



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

POLITICAL COMMITTEE (PC)
Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships
(PCNP)

NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS – A SNAPSHOT

Report

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145 PCNP 19 E rev. 1 fin | Original: English | 13 October 2019

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following the end of the Cold War, the Alliance attempted to build a strategic partnership with Russia. However, relations between NATO member states and Russia have deteriorated considerably in recent years, starting from 2008 and its military aggression against Georgia, and particularly in the wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its continued political, military, and economic support to members of the illegal armed groups operating in the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

2. Russia's actions are challenging security and stability in the entire Euro-Atlantic area. In addition to the Kremlin's outright hostile and destabilising policy towards Ukraine, Russia has engaged in disinformation and hybrid activities which interfere in the democratic processes of NATO member and partner countries and aim to undermine public trust in democratic institutions in NATO member states. In addition, Russia's efforts also seek to undermine the Alliance as a whole and alter the rules-based international order.

3. This overview is an update of earlier reports of the NATO PA's Political Committee on Russia and on NATO-Russia relations. In this short paper, your Rapporteur analyses Russia's approach to the Alliance and the implications for NATO member and partner countries. The report identifies key areas where Russia's actions impact the security of NATO Allies; it suggests that the Kremlin is likely to continue its confrontational attitude towards the Alliance as President Vladimir Putin shows no intention of changing. More generally, the Kremlin is pursuing a revisionist approach and wants to establish a different international order. Responding to Russia's provocative actions, the Alliance needs to remain firm and continue to strengthen defence and deterrence while avoiding escalation. Moreover, NATO member states need to maintain political cohesion in their relationship with Russia and muster the necessary political will to counter Russian aggression when and where necessary. At the same time, Allies should seek to continue political dialogue with Russia and evaluate possible avenues to expand and, if possible, deepen this dialogue.

II. RUSSIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND NATO

4. The foreign and security priorities of any nation are the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the defence of its territory and citizens against attack. Russia is no different and the key official documents that guide the Russian government's foreign and security policy are the National Security Strategy, the Foreign Policy Concept, and the Military Doctrine. These documents, together with Moscow's actions, are a good indicator of Russia's goals and the instruments that it uses to achieve these goals.

5. The Foreign Policy Concept was updated in 2016. It assumes the decline of the West and emphasises the development of relations with other regional groupings, particularly the People's Republic of China (PRC), as potential partners for Russia. The concept also emphasises the role of the West in trying to contain Russia and expand its influence in Russia's "near abroad".

6. Similarly, the National Security Strategy of 2015 underlines the need to support a multipolar international order where Russia is a power actor equal to the United States. The fear of "encirclement" already expressed in the 2009 version of the document is formulated again. The document also expresses concern about "regime change" instigated and supported by the West in Russia's neighbourhood and potential domestic instability.

7. The Military Doctrine of 2014 considers the Alliance a "fundamental external threat" and NATO's Open Door policy a "military danger". The document lists external military dangers emanating from NATO's policies, including the "movement of military structures" near the Russian borders and the "deployment of military contingents of foreign states in neighbouring countries". Following this line of thought, the concern over the establishment of regimes in "bordering states,

whose policies threaten the interest of the Russian Federation” is strongly stressed. Although internationally active terrorist groups, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and arms and drug trafficking are mentioned in the document, they do not feature as prominently as before. The Military Doctrine considers the West responsible for Russia’s social unrest and economic struggles. To tackle these threats, the Doctrine argues that Russia should protect its sphere of influence and look for alternative partners. However, the doctrine does not exclude cooperation with the West on issues of common interest: fighting terrorism and Islamist extremism, arms control, and strategic missile defence.

8. In addition to these official documents, public statements by senior Russian officials shed light on the Kremlin’s foreign and security agenda. All key decisions on foreign policy, security, and defence are in the hands of President Vladimir Putin, who has been in office since 2000 (with the exception of the period between 2008 to 2012 when he served as Prime Minister). He has enjoyed high approval ratings among Russians; much of his popularity derives from his foreign policy of great-power revival; public support for him was particularly high after the annexation of Crimea. Western criticism of Russia’s assertiveness has helped consolidate that support. The Kremlin’s control of most of the media and its efforts to stifle the opposition are other factors that helped to keep approval ratings high and government critics silenced.

9. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has put a premium on restoring international recognition for its self-proclaimed status as a great power that can claim to be on par with the United States. The Kremlin sees Russia in perpetual conflict and competition for dominance and influence. For Moscow, the West, including the EU, is challenging both Russia’s security and its great-power ambition. Senior Russian officials have repeatedly criticized the Alliance for pursuing policies that ignore Russia’s legitimate security interests. Relations with the West are primarily seen as zero-sum games and the Kremlin presumes that Western policies are primarily designed to weaken and encircle Russia. In the past, Vladimir Putin has frequently used aggressive, if not outright threatening, rhetoric towards NATO and the West more generally. He has further ratcheted up his rhetoric towards NATO in his 2018 state of the nation address when announced the introduction of new weapons systems that, he claimed, would render Western defence useless, including hypersonic missiles and a nuclear torpedo.

