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Policy brief

Conventional Arms Control
in the Euro-Atlantic Region:
Is it Desirable? Is it
Achievable?

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Conventional Arms Control in the Euro-Atlantic Region: Is it Desirable? Is it Achievable?

The role of Conventional Arms Control (CAC) in the Euro-Atlantic region has again become the focus of activity among officials in many national capitals, as well as within the academic and NGO community. This surge of interest is due to the demise of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) regime and its system of transparency, predictability and accountability; Russian concerns over the perceived imbalance in conventional forces; and the persistence of pockets of instability in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Put alongside current security issues the state of CAC cannot be termed a burning priority. Nevertheless, there is a general recognition that security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region would be substantially improved with the continuation of a regulatory framework governing conventional forces. The question is what sort of framework? What type of conventional arms control measures are needed – and achievable? Which nations and organisations should be involved? What should be the scope in terms of territory and capabilities? How much of the existing CFE regime can be used? What relevance do the CFE structures, procedures and ways of doing things have for the situation today?

While CFE may provide a starting point for the answers to some of these questions; time however, has moved on. The strategic landscape which defined the roles of armed forces during the Cold War has been transformed; the rigidity of the Cold War replaced by a variable geometry of relationships. NATO, however, continues to occupy a dominant role and Russia to express concerns over the consequences of NATO enlargement for its security. Changes to the strategic landscape are accompanied by changes to the characteristics of armed forces themselves; posing new questions for the development of a new CAC regime.

This report will assess the status of discussions for the development of a new CAC framework. It will look at the legacy of the CFE Treaty and the changing contemporary context in terms of both the strategic landscape and the armed forces themselves. Noting the continuity of NATO's dominant role and of Russia's security concerns it assesses both in detail. Finally, it will look at the primary challenges to the development of a new CAC regime, identify the basic questions, look at the input of NATO's High Level Task Force (HLTF) and examine the potential role of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC).

The CFE Legacy

The stabilising framework of the CFE Treaty is all but defunct with only the initial glimmerings of a replacement regime on the horizon.¹ The Treaty was the product of a specific period – the Cold War – which has now passed. It focussed on what were seen as the most threatening, and therefore destabilising, elements of the security situation in that period – namely the concentration of heavy armour by NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe. The CFE regime involved substantial and verifiable reductions in the five main categories of military armament,² a data exchange on the composition of each participant's armed forces, notifications on substantial deployments and changes in structure, limitations on holdings, deployments, and concentrations of forces and an elaborate compliance mechanism, including intrusive on-site inspections.

However, the changed strategic environment, political differences and unilateral suspensions of observance have meant that the Treaty has lost much of its relevance and vigour. The routine of inspections and the exchanges of information that have provided a comforting blanket of transparency, predictability and accountability are eroded beyond repair.

The Vienna Document process continues to provide some transparency on military forces and important thresholds for prior notification and observation of large-scale military activities. But even these are out of date and participating States unable to update them significantly. Even with such an update, the Vienna document is regarded widely as being limited by its politically binding nature and, in its implementation, by less vigorous verification, among other factors.

1 CFE is alive but barely so. The Adapted Treaty was signed in 1999 and replaced the bloc to bloc structure of the original Treaty with individual national and territorial ceilings, but has not been ratified by any NATO nation and has thus not entered into force. Russia suspended implementation of the CFE Treaty in Dec 2007, following years of complaints about various aspects of the regime. NATO stopped implementing the Treaty vis a vis Russia in Dec 7 2011 following several attempts to convince Russia to resume full implementation.

For analysis of the status of conventional forces arms control see:

“Conventional Arms Control in Europe: is there a last Chance?” by Wolfgang Zellner. Arms Control Association. Vol. 42 no. 2. 2012.

“Developing a New Approach to Conventional Arms Control.” Dr Jeffrey D MacCausland. Op Ed. Strategic Studies Institute. April 2013 and

“The CFE Treaty and Expanded CFE Treaty at a Glance”. Tom Z. Collina. Arms Control Association August 2012.

2 Tanks, artillery, armoured combat vehicles, combat helicopters, and combat aircraft.

The Open Skies Treaty provides all parties with the ability to overfly the territory of all other states. However, its future has been threatened firstly by the use of outdated technologies including low resolution versus high resolution digital photography; and secondly, by the introduction of territorial disputes such as the recent standoff over the status of Cyprus' application to join the regime.³

The question now is whether a new arms control framework is needed to regulate and constrain conventional armed forces and their activities in the Euro-Atlantic region?

