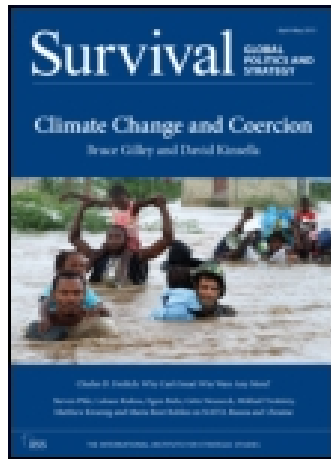


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Forum: NATO and Russia

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Forum

NATO and Russia

Editors' note

In the most recent issue of this journal, Matthew Kroenig argued that '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' ('Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War', *Survival*, vol. 57, no. 1, February–March 2015, p. 49).

The article posed a troubling question: 'If Russia were to rerun its playbook of hybrid warfare from Ukraine against a NATO member, how would the West respond?' (p. 50). Kroenig's answer was that Western strategy, as it currently stands, is inadequate. He argued that Russia could combine asymmetric tactics with the threat of early nuclear use, to deter NATO from defending a member of the Alliance under hybrid-warfare attack.

Kroenig proposed a number of alterations to NATO policy and posture, including forward deployment of conventional forces in Eastern Europe, pausing NATO expansion to Ukraine and Georgia, and upgrading the Alliance's nuclear forces. In the nuclear realm, Kroenig argued that NATO should develop a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons, and that the Alliance should consider deploying 'any tactical system that could prove useful on the battlefield', including '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' (p. 64). Emphasising recent Russian assertiveness in nuclear matters, as well as US allegations that Russia has violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, he concluded: 'An arms race is already under way; NATO is just sitting it out.'

We invited American, European and Russian experts to react to these recommendations. Their responses are printed below, along with a reply from the author.

NATO's response must be conventional, not nuclear

Steven Pifer

Matthew Kroenig argues that NATO faces a resurgent Russia that could threaten Alliance members, and offers sensible steps for NATO to boost its conventional deterrent and defence capabilities. His suggestions for changes to NATO's nuclear force posture, however, have less merit.

Russia's use of its military to seize Crimea, fuel Ukrainian separatism and invade Donbas broke the cardinal rule of the European security order: states should not use military force to take territory from neighbours. For nearly 25 years after the end of the Cold War, NATO regarded Russia as posing no threat to its territory. As Kroenig correctly argues, that must change.

It would be prudent for NATO to assume that Moscow might apply elsewhere the hybrid-warfare tactics it has demonstrated in Ukraine. The Kremlin has asserted a right to 'protect' ethnic Russians, regardless of their location or citizenship – or whether they wish to be protected – and Russian President Vladimir Putin has made clear his deep personal animosity toward NATO.¹ In NATO member states Estonia and Latvia, ethnic Russians comprise about 25% of the population.

Kroenig makes useful suggestions for improving NATO's conventional force posture. Russia's hybrid warfare employs a mixture of local fighters, Russian soldiers without insignia (whom Ukrainians referred to as 'little green men') and, sometimes, regular Russian army units – backed by other forms of non-kinetic combat such as cyber and information warfare. Russia used this mixture in Ukraine to obscure and deny involvement by its military, no matter how damning the evidence of its participation in the conflict.

NATO needs to think through how it will deal with such tactics. If 100 little green men seize a government building in Estonia and NATO spends weeks debating whether that is or is not an Article V contingency, Putin will have won big.

NATO cannot make a blanket decision in advance about a specific Article V case. It can, however, define a general response strategy and thresholds

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that would lead to NATO action against irregular warfare on an ally's territory. The Alliance should exercise hybrid-warfare contingencies in states such as the Baltics, deploying special forces and other capabilities to reinforce local security units. The simple fact of such exercises may help dissuade Moscow from believing it could successfully execute hybrid-warfare tactics.

NATO also must follow up on its decisions to develop a rapid-reaction force capable of deploying to any location within NATO in 48 hours, and to deploy headquarters elements in the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. In parallel, the Alliance should place infrastructure in the region to facilitate the reception of reinforcing units.

NATO allies should, as Kroenig advocates, extend and expand the forward presence of Allied military units in Central Europe. While there is no Alliance consensus at this point to change its 1997 policy of no 'permanent stationing of substantial combat forces' on the territory of new members, much more can be done within the confines of that policy.²

The US Army has, since last April, deployed four companies, one each in the three Baltic states and Poland, for what the Pentagon terms a 'persistent' deployment.³ Let persistent become the new permanent. Other NATO members should make persistent deployments alongside the US companies, as a signal of commitment to forward defence. The US Army should proceed with its plan to deploy a heavy brigade's worth of M1 tanks and *Bradley* fighting vehicles in Poland, and the Alliance should continue an increased schedule of ground-force exercises in the Baltic and Central European region.

NATO conventional forces remain superior to Russian forces in quantity and quality. With time in a building crisis, NATO could deploy its response force and other units to the Baltics. That reinforcement capability should be regularly exercised.

A major Russian conventional assault, conducted on short notice, however, probably would overwhelm forward defences. NATO forces would fight a holding action, allowing the Alliance to move additional forces into the area for what would likely be a costly but still winnable conventional conflict. The stronger the Alliance's ability to defend against and resist an initial assault, the less costly and quicker the fight would be.

Finally, individual NATO members need to increase their defence spending. That would maintain NATO's edge in view of substantial Russian efforts toward modernisation.

While Kroenig deserves high marks for his conventional-force recommendations, his suggestions regarding NATO's nuclear posture should be viewed with scepticism.

