

# NDC Research Paper

Research Division – NATO Defense College – Rome

## NATO strategy: integrating defense and collaborative security

Schuyler Foerster and Jeffrey A. Larsen



Research Division

No. **18**  
Mar 2021





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NDC Research Paper No.18 – March 2021

NATO Defense College – NDC Research Papers Series

Series editor: Thierry Tardy  
Copy-editing: Mary Di Martino

NDC Research Paper 18 – 2021  
“NATO strategy: integrating defense and collaborative security”  
by Schuyler Foerster and Jeffrey A. Larsen

Keywords

NATO Strategy, Defense, Containment, Harmel Doctrine, Collaborative Security

Nota Bene

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ISSN: **2618-0057**  
ISSN (online): **2618-0251**



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# Acknowledgements

This research is the product of the support and cooperation of over 100 international security experts – both in and out of government – who gave of their time, expertise, and perspective to discuss the issues at the heart of this paper. To the many individuals who helped inform and guide this research, we are in your debt. Any errors of fact or judgment in this paper are the sole responsibility of the authors.

We are especially grateful to the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), which funded this project through the Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (PASCC), and to the PASCC team members who participated in our workshops and provided good counsel along the way. Through their support, we were able to meet with a wide range of experts and policy practitioners in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as the United States. In three workshops – in Brussels (November 2018), Washington, DC (January 2019), and Monterey, CA (March 2019) – we benefitted from the insights of 35 American and European experts and practitioners who participated to discuss the issues addressed in this report.

We also wish to thank the reviewers at the NATO Defense College for their helpful suggestions to improve this work so it could be published in a timely fashion. Our shared objective in this enterprise is to make a meaningful contribution to the NATO Alliance and transatlantic security.

We dedicate this work to Dr. James Smith, Director of the US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at the US Air Force Academy. Jim's lifelong dedication to national security education and the art of strategic thinking has had a major impact on both of us.



# Executive summary

This *Research Paper* addresses four key issues: 1) a holistic definition of strategic stability, highlighting the principal sources of instability in Europe and identifying requirements for strengthening stability in Europe; 2) an examination of recent NATO efforts to shore up its defense and deterrent capabilities, while underscoring the need to address defense against non-military threats to stability; 3) a discussion of how a comprehensive arms control agenda could contribute to strategic stability, including wide-ranging discussions with Moscow about Russia's place in an evolving European security framework; and 4) an analysis of three different strategic approaches that NATO might pursue, each of which combines enhancements to military and non-military defense and the possibility of a broader collaborative security agenda.

The continuing volatility of NATO's strategic environment will require that NATO maintain its long-established strategies of deterrence, defense, and reassurance. However, a strategy that depends almost exclusively on the deployment of military forces will be insufficient to sustain strategic stability in the long run. NATO also requires a clear and purposeful strategy that incorporates both defense and dialogue – including arms control policies – as integral and complementary tools for addressing threats.

The authors recommend that NATO should proceed to shape a new Strategic Concept by outlining a 21<sup>st</sup> century Harmel Doctrine, emphasizing both defense and dialogue with Russia as complementary paths to improving strategic stability. Simultaneously, NATO should fulfill its requirements for a 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy for deterrence and defense in dealing with nuclear, conventional, cyber, hybrid, and other military and non-military threats.

For the foreseeable future, NATO will need to craft a strategy for security and stability in Europe based on the assumption that Russia does not share the West's worldview and will likely continue to seek to undermine the stability and cohesion achieved in Europe following the end of the Cold War. If Russia proves unwilling to engage in a meaningful collaborative security relationship, NATO will be justified in embarking on a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of a renewed “containment” policy that includes the reintroduction of even greater military capabilities in Europe.

In all cases, NATO should ensure that Alliance cohesion – including its transatlantic security link – is preserved even as it deliberates difficult strategic questions.



## List of abbreviations

A2/AD	anti-access/area denial
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe
CSBM	Confidence- and Security-Building Measures
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DCA	Dual-Capable Aircraft
DTRA	Defense Threat Reduction Agency
EST	European Security Treaty
EU	European Union
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PASCC	Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



# Introduction

In November 2019, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War One, *The Economist* explained that “the first world war happened because a generation of Victorian leaders took for granted the stable order that had prevailed in Europe for decades”.<sup>1</sup> In many respects, this is a refrain for our time as well. Despite the traumas of the Cold War and the more than a quarter century that has followed, Europe has enjoyed a substantial and, in many ways, unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. The geopolitical stability of the bipolar Cold War standoff gave way to a Europe that was much closer to the ideal of “a Europe whole and free and at peace”<sup>2</sup> than at any time in its history. NATO as a Cold War political-military Alliance was the essential pillar of security that underpinned a broader movement toward European integration and transcended the nationalist tensions that had spawned two world wars in the twentieth century. With the end of the Cold War, both NATO and the European Union (EU) – together comprising the heart of what we call “the West” in this paper – saw their boundaries and influence increase as each adapted to a new geopolitical reality rather than collapse following the demise of the Soviet Union and its empire in eastern Europe.

Despite what seemed for more than two decades to be a “new normal” of post-Cold War stability, however, Europe now faces the dangers of a revisionist great power on its eastern flank, alongside the persistent threat of terrorism, plus fragile political and economic institutions among many states on Europe’s southern periphery – all of which challenge the stability of European governments and societies.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the foundations of Western cohesion – collective defense, transatlantic security bonds, and European political and economic integration – are showing their age and potential fragility. These institutions are not doomed to failure or on the verge of disintegration, but neither can their continued

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1 Charlemagne, “Lessons from history 100 years after the Armistice”, *The Economist*, 8 November 2018, [www.economist.com/europe/2018/11/08/lessons-from-history-100-years-after-the-armistice](http://www.economist.com/europe/2018/11/08/lessons-from-history-100-years-after-the-armistice)

2 President George H.W. Bush first outlined this vision – and this oft-repeated phrase – in a speech in Mainz, Germany, 31 May 1989. See “A Europe whole and free”, US Diplomatic Mission to Germany press release, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga6-890531.htm>

3 The challenges to NATO stability from the “South” are qualitatively different than the issues that are the focus of this study, except insofar as they threaten Alliance cohesion and contribute to disparate threat perceptions among Allies. See J.A. Larsen and K. Koehler, “Projecting stability: NATO’s ‘new’ mission to the South”, in E. Cusumano and S. Hofmaier (eds.), *Projecting resilience across the Mediterranean*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2019, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-23641-0\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-23641-0_3)

success be taken for granted. Within the institutions and national capitals of NATO and the EU, there is no clarity about how to respond to the challenges of a strategic environment that has become unstable.

