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THE EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY FORMULA: STABLE DETERRENCE AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

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MOSCOW, AUGUST 2017

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Defining the Problem

Future scholars will probably study today's relations between Russia and the West as a paradox. They will refer to them as an example of the nonlinearity of world politics, find in them numerous "black swans," and write up countless dissertations on the unpredictability of relations between the great powers. Indeed, the Euro-Atlantic system of security has worsened considerably within a very short historical timeframe. It has deteriorated from the well-ordered and rational system that the idealists of the post-bipolar period envisioned into a state of Hobbesian anarchy and fear. This happened despite the fact that few warning signs indicated on the eve of the 2014 crisis that a rapid paradigm shift was imminent. When it did come, the collapse of the post-bipolar order was both swift and irreversible.

Unlike academics who can afford the luxury of investigating the cause and effect of events after the fact, politicians and diplomats live in the present and must make decisions here and now. What's more, they must do so in the face of incomplete information, numerous unknowns, and an array of standard approaches that have grown either outdated or that would now produce results opposite to those desired. They must somehow minimize the damage caused by the breakdown of the existing order while simultaneously laying the foundation of a new one. Such circumstances necessitate that participants look beyond the immediate horizon in search of principles that could serve as the basis for building a system of security that meets the needs of all. This is where realists and experts must work together. Expertise in Euro-Atlantic security has become increasingly abstract in recent decades. There is now an unprecedented and urgent demand for visionaries with a detailed knowledge of the situation on the ground, but who are also ready to take a fundamentally new look at long-established views.

This report proceeds from the understanding that the major gap in capabilities between Russia and NATO has produced an asymmetric and unbalanced system of security in the Euro-Atlantic region. Although that asymmetry was not of critical concern prior to the Ukrainian crisis, it has become a source of serious risks under current conditions. The series of interventions in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, etc. – undertaken in the 1990s and 2000s under various pretexts and for a range of reasons – has significantly undermined international law and the authority of international institutions. The system for arms control is gradually eroding. At the same time, new factors such as crisis-ridden and weakly governed states, radical movements, the threat of hybrid war, and the emergence of cyberspace as an area of vulnerability and rivalry have increased the level of uncertainty in the world. There is a growing ideological polarization between Russia and the West. All this leads to an increased risk of military confrontation between Russia and NATO, despite the fact that the military capabilities of both are significantly lower now than during the Cold War.

Russia and the West should hold no illusions about the prospects for improving relations: they lack the critical mass of common goals, interests, and values to make that likely. It is hardly possible to build a partnership for the sake of partnership alone. The deterrence paradigm will define our relations over the long term. We must acknowledge this as an unpleasant fact of international life without holding any illusory hopes in this regard. Nonetheless, both sides have a pragmatic interest in stabilizing that deterrence. *Unpredictable and chaotic means of deterrence greatly increase the likelihood of an open conflict erupting, whereas moderate and relatively predictable measures reduce the risk of escalation and minimize possible negative consequences.*

This paper argues that Russia and the West can stop and even reverse the increasingly negative nature of their security relations by *taking control over the dynamic of deterrence and clearly separating rhetoric from defense-related actions*. In such a situation, both sides face a great temptation to paint the other as an absolute evil. The conflict paradigm follows a particular logic that naïve optimism and blind trust can never alter. The necessary alternative is a consistent and systemic approach that would enable

each of the parties to achieve their key interests while also creating convenient and amenable security conditions for themselves without lapsing into any extreme scenarios. It is also important to understand the close link between security and such factors as values, the economy, societal demands, and so on. This complicates the task considerably, moving it beyond a dialogue between military officials, diplomats, and experts. A systemic approach involves the simultaneous work on all variables in the formula of Euro-Atlantic security.

The Euro-Atlantic Security Formula

The current Euro-Atlantic security formula is the result of a number of parameters. And, while each of these parameters is a “known,” each carries an unknown potential to influence future changes to the overall formula. Each might unexpectedly “shoot off” in an unexpected direction, not to mention that it is already difficult to predict what their cumulative impact might be. It is necessary to understand this set of parameters clearly and how they might play out in the future. Which specific factors influence Euro-Atlantic security?

The first is the imbalance between Russian and NATO forces. The Euro-Atlantic system of security is asymmetric and bipolar, making it less stable than the symmetric bipolarity of the Cold War era. However, NATO’s real military capability declined prior to the Ukrainian crisis because its geographic expansion was accompanied by a decrease in its resource base. Russia’s military capability suffered a dramatic decline in the 1990s, and although the military subsequently implemented major reforms, Russian troops clearly are not focused on a full-scale conflict in Europe, much less on staging a major offensive. The Ukrainian

crisis changed this dynamic. The question now is how Russia and NATO will use their respective resources and what percentage of those resources they will direct against each other.

The second parameter concerns structural features: Russia and NATO are fundamentally different in nature. Russia is a sovereign state, whereas NATO is a military bloc. The structural features of the latter are important with respect to interests, decision-making, and future strategy. The NATO member countries make vastly different contributions to overall security, creating a wide range of future approaches by the bloc, including towards Russia. The future role of the European Union is also important in this respect. Although it is doubtful that European bureaucrats will manage to realize their ambitious plans for expanding the political role of the EU at this stage in the game, Europe’s changing role in NATO could lead the Alliance to adopt any number of different strategies.

Third is arms control for conventional weapons and nuclear missiles, as well as the condition of Europe’s institutional framework. There is an intertwining here between the CFE Treaty and new CACE

initiatives, the future of the INF Treaty, prospects for START, the missile defense factor, and the condition of strategic stability in Russian-U.S. relations. The institutional base depends largely on the future of the OSCE and the soundness of the basic principles of international relations in the Euro-Atlantic region.

The fourth is the way in which the parties perceive each other. Unlike the balance of power, this component is difficult to measure, but it plays an extremely important role. NATO member countries perceive Russia very differently, with the harsh rhetoric of Poland contrasting sharply with the restraint shown by Germany and the Mediterranean countries. Even in Russia itself there is some debate regarding the extent to which the West poses a threat. In either case, decisions are often made based on expectations of a worst-case scenario. That means any significant change in the balance of power, however justifiable it might be in and of itself, can be viewed as a deadly threat. The current pattern of mutual perception creates an obvious asymmetry between stimuli and

