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Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War

Matthew Kroenig

Russia's annexation of Crimea, invasion of Donbas, and continued threats to Ukraine and other European countries not only menace the stability of the post-Cold War order in Europe, but also pose a fundamental challenge to the assumptions about the strategic environment that have undergirded the NATO alliance for the past quarter of a century.

Since 1989, NATO strategy has been premised on a set of beliefs, each one of which has been called into question by recent events: the Euro-Atlantic community is stable; NATO does not face any serious threats to its collective defence; NATO's most likely military missions will be out-of-area operations; enlargement of the Atlantic community will lead to a Europe whole, free and at peace; and Russia can be regarded as, or will soon become, a strategic partner. Indeed, each of these ideas featured prominently in NATO's most recent Strategic Concept, released at the NATO summit in 2010,¹ and in its Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, published just two years ago.²

But this set of beliefs, much like Ukraine itself, was torn apart by President Vladimir Putin's actions earlier this year. Western analysts are beginning to realise that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and of Georgia six years ago, may not be isolated incidents, but rather symptomatic of a grander ambition in Moscow to restore a Russian sphere of influence in the area of the former

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Soviet Union, and that these plans could come to threaten regional stability and NATO members directly.

To be sure, the Russian Federation is not the Soviet Union. It is plagued by severe economic, demographic and governance problems, and it will not be in a position to stand as a peer competitor to NATO and the West for the foreseeable future. But that is not the point. Russia could very well destabilise Eastern Europe for years to come through its ability to threaten or attack NATO members, undermining the post-Cold War international order. Moreover, Russia has identified an effective military strategy that, unless Washington and Brussels change course, could pose a serious challenge to NATO's ability to defend its easternmost members.

If Russia were to rerun its playbook of hybrid warfare from Ukraine against a NATO member, how would the West respond? Allowing Russia to occupy even a small part of NATO territory would deal a devastating blow to the credibility of the Alliance. NATO would, therefore, be compelled to come to its ally's defence with lethal military force. But would the overt brandishing of Russian nuclear forces that we have seen in the Crimea–Donbas crisis deter NATO's intervention? If NATO did use military force in an attempt to reassert control, and Russia conducted a limited nuclear strike for the purpose of 'de-escalation',³ how would NATO respond? In short, Russia's emerging capabilities and strategy put NATO on the horns of a series of difficult dilemmas, and the situation demands not only minor modifications to business as usual, but a fundamental re-evaluation of NATO defence strategy and posture.

Of course, NATO and its member states have already taken notice of, and responded to, Russian aggression, most notably by passing sanctions on the Russian economy, providing non-lethal aid to Ukraine and building a new rapid-reaction force, but these have been tactical moves in response to the immediate crisis at hand, not the wholesale strategic review that is required.⁴

NATO after the Cold War

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 deprived NATO of its *raison d'être*, and some prominent analysts predicted that the Alliance, having outlived its usefulness, would soon dissolve.⁵ Instead, the transatlantic security

community, tied together by historical bonds, shared values and a common vision for the future, forged a new role in the post-Cold War order.

The primary stated goal of the Alliance remained the collective defence of its members, but this task took on far less urgency as Moscow throughout the 1990s and most of the 2000s appeared much less hostile. Moreover, the objective military threat had also been reduced by a series of arms-control treaties penned in the waning days and aftermath of the Cold War, including the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This reduced threat was fully reflected in all three of the post-Cold War NATO strategic concepts in 1991, 1999 and 2010. The 1991 document stated, for example, that 'since 1989, profound political changes have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe which have radically improved the security environment in which the North Atlantic Alliance seeks to achieve its objectives'.⁶ Similar language remains in the 2010 concept, which declared that 'today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of conventional attack against NATO territory is low'.⁷

In response to the changed strategic environment, NATO's defence posture was drastically relaxed. In particular, NATO made the reduction of both conventional and nuclear forces, and providing defence at the 'lowest possible level of forces',⁸ an explicit and continuing objective of NATO policy. In addition, NATO moved away from a 'concept of forward defense towards a reduced forward presence'.⁹ In the nuclear realm, it modified 'the principle of flexible response to reflect a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons',¹⁰ resulting in the virtual elimination of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, with the exception of several hundred gravity bombs retained largely to symbolise the transatlantic nuclear link.