He is correct that Russia has a significant advantage in tactical – also referred to as non-strategic or sub-strategic – nuclear weapons in the European area. Russia's military doctrine envisages use of nuclear weapons in the event of the use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons against

Russia or its allies, or when conventional forces are used and the 'very existence' of the Russian state is at stake.⁴ Moscow might even envisage resorting to nuclear weapons in the (most unlikely) case that NATO forces moved into Ukraine and attacked Russian forces there.

No ally wishes to fight tactical nuclear war

It is less plausible that Russia, having launched a conventional attack and seized NATO territory in the Baltic region, would resort to nuclear weapons to defend against an Alliance counter-attack aimed at driving Russian forces out of NATO territory. The Kremlin would well understand that such use would raise the prospect of NATO use of nuclear weapons against Russian territory.

The US nuclear arsenal in Europe is sufficient for this purpose. NATO has no need to match the Russian arsenal in size or diversity. No ally or NATO commander wishes to fight a tactical nuclear war in Europe. The purpose of the US arsenal is political: to assure allies of the US commitment to their defence and, if used, to warn Russia that the situation verges on escalating out of control, to the strategic nuclear level.

As Kroenig notes, the Department of Defense has said that it is considering military countermeasures in response to Russia's testing of a ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The prospect that the United States might revive the *Pershing* II ballistic missile, or develop a *Pershing* III, would certainly get the attention of the ministry of defence in Moscow.

However, Kroenig glosses over how difficult deploying such a missile in Europe would prove. I worked at the State Department's NATO desk on implementation of the NATO 'double-track' decision in the early 1980s. NATO succeeded in deploying *Pershing* IIs and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe, which triggered a change in the Soviet negotiating approach that led to the INF Treaty. But it was a very close thing. At several points, the deployment decision came close to unravelling, which would have inflicted a hugely damaging – if not fatal – blow to the Alliance. No one who went through that experience would be eager to try again.

That, moreover, occurred when NATO faced the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, which held a significant quantitative advantage in conventional forces, in terms of both men and weaponry. Given that NATO today is larger, has conventional-force advantages, and faces Russia, not the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, it is difficult to see a realistic prospect for deploying additional US nuclear weapons in Europe, even if one thought it was a good idea.

Kroenig's proposal to locate dual-capable aircraft and nuclear weapons in Poland seems particularly problematic. Firstly, basing dual-capable aircraft and nuclear weapons in Poland would make them much more vulnerable to a Russian pre-emptive strike. For instance, Russian *Iskander* ballistic missiles, which have an estimated range of 400–500 kilometres and a flight time measured in minutes, have reportedly been deployed to Kaliningrad.⁵ From there, the *Iskanders* can cover two-thirds of Poland's territory. It makes little military sense to place dual-capable aircraft and nuclear bombs at risk when they can reach targets, including in Russia, from their current bases with refuelling – something at which US and NATO pilots are proficient.

Secondly, a proposal to base nuclear weapons in Poland would encounter significant opposition within NATO. While some allies have questioned whether NATO should adhere to its policy of no permanent stationing of substantial combat forces in new members, no ally has challenged the parallel three nuclear no's: 'no intention, no plan and no reason' to place nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.⁶ In response to congressional suggestions of forward-deploying nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, the Dutch government has already publicly voiced its opposition.

It makes little political sense to respond to a more aggressive Russia with a proposal that would provoke a major rift in the Alliance.

Thirdly, placing nuclear weapons on Russia's doorstep would be a hugely provocative act. Many allies would regard it as borderline reckless. Moscow would view it as the equivalent of the 1962 Soviet effort to place nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles away from the shores of Florida. Proceeding with a plan that would divide NATO and infuriate the Russians does not make good political sense.

NATO faces a Russian security challenge that it had hoped had ended with the conclusion of the Cold War. The Alliance's security holiday is over. NATO needs to take prudent steps to bolster its deterrent and defence capabilities, particularly in the Central European and Baltic region. Those steps, however, should focus on enhancing the Alliance's conventional forces, not its nuclear capabilities.

Notes

- ¹ Anna Dolgov, 'Russia Sees Need to Protect Russian Speakers in NATO Baltic States', *Moscow Times*, 16 September 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-sees-need-to-protect-russian-speakers-in-nato-baltic-states/507188.html>.
- Press Service, 22 April 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122103>.
- ² 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation', Paris, 27 May 1997, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm.
- ⁴ Pavel Podvig, 'New Version of the Military Doctrine', Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces, 26 December 2014, http://russianforces.org/blog/2014/12/new_version_of_the_military_do.shtml.
- ³ See, for example, Claudette Roulo, 'U.S. Troops to Arrive in Baltic Region for Exercises', *American Forces*
- ⁵ Steve Gutterman, 'Russia Has Stationed Iskander Missiles in Western Region: Reports', *Reuters*, 16 December 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/16/us-russia-missiles-idUSBRE9BFoW020131216>.
- ⁶ 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation'.

Putin's nuclear bluff

Lukasz Kulesa

There is much to like about Matthew Kroenig's article. He is right to treat the NATO–Russia crisis not as a passing storm, but as a change of climate, requiring a comprehensive review of NATO's strategy. Let us face the truth: Russia is not a prospective strategic partner for the Alliance. As long as it continues on its current political course, it remains our adversary. Also welcome is his call to think seriously about the scenarios in which Russia may use passive or active forms of nuclear brinkmanship in its dealing with NATO states.

As a Central European whose native Poland has benefited significantly from the security of NATO membership, however, I take issue with Kroenig's call to put eastern enlargement on hold. There is no way it can be 'quietly' dropped from NATO's agenda (p. 59) without the Alliance appearing to make a major concession to Russia, thus seriously undermining its own credibility. We should proceed with membership plans for Georgia, in particular, which has been doing everything it can to reach NATO standards and cooperate as closely as possible with the Alliance, and may be faced with increased pressure from Russia in the coming months to abandon its pro-Western policy. It is true, nevertheless, that the issue is controversial, and we should have the courage to discuss it with brutal honesty within the Alliance, long before decisions on enlargement will need to be taken at the 2016 Warsaw Summit.

