



BULLETIN

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NATO Policy towards Russia after the Crimea Annexation: More Deterrence and Farewell to Partnership

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The annexation of Crimea by Russia ruined the already fragile degree of trust it had among NATO members. The Alliance faces the painstaking task of a thorough review of the relationship. The top priority should be to enhance deterrence and defence capabilities for NATO members neighbouring Russia. The restoration of elementary military predictability and confidence in Europe, focused primarily on the situation in Ukraine and Crimea, should also be on the top of the new agenda.

Russia's actions in Ukraine have blatantly breached the fundamental principles of NATO–Russia ties underwritten in the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security and the 2002 Rome Declaration. The pursuit of a “true strategic partnership” with Russia, envisioned by the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept, has ceased to be a realistic goal for the foreseeable future. Russia's incorporation of Crimea has, to a greater extent than the war with Georgia, strengthened the perception that Russia has returned to the role of an assertive regional power seeking to secure its spheres of influence by military means. A repetition of calls for a new, quality relationship that emerged relatively soon after the Georgian conflict seems highly unlikely. NATO members are now forced to drastically reconstruct their long-term approach to Russia.

Disturbing Trends. The conflict in Ukraine follows previous signals indicating the increasing role of military power in the Russian political toolbox. The scale of its “snap military exercises” has intensified since 2013 and they have not only tested the readiness of Russia's armed forces but also have been used as a practical instrument of intimidation and form of aggression. Starting 26 February 2014, Russia conducted a series of manoeuvres with the participation of land forces from its Western and Central Military Districts, along with the Baltic Fleet. The military drills were used not only to cover force redeployments and enable their rapid concentration near the Ukrainian border but also to distract attention from developments in Crimea and to send a message to NATO and EU countries politically engaged in the Ukrainian crises. The dexterity of Russia's rapid mobilisation of armed forces only exasperated its neighbours' anxieties that in the future they may fall prey to a surprise attack.

Russia's attempts to heat up relations with NATO seem to be visible in its practice of using military drills to signal discontent with Alliance activities. For instance, on 30 October 2013, two days after the official commencement of missile defence site construction in Romania, Russia conducted a surprise large-scale readiness test of its missile forces, including the firing of four intercontinental and four short-range ballistic missiles. This shows that Russia's harsh rhetoric against NATO missile defence is augmented by demonstrable action.

Unease about Russia's conduct is reinforced by its decreasing military predictability in Europe. There is no effective and functional conventional arms control mechanism. The existing confidence-building measures are also insufficient. In conducting surprise military drills, Russia exploits loopholes in the 2011 Vienna Document, in which military activities lasting less than 72 hours and carried out without advance notice to the troops involved do not require prior notification of signatories or inviting outside observers. Even in cases of exercises notified in advance, such as “West 2013,” it might be questionable whether the number of troops declared to be involved was accurate. Additionally, and contrary to NATO members' wishes, Russia so far has not been interested in increased transparency

and confidence-building measures related to its non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. It seems also uncertain how long it will remain a party to the INF Treaty, which eliminated ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500–5500 km.

More Deterrence. NATO should react to Russia's recent activities. Taking into account the growing risk of a relatively sudden and unforeseen crisis near NATO's borders, there is a pressing need for the establishment of new forms of NATO military deployments in Central and Eastern European countries. Additional forms of a permanent presence in countries neighbouring Russia would strengthen the message that any act of military aggression against them would spark immediate engagement and a response from other NATO allies.

Of great value to Poland would be the transformation of the current rotational presence of the U.S. Air Force into a permanent deployment. For the Baltic States, of great significance would be supplementing the Air Policing mission with permanent NATO land forces on their territories. This could take the form of continuous rotations of various units or sub-units from NATO countries, which would allow for joint training and the broad participation of allies in sharing the burden of the mission. This would be important as traditionally the interoperability of land forces is the most difficult to achieve. The joint procurement by several Allies of air and missile defence units through the Smart Defence Initiative with the aim of deploying them in the Baltics also seems worthy of consideration. Interest in acquiring this capability has been signalled by Lithuania and Estonia. The involvement of additional states could increase the chances that such costly aspirations would be realised.

To increase the readiness of NATO forces to act in the region, the Allies should establish a schedule of regular exercises for the next several years. NATO should also review the adequacy of its contingency plans and deterrence and defence posture, including power projection and ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) capabilities in light of the lessons learned from the Russian actions in Ukraine.

NATO members should withdraw their proposal of missile defence cooperation with Russia, which involved creating two joint centres to share early warning data and for planning and coordinating responses to ballistic missile attack from a third country. Even though NATO's offer had not been accepted by Russia, such a step would be a clear message of a radical shift in the Alliance stance.

It is highly likely that Russia will intensify the modernisation and rearmament of its military forces in the Western Military District and in Belarus. It is also possible that Russia might release information about Iskander deployments or the basing of nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad to increase pressure on NATO members. Still, the benefits of NATO visible assurances would outweigh any negative consequences, especially when taking into account Russia's now obvious capability to rapidly redeploy its forces, its diverse missile arsenal and the existing insecurity stemming from a lack of transparency about the level of modernisation of Russia's armed forces. In case of disproportionate Russian military deployments near NATO borders, the Allies should consider a wide range of options in response, including an overt withdrawal from political pledges of military restraint in the vicinity of Russia's territory.

The Role of Stability “Re-building” Measures. While also enhancing deterrence and defence, NATO members should strive to improve mechanisms aimed at preventing an uncontrollable escalation of military tensions in Europe. The primary goal should be to create mechanisms focused on stabilising the military situation in and around Ukraine. The NATO countries should use OSCE as the main forum of dialogue for clarifying any military incidents, enable international observers in Crimea, and seek to decrease the concentration of Russian troops in the Ukrainian border area.

NATO should prioritise dialogue and practical cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia. With Russia, direct contacts should focus on re-establishing military predictability and stability in Europe. The Alliance members should underline that the long-term process of re-building trust will not be possible without creating an effective conventional arms control agreement or increasing transparency and confidence-building measures related to non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe. NATO's conceptual work on developing new arms control and confidence-building mechanisms should continue. The Alliance should also maintain its readiness to talk about reciprocal transparency on NATO and Russian missile defence.

Conclusions. The implications of the events in Ukraine on the European security landscape and the need for a deep revision in relations with Russia should be the key features of the next NATO summit, which will be held in September in Wales. The enhancement of NATO regional deterrence and defence will be of crucial importance to Poland and the Baltic States. To convince others to engage in supporting this goal, these states should first of all demonstrate their own commitment to augmenting their defences. Poland can do this by vigorously pursuing its modernisation plans. It should also analyze whether and how its own plans might be harmonised with potential new multinational Smart Defence projects aimed at strengthening NATO's eastern flank. The Baltic States could show their readiness to increase host-nation support to facilitate the presence of NATO allies on their territories, and Lithuania and Latvia should accelerate the timeframe for increasing their defence budgets to 2% of GDP. Simultaneously, Central and Eastern European states should underline the necessity of re-building basic military stability and predictability in Europe.