10. The Kremlin is fixated on territorial security. This view is compounded by its historical experience. Therefore, in the view of the Kremlin, Russia needs a buffer zone of friendly or dependent states around it in order to be secure. This is essentially a view of the world seen through the lens of 19th-century great-power politics. President Vladimir Putin regards military might as an indispensable prerequisite for asserting Russia’s national interests successfully. Correspondingly, the role of the intelligence services and of the armed forces in the implementation of Russia’s foreign policy has increased during the Putin presidency. Coercive diplomacy, including the threat of military force, has become an integral part of Russia’s toolbox in dealing with other countries. This is most clearly visible in the countries of the former Soviet Union, and particularly in the case of Ukraine and Georgia. Russia has military bases and soldiers in both countries, without the consent of their governments.

11. The Russian leadership considers these and the other countries of the former Soviet Union to be in its “sphere of influence”. This “sphere of influence” or “near abroad” is seen as a necessary buffer against external security threats. Activities of external actors, and particularly those of NATO member states, in the region are primarily viewed as attempts to move the countries away from Russia and thus to undermine Moscow’s claim to regional leadership. This is also explicitly mentioned in the National Security Strategy of 2015. Moreover, in the view of the Kremlin, control over a “sphere of influence” also underpins its claim to be a great power.

12. As Russia’s relations with NATO Allies have deteriorated as a result of the Ukraine crisis, it has increasingly turned its attention to China. Cooperation between Russia and China has also increased

in the economic realm, particularly regarding oil and gas, and Moscow hopes that it can benefit economically from China's Belt and Road initiative. Moscow hopes that further deepening economic cooperation between the two countries can dampen economic losses for Russia resulting from its deteriorating ties with the United States and the EU. Russia's security cooperation with China is mainly taking place in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which focuses on counterterrorism and tackling internal unrest.

13. At the same time, as it recognises that its economic position in Central Asia is gradually diminishing, Moscow is also concerned that China's increasing presence could limit its leverage on the region. For now, Russia continues to be the main security actor in this region, but China is also increasing its political and security footprint there. In addition, the two countries' interests and strategies do not always coincide.

III. RUSSIA-NATO RELATIONS – A SNAPSHOT

14. Cooperation between the Alliance and Russia was instrumental in managing the security and stability of the post-Cold War area. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act provided the formal basis for this relationship. Dialogue and cooperation were strengthened in 2002 with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which focused on the struggle against terrorism, crisis management, non-proliferation, arms control and confidence-building measures, theatre missile defence, search and rescue at sea, military-to-military cooperation, and civil emergencies. One of the most successful areas of NATO-Russia cooperation was the joint commitment to promote peace and stability in the Balkans. However, President Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich security conference and, more importantly, the cyberattacks against Estonia in the same year and the 2008 Russia-Georgia war indicated a dramatic change in the relationship. In 2019, that spirit of cooperation has dissipated. The current relationship between NATO and Russia can be described as one of high tensions and confrontation.

15. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the first time that one country had taken a part of another by force in Europe since the end of the Second World War. But Crimea was only the tip of the iceberg. There is a pattern of Russian behaviour which started to become visible already in 2008 after the Russian military aggression against Georgia. After 2014, Russia's provocations also included provocative military manoeuvres and the use of hybrid actions against member and partner nations.

16. The response of the Allies to Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea and other aggressive actions has been firm. All practical cooperation with Russia was suspended by NATO in April 2014. NATO has also adapted by rebuilding its military capabilities and by streamlining its structures and processes, thus making the organisation fitter and faster for decision making. This also includes adapting to new technologies like cyber and artificial intelligence. The decisions taken at the Summits in Wales in 2014 and in Warsaw in 2016, together with the US European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), renamed the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) in 2017, shifted NATO's posture back toward collective defence and deterrence. In this context, NATO Allies have deployed combat-ready troops in the east of the Alliance on a rotational basis and tripled the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF), among others. Moreover, NATO Allies have also coordinated their response to Russian aggression with the European Union. For, example, the European Defence Agency is leading efforts that will improve NATO's ability to deploy and sustain forces as highlighted at the 2018 Brussels Summit. NATO member countries and the European Union have invoked several rounds of sanctions to make Russia comply with the international agreements to which it has committed.