This study examines the challenges to strategic stability in Europe, as they relate to NATO in particular,<sup>4</sup> and analyzes the prospects for a NATO strategy that integrates both defense and collaborative security to address those challenges. The paper begins with an overview of the challenges facing European security in the near term, with an emphasis on Russia and the particular threat it presents along NATO's eastern flank. This first part also looks at NATO's current strategy for dealing with this threat, as well as how that approach supports strategic stability in the region. In the second part, we examine three options for the Alliance, and, more broadly, for Europe as a whole: a military response, focusing on defense, deterrence, and containment, akin to George Kennan's recommendations in the late 1940s; a hybrid approach that can be likened to a "new Harmel", in which the Alliance combines both defense and dialogue to develop a mixed approach to dealing with Russia much as it did during the second half of the Cold War;<sup>5</sup> and a response focusing primarily on ending the Russian threat via a new European security conference, something Moscow has pushed for in recent years, akin to a "new Yalta" in which Russia would have its place as a co-founder and major power. The authors recommend the second approach – a new Harmel – which would combine steely resolve in the form of military preparations with a return to collaborative security tools such as cooperative security measures, arms control, and simply talking with the adversary. Each option includes pros, cons, and specific recommendations for NATO in its development. The paper concludes with a section on implications for the Alliance in its choice of responses to the Russian challenge.

The research for this paper was conducted using secondary sources, as well as primary source field interviews with more than 100 European security experts on both sides of the Atlantic. This year-long effort concluded with expert workshops in Brussels, Washington, DC, and Monterey, California.

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4 While this study focuses on NATO, we stress the importance of greater collaboration between NATO and other European security institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Addressing threats to strategic stability involve issues beyond the competence of NATO alone.

5 The original Harmel Report, "On the Future Tasks of the Alliance", was authored by Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel and approved by NATO in December 1967 ([www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_26700.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm)). The Report advocated a two-track strategy, based on the principle that "military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complementary". The authors of this paper recommend that NATO more vigorously pursue a similar strategy today, as described later in the paper.

# The need for a new NATO strategy in a more dangerous world

## The return of Russia as a great power competitor

During the Cold War, strategic stability in Europe derived principally from two factors. First, though obviously a substantial military threat to NATO, Russia also had to contend with the likelihood that any war in Europe could escalate to global thermonuclear war, in which the notion of “victory” would have no meaning.<sup>6</sup> This led to more cautious behavior on both sides. Second, stability derived from the cohesion of the Western Alliance, grounded in shared political values, collective defense, and the decades-long commitment of the United States to European security. Although the Cold War witnessed numerous crises that brought the world to the brink of cataclysmic war, even during its most frigid moments there was a shared interest in ensuring that the crisis continued to be managed carefully; the risks of war had to be communicated clearly; and the two superpowers needed to remain in continual dialogue to maintain this fragile peace. In addition, for the West, it remained vital that the Alliance hold together.

Today, the possibility of strategic surprise is greater than it has been for decades. We see challenges to strategic stability in Europe on several fronts. Most visibly, Russia has pushed back against the West, openly using military force in Georgia and Ukraine, asserting its right to be treated as a great power and to dominate a sphere of influence in which it believes the West is encroaching.<sup>7</sup> Putin’s regime consistently protests the incursion of “Western” institutions and values into the former Soviet space and views this as a direct threat to Russian national interests.<sup>8</sup> Russia’s nuclear and conventional military capabilities

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6 President Reagan’s mantra – “nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought” – was the foundation of his relationship with Gorbachev. See the Joint Soviet-United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva, 21 November 1985, [www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/112185a](https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/112185a)

7 Dealing with a world of increasing “great power competition” is a core theme of both the 2017 US National Security Strategy (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>) and the 2018 National Defense Strategy, *Sharpening the American military’s competitive edge* (<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>).

8 This difference in “worldview” is particularly evident in the 2016 Russian National Security Strategy. See [www.icee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf](http://www.icee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf), paras.12, 15,

are being enhanced in ways that are potentially destabilizing, including a renewed emphasis on deploying nuclear weapons that can hold at risk critical targets in Europe, as well as novel nuclear systems meant to buttress Russia's secure second strike capabilities, thereby attempting to deter the West from responding to conventional or unconventional Russian actions. Similarly, Russia's growing offensive cyber and anti-satellite capabilities offer additional destabilizing avenues for preemption.<sup>9</sup>

Even as Russia has sought to improve its warfighting postures, it has increasingly emphasized non-military, asymmetric, or so-called "hybrid" operations to achieve its goals, which have targeted – with alarming effectiveness and much less cost and risk – the resilience of Western democratic institutions. These include political measures and new technologies for sophisticated information warfare, attacking critical infrastructure, and shaping a political environment to one's advantage, all without resort to military force.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, debates within Europe about immigration and the benefits of economic integration have engendered a rise of nationalism and "nativism", which – on a societal level – run counter to the integrationist ethos of the "European project" and – on a policy level – fuel the political appeal of efforts to regain national sovereignty at the expense of European multilateral cooperation. Although this is not a "NATO phenomenon", it is having a significant effect on the political dynamics of almost all NATO member states.<sup>11</sup>

17, & 18. For a broader discussion of Russia's distinctly "non-Western" view of the world, see K. Giles, *Moscow rules: what drives Russia to confront the West*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, Chatham House Insight Series, 2019. See also A. Stent, "What drives Russian foreign policy?" in J. R. Deni (ed.), *Current Russia military affairs: assessing and countering Russian strategy, operational planning, and modernization*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, July 2018, p.6, and *The limits of partnership: US-Russian relations in the twenty-first century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2014; also M. Kofman, "Drivers of Russian grand strategy", *Frivärld*, April 2019, at <https://frivarld.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Drivers-of-Russian-Grand-Strategy.pdf>

9 See J. Miller & R. Fontaine, *Navigating dangerous pathways: a pragmatic approach to US-Russian relations and strategic stability*, Center for New American Security, Washington, DC, January 2018, [www.cnas.org/publications/reports/navigating-dangerous-pathways](http://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/navigating-dangerous-pathways); S. Charap, "Strategic Sderzhivanie: understanding contemporary Russian approaches to 'deterrence'", *Security Insights* No.62, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, September 2020, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP68279.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP68279.html); R. Cohen and A. Radin, "Russia's hostile measures in Europe", RAND, 2019, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1700/RR1793/RAND\\_RR1793.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1793/RAND_RR1793.pdf); K. Giles, "Russia's 'new' tools for confronting the West: continuity and innovation in Moscow's exercise of power", RUSI Research Paper, Chatham House, March 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/03/russias-new-tools-confronting-west-continuity-and-innovation-moscows-exercise-power>; and D. Johnson, *Russia's conventional precision strike capabilities, regional crises, and nuclear thresholds*, *Livermore Papers on Global Security*, No.3. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, CA, February 2018, <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/Precision-Strike-Capabilities-report-v3-7.pdf>

10 This theme is highlighted in the 2016 Russian National Security Strategy, para.36. See J. White, *Dismiss, distort, distract, dismay: continuity and change in Russian disinformation*, Free University Brussels, Institute for European Studies, Iss.13, May 2016, [www.ies.be/node/3689](http://www.ies.be/node/3689); also G. Lasconjarias and J. Larsen (eds.), *NATO's response to hybrid threats*, NATO Defense College, Rome, December 2015, [www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=0#](http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=0#). On Russian influence in European elections, see "Putin's asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for US National Security", Minority Staff Report, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 10 January 2018, [www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FinalRR.pdf](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FinalRR.pdf)

11 On Europe's populist challenge, see M. Browne, D. Rohac and C. Kenney, *Europe's populist challenge: origins, sup-*

President Trump's equivocation regarding the US commitment to transatlantic security raised serious doubts among European Allies about the durability of that commitment, exacerbating already centrifugal forces challenging Alliance cohesion. Notwithstanding repeated assurances by senior Administration officials and the US Congress, this resulted in serious damage to transatlantic ties.<sup>12</sup> Restoring faith in the US Alliance commitment is a key priority for the new Biden Administration.