The CFE Treaty has to be the starting point for current discussions not simply because it remains, legally, in effect but because it is important to see what portions of the Treaty remain relevant. What can be retained, and what lessons drawn from its implementation?

The disappearance of the focal point of collective balance between two opposing alliances invalidates, for today's conditions, the CFE approach of totals of forces and the related definition of collective ceilings. Rather, it suggests that future agreements should look to retain an emphasis on the regulation and constraint of military activities relative to stability verified through enhanced transparency – a return to the primacy of confidence and security building measures.

The strategic landscape in which CFE has functioned has been transformed

Nevertheless, it is important to consider what can be retained from the existing regime, what should be strengthened and what should be added?

The Changing Euro-Atlantic Landscape

The strategic landscape in which CFE has functioned has been transformed. The tensions that defined the roles of armed forces during the Cold War have almost disappeared. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union saw the emergence of independent countries of varying political affiliations. Many of these became members of NATO; others became partners participating in NATO's overarching Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC); and members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Russia and other

3 Officials were hopeful, however, that solutions to both problems were in sight which would restore the effectiveness of the regime.

successor states of the Soviet Union became NATO partners, but also members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

There is little need here to describe in detail the frequently overlapping memberships and organisational affiliations which came to comprise security arrangements in the Euro-Atlantic space – known at the time as the “alphabet soup” of international organisations. In this context it is sufficient to say that this landscape of variable geometry affiliations and alignments makes it difficult to provide a coherent picture of the role and place of conventional forces. What can be said is that **for most countries in the Euro-Atlantic region the numbers, types and configurations of conventional forces currently deployed by other countries do not represent a threat.**

*Russia continues
to criticise NATO
enlargement*

However, the Euro-Atlantic space is far from being trouble free; dividing lines and rivalries persist; pockets of actual and potential instability remain. Azeri and Armenian forces are in a dangerous stand-off over Nagorno-Karaback. The situation in Moldova – with Russian troops backing a separatist regime in Transdniestria – is unresolved. The Balkans is still not free of tension and the continual potential for the re-emergence of latent violence in Kosovo. Conventional forces were used in the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia. Those members of NATO in close proximity to Russia seek reassurance on the Article 5 commitment to consider any armed attack against one as an armed attack against all NATO members. Russia continues to criticise NATO enlargement and the consequential military activities and complains of what it perceives as an “imbalance” in conventional forces.

In other words while conventional forces no longer dominate the Euro-Atlantic landscape the potential for their use remains. War on a European scale is deemed unthinkable; but not so the more limited use of armed forces in one of the areas of instability or tension. Conventional forces continue to represent a potential source of concern.

The Changing Roles of Conventional Forces

Conventional forces remain a central element in the defence plans of all countries in the Euro-Atlantic region. These conventional forces have the familiar characteristics associated with the defence of national territory from external and internal threats; and, for some nations, the capacity to carry out expeditionary operations. The capabilities for these missions will be determined, as always, by developments in

technology and the resources available. However, as a result of budgetary pressures and also the influence of the new strategic environment the characteristics of these forces are changing.

This is not the place for a detailed assessment of the changes that are underway. It is enough to point to some of the broad trends against which the search for a new arms control regime will take place.

The first thing to note is that changes to defence structures inevitably take time as they involve long standing investments and ways of doing things. Nevertheless, changes in the strategic environment, the revolution in military affairs of the past two decades, and related technological advances have resulted in a move away from the large, heavy armour and firepower capabilities of the Cold War.⁴

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Instead there is an emphasis on mobility, flexibility and “deployability”. Smaller, lighter and more mobile platforms for lift and surveillance plus the benefits of precision guidance and advanced communications are the order of the day. There have been systemic changes to the way these capabilities are organised.

Substantial numbers of military personnel are still needed to ensure “boots on the ground” whether for defence of territory, internal policing or for outside interventions.

The depth and scope of the changes and reforms to armed forces structures vary from country to country. Most countries have a tendency to cling to “balanced” forces – similar structures and capabilities but smaller and fewer – and because of the long term implications are wary of dramatic change.

Technology as always will continue to provide new means for achieving military goals. In turn these technological advances pose new challenges to efforts to regulate and constrain military means.

