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Policy recommendations and implications for NATO

That NATO must do something to update its strategy in the near term is understood. Which direction it takes, however, is still to be determined. The authors presume that its decision will reflect some form of either Option 1 or 2 as described above. Based on that assumption, we offer some prescriptive recommendations for implementing either of these strategic choices.

Defense measures to strengthen strategic stability

Regardless of which option NATO chooses, NATO must ensure that its defensive capabilities against both military and non-military threats can respond to Russian challenges.

NATO's response to challenges from Russia in recent years has focused on augmenting forward-deployed conventional military capabilities through improved infrastructure, training, and rotation of multinational forces. There is no illusion that NATO could mount an effective conventional defense of forward territory; nonetheless, these are important steps to bolster NATO's deterrence and reassurance postures. These are trip wires, designed to reassure Allies that NATO will be engaged in collective defense. These steps constitute a reasonable response to a potential conventional threat, by signaling that any significant Russian military action against the territory of a NATO member state will be met with a concerted NATO response, not just a national response.

These efforts are not, however, sufficient. NATO must be prepared to deter and defend against the full range of threats, including non-military actions. Russia's non-military and hybrid military tools, for example, seem designed to achieve political goals while remaining below the Article 5 threshold for collective defense. NATO's focus on a conventional military response may not only be ineffective against these tools; it may also exacerbate a crisis if Russia interprets such actions as preparations for NATO aggression.[48]

48 This is one of the conclusions from a table-top exercise. See J. Smith and J. Hendrix, *Assured resolve: testing possible challenges to Baltic security,* Center for New American Security, Washington DC, April 2016, www.cnas.org/publications/reports/assured-resolve-testing-possible-challenges-to-baltic-security

Given the requirements for strengthening strategic stability, in the following paragraphs we offer a number of recommendations for improving NATO's defense posture.

Reaffirm the credibility of the US strategic deterrent. The United States must unequivocally reaffirm its commitment to collective defense, including NATO's oft-repeated statement that "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States".[49] This "supreme guarantee" should not be designed to threaten a first strike capability, but to ensure a survivable second-strike capability. We do not believe that Russia is keen to launch a war leading to retaliation that would threaten its homeland.[50] Many current advocates of US nuclear modernization emphasize the need for nuclear superiority. We are skeptical that nuclear superiority is even possible; we also fear that pursuit of that goal would be destabilizing. Instead, we recommend preserving NATO's limited theater nuclear capability, currently represented by NATO dual-capable aircraft (DCA) that can carry nuclear munitions. This should remain a reserve that offers options and demonstrates NATO's policy of cooperative risk- and burden-sharing in strengthening US extended deterrence.[51] At the same time, we believe the Alliance should refrain from attempting to station new intermediate-range nuclear forces on NATO soil. Russian weapons developments do not require symmetrical US or NATO response; US and NATO air- and sea-launched capabilities can effectively hold Russian strategic targets at risk. An attempt to station ground-based INF systems on NATO soil would severely strain Alliance cohesion and be provocative to Russia, fueling a new arms race in Europe.[52] Finally, NATO should develop non-nuclear strategic strike capabilities as a credible complement to nuclear capabilities, able to hold Russian strategic targets at risk without resort to nuclear weapons. Whether

49 NATO's 2012 *Deterrence and defense posture review*, www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm. On the challenges for NATO as it revisits the demands of nuclear modernization, see J. Larsen, "NATO Nuclear adaptation since 2014: the return of deterrence and renewed Alliance discomfort", *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol.17, No.174, 25 March 2019, https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-019-00016-y; and R. Legvold and C. Chyba (eds.), "Meeting the challenges of a new nuclear age", special edition of *Daedalus,* Spring 2020.

50 See, for example, O. Oliker, "Moscow's nuclear enigma: what is Russia's arsenal really for?" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.97, No.6, November/December 2018, pp.52-57. For contrary arguments, see M. Kroenig, *The logic of American nuclear strategy: why nuclear superiority matters,* Oxford University Press, New York, 2018, especially Chapter 6; E. Colby, "If you want peace, prepare for nuclear war: a strategy for the new great power rivalry", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.97, No.6, November/December 2018, pp.25-32; and K. Zysk, "Escalation and nuclear weapons in Russia's military strategy", *The RUSI Journal,* 2018.

