

NEW CONTOURS OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

The article focuses on the key aspects of Russia-NATO interaction in the realm of Euro-Atlantic security against the backdrop of a currently tense international situation. As the author argues that, the recent events, notably the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation and the situation in and around Ukraine have further deteriorated the relations on both sides, which sometimes resemble that of the Cold War era. The European region witnesses growing military tension, further poisoned by the new deployments in Central and Eastern Europe. This leads to a ever exacerbating military standoff and the rupture of almost all bilateral ties between NATO and Russia. The Alliance regained a new purpose for its operations, related to the territorial defense of its members. Meanwhile, rhetoric of parties and mutual perception evolved into outright hostility. This does not mean, however, that Moscow and the West should refrain from efforts to improve the situation and normalize relations. Moreover, the parties, already, demonstrate some signals of interest in restoring dialogue. In this context, the author proposes a set of preliminary constructive steps which, hopefully, could alleviate the current tensions and lead to a renewed substantive dialogue of Russia and NATO partners over the issues of regional stability and security. The opportunities for progress are seen primarily within the realm of increasing transparency as well as in establishing additional avenues for institutionalized dialogue between Russia and the West. Apart from the bilateral Russia-NATO formats, OSCE and its various mechanisms could play an important facilitatory role.

Keywords:

arms control; confidence-building measures; Europe; NATO; OSCE; Russia; transparency; West; USA.

The protracted crisis due to the developments in Ukraine and Crimea's reunion with Russia have not only dramatically changed the situation in world politics, but have also substantially impaired the relations between Russia and the West, especially with some leading NATO countries and primarily with the USA. Although it would not be appropriate to state that the world is on the verge of a new crisis similar to the comprehensive systemic confrontation of the cold war period, the situation in Europe remains extremely alarming, at least when it comes to politico-diplomatic rhetoric and a whole range of moves made on both sides in the military field. While even at

the height of the cold war, the West preserved illusions about a possible transformation of the Soviet regime, about successful implementation of the concept of convergence and then, with the arrival of glasnost and perestroika, about the prospects of Russia's entry into the common European house, its joining the community of the democratic industrial powers, with the creation of a common space of development and security stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, nowadays such sentiments in the political class of the leading Western countries are extremely rare.

Moscow is openly accused of undermining the foundations of the post-war order on the

European continent, of unlawful acts aimed at destroying international legal rules, of illegitimate aggressive intentions threatening European stability and the security of the countries that are Russia's neighbours. NATO has practically received a new lease of life and a new agenda for building up its military presence, though quite limited for the moment, in the east of the continent with the declared aim of containing Russia's hegemonic efforts. There is a growing stream of mutual accusations of bad faith, demonisation of each other and hostile trends in their policies. Meanwhile, a certain dualism of approaches to the 'Russian issue' is also typical of Western countries when new sanctions are imposed alongside the acknowledgment of the need to have a dialogue with the Russian leadership and to broaden contacts with Russian civil society. The lifting of sanctions in the near future is hardly realistic in this context. NATO accuses Moscow of the non-fulfilment of the Minsk agreements and says that it will never recognise Crimea's 'annexation'. What prevents the situation from being remedied?

We can agree with many experts who believe that Russia's bilateral relations with the West began to grow more complicated long before the Ukrainian developments. The euphoria about future 'entente cordiale' in the early 1990s after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist system was abandoned in part due to the war in the North Caucasus, the antagonism of the Russian political class and society in general towards NATO's activities in the Balkans in the middle of that decade, the known internal transformation of Russian society, the adoption, though informally of the ideology of 'the nation's greatness' and quite often the rejection, as Russia's Western partners believed, of many democratic values.

According to many Western Kremlinologists, the apparent reasons are limited, inadequate and halfway reforms in Russia, the absence after the collapse of the Soviet system of such measures, which are typical of democratic transit of Eastern European countries, as total decommunisation and de-sovietisation, the ban on professions and lustration of senior officials of the Communist party and Soviet government

agencies, as well as senior officers of power-wielding structures. On the whole, since the mid-1990s, Russia has been dominated by the triumph of the proverbial 'left idea' and nostalgia for the bygone greatness of and life in the USSR as a reaction of the major part of society to the actual failure of ill-conceived reforms, a drastic fall in the standards of living, the impossibility and inability to adapt to the new realities of market economic infrastructure.