With its core security protected, the Alliance could focus on advancing its interests in other ways. Primary among these was NATO enlargement. From a core of 12 original members in 1949, NATO has grown to include 28 states, including some (such as Poland and the Baltic states) which are situated well within Moscow's former sphere of influence. NATO has also stated intentions to expand further, naming Georgia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina as formal aspirants, and increasing cooperation with Ukraine.¹¹ While many predicted that continued expansion might threaten

Russia's core interests, NATO leaders saw enlargement as contributing to international – and Russian – security.¹² In 2010, NATO restated its 'firm commitment to keep the door open to all European democracies that meet the standards of membership, because enlargement contributes to our goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace'.¹³

NATO's leaders hoped that an expanding zone of peace and prosperity in Europe could entice Russia to become a part of the transatlantic community, not as a formal NATO member, but as a strategic partner. The 1997 Russia–NATO Founding Act attempted to formalise this new, more cooperative relationship.¹⁴ The document promised that the former Cold War foes would 'build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security'. In the document, NATO made reassurances to Russia that its force posture would not encroach on Russia's former spheres of influence, emphasising that it had 'no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons to the territory of new members' and that it would integrate new members into NATO without 'additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces' on their territory. The hopes for cooperation continued in the 2010 Strategic Concept, which expressed its desire 'to see true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia'.

Beyond enlargement, NATO contributed to international security through participation in out-of-area operations. As a military organisation freed from dealing with a proximate military threat, NATO engaged in expeditionary operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere. The 2010 Strategic Concept set forth 'crisis management' as one of NATO's principal tasks and promised to address crises and conflicts that 'have the potential to affect Alliance security'.¹⁵

Finally, and perhaps less explicitly, it could be argued that NATO's other post-Cold War role was one of moral suasion. With Europe's strong record on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, NATO contributed to advancing global public goods that fell outside its narrow security interests. Indeed, the 2010 concept identified 'cooperative security' as the third of NATO's three principal tasks. NATO has provided international legitimacy to military missions that could not achieve a UN mandate, sought to

improve relations with other regions of the world (including North Africa and the Middle East), worked to provide humanitarian aid to conflict zones, and promoted global non-proliferation and disarmament. The 2010 document is most ambitious with regard to this latter goal, making the creation of the conditions for 'a world without nuclear weapons' an explicit objective of NATO strategy.¹⁶

Combined, these pillars have been the basis of NATO strategy for over two decades, but they are being challenged by changes in Russian strategy and posture under Putin. And nowhere was this more evident than in the takeover of Crimea.

Russian challenge

While there has been an intense focus on the immediate crisis in Crimea, there has been too little reflection on what Russian actions in Ukraine (and in Georgia in 2008) say about Russia's broader strategy and the challenges this poses to NATO's business model.

Many long-time Russia watchers argue that we should have seen this coming.¹⁷ Putin has never been content with a cooperative relationship with the West so long as that meant watching Russia's sphere of influence gradually diminish as Eastern European states cosied up to the West. Rather, he has gone on record declaring the collapse of the Soviet Union to be the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century', and he is determined to re-establish a greater Russia in areas formerly controlled by the Soviet Union.¹⁸ He has shown in Georgia and Ukraine that he is willing to pursue this goal through military means if necessary. While there is no indication that Putin has immediate designs on outright control of NATO member states, it strains credulity to think that he would not prefer greater sway over countries that had formerly been firmly within Moscow's orbit. It would be imprudent, therefore, for NATO to rule out such a contingency as beyond the realm of possibility, as it essentially has in recent strategy documents.

