

ISSUE BRIEF

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BRENT SCOWCROFT CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Conventional Arms Control in Europe and Related Regional Security Concerns

Conventional arms control in Europe remains relevant more than two decades after the signing of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). Today, it could serve as a useful vehicle for collaboration with Russia on a broad range of security issues, and productive movement forward would also do much to reassure and secure smaller NATO allies and regional partners. Ultimately, what is needed is a paradigm shift away from “mutual assured destruction” and towards a concept of “mutual assured stability.”

Achieving a modernized conventional arms control arrangement in Europe requires new thinking and a new approach to addressing regional security. The task is not easy and it will likely take time, but initiating the process cannot wait if it is to contribute to long-standing American efforts towards strengthening European security. The development of a new arrangement is particularly challenging at a time when Moscow seems to be removing itself from ongoing cooperative efforts regarding European security, focusing more than its Western partners on “threats” emanating from within Europe. The challenge is compounded by the fact that financial and fiscal constraints on defense budgets in most countries in the Euro-Atlantic areas have taken their toll on Allied defense posture and seems to limit *de facto* conventional armed forces in Europe irrespective of arms control efforts.

In this context why would a new arrangement for conventional arms control in Europe seem necessary?

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The US strategy “*Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century of Defense*,” while outlining a new focus on Asia and the Middle East, reiterated the importance of Europe as the “home to some of America's

most stalwart allies and partners.” It clearly stated that the United States has enduring interests in supporting peace and prosperity in Europe as well as bolstering the strength and vitality of NATO. Moreover, a commitment to continued efforts toward building a closer relationship in areas of mutual interest was intended to encourage Russia to be a contributor across a broad range of issues. Similarly, on the NATO side, allies have recently reexamined arms control and its defense posture through the Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) agreed at the latest NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012. Allies indicated their readiness to develop and exchange transparency and confidence-building ideas with Russia towards better mutual understanding of NATO’s and Russia’s non-strategic nuclear force postures in Europe, while confirming the importance of conventional arms control.

Addressing conventional forces in Europe will require both a broader approach to security concerns in and around Europe, engaging Russia as well as European allies and partners, while providing for the particular security interests of key sub-regions within Europe through a new arrangement for conventional arms control in Europe.

What Are the Issues at Stake?

In December 2007, Moscow announced that it was suspending its observance of the original CFE treaty. In turn, in November 2011, NATO CFE allies declared that they were ceasing implementation of their CFE obligations vis-à-vis Russia, while continuing to implement the Treaty for all remaining state parties. It is likely that Russia nonetheless gets most of the benefits of the CFE Treaty through partners such as Belarus, Armenia, and Kazakhstan without any of the obligations or costs of CFE commitments following its 2007 suspension. As a result, and despite expressed Russian concerns over its conventional inferiority compared to that of NATO, Moscow seems to have little to lose from the *status quo*. Given Moscow’s disengagement and increased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, allies and their partners may be affected more negatively by the conventional stalemate. The idea of legally withdrawing from CFE might appear tempting to some, but it would require a difficult consensus

among allies and other CFE signatories. In the end, those most affected by a crumbling CFE are the smaller countries (Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) outside of the Alliance for whom the break down of arms control in Europe could make the difference between war and peace.

Beyond the strategic challenge of bringing Russia back to the negotiating table, there are specific issues relating to the CFE regime facing the Euro-Atlantic security community, which remain daunting to those interested in another conventional forces arrangement. How does one come to consensus on “host-nation consent” in the context of foreign troops stationed on the territory of other states parties— notably Russian troops in Transnistria and other territories? How does one get the relevant actors to come to terms with issues related to the “flank regime” of the CFE treaty in a successor arrangement? Such issues would require a process leading to a new arrangement focused on sub-regional security concerns. However, the new arrangement cannot entirely escape the larger political and strategic European-wide dimension. Does one aim at a grand bargain with Russia or does one slowly build cooperative solutions on sub-regional and practical issues?