Nowadays it is hard to deny that the present-day Russian and Western elites hold polar opposite views on the essence of democracy and state structure, on the principles of functioning of the state system, on the division of powers and on parliamentary control over executive agencies, military construction, power-wielding structures, budget and foreign policy. That results in markedly differing approaches to most international problems and the nature of world processes in general.

Officials, experts and the mass media often say that NATO and the USA are attempting to exert military pressure on Russia, to infringe its legitimate interests and force it out of world politics; accuse them of antagonism to the strengthening of Russia's foreign policy position and domestic stability, of wanting to support the non-system destructive opposition and to bring orange revolutions to the Russian territory by way of the Ukrainian crisis.

The Russian military, which is intensifying its combat training, surprise operational readiness inspections and large-scale military exercises, accuses NATO of trying to form a new ring of military bases around Russia, to damage its traditional links with the post-Soviet states and to promote the strategy of hybrid warfare. Although NATO's activity (on a rotational basis) near the Russian borders over the past two to three years is incomparable with the size of the opposing contingents and resources and is not basically a menace to Russia as the leading nuclear power, the very fact of its intensification, primarily under US pressure, is a signal that is of concern to Moscow and the Russian military authorities.

It may be assumed that NATO-Russia military confrontation is becoming more heated, in view of the new strategies emerging in the

Alliance to resist what is regarded as new Russian expansionism in Europe, for instance, following the results of the summit in Wales and NATO's forthcoming summit in Warsaw. Such approaches have already got as an 'ideological basis' reports of leading Western think tanks, such as, for instance, the RAND Corporation, Atlantic Council or Chatham House, which consider scenarios of military conflicts in Europe in response to a possible 'aggression from Russia under the Crimean scenario' against Poland and Baltic states.¹ Unfortunately, there is an increase in very dangerous incidents fraught with unpredictable consequences and involving warships and aircraft in the contact zone near the borders of Russia and NATO countries, in particular in the waters of the Baltic and Black Seas, the tragedy with the Russian Su-24 bomber being an example. NATO's expansion to the east has already been called in Russian official documents, such as the new revision of the Military Doctrine and the National Strategy Concept, a threat to Russia's security. The military contacts with the Alliance have practically been frozen. The NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security of 1997, which Russian military officials accuse their NATO colleagues of violating, is not functioning. The recent renewal of the work of the NATO-Russia Council, which is considered by many Russian politicians to be outdated, ineffective and incapable of responding successfully to crises in the bilateral relations, has not resulted in positive breakthroughs.

As if in response to double standards, sanctions wars and the West's antagonism to Russia's policy towards Ukraine and its foreign policy in general, Moscow announces its 'turn to the East' and the strengthening of integration groups, such as the BRICS and the SCO, and the system of politico-military alliances like the Collective Security Treaty. In this regard President Putin's famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 and Prime Minister Medvedev's recent speech at

the same forum this February turned out to be a kind of programme manifesto in respect to the philosophy of Russia's foreign policy approaches. They have continued the line, which formed in Russia's practices long ago, of criticizing NATO for its unwillingness to take into account Moscow's interests and to consult Russian leaders before making decisions on crucial issues (for example, missile defence or 'tactical' nuclear weapons) and for having no intentions whatsoever to reckon with Russia as an equal partner. Western commentators were apparently disturbed by the Russian politician's words: *"We believe that NATO's policy towards Russia remains unfriendly and opaque. One can say even more harshly, we have slid into the times of a new cold war. Almost on a daily basis Russia is called the most terrible threat to NATO in its entirety, or to Europe alone, or to America and other countries. Scary films are made about Russians starting a nuclear war. Sometimes I wonder: are we in 2016 or 1962?"* Medvedev said.²

Consequently, the main obstacles in the way of a constructive dialogue on security in Europe seem to lie in Russia's views on the Alliance as an aggressive legacy of the cold war that is imbued with Russophobic stereotypes and in significant mistakes made in the past and the present by NATO's politicians in relation to Russia's legitimate interests.