In other words, the conventional forces landscape is a more fluid and flexible environment without the clearly identifiable threatening capabilities which gave the CFE Treaty its relative simplicity. This requires a rethink of the aims, principles and means of conventional forces arms control.

4 The continuing role of the platforms associated with these characteristics – such as tanks and artillery – is an on-going debate in many countries.

Change and Continuity

In this fluid landscape there are two elements of continuity. First, NATO has remained the dominant security organisation; a group of countries committed to collective defence who consult and coordinate regularly on that defence. Second, Russia continues to see NATO as a threat to its security; a situation exacerbated by what it perceives as an imbalance in conventional forces and related technology to its disadvantage.

Both these elements of continuity, for very different reasons, are relevant to the discussions of conventional arms control and merit greater discussion below.

NATO's Role

NATO has a specific relevance to discussions on a future CAC framework. This relevance is due firstly, to the preponderance of the deployable conventional capabilities of its member states in the Euro-Atlantic region vis-à-vis Russia, but secondly, because in discussions which have a bearing on their collective defence – and CAC falls in that category – NATO members will always attempt to present a unified position.

NATO's member states contribute a majority of the conventional forces in the Euro-Atlantic area most of which are committed to the Alliance. These forces are developed according to national aims, priorities and resources. NATO does its best to harmonise and coordinate these contributions through its force planning process.⁵ This guiding hand, however, has distinctly light touch and decisions are based primarily on national considerations.

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The planning process together with the integrated command structure provides an important element of coherence and credibility to NATO's commitment to collective defence. From the perspective of CAC it also means that there are elements of NATO's activities that NATO members will seek to protect such as retaining maximum flexibility in implementing its Article 5 commitment through measures related to reinforcement and exercises.

NATO's significance for CAC lies not only in the capabilities of its member states, but in the coordinated approach it brings to any discussions that affect its conventional

⁵ France re-joined the military structures of the Alliance and the defence planning process in April 2009.

capabilities. However, this coordination role has been controversial within the Alliance.

During the early days of the CFE discussions there were different, and frequently conflicting, views on the relationship of the negotiations to the broader OSCE process⁶ and the role of the two alliances – NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Within NATO, most allies insisted that ceilings and reductions for conventional forces had to be on the basis of the collective capabilities of the two alliances; and that NATO had to exercise a specific coordinating role to preserve alliance unity. Other members, France in particular, preferred the greater flexibility of the 35 nation CSCE framework and the commitment of individual nations; and sought to minimise NATO's involvement.

As a result the CFE Treaty was negotiated and signed within the framework of the CSCE by the 23 individual members (or "states parties") of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.⁷ The negotiations and the resulting zonal ceilings were based on the collective capabilities of the two alliances. But the obligations were assumed and implemented by the individual states parties.

The coordination of the position of NATO members during the negotiations for the CFE Treaty was assured through the HLTF⁸. The creation of the HLTF was the recognition of the significance of the issue and the need for high level attention in capitals. The insistence by some members that the negotiations were not bloc to bloc meant that the role and status of the HLTF was always sensitive – "as NATO but not NATO" – as was the reporting mechanism. The unified positions worked out by the HLTF were communicated to delegations in Vienna by national capitals rather

6 It ran parallel to the Conference on Disarmament in Europe (CDE) in Stockholm – held in the context of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – which focused on confidence and security building measures.

7 The negotiations were in the framework of, but autonomous from, CSCE.

8 Created by the Halifax Declaration in 1986. The HLTF was defined as "the steering instrument for the coordination of the Alliance position on questions of general strategy and on substantive issues".

This was similar to the creation by NATO in 1977 of a High Level Group for nuclear affairs in order to ensure high level attention in national capitals and the formation of the Special Consultative Group in 1979 to coordinate policy related to the negotiations of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. In each of these cases the special status of the committees means participation by officials from capitals and reporting directly to Ministers. This circumvention of the normal NATO process causes internal tension from time to time.

During his tenure on NATO's International Staff 1983-89 the author was involved with the HLTF and chaired the Red Blue Team Exercise that developed NATO's data submission on the conventional forces of both alliances for the CFE negotiations.

than through the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. Tactics in the negotiations were agreed jointly by the local NATO caucus in Vienna, the chair of which rotates.⁹

The tensions of the Cold War which framed the disagreement over the nature of conventional arms control and the role of NATO have disappeared. The HLTF continues to perform its coordinating function and its primacy in Alliance deliberations on conventional arms control. NATO officials are frequently at pains to emphasise this primacy and that discussion of conventional arms control “is the preserve of the HLTF”.