The significance of a more holistic definition of strategic stability is that we can see more clearly how European stability is threatened in ways short of war. Threats to strategic stability in Europe – including from assertive great powers such as Russia – are not only military. There are those who argue that Russia is inherently expansionist and aggressive.<sup>13</sup> Hence, NATO must anticipate that Russia will – if it sees an opportunity – employ its formidable military capabilities against one or more of NATO's members and must therefore be prepared both to deter such action and to defend territory if deterrence fails. This is NATO's core mission of collective defense, embodied in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that Russia's historic fear of outsiders has engendered a defensive, even paranoid, mindset among Moscow's leaders.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it may be that Russia fully appreciates the risks associated with engaging NATO directly with military force, especially if that includes the risk of nuclear war for anything other than

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porters, and responses, Center for American Progress, 10 May 2018, [www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/05/10/450430/europes-populist-challenge/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/05/10/450430/europes-populist-challenge/); I. Krastev, "Eastern Europe's illiberal revolution: the long road to democratic decline", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.97, Iss.3, pp.49-59; and R. Wike, K. Simmons, B. Stokes, and J. Fetterolf, *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy – But Many also endorse Nondemocratic Alternatives*, Pew Research Center, 16 October 2017, [http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/10/17102729/Pew-Research-Center-Democracy-Report\\_2017.10.16.pdf](http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/10/17102729/Pew-Research-Center-Democracy-Report_2017.10.16.pdf)

12 This damage will presumably be repaired under a new presidential administration. For a representative analysis, see S. Erlanger and K. Bennhold, "Rift between Trump and Europe is now open and angry", *The New York Times*, 17 February 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/europe/trump-international-relations-munich.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/europe/trump-international-relations-munich.html). Also C. Stelzenmueller, "Hostile ally: the Trump challenge and Europe's inadequate response", The Brookings Institute, August 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/hostile-ally-the-trump-challenge-and-europes-inadequate-response/>

13 This is the predominant view in NATO and its member states, and as such, there is a large body of recent literature reflecting this perspective, including many of the sources found in the footnotes in this paper. See, for example, A. Peczel, "Defining the needed balance of deterrence and arms control in Europe", in A. Morgan and A. Peczel (eds.), "Europe's evolving deterrence discourse", *Center for Global Security Research Occasional Paper*, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, CA, October 2020; R. Blackwill and P. Gordon, *Containing Russia, Council Special Report No.80*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, January 2018; R. Cohen and A. Radin, "Russia's hostile measures in Europe: understanding the threat", *Report RR1793*, RAND, 2019; and K. Giles, "Russia's 'new' tools for confronting the West: continuity and innovation in Moscow's exercise of power", *Chatham House Research Paper*, RUSI, March 2016.

14 Examples of this perspective are more often heard in European conferences than seen in publications. This is especially true in Germany and the Mediterranean states. Recent publications touching on this issue include A. Monaghan, *Dealing with the Russians*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2019; S. Rynning, "NATO's futures: the Atlantic Alliance between power and purpose", *NDC Research Paper No.2*, NATO Defense College, Rome, March 2019; and A. Motyl, "Putin may want to be an Emperor, but Russia isn't an imperial power", *ForeignPolicy.com*, 28 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/28/putin-may-want-to-bean-emperor-but-russia-isnt-an-imperial-power/>

vital national security interests.<sup>15</sup> In that case, one could have more confidence in NATO's posture of extended deterrence. It also suggests that the West should be more attentive to policies that appear threatening and provocative to Russia, even if the West's intentions are benign. The West should also take seriously non-military threats that offer Russia the opportunity to achieve political ends without the costs or risks of military action.

Whatever the motivation behind Russian actions, however, Russia is demonstrably improving its capabilities to advance political goals while acting under a threshold that would trigger a consensus NATO decision to invoke the collective defense commitment in accordance with Article 5. With military force in the background as intimidation, Russia is increasingly in a position to threaten NATO's security interests and present the West with a political *fait accompli*, possibly without the overt use of force. This is a clear form of strategic instability.<sup>16</sup>

On a broader geopolitical front, the West – NATO member states and European Union (EU) members – must deal with political divisions of their own making. Each of these domestic political situations poses an opportunity for Russia to seek to undermine the cohesion of the West, which has been so critical to strategic stability over the past seven decades. The more Russia can exacerbate political schisms and instill doubt about the wisdom of multilateral cooperation, especially in security matters, the more there is doubt about the West's ability to respond to intimidation and a possible *fait accompli*.<sup>17</sup> There would be no greater prize for Russia than for the United States to be “de-coupled” from the security of Europe, regardless whether such a wound might be self-inflicted.

### ***NATO's defense challenge***

Following the Cold War, US military forces in Europe declined from almost 350,000 to just over 50,000 in 2016.<sup>18</sup> Allies (including the United States) significantly reduced defense

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15 See, for example, Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov, “Russia's foreign policy in a historical perspective”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 30 March 2016, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russias-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067>

16 For representative papers on this, see B. Hodges, J. Bugajski, and P. Doran, “Securing the Suwalki corridor: strategy, statecraft, deterrence, and defense”, Center for European Policy Analysis, July 2018, [www.cepa.org/securing-the-suwalki-corridor](http://www.cepa.org/securing-the-suwalki-corridor); D. Barrie, B. Barry, L. Beraud-Sudreau, H. Boyd, N. Childs, and B. Giegerich, “Defending Europe: scenario-based capability requirements for NATO's European members”, International Institute for Strategic Studies, April 2019, [www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe](http://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe); and D. Shlapak and M. Johnson, *Reinforcing deterrence on NATO's Eastern flank: wargaming the defense of the Baltics*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2016, [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

17 For a review of recent Russian misbehavior in the soft power arena, See H.R. McMaster, *Battlefields: the fight to defend the free world*, HarperCollins, New York, 2020, chapters 1-2.