Where Kroenig and I most clearly part ways is on the question of a proper response to Russian nuclear brinkmanship, and its purported threat of early ('de-escalatory') use of tactical nuclear weapons during a conflict with NATO (p. 57). Official Russian nuclear doctrine leaves very little – if any – place for de-escalatory nuclear strikes during a limited conventional conflict (according to the doctrine, Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons only if a conventional attack threatens 'the very existence of the state').¹ Still, some Russian exercises seem to point to

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preparations to use short-range missiles and bombers for limited strikes against major military bases, logistical hubs or population centres.² It remains an open question whether the Russian leadership would indeed be ready to threaten, let alone order, such a warning shot against NATO, especially in a hybrid-conflict scenario in which the Russian military is not officially participating. It would be extremely risky for Moscow to assume that there would be no response from the Alliance, especially since such a threat would be a direct challenge to the undisputed NATO leader – the United States. Russia seems content with creating an impression that its criteria for the early use of nuclear weapons are less stringent than its doctrine. But we should not mistake these nuclear bluffs for reality.

*We should not
mistake nuclear
bluffs for reality*

At the same time, there is no doubt that Russia attaches a significant role to nuclear weapons in the game of brinkmanship it plays with the US and its allies. Reports about possible deployments of nuclear weapons closer to NATO territory (in Kaliningrad and Crimea), recurrent nuclear exercises and a return to more frequent patrolling are, undoubtedly, a form of psychological warfare.³ They are supposed to show Russia's resilience to outside pressure, as well as to coerce NATO states to accept Russian demands on issues such as further enlargement, non-deployment of conventional forces closer to Russian territory and the scaling back of NATO missile-defence plans.

Recognising nuclear brinkmanship for what it is – a political, rather than military, challenge – should be the first step towards preparing a sound strategy to counter it. Kroenig proposes playing the game according to Russia's rules. He suggests a strategy of NATO nuclear brinkmanship which would mirror the Russian one, with muscular declaratory policy and development of 'any tactical [nuclear] system that could prove useful on the battlefield' (p. 64). For Kroenig, the deployment of US nuclear gravity bombs to Eastern Europe, and preparing Polish air forces to use them, would be only a first step.

Leaving aside the negative consequences for the integrity of the non-proliferation regime, this is a recipe for an inter-Alliance clash of epic

proportions. A number of NATO states still have serious reservations about the continued stationing of US B61 bombs in Europe, and are likely to be allergic to any proposals of increasing substantially the role of nuclear weapons in NATO deterrence. With regards to Central Europe and Poland, the impression that they would welcome US nuclear weapons on their soil with open arms is an oversimplification. Former president (and Nobel Peace Prize winner) Lech Walesa famously suggested that Poland should 'borrow or lease' a couple of nuclear warheads, but this is not the prevailing mood in Warsaw or in the neighbourhood.⁴ Granted, most countries in the region agree on the importance of the nuclear dimension of NATO deterrence, and value the presence of US weapons in Europe. It was recently revealed that Polish F-16s participated in NATO nuclear exercises – apparently in a supporting, not nuclear-weapon-carrying, role.⁵ But the front-line Allies are primarily interested in keeping NATO politically unified and focused on conventional-reassurance measures. A bitter dispute within NATO (especially one that would pit them against nuclear-weapons-averse Germany) on modifying nuclear posture is the last thing they need.

At the practical level, NATO will never be as good at nuclear brinkmanship as Russia. Russia can move its sub-strategic nuclear weapons and delivery systems around the country, or bring them to Crimea; it can conduct and advertise nuclear exercises at will; and Russian leaders and public figures can make boastful statements about nuclear weapons. NATO is much less swift, and much more secretive, when it comes to its nuclear-posture decision-making. Just imagine the difficulty of 28 NATO allies agreeing on tit-for-tat nuclear brinkmanship vis-à-vis Russia: matching deployment for deployment, statement for statement and exercise for exercise.

Additionally, it is hard to imagine the US producing and deploying the new sub-strategic nuclear weapons proposed by Kroenig in a time frame that would make them relevant to the crisis at hand. It will be difficult to replicate the dynamics of the 1980s *Pershing* II deployment (leading to Soviet acquiescence to the elimination of all intermediate-range systems) if there are no shorter-range ballistic missiles or ground-launched cruise missiles ready to be deployed to Europe.

Instead of trying to beat Russia at its own game, it would be far more effective (and cheaper) for the West to introduce its own rules. The first rule should be for NATO to be much more explicit about being a nuclear alliance. Instead of hiding the language on nuclear deterrence deep in joint statements (in paragraphs 49 and 50, for example, of the 2014 Wales Summit communiqué),⁶ NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg should underline the importance of nuclear deterrence before journalists as part of a speech delivered, for example, at Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands.

Secondly, NATO should stop thinking in terms of a clear-cut division between strategic and sub-strategic nuclear forces. It may make sense in the framework of the US–Russia arms-control negotiations, but in reality any use of nuclear weapons along NATO–Russia borders would have strategic consequences. We do not need to replicate the Russian arsenal of sub-strategic weapons, but rather make clear to them the inevitability of retaliation against any strike, be it with a ‘battlefield’ weapon or not.