Political Considerations

The first step in considering a new arrangement for conventional forces in Europe is to examine how the community reached a stalemate in adapted CFE negotiations. An honest assessment is challenging as it depends on whether one looks at the strategic picture or rather at the tactical level focusing on specific issues. One may argue that NATO’s hardline negotiating approach in the last decade towards implementation of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit decisions essentially gambled the basic structure of military transparency and predictability from the Atlantic to the Urals in an effort to dislodge a rather small Russian contingent of retired military personnel from Gudauta (Georgia) and a few dozen railcars of World War II ammunition from Colbasna (Transnistria). However, this would fail to take into account very real concerns and strong emotions on the part of countries with Russian troops and ordnance on their territory without their

consent. It would also fail to recognize issues of principle and disregard what some have considered to be Russian legal commitments. Finally, it could be interpreted as a mockery of a very complicated process, which all parties once considered to be the cornerstone of European security and which certainly facilitated the transition to a post-Cold War era. Ultimately, assigning blame is hardly helpful in defining the way forward. The challenge will be in rising above the well-known and entrenched positions which prompted the demise of CFE.

The second step should therefore be to identify the various stakeholders among allies and their partners, including Russia with their current interests, and what is at stake for smaller players like Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. A modern arrangement for conventional forces in Europe ought to address today’s security concerns in Europe, with an eye to tomorrow’s. The fragmentation of European security has resulted in a complex web of diverging interests, be it within Russia or within the Alliance. Within Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is likely to be the most interested party in negotiating a new arrangement for the sake of seeking international cooperation given its broad mission, but also for re-engaging the Russian defense establishment in international dialogue. The Ministry of Defense, on the other hand, has little interest in being transparent. In fact, the West is sufficiently transparent as it is with Moscow and it seems of little value to incur the costs of additional obligations when Russia already has what it needs— if not what it hoped for—by maintaining the status quo. To the defense establishment, arms control translates into reduced military options and the Russian military would be prepared to accept such limits only if a reciprocal limit of military options were to be imposed on the other side. The thinking seems still rooted in a “balance” approach to negotiations. In addition, the military-industrial complex appears inimical to any limits likely to constrain its technical options and this corporate influence in Moscow seems to be playing an increasing role. Finally, the Kremlin is unlikely to have organic expertise in conventional arms control. Its role is likely to be limited to taking a position solely in the absence of inter-agency consensus. In such circumstances, its position could be

easily influenced by arguments equating transparency with espionage.

On the NATO side, there is no interest in seeing the relationship with Russia sour further. There are at least two main reasons why allies would wish to continue adapting the conventional arms control regime. First, arms control is a continuing Alliance imperative. The DDPR approved at the 2012 Chicago Summit sees arms control as part and parcel of NATO’s deterrence and defense posture for years to come. A failure on the conventional side could ultimately contribute to dissension over NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture. Second, allies value the system of military transparency and the multinational networks of experts and trained specialists and observers, which has usefully served as the bedrock for cooperative security in Europe.

However, looking more specifically at vested interests of particular allies and partners in the region, there are specific positions at play. For a few allies, including the United States, the continued development of national technical means, combined with the deterioration of Russia’s conventional forces to the point where they no longer represent a credible military threat has rendered the CFE Treaty much less important to military transparency than it was two decades ago. Germany, on the other hand, is a staunch supporter of arms control in Europe and will remain attached to the CFE regime and its modernization. The Treaty has become primarily a “Russia handling” tool in Berlin—a means of promoting military-to-military contacts. For Turkey and Norway, the flank limits on Russian territory are a central feature of the CFE Treaty, because of the restrictions on the levels of Russian military equipment in their border areas with Russia. Romania has also particular interest with regard to Moldova and the Transnistria dispute.

However, Turkey is likely to be the most challenging— albeit instrumental—ally to find compromises, given that it already has accommodated and compromised significantly in the past in terms of the flank regime. Behind Turkish unease at the potential demise of the CFE regime lies the anxiety over the fact that it could worsen tensions

between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries are eager to continue re-arming beyond the levels permitted by the CFE Treaty, and with the demise of CFE, Turkey could experience a full-scale arms race in its region. That said, Turkey's foreign policy is evolving significantly towards a regional role. The overall improvement in Turkish-Russian relations during the past decade has made the CFE issue less prominent in Ankara. In fact, as a significant player in the region, Turkey could become an important driver of an eventual compromise between NATO and Russia.

In the Balkans, some may fear that the demise of the CFE Treaty might undermine the arms control arrangements contained in the Dayton Accords. However, the actual consequences of such a possible demise on sub-regional efforts are not entirely clear. In the Baltic region, the issue is yet again different. There would be no alternative mechanism to ensure transparency of military forces on the territory of the Baltic States and Russia without a conventional forces arrangement. Different sub-regional interests and concerns seem to point increasingly to a "sub-regionalization" of conventional arms control in Europe.