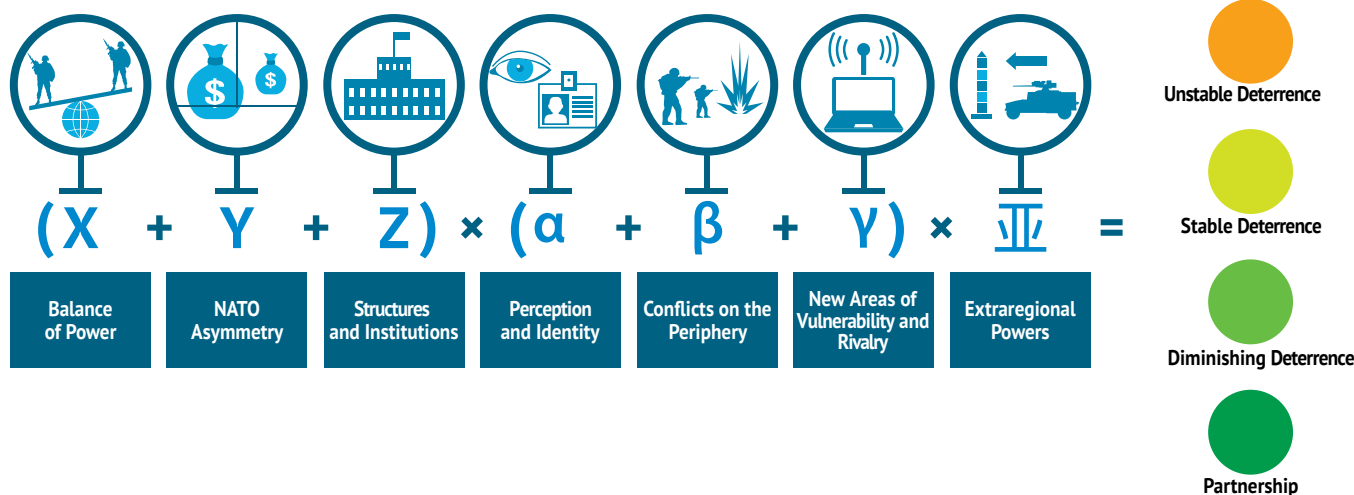
reactions, between the actual degree of threats and the subsequent responses to them. In short, it has led both sides to overreact.

The fifth parameter concerns conflicts on the periphery of Russia and NATO in which both sides have intervened in the past, are now intervening, or will intervene in the future. The Balkans, the Caucasus, Ukraine, Syria, and the Middle East as a whole generate destabilizing impulses of varying intensity and strength, with the result that Russia, the U.S., and NATO often find themselves hostages to the events unfolding there. Those regions on the periphery are capable of seriously aggravating the situation, provoking crises, and generating universal threats such as radical Islamism.

The sixth is the condition of other areas of vulnerability and rivalry, cyberspace foremost among them. Also worth mentioning in this regard is the media confrontation that has assumed a new and broader dimension in an era of social networks and the emergent phenomenon of so-called “post-truth.” Hybrid wars – that are much more difficult to operationalize, and therefore much more

EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY FORMULA

$$(X+Y+Z) \times (\alpha+\beta+\gamma) \times \underline{\text{II}} = ?$$



difficult to establish ground rules for – now join the proxy wars already being fought in these peripheral regions.

The seventh parameter concerns processes occurring beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. Unlike the Cold War, when world politics was largely confined to the confrontation between the Soviet and Western blocs, today's international relations are much more diverse. The rise of China and other centers of power will have a growing impact on the Euro-Atlantic region in the future, while Russia will

be a significant military-political player in both the West and the East.

The first three variables – that we will conditionally denote as 'X,' 'Y,' and 'Z' – are traditional for the Euro-Atlantic security narrative and are well-developed in terms of specific numbers and concepts. The next three variables – that we will call 'α,' 'β,' and 'γ' – are much more difficult to operationalize and are therefore less clearly defined. The seventh variable comes from outside the region and we will denote it with the Chinese hieroglyphic 亚.

Factor X. The Balance of Power

Prior to the Ukrainian crisis, the dynamics of the military capabilities of Russia and NATO did not pose a problem to the stability of the region. Of course, the wide disparity in defense spending has continued throughout the post-Cold War period, with the imbalance increasing when the U.S. boosted such spending in the 2000s. However, it would hardly be accurate to say those actions were aimed against Russia. In fact, the U.S. and its allies spent considerable sums on the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, but consistently reduced defense spending following the economic crisis of 2008–2009. In fact, that downward trend continued until 2015, with U.S. defense spending falling from \$757.5 billion in 2009 to \$641.3 billion in 2015. Defense spending among Washington's European allies similarly fell over the same period from a combined total of \$282.2 billion to \$235.3 billion. Overall NATO spending dropped from \$1.06 trillion to \$891.7 billion between 2009 and 2015.¹ The number of military personnel also decreased from 2009 to 2015. Over that period, U.S. Armed Forces fell from 1.418 million troops to 1.311 million, those of its European allies

dropped from 2.112 million to 1.816 million, and those of NATO as a whole declined from 3.589 million to 3.192 million. There were 25,000 U.S. troops stationed in Europe in early 2016, with the majority stationed in Germany (the 2nd Cavalry Regiment [Mechanized], the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, and the 10th Army Air & Missile Defense Command) and in Italy (the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team).²

Reforms to Russia's armed forces went into full swing after 2008. Defense spending increased from \$51.5 billion in 2009 to \$88.4 billion in 2012, then fell to \$66.4 billion in 2015.³ Military reforms greatly optimized both the structure and size of the army. However, defense spending accounts for a significant percentage of Russia's GDP – 5.4% in 2015, as compared to 4.1% in 2009.⁴

The Ukrainian crisis had a significant impact on the plans of all the parties concerned. At the NATO summit in Wales,