17. NATO has taken defensive and proportionate steps in response to Russia's aggressive actions. In the Baltics and Poland, NATO deployed four multinational battlegroups, the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) consisting of approximately 4,500 troops from NATO Allies. The eFP and

the tailored Forward Presence (tFP) were established in response to a clear threat from Russia. It is a persistent rotational presence, not a permanent deployment of troops. The same is true for NATO's air-policing mission in the Baltic region. At the same time, NATO has kept channels of political and military communication open to allow for the exchange of information on issues of concern, reduce misunderstandings, and increase predictability. NATO's continuing dialogue with Russia in the NRC primarily addresses the conflict in and around Ukraine, as well as arms control, military activities, and the need to increase transparency and reduce risk. While the NATO-Russia partnership that evolved during the 1990s no longer exists, the relationship between the two is of crucial importance for the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond. Several key issues dominate the relationship between Moscow and Brussels.

IV. KEY ISSUES FOR NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS

18. The scale and scope of Russia's military build-up from the Arctic to the Black Sea and its provocative military activities in areas directly bordering the territory of NATO member states dramatically increase the risk of an unwanted military conflict and escalation. The conduct of large-scale snap exercises and particularly the deployment of modern anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems along NATO's eastern flank are also of serious concern. There have been numerous instances when NATO and Russian aircraft and ships have been on collision courses in the Baltic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. Even though Russian military capabilities are generally smaller and weaker than that of NATO, in some of the regions bordering Russia, such as the Baltics, the Alliance faces a clear imbalance in conventional capabilities. Moreover, Russia's military can project enough power to disrupt, whether in the South Caucasus, Ukraine, or the Middle East.

19. The existing tensions between Russia and NATO and the aggressive tone of Russian officials against NATO increase the risk of an accident spiralling out of control and escalating into a potential military confrontation. Russia's irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric and the notion that the Russian leadership appears to embrace the idea that limited use of nuclear weapons could be feasible and provide a strategic advantage ("escalate to de-escalate") have put the issue of nuclear weapons and arms control back on the agenda. The current Russian military doctrine appears to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons.

20. Indeed, the issue of nuclear forces and arms control has come up on the agenda again after both the United States and Russia have suspended participation in the bilateral Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and the US withdrawal which has taken effect on 2 August 2019. Already in 2014, the United States suspected Russia to have tested missiles beyond the range allowed by the INF Treaty. Although Moscow continues to deny that it has violated the INF Treaty, it admitted its infractions in a piecemeal manner after they could no longer be denied. After years of denial, it admitted in spring 2018 that it had a new system but claimed that it had a range of only 480km and was therefore in accordance with the Treaty. In December 2018, Allies formally concluded that Russia was in violation of the INF Treaty. They called on Russia to return to full and verifiable compliance with its Treaty obligations. The North Atlantic Council has supported the US decision to suspend its obligations under the INF Treaty and to launch the six-month process of leaving the INF on the grounds that Russia's development and deployment of the 9M729 missile system (called the SSC-8 by NATO) violates the agreement.

21. Maintaining and, if possible, strengthening existing arms control regimes is a cornerstone of NATO's policy. However, while NATO remains committed to arms control and disarmament and adheres to international treaties, Russia has in the past years implemented international arms control agreements only selectively; in this area, too, it is testing NATO Allies as to how far it can go in bending the commitments it has made.

A. AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS MEMBER STATES

22. Russia's use of hybrid warfare has grown considerably in recent years. Cyberspace has become a central tool for the attempts of the Kremlin to undermine the cohesion of the Alliance and destabilise democratic institutions in NATO member and partner states. This poses a serious challenge to Euro-Atlantic stability, security, and unity.

23. Russia has targeted elections and referenda according to Western intelligence agencies and non-governmental organisations like "Bellingcat", which were able to attribute cyberattacks to Russian military intelligence. As [the 2018 General Report of the NATO PA's Science and Technology Committee](#) argued, the Kremlin follows an "operationally opportunist approach". Accordingly, Russian disinformation efforts aim to exacerbate pre-existing tensions within a society, with the goal to undermine democratic institutions. In this context, these disinformation campaigns and cyber activities attempt to "advance political groups and politicians perceived as amenable or friendly to Russian influence and discredit those seen as hostile". The Kremlin is also supporting anti-establishment forces and cooperating with fringe parties on both ends of the political spectrum. Moreover, from the perspective of the Kremlin, its efforts to discredit Western values also provide an opportunity to undermine confidence in Western democracies and in the West as a whole. In addition, if Western democracies can be depicted as dysfunctional and weak, the Russian system looks more attractive to both its own people and potential allies.

24. Russia's hybrid toolbox ranges from political interference and applying economic pressure to aggressive espionage, exporting crime and corruption, conducting cyberattacks, the use of force, and targeted assassinations. Particularly reckless actions have been the use of military-grade nerve agents to kill Russian expatriates on Allied territory. The most notorious examples of this are the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the United Kingdom in March 2018 and the killing of Alexander Litvinenko in November 2006 with highly radioactive polonium 210.