In the end, the main stakeholders in the future of CFE and a potential new arrangement are the countries closest to Russian borders, whether they are NATO members (Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) or whether they are NATO partners (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia). However, beyond the sub-regional dimension of future talks, European-wide interests remain—and so does the key question of how to bring Russia back to the negotiating table. While the United States and the Alliance have provided reassurances to the smaller stakeholders in concrete terms through contingency planning and military exercises, reassurance of a different kind may have to be considered towards Russia, beyond transparency and confidence building measures. It is not entirely clear however whether Russia is genuinely interested in being reassured.

Proposals on Conventional and Non-Strategic Issues

In arguing that the *status quo* is no longer a viable option,

one would have to conclude that allies' legal withdrawal from CFE might ultimately be the only logical outcome. The US strategy should be to initiate a new process, which corresponds to current security concerns in the region, prior to seeking consensus on legal withdrawal from CFE. Given the trend towards a fragmentation of Europe, this may result in a sub-regionalization of negotiations at first towards a future arrangement on conventional forces in Europe to be negotiated over the long run. The principal aim for the new arrangement would be however to focus on the technical elements of conventional arms control in Europe—the very elements that ensured the success of CFE (equipment reductions, data exchange, inspections) and recast the political elements of CFE (its geography, bloc-to-bloc, and balancing approach).

Building on recent discussions within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), one could set-up a new process at thirty-six (thirty CFE states parties and six allied non-CFE states parties). The main idea would be to break down discussions and negotiations into manageable issue-specific task forces, which might meet in different formats and under the auspices of different organization (OSCE, NATO-Russia Council, and NATO). One might start with easier issues thus encouraging eventual agreement on more difficult questions at a later stage. One could also tackle them in parallel to speed up the process. The number of task forces should be open-ended. Four or five issues would lend themselves naturally to the creation of four or five task forces addressing at first: 1) The issue of limits of equipment at a time when further cuts are expected and reduction may seem to be of less interest, but remains crucial in specific sub-regions like the Caucasus. 2) The issue of including in the new arrangement limits on new types of equipment - be it helicopters, naval assets or other equipment of greater concern such as global strike weapons—would respond to the need for modernization addressing current rather than past challenges. 3) The definition of "substantial combat forces" in the context of restraint to which both NATO and Russia committed in the nineties in terms of possible stationing of permanent additional forces towards their respective borders would seem to be long overdue. 4) The successor arrangement to the CFE flank regime

would likely be the most challenging work in developing a new arrangement, and probably the focus of negotiations thereby reinforcing the sub-regionalization of the new arrangement at first. 5) Finally, discussions on possibly new types of inspections, which may consider extending transparency to non-strategic nuclear weapons might pave the way for an interesting development and bridge over discussions from conventional to strategic issues.

Quid Pro Quo on Strategic Issues?

The development of a new arrangement for conventional forces in Europe may still have to "*move at a pace dictated by nuclear atmospherics*" to borrow the phrase of a European arms control expert. Conversely, Moscow argues that progress on the conventional side would be required to address their conventional inferiority, if there is to be discussion on non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. Past negotiations over CFE as well as original talks over mutual balanced force reductions (MBFR) prior to CFE have always reflected the wider strategic relations between East and West, and more specifically the bilateral relationship between the United States and Russia. Arms control is essentially rooted in the ultimate concern over nuclear stability.

In terms of US strategy, it would seem that the *sine qua non* for a new arrangement on conventional forces in Europe lies with incentives for Russia to re-engage in a negotiation process. Such incentives seem to range nowadays from additional nuclear advantages to getting further information on—albeit unrealistic access to—advanced US missile defense technologies through some sharing arrangement. Another type of possible inducement in engaging Russia in further arms control negotiations—possibly as potential follow-on negotiations post-New START—could draw from the NATO DDP and its commitment to develop and exchange transparency and confidence building ideas with Russia towards mutual understanding regarding non-strategic nuclear force postures in Europe.