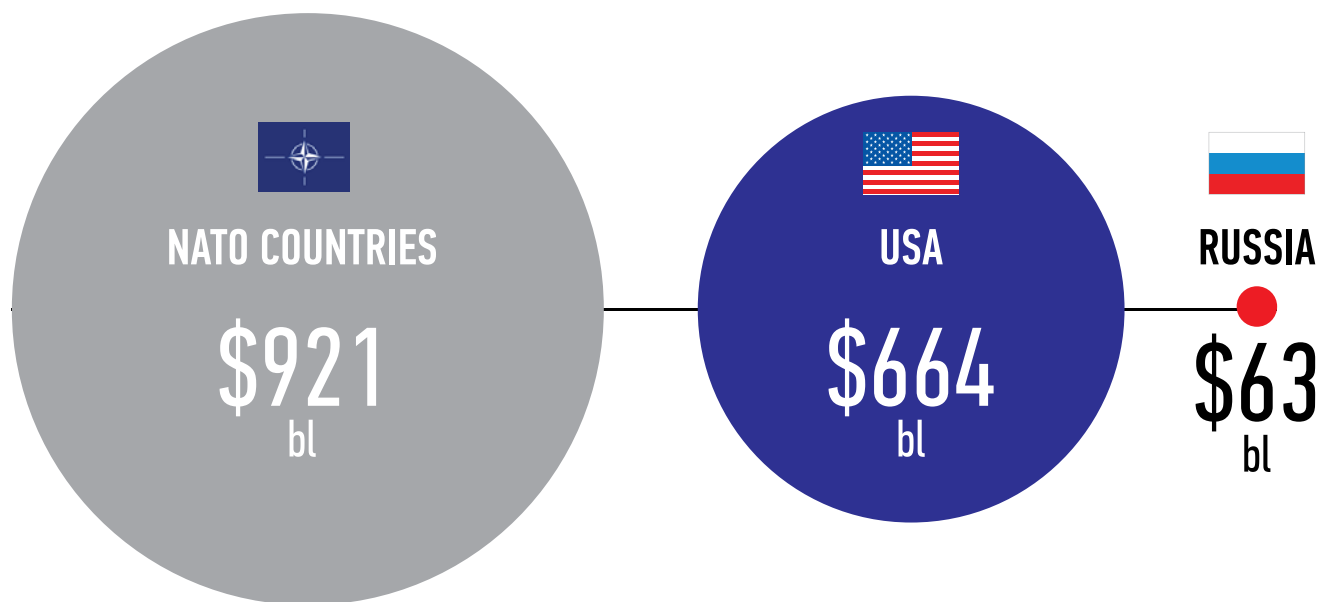
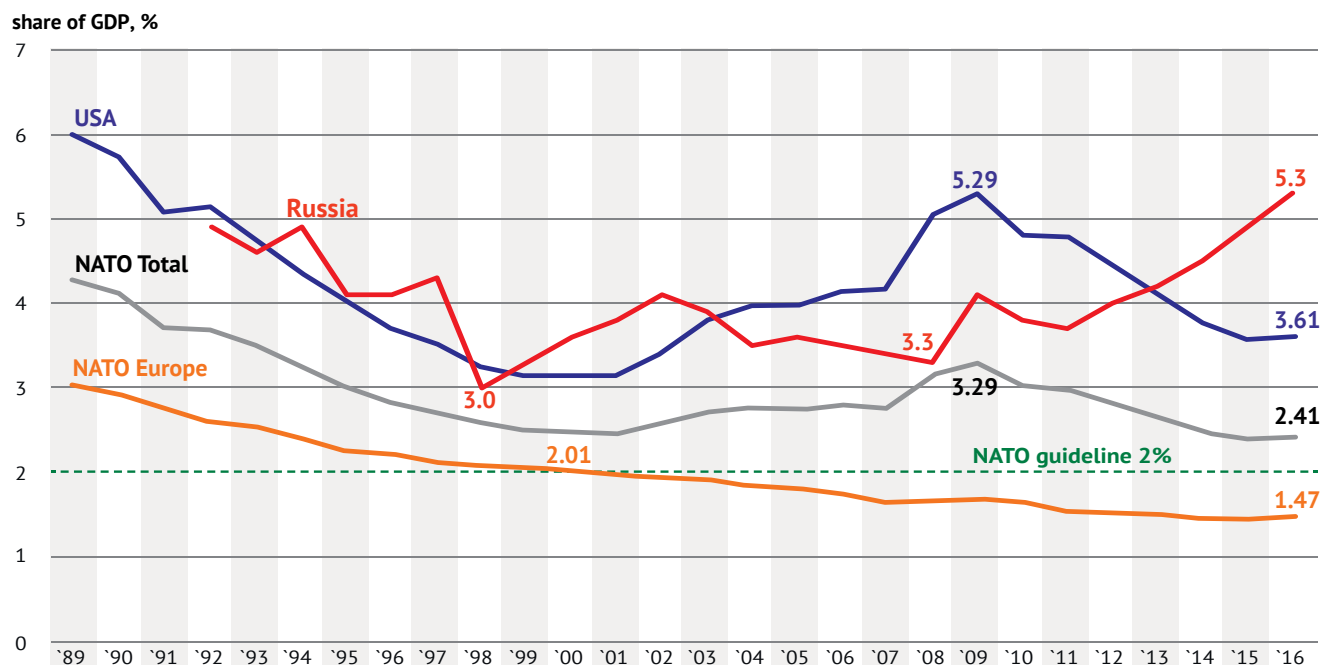
¹ Figures presented at then-current prices in U.S. dollars.

² Data drawn from the official NATO website: http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_03/20170313_170313-pr2017-045.pdf

³ Figures reflect fluctuations in the ruble exchange rate against the U.S. dollar.

⁴ According to SIPRI data.

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE

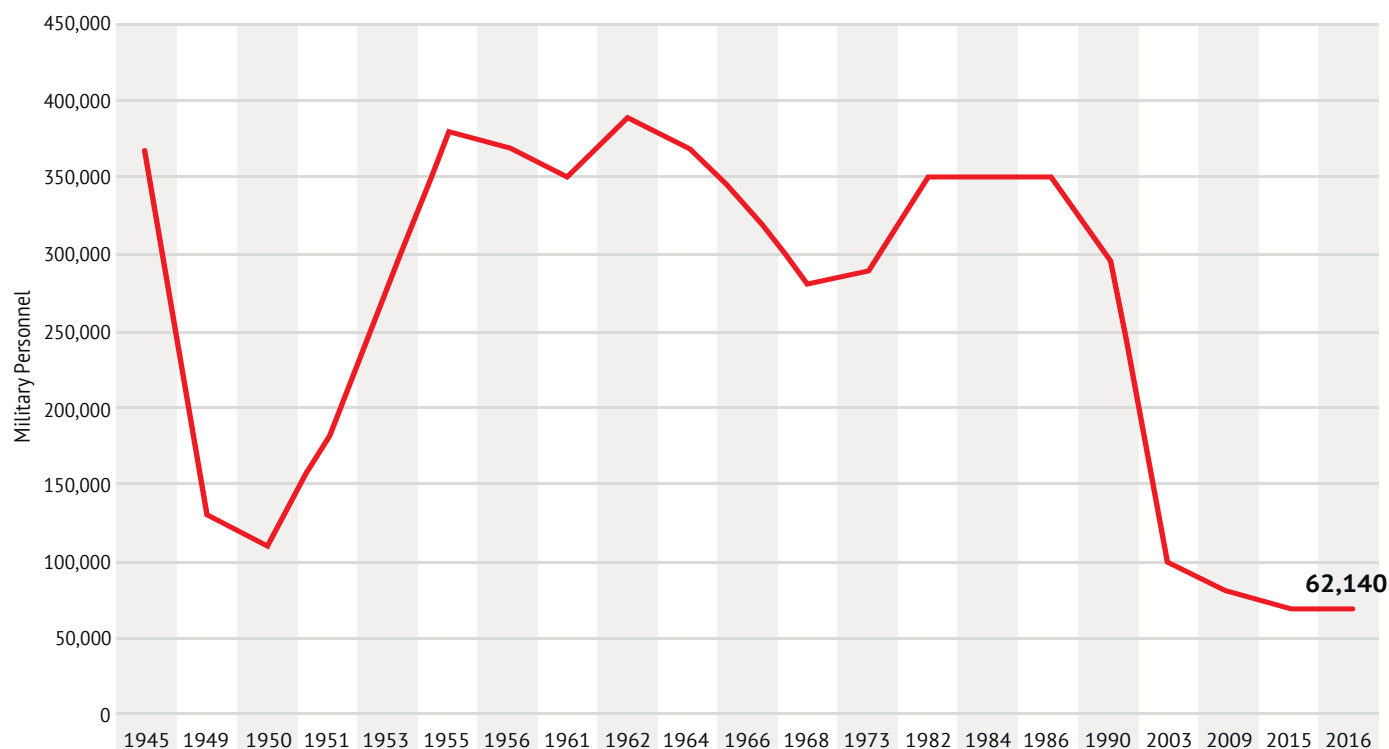


Source: NATO, SIPRI (data for Russia).