US, British and French strategic assets, thirdly, should be used to reinforce the deterrent message. In June 2014, the US deployed strategic bombers to Europe for a ‘training mission’, in a none-too-subtle move meant to demonstrate US nuclear-deterrence capability. Could US strategic forces not be used in a similar fashion in future? Why not organise some training deployments of French nuclear-capable aircraft to Central Europe, or calls by British nuclear-armed submarines at NATO ports? The advantage of such signalling is that, unlike Kroenig’s proposals, it would use the systems that are currently operational.

Finally, NATO should stay focused on adjusting the conventional and ‘hybrid’ dimension of deterrence to address the most likely threats from Russia. Implementing the NATO Readiness Action Plan, and strengthening resilience at the national level in Central Europe, will limit the possibility of Russia underestimating the resolve or ability of the Alliance to respond to the use of hybrid-warfare tactics or conventional pressure. That remains the best guarantee against further escalation. An attempt to refocus NATO’s attention on nuclear deterrence could be a dangerous distraction.

Notes

- ¹ See Vladimir Dvorkin, 'Nuclear Weapons in Russia's Amended Military Doctrine', *Carnegie Eurasian Outlook*, 22 January 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=58774>.
- ² The June 1999 *Zapad-99* exercises included limited nuclear strikes by strategic bombers in the scenario of a NATO attack on Kaliningrad. The *Zapad-2009* and *Vostok-2010* exercises reportedly involved simulated nuclear strikes. According to at least one account, the latest *Zapad-2013* exercises also rehearsed nuclear-weapon use. See Michael R. Gordon, 'Maneuvers Show Russian Reliance on Nuclear Arms', *New York Times*, 10 July 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/10/world/maneuvers-show-russian-reliance-on-nuclear-arms.html>; Stephen Blank, 'What Do the Zapad 2013 Exercises Reveal?', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 10, no. 177, 4 October 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/regions/europe/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41449&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=51&cHash=e521c4aeb4f9cc99f736bed9a7669601#.VOyICE1yaUk; and Adrian Croft, 'Insight – Russia's Nuclear Strategy Raises Concerns in NATO', *Reuters*, 4 February 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/02/04/uk-ukraine-crisis-russia-nuclear-insight-idUKKBN0L825A20150204>.
- ³ See Hans M. Kristensen, 'Russia and NATO Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces', paper presented to the conference 'NATO Advanced Research Workshop: Preparedness for Nuclear and Radiological Threats', Los Angeles, CA, 18–20 November 2014, http://fas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Brief2014_NATO-LAa.pdf.
- ⁴ 'Poland Needs Nuclear Arms to Ward off Russia: Walesa', *AFP*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/world/europe/story/poland-needs-nuclear-arms-ward-russia-walesa-20140924#sthash.15tysq7K.dpuf>.
- ⁵ Hans M. Kristensen, 'Polish F-16s in NATO Nuclear Exercise in Italy', *Federation of American Scientists*, 27 October 2014, <http://fas.org/blogs/security/2014/10/steadfastnoon/>.
- ⁶ NATO, 'Wales Summit Declaration', Newport, 5 September 2014, paras. 49–50, http://www.nato.int/cps/po/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

Against renuclearising Europe

Egon Bahr and Götz Neuneck

Matthew Kroenig calls for a revised NATO strategy in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a 'grand ambition in Moscow to restore a Russian sphere of influence in the area of the former Soviet Union' (p. 49). He articulates a fear shared by many these days: that Russia might repeat its irregular strategy against Ukraine, this time against a NATO ally, necessitating an Article V response. He concludes that NATO – which enjoys a clear aggregate conventional military advantage over Russia (as well as a bloated US nuclear arsenal) – ought to respond by strengthening collective defence in several areas. In calling for a 'preclusive' strategy, involving the forward presence of troops in Eastern Europe, new sub-strategic nuclear weapons and twenty-first-century tools including economic sanctions (which are already in place), space, cyber, conventional strike and directed energy, he seeks to reactivate the full Cold War toolbox.

The rationale here is to establish 'escalation dominance', so that Moscow has no incentive to initiate escalation, especially with an early use of nuclear weapons, in order to win a conflict. This model not only brought us the arms races of the Cold War, but also brought the superpowers and Europe close to the brink of nuclear war, notably through the 1983 *Able Archer* exercise and the consequent Russian reaction.¹ In the background is the aim of preventing an all-out nuclear war involving the use of US strategic nuclear weapons, which would provoke devastating Russian retaliation. Such arguments about coupling and de-coupling between the United States and Western Europe reach back to the days of the Vladivostok meeting between Leonid Brezhnev and Gerald Ford in 1974, and 1980s debates over the NATO double-track decision.

President Barack Obama, in his Prague speech of April 2009, stated correctly that 'the existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War'.² It is neither intelligent, nor in European

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interests, to raise again dramatically the threat of nuclear war. As Ronald Reagan recognised, a nuclear war 'cannot be won and must never be fought'.³ These weapons' effects are so overwhelming and catastrophic that any concept of using them in a 'limited' way is completely disconnected from reality.

The article's description of the current status of NATO and Russia's nuclear weapons reveals the author's bias. Kroenig claims that NATO has decided 'to virtually eliminate tactical nuclear weapons from Europe' (p. 56) knowing well that NATO still deploys around 200 free-fall gravity bombs on air bases in five allied countries. Kroenig surprises with the claim that Russia's tactical nuclear weapons are 'ready for delivery' (p. 56) and that Russia is deploying modern capabilities for all of its strategic nuclear triad. Russia is indeed modernising its aged strategic arsenal, but so is the United States.⁴ The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the US will spend \$348 billion on nuclear weapons over the next decade, overhauling its entire nuclear arsenal.⁵ Kroenig also assumes that Russia is developing a ground-launched cruise missile, prohibited under the landmark 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. These accusations are mentioned in the US State Department's 2014 compliance report, but no details are yet known to European allies, nor have they been released to the public.