25. One issue that is all-too-easily overlooked in the Kremlin's toolbox is corruption – which plays a central role in sustaining and expanding Russian influence. According to two studies by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Kremlin has, over the years, used economic leverage to develop and cultivate an opaque network of patronage across Europe that is used to influence and direct decision making. The CSIS studies continue by arguing that "this network of political and economic connections, an 'unvirtuous' cycle of influence, thrives on corruption and the exploitation of governance gaps in key markets and institutions. Ultimately, the aim is to weaken and destroy democratic systems from within". Russian malign economic influence and illicit finance operate in a financial grey zone that is a clear and present danger to US national security as well as transatlantic security.

B. NATO ENLARGEMENT

26. NATO's Open Door policy is one of the cornerstones of NATO policies. By contrast, Russia's principal foreign policy priority is to check any further advance of NATO into what it considers its "sphere of interest". Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that enlargement is directed against Russia and would endanger its security. Moscow is therefore working actively against NATO's Open Door policy, even in regions which it does not consider to be part of the "near abroad". For example, the Kremlin invested considerable time and energy to undermine the efforts of the Republic of North Macedonia to join the Alliance. After Athens and Skopje had reached the Prespa agreement, Russia increased its activities to prevent the implementation of the agreement. Thus, Russia's efforts to prevent the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and especially into NATO is also stoking tensions inside those countries and among them.

27. Moscow's narrative of the Open Door policy falsely suggests that enlargement is a ploy devised in Allied capitals to expand NATO's territory at Russia's expense. However, NATO membership has never been imposed on any country, nor were countries "invited" to join the

Alliance. On the contrary, applicant countries have always initiated accession preparations because they saw membership in their strategic interest. Moreover, all member states have joined the Alliance in accordance with their domestic democratic processes. Membership in NATO therefore reflects the will of the people of the nations. What is more, it is a fundamental principle of international law that every nation has the right to determine its own security arrangements. This right is explicitly mentioned in numerous agreements that were signed by Russia, including the Helsinki Final Act and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Every country that joins NATO also commits to upholding the principles and policies of the Alliance, which includes the commitment that "the Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia". Thus, NATO enlargement is not directed against Russia. On the contrary, the Open Door policy of the Alliance has contributed to spreading democracy, security, and stability across Europe.

28. At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government decided that Georgia and Ukraine would become members of the Alliance. The desire of Georgia and Ukraine to join the Alliance is a particular thorn in Russia's side. It seeks to build as many obstacles as possible to prevent Kyiv and Tbilisi from achieving their stated foreign policy goals. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a blatant violation of international norms and agreements, as is the continuing support for insurgents in eastern Ukraine, which has cost some 13,000 lives over five years. Moreover, Moscow is only implementing the Minsk Agreements selectively. Allies also condemned Russia for the illegal construction of the Kerch bridge and for conducting a policy of selective access denial to the waters. Moscow upped the ante in late November 2018 when it used military force against three Ukrainian naval vessels in international waters in the Black Sea, near the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine also included an economic component. To destabilise Ukraine, Russia had increased the price of gas, circumvented Kyiv in providing direct gas supply to separatists, and expropriated Ukrainian energy assets in Crimea and offshore in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

29. In addition, to counter Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO has stepped up political and practical support to Kyiv. NATO assists Ukraine in the modernisation of its force structure, command and control arrangements, the reform of its logistics system, defence capabilities, and plans and procedures. NATO also provides tailored assistance to strengthen good governance and fight corruption. The focus of this assistance is on the reform of the country's security and defence sector via the Comprehensive Assistance Package, which includes ten Trust Funds that provide considerable financing. NATO's commitment to a stable and secure Ukraine was reconfirmed at the Brussels Summit in July 2018. The NATO-Ukraine Commission, established in 1997, provides a forum for comprehensive dialogue between NATO and Ukraine on the security situation in Ukraine as well as in Crimea and in the Black Sea region. The new President Volodymyr Zelensky has reaffirmed Ukraine's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration and to the reform process which he would like to see moving more rapidly.

30. In Georgia, Russia continues its illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia and has strengthened its military presence there. Both NATO and the EU have criticised the Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While Russian-Georgian relations have improved, the full normalisation of ties seems far off. At the 10th anniversary of the 2008 Russian aggression and occupation of Georgian territory, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev warned that "an attempt by NATO to incorporate the former Soviet republic of Georgia could trigger a new, horrible conflict" and that "NATO's plans to eventually offer membership to Georgia are absolutely irresponsible and a threat to peace".

