

Redefining NATO

Recent events in Eastern Europe have forced members to rethink defense priorities

By Dr. Teodora Crina Popescu, International Defense Cooperation Directorate, Romanian Ministry of Defense



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ATO's three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security contribute to safeguarding the security of Alliance members. Acknowledging that security developments beyond the Euro-Atlantic area could negatively

affect the Alliance — and to ensure the freedom and security of its member states — NATO has partnered with countries and international organizations to contribute to the enhancement of the international security environment.

Although a strategic partner for NATO¹ and a privileged partner of the European Union, Russia has adopted a defiant stance toward the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's enshrined principles. At the same time, it is asserting its power through projects that emulate Western models in a bid to compete with them, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization versus NATO and the Eurasian Union versus the EU.

Following the latest developments in Ukraine, NATO allies and EU member states have started to acknowledge that security in their proximity should not be taken for granted, and the principles and norms that govern international relations could be breached with no fear of retaliation.

At the end of the Cold War, cooperation and active engagement between former adversaries were considered the game changer that heralded an era that was supposed to diffuse conflicts, bring lasting peace

and consolidate trust. But after 25 years, this model showed its limitations as geopolitics in Europe started to matter again.

Russia's current behavior is the new game changer as it affects the Euro-Atlantic structure, order and security, and signals a return to the use of military force in foreign policy and a renewed competition in military technology.

Russian assertiveness

The annexation of Crimea sent for a second time — after the lesson learned from the Russian-Georgian crisis in 2008 — a strong message to the region about Russia's resurgence and assertiveness

in pursuit of achieving its national interests in the “near abroad” (when its own security is at stake) by using two intertwined means: redrawing borders and using hard military force.

Russia is asserting its *droit de regard* not only over the Russian-speaking communities, but also over its former historical territory. It is a sort of compatriot policy outlined in Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020 and its consequent 2010 Military Doctrine that calls for the political, economic and potentially, military protection of the rights and interests of Russian citizens and ethnic Russians living abroad.

For the past 20 years, Russia, following an incremental approach, established a foothold in several former Soviet states, creating a security belt (*cordon sanitaire*) with strategic military bases and heavy Russian military presence² (e.g., Kaliningrad, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Crimea). Furthermore, in fostering protracted conflicts around the Black Sea, Russia tries to project, protect and consolidate its influence and control over its near abroad and increase its authority at the regional level.

Russia has consistently signaled a qualitative change of its pattern of behavior, reflected in an increased defense budget, rising military expenditures dedicated to modernization and acquisitions of strategic weapons, and the unilateral withdrawal³ from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe in 2007. This behavior is also reflected in the unprecedented frequency and amplitude of military exercises — some conducted with clear anti-NATO member state scenarios⁴ — and the alleged breach⁵ of a landmark arms control agreement through the testing of a new cruise missile. Unfortunately, the Alliance did not always correctly perceive or interpret Russia's intentions.

Russia's plans to countervail NATO's and the EU's actions in its near abroad, to aggressively promote its own integrative projects (using diplomatic, political and economic levers) and to consolidate its influence in the region, revived the danger of defreezing a series of conflicts around the wider Black Sea area and the propagation of secessionist phenomenon. Its opting for old-fashioned nationalism and the use of military force over political negotiations, cooperation and respect for borders that have governed East-West relations could lead to disruptive regional and ethnic conflicts.

Russia's actions have strategic, cumulative and long-term effects and consume a significant share of attention on the Allied agenda, especially NATO's Summit in Wales in the autumn of 2014. The changes generated to the geostrategic coordinates of the

Bulgarian soldiers demonstrate room-clearing techniques in July 2014 as part of Platinum Lion 14-1, a multinational exercise in Novo Selo, Bulgaria, that also included troops from the U.S., Romania, Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom.

Euro-Atlantic region, corroborated by the fact that NATO is identified in Russia's 2010 Military Doctrine as a danger⁶ (a ranking below that of "threat") would definitely have an impact on how the Alliance will re-define itself.