In response, Kroenig recommends that NATO consider the development and deployment of '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' (p. 64). This would mean a deliberate break with the INF treaty, resulting in a new arms race to deploy medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe. It would also further harm the moribund Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), which urgently needs a follow-on agreement.

The real victim of such a move, however, would be Europe itself. Kroenig rightly recognises that the renuclearisation of Europe would 'pose political difficulties in Western European capitals and could be divisive within the Alliance' (p. 64). That is putting it mildly: it would deepen the division of Europe for decades. This nuclear *déjà vu* would create new, costly and

dangerous situations; it would activate and polarise civil society, leading to new demonstrations and resistance; and, in provoking a new European arms race, it would damage the non-proliferation regime. Dangerous messages and shortsighted actions – based on unproven and biased assumptions, exaggerations and selective facts – are the best route to a new Cold War, and Russia has enough instruments in its own Cold War toolbox to respond. If NATO leaders listen to Kroenig’s advice, one can only conclude that the title of his article will become reality.

Instead, both sides must make efforts to find solutions to the range of challenges facing existing arms-control agreements, and to develop new frameworks. This means approaching seriously the controversial missile-defence debate in Europe, the relevance of the INF treaty and the outdated CFE treaty; exploiting under-used transparency measures in the framework of the Vienna Document with regard to the dangers of aircraft incidents over Europe; holding a serious dialogue within the framework of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on a future European security architecture, including limited military thresholds, transparency and verification instruments; and using institutions such as the NATO–Russia Council and the OSCE to discuss existing valid principles such as the ‘indivisibility of security’ and ‘non-interference in internal affairs’, as well as future fundamental security concepts. A dialogue between the US and Russia about strategic stability with lower numbers of strategic nuclear weapons is also overdue; both nuclear superpowers must remain committed to the provisions of the New START treaty, and should prepare new negotiations for a follow-on agreement.⁶ They must limit the potential damage to the Non-Proliferation Treaty from the Ukraine conflict, paying particular attention to their obligations under Article VI and the 2010 Action Plan. A declaration of stockpile numbers, weapons-grade material and the number of deployed strategic and tactical nuclear weapons would be a step forward. Lastly, the US and Russia must rebuild their cooperative threat-reduction programme (responsible for eliminating thousands of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles, and tons of chemical weapons), and Russia should return to the international nuclear-security summit process in time for the 2016 meeting in Washington DC.⁷

Arming Ukraine with defensive lethal assistance will only worsen the situation, and will not stop the killing. Instead, combined and coordinated diplomatic efforts ought to be redoubled to bring Russia back into abidance with the rules of the international system, and to work to strengthen the norms and institutions of European security. Deplorably, there are an increasing number of voices in the United States who have clearly forgotten the lessons of how we succeeded in ending the Cold War. The heritage of 'common security' and successful Ostpolitik is endangered by preparing new rounds of conventional and nuclear deployments. The approach of those who worked to achieve balance between the United States, Europe and Russia – including Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, George Shultz, William Perry, Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl – is increasingly ignored. Investments in cooperative security efforts aimed at enhancing stability, mutual security and predictability through dialogue, reciprocity, transparency and arms limitations, are eroding. Regrettably, the arms-control agenda in Europe is increasingly undermined by ignorance, disinformation and the logic of armament.

Notes

- ¹ See James E. Doyle, 'Why Eliminate Nuclear Weapons?', *Survival*, vol. 55, no. 1, February–March 2013, pp. 18–19.
- ² 'Remarks by President Barack Obama', Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, 5 April 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered.
- ³ See, for example, Ronald Reagan, 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union', 25 January 1984, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40205>.
- ⁴ On the status of Russian tactical nuclear weapons, see Andrei Zagorski, 'Russia's Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Posture, Politics and Arms Control', *Hamburger Beiträge*, no. 156, Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg (IFSH), February 2011, pp. 13–21, <http://ifsh.de/pdf/publikationen/hb/hb156.pdf>; and Tom Nichols, Douglas Stuart and Jeffrey D. McCausland (eds), *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), pp. 109–226, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=1103>.
- ⁵ Congressional Budget Office, 'Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2015 to 2024', January 2015,

<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/49870-NuclearForces.pdf>.

⁶ See 'Preparing for Deep Cuts: Options for Enhancing Euro-Atlantic and International Security', First Report of the Deep Cuts Commission, April 2014, pp. 9–11, http://deepcuts.org/files/pdf/First_Report_of_the_Deep_Cuts_Commission_English.pdf.

⁷ See Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, 'The United States and Russia Must Repair Their Partnership on Nuclear Security', *Washington Post*, 23 January 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-united-states-and-russia-must-repair-their-partnership-on-nuclear-security/2015/01/23/555b9a60-a271-11e4-903f-9f2faf7cd9fe_story.html.

Nuclear escalation and the 'Russian world'

Mikhail Troitskiy

It is a sovereign right of states and alliances to undertake the strategic reassessments or military-posture adjustments that they deem necessary. There is also little doubt that, since early 2014, Russia has been pursuing a policy course which has significantly increased uncertainty about its ultimate goals, and narrowed NATO's options for reassuring Moscow.