31. NATO and the EU have repeatedly stressed their firm support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine within their internationally recognised borders. At the recent meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in early April 2019, NATO agreed to step up its support for Georgia and Ukraine by offering training of maritime forces and coastguards, port visits, exercises, and the sharing of information, among others.

32. Georgia already has all practical tools to prepare for membership, such as the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC), an Annual National Programme (ANP) and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP). Moreover, the country makes a tangible contribution to NATO missions and thus plays an important role in strengthening Euro-Atlantic security. Georgia is fully committed to the joint efforts and continues to be not only a consumer but also a provider of security to the Euro-Atlantic area.

C. SYRIA AND STABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

33. While NATO Allies are still struggling to find common ground about Syria, Russia and Iran have strengthened the Assad regime. The Kremlin has dedicated significant resources to bolster the Assad regime, which has committed war crimes against its own people. Numerous UN reports have confirmed that the regime has used the nerve agent sarin and chlorine gas attacks in the eight-year-old conflict which has killed at least 500,000 people and displaced more than 10 million. Moscow and Tehran's support for Bashar al-Assad saved the murderous regime from the jaws of defeat and enabled it to regain control of most of the country. Moscow's military intervention kept the regime in power; the defeat of the opposition will further discourage the regime from engaging in the UN-facilitated political solution process. Unless governance changes, the conditions in which violent terrorism thrives will continue to exist.

34. Moscow will play a leading role in any potential resolution of the conflict, although it competes with Tehran, which has also assumed a greater role in Syria and in Iraq. This may pose a considerable challenge for one NATO Ally, Turkey, which borders Syria and Iraq. Moreover, Russia's military presence in Syria enables it to project power throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. As a consequence, Moscow's leverage in shaping the future of the Middle East has increased. It remains to be seen if Russia's thus far relatively successful intervention in Syria will entice the Kremlin to seek a more significant role in other parts of the MENA region, for instance, Libya.

35. Moscow is also expanding its influence in other parts of the MENA region and in Africa as a whole by pursuing every opportunity to re-establish relations with erstwhile partner countries of the former Soviet Union and others. Arms sales, security agreements, and military training play an important role in Russia's outreach to Africa. As the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships learned from its visit to US Africom in March 2019, 19 out of 54 African countries have signed memoranda of understanding (MoU) with Russia since 2014. Russia's trade with Africa rose by 26% to USD 17.4 billion; Russia supplied 39% of the arms that were imported by African countries between 2013 and 2017. In comparison, the corresponding figures for the PRC and the United States are 17% and 11%, respectively. An illustration of Moscow's expanding activities in Africa is its engagement in the Central African Republic (CAR), where private Russian security contractors such as the Wagner Group, which is also present in Eastern Ukraine and in Syria, already exercise leverage. These groups have expanded their presence and engagement considerably; their activities now include providing protection and advice to the CAR president, securing mining projects, and mediating negotiations among armed groups.

36. Developments in both the MENA region and the rest of Africa are important drivers for the security on NATO's southern flank. Therefore, the Alliance needs to monitor Russia's engagement in this part of the world more closely.

37. In addition, Russia is actively trying to expand its influence in other parts of the world. The Kremlin has been supporting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chávez. Moscow has also sold arms and provided credit to Caracas, including loans by the Russian oil company Rosneft to Venezuela's state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), which is apparently embroiled in a major corruption scandal. To support President Maduro

in his standoff against opposition leader Juan Guaido, Russia sent two military planes with troops and equipment to Venezuela.

D. TERRORISM

38. The fight against international terrorist groups was a key area for practical cooperation between NATO and Russia. Both sides worked together in Afghanistan before the practical cooperation was suspended. Areas of cooperation included the training of Afghan and Pakistani counter-narcotics personnel and a Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund. In addition, Russia also contributed assets to NATO's Operation Active Endeavour and participated in joint counter-piracy exercises.

39. Moscow is considerably concerned that radical Islamist groups could operate on its territory, particularly in its southern parts. Violence by extremist religious groups has been slowly increasing, particularly in Dagestan. Daesh's territorial losses in Iraq and Syria may lead to further instability as former Islamist fighters may return to the North Caucasus. Dagestan's interior ministry estimated in early 2017 that approximately 1,200 Dagestanis had left to fight for Daesh. The instability emanating from the MENA region is already spreading to the Central Asian Republics, which face serious economic, social, and governance issues. Moscow has followed the developments in Afghanistan closely; it has become increasingly active diplomatically to reach a negotiated settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Moscow's contacts with the Taliban date back to the early 2000s, and there have been allegations that Russia shared intelligence with the Taliban and possibly also provided weapons to the insurgents. While these allegations are thus far unproven, Moscow's reaching out to the Taliban has given them a modicum of legitimacy and recognition, which could possibly embolden the group. On the other hand, if complementary to and coordinated with the US-backed Kabul Process, Russian current efforts could, in fact, help to find a solution that ends the conflict in Afghanistan.