The HLTF will be responsible, therefore, for coordinating and harmonising the different perspectives and concerns that exist within the Alliance on CAC. It has recently begun what has been termed a structured review of the future of conventional arms control. The HLTF’s input to potential discussions on CAC is discussed later.

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In the context of NATO’s role in CAC it is important to remember that arms control is also a national responsibility and arms control initiatives derive from the individual members. Through the HLTF NATO plays a coordinating role as it does for force planning – with, some would argue, rather less prominence. There are different views among member states concerning the priority to be given to arms control considerations in

Alliance security policy. Ensuring a link between defence planning and arms control is difficult enough in a national capital and doubly so in a multilateral alliance.¹⁰ For some members the insistence on a NATO collective voice is precisely to ensure that arms control considerations do not diverge from force planning.

Whatever the framework selected for conventional force discussions it is clear that the member states of NATO and the organisation itself will play a specific role in the development of a new CAC framework.

9 Authors notes from the period.

10 This is often made difficult by the fact that defence policy is the responsibility of Ministries of Defence and arms control of Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

In May 1989 NATO adopted a comprehensive concept designed to assist Allies in achieving arms control objectives “by ensuring an integrated approach covering both defence policy and arms control policy: these are complementary and interactive”. A Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament. Brussels 1989. Para 5.

Russian Concerns

As a result of the myriad geostrategic changes since the end of the Cold War Russian officials now argue that their conventional forces are in a position of considerable inferiority compared with the conventional forces of NATO members and other potential challenges.¹¹ This perception reflects the continuing tension in the NATO Russia relationship and has significant consequences. It is one of the reasons advanced by Russian officials to explain the current reliance on nuclear weapons in Russian military doctrine, particularly the non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW's).¹² This in turn explains Russian unwillingness, thus far, to enter into discussions on NSNW's, even concerning achieving greater transparency. It also contributed to their decision to suspend implementation of the CFE Treaty.

Because of the consequences of Russian concerns, and their relevance to current CAC discussions, the basis for this perception needs to be examined in greater detail. If these concerns are held seriously, they must be treated seriously.

The Russian view of the inferiority of its conventional forces has to be assessed in two different but related dimensions: first, the geo strategic assumptions which underpin the perception and second, the scale and nature of the inferiority and the validity of the analysis on which it is based.

There is no need here to examine the range of challenges perceived by Russian policy makers. In addition to the "danger" or "threat"¹³ posed by NATO Russia has an uneasy relationship with its "near abroad" and also with China. NATO's capabilities are of special significance. Enlargement has brought into NATO former members of the Warsaw Pact who remain deeply suspicious of Russia. Their inclusion in NATO planning and their gaining greater reassurance on NATO's Article 5 commitment through exercises, contingency planning and other activities has reinforced the Russian perception of NATO creeping closer to Russia's borders. Russian officials persistently point out that the Baltic States remain outside the CFE Treaty, despite the fact that NATO infrastructure, through projects such as NATO Air Policing, is now on Russia's borders.

11 It is important to note that the situation is compounded by the internal weaknesses of Russian forces and inadequate modernisation.

12 For discussion of Russian views on nuclear weapons see Stephen J. Blank and other authors in "Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future" Editor Stephen J. Blank. Strategic Studies Institute. Nov 2011. The US Army War College Carlisle.

13 For discussion of the distinction between a military threat and a military danger see the chapter by Roger N. Dermott in Stephen J Blank. *ibid*.

Despite the scepticism of NATO members towards Russian claims that the Alliance represents a threat to Russian security, there can be little doubt that Russia sees NATO and its enlargement in an adversarial light.

So what is the validity of the Russian claim of conventional inferiority? What is the level of inferiority, what is the basis for the assessment and how significant is it in Russian security concerns? It is at this point that life becomes complicated as such assessments are complex and inevitably open to question. However, in order to understand the Russian position and to see where it sits in Russian priorities it is essential to establish an agreed basis for discussion.