There may be a *quid pro quo* to be found in focusing discussions regarding non-strategic nuclear weapons through transparency and confidence building rather than limitations at first, while contemplating possible reductions

through unilateral declarations (possibly coordinated). This would allow for initiating negotiations with the Russian Federation to address the disparity between the non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons stockpiles of the Russian Federation and of the United States, and to secure and reduce tactical nuclear weapons in a verifiable manner, as committed to by President Obama in his letter to the Senate dated February 2, 2011.

With regard to missile defense, earlier ambitions for active missile defense cooperation at the level of system(s) may have to be revised for more realistic cooperative measures designed to build confidence and strengthen cooperative security in Europe, rather than pursue "game-changer" objectives. That said, Russia would have to refrain from seeking limitations—numerical or geographical—to the US and NATO system. Reaching a compromise is not impossible if there is sufficient political will on all sides. Clearly, it would remain in the national interest of both Russia and the United States to maintain military situational awareness on ballistic missile threats to Europe from the Middle East. Joint military awareness would provide security and stability for Europe, Russia, and the United States. Transparency efforts and consultation between Russia, the United States, and NATO on missile defenses in Europe should stay the course, and take account of issues of affordability and technological progress. Ultimately, a mix of efforts from arms control negotiations to practical cooperative measures will continue to be required in European security. Moreover, strategic stability talks might assist in developing an ultimate *quid pro quo*, which could lead to possible Declaration(s), at the bilateral and multilateral levels, rather than legally binding agreements, which seem beyond the realm of the possible in today's Congress.

Following on DDP efforts at NATO, there may be scope for a political declaration between allies and Russia building on future exchanges on transparency and confidence building with Russia. This Declaration could offer to: 1) consult with Russia on transparency and confidence building while considering possible future reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons—to be possibly centralized at fewer sites; 2) re-launch negotiations on a new arrangement

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on conventional forces in Europe; and, 3) consider the impact of missile defense on deterrence and defense postures. This effort could be undertaken through a NATO-Russia Council (NRC) dialogue working towards an NRC Declaration in the not-too-distant future.

European Security: Work in Progress

Arms control would seem to continue to offer a useful process in European security, with tools and mechanisms familiar to all with negotiations offering clear rules of the game. It is important to reflect on the continued relevance of arms control in terms of an overall framework to engage in a broad security dialogue with Russia. Arms control is effectively a means to an end. It was developed as a tool for managing risks in an adversarial security relationship. The return to arms control in today's debates may not necessarily imply a return to an adversarial relationship. It may just be an indication that the relationship between Russia and the West is in a state of flux, best characterized as "unfinished business." The role of arms control seems to have evolved from an instrument aimed at mitigating the consequences of military confrontation during the Cold War, to an important tool in today's environment in support of a deteriorating political relationship between Russia and the West, and with a desire to maintain the ultimate goal of cooperative security towards an inclusive security community in Europe—however distant this goal may seem today.

Renewed conventional arms control efforts will have to address the potential use of force regionally or locally, and tailor arms control instruments to the local and sub-regional levels. That said if the goal is to narrowly ensure that Russia will accept that it is in Georgia illegally and for Russia to withdraw and reverse its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the price will likely be too high for the assurances Moscow may draw from a new arrangement on conventional forces in Europe. This is not to diminish the importance of these issues, which still have to be addressed. These politically sensitive issues may stand a better chance of being addressed effectively as part of a broader political dialogue rather than through purely arms control negotiations.

The ultimate goal of an inclusive European security community may still be a distant future, especially at a time when despite twenty years of western cooperation with Russia, the dominant paradigm remains one focused on "mutual assured destruction" and "nuclear atmospherics." The interim goal may be to achieve through "mutual assured stability" a European security community with a set of relations among nations and international organizations where nuclear weapons and deterrence are no longer central since nuclear war is considered "extremely remote", and where peaceful integration in economic, political and diplomatic areas can play an increasing role in limiting major security rifts over territorial, ideological disputes and natural resources.

The outcome is not predetermined. Europe has not reached a secure and peaceful condition, even if most parts of Europe form a security community where resumption of historical conflicts is currently unthinkable. There are still moving parts and some "unfinished business". In terms of inclusive European security community, in the past two decades, allies have developed and sought to implement a vision of "Europe whole, free, and at peace" which focused essentially on Central and Eastern Europe. The unfinished business begs for a broader deal to complete the vision that addresses Russian security concerns, while respecting the security interests of others.

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