E. ARMS CONTROL

40. Although Russia shares an interest in a functioning arms control regime, it has also sometimes shirked its obligations to implement agreements it signed. Moscow's selective implementation of the Vienna Document and the Treaty on Open Skies as well as its long-standing non-implementation of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty have undermined trust in arms control instruments. NATO Allies have consistently stood by the letter and the spirit of the Vienna Document. In 2018, they continued to notify the OSCE of military exercises well in advance, even when they were below the notification thresholds. They have also consistently made provisions to facilitate international observation of large-scale manoeuvres. With its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has also violated the Budapest Memorandum and the Helsinki Final Act, which lay out the principles for relations among states in the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, Moscow is also not complying with the terms of the Treaty on Open Skies, among others by restricting flights over the Kaliningrad Oblast, Crimea, and over the Russian-Georgian border in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions.

41. As recently as at the 2018 Brussels Summit, Allies reaffirmed their long-standing commitment to conventional arms control as a key element of Euro-Atlantic security. NATO Heads of State and Government emphasised the importance of full implementation and compliance to rebuild trust and confidence. Verifiable conventional arms control not only puts a limit to military forces, it also provides transparency and predictability of military deployments, manoeuvres, and exercises. For years, Moscow openly lied about its non-implementation of the military deployments and exercises in the Vienna Document of the OSCE, and, in 2007, it suspended its obligations under the CFE treaty.

42. An issue of concern to NATO Allies is the question of Russian nuclear armed intermediate-range missiles. Russia's lacking willingness to return to compliance with its international obligations under the INF led the United States to formally withdraw from the Treaty.

NATO Allies are united in their support for the United States and have agreed that NATO's response to the Treaty's termination will be defensive, coordinated, and measured, that NATO will not mirror Russia's actions, and that Allies do not intend to deploy new nuclear land-based systems in Europe. While the INF Treaty was a bilateral agreement between the United States and Russia, it was important for NATO because it eliminated all land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles that threatened European Allies. Therefore, both NATO and Russia should have a vested interest in a stable arms control regime that covers intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

V. MANAGING NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS

43. Russia is "too big to ignore". It was and will remain a key actor with significant influence for Euro-Atlantic and indeed global security. The country plays a crucial role in international security, among others in tackling the nuclear challenges posed by North Korea and Iran. Moreover, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it has considerable leverage over the international security agenda. However, under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has often acted in a disruptive manner, threatening NATO Allies and partners. NATO Allies have declared that there can be no going back to "business as usual" as long as Russian aggressions continue. The Russian government, on the other hand, seems unable or unwilling to change its approach towards the Alliance. NATO needs to have working relations with Russia, even though earlier attempts to engage had not worked because of the entrenched imperatives that drive Russian politics. If a substantial change in the relationship is unlikely in the short to medium term, it is crucial to manage the relations in a manner that reduces risks and avoids escalation. Against the backdrop of the current state of affairs, the following ways to manage relations with Russia seem feasible.

A. STRENGTHENING DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE, CONTINUING REASSURANCE MEASURES

44. NATO Allies need to be firm and united, and clearly signal to Moscow that continued pursuit of its unacceptable and dangerous pattern of behaviour will expose it to significant costs and consequences. Russia's rhetoric and military behaviour, and its snap exercises in the vicinity of Allied territory are threatening to Allies and partner countries. The military measures agreed upon at the Wales, Warsaw, and Brussels Summits to adapt Allied defence and deterrence capabilities are therefore part and parcel of NATO's response to Russian assertiveness. Reassurance measures to Eastern Allies need to be continued and the capability improvements need to be implemented.

45. The deployment, on a rotational basis, of credible conventional assets on NATO's eastern and south-eastern flanks is a measured response that improves NATO's defence and reassures Allies. Modernising and strengthening military capabilities obviously requires sufficient allocation of resources. NATO Allies therefore need to implement the 2016 Wales Investment pledge and increase their defence expenditures. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has a role to play here as the members of the Assembly can support measures to increase military mobility and defence spending in their national parliaments.

46. NATO member states need to do more to monitor and, where necessary, act against malign Russian economic and financial influence. Speaking to the Political Committee at the 2018 Spring Session in Warsaw, Anders Aslund, Swedish economist and resident senior fellow in the Eurasia Center at the Atlantic Council, recommended that the West establish new ground rules for how the financing is managed in the West. He reminded the Committee that private Russian financial holdings abroad are currently estimated to be worth around USD 800 billion, slightly more than half of Russia's GDP. The largest chunk of this money is held anonymously. The Allies must take decisive action to limit Russia's harmful behaviour in their financial systems through transparency and enforcement of our rule of law and adopt a coherent and proactive strategy to target the Western assets of corrupt Russian elites.

47. Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and ongoing occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories cannot be accepted. NATO Allies need to demonstrate their consistent and unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine in their internationally recognised borders. In this context, Allies should continue to emphasise that Russia must fully implement the Minsk Agreements. With regard to Georgia, Allies should call again on Russia to reverse its recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/ South Ossetia as independent states; to stop the construction of barbed wire fences and artificial barriers along the occupation line, end militarisation of these regions, and to halt steps toward factual annexation of Georgian territories; and to implement the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, particularly the withdrawal of Russian forces from the territory of Georgia, which are present without Georgia's consent, and allow the creation of an international security arrangement on the ground.

48. Building societal resilience and devising additional countermeasures against disinformation is another area where NATO member states need to invest more time and effort. Russian attempts to destabilise the democracies of NATO Allies and partner countries, whether through hacking, propaganda, or otherwise, is completely unacceptable. Allies should raise this issue in the NRC and in their bilateral dialogue with Russia. Moreover, NATO member states need to build resilience among their civil society against such meddling by developing a comprehensive set of policies. This would also include revising education policies in order to promote critical thinking and cyber literacy from an early age. Social media companies need to increase their capabilities in removing fake news and identifying fake or automated accounts. Attention should be paid to any future interference in the democratic processes – which should be deterred.

49. NATO Allies should continue reinforcing deterrence on its eastern flank by improving strategic infrastructure. Moreover, the Allies should also consider additional targeted sanctions if Moscow continues with its hybrid attacks and interference in the democratic processes of NATO member and partner countries.

B. MAINTAINING THE ECONOMIC PRESSURE

50. The sanctions that have been imposed by NATO Allies and the EU are designed to entice Russian compliance with its international obligations and commitments. Even though the existing sanctions regime has so far not made Moscow change course, it clearly demonstrates to Russia that there is a price to pay for its aggressive actions. Moscow aims to have the sanctions regime lifted or at least progressively eased. Maintaining a united approach of NATO Allies and the EU and keeping up the economic pressure on Russia is important, even though it comes at real costs for companies from NATO member countries. The Kremlin would perceive any unilateral easing of the sanctions regime as a validation and would feel emboldened to continue its assertive policies.

51. Notwithstanding the return of Russia to the Council of Europe, unless the Kremlin revokes its reckless policies, sanctions should be continued. NATO Allies and the EU should also consider expanding the existing sanctions regime if the Russian leadership continues to destabilise the democratic systems of NATO member countries. The governments of NATO and EU member states should also monitor the activities of Russian oligarchs in the West more closely. In addition to putting economic pressure on Russia, the implementation of sanctions is also important in maintaining Alliance cohesion.

C. CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPING IT FURTHER

52. At the same time, NATO should seek ways to encourage the Kremlin to change its approach. The most promising way forward for NATO is to continue its dual-track approach of maintaining a strong defence and deterrence, and complementing this with a periodic, focused, and meaningful dialogue. As far as NATO is concerned, this dialogue continues to take place in the NRC. Since 2014, nine meetings of the NRC have taken place and the topics that have been addressed have been expanded. The issue of "hybrid" or asymmetric techniques was also put on the agenda in 2018.

This is a necessary, if overdue, evolution of the dialogue. At the same time, NATO should put Russian attempts to destabilise Western democracies higher on the agenda of the NRC and member states in their bilateral dialogue with Russia.

53. Moreover, NATO should evaluate additional avenues to improve the existing NATO-Russia dialogue, even if Moscow's assertive propaganda makes dialogue very difficult. As long as the narrative on the intentions and aims of both sides remain as far apart as they currently are, the scope for misunderstandings and the risk of military escalation will remain high. A joint report of the European Leadership Network (ELN) and the Moscow-based Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) suggested several possible ways to improve the level of dialogue between NATO and Russia. Among others, NATO and Russia should raise the quality of this dialogue by increasing the number of NRC meetings and making the rhythm of these meetings more predictable. Moreover, additional channels of communication should be used, particularly between militaries. The ELN/RIAC also suggests extending the dialogue beyond official contacts, which could help both sides to better understand the other side's narratives and perceptions.

D. USING AND CREATING COMMON GROUND – PURSUING A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH

54. Russia's interaction with Western countries will be at best transactional, based on national interests when those happen to coincide or come sufficiently close. Despite Russia's antagonistic behaviour, there are areas where the interests of NATO and Russia align and where both could create common ground. These include counterterrorism, search and rescue in the Arctic, counter-piracy, and anti-narcotics in Afghanistan.

