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NATO's Eastern Flank: Towards NATO 2022 Madrid Summit

Edited by
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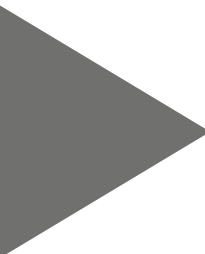
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Dominik P. Jankowski, Tomasz Stępniewski

Introduction

NATO's approach to security is based on a 360-degree concept. From a political perspective, NATO's flanks – Eastern, Southern, Northern – remain equally important. At the same time, the military challenges and threats, and their scope and intensity, continue to be distinct in every part of the Alliance.

Since 2014, the Eastern Flank has gained in military importance due to three factors. First, the security environment has drastically changed. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the substantial military build-up in Russia's Southern and Western Military Districts, including in the Kaliningrad Oblast, have altered Allied strategic calculus. Second, in response to those developments NATO started its military adaptation in order to enhance the Allied deterrence and defence posture, including by deploying an enhanced forward presence to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Third, the lines between peace and conflict have become blurred due to increasingly sophisticated Rus-

sian hybrid campaigns that were supported by its proxies, including Belarus.

With this publication, the Institute of Central Europe (Instytut Europy Środkowej, IEŚ) in Lublin contributes to a broader expert discussion on the preparations of NATO's next Strategic Concept, which should properly reflect the importance of NATO's Eastern Flank.

In his article, Tomasz Kowalik (Multinational Corps North-East) underlines that collective defence remains a key pillar of the Alliance. The recent events in 2021 on the Eastern Flank have further proven that this core task needs unabated and continuous focus, including in NATO's next Strategic Concept. Furthermore, Marcin Kozieł (International Staff, NATO) argues that NATO needs to embrace anew the vision of a democratic and prosperous Ukraine as a fundamental component of Euro-Atlantic security and act accordingly: put Ukraine high on the agenda of its Summit in Madrid, more actively involve Ukraine in its policy-making, and take a long-term, strategic view of progress. Finally, Robert Pszczel (Casimir Pulaski Foundation) emphasizes that Russia's policies and deliberate actions have driven NATO-Russia relations to the point where the Allies have to acknowledge the hostile nature of their recent partner. The next Strategic Concept should be used to describe this pattern of aggressiveness clearly and to define Russia as a hostile power while pressing for the tools that would minimize the risk of actual confrontation.

Dominik P. Jankowski, Tomasz Stępniewski
Brussels and Lublin, December 2021



Tomasz Kowalik

NATO's Eastern Flank: Towards a More Robust Defence

Executive Summary

While the threats from the East are continuously evolving, the Alliance needs to further bolster its defensive capabilities on its Eastern Flank. Allies are facing an increasing combination of conventional and hybrid pressures underpinned with ever more aggressive disinformation campaigns.

Given this backdrop, NATO needs to remain prepared to dissuade, deter, defend and counter aggressive activities. Particularly, the Bucharest Nine (B9) countries need to close ranks and consolidate their defences against those challenges.

NATO in the context of both its 2022 Summit in Madrid and adopting the next Strategic Concept should once again reinvigorate its Article 5 commitment and provide a series of practical measures underpinning this obligation.

Introduction

As the Alliance is developing its next Strategic Concept, following the Lisbon Summit Concept from 2010, it is facing ever evolving new challenges. While collective defence remains a key pillar of the Alliance, and recent events in 2021 on NATO's Eastern Flank have further proven that this NATO core task needs unabated and continuous focus, new impetus is needed to bolster NATO's defence capabilities. Further agile countering of intensifying disinformation and evolving hybrid activities requires equally simultaneous attention by the Alliance.

New Threats Emanating from the East

Security challenges stemming from the East continue to exist and grow through the continued build-up of the Russian military, both in numbers of units and troops as well as modern offensive equipment, disruptive technologies, more advanced and complex exercises and increasingly provocative behaviour and narratives, including more complex hybrid attacks. Those hybrid attacks are underpinned with aggressive disinformation campaigns.

The most recent orchestrated and stimulated migration crisis in 2021 on the borders with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland shows that a new and unprecedented hybrid method has been used in order to destabilise the Alliance's eastern frontier and the EU as a whole. Unprecedented high numbers of migrants are being transported from Iraq and other MENA countries as well as Asian countries into Belarus, and from there they are moved by organised means to the borders of NATO/EU. The groups of migrants are subsequently assisted by Belarusian uniformed services to forcefully cross

the border. Furthermore, the continued hybrid attack conducted by Russia's proxy – A. Lukashenko's regime in Belarus – coincided with Russia's strategic exercise ZAPAD-21, which assumed in its scenario an artificially stimulated influx of migrants leading to a border crisis.