18 “US Military Presence in Europe (1945-2016)”, US European Command, 26 May 2016, [www.eucom.mil/doc/35220/u-s-forces-in-europe](http://www.eucom.mil/doc/35220/u-s-forces-in-europe). That number continued to drop in subsequent years, and in 2020 President Trump announced a withdrawal of one-third of the remaining US forces in Germany. See “US to withdraw 12,000 troops from Germany in ‘strategic’ move”, BBC online, 29 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53589245>

expenditures as a percent of gross domestic product, and many redirected substantial military forces to other purposes.<sup>19</sup> In NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, the need to "preserve the strategic balance in Europe" had disappeared from its long-standing inclusion in the list of "tasks of the Alliance", replaced by new missions of "conflict prevention" and "crisis management" as NATO focused on trying to establish and maintain peace in the Balkans.<sup>20</sup> Thus began a decade and a half of so-called "out-of-area" military operations and the neglect of Europe's core security needs.

The Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea in early 2014 signaled that the security challenges in Europe that had given birth to NATO 65 years before had not disappeared. At its summit meeting in Wales in September 2014, NATO Allies declared that "Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace".<sup>21</sup> The security environment in Europe had suddenly become volatile, as Russia increasingly asserted its interests in Europe through a wide range of military and non-military policy instruments that undermined strategic stability.

NATO may no longer face the Cold War threat of a massive Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe, backed up by Soviet tactical and strategic nuclear capabilities. Nonetheless, Russian military capabilities pose a significant threat in at least five respects.<sup>22</sup> First, so-called "hybrid" warfare initiatives are designed to destabilize NATO members and partners, undermine Alliance cohesion, and accomplish political and military objectives without engaging a concerted NATO response.<sup>23</sup> Second, the prospect of grabbing NATO

19 In 1990, median NATO military expenditures were 2.5 percent of GDP; by 2014, they had declined to a median of 1.3 percent of GDP. T. Sandler and J. George, "Military expenditure trends for 1960-2014 and what they reveal", *Global Policy*, Vol.7, No.2, May 2016, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1758-5899.12328>

20 Compare the 1991 and 1999 NATO Strategic Concepts at [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm) and [www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_27433.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm)

21 NATO's Wales Summit Declaration, 5 September 2014, [www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm). On this transition in NATO's thinking, see R. Moore and D. Coletta (eds.), *NATO's return to Europe: engaging Ukraine, Russia, and beyond*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2017.

22 For a comprehensive overview of Russian military developments, especially improvements in conventional warfighting capabilities, see K. Hicks, L. Sawyer Samp, et al., *Recalibrating US strategy toward Russia: a new time for choosing*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 2017, chapter 3, [www.csis.org/analysis/recalibrating-us-strategy-toward-russia](http://www.csis.org/analysis/recalibrating-us-strategy-toward-russia). See also C. Brustlein, "The erosion of strategic stability and the future of arms control in Europe", *Proliferation Papers* No.60, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, November 2018, [www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/brustlein\\_erosion\\_strategic\\_stability\\_2018\\_3.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/brustlein_erosion_strategic_stability_2018_3.pdf)

23 Notwithstanding a debate about the so-called "Gerasimov Doctrine" (named after the Chief of the Russian General Staff), a distinctive part of that strategy is the manipulation of information as a critical element of warfare – as a prelude, substitute, or complement to the use of military force – to achieve political objectives. See A. Kramer, "Russian General Pitches 'information' operations as a form of war", *The New York Times*, 2 March 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/world/europe/russia-hybrid-war-gerasimov.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/world/europe/russia-hybrid-war-gerasimov.html). For a discussion of hybrid warfare and its application in Ukraine, see H. Reisinger and A. Golts, "Russia's hybrid warfare: waging war below the radar of traditional collective defense", in G. Lasconjarias and J. Larsen (eds.), "NATO's response to hybrid threats", *Forum Paper* No.24, NATO Defense College, Rome, December 2015, pp.113-136.

member territory with numerically superior in-theater conventional and special forces could present NATO with a political *fait accompli*. Third, Russian anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) and other conventional defense capabilities are designed to prevent NATO from mounting any substantial defense or reinforcement of states on NATO's periphery, forcing NATO to choose between two unacceptable responses and one unlikely alternative: accepting a Russian tactical or regional victory, or escalating the conflict with the use of nuclear weapons, or fighting a long conventional campaign to recapture lost territory. Fourth, Russia backstops its conventional capabilities with significantly improved theater and strategic nuclear forces, thus potentially threatening the United States and putting into question the viability of NATO's extended deterrence posture. Fifth, growing Russian offensive cyber and anti-satellite capabilities threaten the West's systemic dependency on vulnerable information systems, inviting destabilizing scenarios for preemption and rapid escalation in a crisis.

### ***A holistic definition of strategic stability***

The security community regularly calls for a return to “strategic stability” in Europe, but there is no consensus on what constitutes strategic stability in either a global or regional context.<sup>24</sup> In the Cold War, the concept of strategic stability emphasized measures to enhance predictability by reducing the possibility of miscalculation and the incentives for preemption in a crisis or escalation in a conflict, especially in a nuclear confrontation. Most discussions of strategic stability today focus on the relationship between opposing military forces – particularly nuclear forces – and whether their numbers, characteristics, and deployments are such that a prospective adversary would perceive an incentive to initiate conflict or to escalate to a level of warfare that cannot be controlled.

For this study, we defined strategic stability as *resistance to sudden change, such that a security relationship is unlikely to shift quickly from peace to war even under pressure of a crisis*. This definition does not connote absence of change, only that, to the extent possible, change will be measured and deliberate, evolutionary, predictable, and manageable.<sup>25</sup> This more holistic view includes – but goes beyond – the traditional focus on military and particularly nuclear

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24 This is a central theme of Eldridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson (eds.), *Strategic stability: contending interpretations*, Carlisle, PA, Strategic Studies Institute & US Army War College Press, 2013, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2216.pdf>; and L. Rubin & A. N. Stulberg (eds), *The end of strategic stability? Nuclear weapons and the challenge of regional rivalries*, Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 2018. See also C. S. Chivvis, A. Radin, D. Massicot and C. Reach, *Strengthening strategic stability with Russia*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2017, [www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE234.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE234.html)

25 This definition is based on an earlier study by one of the authors, which analyzed in greater detail the nature of strategic stability in Europe, its historical conditions, and contemporary sources of instability. See S. Foerster, *Structural change in Europe: implications for strategic stability*, US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies, August 2018, [https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Strategic-Stability-in-Europe\\_Foerster\\_2018.pdf](https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/Strategic-Stability-in-Europe_Foerster_2018.pdf)

forces. This is a dynamic concept and applies both to the broader strategic relationship as well as to the military relationship. At its core, strategic stability is about preserving a degree of predictability about state behavior, and reducing uncertainty in a crisis, to reduce the risks of miscalculation in circumstances that might escalate into conflict or from one level of conflict to another.

Strategic stability in Europe is fundamentally a political condition, driven significantly – but by no means exclusively – by military considerations. This report looks at two baskets of factors that influence stability: defense and dialogue. It employs the term “defense” to include more than force posture improvements, and “dialogue”, or more broadly “collaborative security”, to include more than traditional arms control measures. This is not simply a question of semantics. It reflects the extent to which the requirements for strategic stability in Europe have changed in today’s more complex environment.