51 See B. Roberts, *The case for US Nuclear weapons in the 21st century,* Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA, 2016, for an argument for a "balanced" approach that preserves a modernized nuclear deterrent, while working for avenues to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons.

52 Moscow has publicly stated that any US INF deployments in Europe will be met with counter deployments. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg has declared that NATO Allies "don't have any intention to deploy new nuclear land-based weapons in Europe". "Stoltenberg: NATO mulls options in post-INF world, doesn't want arms race with Russia", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13 February 2019, www.rferl.org/a/stoltenberg-nato-mulls-options-in-post-inf-world-doesn-t-wants-arms-race-with-russia/29768184.html

such restraint would prevent a Russian nuclear response, however, is uncertain.

Ensure sufficient strategic warning and timely responsiveness in a crisis. NATO, EU, and national intelligence capabilities should focus on the full range of threats – including non-military "hybrid" threats – against the "territorial integrity, political independence or security" of Western countries.[53] This will require intelligence agencies to incorporate additional strategic warning indicators beyond traditional measures of a potential adversary's military mobilization and preparedness. NATO must improve the resilience of its Alliance and national command, control, communications, and intelligence capabilities – both to kinetic and to cyber attacks – to ensure they do not provide a tempting and lucrative target for preemption in a crisis. This includes reviewing NATO's internal command and control and decision-making processes to ensure NATO can be responsive and timely in a crisis.[54] NATO should have clear policies and protocols on how it would signal to an attacker its intentions regarding reinforcement, defense, and, if necessary, escalation, to avoid miscalculation. And the Alliance should incorporate decision-making protocols for consultation and response in the case of actions below the military threshold.

Further strengthen NATO's conventional defense capabilities. The Alliance should continue its ongoing initiatives to deploy rotational "enhanced forward presence" forces, preposition equipment, and earmark forces for rapid response. While doing so, it should avoid new permanent forward basing structures for forces with offensive combat capability, which Russia would view as provocative. It should also improve its integrated air and missile defense, especially to enhance coverage of front-line states. Effective air defenses can deny an attacker the benefits of a preemptive strike intended to disarm or disable NATO defense, decision-making, and reinforcement capabilities.

The Alliance must ensure that it has the capability to reinforce Allies by air, sea, and land in a timely fashion. This includes developing in-place logistics plans and ensuring – in coordination with Allied governments – the ability of forces to move through Europe expeditiously. The creation of NATO's new Joint Support and Enabling Command, Joint Force Command-Norfolk, and the re-establishment of the US Second Fleet are all positive steps in this direction.

Strengthen defense against non-military threats. NATO needs to expand Alliance

53 This includes both NATO and EU countries. On the role of the EU in complementing NATO efforts in this regard, especially with respect to hybrid threats, see B. Fagersten, "Forward resilience in the age of hybrid threats: the role of European intelligence", February 2017, https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/resilience-forward-book-fagersten-final-version.pdf

54 On the destabilizing potential of NATO's inability to reach a timely consensus on a response to Russian actions, see T. Frear, L. Kulesa, and D. Raynova, *Russia & NATO: how to overcome deterrence instability?* European Leadership Network Euro-Atlantic Security Report, April 2018, p.11, www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/report/russia-and-nato-how-to-overcome-deterrence-instability/

defense planning and crisis management efforts to incorporate defense against non-military "hybrid" threats, including infiltration, information warfare, and political disruption. This includes the incorporation of "resilience" more explicitly and specifically into NATO's strategic approach. Even if many areas of resilience remain the province of national competence rather than in the domain of NATO collective defense, they all would benefit from Alliance action in building capabilities, sharing expertise, and planning.[55]

The Alliance should expand cooperation with the EU and with European governments to include specific plans to coordinate responses to non-military threats. Finland's recently established Center of Excellence for Combatting Hybrid Threats is a valuable initiative inviting participation from both NATO and EU states.[56]

Cultivating a collaborative security relationship

If, as the authors propose, the Alliance chooses Option 2, a "new Harmel" approach to dealing with Moscow, there naturally follow a number of recommendations for implementing such a strategy. These do not negate the previous recommendations for a stronger defense, since defense and deterrence make up one half of the dual-track approach. But they are a critical additional set of initiatives that will provide openings for dialogue, discussion, and *détente* – the second half of the stability equation.