it gave added impetus to an earlier decision that member states increase defense spending to 2% of GDP and devote 20% of their military budgets to modernizing or purchasing new weapons systems (the so-called “2/20”

plan). The U.S. also launched its European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) in 2014 that calls for building up presence, intensifying exercises and training, and creating reserves and infrastructure. The ERI budget for 2017

U.S. FORCES IN EUROPE (1945–2016)



U.S. Forces in Europe (2016)

Army	25,297
Air Force	28,369
Navy	7,677
Marine Corps	797
Total	62,140

U.S. Forces in Europe after Cold War

–85%
U.S. Forces

–75%
Basing Sites

Source: NATO.

totals \$3.4 billion, as compared to \$985 million in 2015 and \$790 in 2016. Beyond the U.S. forces already in Europe, ERI calls for an additional armored tactical group to deploy from Germany to Eastern Europe on a rotational basis (with approximately 3,500 troops and 2,200 pieces of equipment, including 87 tanks). However, that hardly constitutes a major buildup because the U.S. withdrew its 170th and 172nd Infantry Brigades in 2012–2013. Thus, the current movements only restore the status quo while

altering the quality of the forces and shifting their place of deployment. Following the same logic, the U.S. has suspended plans to eliminate the 493rd Fighter Squadron based in the UK. The ERI budget focuses primarily on creating division-sized reserves for rapid deployment in the event of a crisis – namely, four additional brigades (two armored, one artillery, and one for logistics support).⁵

⁵ See Tebin, P, 2017, “A Tranquilizer with a Scent of Gunpowder”, Valdai Paper No. 70, July.

In addition, NATO is implementing its own measures. The Alliance adopted a Readiness Action Plan at its Wales summit in 2014 that provides for a significant expansion – up to 40,000 troops – of the NATO Response Force, and for creating within that structure a Very High Readiness Joint Force (VJTF) capable of starting deployment within 48-72 hours. Two multinational brigades, as well as various other elements augment the VJTF. In addition, NATO decided at its Warsaw summit in 2016 that it would create four multinational battalions in Poland and the Baltic states with a combined 4,000-5,000 troops as part of its enhanced external presence program. These units would play not so much a military as a political role – affirming that NATO would uphold its security guarantees.

A number of changes also took place in Russia. Three new motorized rifle divisions (the 144th, 3rd, and 150th) were created on the basis of existing brigades on the southwestern borders, and the 1st Guards Tank Army and the 8th Combined Arms Army were reestablished. Obviously, these measures were implemented in anticipation of a possible new crisis in relations with Ukraine and to defend a border that had

previously been practically demilitarized. In addition, Russia has deployed its 90th Guards Tank Division in the Chelyabinsk region, the 42nd Guards Motor Rifle Division in Chechnya, and is carrying out military construction in the Arctic and Crimea.⁶ Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that Russia has made no serious moves to alter its military capability in the Baltic region. Moscow has avoided engaging in an arms race in the zone of direct contact with NATO.

Both sides have intensified their military exercises significantly. However, a dramatic buildup of military capability seems unlikely. Not only do the U.S., its European allies, and Russia all face financial limitations, but Russia has largely completed its military reform program already.

Thus, in terms of the balance of power, Russia and NATO now paradoxically have a common interest in stabilizing deterrence. Such stability would not only help avoid unintentional escalation, but would also facilitate the judicious allocation of financial resources. If deterrence is unstable, the asymmetric bipolarity that was not a critical factor prior to the Ukrainian crisis could now become a source of serious risks.

Factor Y. NATO Asymmetry

In fact, NATO's structure is unbalanced because some member states are "suppliers" and the others are "consumers" of security. The United States pays almost 70% of the bloc's defense expenses and is the driving force behind the "2/20" concept. This approach benefits the U.S. in that it spreads the cost burden more evenly while also expanding the market for its own military-industrial complex. In effect, it asks Washington's European allies to foot more of the bill for their own security and to provide greater support for the defense industries of their fellow allies (meaning primarily that

of the U.S.). The "Russian threat" provides a weighty justification for this approach.

However, an examination of the cost structures of the European allies reveals certain features that will inevitably have an impact on the policy of the Alliance. Twelve⁷ of the 26 European NATO member countries

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ In descending order: Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Albania. Hereinafter in this section, data are taken from the official NATO portal: http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_03/20170313_170313-pr2017-045.pdf

contribute 1 percent or less to the overall budget, with a combined contribution amounting to a little more than 4.4% of total expenses. That group primarily consists of the new Eastern European and Balkan members. Of the Eastern European countries, only Poland can boast making a relatively significant contribution (4.3%) and achieving the goal of allocating 2% of its GDP to defense spending. It is safe to say that the remaining countries in that group are “consumers” of security. Not surprisingly, almost all of those countries fall short of contributing 2% of their GDP, and even when they do, as in the case of Estonia, in real terms the negligible sums involved make almost no difference to the overall picture.⁸

The “suppliers” of security – the United Kingdom and France – comprise the second important European segment. They account for a combined 41% of total European military spending. London exceeds the 2% bar and Paris is close to attaining it. However, they also have two important features. Both countries are nuclear powers and have military and political ambitions beyond the region. The relatively higher share for defense that they allocate from their GDPs is the price they pay for these two interests and remains a constant regardless of the “Russian factor.”

The third segment consists of countries⁹ that make a significant contribution to defense spending while holding no significant global responsibility or seeking to avoid it, and that soberly assess the actual extent of the “Russian threat.” Taken together, these countries pay almost 50% of Europe’s contribution to NATO defense spending, while only Greece fulfills the 2% of GDP requirement.

⁸ This sum exceeds \$2 billion only in the Czech Republic, and surpasses only \$1 billion in Hungary and Slovakia. The total falls below \$1 billion for the rest of the countries.