In this definition, “defense” reflects the reality that threats to strategic stability are both military and non-military, particularly in a world facing an emerging conflict spectrum ranging from hybrid warfare to nuclear use. Defense against those threats requires more than just improvements in one’s traditional military force posture. Similarly, “collaborative security” includes standard arms control measures such as limits on the numbers or types or deployments of categories of military forces or confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) designed to enhance transparency and predictability. It also includes steps to build a broader security relationship between prospective adversaries, to avoid miscalculation and to engender a sense of mutual confidence in the stability of the relationship. Collaborative security should anticipate the possibility of larger discussions among all key stakeholders about the future security architecture of Europe.



## Designing a coherent NATO strategy

In many ways, NATO's security challenges today are more formidable than in the Cold War, when nuclear and conventional military balances were the dominant variables. Current and prospective threats encompass new technologies in new domains that defy the traditional application of theories of deterrence and defense. In addition, non-military tools can be just as disruptive, if not destructive, as military forces. While NATO clearly appreciates – through its rhetoric – the scale of this challenge, it is altogether a different matter to integrate new defensive capabilities, policies, and procedures into an established organization.

Historically, NATO has often turned to “dual-track” decisions to address security challenges, most notably in the 1967 Harmel Report, which stressed the complementarity of defense and détente, as well as the 1979 “dual-track decision” on intermediate range nuclear forces.<sup>26</sup> In recent years, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg has spoken frequently of the need for “defense and dialogue” as essential to building a stable relationship with Russia.<sup>27</sup> Such a dual-track strategy not only has the potential for contributing to the overall stability of the strategic relationship, but also brings the additional benefit of bolstering domestic political support within the Alliance for continued necessary investments in defense capability.

Defense and collaborative security are complementary rather than competing approaches to strengthening strategic stability in Europe. Ultimately, sustaining strategic stability in Europe will depend on a comprehensive political, economic, social, diplomatic, and military approach in the face of fundamental changes in the European strategic environment. Within that context, NATO will need to develop a coherent security strategy that incorporates improvements in defense and pursuit of a collaborative security relationship with Russia as complementary tools for maintaining stability in its increasingly volatile relationship with Russia.

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26 “Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance”, 1967, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_67927.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67927.htm)

27 The formulation “defense and dialogue” is sometimes also framed as “deterrence, defense, and dialogue”. See, for example, Secretary General Stoltenberg’s remarks, “NATO engages: the Alliance at 70”, following his address to a Joint Session of the US Congress, Washington DC, 3 April 2019, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_165212.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_165212.htm)

Integrating defense and collaborative security as complementary elements in NATO strategy is the ideal. On the one hand, incorporating offers for collaboration with a potential adversary is good politics when advocating for defense improvements. It is also sound strategy: the security environment is too dangerous and too prone to miscalculation if NATO and Russia spiral into an unconstrained strategic competition.

While NATO can control the decisions it makes about defense improvements, it cannot control the decisions of the Russian government and whether Russia is interested in building any kind of collaborative security arrangement. Thus, NATO strategy needs to be coherent within its own logic, without being hostage to the decisions of the Russian government.

In that regard, we see three broad strategic approaches that NATO can take, each of which integrates political and military actions that NATO can control, but only one of which will truly serve as a balanced approach to strategic stability.<sup>28</sup> The Alliance can pursue a military buildup to deal from a position of strength with the direct threat of aggression from a nuclear-armed great power on its periphery, although that would come with tremendous political and economic burdens. Alternatively, NATO could resurrect an approach it has used successfully in the past, pursuing defense and dialogue with Russia. This was its preferred approach in the 1967 Harmel Report, the 1979 dual-track approach to Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF), and multiple arms control negotiating fora from the 1960s until 2011. A third option would be one whereby the West might wish to acknowledge Russia's legitimate security concerns (some of them self-inflicted) and consider a pan-European security conference that would address Russia's place in a future security arrangement with its neighbors. Each approach has positive and negative aspects, and each is analyzed below.

## **Option 1: a new containment strategy**

This strategy is modeled after the initial US containment strategy spelled out in 1947.<sup>29</sup> George Kennan's premise was that the Soviet Union's world view – both because it was Soviet and because it was Russian – would never be compatible with a Western liberal vision of the world order; therefore, one should not count on the Soviet Union to cooperate with the West. The Soviets might demonstrate flexibility on tactical matters for expediency's sake,

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28 A similar framing of options is offered by T. Aust, "Modernized deterrence and revitalized dialogue: adapting the Harmel Report to the post-2014 Europe", *Research Paper* No.146, NATO Defense College, Rome, May 2018, [www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1182](http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1182)

29 "X" (G.F. Kennan), "The sources of Soviet conduct", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.25, Iss.4, July 1947, [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1947-07-01/sources-soviet-conduct](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1947-07-01/sources-soviet-conduct). Also see J. L. Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: an American life*, Penguin Press, New York, 2011.

but the West simply could not rely on Russian good will to achieve its political objectives.

In the same manner, a 21<sup>st</sup> century variant of this strategy – dubbed by some as “constraintment” – presumes that Russia and the West do not share fundamental interests.<sup>30</sup> For its own purposes, Russia might be prepared to pursue extension of New START or preserve existing CSBMs that give it greater awareness of Western military preparations, but it would be unlikely that Russia would be willing to move forward with any bolder agenda. Therefore the West must rely on military force to contain Russian ambitions.

For NATO, protecting the Alliance is a principal objective. Hence, NATO should proceed with measures designed to shore up its own deterrence, defense, reassurance, and resilience capabilities, while avoiding unduly provocative actions that might precipitate a crisis. The authors suggest several specific recommendations for strengthening NATO’s military capabilities in the following section.

Although NATO would, in this model, be willing to engage with Russia on a broader security agenda, NATO might insist on a variety of preconditions for improved relations, including rescinding the annexation of Crimea and withdrawing Russian military forces from Ukraine, Georgia, and Transnistria – conditions which Russia would likely refuse to contemplate without major concessions from the West, and perhaps not even then.

Clearly, NATO must meet the twin requirements of deterring a prospective adversary that has the full panoply of nuclear weapons and conventional forces deployed near NATO territory, and reassuring Allies, so they have confidence in the Alliance’s extended deterrent. But NATO must also take care to reassure potential adversaries that its efforts in deterrence and reassurance are not seen as provocative or posing an offensive military threat. This is a difficult balance, all the more because shaping a balanced policy requires consensus among thirty Allies with differing perspectives and objectives. These are ultimately political decisions, which should be guided by the requirements to strengthen strategic stability

### *Pros and cons of option 1*

For NATO, the advantages of this option are, first, that it is – like Kennan’s 1947 concept – a strategy that realistically accepts Russian behavior at its face value and pragmatically avoids trying to change what one cannot change. NATO can proceed at its own pace in making defense improvements and chart future defense investments on its own terms. It is also a *status quo* orientation, which will resonate well within governments and bureaucracies.