Unfortunately, such disturbing developments take place in the context of almost zero progress in arms control in the region. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe is as good as dead; the OSCE, which remains the only forum in the region for addressing security concerns, does not deal effectively enough with security issues. The dialogue on the European missile defence system has been suspended. There is no prospect for launching a substantive dialogue on non-strategic nuclear weapons on the continent. The Treaty on Open Skies is the only one to keep functioning. The events in and around Ukraine have raised questions about the efficacy of the

¹<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21697236-germanys-establishment-once-believed-conciliation-russia-no-longer-fool-me-once>

²<http://ria.ru/world/20160213/1374071291.html#ixzz46v81eya2>

Helsinki process, the efficiency of the OSCE Vienna Document and the significance of such instruments as the Budapest Memorandum. In this respect, the Minsk Process is seen by NATO as the only way of stabilising the situation on the continent. But even in this case the parties talk without hearing each other and multiply mutual accusations of not complying with its provisions.

It is obvious in general that the parties would like to see more predictability and willingness to take into account each other's interests in terms of security and all the more so as to prevent black holes of instability akin to the Syrian conflict from emerging at the heart of Europe and not to allow the heating of frozen conflicts, of which we were recently reminded by an exchange of gun fire in Nagorno-Karabakh.

It is obvious that the groundwork for a productive discussion of problems would be laid if the parties abandon inflammatory provocative rhetoric, do not foment information warfare and propaganda campaigns, stop accusing each other of aggression and reluctance to hear each other, and distributing propaganda TV and cinematographic products.

Specific measures are undoubtedly important. Russia is interested in NATO's non-enlargement to the east and in it keeping at a distance from Russia's borders, in the organization not deploying more armed forces contingents, arms depots and military equipment in Eastern, Central Europe and the Baltic states and in reduced military activities on the whole there. An important subject for Russia is the decisions made at NATO's summit in Bucharest regarding the admission of Ukraine and Georgia to the bloc.³ Russia is concerned about NATO's renunciation of the principles of 'collective and equal security' and the mythologisation of Russia's alleged aggressive plans with regard to some countries of the bloc. Moscow points out that the NATO-Russia Founding Act begins with the words that the parties are no longer adversaries.⁴ This document contains, besides the principles of coop-

eration, schemes and areas of interaction, important commitments to exercise restraint in the military sphere. For instance, NATO committed itself not to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, not to create any infrastructure for that end and not to deploy additional substantial combat forces on a permanent basis. These commitments, in Russia's opinion, are one of the essential elements of the current system of military security in Europe.

In the meantime, Moscow, while rejecting the very idea of its isolation of any kind, would like to re-establish equitable partnership relations with NATO, including the USA, as the MFA of Russia reiterated time and again, though nowadays the prospects of a new détente, let alone 'reset' or a new Ostpolitik in the bloc, are extremely clouded. The main condition for Russia is apparently recognition that Russia's foreign and domestic policies are independent, self-sustaining and autonomous in character and consideration for the legitimate interests of Russia as a regional and global power.

What is also extremely disturbing is a growing tendency to interpret the relations with Russia in the vein of a cold war with a flow of groundless accusations, which cannot but destabilise the situation in Europe. What is meant here in the first place is the lack of progress in the talks on the deployment of a missile defence system by the USA in Europe and around it. One more topic is the build-up of NATO forces in Europe over the past months.

Moscow also accuses the USA of supporting the Kiev leadership, which came to power, according to the official version in Russia, in the wake of a coup and commits genocide of its own people in some parts of the Donbass region of Ukraine, and of seeking to provide Ukraine with offensive arms and to use the continuing conflict to exert pressure on Russia. Moscow also criticises the intentions of the Obama administration to quadruple appropriations for the armed forces and their training in Europe, up to \$3.4m, and is critical of its pres-

³http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

⁴http://eulaw.edu.ru/documents/legislation/eur_int_law/nato_rus_act.htm

sure on its European allies in NATO to increase their military expenditures.

It is clear then that the situation on the European continent in terms of security remains alarming. Any breakthroughs in the near future are hardly realistic. It is even more difficult to anticipate any specific steps here in the field of arms control in the immediate future. There is obviously a crisis when it comes to stability and the climate of trust.