In fact, Moscow has a proven military strategy for pursuing these aims – namely, a combination of hybrid warfare and nuclear brinkmanship. Russia has incrementally revised the status quo in its favour through low-level conflict, and then deterred outside intervention to halt or reverse these moves

through threats of early escalation to nuclear warfare. This approach was employed against Georgia and Ukraine and could conceivably be repeated against an Alliance member. NATO's long-standing policy of maintaining security with a reduced forward presence at the lowest level of force possible was sustainable so long as Russia remained cooperative, but it has opened up an opportunity for a more expansionist Russia to take advantage of NATO's slackened posture.

While NATO as an alliance enjoys a clear conventional military advantage over Russia in the aggregate, its minimal forward presence means that Russia still retains a massive conventional superiority over its smaller neighbours. Through the use of irregular (as in Ukraine) or regular (as in Georgia and Ukraine) warfare, Russia could attempt to use its advantage against smaller neighbours to make gradual territorial revisions against nearby NATO members. If such moves provoked NATO to invoke Article V and resulted in major combat operations, both sides would suffer greatly, and it is likely, given NATO's aggregate advantage, that Russia would eventually be defeated.

Key to Russia's approach, therefore, must be to prevent a drawn-out conventional military campaign with NATO. It can seek to do this in two ways. Firstly, it can use hybrid warfare to make its revisionist actions as subtle as possible, avoiding moves that would trigger an automatic, robust response.¹⁹ As it showed in Crimea and the Donbas, it can use the pretext of protecting Russian nationals, ties to sympathetic elements within the victim country, propaganda campaigns, cyber attacks, irregular warfare including professional soldiers in unmarked uniforms (the so-called 'little green men'), and coercion through the massing of conventional forces on the border, to make small but meaningful gains short of outright invasion. It could always hold out the threat, or even the execution of, a conventional invasion at a later date to solidify these acquisitions.

Secondly, Russia can engage in nuclear brinkmanship to deter NATO intervention by making it clear that responding to Russian aggression could result in nuclear disaster. If NATO disregards the threats and attempts to repel a Russian invasion, resulting in direct combat, Russia could escalate to the early use of tactical nuclear weapons against NATO forces in a bid to

compel Western capitulation. Past Russian military doctrine has explicitly called for the use of nuclear weapons early in a crisis as a means of offsetting NATO's conventional superiority and 'de-escalating' a crisis.²⁰ The strongest language about nuclear pre-emption has been removed from recent public versions of doctrine²¹ (although we do not know about the classified annexes), but it remains firmly ingrained in Russian strategic thinking.²² That Moscow, as the conventionally inferior power, would look to nuclear use early in a crisis is not surprising given that this is similar to NATO doctrine during the Cold War, when it was outmatched by the conventional forces of the Soviet Union. Still, while understandable, Russia's renewed nuclear forces should be troubling to NATO planners.

Although less widely reported than the conventional aspects of the conflict, Russian nuclear sabre-rattling has been an integral part of Putin's approach to Crimea.²³ Russia ostentatiously brandished all three legs of its nuclear triad during the crisis: nuclear-capable bombers were sent to North America, nuclear-capable fighter bombers more than tripled their number of patrols over the Baltic, nuclear submarines were detected off the coasts of Western European countries, and Russia test-launched a new intercontinental ballistic missile.²⁴ While nuclear powers must train and exercise their nuclear forces, the extraordinary increase in the overall scope and frequency of Russian nuclear activity in recent months sends an unmistakable signal. In addition, officials have publicly reserved Russia's right to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea.²⁵ Furthermore, Putin has made several public comments boasting of Russia's nuclear-superpower status, saying in August, for example, that, 'Russia's partners should understand it's best not to mess with us', reminding them that 'Russia is one of the leading nuclear powers'.²⁶ In October, Putin made a thinly veiled reference to nuclear war, saying, 'We are hoping that our partners will ... remember what discord between large nuclear powers can do to strategic stability'.²⁷ It is no coincidence that Russia reached its most aggressive nuclear signalling at the height of the most serious East-West conflict since the end of the Cold War. The message was clear: the West must stay out of Ukraine lest things escalate to catastrophic levels.