The disadvantage of such an approach, however, is that it may not be politically or

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30 See A. Jain, D. Wilson, F. Hampson, S. Palamar, C. Grand, *et al.*, “Strategy of ‘constraintment’: countering Russia’s challenge to the democratic order”, Atlantic Council, March 2017, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/strategy-of-constraintment](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/strategy-of-constraintment)

economically sustainable. NATO's decades-long neglect of defense investments after the end of the Cold War contributed to the current state of strategic instability in Europe, but there is nothing in this strategy to motivate European governments to make significantly greater investments going forward. Hence, this strategy does not address the real sources of strategic instability in Europe, while at the same time failing to provide a political framework in which NATO can effectively address them itself.

## **Option 2: a new Harmel doctrine**

Whereas the first model reflects pessimism about the prospects for meaningful engagement with Russia, and the third model expresses cautious optimism about the possibility that one could craft a substantive dialogue, this hybrid model represents middle ground that draws from NATO's 1967 Harmel Report by emphasizing the complementarity of defense and détente. As such, this model pairs explicit commitments to improve NATO defense posture with concrete proposals to advance a collaborative security agenda, without committing to wider discussions about the nature of Europe's security architecture.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Existing arms control regimes***

During the Cold War, policymakers understood the distinctions between “arms control” and “disarmament”, emphasizing the former as a valid policy instrument designed to enhance stability in an otherwise confrontational strategic relationship.<sup>32</sup> In that regard, arms control was viewed as an essential complement to strategic policy, principally designed to reduce the ability to launch surprise attack and to minimize incentives to do so in a crisis.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of the Cold War, European security was bolstered by a network of arms control regimes placing verifiable limits on strategic nuclear weapons (START), intermediate-range nuclear forces, and conventional forces (CFE). In addition, the Open Skies Treaty and a variety of CSBMs applied by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including the Vienna Document, were designed to promote greater transparency of military forces and their deployments and exercises.<sup>34</sup>

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31 The “Report on future tasks of the Alliance” (Harmel Report), 13 December 1967, can be found at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_26700.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm)

32 See, especially, T. Schelling and M. Halperin, *Strategy and arms control*, New York, Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985, reprinted from the 1961 original, and H. Bull, *The control of the arms race: disarmament and arms control in the missile age*, Praeger, New York, 1965.

33 Although the concept was applied principally to nuclear weapons, the same concepts featured in conventional arms control. See S. Foerster, W. Barry III, W. Clontz, and H. Lynch, Jr., *Defining stability: conventional arms control in a changing Europe*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1989.

34 For a comprehensive survey of arms control – its historical background, accomplishments, and issues through the end

Since the end of the Cold War, this network has substantially unraveled.

During the first Obama administration, Russia under President Medvedev had demonstrated a willingness to engage on a variety of arms control measures, including signature of the New START Treaty and advancing a variety of new provisions to adapt the Vienna Document. Since Vladimir Putin's return to the Russian presidency in 2012, however, Russia has shown little willingness to build on the post-Cold War arms control framework and increasing reluctance to adhere to or advance CSBMs that it views as excessively intrusive.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the United States during the Trump administration echoed these views with a hardline approach that diminished the role and value of arms control and withdrew from several treaties.

As part of this model, NATO could embark on drafting a new Strategic Concept with the following elements:

- affirm that the principles from the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris remain the basis for achieving a Europe “whole, free, and at peace”;
- recognize the fundamental differences in Western and Russian worldviews, while acknowledging the need to address a wide range of challenges to strategic stability;
- affirm the role of arms control and CSBMs in reducing: 1) incentives for surprise attack; 2) opportunities for miscalculation; and 3) uncontrolled escalation in a conflict – all interests that are shared by Russia;
- specify NATO's priorities for engaging with Russia in various forums – including adapting the NATO-Russia Council – on measures to increase strategic stability and affirm NATO's willingness for meaningful dialogue with Russia on matters involving mutual security interests;
- outline the requirements for a 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy for deterrence and defense in dealing with changing nuclear, conventional, cyber, hybrid, and other military and non-military threats;
- identify specific defense investments needed to meet this wider range of responsibilities;
- reaffirm NATO's commitment to pursue, in concrete ways, “both defense and dialogue” as complementary paths to improving strategic stability.

### *Elements of a collaborative security relationship*

Experts interviewed as part of this study overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of

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of the 20th century – see J. Larsen (ed.), *Arms control: cooperative security in a changing environment*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2002.

35 V. Pacer, *Russian foreign policy under Dmitry Medvedev, 2008-2012*, Routledge, London, 2016, p.85.

building a collaborative security relationship with Russia. But in an increasingly volatile security environment, the presence of advanced conventional forces, theater nuclear weapons, and new weapons technologies pose unprecedented strategic threats, for which traditional arms control and confidence building arrangements may not be effective. Hence, in this respect, simply re-creating regimes from the 1980s would not be a preferred strategy.

Future arms control policies may need to move beyond their traditional emphasis on regulating numbers and types of certain categories of weapons and cultivate elements of a broader collaborative security relationship, to avoid miscalculation and to engender a sense of mutual confidence in the stability of the relationship. In an age of radically changing weapons technologies and new kinds of non-military threats, arms control should seek to reinforce a shared common interest in preserving the stability of an otherwise contentious relationship, while addressing factors that could lead to catastrophic war, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

Fashioning a relevant and effective strategy must begin with the recognition that there are fundamental differences between a Western view of strategic stability and Russia's view. Russia may well view "strategic stability" in Europe as one in which NATO strength is dissipated and the US disengages from Europe. There is good evidence to suggest that Russia's preferred view of strategic stability is one in which it dominates an unassailable and recognized sphere of influence that provides a sufficient geopolitical buffer for Russian security.

Whether this incompatibility of worldviews would allow pursuit of a collaborative strategy with Russia is not yet clear. Today, some argue that this gap is insurmountable: that there can be no workable arms control strategy because Russia is not interested in preserving a *status quo* in which NATO remains strong and relevant and on Russia's borders.

Others argue that Russia has historically been fearful of the West, and that Russia believes it is inherently inferior technologically and dangerously vulnerable to states on its periphery. In that case, if Moscow can be provided sufficient assurances about its own security, then Russia might be persuaded to cooperate in building a stable relationship, even if there remain many differences in interests and worldview.

Yet a third, more nuanced, argument is that – notwithstanding incompatible worldviews – there remain important shared interests on which one can build a broad collaborative security agenda. Even if there is not a common definition of "strategic stability", there has always been – even during the Cold War – a shared interest in both Russia and the West in avoiding circumstances that could trigger war, either deliberately or through miscalculation. Clearly, during the Cold War, ideological and geopolitical incompatibility did not preclude

a wide range of arms control measures.<sup>36</sup>

There are a number of easily identifiable issues that might serve as shared interests for the purposes of collaborative security.<sup>37</sup> For example, both sides presumably wish to reduce incentives and capabilities for a surprise attack at any level of conflict. The two adversarial camps could create more space and time during a crisis and at the beginning of conflict. They could limit weapons systems particularly effective in achieving a preemptive strike that either disarms or disrupts a defense or deters the defender from responding. They could preserve the survivability of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and second-strike forces, both conventional and nuclear.