Rebalancing NATO's strategic interests

NATO is an effective political-military organization that fulfills, as stated above, three essential core tasks: collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security. For the past 25 years, NATO successfully focused on the last two tasks to stop conflicts when they had the potential to affect the Alliance's security and to engage through partnership with relevant countries and international organizations to contribute to international security. As stated in the last NATO Strategic Concept, "Active Engagement, Modern Defense," adopted in Lisbon in 2010: "Today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low."

Although this might still be valid, the Russian game changer compelled NATO's Eastern European member states to voice legitimate concerns based on fears and lingering stereotypes embedded in Cold War experiences.

Therefore, NATO should re-evaluate its interests, shift its focus from decades of involvement in out-of-area operations to collective defense, remain operational and be prepared for the worst-case scenario. Moreover, NATO should assume and be able to operate beyond its post-International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) milestone in a post-Crimea security environment where the specter of conventional war, alongside asymmetric threats, is revived.

In this context, the NATO Summit in Wales was a litmus test in which collective defense interests prevailed against individual national interests (spurred by economic dependence or military contracts), sending a strong signal about the solidity and solidarity of the Alliance and the indivisibility of its security.

What should be done?

Changes in the European security environment should inspire NATO to take a series of actions. First, NATO should offer its members short-term, as well as long-term, credible and visible reassurance and deterrence measures. For the European members, especially for Central and Eastern European countries, the flexible response doctrine and the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons are of utmost importance.⁷

The current changes in the Euro-Atlantic security environment void the debates on removal of nuclear tactical weapons from the territory of Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The status quo⁸ will remain

sustainable if the European allies who now have nuclear-capable aircraft renew their political commitment to maintain such capability.⁹ Additionally, NATO should take measures to upgrade dual-capable aircraft readiness, signaling the Alliance's seriousness and resolve. All of this should be reflected in NATO's Deterrence and Defense Posture.

NATO should also ponder accelerated development of military infra-

structure and reassignment of military assets to the Alliance's Eastern border (consolidated participation in air policing and surveillance patrols), covering the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as an increased presence of U.S. facilities on some of these countries' territories. Furthermore, transforming the U.S. presence in Task Force East into a permanent one would clearly reassure Eastern European allies about American commitment to their security. Steadily cut since the early 1990s, U.S. forces in Europe today face the prospect of additional reductions, given the defense sequestration and the strategy shift to pivot to Asia. The time has arrived for the U.S. to reconsider these policies and pivot to Europe again and re-establish the American footprint.

Second, owing to the current level of strategic unpredictability and insecurity, the Allied Military Authorities should be prepared to re-evaluate the threat assessment and subsequent planning.



Romanian soldiers receive instruction from a U.S. Marine, left, during exercise Platinum Lion 14-2 in August 2014. The training brought together forces from the U.S., Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. CPL. JOSHUA GRANT/U.S. MARINE CORPS

Third, NATO countries should acknowledge the cost of providing security. Although the economic crisis still affects Europe, allies should reverse the tendency to reduce defense budgets and increase defense spending gradually to 2 percent of gross domestic product.¹⁰ Moreover, all projects circumscribed to “Smart Defense” should be streamlined, and the European powers should carry their fair share of NATO’s military burden. This is not an easy task and requires, first and foremost, strong political will and supportive public opinion. Under current circumstances, although the consolidation of the defense sector would be detrimental to other sectors, it will accelerate and strengthen the buildup of a critical capabilities package. European allies should acknowledge that the U.S. alone cannot continue to subsidize Europe’s security and that they have to rebalance the financial burden. Increased focus should be dedicated to joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, strategic airlift and sealift, missile defense and cyber defense.

Fourth, NATO’s core tasks require military forces of a certain quality and quantity. Unfortunately, only a limited number of European Armed Forces are available and prepared for deployment and in many Allied countries the usability targets set by NATO remain unmet. Therefore, the growing gap between the level of ambition and NATO’s available means could affect its military capacity and political credibility. In this context, allies should consolidate operational training, readiness, preparedness, interoperability, sustainability and survivability.

Fifth, NATO should commit to and revitalize a multiyear exercise program (with increased frequency and different levels of ambition) covering especially Article V scenarios. These engagements should not be limited to the NATO Response Force (NRF), but also work within the framework of the Connected Forces Initiative.