*Russia brandished
its nuclear triad*

NATO's decision to virtually eliminate tactical nuclear weapons from Europe has left Russia with a wide range of options on the nuclear escalation ladder. As the West explicitly de-emphasised nuclear weapons, Russia moved in the other direction, deploying modern capabilities for all legs of its strategic nuclear triad and retaining roughly 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons ready for delivery (and more in storage). Weapons for battlefield use include nuclear torpedoes and depth charges, air defences and ballistic-missile defences armed with nuclear warheads, nuclear air-to-surface missiles and bombs, and nuclear surface-to-surface missiles, including the SS-26 *Iskander*.²⁸ Russia's reported test of an intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile is a blatant violation of the INF Treaty.²⁹ Although Russian officials in Track Two dialogues insist these capabilities are needed to deal with the threat of similar weapons in China, intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missiles also happen to be perfectly suited to keep Western European NATO allies at bay, while Russia makes moves against its Eastern European neighbours.

Russia's superior sub-strategic nuclear capabilities, combined with the fact that Moscow may have a greater stake in outcomes in Eastern Europe than Western capitals, encourage Moscow to engage in nuclear brinkmanship as a means of attempting to achieve its goals in its near abroad.³⁰ Russian planning assumes that NATO does not have the stomach for nuclear war with Russia and that the threat of nuclear attack, or, if necessary, the battlefield use of tactical nuclear weapons, would be enough to convince the West to sue for peace.

If Russia were to repeat the strategy it used in Ukraine, but this time against a NATO member, how would the West respond? Russian speakers make up a quarter or more of the population in Latvia and Estonia, and the Russian foreign ministry has announced that 'whole segments of the Russian world' may need Russia's protection.³¹ If Russia used the need to prevent discrimination against Russian speakers as a pretext to wage hybrid warfare against a Baltic country, NATO could not settle for rhetorical condemnation, non-lethal aid and sanctions, as in Ukraine. Allowing Russia to occupy even a small part of NATO territory would shatter the credibility of the commitments that hold the Alliance together. NATO would, therefore,

be compelled to come to its ally's defence with lethal military force.

But would overt brandishing of Russian nuclear forces at the height of the crisis deter NATO's intervention? In other words, would NATO be willing to risk nuclear war over the destabilisation of, or minor territorial encroachments in, a member state? If NATO did use military force in an attempt to reassert control and Russia conducted a 'de-escalatory' nuclear strike, how would NATO respond? Would NATO escalate to nuclear war, or back down? If the former, what type of nuclear forces would be employed? Due to the virtual elimination of its tactical nuclear capability, NATO's most obvious nuclear strike option would be with strategic weapons, but such a move might provoke a devastating nuclear retaliation. To recall Henry Kissinger's criticisms of the doctrine of massive nuclear retaliation, NATO's most obvious options would be suicide or surrender.³²

A new NATO strategy

For decades, the Alliance has assessed that the Euro-Atlantic region is stable and the threat to NATO countries is low. That assessment can now be made with much less confidence. With the spectre of a new potential threat at its doorstep, NATO needs a revised strategy undergirded by a more robust posture. In the aftermath of Crimea, collective defence should be the Alliance's principal, overriding task.

It is clear in hindsight that NATO has for some time been too optimistic about the threat to Europe and prospects for cooperation with Russia. The 2010 Strategic Concept's failure to explicitly mention a potential threat from Russia and to reference Moscow only as a possible partner for cooperation, therefore, was negligent. A new concept does not need to name Russia as an adversary, and it can hold out the hope for more cooperative relations, but it must also explicitly acknowledge that the greatest potential security threat to NATO members is posed by Russia and that NATO must plan accordingly.