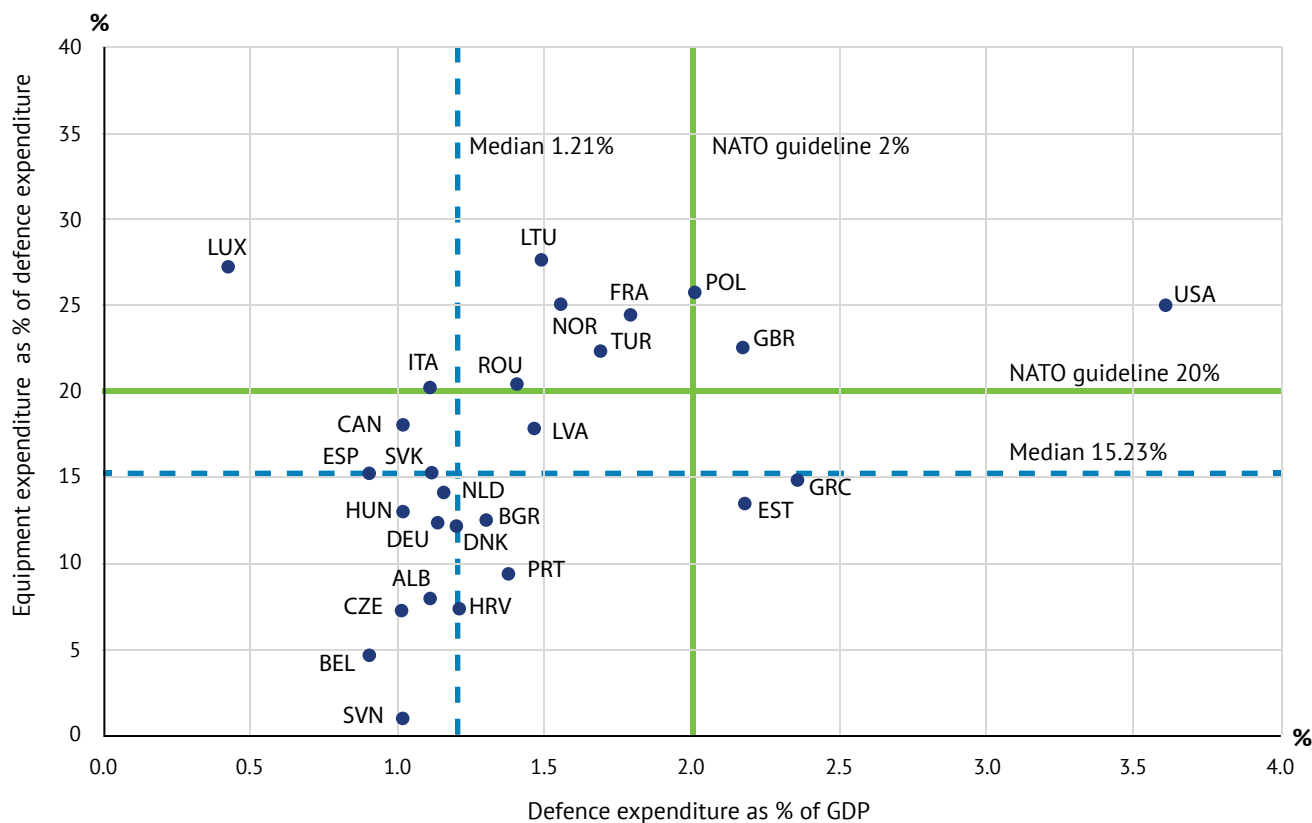
⁹ These include Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, and, to some extent, Turkey.

This is an entirely rational policy. Were they to increase their defense spending, they would only help other countries pursue their global interests without necessarily making their own countries more secure. And if they applied the 2/20 standard, they would be forced to bear a major share of the costs. For example, Germany would have to boost its defense spending by \$30 billion, Italy by \$18 billion, Spain by \$16 billion, and the Netherlands by \$7 billion.

In other words, a significant number of NATO member countries in Europe would benefit greatly from a policy of stable deterrence and, unlike the Eastern European countries, would have nothing to gain from speculating about the “Russian threat.” They already make a major contribution to NATO defense spending in Europe and would have to make the greatest sacrifices to meet the 2/20 requirement. They would better spend that money addressing concrete challenges such as radical Islamism rather than an exaggerated threat from Russia.

The EU is also an important structural part of this equation. If NATO manages to implement its new global strategy, the EU could theoretically become a more important player on the international arena. That could lead to a transformation from NATO as “the U.S. + its allies,” to “the U.S. + the EU + their allies.” A NATO-EU declaration was adopted at the NATO summit in Warsaw that defined the key areas of cooperation as well as a “division of labor.” Presumably, the EU will have to deal with hybrid threats, cyberspace, combating illegal migration, and so on. However, that is an inherently asymmetrical model because it would bind the EU to NATO’s political and operational goals. That means Germany and other countries that want to avoid major increases in military spending might have to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of Atlantic interdependence and solidarity.

ADHERENCE TO NATO GUIDELINES BY MEMBERS (2016)



Source: NATO.

Factor Z. Structures and Institutions

The erosion of the arms control process, the blurring of the role of the OSCE as an institution of pan-European security, and the growing uncertainty over strategic stability are all trends that began at least 15 years ago and they create a negative environment for Euro-Atlantic security. It compromises the tools for mutual predictability developed toward the end of the Cold War. That downward trend will likely continue in the medium term, after which these tools and processes will finally break down completely. That will raise the question of developing new rules. Nevertheless, the specific policies that all sides adopt, the actual steps they take toward building

up or reducing armaments, and the efforts they make toward observing specific rules and regulations remain extremely important.

The conventional arms control process hit a serious roadblock when NATO members refused to ratify a modified CFE Treaty. For Russia, implementation of the CFE Treaty would have greatly reduced the urgency of any NATO expansion by providing effective control over the two sides' military capabilities. The absence of a CFE Treaty has turned the sovereign choice of individual countries in favor of NATO into a zero-sum game for Russia and made military and political competition in the post-Soviet space

[among the former Soviet republics] inevitable. Despite this, both Russia and NATO have continued right up until the present day to uphold the stipulations and the “spirit” of the Treaty, and to adhere to the Founding Act of 1997 (despite its vague definition of what constitutes excessive military activity). This is an extremely important point that makes it possible to resume dialogue one way or another. And, although the CACE initiative by Frank-Walter Steinmeier in 2016 did not develop further, military deterrence remains of great importance to both Russia and NATO. One working alternative would be to hold a dialogue on separate sub-regional agreements on conventional arms, focusing in particular on arms control in the Baltic region.