After the end of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan in December 2014, NATO intends to shift emphasis from operational engagement to operational preparedness. Therefore, holding regular military exercises tests and validates NATO’s concepts, procedures, systems and tactics (among them the command and control structure, interoperability, readiness and preparedness of forces and logistics). These types of exercises will also demand complementary training and comprehensive education as part of the Connected Forces Initiative to sustain and enhance interconnectedness and interoperability achieved by Allied forces in past operations.

Sixth, NATO should be prepared to swiftly integrate capable partners that decide to join NATO in Alliance structures. Sweden and Finland are cases

in point and already act as de facto member states. They are pro-active actors, participating in NATO-led operations and the NRF, and playing a dynamic role in a number of multinational projects for the development of NATO’s capabilities.

Last but not least, the Alliance has acknowledged that it can no longer conduct business as usual with Russia and that a strategic pause is needed to evaluate this relationship. If Russia continues to display attitudes similar to the one in Crimea, adopts aggressive rhetoric on the issue of Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia and Estonia, and these crises escalate, NATO could consider curtailing any political and military cooperation with Russia and even denounce and consider irrelevant the Founding Act.¹¹ This could lead to a reconsideration of the Political-Military Matters enshrined in this document. □

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1. As stated in the 2012 Chicago Summit Declaration: “NATO-Russia cooperation is of strategic importance. ... We want to see a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia.”

2. Kaliningrad is the home of two Russian air bases and also offers access for Russian Baltic Fleet, Baltiysk naval base being its only ice-free port to the Baltic. Bombora in Abkhazia is the largest military airfield in the South Caucasus, and Crimea now offers *permanent* access for the Russian Black Sea Fleet and ensures Russian naval supremacy in that area.

3. Russia issued a statement December 12, 2007, “suspending” its implementation of the CFE Treaty, although the treaty does not contain a provision for suspension, only withdrawal. Under suspension, Moscow stated that it will not participate in treaty data exchanges, notifications or inspections. Although the Kremlin noted that it has no plans for arms buildups, it also declared that it would not be bound by treaty limits. NATO members called on Russia to reverse course and declared their intention to continue implementing the treaty “without prejudice to any future action they might take.”

4. Though the training scenario of ZAPAD (WEST) 2013 envisioned repulsing an attack on Belarus by “terrorist” forces, the exercise’s territorial scope, range of operations and number of units and force types suggested that Russia was practicing for a large-scale war against a conventional army.

5. The allegation is that Moscow flight-tested a new medium-range, land-based cruise missile. Such a test would violate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which permanently banned ground-launched ballistic or cruise missiles capable of traveling 500 to 5,500 kilometers.

6. The doctrine stated the danger of NATO globalizing its endeavors, attempting to expand its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders and enlarging by adding new members. Clearly, this referred to the intended enlargement of NATO by including Georgia and — before it opted for non-bloc status — Ukraine. The next doctrinal danger abroad was the deployment (or expansion) of foreign military contingents on territories neighboring Russia or its allies.

This probably pointed at the American military facilities deployed in Romania and Bulgaria. Another listed foreign danger was the development and deployment of missile defense systems, a reference to NATO’s ballistic missile defense.

7. Tactical nuclear weapons represent an important symbol of credibility of Article V to these countries.

8. Maintaining the estimated 200 Europe-deployed U.S. tactical nuclear bombs-B61 gravity bombs.

9. Decisions about replacing the aging fleets (Dual-Capable Aircraft) in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy must now take into consideration the necessity of introducing into service an aircraft certified and equipped with the required avionics package to carry nuclear weapons, even though existing planes may be kept operational well into the 2020s.

10. Only the U.S., the United Kingdom and Greece allocated 2 percent of GDP for defense in 2013. Constantly diminishing defense budgets have caused a three-pronged imbalance: increased discrepancy in capabilities between the U.S. and the European allies, European dependency on U.S. capabilities and deficits in European forces.

11. Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, signed in Paris, France, on May 22, 1997.