NATO should not presume that Russia currently has any interest in building a collective security relationship with the West, nor should the West necessarily meet Russian demands to entice them to the table. We suggest, however, that in the long run both Russia and the West have interests that could be met through a healthier and more open relationship.

The proposals offered below are not, therefore, intended as an alternative to improving NATO's deterrence, defense, reassurance, or resilience postures. They would, however, be a valuable complement to those efforts that, together, would constitute a more sustainable – and more affordable – means to enhance strategic stability in Europe. If nothing else, a concerted NATO effort to offer Moscow such an agenda would be important to shoring up the domestic political consensus in NATO to pursue defense enhancements that are also critical to improving strategic stability.

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55 One report suggests pre-planning "resilience response teams" so that experts can be deployed to address a range of issues. See Smith and Hendrix, *op.cit.*, p.14. These could be a combined NATO-EU effort. For a broader discussion, see O. Nikolov, "Building societal resilience against hybrid threats", *Information & Security: An International Journal*, Vol. 39, No.1, 2018, pp.91-109, https://doi.org/10.11610/isij.3908

56 In 2017, Finland established a European Centre of Excellence for Combatting Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), open to both NATO and EU members. Its mandate is "to serve as a hub of expertise". See https://www.hybridcoe.fi. On areas of possible cooperation between NATO and the EU, see A. Hagelstam and K. Narinen, "Cooperating to counter hybrid threats", *NATO Review*, 23 November 2018, www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/Also-in-2018/cooperating-to-counter-hybrid-threats/EN/index.htm

It is true that there may not be the political will – in either Moscow or in the West – to pursue a collaborative security strategy in the near term. That does not, however, preclude the need for NATO to fashion its own vision for what a collaborative security relationship with Moscow should or could look like. NATO, both collectively and in its national capitals, should be thinking through the implications of each of these prospects. It would be politically disastrous for NATO to find itself unprepared to respond were Moscow suddenly to present an opportunity for meaningful engagement. In that regard, there are a number of recommendations for how a more collaborative security relationship might be pursued.

Establish a pol-mil strategic dialogue with Russia. NATO might propose a multi-layered, political and military "strategic dialogue" with Russian counterparts, both bilaterally with the United States and multilaterally within a NATO context, to discuss approaches for enhancing strategic stability. This would allow the expansion of bilateral and multilateral official and unofficial ("Track 1.5" and "Track 2") contacts, focusing on issues of concern to each side, especially as they relate to how participants understand the requirements for strategic stability in Europe. They could also restore more regularized military-to-military contacts between the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Russian head of the General Staff, with corresponding exchanges at the 2- and 3-star level between local and regional commands. In addition, the two sides could reconvene regular meetings of the NATO-Russia Council at the ambassadorial level, on the understanding that this is not "business as usual".[57] They could develop regular channels for NATO-Russia military-to-military communications; broaden NATO-Russia hotline channels to address dangerous military and cyber incidents; develop joint NATO-Russia crisis management exercises to deal with such incidents; and establish multilateral Risk Reduction Centers, modeled on the bilateral Nuclear Risk Reduction Center. These venues would provide the opportunity for discussions in multiple areas of common concern, such as perceived anomalies between doctrine and forces, common approaches to counterterrorism, and the need to deal with the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Propose a regularly scheduled bilateral US-Russian forum for consultations on strategic (including both nuclear and non-nuclear) weapons and technologies. This would be an ideal forum in which to establish a roadmap for New START extension, and to explore possible parameters for a follow-on agreement on strategic nuclear weapons, which could range from a limitation agreement based on the New START model to a

57 For specific recommendations on how to reinvigorate the NATO Russia Council and provide substance to that dialogue, see K. Kubiak (ed.), *Towards a more stable NATO-Russia relationship,* European Leadership Network Euro-Atlantic Security Report, February 2019, www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/31012019-Towards-a-more-stable-Russia-NATO-relationship.pdf

broader package that could incorporate intermediate nuclear forces and non-strategic nuclear forces, plus a range of CSBMs to ensure greater transparency. It would also provide the venue to discuss alternatives as a replacement for the INF Treaty, including the possibility of additional CSBMs if NATO were to accommodate Russia's desire for land-based systems east of the Urals; to address ways to reduce incentives for surprise attack and perceived threats to a survivable deterrent, particularly in light of prospective new weapons technologies, including hypersonic vehicles; to consider nuclear CSBMs, including information exchange on nuclear systems not covered by existing agreements such as non-strategic nuclear weapons, plus notification systems for movement of mobile systems; to discuss possible frameworks for new CSBMs regarding new weapons domains, including autonomous weapons, space deconfliction, and rules of the road for cyber; and to explore ways to assuage Russian concerns about ballistic missile defenses, including information exchange and possible reciprocal visits involving Kaliningrad missile sites and NATO missile defense sites in Poland and Romania.