In comparing the forces Russia has available with those it might require, Russian analysts frequently present absolute totals¹⁴. They use as their source figures drawn from the "The Military Balance" published annually by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)¹⁵. Presentations on this basis inevitably demonstrate that the total numbers of forces that Russia could face are considerably superior to Russian capabilities. Adding the qualitative advantages in other areas such as technology, doctrine, interoperability, logistics and communication that the US, and therefore NATO, are said to enjoy, the reasons for Russian concerns are apparent.

However, in assessing the validity of Russian concerns it is important to acknowledge the problems involved in producing such comparative assessments.¹⁶

First, the political assumptions on which the assessments are based are fundamental in assessing risk. Military planners stress that capabilities should be the focus of attention. However, the identification of certain capabilities as a source of concern is always through an interpretation of intent. The forces identified in Russian assessments as contributing to Russian conventional inferiority are an indication that they are seen as a potential risk or threat.

Second, understanding the methodology underpinning the comparison is also crucial. What is being included, in which area and in which timeframe? When Russian totals are compared with those of others is "like being compared with like"? Assessments depend critically on the

14 See for example the issue brief by Oleg Shulga in ELN 6 Feb.2013. Available at: <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-conventional-imbalance-and-debate-on-russian-non-strategic-nuclear-weapons-462.htm>

15 These are a reasonable starting point for discussion The IISS has been producing its Military Balance for many years. Its numbers are acquired from national authorities and are considered reliable; they also provide a degree of comparability.

16 For a detailed discussion of the problems involved in force assessments and comparisons see the authors chapter "The East-West Military Balance: Assessing Change" in "The Changing Strategic Landscape" Adelphi Paper 236. IISS London 1989.

definition of the capability being counted, on its location and on its availability or readiness. Forces that according to organisational structures should be in place are frequently not at strength.¹⁷ Many NATO countries today are well under the equipment levels they have been permitted under the CFE regime.¹⁸

There are also a range of qualitative factors such as age and various technological factors which are difficult to assess but will have a significant impact on the employment and performance of the forces concerned. In this respect Russian officials point to American, and therefore NATO's, advantages in high technology as being of particular concern. In establishing the basis for assessment and comparison of forces there is also the question of scope; for example, should naval forces be included?

*Absolute totals only tell
part of the picture*

Where does this leave the Russian assessment that its conventional forces are in a position of considerable inferiority? Absolute totals only tell part of the picture and omit as much as they include. They present overall capacity; but not how, and under what circumstances, the capacity would be used nor with what consequences. They do not, for example, address the issue of regional disparities, the potential concentration of force, or the myriad qualitative factors that are relevant to actual performance. The latter would include combined capabilities, long range strike, or reinforcements with appropriate logistic arrangements.

Many of these qualifications may appear largely irrelevant to the totality of Russian estimates and to the broader problems of CAC today. Indeed, the picture concerning Russian forces is itself changing. As their equipment levels come down, Russian armed forces are engaged in a comprehensive reform of doctrine and training and acquiring new equipment to ensure smaller, more mobile units. So while numbers reduce, the capabilities increase radically. This is, of course, a Russian reflection of changes that NATO undertook two decades ago.

In view of the strength of Russian concerns, and their consequences, the validity of Russian perceptions needs to be addressed. However, this can only be done when the rationale and underlying assumptions have been agreed and the appropriate qualifications taken into account. Serious discussions can only take place on the basis of what is best termed "a level playing field" of agreed analysis.

17 During the 1980's NATO redefined the readiness status applied to Soviet forces which reduced the number of Soviet divisions immediately available which led one press report to comment that NATO had reduced the Warsaw Pact threat by 58 divisions without "a shot being fired!" See the authors report. *ibid.*

18 The US has stationed in Europe only 90 tanks out of the 4006 allowed by CFE limits; other allies are under permitted totals. See Jeff McCausland in "Salvaging the CFE Treaty Regime: Options for Washington". Brookings 2012.

The relevance of this dimension to the broader considerations of CAC is considered later. However, the fact that it constitutes the basis of Russian concerns would suggest that the relevance of limits and ceilings has not totally dissipated.

Looking to a Future Framework for CAC

The changes to landscape and the armed forces have created a new context against which the requirements of conventional arms control in the Euro-Atlantic region must be thought through.