The former core tasks of crisis management and collective security should be downgraded. Crisis management and out-of-area operations have in the past been more divisive among the Alliance than collective defence, and mustering the political will and spending to sustain expeditionary operations will prove even more difficult with a pressing threat on the periphery

of Europe. Nevertheless, time and again in the past, international crises have erupted and NATO has found itself involved in operations that would have seemed inconceivable months or even weeks before, including Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya in 2011. A new crisis in the arc of instability stretching from North Africa to South Asia could flare up at any moment, and NATO intervention might be demanded. For this reason, crisis management will always remain a possible objective of NATO operations, but, for the first time in decades, it must take a back seat to collective defence.

Collective security can also survive the post-Crimea strategic shake-up, but it too should be demoted and its content should be revised to focus

NATO must circle the wagons

less on disarmament and more on other global public goods such as human rights and democracy. It is difficult to sustain a disarmament mission when Russia and most other nuclear powers are moving in the opposite direction.

To be sure, just because Russia is relying more on nuclear forces does not mean that NATO must respond in kind.

Still, it is hard to see how NATO can address the nuclear component of Russian strategy without some upgrade of nuclear capabilities and options. In the past, NATO explicitly tied its nuclear force posture to developments in other countries. In the 1999 Strategic Concept, for example, the Alliance declared that ‘the existence of powerful nuclear forces outside the Alliance ... constitutes a significant factor which the Alliance has to take into account’.³³ It is necessary to explicitly reintroduce such considerations into NATO planning.

Finally, the ambitions of the quarter-century project of enlargement must be scaled back. With a serious threat to existing members, NATO must circle the wagons. The 2010 Strategic Concept restates the Alliance’s ‘firm commitment to keep the door to NATO open to all European democracies that meet the standards of membership’.³⁴ The events in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 have demonstrated, however, that NATO would be reluctant to fight wars to protect some of the most likely new members. NATO cannot invite countries to join the Alliance if it is unwilling or unable to defend them. To be sure, Moscow might be less likely to attack Kiev and Tbilisi in the first place if they were NATO members, but their membership must be premised

on something more than a bluff. NATO should actively pursue membership for the more easily defended states of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, but Ukrainian and Georgian membership must be put on pause. The door for future membership will remain open, but they should not be brought into the Alliance unless and until NATO can first consolidate a workable defence around its existing members. Some in the West will undoubtedly be disappointed by a halt to the enlargement project before creating a Europe truly whole and free, but they should take a step back and take stock of how far we have come. Twenty-five years ago the central fault line between East and West in Europe ran through Berlin; now, that boundary is some 800 miles to the east. This is a significant geopolitical shift in the balance of power, and one that has provided a greater degree of freedom and economic prosperity to the people living in that zone. The West can be proud of this accomplishment.

To minimise diplomatic fallout, NATO should simply and quietly drop the more ambitious language of recent years and return to the more modest language in Article X of the Washington Treaty: 'The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.'³⁵

At the same time, though, NATO must refrain from announcing (even if it is true) that non-NATO members will never be directly defended by the Alliance. US President Barack Obama has come dangerously close to doing so in the recent crisis, saying that there is 'no military solution' to the crisis in Ukraine,³⁶ but such statements miss the point that any solution will have at least a partial military component, and serve only to reassure our adversaries of what they can get away with. It would be preferable to leave at least some uncertainty in Putin's calculations. Further, the truth of the matter is that NATO itself might not know the extent to which it is willing to go, depending on the circumstances. Recall Dean Acheson's fateful speech to the National Press Club in 1950, placing Korea outside of America's defence perimeter just before the Korean War.

