in many respects are dependent on the ability of transatlantic allies to jointly manage common risks and facilitate mutual exchange. Under a pessimistic scenario, the polarisation of American society and frequent legislative gridlocks in Congress would constrain Biden's efforts, making him preoccupied with domestic issues and muddling through the healthcare crisis and economic reforms. Although his style would facilitate better communication with US allies, it would be limited mostly to form rather than an upgrading of common interests and stronger US engagement internationally.

Meanwhile, EU members would continue muddling through with their domestic policy responses, rhetorically urging for a more united EU approach to contemporary challenges but failing to live up to these words in terms of delivering economic reforms and allocating resources. Under this scenario, the political and possibly economic fragmentation of transatlantic community would be slowed down but not reversed.

For the Baltic States, “Homework”...

From the perspective of the Baltic States, the question is how they could contribute to increasing the likelihood of the optimistic scenario. Three points should be stressed. First, as usual, much depends on domestic successes. So far, all three Baltic States have shown flexibility and resilience in dealing with external shocks and the ability to maintain economic dynamism. After the initial shock of the 1990s, they had to deal with an economic crisis that resulted from the financial crisis in Russia in 1998–1999. In the end, the crisis accelerated economic restructuring and helped their accession into the EU and NATO. About a decade later, they experienced one of the worst economic declines among all EU member states, triggered by the Great Recession. However, fast recovery soon followed, which eventually allowed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to join the eurozone at the tail end of the crisis. In 2014, after Russia’s embargo on agricultural and some other exports from EU member states, Baltic States exporters were among the most affected in relative terms among EU countries. However, yet again their economies proved to be flexible and resilient in terms of finding alternative markets and sustaining economic growth. During the great lockdown in 2020, the Baltic States were among the least affected by COVID-19 pandemic in terms of economic decline and the healthcare situation, with the “Baltic travel bubble” over the summer being showcased as a good-practice example of a cooperative approach towards the management of the crisis.

To be sure, it remains to be seen how the Baltic States (and other EU member states) will deal with a second – and possibly more – wave(s) of the pandemic. Particularly important in terms of leadership and state capacity will be the test posed by the economic transformation, which presents an opportunity for laying the foundations for an economic “catching-up” with the average level of GDP per capita of the EU27

and further convergence with the most prosperous countries. This leads to the second point, which is related to the strategic priorities of the Baltic States within the EU. Since the early 1990s, the Baltic States have been persistently working on a “return to Europe” and the transatlantic community of liberal democracies. Although this process was symbolically completed in 2004 with their accession to the EU and NATO, they still had a lot of “homework” to do. They had to prove their readiness to join the Schengen area and eurozone and to convince their allies within NATO to provide military defence plans and reinforce their presence within the region.

... Is Also EU-wide Work...

At the same time, they proved to be capable members of the EU when the time came for EU Council presidencies, and they were reliable advocates for societies in Eastern partnership countries when supporting their aspirations for political and economic reforms and closer relations with the transatlantic community of liberal democracies. However, more could be done for the purpose of consolidating the EU common market and networking with potential coalition partners to advance this priority, especially in the cross-border provision of services, digitisation and developing infrastructure links. The exit of the UK from the EU reduces the coalition of common market supporters, but the COVID-19 pandemic vividly illustrated the benefits of open borders (and the costs of the border closures), while the ongoing economic transformation presents an opportunity to advance the common market project, which has been politically side-lined for quite some time.

Moreover, it is time for the Baltic States to start thinking strategically about the EU’s budget priorities. For more than 15 years, since their accession into the EU, they have based their political thinking and negotiating behaviour on being net recipients of EU money. However, if they are serious about further economic convergence and prosperity, they have to start thinking as net payers. This would require a serious rethinking of their investment priorities, sources of economic growth and the very concept of solidarity within the EU. To be sure, this change is achievable if the remaining social and demographic issues in the Baltic States are properly addressed alongside the process of structural change

and economic transformation. Needless to say, such a transformation is vital for the long-term security and statehood of the countries.

... And a Transatlantic Network

The final issue has to do with the reinvigorated transatlantic ties of the Baltic States. It is widely acknowledged in the Baltics that among NATO members only the US has sufficient capabilities to deter potential aggressors, although contributions from other allies such as Germany, Canada, the UK and other NATO members is also important. The Baltic States rightly chose to strengthen their credibility in their dialogue with the US administration, especially when it came to President Trump, by increasing their defence budgets. While Estonia has been consistently prioritising spending on defence (and at the same time being able to have the smallest debt and usually a balanced budget), it was only after the worsening security situation in the Eastern neighbourhood and annexation of Crimea that political elites in Latvia and Lithuania also matched their talk with money. Admittedly, Baltics have been contributing to NATO-led military operations abroad and have allied with the US in some of its foreign interventions. However, this should be complemented with additional efforts at bipartisan networking in the US after the new administration starts its work. Although Joe Biden is well informed about the situation in the Baltic Sea region, has relevant experience and is open to expert advice, more intense engagement among Baltic and American policymakers, academics, civic representatives and businesses is vital for maintaining transatlantic ties. To be sure, trade liberalisation and investment facilitation among the US and the EU, which also requires working with and through the EU institutions, is important for the Baltic States.

To conclude with the most important point – the renewal of US leadership within the transatlantic community is possible only with the active engagement and contribution of European allies. This opportunity has to be used for the common benefit to be better able to cope with global changes, and the Baltic States must be at the forefront of these efforts, since failure to reinvigorate the transatlantic community for them could be particularly costly.

France's Perspective of NATO-Russia Relations in the Baltic Sea Area: Challenges and Perspectives

Céline Bayou

On August 23, 2018, during her official visit to Finland, French Minister for the Armed Forces Florence Parly stressed that France does not intend to take a distanced look at security issues in the Baltic region, which might otherwise be perceived as being located thousands of miles from the concerns of Paris and on the fringes of Europe. "Your security is our security", she affirmed, recalling that, far from its reputation as a country that has essentially turned towards its south, France is no less mobilised towards its north. Particularly since 2014.

Should "Nordic balance" be Forgotten?

Marked by major security challenges, the Baltic Sea region has seen, over the last decade or so, the revival of tensions forgotten since the end of the Cold War, which led to a deterioration of the regional stability. After a few years of euphoria, during which the countries of the region thought they had put an end to the system of confrontation and were in the process of building a new Mare Nostrum, tensions have now been on the rise and an unprecedented situation has appeared.

The current situation is indeed a new phenomenon in a region that, although it was characterised by tensions during the Cold War, had nonetheless found a balance. This so-called "Nordic balance" was based on the fact that each actor in the region was not going to change its geopolitical posture. Tensions existed between the Eastern bloc (embodied by the Warsaw Pact, to which belonged Poland, the Democratic Republic of Germany and the USSR, including the

three Baltic republics and Russia) and the Western bloc (embodied by NATO, to which belonged Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany), as well as neutral Sweden (which we know today would have been on the Atlantic side in the event of a conflict) and neutral Finland (which had a special relationship with the Soviet Union). The resulting balance, born of a transitional configuration between the two blocs – with, at each end, countries embedded in opposing spheres of influence and, in the centre, neutral countries – seemed destined to last: breaking it up would have harmed the interests of the whole region.

This status quo, which for a long time suited the countries concerned – those in NATO and the Warsaw Pact – was shattered with the latter's disappearance and the announcement of the end of the east-west divide. From then on, a reunified Germany, as well as Denmark, have been strong members of the European Union and NATO, although the latter maintains a somehow distant relationship with European defence structures. EU members Sweden and Finland have not joined NATO, but they have abandoned their claims of neutrality and are increasingly cooperating with the Atlantic organisation. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined NATO in 1999 (in the case of Poland) and in 2004 (for the other three) and have been members of the EU since 2004. Thus, the end of the Nordic balance came with a bright side: the end of frozen postures and, more broadly, the extension of democracy in the former Soviet-style regimes.

But not everyone saw it like that. Under Putin's leadership, Russia has clearly broken with the regional consensus on Western democracy. It also has continuously challenged extensions of EU and NATO. Moscow deplored the successive enlargements¹, which, in its view, tended to make the Baltics into an inland sea for the EU, and it regularly warns Stockholm and Helsinki about the consequences that a potential accession to NATO would trigger. Hence, the end of the "Baltic balance" had more complex consequences in that the region became somehow less "readable". All the problems in the Russian-West relationship now seem to converge in this area. The current repositioning of various states is accompanied on either side by a

¹ Sergey Utkin, "Together and apart: Russian debate on Europe", *Euro-Atlantic Security Policy Brief*, June 2019.

representation of threats that leave people wondering whether the slightest of incidents might not result in consequences that are more serious².

Sparked by Moscow's posture, the remilitarisation of the region has spread to all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. Russia has developed a policy of power assertion and strategic intimidation made up of military deployments, threats to use force and even the use of force in different theatres (Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, etc.), as well as international law violations, especially with the annexation of Crimea. Since 2011, it has modernised its armed forces in the Kaliningrad and Leningrad oblasts and has adopted a posture of "aggressive sanctuarisation" by deploying a large number of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities³. Along its western borders, Russia has set up a "strategic belt" from the Arctic to the Middle East. In a manner that has been unprecedented since the Cold War, Russia is conducting military drills and operations in different theatres at the same time (the Baltic Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Levant). Its maritime presence⁴ and airstrike campaign in Syria are both symbols of this.

In response, the allies, including France, have reinforced their protective measures in the east on behalf of their Eastern allies. The 2014 Wales Summit saw NATO adopt assurance measures. It reinforced these again after the Warsaw Summit in 2016, notably through setting-up the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Poland and the three Baltic States. Most of the countries in the area also increased defence spending to meet the target of devoting 2% of GDP to defence by 2024 (Poland and the Baltic States have already hit the target). Several countries in the region have pursued the modernisation of their militaries by producing or buying new equipment. Some reactivated conscription (Lithuania), reinforced their reserves (Finland and Baltic States), or partly remilitarised their territory (Swedish Gotland and Finnish Finnmark), while strengthening their defence partnerships on

² Céline Bayou, "Tensions sécuritaires dans la région baltique : que reste-t-il de l'équilibre nordique ?", *Questions internationales*, n° 90, March-April 2018, pp. 106–112.

³ Sergey Sukhankin, "David vs. Goliath: Kaliningrad Oblast as Russia's A2/AD 'bubble'", *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 2(1), 95, 2019, 95–110.