Both sides presumably want to reduce opportunities for miscalculation or accident. Collaborative approaches might increase transparency and predictability about adversary capabilities and intentions. They would establish a pattern of communication between potential adversaries before a crisis, to enable a more effective exchange of information and communication during a crisis. This would avoid actions that fuel misperceptions about the other's presumed aggressive intent. The two sides also wish to reduce the likelihood of uncontrolled escalation. They must ensure the survivability of key command and control capabilities; they could develop, exercise, and employ effective communication systems at both political and military levels between prospective adversaries; and they could create better "rules of the road" for crisis management, especially as new weapons technologies emerge.

The West has additional incentives for pursuing such an agenda. NATO's historical pattern of promoting "defense and dialogue" as complementary security strategies is important to preserving cohesion within the Alliance. Any effort to implement the defense agenda outlined in option 1 would require – for domestic political as well as Alliance strategic purposes – a complementary diplomatic initiative, whether or not Russia is willing to engage.

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36 For a wide-ranging expert discussion of the importance of viewing defense and arms control as complementary paths to strategic stability and the challenges of adapting to new technologies, see, *Managing risk: nuclear weapons in the new geopolitics – A Brookings interview*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 2019, especially pp.1-6, [www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP\\_20190211\\_nonproliferation\\_interview.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_20190211_nonproliferation_interview.pdf)

37 For a detailed discussion of some of these objectives, as well as a catalog of possible measures and specific weapons systems to achieve them, see Brustlein, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-68. For overviews of US approaches to arms control after 2020, see C. Ford, "US priorities for 'next-generation arms control'", *Arms Control and International Security Papers*, No.1, US State Department, 6 April 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/T-paper-series-1-Arms-Control-Final-1-508.pdf>; and "Special presidential envoy Marshall Billingslea on the future of nuclear arms control", transcript of presentation to Hudson Institute, 21 May 2020, <https://www.hudson.org/research/16062-transcript-special-presidential-envoy-marshall-billingslea-on-the-future-of-nuclear-arms-control>

### *Pros and cons of option 2*

The principal advantage of this dual-track approach is that it fits a familiar policy model for NATO and arguably gives substance to the Secretary General's rhetoric in recent years. One need not choose between defense and détente. Not only are they not mutually exclusive, they are mutually reinforcing, especially insofar as this synergy provides a political foundation for continued and focused investments in NATO defense. As such, it is also the most likely approach for achieving greater strategic stability.

Based on interviews with experts and policymakers throughout this study, however, it is clear that most governments in NATO – including the United States – are neither prepared for, nor inclined to proceed down, this path in the near term. This, therefore, is the greatest disadvantage of this approach. There is significant political risk in launching such an initiative because there is no clarity about the substance of this approach and no assurance about the outcome. In 1967, the Harmel Doctrine amounted in some respects to catching up with political developments already occurring in Europe, and NATO countries understood the need to move with that political momentum. Likewise, NATO's 1979 "dual-track decision" relating to INF was focused less on the broad relationship with the USSR than on a specific weapons system that the Soviet Union was deploying, and specific weapons systems that NATO was committing itself to field if the Soviet Union did not respond.

Moving the Alliance to embrace this approach, therefore, will require determined leadership and a substantial period for NATO governments to deliberate and come to consensus on the details. Yet this is also an advantage of this approach. Precisely because there is no immediate prospect of engaging in a meaningful collaborative security dialogue with Russia, NATO has time to begin its own deliberations, within and among its governments. Unless one assumes that there will never be an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with Russia, NATO will sooner or later have to specify how its own interests could be served in that dialogue. This model offers an opportunity to do that while putting needed defense improvements into a more acceptable political context.

### **Option 3: a new European security architecture**

This third model is controversial and faces considerable opposition among conservative security experts in the West. But as one means of enhancing stability in Europe, and keeping Russia from undertaking revisionist behavior, it is an option that should be considered.

In June 2008, Russian President Medvedev proposed a new pan-European security treaty (EST), based on the principle of "indivisible security", meaning "a legal obligation pursuant

to which no nation or international organization operating in the Euro-Atlantic region is entitled to strengthen its own security at the cost of other nations or organizations”.<sup>38</sup> At the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the February 1945 Yalta Conference, Russian Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin applauded the Yalta Conference and accused British and American leaders of “disowning one of the finest and noble moments of their own and world diplomatic history”.<sup>39</sup>

It is no coincidence that Medvedev’s proposal came on the heels of two events that reinforced Russia’s conviction that NATO was determined to continue encroaching on what Russia perceived as its legitimate sphere of influence. In February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia, which Russia denounced as a flagrant violation of international law and the agreement that ended the 1999 Kosovo war.<sup>40</sup> Then in April 2008, at its Bucharest Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government declared that Ukraine and Georgia “*will* become members of NATO”.<sup>41</sup>

Medvedev’s proposal was devoid of real substance and quickly withered away. It was dismissed at the time by Western diplomats as a vague Russian attempt to thwart NATO enlargement, undermine the already agreed principles in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris, and divert attention from Russia’s attempts to skirt the CFE Treaty.<sup>42</sup> As Russian troops marched into Georgia in August 2008, Medvedev’s proposal – even before the Kremlin presented the draft treaty – was demonstrably hollow. After 2012, Putin seems to have decided that political and military intimidation, rather than negotiated principles, was to be his preferred way of blocking what he saw as Western encroachment and deliberate attempts to undermine Russian security.

Ultimately, the wellspring of strategic instability in Europe may simply be that Russia does not view the existing security order as legitimate, and, until that order is changed to accommodate Russian security interests, Moscow will be in search of ways to revise the *status quo*. One may address military force imbalances and devise arms control regimes to enhance stability in the military relationship, but unless this structural instability is addressed, the political imperative in Moscow to change the existing order will inevitably

38 For the Kremlin’s draft European Security Treaty, see <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>

39 P. Felgenhauer, “Russia proposes a Yalta-2 geopolitical tradeoff to solve the Ukrainian crisis”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.12, Iss.26, The Jamestown Foundation, 26 February 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-proposes-a-yalta-2-geopolitical-tradeoff-to-solve-the-ukrainian-crisis/>

40 D. Bilefsky, “Kosovo declares its independence from Serbia”, *The New York Times*, 18 February 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18kosovo.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18kosovo.html)

41 Emphasis added. Bucharest Summit Declaration, [https://www.nato.int/cps/us/nato/hq/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/us/nato/hq/official_texts_8443.htm). This NATO position remains in place as of 2020.