Although the process of arms control over nuclear weapons and missiles remains the prerogative of Russian-U.S. relations, the issue is important to the European continent as well. The INF Treaty is a key component of European security, but its foundations are eroding continually as Russia expresses dissatisfaction over the possible dual use of the U.S. missile defense system and Washington accuses Moscow of developing and testing banned weapons without putting forward any evidence as proof. Although the parties are unlikely to withdraw from the INF Treaty, the agreement is at risk of de facto losing its significance. This could also result from the emergence of new military technologies that do not fall within framework of the Treaty. The U.S. increasingly links implementation of the INF Treaty with prospects for the dialogue on START. The Prague Treaty will probably be extended, but the work on the new treaty could

stall. Furthermore, the West has increasingly called for using missile defense as a means to deter Russia. If the U.S. further expands its missile defense program, Moscow might object to continued work on the otherwise promising START process. If that happens, the breakdown of the INF Treaty and START would have a negative impact on the security of not only Russia and the U.S., but also Europe.

The erosion of the role of the OSCE as an inclusive pan-European institution has become a major problem for Euro-Atlantic security. Although the Founding Act of 1997 gave the OSCE a leading role, that organization lost significance as NATO's role grew. In effect, the Alliance assumed the role of the key security institution in Europe. The fact that it is not inclusive of Russia gave rise first to inevitable difficulties, and later to a crisis in Russia-NATO relations. The Russia-NATO Council failed in its task of smoothing out those differences. The Ukrainian crisis has once again brought the role of the OSCE to the fore because the organization is the only, albeit imperfect tool for the mediation and resolution of conflicts. However, the current situation concerning Ukraine reveals the limits of the OSCE and the need to adapt the Helsinki Accord to current realities.

Thus, the erosion of the arms control process and the weakness of the OSCE make deterrence a top priority. At the same time, the controlled transformation of primary structures and institutions should contribute to stabilizing rather than destabilizing deterrence. Abruptly dismantling the remaining mechanisms guaranteeing predictability would hardly increase security for anyone.

Factor α . Perception and Identity

The balance of power and the structure of alliances and institutions are important in themselves. However, such subtle matters as

perception and identity can give them a qualitatively different meaning. The Ukrainian crisis provided a clear demonstration of this. Previously, Russia

and Ukraine hardly viewed each other as military threats and the military capabilities of Russia and NATO had declined significantly since the Cold War. Nonetheless, a severe crisis with heavy axiological underpinnings erupted over Ukraine. Several factors in this process will have long-term effects.

The first is the role of Russia as a “significant” outsider in the fabric of Western identity. Eastern Europe has spent the last 25 years actively promoting the idea of Russia as “different” and “civilizationally incompetent.” In all fairness, it should be noted that the anti-Russian element of Eastern European politics had gradually declined at one point. However, first the Georgian and later the Ukrainian crisis gave it a new impetus. The anti-Russian narrative holds that the Russian state as such is depraved and developed imperfectly over its history: it therefore casts Russia as an autocratic state that must learn the proper forms of political life, but stubbornly resists doing so. According to this logic, Russia projects its inner depravity outward, causing the autocratic state to pursue an expansionist and aggressive foreign policy. As long as Russia does not change internally, it is pointless to expect any change in its foreign policy. Russia is frequently viewed as a sort of “laboratory rat” whose behavior can be controlled through punishments (sanctions) or rewards. Such an attitude is implicit in the U.S. narrative about Russia.

The bottom line is that the West explicitly or implicitly denies Russia’s legitimacy even though Russia expresses no analogous concerns regarding Western states or their political systems. That imbalance greatly complicates discussions of purely political issues. It is difficult to imagine Moscow having a constructive dialogue with a partner

whose views hinge on the belief that the Russian state must or will inevitably undergo fundamental changes before it can achieve legitimacy.

After the Cold War, another assumption was added to this stereotype – the anticipation of Russia’s imminent decline or collapse. This tempted the West to ignore Moscow’s interests while outwardly maintaining a partnership with it and to feel deeply disconcerted when Russia suddenly returned as an active player to world politics. There is no question that Russia does face a great many problems. Its economy, human potential, and system of governance are all backward in many ways. However, as Fyodor Lukyanov aptly noted, policy is implemented in the present – here and now. Projecting Russia’s “inevitable decline” onto current policy was a serious mistake and the certainty over Russia’s imminent collapse proved completely unfounded.

Deeply entrenched anti-Western sentiment is also part of the Russian identity. Admittedly, the Russian media and certain political forces often exaggerate this, at times blaming the West for almost all of the troubles in both this country and the near abroad. The idea of liberalism has become the antithesis of patriotism. All this has a negative impact on those areas of cooperation with the West that Russia undoubtedly needs and strengthens anti-Russian rhetoric in the West. Russia also suffers from another dangerous belief – the growing conviction that the liberal order will collapse, itself a mirror image of the West’s certainty of Russia’s imminent fall. *This entire narrative is deeply entrenched at the level of strategic culture on both sides and is a serious obstacle for the stabilization of political relations*

Factor β . Conflicts on the Periphery

Conflicts on the periphery have come to assume the unswerving role of a “detonator” in Russian-Western relations, and with each

successive intervention, the power of that “detonator” increases. From Yugoslavia to Syria, Russia and the West have traveled a long and

arduous path. Ironically, Moscow has proven itself a “good student” of Washington and Brussels in offering justification for its own operations. It is possible to argue endlessly over who is right and who is wrong in each particular instance, but the overall result of all these interventions is incontrovertible – the decline of international institutions, a complete breakdown in trust, the growing role played by the use of force, and an even deeper degradation of the peripheral regions. This has spawned a host of problems, from terrorism to uncontrolled migration.

To this day, a great many Russians believe that Western intrigues cause all the problems in the peripheral regions. For their part, Western Russophobes hold the reverse view, seeing Moscow’s hand behind every significant event. This misconception has led both sides to make the serious error of underestimating the role played by the internal dynamics of countries in translation on the Russian and European periphery. In a sense, Russia and the West have been “caught sleeping” as a number of processes have quietly built up on their frontier and, one after another, bred revolutions and state crises, with all of their attendant consequences. Subsequent interventions have only intensified these problems, finally pushed them out of control, and turned Russia and the West into bitter rivals as well. Both sides find themselves hostages to the uncontrollable situation on the periphery. This blocks even theoretical attempts to work out at least a set of basic ground rules.