55. The rise of Daesh and other internationally active terror organisations is a common concern for both Russia and NATO. Russian military actions in Syria have inflicted damage on terror organisations but they may also have made it easier for them to recruit. One lesson of the rise of Daesh is that fragile and weak states risk collapse. The need to rebuild Syria after the end of the conflict and Moscow's limited capacity to do this will require involvement of the international community, including NATO member countries and the EU. This may provide Allies with an opportunity to influence the negotiated outcome of the Syrian civil war. In this regard, instead of a conditional and sequential approach, a more dynamic position that moves parallel to the political track should be adopted by the Allies with respect to reconstruction efforts.

56. NATO should encourage Russia to participate in the fight against terrorism and contributing to regional stability by fully supporting the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process Allies expressed support for. This would include President Ghani's peace initiative and his government's reforms. Russia should also encourage neighbouring countries, like Pakistan and Iran, to pursue policies that are conducive to increased Afghan stability.

57. The deployment of new missiles by Russia increases instability in the Euro-Atlantic area considerably. The new Russian missiles are nuclear-capable and highly mobile as well as hard to detect. They can reach any European capital in minutes. Despite Russia's infringements of existing arms control regimes, it is important to conduct a dialogue on disarmament with Moscow. With a much lower military budget than that of NATO, Russia, too, should have an interest in maintaining arms control regimes and avoiding entering into an arms race. The modernisation of Russia's missile capabilities is also intended to compensate its comparative conventional weakness and it may also be used as a bargaining chip in future arms control negotiations.

58. The INF Treaty has been a cornerstone of the international arms control regime. Following the withdrawal of the US from the Treaty, NATO Allies remain united in their approach to Russia's lasting non-compliance with its international obligations and decided to respond in a measured and responsible way to the continued deployment of its nuclear-capable, mobile SSC-8 missile system

which poses significant risks to European Allies. As today's international security environment differs from that of the 1980s, which was dominated by the bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States and Allies should discuss and advance proposals for a more comprehensive agreement that recognises the fact that medium-range missiles are now much more widely spread. A possible way forward could be for the US, and possibly also NATO Allies, to begin talks on strategic stability. This could, over time, evolve into developing a joint approach towards the PRC, whose medium-range missiles are outside any arms control mechanism.

59. Russia's military engagements in Syria and the costs relating to Ukraine (support for the insurgents in eastern Ukraine, infrastructure costs following the annexation of Crimea) put a heavy burden on the budget. Moreover, corruption remains a problem and it will be difficult for the Kremlin to address the country's economic and social problems - which include a rapidly ageing society, severe poverty, and inequality among others - effectively. Russia basically remains a rentier economy, which is very dependent on income generated by oil, gas, and commodities; any drop in prices can have a tangible impact on the country's revenues budget. However, although Russia faces significant economic and social problems, it still has the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal. What is more, with its considerable military capabilities and other means, it can easily play the role of a "spoiler" in policy areas that are important for NATO Allies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

60. When Vladimir Putin was first elected as President of Russia he was interested in cooperation with the West - but under his own, unrealistic, terms. Since then, the NATO-Russia relationship has been characterised by three inflexion points: first, the termination of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the United States and Russia in 2002; second, the 2003 Iraq War, to which Russia was fundamentally opposed; and thirdly, Western support (or, more precisely, the Russian perception of this support) to the Ukrainian revolutions of 2004 and 2014.

61. NATO genuinely wished to work with Russia, however, Moscow has *de facto* been at political war with NATO and the EU for at least a decade, but it took time for the West to realise this, not least because Russia's "influence operations" were largely covert. These influence operations were originally focused on Russia's neighbours, but in recent years the Kremlin has also been trying to influence processes in Western countries. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia continues to test NATO; he has been very apt in exploiting opportunities when they arose. He does not shy away from military aggression in countries on Russia's borders in order to prevent them from developing closer ties with the Alliance or the European Union. Moreover, in pursuing its interests, the Kremlin also often blurs the line between peace and war. This raises very serious questions about how best to respond to these challenges which seek to alter public perceptions. The Allies must therefore maintain their political unity and strengthen public awareness of Russia's actions. Sanctions can be one helpful tool in dealing with Russian aggression, but it is important to note that they are a political instrument and must be linked to a political objective regarding Russian behaviour. In order to be successful, they should be targeted, proportionate, and gaged to incentivise a change in Russian behaviour.

62. More generally, NATO's relationship with Russia must be based on the principles of the international rule of law, therefore the Allies should encourage Russia to go back to the rules-based international order. It appears, however, that the Russia of President Putin is seeking to dismantle this order. Moreover, any possible rapprochement between the Alliance and Russia must not be at the expense of any third country, and NATO partners in particular. This implies that Allies cannot accommodate Russia's demand to abandon the Open Door policy because that would contradict the principles and values of the Alliance. However, NATO should evaluate ways to improve and broaden the dialogue on NATO partnerships and other issues with Russia with the aim of increasing common ground.

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