⁴ Matthew Thomas, "Maritime Security Issues in the Baltic Sea Region", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, July 22, 2020.

a bilateral basis or within different regional cooperation groups (the Nordic Defence Cooperation [NORDEFKO], the Nordic Baltic 8, or the Northern Group).

Despite a long-term military build-up, these countries are perfectly aware that they cannot face alone the security challenges posed to the Baltic space and call therefore upon the solidarity of their allies and partners.

France as a New Baltic State

As a reaction to the deteriorating strategic context since the annexation of Crimea by Russia, France has increased its presence in the Baltic Sea area⁵.

France maintains a **regular dialogue** with its Baltic and Nordic partners and develops cooperation bilaterally. For example, it holds an annual French-Baltic security seminar (a forum of discussion between members of parliament, decision-makers from ministries of defence and ministries of foreign affairs, and academic experts) with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. When President Macron visited Lithuania and Latvia in September 2020, the parties decided to organise these meetings in a 3+1 format at the level of foreign ministries as well. Since 2015, France has also signed intergovernmental agreements with the three Baltic States and Denmark, four letters of intent with Poland, and a framework paper with Finland. These agreements aim at increasing strategic exchanges and fostering interoperability between the armed forces. In doing so, France confirms that it shares the security interests of its partners and is willing to remain involved in the region.

At the **European level**, France is also working together with some of its partners in the region (Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Germany) to develop a common strategic culture within the European Intervention Initiative (the EI2 was announced by President Macron in September 2017 and officially launched in June 2018). This aims at strengthening solidarity among a core group of European states that are politically willing and militarily able to take on their responsibilities. The

⁵ "France and the Security challenges in the Baltic Sea region", *Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie* (DGRIS), Ministère français des Armées, Paris, January 2019.

participation of four countries in the Baltic region will certainly deepen common reflections regarding security challenges in this area and the best ways to address them. France has also participated in the Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki since its creation in April 2017, with an annual financial contribution to its budget, French representatives who take part in the different working groups, training sessions and exercises, and, since 2020, through a French representative inside the centre.

Within NATO, France has constantly taken part in the alliance's Baltic Air Policing (BAP) missions over Estonia, Lithuania and Poland. France is the second largest contributor to Air Policing missions, with eight deployments since 2007. For example, from May to August 2020, it deployed four Mirage 2000-5 fighter aircrafts to Estonia for monitoring, control and identification missions in the framework of the enhanced air policing mission. France also ensures a regular presence in the Baltic Sea by deploying annual maritime surveillance patrols. In 2018, it took command of the NATO Maritime Component, which makes it possible to project a command platform within five days. It also participates in about 10 military exercises each year in Northern Europe with air, land and maritime assets. In total, 4,000 French soldiers from all armed forces have been mobilised each year since 2014 to carry out about 20 activities on the eastern flank, principally in this area. France participates in the three NATO Centres of Excellence in the Baltic States, with one representative at the Strategic Communications Centre in Riga (until 2019), two representatives at the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, and one representative at the Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Vilnius. France has taken part in the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) since its inception in 2017; in line with the decision taken at the Warsaw Summit to reinforce the alliance's deterrence and defence posture, France deployed a contingent to Estonia in 2017 and 2019, then to Lithuania in 2018 and 2020. It will be once again deployed to Estonia in 2021.

It should be noted that the Baltic countries are developing a multi-scale approach too, and that they are perfectly aware of the need to engage themselves beyond the limits of the region. This leads, in particular, to common deployments with France, mainly to Africa and the Middle East, as the major security challenges on the southern flank, namely the fight against terrorism and the management of migrant

flows, affect Europe as a whole. All the states bordering the Baltic Sea are engaged either in the Levant or in Africa. In the Sahel region, they take part in the fight against terrorism and the stabilisation of the region, alongside France, within the framework of MINUSMA (the UN mission in Mali) and EUTM Mali (the EU Training Mission Mali). Estonia is also participating in the French operation Barkhane, with 50 soldiers deployed since the summer of 2018. In Lebanon, Finland has replaced a French company from the UNIFIL Force Commander's Reserve (a UN mission) with 300 soldiers following France's invocation of article 42.7 of the Treaty of the European Union in 2015. In order to fight against migrant trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea, all the countries in the region that are also EU members (with the exception of Denmark because of its opt-out from the CSDP) participated in operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED, "Irinì").

These commitments from the Baltic countries are important for France, which recognises the increasingly intertwined nature of European nations' interests. Converging threats against Europe, including terrorism, that have affected most of the territories of the Baltic space (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden), and the in-depth dialogue between Europeans concerning strategic priorities, are gradually shaping a growing number of fundamentally shared interests⁶.

For a Comprehensive Approach to Baltic Region Security

From 1949 on, NATO has been the strongest military alliance in the world, producing interoperability, standards, and response plans, as well as making national staffs work together. Today, the alliance remains the cornerstone of European security, in particular to protect against threats from the east and south-east. Let's be clear: in the current strategic context of the Baltic Sea, there is no alternative to NATO, which is seen by all the bordering states as the ultimate life insurance⁷. That said, France believes that, to maintain its dominance, NATO must

⁶ *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale*, Ministère français des Armées, Paris, 2017.

⁷ CEMA François Lecointre, "L'armée doit se préparer d'ici à 2030 à soutenir un engagement majeur", *Les Echos*, 23 octobre 2020.

resolve some of its current contradictions. One of them is, of course, how committed the United States is to the alliance they created. The US is the most important member of NATO, but, over the last four years, many questions have remained unanswered as to what kind of trust the allies should put in the word of a US president who is highly critical of NATO.

But the desire to reinforce the alliance should not exclude the need to adapt it to a new, threatening world. Indeed, the emergence of a bipolar world dominated by US-China competition is starting to become one of the crucial factors that shapes global security: this evolution may be particularly challenging for the Baltic region, where Russian and Chinese ships have already trained together. This could force Europeans to face increasing responsibilities, as the US will focus on the East Asian theatre and compete locally with an ever more assertive China. Conversely, in case of a bipolar *détente*, Washington might want to cooperate increasingly with China at the expense of the transatlantic partnership. In all cases, Europeans, and this applies to the Baltic States as well, have no choice but to develop their strategic autonomy⁸.

Following the progressive erosion of the cooperative security policies they pursued after the end of the Cold War (which had resulted in an unprecedented reduction of nuclear weapons and conventional armed forces in Europe), in recent years, NATO and Russia have each returned to a mutual deterrence relationship. In the Baltic Sea region, threat perceptions have profoundly changed since 2014: nowadays, they are directly contrary and mutually exclusive to one another on both the Russian side and the Western side (including “non-aligned” states). The situation contrasts with that which prevailed until 2013, which was characterised by elements of tensions but a real confidence that the situation would remain more or less stable. From now on, a number of factors, the “drivers of escalation”⁹ (uncertainty, show of force, sub-regional conflicts, and even the nuclear dimension), increase the dangers of competition and create instability. This instability has led actors to create a real “security dilemma” – as each state strengthens

⁸ Pierre Haroche, “Is Europe ready for a bipolar world?”, *IRSEM*, Paris, 30 January 2020.

⁹ Wolfgang Zellner (coord.), “Reducing the Risks of Conventional Deterrence in Europe – Arms Control in the NATO-Russia Contact Zones”, *OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions*, Vienna, December 2018.

its own security, the level of global conflict and global insecurity therefore increases. This ends up creating a paradox, which NATO's demonstration of defence and deterrence in the region reflects: while objectively the tensions observed are greater in the Black Sea region (the annexation of Crimea and Russo-Ukrainian tensions, the game of Turkey, energy issues, etc.), NATO's presence is numerically lower there (with tFP, the tailored Forward Presence) than in the Baltic Sea region.

Even if the current deterrence relationship in Europe is still predominantly perceived as more or less stable, the variability of the postures of the actors involved creates risks: what will happen regarding the US's military presence on European soil? How will Moscow react to a permanent deployment at its borders? More generally, is it still possible to consider Russia as a "predictable" actor? Will we find a solution to the worsening demise of the European arms control regime? Is it still manageable to adapt the Vienna Document and ensure that it remains relevant for the capabilities of modern armed forces, including mobility, anti-access/area denial (A2/AD), and long-range strike potentials? And so on, and so forth.

Addressing these strategic issues cannot be a NATO-only task: while there is a clear need to stabilise the deterrence relationship in Europe, the political solution cannot be reduced to a single monologue within NATO¹⁰ or with Washington¹¹. The need to enlarge the dialogue to encompass all the parties involved takes on its full meaning in the Baltic region, which includes both NATO member and non-member countries, EU member and non-member countries, countries developing evolving relationships with these organisations, and, last but not least, the third country that is seen as the main threat by the whole region. Even more than elsewhere, this actor should simultaneously be efficiently contained as well as also engaged. These are the reasons why we cannot see any contradiction in promoting a multi-scale approach in the Baltic Sea area, which would be at the same time bilateral, regional, and European and NATO-led.

¹⁰ Rachel Ellehuus & Andrei Zagorski, "Restoring the European Security Order", *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS), March 2019.

¹¹ Piret Kuusik, "Through the Looking Glass: the Nordic-Baltic Region and the Changing Role of the United States", *Estonian Foreign Policy Institute* (ICDS), June 2020.

Recommendations

The times we are living in are particularly unpredictable, with news challenges and threats, and the Baltic Sea region is increasingly finding itself in the throes of imbalance. If we want to act in order to maintain peace and stability in the whole region, we must continue to strengthen our capability to act together at different levels and in a coordinated manner.