With a narrowed focus on NATO's true core task, the next step must be to devise a posture to provide for NATO's collective defence in this new

security environment. During the Cold War, Western strategists believed it was important to attain escalation dominance over the Soviet Union.³⁷ If the West possessed superiority at every level of warfare, Moscow would have no incentive to initiate or attempt to escalate and thereby win a conflict.

NATO's post-Cold War drawdown has created vulnerabilities, however, and Putin has designed a strategy geared toward exploiting them. The key to NATO's response, therefore, must be to close the gaps. Such an approach should be even more attainable now than during the Cold War given the vast shift in economic power to the West. In practice, this means that NATO must be able to deter and defeat local hybrid aggression against NATO members and to deter, and if necessary defeat, any Russian attempts to escalate its way out of a conflict through the early use of nuclear weapons.

To prevent a replay of Ukraine against a NATO ally, NATO should more clearly articulate what counts as an attack under Article V of the NATO charter. NATO's top commander General Philip Breedlove has already declared that 'NATO [must] be ready for so-called "little green men"' and that 'if NATO were to observe the infiltration of its sovereign territory by foreign forces, and if we were able to prove that this activity was being carried out by a particular aggressor nation, then Article Five would apply'.³⁸ Such messages must be sharpened and repeated. NATO should declare that any armed insurrections or foreign forces in NATO countries, whether attributable or not, will be considered an attack against NATO, and that NATO will respond to crush the forces and, furthermore, once attribution has been obtained, to retaliate against any state that sponsored them.

To bolster this threat, NATO must work to strengthen Eastern European states, including military assistance with intelligence and early-warning capabilities, cyber security, airpower, and stepped-up training in policing, border patrol and counter-insurgency. Although outside of NATO's normal lane, vulnerable member states should also be encouraged to pursue a political agenda to incorporate ethnic minorities into a shared national-identity conception. In case all else fails, Eastern European allies must make themselves indigestible to a Russian occupation. Local forces should train for guerrilla warfare to buy time for allied reinforcements and, if necessary, to wage insurgency against Russian forces.³⁹

Renewed Western attention to information warfare is also in order.⁴⁰ Much as in the conventional and nuclear space, we have seen a concerted Russian effort in the face of NATO indifference providing Russia with a tactical advantage that it is exploiting for strategic gain. By the early 2000s, Western powers had become enamoured solely with the high-tech cyber component of information warfare. Meanwhile, Russia has continued to develop its lower-level propaganda and information-warfare capabilities. At the same time, following China's example, Russia has cultivated a potent patriotic hacking capacity, and we can expect these tools to feature prominently in any future hybrid conflict. NATO would have been far better equipped to respond to Putin's information-warfare campaign in Ukraine 15 years ago than it is today. It must reverse these losses and once again prioritise counter-information warfare in military training and doctrine.

*Prepare to
repel an
invasion*

NATO must also be prepared to repel an invasion by regular Russian forces. Currently, it is not up to the task. As Jakub Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell have recently argued, NATO relies on a 'defense in depth' strategy that would allow Russian forces to penetrate deep into NATO territory before NATO could organise a response force to repel them.⁴¹ This strategy may have been sufficient so long as the major concern was a Russian drive to the English Channel, but the more realistic threat at present is that Russia could use its local military superiority to slice off parts of NATO without driving into the heart of Europe. Such a move would discredit the promises that underpin the Western security order; and expelling Russian forces from an Eastern European neighbour, once entrenched, would be enormously difficult and costly. It would be much better to deter such a move in the first place.

Grygiel and Mitchell recommend a 'preclusive' defence strategy designed to prevent Russia from taking NATO territory. Such a strategy would be consistent with past NATO policy, last articulated in 1999, that 'the combined military forces of the Alliance must be capable of deterring any potential aggression against it [and] of *stopping an aggressor's advance as far forward as possible* should an attack nevertheless occur' (emphasis added).⁴² Some of Grygiel and Mitchell's recommendations, however, such as the idea that

NATO should go on the offence to destabilise restive Russian provinces and keep Moscow off balance, go too far.

