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NATO at a Critical Crossroads

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The new strategic reality for the Atlantic Alliance is shaped not by the increase of instability and uncertainty, but by a very definite increase of direct military threats from a powerful and aggressive neighbour. This adversary perceives military power as the most effective, indeed the only, available instrument of policy, and has acquired new skills in applying it in both "hybrid" and traditional ways. Russia considers its readiness to deal with high security risks as an important political advantage, and is relentlessly exploiting every potential division in Western unity by seeking to undermine NATO's ability to act in a timely and cohesive way. Moscow probes and targets strategic vulnerabilities in NATO's security posture, and tries to maximise its

particular positions of power. Besides the Baltic and the Black Sea theatres, Russia may in the near future attempt to utilise its strategic advantage in the Arctic, where it continues to increase military activities and infrastructure, despite the absence of any threats to its interests.

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First of all, the summit should reaffirm in practical and concrete terms NATO solidarity, calling on the nations to provide their contribution outside their specific geographical proximity. In organisational terms, a thorough reconsideration of the financial mechanisms of the Alliance appears to be necessary, stopping to keep the “costs lie where they fall” principle as a truth of faith. Also, a new task should be given to the Secretary General to revise and possibly partially reverse the recent reorganisation of the NATO Command Structure in order to grant effectively a consistent match with the agreed level of ambition, which, in the present strategic scenarios, seems to be more realistic than ever. And finally, on the political side, a new approach should be tested with Russia, making it clear that there are no hostile intentions from NATO and that Moscow has no reason to be aggressive in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia, with whom negotiated agreements must be found and complied with in order to solve the controversies.

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If NATO wishes to deter Russian aggression reliably, its deterrence and defence policy must once again contain a serious nuclear component, and Western leaders must begin the difficult task of revisiting NATO nuclear deterrence policies and postures. The NATO Warsaw Summit provides the ideal opportunity to fill the most critical gaps in NATO’s nuclear posture and to initiate the longer process of nuclear adaptation.

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Bringing a new reading to collective defence after the Cold War allowed, among other things, an expansion of NATO’s tasks as well as membership. This being said, it is high time for deep reflection about the opportunities and limitations for the Alliance from the perspective of the promotion of peace, more than 25 years after the end of the bipolar order. Drawing on the introductory remarks to this special issue, the paper will focus on 1) the strategic differences between a security versus a peace agenda for NATO in the context of increasingly transnational and complex threats, 2) Russia as both a necessary ally and a challenger at NATO’s borders, including its positioning regarding a “shared neighbourhood” with the European Union (EU) and the Atlantic Alliance, as well as Moscow’s investment in the development of military alliances to the east (the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, or CSTO), 3) the Middle East as a geostrategic area where the conflation of competing interests, norms and values has revealed complex dynamics, both in-country and regional, and impacted on the NATO

space (for example, the effect of the Syrian conflict), and 4) whether the conceptualisation on a “European security architecture” remains useful or has become meaningless in face of current challenges.

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Against this background, NATO’s strategic adaptation has only just begun. The Alliance’s 2014 summit in Wales initiated the process and defined the short-term goals to reassure allies against the context of a shifting and deteriorating security environment. The 2016 Warsaw summit will rightly celebrate what has been achieved since Wales. Strategic significance, however, will be achieved only if NATO’s heads of state and government use the occasion to agree a strategic adaptation plan that balances tasks and geographies and embraces the idea that adaptation is a process not a result, and make a firm commitment to improving the resources available to meet the security needs of the Euro-Atlantic security community.

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The Warsaw Summit, to be held on the 25th anniversary of the end of the Cold War, a conflict not only between the U.S. and the USSR, but also between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and this is very symbolic. Our greatest expectation would be a clear and unquestionable declaration and plan, provided by NATO collectively and supported by the resources of each individual Ally, aimed at dramatically updating and increasing NATO’s conventional Article 5 capabilities. Anything less would be considered, by the Kremlin in particular, as the Alliance backing down.

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Even though Article 5 is NATO’s ultimate security guarantee, it is only the very last in a long chain of measures that need to be functioning in order to respond to today’s most probable and lethal threats. The Alliance has spent the last two years implementing the agreed Readiness Action Plan and reassuring eastern members not only with rhetoric, but also by taking more action and putting more troops on the eastern border. This is all what one would expect a political-military alliance to do when it is threatened. The evolution of NATO’s posture towards Russia has proven to NATO members, and, arguably, to their adversaries, that the Alliance still has a mission.