- It is essential to increase our spending in real terms as well as our **defence capabilities within NATO**. Because nations are the sole owners of the capabilities made available to NATO, they bear a considerable responsibility for the credibility of the alliance. It is also a question of fairness in the distribution of the burden of our collective security. This is particularly true for us Europeans. In this regard, we can only welcome the efforts made by the EU to support this dynamic with new instruments such as the European Defence Fund.
- Our collective security is based as much on strong defence as on assumed deterrence based on a fair distribution between conventional, anti-missile and nuclear deterrent resources: to ignore or downplay the nuclear nature of the alliance would be a serious mistake at a time when the nuclear arsenals around us modernise and the non-proliferation regime shows great fragility.
- With other NATO members, France is participating in the harmonisation of work resulting from the concept of Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic area (DDA). This necessary work must not lead us to renounce the fundamental balances that we have agreed upon for years. Our work must be driven by a concern for long-term flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability in the face of threats. This approach involves not being limited to the subject of Russian missiles but ensuring that we can respond to terrorist threats wherever they come from.
- We must also better fight against cyber attacks or intrusions, and sometimes manipulations, and build a security architecture by installing channels of trust that, over time, we must also know how to rebuild. This won't happen overnight, but it is a necessity.
- As Russia continues to increase its military capacities along its western borders in the Baltic region, neighbouring states have

to face rising security concerns by adapting and expanding their capabilities. Russia's aggressive stance in this region in particular is not acceptable: therefore, participating countries like France will have to keep on contributing to the eFP. More generally, NATO and its partners have to remain vigilant concerning any attempt by Russia to challenge the security balance that remains in the Baltic area.

- For a long time, we thought that what structured our discussions with Russia was NATO, and therefore we delegated those discussions to the transatlantic relationship. Therefore, we did not build pathways for disarmament dialogue between Europe and Russia. With the disintegration of the security architecture and the end of disarmament treaties, we are just beginning to measure the consequences of this neglect. We have come to a point where we need to rethink it more on our own. This does not mean giving up the transatlantic relationship – just the contrary – but it does mean **Europeans having the ability themselves** to think about their relations with Russia. Because that is what allows us to build a much more stable and protective relationship over time.
- Regional initiatives such as the Nordic Defence cooperation agreement signed in 2018 between Finland, Norway and Sweden must be encouraged in different formats. The main principle of this is that the Baltic countries will improve their defence capabilities and cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict by having discussions based on common security concerns in the region, regardless of whether the countries belong to the alliance or not. In light of the security situation, cooperation and unity among like-minded countries must prevail. For that, other formats still have to be invented.
- France resumed contacts with Russia in the strategic-political field in September 2019 – we made it clear that the revival of this dialogue does not signal a return to the situation prior to the annexation of Crimea, and that the security of our allies and partners remains a priority. During the talks, France strongly and regularly protests against manoeuvres that are detrimental not only to our national interests but also to our allies' and partners' interests (such as disinformation); regarding the Baltic Sea region, the challenge remains to deter further escalation.

- With regard to Russia, it is essential to maintain a **balanced approach**, dissuasive but not escalatory. The eFP and the recent sanctions taken by the European Union in the context of the crisis in Belarus and the Navalny affair are all strong messages, but it is essential to maintain a demanding dialogue with Russia in order to get our messages across.
- To go even further, our common objective with regard to security in the Baltic Sea region must be to eventually work out with Russia a set of tools for the de-escalation of conflicts. Incidents are recurrent in the region, be they incidents at sea or violations of airspace, in particular – it is urgent to establish contact channels with Russia in order to avoid any accident.

The China Factor – a Push for NATO2030 Strength and Purpose

Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova

Introduction

As NATO is prioritising its goals for the next decade and trying to point its member states' attention to joint challenges, China now ranks high on its agenda.

This paper argues that in the decade leading up to 2030, the China factor has the potential to influence NATO policies along three major vectors, which can ultimately contribute to a stronger NATO.

First of all, Washington will be interested in maintaining close transatlantic ties out of a need for political support against the aspects of China's rise that yield security implications for the US.

Secondly, the big European NATO members – such as Germany, France, and the UK – while being generally supportive of the US's security value outlook, will continue to play a smoothing and levelling diplomatic role to avoid an escalation of Sino-American opposition. They will be accepted by China in this role, as the PRC does not assign the same level of threat to European NATO members as it does to the US.

Thirdly, the China factor is reason enough to expand NATO cooperation with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific, contributing to the "globalisation" of the alliance.

In conclusion, this paper tackles the question of China as an imminent threat to the existing security architecture.

“The one that benefits the least is the United States”¹ – Or Is It?

The US-China rivalry, translating into NATO-China enmity, is generally seen as the issue with the biggest potential to affect global security in the 21st century. Observers admit that introducing a strategic debate on this issue among the members of the alliance would be challenging, as the “alliance’s reflex is to shy away from political discussions”,² but ultimately point out that there is a silver lining to it, since the United States on its own will have trouble responding to China’s policies that have security implications – such as 5G, cyber, disinformation, and the ever-growing military capabilities.

China singles out the US in its defence planning documents. To quote the 2019 whitepaper “China’s National Defense in the New Era”, “International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies, and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability.”³

It is hard to imagine China militarily challenging the US, given its uneven “pockets of excellence” capabilities – with one exception. The biggest risk that could spark an outright confrontation with the US would be an attempt at a change in the Taiwan status quo by either side.⁴ The sensitivity of the Taiwan issue holds a significant place in the whitepaper: “China resolutely opposes the wrong practices and provocative activities of the US side regarding arms sales to Taiwan,

¹ Quote from US President Donald Trump, from: “Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg After 1:1 Meeting | London, United Kingdom,” The White House, December 3, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>

² Brattberg, Eric, “Time for NATO to Talk About China,” Carnegie Europe, March 26, 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/78684>

³ “新时代的中国国防” http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm, English translation: “Full Text: China’s National Defense in the New Era,” The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

⁴ Fingar, Thomas, “China’s Foreign Policy goals,” guest talk, Riga Stradins University, September 18, 2020.

sanctions on the CMC Equipment Development Department and its leadership, illegal entry into China's territorial waters and maritime and air spaces near relevant islands and reefs, and wide-range and frequent close-in reconnaissance."⁵ It has been well-established that the PLA has prioritised limited wars since 1985, with the Taiwan strait crisis of 1996 having "convinced the PLA planners that a likely war scenario for which the PLA should be prepared to deter or fight is a medium-sized local war comparable to PLA WZC", with the goal of turning the "PLA absolute inferiority to local and temporary superiority".⁶

The PRC, however, does not assign the same level of threat to the European NATO members, providing NATO-China relations with more leeway in terms of perceptions and negotiations than bilateral US-China platforms. The defence dialogue with EU countries is even mentioned as a positive development in the whitepaper: "China is actively developing its military relations with European countries. Exchanges and cooperation in all areas are making sound progress. Targeting a China-Europe partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilization, China conducts security policy dialogues, joint counter-piracy exercises and personnel training with the EU."⁷

Therefore "a joint China policy" could be a valuable argument for Washington against stepping away from transatlantic unity: "The strategic challenge posed by China's rise should in theory bring Europe and North America closer together to assert common interests and values in a more multipolar world."⁸

⁵ "新时代的中国国防" http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm, English translation: "Full Text: China's National Defense in the New Era," The State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

⁶ Li, Nan, "The PLA's Evolving Campaign Doctrine and Strategies," RAND Corporation, Conference proceedings, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF145/CF145.chap8.pdf

⁷ "新时代的中国国防" http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm, English translation: "Full Text: China's National Defense in the New Era," The State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

⁸ Brattberg, Eric, "Time for NATO to Talk About China," Carnegie Europe, March 26, 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/78684>

Keeping Up “the only place where North America and Europe meet every day”⁹

NATO is indeed the most institutionalised, trusted and efficient platform for North American communication with Europe. China does not oppose NATO outspokenly – its critique of the organisation is very general and based on a grudge over expansion: “NATO has continued its enlargement, stepped up military deployment in Central and Eastern Europe, and conducted frequent military exercises”.¹⁰ But the strained US-China relationship will continue to spill over into NATO’s agenda.

Under the circumstances of Sino-American contradictions, European NATO members are a calming presence – a critical role which will continue to matter in the next decade, as long as US-China disputes remain. The example of bargaining over the language in a classified report on China attests to this role: “Where the United States sought tough language on how China caused vulnerabilities in allied critical infrastructure and resilience, France and Germany resisted. The outcome was softer language on vulnerabilities and therefore fewer “taskings” to NATO planning staff.”¹¹ Although they are strongly critical towards China on political values and trade issues such as the lack of a level playing field and non-transparent party-state-business relations, as well as being vigilant about China’s information-gathering and hybrid ops, the big European members are reluctant to add fuel to the fire, and in this capacity will exert a de-escalating authority in the years leading to 2030.

It should be noted here, however, that a “calming presence” effect in relation to China can only be exercised by the big NATO member states with leverage, whose position is not reliant on the US. US security

⁹ Quote from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, from: “Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg After 1:1 Meeting | London, United Kingdom,” The White House, December 3 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>

¹⁰ “新时代的中国国防” http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm, English translation: “Full Text: China’s National Defense in the New Era,” The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

¹¹ Ringsmose, Jens, Rynning, Sten, “China Brought NATO Closer Together,” War on the Rocks, February 5, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/china-brought-nato-closer-together/>

recipients, including the Baltic States, for whom the US is the driving force for protection against their sole existential threat – Russia – are likely to continue to act as amplifiers of the US’s message, as proven by the 2019/2020 cases of bilateral Joint Declarations and Joint Statements on 5G security, signed by Romania (August 20, 2019), Poland (September 5, 2019), Estonia (November 1, 2019), Bulgaria (November 25, 2019), Latvia (February 27, 2020), the Czech Republic (May 6, 2020), Slovenia (August 13, 2020), and Lithuania (September 17, 2020).

“Able to change when the world is changing”¹² – Towards a Global Outlook

During his *Remarks on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world*, Jens Stoltenberg pointed out that “[...] the rise of China is fundamentally shifting the global balance of power. Heating up the race for economic and technological supremacy. Multiplying the threats to open societies and individual freedoms. And increasing the competition over our values and our way of life,”¹³ in what was only the first of many mentions of the People’s Republic of China that day. Such an outcome was hardly unexpected. The necessity for NATO to define and gauge China had already been brewing in practitioner and think-tank circles prior to the 70th NATO Summit in December 2019.

When asked outright if NATO saw China as the enemy, Stoltenberg pointed out that the issue is not black and white: “NATO does not see China as the new enemy or an adversary. But what we see is that the rise of China is fundamentally changing the global balance of power and the NATO leaders [...] for the first time in NATO’s history, agreed that NATO has to address the consequences, the security consequences, of

¹² Quote from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, from: “Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg After 1:1 Meeting | London, United Kingdom,” The White House, December 3 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>

¹³ “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 8, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm

the rise of China.”¹⁴ Still, the issues he had pointed out earlier – the race for technological supremacy, threats to societies and freedoms, and the alternative value package – coupled with mentions of China’s growing military might were too important to be ignored. Interestingly, these very issues serve as a uniting factor between NATO and the non-NATO Indo-Pacific Western partner countries – and understandably so. After all, they need the expertise of the NATO members for several reasons.