The Ukrainian issue is a long-term negative factor. It is virtually impossible

to carry out the Minsk agreements under current circumstances. After suffering military defeats in Donbass, Kiev views the process as coercive and will make every possible effort to block it or rework it to its own advantage. Paris and Berlin cannot (and probably do not want to) pressure Ukraine into implementing the agreements. Russia will not “surrender” Donbass, much less raise the question of Crimea. All the parties have taken a “wait and see” strategy in the hope that some extraordinary circumstances will force their opponent to make concessions. It appears that Ukraine and the West are waiting for an economic and political crisis in Moscow that would serve as a “game changer.” Moscow holds similar expectations concerning its opponents. However, Moscow, Washington, and Brussels all hold no control over the situation in Ukraine. *This means it will be a long-term conflict for all parties involved.*

Moscow and Washington have much more room for compromise concerning Syria and the Middle East in general because, despite their many differences, they face a common threat there from radical Islamism. The ideological nature of that threat makes it far more dangerous. Whenever a terrorist organization is defeated, a new one will always appear until a breakthrough is achieved in the ideological struggle. However, there remain serious misgivings about presenting a united front against the radicals. The intensity of the standoff between Russia and the West will be directly proportional to the increase of their vulnerability to the threat of radical Islamism. *In this case, the stabilization of deterrence is the lesser of two evils.*

Factor γ . New Areas of Vulnerability and Rivalry

Cyberspace has long been an area of rivalry, but the general deterioration of Russian-Western relations has made it

an area of even greater sensitivity – and one without any established ground rules. In addition, cyber attacks and counter-attacks

are often very difficult to attribute conclusively to a particular state or group. This makes the digital environment an ideal arena for hybrid forms of confrontation in which hostile acts are ostensibly absent, but where fierce conflict is actually taking place. Moreover, states and their institutions are poorly protected against cyber attacks, and their vulnerability only increases as the reliance on digital forms of information increases. This places a wide spectrum of areas at risk – from the databases of state institutions to critically important elements of infrastructure, including nuclear facilities. The problem is that it is very easy to politicize cyber attacks but difficult to channel them into predictable legal proceedings between the parties. This imbalance gives the digital environment an oversized importance in political relations – and that role will only increase in the future. The mechanisms by which Moscow and Western capitals cooperate on threats in cyberspace remain unsatisfactory.

The scandal over alleged Russian interference in the U.S. presidential elections is a perfect illustration of this. In the U.S., it is considered axiomatic that the Russian hackers did, in fact, influence the outcome of the election. And yet, per tradition, the U.S. considers the incriminating evidence of such interference to be “classified” and therefore refuses to divulge it publicly. Washington made no use of the mechanisms in place for bilateral consultations in such situations. The matter has never shifted from the political to the legal realm, thus setting a dangerous precedent in which any country could find itself blamed for anything under the sun. Does such an approach strengthen the security of the U.S., its allies, or Russia? Hardly.

Another problem is linked to the digital environment – the new dimension of the media environment. Social networks have given rise to the phenomenon of “post-truth”

in which any opinion – even those ungrounded in any facts – can “go viral” overnight. The “truthfulness” of this or that opinion is determined by its source, with social network users tending to believe their “friends” and other like-minded users rather than the facts of the situation. All this devalues professional journalism because now any blogger or social network user can position himself or herself as a “journalist.” Propaganda used to be centralized and controllable. Now it has taken on a life of its own and, at times, drives official rhetoric to the absurd. The problem is that the absurd views circulating on the Internet now influence political decisions everywhere – from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Even the findings of top government agencies can take a back seat to whatever babble is current on the Internet. The media policy of Donald Trump and his relationship with U.S. intelligence agencies are symptomatic of the “post-truth” era. Social networks such as Twitter have become a more important source of information than the president’s daily briefing by the CIA.

These new areas of rivalry can mean only one thing for Euro-Atlantic security – that any destabilizing impulse in the “traditional” spheres of interaction will have disproportionately large repercussions in the new ones, and vice versa. This greatly amplifies the cost and potential damage caused by destabilizing actions and could reach unexpectedly high levels in the future.

The concept of “hybrid warfare” enjoys great popularity today. Although the idea is extremely vague, the West associates it with a range of clandestine and hostile actions that Russia has taken to destabilize other countries. Ironically, Russia has long seen the West as pursuing “hybrid” operations, with “color revolutions” foremost among them. Although both points of view exaggerate the actual threat, in the era of “post-truth,” it seems that only a handful of specialists find this a matter of concern.

CIA AT CYBERWAR



Factor . Extra- Regional Forces

The enthusiasm with which Russia and West position themselves as threats to each other indicates that they continue to view their relationship as central to global politics. However, for the 25 years since the end of the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic region has played an increasingly indistinct role in global security. The rise of non-regional players and the shift in world politics' center of gravity to the Asia-Pacific region has deprived the Euro-Atlantic region of its status as the "axis" of that framework. The world really is becoming increasingly multi-polar. However, multi-polarity is by no means tantamount to security. More pluralistic by nature, multi-polarity also brings with it a new level of uncertainty.

In this new configuration, the dynamics of China's capabilities and the way in which the Beijing authorities use it are becoming increasingly important. Beijing conducts a foreign policy that is balanced and cautious, but also assertive. The country is rising to a qualitatively new level of technological development, and this is reflected in its political and military capabilities (including space and nuclear missiles). Its economic influence is growing. China has seized the initiative in soft power also, offering its neighbors the concept of harmonious co-development. Beijing is well-positioned to build a system of regional and inter-regional economic alliances – especially given the crisis in the U.S.-led TTP initiative. Finally, events in the South China Sea have shown that Beijing has the ability to defend its security interests with determination.

The rise of China is important to Euro-Atlantic security for several reasons. The first is the military and political rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing. It is too early

to speak of a military alliance, but it has already reached a considerable scale, and this important diplomatic victory goes a long way towards mitigating the effects of Russia's isolation from the West. In addition, the rapprochement between Russia and China is turning into a problem for the U.S. Washington could fall into a double deterrence trap were it to pursue a course that opposes both Moscow and Beijing simultaneously. The second is the highly concentrated U.S. military and political presence in Asia that will inevitably be linked to its similar presence in the Euro-Atlantic region. Third is the possible reconfiguration of strategic stability due to the growing role of China's nuclear missile capabilities, and its activities in space, cyberspace, and other areas.

However, it is important to understand that Washington and Beijing are not doomed to geopolitical confrontation. Any uncritical belief in such a view on the part of Moscow could lead it to make serious political mistakes. The U.S. economy remains deeply interdependent with both the Chinese and EU economies – although the success of Beijing's Belt and Road initiatives could further strengthen China's ties with Europe. Under certain new global conditions, Moscow runs the risk of remaining in a supporting role.

The bottom line is that a deepening confrontation between Russia and the West would weaken the competitiveness of both. In the Russia-China-West triangle, Beijing has the most favorable position because it has better relations with Russia and the West than Russia and the West have with each other. Ultimately, the global competitiveness of Washington, Brussels, and Moscow depends on whether they stabilize deterrence and eventually end their confrontation.