Propose a regularly scheduled forum between NATO and Russia for consultations on conventional forces in Europe. Such consultations would not supersede existing mechanisms such as the OSCE, but could feed into appropriate negotiating forums if necessary. NATO and Russia could revisit the possibility of adapting the CFE Treaty, with modifications based on what was agreed in 1999 but never put in place. They might also consider ways to limit forward-deployed electronic warfare capabilities; explore enhanced CSBMs as part of a broader "stabilization agenda", including increased information exchange, limits on the size of exercises in proximity to borders, and notifications on cross-border troop movements, and notifications regarding deployment of long range strike capabilities; develop a protocol for informal one-for-one inspections; establish regular political and military discussions on protocols to manage crises, avoid accidents, and create pathways to de-escalation; and explore regional disengagement models in areas of friction between NATO and Russia. One possibility, for example, might expand the NATO Russia Founding Act "no substantial combat forces" provision to Kaliningrad, Belarus, and the Russian Western Military District.[58]

These proposals reflect a comprehensive security agenda that would broaden the scope of possible dialogue; they do not presume negotiations leading to agreements. The emphasis is on building open and regularly used channels of communication, of developing a "habit" of consultation on security issues. Formal negotiations can follow, as appropriate, in existing or new bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

58 OSCE Network, *Reducing the risks of conventional deterrence in Europe: arms control in the NATO-Russia contact zones*, Vienna, December 2018, http://osce-network.net/file-OSCE-Network/Publications/RISK_SP-fin.pdf

None of the elements suggested here is new; indeed, most have been raised in one form or another in various formal and informal security dialogues. In this respect, building a process of regular consultation is a modest, but critical, first step.

Getting Russia to the Negotiating Table. The question remains as to under what circumstances Russia would be willing to reengage. Russia is clearly not willing to seek these objectives at any price. It has typically been eager to have "a seat at the table" in shaping European security architecture, provided, of course, its specific interests are served. For the West to entice Russia to engage in a meaningful security dialogue, therefore, the West might find it has to be willing to put on the negotiating table issues that it otherwise would prefer to avoid.

There are a number of identifiable issues that we can presume Russia would like to see on the table. To be clear, these are not recommendations for the Alliance, but rather important perspectives of the adversary that it will be advisable to recognize prior to the start of negotiations. For example, Moscow may wish to establish boundaries to what it perceives as Western strategies of "encroaching" on what Russia sees as its traditional sphere of influence. This could include restrictions on further NATO and EU enlargement, especially as it pertains to states previously in the Soviet Union; commitment to "non-interference" in the internal affairs of other states, especially if that phrase means affirmation of existing regimes, disavowal of "regime change", and refraining from intruding on the "information space" of other countries; or face-saving resolution of the Ukraine crisis, possibly including accommodating Russia's annexation of Crimea, full implementation of the OSCE Minsk Agreement, and removal of associated economic sanctions.

Russia may also want the West to recognize Russia's desire for "Eurasian" security, not just "European security", with allowances for Russia's need to address prospective military threats from China. This could include incorporating China into multilateral arms control negotiations, or accommodating Russia's desire to deploy INF systems east of the Ural Mountains. Or Moscow may wish to restrict the West's ability to develop and deploy offensive and defensive strategic capabilities that have typically been outside arms control regimes. This could include restrictions on modernization of NATO theater nuclear forces; restrictions on the development of strategic precision conventional strike capabilities, including hypersonic weapons; or limits on the development and deployment of theater ballistic missile defenses and of offensive cyber capabilities.

Finally, Russia may try to restrict – through new CSBMs – NATO's rapid reinforcement capabilities, including attempts to avoid notification requirements regarding naval activities or large movements of troops across national borders.