First, China is a massive defence spender and a country that is, in the words of its own foreign minister, “becoming strong”.¹⁵

Secondly, it is a country that has a defined strategy of shaping a more active international role by “actively building a global network of partnerships to advance China’s diplomatic agenda” and “spearheading the reform of the global governance system”.¹⁶

And finally, and perhaps most strikingly, it is an actor that is not in isolation or opposition to the NATO member states – far from it. As the leading export country worldwide¹⁷ with the largest proportion of the global GDP based on PPP in 2019,¹⁸ China is at the centre of a network of international mutual dependency and interconnectedness, including in the defence market. As put by one NATO official: “All the countries in NATO have some kind of relationship with China”.¹⁹

For these reasons, NATO needs to develop a wider global network of partners facing the same challenges – as Stoltenberg expressed, in

¹⁴ “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 8, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm

¹⁵ Wang Yi, “ Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Conscientiously and Break New Ground in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” 20.07.2020., Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml

¹⁶ Wang Yi, “ Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Conscientiously and Break New Ground in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” 20.07.2020., Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml

¹⁷ “Top 20 export countries worldwide in 2019 (in billion U.S. dollars),” Statista, April 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264623/leading-export-countries-worldwide/>

¹⁸ “The 20 countries with the largest proportion of the global gross domestic product (GDP) based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in 2019,” Statista, October 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270183/countries-with-the-largest-proportion-of-global-gross-domestic-product-gdp/#statisticContainer>

¹⁹ Mehta, Aaron, “NATO’s Allied Transformation Command deputy on China, space and future threats,” Defense News, December 2, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/smr/nato-2020-defined/2019/12/03/nato-struggles-with-its-china-conundrum/>

order to respond to the security consequences of China's rise, NATO will need to reach outside its borders and work with "close and like-minded partners" such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand.²⁰

China is an issue with the potential to push NATO even broader, "toward a more global NATO in which the alliance's security agenda is no longer Europe- and North America-centric".²¹

"China is coming closer to us"²² – In Lieu of Conclusions

As argued in this article, the rise of China has the potential to give NATO more strength and purpose in the next decade: it is the reason for pushing the US towards a transatlantic dialogue, it is an opportunity for a bigger European role, and it is a motivation for like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific to turn NATO into a truly globally connected player. But does this mean that China is in fact an imminent security threat for NATO?

For the time being, China feels good within the confines of a NATO-patrolled global space. Aside from the unpleasantness brought to China by NATO's position on the Nine Dash line dispute in the South China Sea, China still gains tremendously from the very "global balance of power" it is perceived to be fundamentally shifting.

First of all, NATO is the undisputed blue-water security provider for a country whose export economy relies on maritime shipping.²³

Secondly, and in connection with the previous point, China realises that NATO is the undeniable cornerstone of the global security

²⁰ "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 8, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm

²¹ Avdaliani, Emil, "China's Effect: A Global NATO," The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, August 10, 2020, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/china-nato-pacific/>

²² Quote from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, from: "Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg After 1:1 Meeting | London, United Kingdom," The White House, December 3 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-stoltenberg-11-meeting-london-united-kingdom/>

²³ Fingar, Thomas, "China's Foreign Policy goals," guest talk, Riga Stradins University, September 18, 2020.

architecture – the very architecture it is benefitting from. In the next decade, China will continue to need global stability in order to pursue its domestic development. The PRC is a country unwilling to enter any formal alliances aside from the existing “Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty” with North Korea of 1961, as clearly stated by the Prime Minister Li Keqiang during his communication with his Russian counterparts: “According to the general trend of world development, the two sides have pioneered the establishment of a new type of international relations that is non-aligned, non-confrontational, and non-targeted against third parties.”²⁴ This, in turn, means that China is not on the path of teaming up with Russia to create an alternative to NATO.

No doubt, Beijing’s rhetoric towards the US has been heating up. However, China is extremely careful to keep the exchange of unpleasanties under control. The 2019 whitepaper is very much focused on a critique of the US, but cooperation and dialogue is acknowledged where it counts. The position is skilfully weighed: “China actively and properly handles its military relationship with the US in accordance with the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation. It strives to make the military-to-military relationship a stabilizer for the relations between the two countries and hence contribute to the China–US relationship based on coordination, cooperation and stability. In 2014, China’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the US Department of Defense signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Notification of Major Military Activities and Confidence-Building Measures Mechanism and the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters. In 2015, the two countries agreed on the annexes on the military crisis notification mechanism and the rules of behaviour for safety in air-to-air encounters. In 2017, the two countries established a diplomatic and security dialogue and joint staff dialogue mechanism with a view to actively strengthening strategic communication and managing risks and differences. The two militaries carry out institutionalized exchanges between the defense authorities, armies, navies and air forces, as well as practical cooperation in HADR, counter-piracy, and exchanges between academic institutions [...] in

²⁴ “李克强接受俄罗斯塔斯社书面采访,” Xinhua, June 16, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-09/16/c_1125000889.htm

China–US relations, the military-to-military relationship remains the generally stable one.”²⁵ Interestingly, the position of the PRC State Council expressed in the whitepaper is that the stabilisation of the Sino-American relationship could be driven by the military – presumably because it is the military whose task is to prevent risks arising from confrontation.

One can suggest that in the next decade China will continue to invest in its military and double-use capacity-building in line with Xi Jinping’s ideas of “China’s dream of national rejuvenation”, under the narrative of defensive development, and NATO needs to strengthen the understanding of the strategic implications of this among its members. China will continue to build on its “interconnectedness” by capitalising on the partner/competitor duality, and its actions will attest to this strategy – intelligence and information gathering, hybrid ops, and outcomes with complicated attribution. In other words, under-the-threshold nudges with the goal of gaining more leverage via distortion, but not outright conventional challenges to NATO.

If in the more distant future, China’s political elite tilts towards extreme nationalism and exceptionalism and decides that it is time to take China’s “rightful place” in the world by force, such an outcome alone would indeed shatter the existing security reality, but this would primarily be devastating for the country itself.

²⁵ “新时代的中国国防” http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm, English translation: “Full Text: China’s National Defense in the New Era,” The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html, p. 23

ADAPTATION:
THE NEVER-ENDING
STORY

The Essence of Timing – Arms Control and Disarmament

Imants Lieģis

As the first year of the second decade of the 21st century draws to a close, timing is crucial. The world is in the throes of a pandemic. Global uncertainties prevail. So, addressing existential issues about arms control and disarmament less than a week before the 2020 presidential elections on 3rd November must be nigh on madness.

To complicate matters further, additional dates that are crucial to arms control are fast approaching. The Open Skies Treaty could see a formal withdrawal by the USA taking effect on 22nd November, the US-Russia New START Treaty could come to an end in February 2021 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has a review date scheduled for no later than April next year. At least those seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons were given a boost on 24th October 2020, when the conditions for the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons were met following the deposit with the secretary-general of the 50th instrument of ratification or accession of the treaty. This treaty will therefore enter into force on 22nd January 2021.

This “Riga Conference Paper” will therefore very much be a snapshot of the situation as at the end of October 2020. Those of us engaged in international relations will be holding our breath over the outcome of America’s crucial elections. The results will undoubtedly have significant implications, not only for Latvia and our region of Northern Europe. A President Biden or second term of President Trump will profoundly impact the global security situation for the next few years. Nevertheless, it is helpful to assess the situation irrespective of the outcome of the US elections.

In looking ahead to the third decade of this century, I will bear in mind NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s proposals about “NATO 2030” – making NATO stronger politically, taking a more global approach, whilst remaining strong militarily.

The security challenges posed to the existing arms control and disarmament regime affect the alliance, but, in this bilateral and multilateral mix, also stretch beyond NATO's areas of competence. The global scope of NATO and its military strength are therefore at the forefront when considering security challenges. Yet political strength and cohesion is the glue holding NATO together at a crucial moment, given the timing and implications of the presidential elections in the USA.

Euro-Atlantic security faces existential challenges caused by a near breakdown of the arms control and disarmament regime. Traditional diplomatic instruments propping up arms control and counter-proliferation have all but disappeared. President Trump's withdrawing America from commitments under existing treaties combined with Russia's blatant breaches have contributed to the situation. A rapidly emerging economically and militarily powerful China, with strategic global ambitions, adds a new and potent mix to developments.

How has this come about and how can the situation be salvaged? In examining these issues, I will confine myself to a focus on some of the most important instruments that have secured a relatively stable *status quo* – the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, New START, and the Open Skies Treaty.

The Current Regime

The risks posed by nuclear weapons have grown as a result of, amongst other things, the end of the **INF Treaty**. This 1987 agreement, signed between the USA and the Soviet Union, heralded fundamental changes to the Cold War order and was regarded as a cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security. Some 2,700 Soviet and US ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500 kilometres were destroyed, albeit, to quote President Ronald Reagan, with a need to "trust but verify". This reduction of nuclear weapons preceded the demise of the Soviet Union. With hindsight, this reduction was a remarkable achievement and was part of a number of agreements which defined the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security architecture.¹

¹ Durkalec, Jacek, "European security without the INF Treaty", September 30, 2019. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2019/Also-in-2019/european-security-without-the-inf-treaty/EN/index.htm>

Nevertheless, after years of non-compliance by Russia, the USA jettisoned the INF Treaty in 2019. During his presidency, Donald Trump had a habit of upsetting the apple cart of earlier agreements. He did this with the Paris Climate Accords, NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as well as the nuclear agreement the West had achieved after painstaking negotiations with Iran. US partner parties to the agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, disagreed and tried thereafter to salvage it.

There are those that argued that in spite of Russia breaching the provisions of the INF Treaty, President Trump should have stuck to it for a variety of reasons. For example, withdrawal gave Putin a public rationale and excuse to continue with more breaches by developing further treaty-illegal weapons systems; it also gave a green light for Moscow to refine its Euro-specific nuclear strategy, aimed at structures and systems vital to the defence of Europe.² The INF Treaty prevented the USA from deploying nuclear weapons not just in Europe, but also, for example, in the South China Sea at a time when China's burgeoning technological advances and military deployments cause concern. China was not a signatory to the INF and therefore not inhibited by its restrictive measures, a point Trump took on board at the time of announcing US withdrawal.