It does not mean, however, that relations should be put on pause and that no attempts should be made to take positive steps in order to restore trust. Such an approach would be counter-productive, all the more so because both parties are sending out signals, though weak ones, showing their readiness for dialogue.

Another key factor would unquestionably be the strict implementation of the Minsk agreements on Ukraine, and without this it seems hardly possible to make real progress in stabilisation and to abandon the sanctions policy. It is important to prevent the 'Bosnisation' of the Ukrainian crisis and particularly new large-scale military operations there. Apparently, Russia and NATO can reach a consensus on this point. The 'Norman format' could be used in the future to achieve some progress on frozen conflicts, in particular in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh.

At the same time, the parties could proceed to a discussion of wide prospects of the future of Europe's security architecture, without at first undertaking tasks that are too huge and definitely impossible.

What could also be discussed is coordination of a number of transparency and confidence-building measures, which would be implemented step by step and lead to the stabilisation of the situation on the continent with regard to military security. An important role in developing these mechanisms and their implementation would be played by the OSCE and Germany that holds its chairmanship.

A specific plan could envisage the following initial steps:

- To intensify the work of the NATO-Russia Council (so far the only forum for dialogue, though often criticised) as well as studying simultaneously prospects for creating new

mechanisms of cooperation and consultations. The possibility of renewing the NATO-Russia Founding Act should also be examined. Meetings between Russian members of Parliament and members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly could be a useful forum for an exchange of views on topical issues related to European security.

- To found a 'group of wisemen' or representatives of the expert community or NGOs to hold discussions along the lines of track II of key challenges in that sphere and new possible outlines of stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic Region, including steps towards actualising them and comparing the parties' military doctrines (such a high-level meeting on doctrines – OSCE High-Level Military Doctrine Seminar – already took place in Vienna this February under the aegis of the OSCE). One more possible topic is the role of Euro-Atlantic institutions in these processes, as well as the participation and contribution of neighbouring states.

- An important task is to broaden contacts and lines of communication between the Russian and NATO defence authorities in order to improve predictability and mutual trust, to rule out dangerous incidents, to provide information about each other's activities, for example, about large-scale troop movements. Joint information centres for coordinating military activity in the region could be a subject of further discussions.

- To develop (in the absence of new agreements on arms control) a system of mutual notification of manoeuvres, naval and air patrol, particularly in the Baltic and Black Seas, in order to avoid wrong interpretation and dangerous escalation of incidents. This type of information was already provided by Russia and the coalition during the campaign against Islamic terrorists in Syria.

- In these mechanisms, the key is to create a 'safety net' against probable incidents, a system of forestalling dangerous destabilisation of the situation. It could include notification of massive troop redeployment, primarily near the borders, and other large-scale activities there, and visits of the other party's exercises and manoeuvres, including surprise ones.

- Russia and members of the Alliance could think about joint peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations in third countries, following the example of what was achieved in Bosnia and Kosovo.

- It might be more practical to establish military contacts at a bilateral level, for example, with Germany or France, rather than with the Alliance as a whole.

- In the future the parties could consider what other positive guarantees of security they could give each other and what measures for confidence building and greater openness, in particular with regard to the redeployment of new NATO forces in a region close to the Russian borders with purely military purposes, could be implemented near borders, for instance, the Russian-Baltic borders.

These steps might seem somewhat naïve and difficult to take in the current political situation between NATO and Russia. However, it appears that if experts worked on them, it would favour greater predictability and stabilisation of the whole range of security problems

in the region and consequently meet the vital interests of Russia and NATO as the very ground for security-related conflictogenity in the region would be eliminated.

Undoubtedly, it is still crucially important to explore possibilities for the strengthening and more productive employment of the existing formats and agreements in the field of arms control, such as the Treaties on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles and Open Skies, to improve further the Vienna Document and to enhance the OSCE capabilities in the field of regional security.

All in all, Russia and NATO face a wide range of challenges and threats, which could turn out to be a good ground for successful cooperation, such as fighting against Islamic terrorism, strengthening the regimes of WMD non-proliferation, addressing the migration problem, fighting against piracy, combating natural disasters, dealing with ecological issues and preventing outbreaks of dangerous epidemics.