These hybrid instruments, doctrinally, are part of a full array of other offensive methods, and thus instant transition into regular military aggression remains a continued possibility. And so, while countering such hybrid activities, the parallel observance of all indicators and warnings in an organised disinformation campaign needs to be soberly analysed. The Allies need to be able to distinguish between 'fake and faint' versus possibly real preparations for something more imminent and ominous. Unfortunately, the aggressive attacks and partial tactical and territorial successes of 2008 in Georgia, 2014 in Ukraine, and 2016 in Syria show that the proactive use of the regular military (including in disguised and deniable form) is a viable option for Russia's current regime to gain its political goals.

Also, the bombings in Vrbětice in Czechia concocted and conducted by Russian governmental secret services in ammunition depots in 2014 are another case in point of hybrid activities, which show that the current Russian regime has already significantly lowered the escalation threshold in order to destabilise its opponents and reach its political objectives, with the ultimate aim of breaking up the unity of the Alliance and the EU and returning to a concert of powers.

The disinformation campaign orchestrated by Putin's and Lukashenko's regimes has reached a new impetus in recent times as well. Adversaries eager to challenge the Alliance – fully cognisant of NATO's centre of gravity being the

unity of its members – bombard this unity with an unprecedented amount of disinformation that is aimed at undermining the perception of allied common values and dividing Allies. Under such circumstances the Alliance should focus on identifying the disinformation activities and mechanisms and handle them with an appropriate level of more proactive and courageous counter narrative to prevent the false and obscure picture from penetrating into NATO's societies and their perception.

Need to Further Close Ranks

Given this backdrop, NATO needs to remain prepared to dissuade, deter, defend and counter aggressive activities. In particular, countries on the Eastern Flank, notably the so-called Bucharest Nine (B9), need to be able to fully implement Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, requiring Allies to develop robust forces enabling them for self-defence. The format of the nine countries close to the borders with Russia, co-led by Poland and Romania, comprises Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Common defence consultations, but also practical military cooperation within the region enhancing interoperability, building linkages and conducting joint exercises are an excellent way to close ranks and enhance their deterrence and defence posture. The next desirable step in this format would be to plan and execute larger scale exercises encompassing militaries from this region. Naturally, appropriate defence expenditures at a minimum level of 2% of GDP with at least 20% of it on equipment are an indispensable effort in order to make Article 3 real.

Infrastructure is key enablement for rapid deployment and reinforcement. The Alliance and its north-eastern Al-

lies, particularly Poland and the three Baltic states, also need to look further into prepositioned stocks. Also, the extension of the NATO Pipeline System would enable swift replenishment of fuel for military units in case of emergency and conflict. Swifter construction of vital routes into the Baltic states, such as the Via Baltica and Via Carpathia as well as Rail Baltica would enable the quick Reception, Staging and Onward Movement of allied troops if needs be. While the forward deployed allied military contingents in the Baltic states cannot be too large and costly, the ability to rapidly reinforce and sustain them through various means of transportation becomes a key ability of the Alliance.

NATO Forces' Readiness and Presence Within and Outside Allied Territory

While the Alliance also needs to maintain a robust and agile NATO Command and Force Structure, including its enhanced and tailored Forward Presence, NATO Readiness Forces and NATO Readiness Initiative Forces capable of responding swiftly to any threats and deploying at an appropriate timeline to allied territory, the Eastern Flank countries need to continue building up their resilience and defensive posture and reach a synergy of deterrence and dissuasion in respect of a potential aggressor's testing the resilience and readiness of the Alliance. Understanding the requirement to mutually support Allies on NATO's frontiers, Poland is actively participating in various essential deterrence and surveillance initiatives. Those include the enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia, providing there a tank company – the largest armoured force on Latvian territory – Baltic Air Policing in Lithuania and Estonia, Air

Surveillance and Interception Capability to meet Iceland's Peacetime Preparedness Needs (ASIC IPPN) and a mechanised company in Romania as part of the tailored Forward Presence. Another example of allied solidarity was the deployment of a *Bryza* reconnaissance aircraft to Incirlik Airbase under the NATO Tailored Assurance Measures for Turkey, thus demonstrating a 360 degree approach. Further, Poland continuously deploys forces to Iraq, KFOR and with the NATO Maritime Standing Groups. Poland also actively sends its troops to various joint exercises with its Allies and partners and continues to invite allied troops to partake in the major exercises it hosts on a regular basis. Such mutual allied support as well as the manning of military posts in the NATO Command Structure and NATO Force Structure are strong indicators of allied mutual solidarity, cementing the Alliance's cohesion.