There are other steps NATO can take to implement a preclusive defence strategy, but this will require forward presence. The days of reducing forward presence for the sake of it are over. As General Breedlove has recommended, NATO should establish a forward-stationed headquarters in Eastern Europe.⁴³ In addition, NATO must put in place defence and exercise plans for every allied member.⁴⁴ Eastern European members must standardise their military forces, with Western help, and replace Soviet-era weapons with modern tanks, aircraft, artillery and air defences. Finally, NATO's current temporary deployments to the Baltics should be

extended and expanded as necessary to restore stability to Eastern Europe.

*Putin has
brought on
a new age*

Some will object that these steps will antagonise Russia or risk abrogating the promises made to Moscow in the NATO–Russia Founding Act, but Putin has already brought us into a new age. In tearing up the most important post-Cold War arms-control agreements, including INF and

CFE, and in attacking Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has gone back on its most important pledges to the West in that document, including its commitment to refrain 'from the threat or use of force against ... any other state, its sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence in any manner'.⁴⁵ Moreover, NATO has vowed in the past that 'the Alliance must be able to build up larger forces ... in response to any fundamental changes in the security environment'.⁴⁶ Russia's recent behaviour constitutes just such a fundamental change. Still, to avoid renouncing its commitments altogether, NATO can simply explain that any extended and expanded deployments to Eastern Europe remain temporary, and that their permanence would depend on Russian belligerence.

Attempts to deter local Russian aggression may not suffice, however, and NATO will also need the ability to deter Russia from the early resort to threats or use of tactical nuclear weapons. NATO must make abundantly clear in its declaratory policy that it stands willing and able to use nuclear weapons in response to Russian aggression against NATO members.

Just how NATO would deter a limited Russian nuclear strike, or respond to such a strike should deterrence fail, is not at all obvious, however, given NATO's existing capabilities. New twenty-first-century tools of deterrence and defence should be brought to bear, including economic sanctions, space, cyber, conventional strike and directed energy, but given the present state of technology, none of these capabilities are sufficiently prompt, devastating and discriminate to serve as an adequate response to a tactical nuclear attack from Russia.⁴⁷ NATO ballistic-missile defences are of no use defending against much of Russia's tactical nuclear forces, such as torpedoes or cruise missiles. NATO can and should harden its conventional forces in Europe against a nuclear attack, but it would not be sensible for NATO to attempt to fight through a Russian nuclear onslaught using conventional power alone.

NATO's tactical nuclear forces were retained in Europe primarily for political reasons, and they are not ideally suited for combat with Russia. At their current locations in Western Europe, NATO's dual-capable aircraft and gravity bombs are out of range of a conflict in the Baltics without refuelling and/or redeployment and, moreover, they would be highly vulnerable to Russian air defences. Furthermore, given the greater flexibility, survivability and numerical superiority of Russia's tactical nuclear forces, NATO could not hope to prevail in a tactical nuclear exchange with Russia without escalating to the strategic level.

But escalation to the strategic nuclear level also carries serious downside risks. The yields of NATO's strategic warheads are too large for a proportional response to a tactical nuclear strike, and an attack from US, British or French territory or submarines would be seen as escalatory, and would increase the danger of the leap to a potentially catastrophic nuclear exchange. (A Russian response against the source of the attack, such as a missile silo or submarine base, could be justified and even proportional, but would mean a nuclear detonation on US, British or French soil.) NATO has few good options for responding to Russian tactical nuclear aggression.