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In this essay we pose five key questions for the future of NATO and provide what we think are five appropriate answers. Our assessment emerges from historical experience, an evaluation of current policies, and what we believe the Alliance’s strategic directions should be. We chose this format for clarity and precision. We submit that the Alliance would be best served by brutal honesty and directness. Our views, of course, are “country centred;” we

speak from the Hellenic point of view. Today, as never before since 1945, we need new, bold directions in the Churchillian manner; and radical re-assessment of theories and, often, myths which, unfortunately and frequently, still drive policy-making.

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Overall, counterinsurgency should be rethought from the perspective of Arab-Muslim host states facing a domestic or regional insurgency, far from orthodox conceptions of this paradigm. A renewed, indigenous understanding of COIN could become the strategic operating concept, guiding the “positioning and application of kinetic (military) and political (non-military) uses of power to achieve national (strategic) aims,” underpinning MENA states’ national efforts to address their domestic and regional challenges and improving cooperation between them and their NATO allies. For these purposes we should adopt a holistic, flexible approach to COIN, and train and prepare armies and civilian players to respond adequately to complex insurgencies.

Jiří Šedivý

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NATO’s expansion steps—lately to Montenegro—will almost perfectly cover the European Union except for a few states. We cannot indefinitely divide the security of Europe into the EU and NATO. It is increasingly evident that is necessary to think of both organisations as a unified Euro-Atlantic area. In this sense, there must be a change in policy for all NATO members, including Turkey. The agreements between NATO and the EU signed on 16 December 2002 have had the potential to increase the effectiveness of full-scale cooperation if completely applied.

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As the challenges will be coming mainly from areas to the south of the NATO zone, the southern Allies will most probably be their first victims. That will happen in circumstances of NATO’s diminished ability to make friends to solve its problems, brought about by Moscow’s current divisive tactics. One could doubt whether those politicians among NATO’s southern allies, currently opposing the idea that Putin should be deterred, will feel more secure in a world based on the Putinesque principle of coercive actions instead of compromise-seeking and negotiations as the cornerstone of international relations. It will be too late by then to quarrel about whether or not it was necessary to allocate resources to reinforce NATO’s eastern flank and who bears the greater responsibility for that change in the way in which world works. It seems much wiser to prevent that change from happening, and concerted efforts to deter Moscow and prove its tactics unsuccessful can achieve this. That is how deterrence of threats existing on the eastern flank of NATO contributes to the security of the Alliance’s southern members.

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Seen from the ground, Asia remains far from quiet when it comes to regional security: the situation in the South China Sea keeps worsening; China challenges Japan's control of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea more forcefully; and North Korea conducted nuclear and ballistic missile tests as recently as January and February 2016. The reality is that Asians are also too busy dealing with the problems in their own region, and generally do not pay much attention to the problems with which Europeans are now preoccupied. That said, however, we are also beginning to see more similarities between the European and Asian security landscapes, and the two regions share an increasing number of common security challenges, mainly caused by those who are prepared to change the status quo by force or coercion, namely Russia and China. In addition, the increasing similarities between the situations in Europe and Asia mean the two are using more common terminology to describe their challenges.

Anna Wieslander

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The forthcoming Warsaw summit will be the time to assess the Enhanced Opportunities Program (EOP), which was introduced at the Wales summit in 2014. In the following it is argued that, due to the high degree of security interdependence in the Baltic Sea area, and the degree of interoperability gained by Sweden and Finland, regional cooperation between NATO, Sweden and Finland should be deepened further, thereby strengthening security and stability in a strategically crucial region for the Alliance. Given that neither Sweden nor Finland is likely to apply for NATO membership any time soon, NATO should develop "extended cooperative security." Such cooperation includes not only the military dimension, such as common situational awareness, exercises and improved partner representation in the military structure, but also elaboration of political consultation mechanisms, to assure common assessments and a rapid response to situations that may arise.

NATO at a Critical Crossroads

As NATO prepares for the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the cohesion of the Alliance is put to the test by new threats emanating from Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa. NATO is trying to adapt to the worst security crisis in Europe since 1990, but it is still far from certain that the Alliance will pass the bar. Twenty-eight sovereign states with sometimes divergent interests are preoccupied with short-term interests rather than the strategic vision necessary for effective action.