Poland leading on the Eastern Front

Poland is setting the tone in the region with its significant increase in defence expenditures having reached 2.37% of GDP in 2020 and spending even more in absolute numbers in 2021. The recent increases of the budget enable the growth both of regular armed forces, including the recreation and build-up of a fourth division along with its combat and enabling units consisting of a new combat brigade and combat support and service support regiments and battalions as well as a swift formation of rapidly available – in case of emergency – light infantry units comprising the Territorial Defence Force. By mid-2021 this recently formed fifth armed service has already grown to over 30,000 troops mustered in 17 brigades and adds significant deterrence by saturating the

potential battlefield while also providing immediate crisis emergency relief needed during the pandemic, forest fires, flooding and other natural disasters as well as assistance to the population living in a temporary state of emergency along the border with Belarus.

All in all, Poland – the largest Ally on NATO's Eastern Flank – was able to grow its troops between 2016 and 2021 from roughly 95,000 to 140,000 soldiers. The aim is to continue this growth over the coming years. A further Polish leadership role, particularly in advanced and complex military exercises, is desirable for better coherence on NATO's Eastern Flank, which has a very similar threat perception. The Polish defence budget also allows for more flexibility in the procurement of needed big-ticket items, such as fifth-generation aircraft fitted with long-range missiles, long- and medium-range air defence systems, tanks and anti-tank guided missiles, long-range missile artillery systems and self-propelled tube artillery, UAVs, and select naval vessels as well as advanced simulation systems, to mention the most significant programmes. All these new capabilities are needed on NATO's Eastern Flank in order to meet the new challenges emanating from a revanchist Russia, rewriting history, manipulating its own population, attacking smaller countries, moving borders, violating international law, and destabilising its neighbourhood as a *modus operandi* of its foreign and defence policy.

Conclusions

NATO, in the context of both its 2022 Summit in Madrid and adopting the next Strategic Concept, should once again reinvigorate its Article 5 commitment and provide a series

of practical measures underpinning this obligation. All Allies need to individually contribute to this commitment and hold the line with respect to defence expenditures and troop deployments within and outside of allied territory. Preparations of appropriate infrastructure for swift allied deployment within the territories should continue. Further, countering the hybrid attacks stemming from outside of the Alliance – including those from the South – should remain a top priority. Finally, the new Strategic Concept needs to re-emphasise the mutual commitment for a unified 360 degree Defence Alliance.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Polish Armed Forces or the Multinational Corps North-East.



Marcin Koziel

NATO-Ukraine Relations on the Road to the Madrid Summit

Executive Summary

The principal challenges which NATO and Ukraine are confronting in 2021 are the political complexity inherent in NATO's 'Open Door' policy and 'reform fatigue' in Ukraine, which is inevitably setting in as Kyiv struggles to bring about Western community-advocated change across its security structures.

NATO needs to embrace anew the vision of a democratic and prosperous Ukraine as a fundamental component of Euro-Atlantic security and act accordingly: put Ukraine high on the agenda of its Summit in Madrid, more actively involve Ukraine in its policy-making, and take a long-term, strategic view of progress. On its part, Ukraine's determination to follow through with deep systemic reform is critical to long-term success.

Key policy proposals include the need for NATO to elevate its relations with Ukraine by integrating Ukraine more closely into the Alliance's own policies and to remodel a practical co-operation infrastructure under the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine for it to better respond to today's and future requirements.