On the other hand, Russia's ongoing breaches of the INF Treaty since 2014, made the terms of the agreement seem unpalatable in any event. Russia has illegally deployed land-based cruise missiles capable of striking our region and beyond. The development of the SSC-8/9M729 intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile, deployed around 2017, offered Moscow military and political benefits, being more capable of avoiding launch detection and tracking during flight, thus striking their distant targets with little or no warning.³ The missile is capable of reaching almost all European capitals and NATO critical infrastructure that would be required in the event of reinforcement capabilities deploying to Europe from North America. Warning signs about the united NATO stance concerning this missile already appeared

² Lindley-French, Julian. "Trump, INF and the Putin Trap". <https://lindleyfrench.blogspot.com/2018/10/trump-inf-and-putin-trap.html>

³ Durkalec, Jacek, "European security without the INF Treaty", *NATO Review*, September 30, 2019. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2019/Also-in-2019/european-security-without-the-inf-treaty/EN/index.htm>

at the Brussels leaders meeting in July 2018, when the following declaration was adopted:

“Allies have identified a Russian missile system, the 9M729, which raises serious concerns. After years of denials and obfuscation, and despite Allies repeatedly raising their concerns, the Russian Federation only recently acknowledged the existence of the missile system without providing the necessary transparency or explanation. A pattern of behaviour and information over many years has led to widespread doubts about Russian compliance. Allies believe that, in the absence of any credible answer from Russia on this new missile, the most plausible assessment would be that Russia is in violation of the Treaty. NATO urges Russia to address these concerns in a substantial and transparent way, and actively engage in a technical dialogue with the United States.”⁴

Clearly the appeal to Russia to “address these concerns in a substantial and transparent way” fell on deaf ears and led to the demise of the treaty the following year.

Whereas the INF Treaty was a bilateral agreement signed between two antagonistic nuclear powers, a crucial element of the nuclear disarmament and arms control regime is the multilateral **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, which entered into force back in 1970. The treaty provides legally binding obligations on disarmament, a verifiable non-proliferation safeguards regime, and a commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It is perceived as an essential pillar of international peace and security, and the heart of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Its unique status is based on its near universal membership, as 191 state parties have joined the treaty, including the five nuclear-weapon states. The treaty provides for a five yearly review procedure, which was due to take place in the spring of this year, marking the 50th anniversary of the treaty’s entry into force. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, the state parties to the agreement postponed the review conference to a later date, defined at the time as “no later than April 2021”.⁴ Expectations for this year’s conference were,

⁴ Brussels Summit Declaration, July 11, 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm

in any event, regarded as low given the ongoing perception by many signatory states that the nuclear weapons states have not done enough to pursue nuclear disarmament.

The deteriorating international security environment also provides scant optimism concerning the possibility of further nuclear arms reductions. This has come about because of the recent decline in US-Russian and US-Chinese relations, the unravelling of the international arms control regime with the termination of the INF Treaty (as illustrated above), uncertainty about the future of the New START Treaty (see below), and the possibility of new, destabilising nuclear arms competitions. However, the reprieve given by the postponement of the date of the Review Conference may offer opportunities related, amongst other things, to the intervening US presidential elections.⁵

At the same time, the question of the extension of the **New START Treaty** between the USA and Russia has also recently raised mildly optimistic hopes. The original Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty was negotiated between the USA and the Soviet Union during the 1980s, signed in 1991, and entered into force after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1994, lasting 15 years. Its successor, New START, came into force in 2011 and is currently the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between Russia and the USA. It imposes limits on the size and composition of the nuclear arsenals of the world's two largest nuclear powers and provides for notifications and inspections to ensure compliance. Reductions were completed by 2018. The treaty expires in February 2021 unless both sides agree to an extension of up to five years.

Given its renunciation of the INF Treaty, there were expectations that the Trump administration would allow New START to lapse. These were based on concerns about new Russian strategic nuclear arms whose status under New START was in some cases unclear, as well as Chinese nuclear forces that remain completely outside the limits of New START (China not being a party to the agreement). However, concerning China, there appears to be more of a US willingness to try to draw China into the discussions at a later stage, and not as a prerequisite to extending New START. Moreover, following a series of negotiations between US

⁵ Einhorn, Robert, "Experts assess the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 50 years after it went into effect", *Brookings*, March 3, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/03/experts-assess-the-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-50-years-after-it-went-into-effect/>

and Russian officials on arms control, including New START, between June and October this year, a slight ray of light has appeared. After meeting in Helsinki on October 5th, US officials reportedly claimed that a framework accord involving a political commitment by the USA and Russia to freeze the total number of nuclear warheads had been discussed. Such a freeze would be linked to the extension of the New START Treaty for a year or longer to allow for negotiations on a more far-reaching treaty.⁶ Later, Russian officials denied that any such framework had been reached; however, responding to these reports, President Putin also indicated Russia's interest in an extension of the treaty for at least a year, reportedly pointing out on 16th October that "it would be extremely sad if the treaty ceases to exist without being replaced by another fundamental document of the kind. All those years, the New START has worked, playing its fundamental role of limiting and containing an arms race".⁷

US national security advisor Robert O'Brien rejected Putin's proposal, calling it a "non-starter", leaving the future of New START in doubt. But Putin went further, maybe hedging his bets on a Biden presidency. According to reports emerging on 26th October, he proposed inspections of the Kaliningrad enclave to dispel US claims of cruise missiles being stationed there. In return, Putin seeks reciprocal access to US and NATO sites in Europe.⁸

At the same time, Europe's voice was raised when some 75 European parliamentarians, quoting Russian reports contradicting prospects of an agreement in the offing, appealed to the US Congress for bipartisan support for extending the treaty.⁹ (Please note, in a spirit of openness,

⁶ See Dave Decamp, "US, Russia Making Progress in New START Talks", *antiwar.com*, October 6, 2020, <https://news.antiwar.com/2020/10/06/us-russia-making-progress-in-new-start-talks/>, and October 6 Wall Street Journal article.

⁷ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin proposes yearlong extension of nuclear pact with US", *Associated Press*, October 16, 2020. <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/europe/top-stories/putin-proposes-yearlong-extension-of-nuclear-pact-with-us/ar-BB1a5S0j?ocid=msedgdhp>

⁸ Jake Rudnitsky, "Putin Offers NATO Missile Inspections in Bid to Rebook Treaty", *Bloomberg*, October 26, 2020. <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/europe/top-stories/putin-offers-nato-missile-inspections-in-bid-to-reboot-treaty/ar-BB1apeB7?ocid=msedgdhp>

⁹ ELN Group Statement: Appeal for the US government to extend New START. October 13, 2020. https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/group-statement/appeal-to-take-action-and-urge-the-u-s-government-to-extend-new-start/?mc_cid=c37b3de2f8&mc_eid=be942ccca2

that I am on the Advisory Board and an active member of ELN, which spearheaded this appeal).

The **Open Skies Treaty**, which entered into force in 2002, allows its 34 state parties to gather information on each other's military forces and activities through aerial surveillance. Given that the USA, Russia and most European countries are members, its transparency-enhancing measures have undoubtedly served as a tool for increasing mutual understanding, confidence and trust. However, on 22nd May 2020, the United States announced that it is withdrawing from the Open Skies treaty. Formal withdrawal is due to take place six months later (i.e., 22nd November). The USA explained that Russia's repeated violations of the terms, combined with technological progress, had made the treaty's added value increasingly limited. However, in order to maintain ambivalence about whether withdrawal will actually take place, Trump claimed that a new deal could be forged with Russia. "We're going to pull out, and they're going to come back and want to make a deal."¹⁰

Given the value of the treaty, Latvia decided to continue to implement its terms whilst bearing in mind Russia's unwillingness to comply *vis-a-vis* Kaliningrad and the Georgian border during the past few years. Clearly, the effectiveness of the treaty is based on compliance by signatories. It will be interesting to see if President Putin's offer to inspect sites in Kaliningrad under the New START negotiations will also apply to the Open Skies Treaty.

Salvaging The Regime

The pattern of Russian disregard for treaty obligations, combined with President Trump's attempts to cut new "deals" that have so far failed to materialise, has led to a dangerous deterioration of strategic stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Whilst Latvia and other European partners are not parties to the bilateral US–Russian agreements, our security is directly affected. Europe's voice should also be heard, with an acknowledgement that Europe's two nuclear powers, France and

¹⁰ Bill Chappell, "Trump Administration Confirms U.S. Is Leaving Open Skies Surveillance Treaty", May 21, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/21/860476172/trump-administration-confirms-u-s-is-leaving-open-skies-surveillance-treaty?t=1601925811343>

the United Kingdom, are key in any discussions. Within NATO, political unity of European allies is a crucial part of making the alliance stronger politically. In turn, a more politically strong NATO can more easily go global. The crisis in arms control is global, which means that the solution must be global in scope.

In trying to salvage existing arms-control, transparency, and confidence-building measures, a number of approaches could be of use.

Firstly, breaches and non-compliance of obligations under the prevailing system should not be swept under the table. On the contrary, there is an obligation to continue to point to the facts, which illustrate cheating and a lack of reciprocity and transparency by Russia. The OSCE is the main forum for discussion under Open Skies. It goes without saying that compliance and transparency are principles that should continue to be strictly adhered by all Euro-Atlantic allies so as to avoid accusations of double standards.

Secondly, Latvia and its regional allies need to voice strategic concerns about US–Russian bilateral agreements in the confines of NATO. There is an urgent need to further develop a European view relating to New START’s extension, which will be of relevance irrespective of the outcome of the US presidential elections. The ELN joint statement by European parliamentarians, referred to above, illustrates how a common approach can be taken. Timing is crucial.

Thirdly, despite the prevailing antagonism in relations with Russia, channels of communication should, even if restricted, remain open. Potential possibilities for ongoing dialogue should be exploited. Neither naivety nor wishful thinking should take over. The origins of the current crisis in relations with Russia should not be conveniently forgotten, nor should new violations to existing norms be ignored. Instead, a strong united standpoint, accompanied by strategic patience in dealing with Putin’s Russia, are essential. NATO’s approach of ensuring deterrence and defence combined with dialogue should remain.