By no means are we recommending that NATO be prepared to meet Russian demands

on these or other issues. Rather, this list illustrates that Russia does have a variety of interests that could be served through dialogue, on which one could possibly build in shaping a collaborative security relationship. Such a relationship would have to proceed from the assumption that Russia has legitimate security interests that need to be met in some way, and that outcomes could be beneficial to both sides rather than zero sum, with shared interests achieved through compromise.

Implications for NATO strategy

Sustaining a stable strategic environment in Europe will require a comprehensive political, economic, social, diplomatic, and military strategy by the United States and its European Allies. Indeed, this is not just a NATO challenge, but a European challenge, requiring greater coordination and collaboration between NATO and the EU. In addition to traditional strategies of deterrence, defense, and reassurance, the West ultimately needs to find a way to integrate Russia into a European security architecture. As long as Russia views the current European security framework as illegitimate, it will be inclined to challenge the stability of that framework.

The previous section outlined three models for integrating defense and collaborative security into a coherent NATO strategy to strengthen strategic stability in Europe. It is not necessary to select one and reject the others, largely because the success of each is dependent on political variables outside NATO's control. Nevertheless, we recommend pursuing the approach that – if successful – would achieve the best outcome for strategic stability in Europe, while being prepared to pursue other approaches as a hedge against the possibility that it may not succeed.

Specifically, we recommend that NATO should proceed to shape a new Strategic Concept, outlining a 21st century Harmel Doctrine (Option 2). This new Strategic Concept would create the framework for a range of specific defense improvements, plus measures to build a collaborative security with Russia. Specific recommendations for both defense improvements and shaping a collaborative security relationship are spelled out in this report.

At the same time, NATO and Alliance capitals should begin internal discussions to outline the boundaries and conditions for an exploratory dialogue with Russia, in order to consider what a new European security architecture might look like (Option 3). This recommendation can proceed in parallel with Option 2, although it could also proceed independently of that effort. This recommendation does not signal any commitment to a new security architecture; rather, it would mark the beginning of a process to consider what would and would not be acceptable. This could build on the recent NATO 2030 report to

the Secretary General, and the beginnings of debate on a revised Strategic Concept.[59] In addition to extensive preparatory work in capitals and in Brussels, this could also be the focus of Track 1.5 and Track 2 discussions with Russians and experts in the so-called "in-between" states.

Whichever option NATO selects, if Russia proves unwilling to engage in a meaningful collaborative security relationship along the lines of either of the above models, then the Alliance should embark on a 21st century version of a "new containment" policy (Option 1). This is a default position if attempts to engage Russia constructively prove fruitless. This does not negate the need for a "New Harmel" Strategic Concept. NATO would have already charted needed defense improvements and made a good faith effort at cultivating a collaborative security relationship, for which the Alliance should always remain prepared. As Kennan noted in 1947, one should be "patient and vigilant" both to dangers *and* to opportunities as they arise.

In all cases, NATO should ensure that Alliance cohesion – including its transatlantic security link – is preserved even as it deliberates on difficult strategic questions. Whether or not there is an opportunity to engage Russia in substantive conversations on improving stability in Europe, there is no substitute for Alliance cohesion. All of these options suggest that the Alliance needs to have serious discussions to reconcile its own disparate views about Russia and the way forward. In that regard, a new Strategic Concept that addresses the world after 2020 – not the world of 2010, when NATO issued its current strategic concept – is essential.[60]

The US commitment to the Alliance will remain vital. The United States needs to exercise leadership in a way that promotes Alliance cohesion and recognizes the different security needs and contributions of NATO's thirty members. Were Allies to begin to hedge against the possibility of US disengagement from NATO, the integrity of the Alliance would be in jeopardy, and Russia would have secured an important security objective without having incurred much cost or risk.

59 See *NATO 2030: united for a new era,* Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group appointed by the NATO Secretary General, Brussels, 25 November 2020, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf

60 The Alliance has begun efforts toward this goal but needs to do more. See *NATO 2030: united for a new era;* also A. Vershbow, "Ramp up on Russia", Atlantic Council, in C. Skaluba (ed.), *NATO 20/2020: twenty bold ideas to reimagine the Alliance after the 2020 US Election,* Autumn 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/nato20-2020/