Introduction

At their Summit in Brussels on 14 June 2021, NATO heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council reaffirmed their commitment to the decisions of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which state that Ukraine 'will become a member of NATO' and stressed that the Membership Action Plan (MAP) remains an integral part of the integration process for Ukraine. They also emphasised the importance of wide-ranging, sustainable, and irreversible reforms in Ukraine, and offered to continue to provide Ukraine with practical support in its efforts to reform the security and defence sector. These decisions follow a thirty-year 'journey' of political relations and practical co-operation, which NATO and Ukraine set out on following the break-up of the Soviet Union. By and large, they reflect the current *status quo*, but progress in advancing key objectives of the NATO-Ukraine partnership largely depends on what happens as NATO gears up for its next Summit, set to take place in 2022 in Madrid. The Alliance's readiness (or lack thereof) to reach a higher plane of development as regards its relationship with Ukraine, and Ukraine's determination to follow through with the deep systemic reform of its national security architecture are critical parts of the equation.

The Way Ahead for NATO-Ukraine Relations

As NATO approaches its Madrid Summit, there appear to be a number of issues which are key to NATO's and Ukraine's ability to continue their strategic 'journey'. The principal challenges which NATO and Ukraine are confronting in 2021 are the political complexity inherent in NATO's 'Open Door' policy and 'reform fatigue' in Ukraine, which is inevitably setting in as Kyiv struggles to bring about Western community-advocated change across its security structures. While the former may, over the long-term, lead to Ukraine's re-evaluating its security options, the latter might seriously hamper progress in aligning Ukraine's security sector with Euro-Atlantic standards. More importantly, NATO-Ukraine relations may also be losing their strategic depth as the relationship risks becoming entangled in a number of politicised issues on the one hand and is being driven by an overly technical vision of progress in implementing reform on the other. Therefore, NATO and Ukraine need a qualitatively new strategy to manage their relations, and what matters most is NATO's determination to return to the strategic roots of the Alliance's partnership with Ukraine, placing Kyiv at the heart of NATO's geostrategy in the 'NATO after Afghanistan' context.

Since its inception at the beginning of the nineties, NATO's long-term vision of Ukraine is that of understanding the role which an independent Ukraine plays in the geopolitical equilibrium. Enshrined in the NATO-Ukraine Charter of 1997, the vision lying at the heart of the NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership is that of 'an independent, democratic and stable Ukraine [as] one of the key factors for ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe, and the

continent as a whole'. Such a Ukraine would be a beacon of democratic success for other Eastern European countries and would become a stabilising factor on NATO's eastern flank. With its large, 41 million population, Ukraine is bordered by four NATO Allies, and its security is of critical importance for stability in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). There is hardly any long-term security in the CEE without a stable and Western-oriented Ukraine. Ukraine also plays a key geostrategic role in the Black Sea basin: its security situation has the potential of either turning the Black Sea into a zone of military tension or transforming it into a regional co-operation space. This very geostrategic position also means that Ukraine plays a crucial role for European energy security, particularly that of eastern NATO-Allied nations.

With the Madrid Summit looming on the horizon, NATO should advance its strategic understanding of the positive geostrategic and geopolitical implications of 'an independent Ukraine' in the transformed strategic environment. As a practical illustration of the importance which the Alliance attaches to Ukraine, Ukraine should feature highly on the agenda at the Madrid Summit. The Summit will also provide the opportunity for a public reaffirmation of NATO's long-term vision of an independent and sovereign Ukraine and the possible introduction of a new strategy for NATO-Ukraine relations based on the ever deeper involvement of Ukraine in NATO's own policies and strategies. Key elements of the above approach could include a decision to deepen political engagement with Ukraine based on joint interests and shared values, introducing a new quality to the Alliance's relationship with Kyiv for it to reflect a truly strategic and yet pragmatic dialogue geared towards joint

action and mutually beneficial interaction, and the delivery of targeted assistance to a number of strategic areas of the national security policy of Ukraine which possess wider transformational potential. In this context, work on NATO's new Strategic Concept, with the latter to be launched at the Summit in Madrid, provides the best opportunity for Ukraine's voice about NATO's long-term strategy to be heard. In practice, as the new Strategic Concept shapes up, NATO should hold discussions with Kyiv at all political levels, focusing on Ukraine's views about – and ways in which Ukraine could contribute to – the development and future implementation of the long-term strategy of the Alliance. Indeed, Ukraine has a role to play in (and has already supported) the achievement of the Alliance's three essential core tasks: 'collective defence', 'crisis management', and 'cooperative security' – reflected in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept.