To increase the credibility of NATO nuclear threats, the Alliance must deprive Russia of its overwhelming battlefield nuclear advantage. Ideally this would be done through arms-control negotiations, but Russia has

shown itself unwilling to even discuss the possibility of reducing its tactical nuclear forces. To encourage Russia to reconsider, and to be prepared in case it does not, NATO must plan for the development and deployment of a new generation of sub-strategic nuclear weapons to Europe.⁴⁸ After all, it was the deployment of the *Pershing* II missiles in the 1980s that convinced Moscow to sign the INF Treaty in the first place.⁴⁹ In addition, NATO should deploy cruise-missile defences to defend against an incoming Russian attack.⁵⁰

The US Department of Defense is already coming round to this view. On a Senate panel in December 2014, Brian P. McKeon, Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, testified that Washington is considering various options for responding to Russia's INF violation, which included 'reactive defense, to counterforce, to counter value defense measures'. He added that 'we don't have ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe now obviously because they're prohibited by the [INF] treaty ... but that would obviously be one option to explore'.⁵¹

Russia is not only developing ground-launched cruise missiles, however. As stated above, it possesses a full range of tactical nuclear capabilities. NATO should also consider the deployment to Europe of any tactical system that could prove useful on the battlefield, with a posture that in combination provides flexibility, survivability, reliability and accuracy. This could include warheads with adjustable yields, nuclear-armed sea and air-launched cruise missiles, and the possible redeployment of gravity bombs with dual-key arrangements to Eastern European states. Poland would be an obvious candidate for the latter, as Polish pilots have already participated in NATO nuclear-strike training missions.⁵²

Some may find these proposals discomfiting, but NATO no longer has the luxury of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons for its own sake, and arguably never did. These decisions have left NATO with a serious capability deficiency vis-à-vis Russia that must be rectified. To be sure, moves in this direction will pose political difficulties in Western European capitals and could be divisive within the Alliance. Yet, although it has not always been easy, NATO members have tended to do the right thing, including the decision to deploy *Pershing* IIs in the 1980s. These proposals should be no different.

Critics will argue that these steps might antagonise Putin, but nothing would do more to incite Russian aggression than signalling NATO's lack of resolve to protect its own members. Forward-stationed nuclear forces would annul NATO's promise to Russia that it has 'no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members'. But intentions, plans and reasons change. Russia has already violated key provisions of the NATO–Russia Founding Act, and if forward-deployed tactical nuclear capabilities would be helpful, it would be foolish for NATO to be constrained by a document that Moscow ignores.

Others may object that an increased NATO emphasis on nuclear forces will increase the risk of proliferation elsewhere, but the idea that other countries would follow NATO's lead in reducing reliance on nuclear weapons always strained credulity, and it has proven demonstrably false by developments in Moscow, Pyongyang, Tehran and elsewhere.

Cost must be a consideration in these calculations as the United States, the most likely funder of NATO's nuclear upgrades, must also be attentive to strategic challenges in East Asia and the Middle East, and cannot afford to gear defence spending toward the European theatre alone. But NATO cannot afford to underinvest in the capabilities necessary to defend its members. Moreover, the capabilities proposed above would be just as useful, if not more so, in other theatres. Analysts have already pointed out that US intermediate-range missiles in Asia could play a critical role in America's air–sea battle strategy to counter China's anti-access/area-denial capabilities.⁵³

In following these recommendations, NATO must guard against intensifying the arms race – but it would be inaccurate to charge that it risks starting one. An arms race is already under way; NATO is just sitting it out. A more muscular NATO nuclear posture is the only way to convince Russia to restrain its own nuclear build-up. After all, Moscow has much more to lose than Washington from an unconstrained nuclear arms race in Europe. And, if these efforts fail to curtail Russian nuclear deployments, then at least NATO will be in a better position to deter the Russian nuclear threat.

It is rare for NATO to produce a new strategic concept – before 2010, the last was issued in 1999 – and it is even rarer for it to chart a truly new strategic direction. NATO's Cold War strategy lasted for 50 years, and its post-Cold War approach for another 25. But a quarter of a century is a respectable life-span for a grand strategy, and there is no need to cling to a strategic concept that has outlived its usefulness, even if only after four years. It is time to face the threat of a new Cold War, and to get NATO ready, if called upon, to fight it.

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