Fourthly, China’s emergence as a military, technological and economic powerhouse needs to be increasingly taken into consideration. As noted already, China remains outside of the INF and START treaties; but future accords will need to take Chinese nuclear forces more directly into account. NATO could consider innovative

proposals that the USA could develop in enhancing strategic stability together with China.¹¹

In a period of spreading hybrid warfare, including rapidly developing technological advances being used for military means, no efforts should be spared in retaining stability by salvaging an arms control and disarmament regime on the verge of collapse. NATO, in maintaining its political and military strength and developing its global role, can offer a strong contribution towards arms control and disarmament in the run-up to 2030. Latvia, in turn, should make its voice heard in the debates. Debates that will continue to be critical after November 3rd, whoever wins the US presidential election.

¹¹ Andreassen, Steven, "US nuclear policy and posture: bending toward Asia?", *The Korea Times*, August 26, 2020. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2020/08/197_294892.html

NATO at 30: Technological Challenges

Benoit d'Aboville

Since its foundation, NATO has always considered its main military and political advantage against its adversaries to be largely dependent upon technological superiority. It rested upon the ongoing capacity of most of the allies – especially the United States – to mobilise their industrial and technical base in building advanced defence capacities.

However, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned at the Global Security 2020 (GLOBSEC) Bratislava Forum on 7 October 2020, “Technological dominance has always been key to NATO’s success. But that dominance is now being challenged by those who do not share our values”. In fact, the military technological advances of Russia and China have been more rapid than expected by most Western experts.

Russia was able to recover, by early 2020, from the collapse of USSR and the ensuing the deep crisis of the 80s. For China, technological progress in the military field – as well as the pace of its military modernisation, both at the conventional and nuclear levels – has been quite rapid. It is understandable that, so far, for most European allies the Russian developments have been commanding more attention than the Chinese ones, which are seen as more distant. For the United States it has been different. But whatever the perceptions are amongst allies, there should be a consensus: both Russia’s and China’s advances in the defence technological race are now quite significant, and for NATO this is another “wake up” signal.

Although the weakness of Russia’s economy and industrial base has prevented Moscow from achieving the full extent of its military ambitions in deploying new advanced military systems, the country has nonetheless making significant progress in the modernisation of its armed forces. This can be seen in developments in the area of its long-range precision strike capability, which had been since the 80s an area of clear NATO superiority. This will now enable Russia to prosecute

targets on land and at sea across the transatlantic area, even from deep within Russian territory. It is also important to mention the deployment, on the Western borders of Russia, of a A2/AD protective “bubble”, which raise quite a challenge for NATO. The area of hypersonics, much touted by Vladimir Putin since his 2018 declarations, is another area of Russian technological progress that is closely watched by NATO, if only because it modifies most of the missile defence parameters.

Rapid technological progress is even more obvious in the case of China. The achievements of Chinese scientific research in the military-industrial sector has been bolstered by the sheer number of high-level academics, professionals and students in the most advanced military-related fields. They benefit from the support of an extensive network of state institutions working with a dual capacity in both areas. This national technological drive is backed at the highest level: over the last three years, a strong political priority has been officially given to challenging the technological advantage of the United States, Japan and others Western nations. Catching up with the US in the technological-military field was one of the main messages from last October’s plenum of the Chinese Communist Party, thus laying the ground for an ambitious multiannual plan for allocating resources for a new technology push.

Therefore, for NATO, the need to look forward at the implications of technological innovations for the strategic and military position of the alliance is an obvious requisite. The allies have to consider not only the next 10–15 years, which is more or less the time frame of the budgetary management of new programmes within NATO, but also – far more challenging – possible technological advances up to 2050 and beyond, even up to the end of the century, a horizon that is even less predictable given the rapid pace of the technology.

In the *short term*, the current challenges are clear: the economic and political consequences of COVID-19 are blurring the financial and economic landscape and thus affecting political and financial perspectives. For many allies, this will lead to new constraints on financing defence expenditures, and, for a few, a slowdown on financing new innovative defence systems. The well-known propensity of political leaders to give priority to short-term decisions, reinforced by the limited political time frame imposed on the political leadership by the electoral cycles of our democracies, create within allied countries a discrepancy

between the rush of technological innovations and the time needed for getting them incorporated into deployed systems. There is, therefore, a growing contradiction between the “short timeframe” of the world of political decision-making, the “fulgurant” pace of modern technology, and the “long timeframe” needed for deploying operational systems.

For those armaments already operational, there is a need to build in, from the start, the necessary capacities for a continuous series of upgrades over the life of the systems. NATO is well-accustomed to these evolutions, and the main concern remains how to maintain a satisfactory level of interoperability between allies. We already see problems resulting at the level of C3I and AI for maintaining the necessary cooperative links between different generations of air platforms existing in Europe.

For those systems that are still nascent, and therefore still at the level of research programmes, the issue is more complicated. Defence-industry professionals like to speak about the “death valley” that advanced defence technological projects have to cross in order to survive the intricacies of the bureaucratic management of the military programmes. They point rightly to uncertainties linked to delays between the moment the impact of a new technological innovation becomes well-understood and accepted within the defence establishment and the political decision to finance its incorporation in armaments which could then be operationally deployed.

For a country like the United States, with ample budgetary and industrial resources, for any given defence programme it is possible to simultaneously explore and finance a plurality of technological options and even to abandon them in the course of the project if they don't meet expectations. For most other allies, this “try and run” approach is simply not affordable. Such an unbalance between NATO allies creates serious planning and coordination problems, especially given, again, the need to maintain the interoperability of the main systems.

For the *medium term*, let's say to 2050, a target which implies a need to already take some basic decisions before the end of the current decade, the technological landscape has been more or less already mapped, but the choices will be even harder.

There are two main factors to consider in this debate. The first one is the political imperative, at least for the United States, to compete with China to maintain its superiority. The second is the very broad range

of technological “game changers” that could affect a whole range of defence postures within the alliance.

During the US’s 2020 presidential election campaign, much attention has been focused on what to expect for the US-China relationship after November 3. The race between the two candidates has been one of stark opposition on most issues, but the candidates’ positions on China share distinct commonalities. Both are advocating for tougher responses on trade, technology, and maritime security, although the two candidates diverge on the tactics. Still, no matter who occupies the White House in 2021, the issue of managing China’s technological drive on military technologies will be a centrepiece of future US defence policy. It is true that this direction was already mentioned in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, but this priority is sure to increase, and calls for allied solidarity will be, as a consequence, more pressing.

For the alliance, this creates a new issue. While at the NATO London Summit of 2019, the allies recognised the need to increase dialogue between themselves about a politically and militarily rising China and its implications for the world’s balance of power, they have not yet fully discussed the kind of actions they could take. Obviously, the US election has been a delaying factor, and until, as in St Peter’s Square, black smoke rises, it was premature to engage in such a sensitive transatlantic dialogue.

What is at stake? Do we speak about consultative mechanisms for a better collective awareness of the security implications of Chinese technology imports – as we had experienced in 2020 with the strong US diplomatic campaign against the use of the 5G technology from Huawei – or, on the opposite side of policy options, do we return to a kind of technological embargo like the one that was imposed during the Cold War on the USSR through the COCOM?

There is obviously not only a difference in the degree of collective action to be sought, but also a large political gap regarding the expected end result and the ways and means to be utilised to achieve it. The economic and political costs would be wildly different, as would the possible degrees of success to be expected.

In the field of nuclear non-proliferation or the control of missile technology transfers, we can take as examples the cases of Pakistan, North Korea and Iran, which demonstrate how difficult it is to prevent the full and tight implementation of constraints agreed upon by

Western countries in a global world economy. The same could also be said about the uneven results of the COCOM experience. Of course, past experience and uneven results should not be the sole reason not to try new approaches, but it gives at least an indication about the difficulties ahead.

Is there a role for NATO here? It will probably be considered by some as too large a forum, and preference could be given to smaller groups. But the problem is much deeper. In the October 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Jared Cohen and Richard Fontaine, in an article calling for “Uniting the techno-democracies”, propose a smaller “T-12” format “which would help democracies regain the initiative in global technology competition”.

One may observe a shift in rationale: from the task of restricting the most sensitive technology transfers, the emphasis should now be given to policies aimed at restoring and bolstering a Western technological advantage, which is seen as about to be superseded by Chinese performances. One may, of course, disagree with such a pessimistic (and, in a way, self-defeating) assessment. But one may also predict that the issue will lead to difficult debates within the alliance.

This will be further complicated by the implications of the so called “disruptive technologies” that lie ahead for NATO for the mid-2030s. One can learn a lot from a very interesting report titled “Science & Technology Trends 2020–2040 Exploring the S&T Edge NATO”, published in March 2020 by the NATO S&T Organisation (STO), which draws upon the support of the alliance’s defence S&T community and NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT).

The report points to several highly interrelated areas that are considered to be major strategic disruptors over the next 20 years: “technologies or scientific discoveries that are expected to have a major, or perhaps revolutionary, effect on NATO defence, security or enterprise functions in the period 2020-2040”.

Amongst the several emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs), either currently in the nascent stages of development or undergoing rapid revolutionary development, a few specific examples should be mentioned: data analysis, artificial intelligence (AI), autonomous vehicles, new space platforms, hypersonics missiles, quantum computer technologies, biotechnology used for defence, and new materials.

These are at different stages of development. Data, AI, autonomy, space and hypersonics are already in use and are seen to be predominantly disruptive in nature, as developments in these areas build upon long histories of supporting technological development. As such, a significant or revolutionary disruption of military capabilities is either already ongoing or will have a significant impact over the next 5–10 years.

New developments in quantum, biotechnology and materials are assessed as being emergent, requiring significantly more time, 10–20 years, before their disruptive natures are fully felt on military capabilities.

Amongst the full list of the technologies named in the report, four EDTs seem to be especially worth considering, if only because they are already a current priority for many allies at the national level.

Autonomy and unmanned vehicles are already widely in operational use in allied operations. Applications include access to unreachable areas, persistent surveillance, robots in support of soldiers, and automated logistics deliveries. However, the proliferation of drones around the world, including cheap ones exported by China, is creating a major problem for NATO's external operations (for example in Syria) by increasing vulnerabilities for allies in asymmetrical combat situations. The use of swarms of dedicated drones is considered to be one of the new ways to attack and destroy enemy anti-aircraft capacities in order to clear for the path for the entry of manned fighters and bombers. But this is also an option that could be used by enemies.