There is a common understanding that NATO lost its *raison d'être* after the end of the Cold War but, at the same time, there is a widespread misconception about what constitutes the Alliance today and what limitations it must overcome to adapt to new challenges. To understand these limitations, one must briefly delve into 21st century NATO. During the Cold War, the Alliance focused on territorial defence and deterrence of conventional and nuclear aggression. But with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the clearly defined threat of existential proportions disappeared. To adapt to this tectonic shift in the geopolitical environment, NATO underwent a fundamental character evolution. For more than two decades, NATO's central policies have been driven by the absence of state-to-state conflict, the desire to eradicate Cold War divisions and the determination to build good relations with Russia. With no conventional conflict in sight, the Alliance has drifted away from the ability to defend its own territory towards being an organisation able to run crisis-management missions and promote broader security through cooperation with different countries.

Over the years, NATO members have lost the capability and institutional memory necessary to run large-scale, high-intensity warfare. The development of light deployable forces that can be sustained for a long period in multinational environments has become a priority. The new democracies

in Europe were invited to the Alliance but the Article 5 security guarantees were not supported with a command and force structure necessary to secure the defence of these new members. Their potential vulnerability was instead a symbol of trust that was supposed to facilitate cooperation with Russia and turn that relationship into a strategic partnership.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, however, opened a new chapter in the history of the Alliance. By taking a piece of sovereign territory for itself, Russia dismantled the pan-European architecture of cooperative security. Russia's actions were an open resort to blackmail and coercion in trying to undermine the cohesion of NATO and the EU and weaken the transatlantic link—crucial for the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to Europe. Russia has demonstrated regional military supremacy with its ability to run sudden offensive operations and thwart NATO reinforcements to the Baltic Sea region. The capabilities, patterns of behaviour, and political-military messaging make it clear that Russia perceives the post-Soviet space as its sphere of influence, wants to maintain a buffer zone extending into EU and NATO territory, and attempts to enforce the creation of a new security architecture that would allow it to weigh in on the defence and security choices of sovereign states. Hence, it cannot be excluded that, for Russia, the best way to achieve this would be by undermining the credibility of the Alliance and making it irrelevant as a collective defence organisation; this would represent a significant strategic victory for Russia.

At the same time, instability in the Middle East and North Africa has fuelled a refugee crisis of historical proportions, straining the unity of the EU and NATO members and further enhancing the terrorist threat to the international community. The Russian intervention in Syria in support of the Assad regime has added an additional geopolitical dimension to the crisis. An effective strategy for the resolution of the Syrian conflict may require a compromise between the West and Russia, with concessions extending beyond Syria.

To deal with such challenges, NATO needs a strategic vision that translates into political and military credibility of the Article 5 guarantee but at the same time makes the Alliance more relevant for its members that do not feel threatened by Russia. There are a number of areas where NATO will have to overcome the lowest common denominator to deliver tangible results.

First. NATO will need to further strengthen the eastern flank to achieve a level of credible deterrence against Russia on a conventional level. NATO reacted to the crisis in Ukraine with the temporary deployment of troops to the Alliance's border states and during the 2014 Wales summit adopted a Readiness Action Plan that will provide the Allies with a very high readiness brigade of 5,000 troops deployable within days and strengthened follow-on forces of 30,000 deployable within weeks. At the same time, Russia has demonstrated the capability to mobilise about 150,000 troops close to NATO borders within 72 hours. Some experts indicate that this regional superiority may be exploited, not only for intimidation and coercion but also in scenarios that include different sorts of incursions into the Baltic States. Should NATO be unable to claim back lost territory, it would have strategic consequences for the whole Alliance and would compromise it as a pillar of transatlantic security. That is why the Baltic countries and Poland advocate the permanent deployment of NATO troops and equipment on the territory of the border states to strengthen its deterrence and shorten the time to react in a crisis situation. In May 2015, Poland also announced Warsaw's strategic adaptation initiative, a suggestion of further measures for NATO that would facilitate the development of the necessary capabilities and force posture better shaped to respond to a Russian threat.