Secondly, in addition to the important roles Kyiv plays in the Alliance's partnerships policies, NATO should fully recognise Ukraine as an important contributor to the Alliance's collective defence. As an example, Ukraine possesses unique experience in managing the full spectrum of hybrid warfare, and it might even be said that after 2014 it has become a testing ground for those modern methods of warfare. With hybrid war dominating the 21st-century strategic landscape, this experience is of significant value to the Alliance and Allies as they develop their collective and national responses to hybrid threats. It could also continue as an example of the best contribution Kyiv could provide in support of the development of collective defence potential. In addition, the experiences from managing hybrid warfare challenges that the Ukrainian Armed Forces and other security formations

possess, including in real-life hybrid warfare environments, have become unique and could be instrumental in both increasing the Alliance's understanding of hybrid conflict and facilitating Ukraine's participation in the Alliance's own efforts aimed at countering hybrid warfare. In this context, the potential of the NATO-Ukraine Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare is still to be fully exploited.

Thirdly, if transformed based on Euro-Atlantic standards and norms, Ukraine's defence industry, including its air, space and rocketry sectors, could be a significant contribution to Allied defence capability development. NATO should take a strategic view of this area of work and promote deeper co-operation between Allied and Ukrainian defence contractors. Such co-operative ventures might be built around the joint development of capabilities or lessons-learned transfers.

NATO should also continue to support Ukraine's reform agenda by assisting in designing and implementing the Annual National Programme of Ukraine and offering practical assistance through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine launched at the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw. Regardless of the current status of political discussion about Ukraine's NATO membership, it is in the Alliance's strategic interest for Ukraine's defence and security sector to be interoperable with NATO and for its security sector governance to reflect Euro-Atlantic practice. Work in this area should revolve around the landmark 2020 National Security Strategy of Ukraine identifying 'deterrence', 'resilience' and 'interaction [co-operation]' as the key national security principles.

At practical co-operation levels, NATO should also reconsider its overall assistance strategy for Ukraine by focusing

the CAP on long-term capacity building and away from the principal focus being placed on managing consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO should also reconsider making the CAP more agile and responsive. In practical terms, the new CAP should include a very narrow set of high-priority issues and projects possessing a significant systemic and transformational character. As part of the new CAP, NATO should also introduce a set of systemic enablers aimed at assisting Ukraine in successfully managing change and addressing issues which block progress in implementing reform. Overall, in its work with Kyiv, NATO should also take a long-term view of progress in defence and security sector reform, recognise the need to apply a patient, step-by-step approach to success, and focus on achieving incremental yet strategic progress, rather than short-term tactical successes.

Last but not least, NATO-Ukraine relations need to be supported by regional co-operation which individual Allies are pursuing with Ukraine. As an example, the Lublin Triangle initiative composed of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, could serve as a framework for implementing various practical projects to be developed ‘in the spirit of’ the principal long-term objectives of the NATO-Ukraine partnership. If launched, defence co-operation activities under the Lublin Triangle could also be aligned as closely as possible with the CAP for Ukraine.

Conclusions

As NATO prepares for its summit in Madrid, it should once again take a strategic view of the NATO-Ukraine partnership, including roles which it plays in the long-term policy and security of the Alliance. The ‘end state’ of the political pro-

cess, which the NATO-Ukraine ‘journey’ is to lead to, is well defined: Ukraine’s full-fledged membership in NATO is reflected in the decisions which NATO leaders took in 2008 in Bucharest and upheld in 2021 in Brussels. Ukraine’s own aspiration to join NATO is also enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine. At the same time, external and internal factors, including (i) Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine, (ii) the lack of political stimulus to sustain far-reaching reform – which would be provided by the political symbolism of Ukraine’s participation in the MAP – and (iii) the complexities of political debate inside the Alliance, including over the pace at which the Bucharest Summit decisions should be turned into reality, may make the NATO-Ukraine ‘journey’ politically gruelling. To manage these negative tendencies, NATO and the Allies should use their meeting in Madrid to reaffirm their commitment to the fundamental vision of Ukraine’s being key to Euro-Atlantic security in an increasingly complex and unpredictable security environment and support that commitment with action.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.



Robert Pszczel

Relations between NATO and the Russian Federation: Where do we go from here? Ideas for the New Strategic Concept

Executive Summary

Russia's policy and deliberate actions have driven NATO-Russia relations to the point where Allies have to acknowledge the hostile nature of their recent partner. The upcoming Strategic Concept should be used to describe this pattern of aggressiveness clearly and to define Russia as a hostile power while pressing for the tools that would minimise the risk of actual confrontation.