The use of **space** for C4ISR, navigation and defence is central to many of NATO's existing capabilities, and ultimately it is the foundation upon which NATO has built a technological edge. The use of space and space-derived data will only increase over the next 20 years, enabling increasingly capable and ubiquitous C4ISR capabilities. Combined with AI, this has the potential to significantly improve situational awareness at all levels, support near real-time assessments of operational effectiveness, and increase targeting success. However, as more and more alliance capabilities come to rely on these assets, risks from ASAT (anti-satellite) or robotic parasitic systems will become more acute. More congested orbits, the increased use of large constellations of smallsats, and increasing levels of space debris will impact the effectiveness and reliability of space-based systems.

Hypersonic technologies are now considered a priority in the US, China and Russia, as well as by Japan, France, the UK, India and Australia. These flight phases occur during re-entry from space into the atmosphere or during propelled/sustained atmospheric flight by a rocket, scramjet or combined cycle propulsion system. This class of weapon system includes air-launched strike missiles (HCM), manoeuvring re-entry glide vehicles (HGV), ground-sea ship killers, and post-stealth strike aircraft. Systems of this nature may rely primarily on kinetic effects alone or may include supplemental warheads (nuclear or non-nuclear). Countermeasures against individual, salvo or swarm hypersonic systems are particularly challenging due to their speed and manoeuvrability. To what degree this puts into question the existing missile defence programmes is a debate which should, sooner or later, be opened within the alliance.

Although new **quantum technologies** have the potential for a revolutionary impact on NATO operations, most (but not all) are in the early stages of development, and significant technical challenges lie ahead before operational systems can be developed. The use of ultra-sensitive gravimetric, magnetic or acoustic sensors will significantly increase the effectiveness of underwater warfare capabilities, potentially rendering the oceans transparent. Quantum technologies have the potential to make stealth technologies obsolete, provide more accurate target identification, and allow covert detection and surveillance. Accurate clocks will enable the development of (precision) positioning, as well as navigation and timing (PNT) systems for use in GPS-denied or inaccessible areas (such as under-ice). Unbreakable quantum key encryption will support substantially more robust and secure communication. Quantum computing, potentially the most disruptive quantum technology of all, has the potential to render previously untenable classical computational tasks.

Some of the conclusions of the NATO STO study are worth quoting in full:

“EDTs are poised to have a significant effect (positive and negative) on the Alliance over the next 20 years. However, productive employment of these new technologies will pose severe challenges and raise fundamental questions of ethics and legality. Expanded use of AI, BDAA and autonomy will

provide greater access to critical operationally relevant data and knowledge, but at the risk of the fog of more. Information itself will increasingly become a warfighting domain and a commodity. In parallel, the use of automated and potentially autonomous systems in operations in which humans are not directly involved in the decision cycle, will become more widespread and increase the pace of strategic competition.”

“Despite these potential leaps in innovation, the evolving battlespace will continue to feature a mix of old legacy systems and new weapon systems. This mix may challenge the Alliance’s ability to fight together. Technological gaps will pose connectivity, communications, doctrinal, legal and interoperability challenges. Capability and capacity mismatches, as well as capacity shortfalls, are to be expected as nations come to terms with the implications of these new technologies ...”

“While it is likely that the Alliance will maintain a degree of technological advantage in some EDT areas, EDTs (in particular AI, Big Data, biotechnology, hypersonic) will likely become cheaper and more accessible to hostile actors. The Alliance’s dependence on advanced technology could increasingly become a liability if care is not taken on how they are integrated and in the development of counter-measures. ... It is essential that we understand the nature of these new technologies, analyse their implications for defence and security, explore the opportunities they offer, push the boundaries of what is possible, and ensure that we are ready to mitigate their risks. NATO is by its international and collaborative nature well placed to consider these issues.”

Indeed, as has already been mentioned by the NATO Secretary General, NATO is a natural platform for transatlantic cooperation on these issues and for debating new technologies. It offers proven consultative mechanisms and a unique network for collaboration on defence and security questions.

But for such a debate to be productive, one has first to convince the public and political circles in allied countries that modern technology

applied to defence has an increasing momentum of its own, and, if we want to redirect it towards our own security interests (or convince others that there is a potential shared interest through arms control), we cannot choose to “swim against the flow or rest on the banks of the river”. There will be no way then to stop some other countries (and potential adversaries) from entering into possession of the capacities that we would then have denied to ourselves.

Changing, but not Ending: Transformations of Multilateralism in the Era of Great Power Competition

Kai-Olaf Lang

For decades, multilateralism was considered to be the paradigm of organising international relations that leads the world to more stability and fairness. After World War II there seemed to be a consensus – at least among the leading powers of the newly emerging West – that there needs to be an arrangement of international interactions based on a shared acceptance of norms and regulations. This “institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct”¹ was both an attempt to avoid disorder and catastrophes resulting from unlimited conflict and an antithesis to other methods of creating stability in international affairs – such as regional dominance by force or voluntary subordination. Multilateralism entails a number of features, which has made it attractive for many actors in international politics. Its most prominent element and defining component is certainly the idea of a “rule of rules” instead of a “rule of strength”. Interactions based on mutually recognised guidelines and embedded in institutions and pre-defined procedures tend to reduce the costs of conflict management by increasing transparency and reliability. Also, at least from a formal point of view, multilateralism is based on equality and (often) on the assumption of inclusiveness. In this respect, multilateral settings can be instrumental to coming to terms with power asymmetries and to providing protection to less powerful actors, who can refer to rules and laws instead of being subject to the strength of mighty players. But multilateralism also has its upsides for “heavyweights”. If they are ready to invest self-restraint

¹ John Gerard Ruggie, Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution, in: *International Organization*, 46 (3), 1992: 561–598, 571.

by participating in a multilateral regime or organisation, they can get rewards in the form of lessened costs of transactions due to generally binding and acknowledged rules, as these can ease negotiations, facilitate compromises and bolster trust.

Of course, the reality of multilateralism has had considerable flaws. Multilateral scaffoldings have at times been designed according to the preferences of some influential members of the framework. For example, institutions have been criticised as not being an “antidote to power”, but on the contrary that they “mask relations of power that transforms them into stealth weapons of domination”.² Moreover, multilateral organisations have often worked in an asymmetric manner, diluting the ambition of equality and *de facto* being governed by informal coordination among countries with huge political, military or economic potential. Also, multilateralism has not always been “inclusive”. Some multilateral architectures were explicitly seen as non-comprehensive (like, for example, NATO), while others were established as counter-arrangements to already existing frameworks (e.g. the Warsaw Pact or COMECON, which of course also were primarily power-amplifiers for a hegemon and not organisations for reducing differences of power among member states). Finally, multilateralism was never the only or prevailing hallmark of international relations. A “rule of rules” was never the only game in town: neither in the post-war-era, when the bipolar confrontation of two power blocks structured the world, nor in the ephemeral post-Cold-War period of the 1990s, when a unipolar moment seemed to emerge. There was no period when a commitment to “generalised principles of conduct” was the exclusive signature of international politics.

These sobering observations should be kept in mind, as they reflect the state of multilateralism in a period of reinforced great power competition. There is no doubt that multilateralism is increasingly under pressure and that conflicts between the various poles of the international system have far-reaching implications for the way multilateral arrangements can function. It is certainly justified to talk about a crisis of multilateralism. However, an analysis of new shortcomings and future problems should start from the assumption

² Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Year's Crisis, 1919–1939*, New York, 1964, quoted from Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, *Power in International Politics*, in: *International Organization*, 59(1), 2005: 39–75.

that there was no golden age of multilateralism – some of the current difficulties had existed earlier, some were latent. Therefore, an analysis about the hardships of multilateralism caused by great power rivalry has to examine at least three factors: firstly, it has to look at the root causes for the troubles of multilateralism, many of them reaching beyond simply the great power issue; secondly, it has to identify the harmful effects of great power competition for multilateral collaboration; and thirdly, it has to think about the prospects of multilateralism by examining how multilateral systems have responded to difficulties in the past, how they were able to develop resilience, and given all this, what adaptations will be possible and necessary to ensure its relevance in international relations.

A Longer Trend

While the “crisis of multilateralism” is often regarded as a result of great power competition, particularly the intensifying US-China rivalry, rules-based systems of international relations have been undergoing a weakening, which has been produced by the interplay of various enduring factors.

Long before China’s rise to become a challenger of US pre-eminence, it became clear that the global equation of power goes through substantial shifts. The emergence of new regional powers in Asia, America or Africa – as well as the ascendancy of even more ambitious players like India or China and the return of a restive Russia – swiftly resulted in a more dispersed distribution of global power. The impression of a post-Cold-War “one world” that accepts the patterns and norms of the West gave way to a multipolar setting, where different centres coexisted or competed with each other.

The appearance of new power centres *per se* is not necessarily detrimental to multilateral arrangements. Problems arise when these players question the core norms of the concept or deliver their own readings of them, e.g. by putting forward a particular understanding of human rights in the context of the United Nations or other fora.

On the other side, multilateralism is limited by the deficiencies and troubles of those who for a long time have heralded the idea of taming power by rules, i.e. the West. The European Union, which in

itself is a multilateral construction, is increasingly divided over questions concerning the strength of community institutions and European law *vis-à-vis* national interests and intergovernmental decision-making. Hence, it has growing difficulties in acting as a standard-bearer of multilateral politics on the international level.

Even more dramatic is US's "withdrawalism": the Trump administration has left various multilateral frameworks, questioned others and refrained from establishing new ones. Retrenchment has ranged from the Paris Agreement on climate change, to the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO, to the compromise on Iran's nuclear programme (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces. However, US resentment towards multilateral arrangements has been cultivated for years, and previous administrations had also shown increasing hesitance. Apart from undermining multilateral institutions as such, one of the most harmful implications of America's retreat is its (partial) farewell from a role that for decades has stabilised multilateral settings: the provider of international public good. This has opened up opportunities for others, who are willing and capable of taking on the function, at least in specific issue areas. A recent and drastic example is the COVID-19 pandemic. At least in the initial stages after the outbreak of the virus, China tried to fill the vacuum that the US (a key international player for mitigating epidemics for many years) had played earlier. Robert Kagan's analysis about the rising international disorder as one of the key implications caused by a downgraded US presence on the global stage and in multilateral structures probably exaggerates America's ability to shape global affairs, but it aptly points at the effects of US disengagement.³ However, his plea for recommitment seems grounded on a rational and liberal cost-benefit analysis, according to which an inward-looking US will feel the ramifications of the global jungle and therefore will reengage. Under the conditions of great power rivalry and domestic demand for a more assertive foreign policy stance, it is questionable whether important segments of the US elite and public sentiment will allow enough leeway for a return to a rules-based and regulated system, which also limits American actions.

³ Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, New York, 2018.

Both in Europe and in the US, another development is limiting multilateralism: the contestation of liberalism and liberal internationalism. Neo-sovereignism in combination with a rejection of what is called the “liberal mainstream” are not solely domestic issues. The agenda of countering liberal hegemony in culture, the economy and politics, as it is pursued by a considerable number of parties and movements, necessarily has an external dimension: the defence of traditional identities or national interests in the sphere of the economy also requires the maintenance or recapturing of sovereignty. But these phenomena, also known as re-nationalisation or de-globalisation, are at odds with the logic of multilateral arrangements – the quest for more national autonomy requires less, not more, of the self-limitation that is enshrined in the idea of multilateralism.

All these trends have led to a variety of deficits and losses for classic multilateralism. Some have even identified a multiple-sided crisis, depicting the simultaneity of a crisis of power, a crisis of relevance and a crisis of legitimacy.⁴ In particular, the effectiveness deficit poses a threat to the multilateral principle. Maybe one of the most visible cases of that lack of meaning for multilateralism was the global financial and public debt crisis, in which both the multilateral structures of global financial governance (the IMF, the World Bank) and the plurilateral formats of club governance (the G7, the G20) were engines of early and effective anti-crisis policies.

A well-functioning and results-producing multilateralism could absorb power shifts and legitimacy problems due to underrepresentation and inept institutions by compensating for them with output-legitimacy; an ineffective multilateralism that “does not deliver” is perceived as superfluous. For that reason, the concept of “effective multilateralism”, which has become a slogan for attempts to revitalise multilateralism, is also a pessimistic confession of its underperformance.

⁴ Anthony Dworkin, Richard Gowan, *Three Crises and an Opportunity: Europe's Stake in Multilateralism*, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/three_crises_and_an_opportunity_europes_stake_in_multilateralism/

Great Power Competition: New Troubles for Multilateralism

Great power competition is nothing unusual in international relations. It is certainly true that great power competition “is more the norm than the exception in the history of international affairs” and that “the past 25–30 years – the period since the end of the Cold War, [was] a period that has featured abnormally low levels of explicit great-power rivalry”.⁵ Multilateralism in particular feels the end of this anomaly. Great powers have an inbuilt quest for extending their influence, and once there are other powers in the game, there is a high likelihood that at some point they will come into conflict with each other. When it comes to pushing through their interests, great powers can do this in a coercive way, disposing of necessary resources. Facing the choice of observing self-imposed rules in international frameworks and not achieving their goals, on the one hand, and relying on the efficacy of their own capabilities while ignoring the sphere of shared principles, on the other, great powers have a propensity to prefer the latter option. This is the underlying grammar that makes multilateralism so vulnerable to the rise of great power struggles.

More particularly, there are at least four development which hamper multilateralism during the current competitive era.

A first aspect of this is the augmentation of a worldview that understands international affairs as a zero-sum game and not as a collaborative process producing mutual benefit. To some extent, this attitude results from an extensive and sometimes instrumental use of the win-win presumption. Whereas cooperation and interdependence can create mutual advantages, they can also be employed as vehicles for national interest. Often pointing at China’s overstretch of the win-win narrative, the European Union also has not been free of hypocrisy in dealing with its partners, packing its own interests into benevolent discourses of reciprocal gains.

But of course, the main driver for the rejection of the win-win perspective is the conviction in important parts of the political elites of great or emerging powers that multilateral organisations and

⁵ Hal Brands, *Six Propositions about Great-Power Competition and Revisionism in the 21st Century*, Perry World House, 2017, <https://global.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/go-six-propositions-brands.original.pdf>

mechanisms do not serve their national ambitions, but rather limit them by putting national interests in a straightjacket of regulations and norms. An instructive illustration of that thinking was an article written during the early Trump era by two advisers of the US president, in which one of the basic suggestions was “that the world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage”.⁶ It is an intrinsic supposition of zero-sum thinking that any change of the international power equation caused by the rise of another player goes along with reductions of one’s own potential – and vice versa. Therefore, from this antagonistic angle, neither the status quo powers nor the advancing powers see the virtues of multilateralism, even though it could serve both sides, binding the existing dominant power as well as restricting the opportunities of the emerging power.

A second factor of great power competition that concerns multilateralism is the practical effect of the Hobbesian zero-sum rationale. Great powers use their resources to generate allies by establishing coalitions, as well as by building new forms of dependency through diplomatic, economic, financial means, with hard or soft power. While “spheres of influence” (or at least attempts to create them) are the most visible emanations of this tendency, there are also other ways of forming loyalties. The geopolitics of infrastructure, geo-economic interdependence, financial dependence or digital connectivity can also be part of the expansion and containment policies of great powers. This does not mean that these new loyalties and dependencies immediately weaken multilateral systems, but great powers can use their networks of like-minded friends and enforced partners to build clusters, which could act as alternatives to multilateral arrangements and the power clusters within them.

A third effect of great power competition for multilateralism is indirectly related to the emergence of clusters and new allegiances around great powers. With the prospect of having durable coalitions, or at least pragmatic partners, great powers can establish their own multilateral “counter-projects” or competitive structures to existing frameworks. One of the most prominent examples of this is the Asian

⁶ H.R. McMaster, Gary D. Cohn, America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone, Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2017.

Infrastructure Investment Bank, a project initiated by China, which among other objectives, was intended to overcome the dominance of the World Bank and its set of goals and principles. It is debatable whether all structures of that kind are multilateral, because not all collaborative sets involving a number of states are rules-based frameworks. Arrangements like the Shanghai Treaty Organisation or BRICS-cooperation are instead minilateral coalitions to counterbalance US or Western dominance. But they can at least impede the effectiveness of existing multilateral institutions. In a similar vein, great powers, referring to close partners, have better chances to act within multilateral structures – not contesting them from outside, but using them as fora for contesting or hedging their rivals.

A fourth factor is the exit option. Whereas great powers might undermine multilateral systems by paralyzing them or by non-compliance with their rules, they can just leave them. Of course, smaller states can also do that, but for them the costs of exits can be too high as compared to the benefits. Formal retrenchment has been a hallmark of the US during the Trump presidency, whereas Russia and China have not followed that strategy. For them, staying in multilateral contexts has also been a way to demonstrate their commitment to rules-based politics and a way to insert a wedge between the US and the European Union.

A Fuzzy Multilateralism: Prospects and Implications for the West and NATO

The picture that emerges from all this is one of profound shifts and manifold pressures, and to some extent of decline and downturn, but not of collapse nor complete disintegration. Hence, multilateralism is transforming rather than ending. It is true that multilateralism has entered a period of stress, which is intensified by the rivalry of old and emerging powers. But reinforced great power competition does not imply that types of action characteristic for the *modus operandi* of great powers will be the only game in town. We will not witness a world of exclusive unilateralism, neither in a new global concert nor in a chaotic mobocracy of permanent clashes. Multilateralism will not be replaced by great power competition but will coexist with it. Therefore,

multilateralism, if it wants to be effective and successfully adapt, will to some extent have to constructively interact with the patterns imposed by great power rivalry.⁷

The overarching feature of this is its fuzziness and patchwork nature. The old concept of liberal multilateralism (which anyway was more of an idea than an authoritative guideline for practical functioning) will increasingly work side-by-side with informal minilateral structures and unilateral action. Multilateral structures will be the battleground for the legitimisation of great power interests, and they will be contested by alternative plurilateral projects. And, of course, all these state-driven endeavours will be complicated by the actions of transnational societal and important business actors.

What conclusions should the West and should NATO draw from this all?

First of all, the West has to restore the spirit of multilateralism. With Joe Biden as the future US president, there should be no illusions about the US's return to traditional multilateralism. However, there is a chance that the image of US international retrenchment will be substituted by signals of recommitment, of reengagement and of international leadership. For that reason, NATO could send a renewed message of support for multilateralism and stress again its traditional, but in public discourse often forgotten, reference to the United Nations and its principles, as well as its newly emerging closeness with the EU – another leader of multilateral approaches.

In relaunching their pledge to multilateralism, the West and NATO have to be realistic and recognise the existence, and the weakness, of a fuzzy, contested and fragmented multilateralism. Conceptually, this fact requires a two-dimensional disposition: strengthening liberal multilateralism and engaging players with non-liberal orientations. Also, the different faces of multilateralism imply the acknowledgment of various forms of plurilateral or bilateral cooperation. Whereas many of these formats are a threat to multilateralism, some of them can prove useful in particular situations or policy areas. The E3 group (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) or other groupings within the EU (or

⁷ Whether a “21st Century Concert” is an appropriate and legitimate concept is debatable, but the idea of reinforced consultation among rivaling powers could be part of a future scenario. Cf. , The 21st Century Concert Study Group, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, 2014.

including external partners) have played an important assisting role for strengthening multilateral negotiations. Member states of NATO should therefore try to bind their initiatives in plurilateral frameworks back to the alliance by regularly reporting and staying in touch with representatives and institutions of NATO.

In this context, NATO partnerships are a longstanding instrument not only of inclusion, but also of spreading ideas of multilateral thinking. NATO should not only reinforce dialogue and collaboration with like-minded countries, including partners from other parts of the world, it should also establish partnerships with multilateral fora beyond the EU, such as the WHO or even the Paris climate agreement. Of course, these can only be segmented contacts, because otherwise NATO would overstrain its mission and capabilities. There is no doubt that some organisations might not be interested in getting in touch with NATO, because some of their members would regard this as an attempt to gain control. However, by offering added value or expertise, NATO would certainly demonstrate an attitude of support for multilateralism.

Summing up, apart from its core mission, NATO has to be aware of its role as a relevant player for nurturing multilateralism. Bearing this in mind, the alliance has to be both committed and prudent: committed, because it is a pillar of assisting the functionality of liberal multilateral structures; prudent, because it has to avoid acting as an instrument in the rivalry of great powers.

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