We are still some distance, however, from the point at which Matthew Kroenig's recommendations could become relevant. While Kroenig rightly describes the trends that have made a clash between Russia and NATO more likely now than at any moment over the past 25 years, it would be imprudent to take measures which would precipitate such a crisis. Powerful constraints still make a direct Russia–West confrontation perfectly avoidable without putting nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert or permanently deploying NATO troops in Russia's immediate neighbourhood. Undertaken at this stage in the conflict, such deployments could make a dangerous escalation between Russia and NATO a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Kroenig argues that Russia's actions in Ukraine have 'torn apart' a European 'set of beliefs' that included the stability of the Euro-Atlantic community, the absence of threats to it, and the prospect of Russia becoming a strategic partner (p. 49). Many in Russia believe, however, that the West's approach to relations with Moscow over the last quarter-century 'has resembled a "soft Versailles policy"', although such a goal has never been clearly articulated, and the majority of Europeans did not realise that it really was the case'.¹ According to this popular line of argument, Russia's response has largely been driven by a sense of vulnerability towards NATO, while the reassuring signals the Alliance was prepared to send to Russia were not costly or clear enough, and therefore insufficiently convincing. One of Russian policymakers' most serious concerns has been that governments in neighbouring states which proclaimed the goal of joining NATO were also keen to build domestic political capital through blaming Russia for their own domestic and foreign-policy challenges.

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Moscow would also dispute the notion that Russia was responsible for 'tearing up' (p. 62) the INF and CFE treaties. On the contrary, Russia was one of the few parties that ratified the Adapted CFE in good faith; NATO states refused to do so, linking ratification to the pull-out of Russian troops from Georgia and Moldova.² Russian officials also believe that they have enough grounds to reciprocate allegations of INF violations, pointing in particular to long-range drones and missile interceptors deployed or developed by the United States.³

While, as Kroenig notes, a world without nuclear weapons may have been part of the declared NATO strategy (p. 53), one has ample reason to doubt its feasibility given the scale of entrenched resistance this goal has encountered in many NATO countries, not least in the United States. Such resistance was never likely to subside even if Moscow had expressed unequivocal enthusiasm for complete nuclear disarmament or deep nuclear cuts.

Leaving aside the assignment of blame for the failure of Russia–West reassurance, the main problem with Kroenig's argument derives from his core assertion that Moscow would be ready to use nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict with the armed forces of another state *outside* of Russia's territory. The hypothetical scenario Kroenig calls NATO to prepare for is this: Russia invades a NATO country; the Alliance's conventional forces rout the invading army; and Russia conducts a tactical nuclear strike against NATO (pp. 54–5). This assumption, however, is not borne out by existing official documents and declarations covering Russia's nuclear posture.

The two latest editions (2010 and 2014) of the official Russian military doctrine only envisage the use of nuclear weapons in defence against a threat to the very existence of Russia as a state.⁴ Such a threat is difficult to imagine in a situation short of a sensitive defeat of the Russian armed forces on the country's territory, leading to the occupation of part of that territory by the enemy. International experts have noted several provisions featured in Russia's 2014 doctrine that tighten up, rather than relax, the country's nuclear posture: the preservation of existing language with regard to the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons; the introduction of 'conventional deterrence' as a complement to nuclear deterrence; and the prevention of war being called the 'cornerstone of military policy'.⁵

As evidence of Russia's increased nuclear brinkmanship, Kroenig points to the assertion by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov of Moscow's right to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea (p. 55). While such a statement did nothing to defuse the tensions surrounding the status of the peninsula, it could easily be read as consistent with Russian doctrine: Moscow considers Crimea part of Russian territory and is prepared to use all means necessary to protect the country's territorial integrity. Lavrov's assertion has few practical implications, so long as no NATO country has suggested that Crimea should be wrested away from Russia by military force.

To support his argument about the loosening of conditions for Russian nuclear use, Kroenig also cites an article by the nuclear-policy analyst Nikolai Sokov. On closer inspection, however, the article notes that the 'utility [of nuclear weapons] is limited. Outside the most extreme circumstances, the damage they can inflict is simply too great and horrible for the threat of using them to be sufficiently credible.'⁶ Indeed, a world in which Russia had delivered a first 'limited' nuclear strike against a NATO member and the Alliance had decided not to reciprocate could hardly be seen as one in which Russia could enjoy the benefits of its 'victory'.

The manner in which Moscow has approached the conflict in eastern Ukraine indicates that the Kremlin is not oblivious to the costs of an overt use of military force against any sovereign state – and certainly against a member of NATO. Despite official rhetoric about the 'demise' of the 'post-Cold War order',⁷ Russia has thus far avoided making irreversible moves – either in the international or the domestic arena – that would truly put an end to that order. The Russian government has been visibly concerned with preventing a dramatic drop in living standards, and has not seriously tried to prepare its citizens for the major sacrifices that would be symptomatic of Moscow's readiness to start a war. Similarly, it is a long leap from harsh rhetoric and forays of Russian military aircraft into the North Atlantic airspace, on the one hand, to sending armed groups into NATO states, on the other.

*The Kremlin is
not oblivious*

While some Russian pundits do a disservice to their country by issuing thinly veiled threats of a 'major war' in Europe or 'destabilisation' on a regional or global scale, public opinion in Russia is staunchly opposed to war with Russia's neighbours or any other states, and to the loss of Russian lives in armed conflicts abroad.⁸ Similarly, Russian policymakers believe – likely not without reason – that NATO publics would not support a review of their countries' military doctrines in favour of more confrontational nuclear postures and force configurations. In this context, Kroenig pertinently recommends that the NATO members fearing exploitation by Russia of their domestic social fissures should beef up police forces (as opposed to massive deployments of international military contingents) and – most importantly – take measures to ensure full social and political integration of all ethnic and linguistic minorities (p. 60). This would significantly enhance the loyalty of those countries' citizens to their governments and strengthen their collective commitment to self-defence.