Introduction

Developments of the last three decades show that there is no other non-member country with which NATO is experiencing such turbulent relations than Russia. Some of the emotion-laden dynamics could have been explained in the

early 90s by the fact that the Russian Federation, having inherited the mantle of the Soviet Union, had also preserved the legacy and mind-set of the Cold War confrontation. That baggage of myths and propaganda vilifying the Alliance was an inevitable left-over from the communist past. But today, there is little doubt that people presently clinging to power in Moscow have no interest in burying the prejudices of the past but instead are keen to get back to the era of confrontation. Russia is treating NATO as an enemy: this is proven by its deeds and words. NATO has no choice but to respond to this policy choice of Moscow.

Recent History

There were genuine hopes that once Russia has started modernising, democracy would take a firm foothold and Moscow would prefer to see the traditional West as potential partner, sharing values and responsibility for jointly tackling shared challenges to international security. This optimistic scenario has been a constant baseline assumption for organisations such as NATO and the European Union. One could describe the efforts of Allies since 1990 as a strategically motivated policy aiming to open a new chapter and treat Russia as an important, even privileged, partner.

From the 'extended hand of friendship' offered to Moscow in 1990 – an invitation to develop consultations and cooperation available to all former Warsaw Pact countries in 1994 – through the Founding Act of 1997 and the Rome Declaration of 2002 that established the special NATO-Russia Council, to the Lisbon Summit of 2010 when Allies stated a desire to strive towards 'strategic partnership with Russia', the story has been one of rejected goodwill and unfulfilled hopes.

The current Strategic Concept (SC) titled 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence' is more than 10 years old and dates to 2010. Times were really different. It was perhaps the pinnacle year of cooperation with Russia, culminating in the NRC Summit in Lisbon. In that SC document Russia is not even mentioned among security challenges. The relevant paragraphs can be found in the partnership chapter, not under the defence and deterrence heading. They speak optimistically about a wish to 'see a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia' and 'intertwining' of 'the security of NATO and Russia', as well as 'dialogue and joint action' potential. All these hopes were buried by the Russian illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, followed by continued military and hybrid activity in eastern Ukraine in 2014. This led to the freezing of cooperation in the NRC.

Where Are We Now

The NATO 2030 agenda, prepared by the Secretary General and approved by NATO leaders at their June 2021 Summit in Brussels, can be seen as a kind of hors d'oeuvre served before the main course: the new Strategic Concept to be adopted at the Madrid Summit of 2022. Russia is mentioned in the agenda only a few times. Together with China, it is described as an authoritarian country pressurising international order and as an assertive player negatively impacting the security environment, which has fundamentally changed since 2010.

The 2021 NATO Summit communique is more comprehensive and explicit. It describes Russia's actions as aggressive and constituting a threat to Euro-Atlantic security. The list of hostile actions is long and includes, inter alia, a multi-domain military build-up, provocative activities,

deployment of dual-capable missiles in Kaliningrad, repeated violations of Allied airspace, attempted interference in Allied elections, malicious cyber activities, illegal and destructive activities by Russian Intelligence Services on Allied territory, political and economic pressure and intimidation, aggressive and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, and counter-productive statements threatening to target Allies because of NATO Ballistic Missile Defence.

Conclusions and Recommendations

NATO is not a taxi service – it does not have to wait for a call to action, meaning it does not have to wait for another escalatory crisis to act, not to mention a masked or open aggression instigated by Moscow. The ongoing debate on the new SC is the right opportunity to seize political initiative. There is sufficient data and analysis (facts, in short) to use the new SC for shaping effective policies to constrain and defend member states (and international order in general) against the hostile campaign which Russia is waging against us. And the starting point has to be definitions.

First, the upcoming SC should succinctly elaborate on the nature of the Russian state. Its authoritarian character and faked democratic institutions and elections are not only a disaster for the Russian people, they also are a crucial driver for assertive and aggressive policy abroad. This basic fact has to be stated at the highest level.

Our general public deserves to know what Allied governments think about the Russian authorities today and why the unchecked powers of the latter constitute a danger to the outside world. The U.S. Congress has shown a path when it introduced a draft resolution which states that ‘any attempt

by President Vladimir Putin to remain in office beyond the end of his current and final term on May 7, 2024 should result in non-recognition by the United States’.

Questioning the legitimacy of the regime (in a political and not legal manner) requires less ambiguity in public. It could serve as an inducement for a more pro-active countering of Russian disinformation campaigns waged against Allied unity, resilience, and democratic strength of our societies.