42 R. Weitz, “The rise and fall of Medvedev’s European security treaty”, German Marshall Fund, May 2012, [www.gmfus.org/publications/rise-and-fall-medvedevs-european-security-treaty](http://www.gmfus.org/publications/rise-and-fall-medvedevs-european-security-treaty)

persist.<sup>43</sup>

In recognition of this structural instability, several analysts have offered proposals that attempt to overcome this seeming zero-sum standoff between a revisionist Russia and a West seemingly determined to stand by its decisions to enlarge its liberal political order.<sup>44</sup> Their proposals focus on those “in-between” states that straddle East and West – those who belong neither to NATO nor to Russia’s Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). They argue that these security organizations and their corresponding economic organizations (the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union) have reached their geographic limits and that further enlargement (or rollback) should be off the table. Negotiations – most likely within the framework of the OSCE – would be necessary to ensure the security and economic viability of the in-between states.

Several American experts on European security, however, strongly disagree with even the hint of such an approach. They claim that the Russian EST proposal would hamstring and eventually destroy NATO.<sup>45</sup> Presumably many, if not most, of the NATO European nations would agree with this critique. Future relations between Russia and the West will depend primarily on decisions made in Moscow. Giving the Russians too many concessions may backfire and simply lead to further demands or, at a minimum, give Moscow an inflated view of its own role as a great power. The bottom line from this perspective is that Russia is, in fact, violating international norms, and should not be in any way rewarded for its recent behavior. In a recent *Foreign Affairs* article, Michael McFaul articulated this more conservative approach to dealing with Russia via containment: “The United States also has to give up on the idea that Russia can or should be integrated into multilateral institutions. The theory that integration would moderate Russian behavior has not been borne out by events. The United States must dig in for a long and difficult confrontation with Putin and his regime”.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, within this or some similar framework that includes all European states there would be room for discussion about political, economic, and human rights issues, as

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43 See K. Giles, *Moscow rules: what drives Russia to confront the West*, Brookings, Washington, DC, 2019.

44 For a range of ideas on how to handle “in between states”, see S. Charap, J. Shapiro, and A. Demus, *Rethinking the regional order of Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2018, [www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE297.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE297.html); also Charap, Demus, and Shapiro (eds.), *Getting out from “in-between”: perspectives on the regional order in post-soviet Europe and Eurasia*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2018, [www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF382.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF382.html). For an analogous, but not identical approach, see M. O’Hanlon, *Beyond NATO: a new security architecture for Eastern Europe*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2017, [www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/full-text\\_-beyond-nato.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/full-text_-beyond-nato.pdf). For a rebuttal, see S. Pifer, “A European security architecture that won’t work”, Brookings Institution, 1 March 2017, [www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/03/01/a-european-security-architecture-that-wont-work/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/03/01/a-european-security-architecture-that-wont-work/)

45 Author interviews, April and October 2020. Also see M. Tsyppkin, “Moscow’s European security gambit”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 10 December 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1900832.html>

46 M. McFaul, “Russia as it is: a Grand Strategy for confronting Putin”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2018, p.87.

was the case with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that gave birth to the Helsinki Final Act in 1974. Besides potentially meeting Russian demands for an end to NATO and EU enlargement, it could provide a context for attempting to resolve territorial issues and conflicts in the multiple “frozen conflicts” in southeastern Europe and the Caucasus region.

Because this approach is so sweeping, the details will be all the more important, especially to the “in-between” states. Would they emerge from this process feeling secure in their “neutrality”, or would they simply be vulnerable to the next act of aggression? Would they – a generation later – believe (as many in Central and Eastern Europe do today) that they simply got left behind and begin to search for other solutions? This may be the decisive variable in this approach, and a reminder of two important realities: first, “nothing should be agreed until everything is agreed”; and second, one must also hedge against the possibility that results may not be what are hoped.

### *Pros and cons of option 3*

The greatest advantage of this approach is that it directly addresses the core of strategic instability in Europe. Rather than envisioning a different security architecture, the West can, of course, tenaciously protect the *status quo*. However, if a state does not view the *status quo* as legitimate; if it has the resources to challenge that situation; and if it believes it can accept the risks of doing so, history suggests that it will be inclined to do so. This approach, therefore, may have the benefit of enticing even a skeptical Russia to the table, in which the agenda could include numerous issues that, today, remain intractable, and that need not be resolved in Russia’s favor. This approach proceeds on the assumption that each state (including Russia) has legitimate security interests as well as responsibilities to respect the security interests of others. That premise is already recognized in documents such as the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. Therefore, beginning such a discussion would not be contrary to the principles of the Alliance.

Such a bold move, however, also has significant disadvantages. After 1945, and again after 1989, there were great hopes that a radical change in the structure of international relations would bring opportunities to shake the habits of history and create a more benign world order. In each case, those hopes were eventually dashed, and there are reasons to believe they would be dashed again. Concessions to Russia on key issues might only be matched by rhetorical concessions that eventually get brutally shattered, as was the case with Russia’s disregard for its own assurances regarding Ukraine in the 1994 Budapest

Memorandum.<sup>47</sup> History also shows that, when there are hopes of moving beyond conflict in international relations, publics and governments tend to view investment in defense as a less urgent priority, even though that same history reminds us of the need to hedge against the possibility that existential security threats will return.

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47 Russia agreed “to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine”, “to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine”, and affirmed “that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations”. “Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons”, Budapest, 5 December 1994, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/No%20Volume/52241/Part/I-52241-0800000280401fbb.pdf>

## 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.<sup>48</sup>

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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](http://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".<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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](http://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 21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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

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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/](http://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.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

## 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/isi.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](http://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”.<sup>57</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>58</sup>

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.

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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](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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup>

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.

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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](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/>



## Conclusion

The West is at an important inflection point. Strategic stability in Europe is challenged in unprecedented ways. If NATO responds to these challenges by deferring needed improvements in defense, the strategic environment will only worsen, the Alliance may fragment, and the commitment of the United States may lose substance.

Likewise, if NATO responds to these challenges solely by launching a major military buildup, it will likely not be sustainable politically without some broader strategic framework, may further fragment the Alliance, and may exacerbate the instabilities already evident in the military relationship.

For its part, the United States should provide the leadership necessary to develop this strategy and engage its European Allies as full partners. No other country is in a position to exercise that leadership and sustain the cohesion of the Alliance that would be required for this – or any – strategy to be successful. With a new Biden Administration in the United States, there are grounds for optimism in this regard.

A strategy that combines a comprehensive set of defense improvements addressing both military and non-military threats, with a readiness to engage Russia on specific measures designed to strengthen strategic stability, remains the best course of action. We recommend that the Alliance adopt Option 2 in this paper – a New Harmel model – to develop a future strategy that enables its ability to mold and enhance strategic stability in Europe and beyond.

Regardless of the model used to frame this integrated strategy – new Kennan, new Harmel, or new Yalta – the immediate requirement is for NATO to begin serious deliberations about the contours of its future strategy.



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