Recent shifts in the Russian mainstream-media discourse make outside observers wonder if the long-standing Soviet post-1945 view of war as primarily a source of tragedy and devastation is giving way to a more trigger-happy attitude. But even if this were the case, there is not yet enough concrete evidence of Russian determination to pursue territorial expansion through risky brinkmanship policies to justify a significant NATO military build-up, especially a forward deployment of destabilising nuclear capabilities.

The leaders of NATO countries have repeatedly emphasised the large price that Russia had to pay for playing hardball with Ukraine. Even if Moscow intended to undermine NATO's resolve and cohesiveness in the course of the Ukraine crisis, the actual dynamic is clear: the more assertive Russian policy is in its neighbourhood, the more united NATO becomes, and the more proposals are voiced for concerted multilateral action to immediately deter and strategically contain Russia. This dynamic should be enough to reassure NATO that the current developments in Russian foreign policy and rhetoric do not justify a risky escalatory adaptation of the Alliance's nuclear posture.

Notes

- 1 Sergey Karaganov, 'Evropa: porazhenie iz ruk pobedy? [Europe: Defeat out of the jaws of victory?]', *Russia in Global Affairs*, January–February 2015, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Evropa-porazhenie-iz-ruk-pobedy-17304>.
- 2 NATO, 'NATO's Role in Conventional Arms Control', 19 August 2014, http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48896.htm.
- 3 'Lavrov obvinil SShA v narushenii Dogovora o RSMD [Lavrov accused the USA of violating the INF Treaty]', Interfax, 7 February 2015, <http://www.interfax.ru/world/422541>.
- 4 See Section 27 of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 'Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii', *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 30 December 2014, <http://www.rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>.
- 5 See, for example, Olga Oliker, 'Russia's New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly', Monkey Cage, *Washington Post*, 15 January 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/15/russias-new-military-doctrine-same-as-the-old-doctrine-mostly>.
- 6 Nikolai N. Sokov, 'Why Russia Calls a Limited Nuclear Strike "De-escalation"', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 13 March 2014, <http://thebulletin.org/why-russia-calls-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation>.
- 7 The meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club (a high-profile, quasi-official gathering of Russian and international policy analysts), as well as President Putin's address to its participants, were held in October 2014 under the theme 'The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules'. See the website of the President of Russia, 'Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club', 24 October 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/23137>.
- 8 Press release, Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 10 November 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/10-11-2014/prisoedinenie-kryma-i-uchastie-rossiiskikh-dobrovoltsev-v-konflikte-na-vostoke-ukrainy>.

A Reply by the Author

Matthew Kroenig

For over a decade, Western defence planners have argued that potential adversaries would seek to negate US and NATO conventional military dominance by preparing asymmetric challenges at the low and high ends of the conflict spectrum. This is exactly what Russia is doing: making changes to the international status quo through low-intensity hybrid warfare, and then deterring outside intervention to halt or reverse these gains with threats to escalate to nuclear use. The purpose of my article was to urge NATO to confront this reality, and to detail the measures necessary to deal with the Russian threat.

In their responses, Steven Pifer, Lukasz Kulesa, Egon Bahr, Götz Neuneck and Mikhail Troitskiy engage with my arguments and take issue with some of my recommendations. I am grateful to these esteemed authors and to the editors of *Survival* for the opportunity to continue this important discussion.

There are large areas of agreement between me and some of the authors. Pifer and Kulesa endorse my central contention that we have entered what will likely be an enduring and much more competitive phase in our relationship with Russia. They likewise support my recommendations for strengthening NATO's conventional-force posture to protect NATO's easternmost members. Kulesa also agrees that some change to NATO nuclear doctrine and posture may be necessary to deter Russian nuclear aggression. That these authors see the challenge in a similar light and agree broadly on much of the necessary response is an important step forward.

Perhaps of more interest, however, are the points of disagreement. Space limitations prevent me from addressing every dispute, so I will focus on the major issues.

The first significant disagreement is over the nature of the threat posed by Russia, as several of my colleagues deny or downplay its nuclear

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component. On Russian nuclear brinkmanship, Kulesa contends that we should recognise Russia's nuclear threats as 'a political, rather than military, challenge'. Pifer also asserts that the purpose of US tactical nuclear weapons is 'political'. But this is a distinction without a difference. As Clausewitz put it, war is the continuation of politics by other means. Nuclear weapons have political utility only because they remain the ultimate instrument of military force. Minimising their political utility for coercion, therefore, requires countering their military potential.

On the possibility of limited Russian nuclear strikes against NATO, Troitskiy, Pifer and Kulesa correctly argue that Russia's recent military doctrine only allows for nuclear pre-emption in extreme circumstances, but this fact provides little reassurance. As I argue in my article, the idea that Russia could conduct de-escalatory nuclear strikes in less severe situations was part of Russia's formal doctrine in the recent past; experts believe that it persists in current doctrine in classified annexes; and it remains firmly engrained in Russian military thinking.¹ Perhaps more important than public documents (which are at least partially window dressing anyway) are how military forces actually plan and exercise; as Kulesa notes, Russian military drills have often ended with simulated nuclear strikes.²

Yet, Pifer argues that a Russian nuclear attack in a war on the territory of a NATO member is 'less plausible' than in other contingencies, and Kulesa maintains that whether Putin would follow through on nuclear threats is 'an open question' because 'it would be extremely risky'. Troitskiy claims that Russia would be wary of doing anything that might instigate a unified NATO response, concluding that 'this dynamic should be enough to reassure NATO'. On one level, they are correct. Nuclear deterrence is, by definition, about highly unlikely but terribly dangerous scenarios. Still, Pifer, Kulesa and Troitskiy essentially ask us to trust Putin not to resort to nuclear use in a serious conflict. This would be an irresponsible course of action. Too often in the past, we have declared possible Russian threats as beyond the realm of plausibility only to watch in horror as they later came to fruition. The invasion of Ukraine was nearly unthinkable until it happened. Rather than trusting Putin not to do what his military forces actively exercise to do, it would be much wiser to put in place a policy and capabilities to deter him.