Second, the threat assessment section of the SC must build on the existing evaluations agreed by the Allies, and it should present – with even greater precision – the holistic pattern of Russia’s assertiveness, its brinkmanship, and the reasons that it constitutes a direct menace to the security of NATO.

One clear and fresh example is provided by the visible proliferation of hybrid attacks conducted or supported by Moscow (cyber hacking and associated disinformation, co-sponsoring of the use of irregular migration as a border violation tool, malign influence campaigns, reckless military behaviour, blackmailing military, and other steps being taken against Ukraine – to name just a few). This is largely due to an intentional use of ambiguity that exists in a grey area between military conflict and operations not meeting such criteria. By connecting the dots in the realm of situational awareness, Allies would significantly diminish this gap and thus, almost automatically, raise the alert levels in terms of institutional readiness.

Third, the next logical step forward ensuing from such a diagnosis is to name Russia a hostile actor, and not solely some of its actions, as is the case today. This would help

enormously in crafting and implementing a more credible deterrence and defence strategy.

Politically, having Russia described by all thirty Allies as a hostile country would help many individual governments proceed with legislative initiatives and policy options that would impose costs on Moscow for those acts that NATO (and the bulk of international community) deems unacceptable. This should be the essence of the updated deterrence and defence strategy. It would also make it easier to beef up meaningful resilience programmes (e.g. sanctions, anti-corruption steps, or cyber defence). And, hopefully, make it more politically palatable to vote for the necessary defence upgrades.

Moreover, it should offer political disincentives to those political leaders who are tempted to flirt with the hostile power, either by engaging in unwarranted dialogue for dialogue's sake with Moscow, or by accepting energy or corruption-laden commercial dependence on Russia. As a bonus, one could envisage that even some of Russia's close partners or clients may think a little bit more carefully about their very close defence relationships with Moscow if it is considered by NATO as a hostile power.

By taking such initiative in the realm of attribution, NATO could positively influence and complement the political posture of the European Union. This may turn out to be of vital importance, as early indications (including publicly available information of the first draft of the EU's Strategic Compass) suggest that the EU is hesitating about adopting a bolder position on the Russian threat.

Operationally, such a political label (reciprocating how the Kremlin sees and treats us), would offer essential guidance to those in charge of defence planning, shaping a military

posture, preparing deployments, and dislocations or specific military and CMX exercises. It would also benefit all the processes related to equipment design and purchases, as well as augment the work associated with situational awareness, sharing of intelligence analysis, and protective measures.

Finally, a few words are in order about possible dialogue with Moscow. This option is currently not available as Russia has de facto intentionally severed diplomatic relations with the Alliance. However, the new SC could still signal three important messages.

First, the long-term goal of NATO to develop normal relations with Russia (once Russia returns to observance of international law and shows credible respect for agreements, she is a party to) should be restated.

Second, to reinforce this commitment, Allies may consider, under certain conditions, not abrogating the NATO-Russia Founding Act – irrespective of the fact that it has been shelved by Moscow. Such a political option would be worth discussing in the coming months and communicated to Moscow.

Third, if Russia were to be defined, as suggested above, as a hostile power with the assumed long-term nature of this challenge, the case for enumerating specific mechanisms that Allies would like to see on stand-by to diminish the risk of actual hostilities would be compelling. A possible array of envisaged channels could include the preservation of the existing hotlines linking NATO military commanders and Moscow, regular public and non-public sharing of messages on the actions/postures deemed most dangerous by the Allies, as well as a more active use of conflict prevention mechanisms available in the framework of the OSCE.



About Authors

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IEŚ POLICY PAPERS

Since 2014, the Eastern Flank has gained on military importance due to three factors. First, the security environment drastically changed. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the substantial Russian military buildup in its Southern and Western Military Districts, including in the Kaliningrad Oblast, altered Allied strategic calculus. Second, in response to those developments NATO started its military adaptation in order to enhance Allied deterrence and defence posture, including by deploying the enhanced forward presence to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Third, the lines between peace and conflict became blurred due to increasingly sophisticated Russian hybrid campaigns which were supported by its proxies, including Belarus. With this publication the Institute of Central Europe (Instytut Europy Środkowej, IEŚ) in Lublin contributes to a broader expert discussion on the preparations of NATO's next Strategic Concept which should properly reflect the importance of NATO's Eastern Flank.

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