The Euro-Atlantic Security Scenario

On the basis of these seven parameters, we will try to identify a few possible scenarios for the future of Euro-Atlantic security. Of course, it is hardly possible to anticipate all possible scenarios, especially because we do not claim to have identified any universal “laws” governing these processes. Recent history has shown how non-linear can be the influence

of even such long-known and well-studied factors as the balance of power. Nonetheless, we feel it is possible as well as necessary to outline several possible scenarios, each of which could result from the influence of factors mentioned here, or their operation in tandem. This projection will focus on the next eight years, until 2025.¹⁰

Scenario 1. Stable Deterrence

Russia and NATO countries position themselves as mutual high priority threats, exchanging tough rhetoric and criticism. They avoid any sharp buildups in military capabilities, however, demonstrating military restraint in the spirit of the CFE Treaty and the Founding Act of 1997. The two sides exercise particular caution in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, areas where they come into direct contact. The 2/20 goal has essentially been revised downward. Much of that money is aimed at combating terrorism and other pressing challenges. The INF Treaty remains intact, although it has not been replaced by an agreement that is adapted to the new technological realities. The Treaty of Prague has been extended. The dialogue on conventional weapons has yet to resume. The OSCE continues to play a secondary role. The conflict in Donbass remains unresolved,

but frozen. The post-Soviet space has achieved equilibrium. A de facto federated state has been created in Syria with special zones of influence of Iran, Turkey, and Russia. At the same time, not only is radical Islamism undefeated there, but it continues to gain momentum. Although terrorists continue to target Russia and the West, the two countries cooperate to only a limited degree in combating terrorism. From time to time, Moscow and the West accuse each other of committing scandalous crimes in cyberspace. No ground rules have been set for the digital environment, but both sides avoid risking an escalation. China pursues a policy of caution, avoiding open conflict with the U.S. and maintaining a high level of economic interdependence. Nevertheless, the U.S. feels compelled to project its power in the Asia-Pacific region to contain China, thus limiting its options in Europe.

Scenario 2: Unstable Deterrence

The accumulation of problems – flare-ups in Donbass, incidents in the Middle East, high-profile crimes in cyberspace, and an escalation in the information war – prompts Russia and NATO to undertake a major buildup

¹⁰ The Valdai Discussion Club developed the outlines of these scenarios in a situation analysis it conducted on March 9, 2017. The idea of stable deterrence as one of the scenarios appeared in the publications: Timofeev, I, 2016, “Russia and NATO in the Baltic”, in: “The Baltic Sea Region: Hard and Soft Security Reconsidered”, edited by Maris Andzans and Ilvija Brūge, Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs.

of their military capacities. The parties view each other as primary threats and are forced to mobilize their resources to maintain the balance of power. The zones of contact – the Baltic and the Black Sea regions – become militarized. Ukraine receives regular shipments of arms. Russia rearms the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic. Solidarity among NATO member states is at an all-time high. All this creates an extremely unstable political situation. Russia's isolation in the Euro-Atlantic region increases. The INF Treaty ceases to exist and START is not

extended. The dialogue on CACE is considered anachronistic. Europe pursues the large-scale deployment of its missile defense system in an effort to deter Moscow. The Russian state turns into a "besieged fortress." Cyber attacks in various forms become increasingly aggressive. China sticks to the sidelines in the mounting confrontation between Russia and the West. Washington projects its might in Europe and is forced to turn a blind eye on the slowly growing influence of Beijing. Nuclear weapons are all that holds back Russia and NATO from further escalation.

Scenario 3: Conflict

A sudden crisis in one of the post-Soviet countries triggers a regional conflict between the parties in the zone of contact. In this short-lived conflict, both sides attempt to deliver a local defeat to their opponent, hoping to force them to make significant political concessions and to damage their reputation. The emphasis is on speed, the element of surprise, and the limited scope of the operation in order to avoid a larger

escalation. The conflict results in greater losses than anticipated and the crisis continues. With both sides unable to achieve a lightning fast victory, the conflict escalates out of control and spreads geographically. The parties launch powerful cyber attacks. Russia and the U.S. are on the verge of launching ICBMs. China and other powers attempt to mediate the conflict as the world approaches the brink of a nuclear catastrophe.

Scenario 4. Diminishing Deterrence

Russian-NATO relations improve as a result of progress in resolving the Ukrainian crisis. Although it proves impossible to implement the Minsk agreements fully, the parties reach a compromise to hold elections in Donbass, begin implementing a road map for reintegration, and carry out measures for building mutual trust. Progress is evident in several areas, but the inertia of the conflict remains very high. Russia and

NATO agree on measures for military restraint in the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The INF Treaty remains intact and is adapted to new technological realities. The two sides hold a dialogue on new START parameters that also consider the U.S. missile defense system. The Middle East remains an arena of instability. Russia and the U.S. find it difficult to cooperate on issues concerning this region, but their militaries stay in constant communication

and thus manage to avoid unwanted incidents. Ground rules for conduct in cyberspace remain unformulated, but the parties refrain from hostile actions and cooperate to neutralize provocations. Russian and Western media tone

down their hostility, although the problem continues in social networks. Moscow deepens its military and political rapprochement with Beijing, giving it greater confidence in its dialogue with the West.

Scenario 5: Partnership

Against the backdrop of mounting common challenges, and thanks to the political will of the leaders of key Euro-Atlantic region countries, a process is launched for a comprehensive restoration of partnership with Russia on the one hand, and NATO, the U.S. and the EU on the other. Relations are built according to a CSTO-NATO format. The main objective is to provide mutual security guarantees and joint countermeasures against terrorism, extremism, and the rising

tide of cyber crimes. The U.S., EU, China, and Russia take steps to create an all-inclusive security space. As part of this format, the parties undertake a fundamental revision of arms control measures and determine the ground rules for managing the digital environment and conflict intervention modality. The system of international relations undergoes a qualitative change and the concept of Euro-Atlantic security, as such, becomes a thing of the past.

Concluding remarks: the paradox of stable deterrence

Of course, these scenarios are simplified. Reality is always far more complex, both in terms of the number of factors at play and the variety of possible outcomes to any situation. Nevertheless, even a simplified scenario makes it possible to envisage possible future developments and assess them professionally as to their likelihood and desirability. Unfortunately, the current scenario of unstable deterrence appears likely to shift into a scenario of conflict – however undesirable that might be. Conversely, there is little to suggest that the parties will move toward a scenario of diminishing deterrence

and possible partnership. The scenario of stable deterrence becomes a sort of watershed, a point of divergence between the two paths. Paradoxically, stable deterrence is the least stable scenario because the parties could just as easily change direction toward either conflict or partnership. However, because the chances look remote for establishing a partnership paradigm, stable deterrence is the lesser of the evils. The scenario of stable deterrence allows the parties to buy time in which they could step back from dangerous escalation and possibly begin working toward constructive relations reflecting the new realities.

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ISBN 978-5-906757-61-6



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