Second. It is necessary for the Alliance to reassess the credibility of its nuclear deterrence. Russia resorts to open nuclear threats against NATO, and the presence of tactical Iskander missiles in the Baltic Sea region would have serious political and military consequences during a crisis, weakening Western political will to act. Russia's subsequent messaging would make a nuclear threat more viable during the crisis. Faced with the risk of nuclear-level escalation without credible ways to respond, NATO would be forced to acquiesce at the early stages of any confrontation. Yet, to make any changes in nuclear posturing is much more challenging than augmenting conventional deterrence.

Third. NATO must boost its support for the Southern Flank through crisis management capabilities and strengthened partnerships. The refugee crisis and terrorist threat are sharply felt across Europe, even in the far north. But Allies in the south who do not feel directly threatened by Russia prefer NATO to become more effective in dealing not only with distant crises in MENA but also their immediate consequences for internal security. These southern countries are also concerned that investments in the east will

consume limited defence resources and are therefore reluctant to support a strategic adaptation to conventional state-to-state warfare. They also argue that the threat from Russia is exaggerated or temporary and a permanent presence on the eastern flank will only further provoke President Vladimir Putin. Irrespective of their motivation, the fact remains that there is no single, unifying threat perception across the Alliance. To solve this weakness, NATO will have to improve its ability to deal with the most acute threats on the priority lists of different member states. With divergent threat perceptions, it will be crucial to strengthen the Alliance through common interests to make it more responsive to a wide spectrum of challenges.

Fourth. While strengthening its defence capability, NATO must come to consensus on new relations with Russia. It matters whether Russia is treated officially as a partner, a potential threat or an adversary because it will translate into long-term NATO policies. NATO will have to initiate the discussion on the changes in its strategic documents to be able to defend its territory and western values as well. On the other hand, it should be able to support OSCE and EU efforts to rebuild the security order in Europe, with Russia as part of it.

Fifth. With a new strategic reality in which Russia could be a geopolitical challenge, NATO will have to reinvigorate its open-door policy. In the new security context, it is important to remember that further enlargement will complicate the decision-making process and new members may need to be defended. But enlargement is a potent mechanism for strengthening the stability and predictability of states. Additionally, freezing enlargement would only convince Russia that its policy of intimidation is working, which could encourage further aggressive behaviour in the post-Soviet area and beyond, with potentially dramatic long-term consequences for Europe.

Sixth. Last but not least, to deal effectively with a resurgent Russia and the security vacuum in the MENA region, the transatlantic link between Europe and the U.S. must be strengthened. This unifying bond—crucial for the credibility of the Alliance's defences—was weakened by the growing disparity between U.S. and European defence spending and the massive decrease of the U.S. military presence in Europe. Ideally, European members should increase their defence spending to the mandated minimum of 2% of GDP. Still, this may be unrealistic for some time. It is, however, possible that the European Allies will be ready for more balanced burden-sharing with meaningful support for the worldwide partnerships that form a major pillar of NATO's global reach.

Patching the Shield: The Baltic States on the Road towards Practical NATO Guarantees

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia became members of NATO in 2004. However, they became members only on the map, not in practice. The Baltic States are still the most vulnerable and the hardest to defend in the event of aggression from the legal successor of the country that necessitated the foundation of NATO. Russia's armed conflict with Georgia and its military intervention in Ukraine have demonstrated not only its capability but also willingness to use military force. Because of the Ukrainian crisis, Allies proceeded with some tangible, albeit symbolic, steps to reassure the Baltic States that they remain under the umbrella of the collective defence policy. As a result, it is safer but still not safe on NATO's eastern flank.

Why Russia Would Need to Harm the Baltic States

In 2005, Russia's President Vladimir Putin admitted that "... the collapse of the Soviet Union was the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."¹ Putin's Russia has consistently striven to increase its power and to improve its international image in almost every area, the political, the economic, the cultural, the military and other, by means ranging from hosting major sports events to resuming long-range strategic bomber flights. Russia has made significant progress in many of the areas mentioned above. However, when compared to the great powers it lags considerably behind, especially as an economic power. Militarily, it would not be able to challenge NATO as a whole on a conventional and linear battlefield.

¹ V. Putin, "Poslaniye Federalnomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii," 25 April 2005, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml. Please note that all on-line resources utilised in the process of writing the current article were last accessed by 31 January 2016.