A second set of disagreements deals with the appropriate response to the Russian nuclear threat. I argue that NATO needs to augment its nuclear capabilities and posture, but others suggest alternate courses of action.

Bahr and Neuneck recommend signing new arms-control agreements, reducing nuclear stockpiles and deepening engagement with Russia. These recommendations might have made sense in 2009, and indeed I supported some of them then, but they are completely out of place in 2015. Bahr and Neuneck accuse my analysis of 'bias', but their anachronistic proposals call to mind the retort often attributed to John Maynard Keynes: 'When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?'

A US president would have few good options

Pifer argues that our extant nuclear capabilities are up to the task of deterring Russia, but NATO currently has strong conventional forces, robust strategic nuclear forces and a gap in the middle. If a US president or NATO commander wanted a tailored nuclear response to a limited Russian nuclear strike, he would have few, if any, good options at present.

Kulesa suggests several commonsensical proposals, such as emphasising NATO's nuclear status, underscoring that any nuclear attack will be met with a nuclear response, and using US, UK and French forces for nuclear signalling. These ideas should be carefully weighed, and, indeed, I recommend some of them in my original piece, but they are not inconsistent with other proposed measures, which must also remain under consideration. (For the record, I do not recommend that NATO play nuclear brinkmanship in a tit-for-tat fashion with Russia as Kulesa claims; I am not sure where he got this idea.)

Finally, all of the authors criticise my call for NATO to consider a wider range of options to make sure that it has credible nuclear forces in order to deter a limited Russian nuclear strike. But their critiques fall well short of the systematic weighing of alternatives that my article intended to inspire. If my analysis is correct, developing usable nuclear options may be helpful, and even necessary, to deter a Russian nuclear attack against NATO in future contingencies. This is a strategic benefit of paramount importance, and the potential downsides the authors cite are not nearly substantial enough to outweigh it.

Pifer argues that forward-deploying nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe would be 'a hugely provocative act'. Similarly, Bahr and Neuneck claim that these proposals would start an arms race, spell the end of the INF treaty, and increase the risk of nuclear war. Let us not forget, however, that Russia has invaded a sovereign nation, has reportedly developed a new missile in violation of the INF treaty, and is issuing thinly veiled nuclear threats against the rest of NATO. These are the hugely provocative acts that risk starting an arms race and that raise the spectre of nuclear war. NATO's taking steps to defend itself in this context is anything but provocative. Indeed, the improved nuclear options I recommend would have the exact opposite effect of those that Bahr and Neuneck fear – instead, they would give Moscow incentives to constrain its nuclear build-up and to stay its hand from nuclear escalation.

The most serious criticism raised by Pifer, Kulesa, Bahr and Neuneck is that the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Europe would cause serious rifts in NATO and even risk tearing the Alliance apart. This is an important consideration, but it is far from decisive. Firstly, many of the options I recommend could be adopted by the United States unilaterally (such as placing lower-yield warheads on strategic missiles) or through bilateral agreement (such as rotationally basing strategic bombers in Europe) without involving NATO directly or causing a noticeable disturbance within the Alliance.

Secondly, this objection only makes sense if one's priorities are upside down. The foremost objective of national-security policy is not to avoid uncomfortable diplomatic encounters. Rather, the purpose of diplomacy is to advance national-security objectives. If, upon consideration, it is decided that forward-deploying new nuclear capabilities in Europe is necessary to deter the Russian nuclear threat, then we must begin serious discussions and careful diplomacy within NATO over the next several years to lay the groundwork to make that option possible, not give up because we fear some difficult meetings or street protests.

Finally, Pifer and Kulesa raise specific, practical concerns with some of my proposals. Pifer points out that forward-deploying B61s further east would make them more vulnerable to a Russian pre-emptive strike, and Kulesa worries that the timeline for developing new options may be too

long to meet current demands. This is exactly the kind of discussion I was hoping to spark. In developing a suite of options to deter a limited Russian nuclear strike, we must make sure that at least some of them are survivable, and that others are available on short order. Returning nuclear cruise missiles to submarines would help with the first concern, and rotationally basing American strategic bombers in Europe could help with the second.

In sum, I appreciate the authors' serious engagement with my article, but none of their criticisms begin to invalidate my analysis or recommendations. NATO's current defence policy and strategy, including its nuclear elements, were devised at a time when the risk of military confrontation between NATO and Russia was extremely remote. That time has passed. Nearly all thoughtful observers agree that the security environment in Europe has dramatically changed. As such, NATO strategy and posture must adjust as well. People are willing to acknowledge this fact at the conventional level, but they shy away from reality when the subject of nuclear weapons is broached.

Perhaps the nuclear strategy and posture we devised in the tranquil post-Cold War world is exactly the same as the one we need for this fundamentally different and more conflictual era, but that seems unlikely. If change is necessary, as I suspect it is, then it would be best to come round to that realisation before it is too late.

Notes

¹ On classified annexes, see, for example, Elbridge Colby, 'Nuclear Weapons in the Third Offset Strategy: Avoiding a Blind Spot in the Pentagon's New Initiative', Center for a New American Security, February 2015, p. 6, <http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/Nuclear%20Weapons%20in%20the%203rd%20Offset%20Strategy.pdf>.

² Nearly all of Russia's major military drills since 2000 have concluded with simulated nuclear strikes. See Nikolai N. Sokov, 'Why Russia Calls a Limited Nuclear Strike "De-escalation"', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 13 March 2014, <http://thebulletin.org/why-russia-calls-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation>.