The need to provide the all-inclusive Euro-Atlantic dimension suggests that the venue should be the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) of 57 states. However, it should be noted that many officials are critical, in the words of one, “of the inherent inertia of the FSC and its consequent inability to get anything done over the past fourteen years”. That being said it is possible that within the broader framework discussions among smaller groups to reflect specific dimensions of the issue – such as the NATO states and other CFE parties due to their shared frame of reference – could be helpful. The utility of the inclusion of smaller states would depend on what they bring to the table. As is discussed later the HLTF will have an important role and, potentially at least, the NRC.

Whatever the level, a frank and open dialogue is needed on what constitutes security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region in today’s environment.

*Are national, territorial
or zonal ceilings no
longer useful?*

It is important, first, to acknowledge not just the breadth and complexity of the panorama under discussion, but the cacophony of voices and perspectives. Producing a coherent picture will be a major challenge. This suggests keeping the approach and the questions as simple and as focussed as possible. The aim of enhancing security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region is easy enough to define. The question is how? What parameters can be agreed in terms of force levels, dispositions and activities? Which systems and capabilities represent a potential cause for concern? What measures of regulation, constraint, and transparency are needed and are possible? And in which zones or regions?

It is not yet clear how much of the CFE approach will be considered as remaining relevant. The CFE focus on capabilities relevant to short warning attack and on fixed, verifiable ceilings was a product of the specific circumstances of the Cold War. How much of this focus should continue to be part of the considerations?

Are national, territorial or zonal ceilings no longer useful? They have the benefit of relative simplicity in terms of identification and verification. Moreover, they are relevant to Russian

concerns and could help local stability in specific regions. They also provide a baseline to inhibit the build-up or concentration of forces.

If they retain some utility then what systems should be included? As already noted, tanks and artillery are of declining relevance for most contingencies. However, not so the other three categories, especially combat aircraft and attack helicopters, whose multi-purpose application, mobility, and flexibility will mean they continue in the inventories of most countries.

The question, then, is what other systems should be the subject of regulation. What systems can be defined as having “destabilising” characteristics in the sense that their presence could give cause for suspicion and unease. During the Cold War these capabilities were relatively easy to identify; but this is far more difficult in today’s conditions. Weapons are neither inherently offensive nor defensive;¹⁹ but there are aspects of configuration and deployment which lend themselves to either orientation and which can reassure or alarm.

It remains to be seen whether the levels of forces will be considered less important than the quality of those forces. However, attention certainly will shift to measures that regulate and constrain how these forces are organised and configured – in other words their effectiveness – as well as their activities.

*There is also a demand
to focus on quality
rather than quantity*

The aim should be to ensure configurations that maximise reassurance and minimise the room for concern and suspicion. These will need to be reinforced by measures that enhance transparency and predictability through the provision of information, exchange of data and the notification of military activities. Notification of structures should be accompanied by elaborations and discussions of doctrine.

Much of this already happens in existing confidence and security building measures in the context of the Vienna Document of CSBM; but these measures need to be strengthened through increased visits, observations and inspections in order to enhance transparency.²⁰

There is also a demand to focus on quality rather than quantity by constraining technological developments. It is likely that efforts will be made to include new surveillance assets –

19 During the last days of the Cold War discussions took place between military officers and civilian defence planners from NATO and the Soviet Union on the question of the “defensive” and “offensive” orientation of armed forces. For discussion of the problems involved in defining this orientation see the author’s contribution to Ronald H Hatchett (ed), “Arms Control: Problems and prospects 1990.” The Mosher Institute for Defence Studies. International Symposium Jan. 4-5 1990.

20 For further discussion of these aspects see the Report “Building Mutual Security in the Euro-Atlantic Region.” The Nuclear Threat Initiative. Washington DC. 2013 pages 21-23.

drones – and precision-guided munitions. This demand to get a handle on technological advances is one that has perennially confronted arms control and which it has been singularly unsuccessful in dealing with. It belongs in the “desirable but too difficult” category.

Discussions may also want to include lessons from arms control arrangements elsewhere

A focus on attempts to regulate and constrain the activities and movement of armed forces and capabilities makes sense in a fluid environment. However, a caveat is in order. Whatever is regulated or constrained, whether it is system or a collective capability, has to be defined. Verification of compliance will depend on the accuracy of the definition and definitions can be a tedious and contentious process, particularly when decided by multiple parties.

There is also the question of regulating forces deployed outside national territory – and the question of host nation consent. This is a particularly contentious issue in view of Russian forces in the Caucasus and Transdnier. However, for some NATO members maintenance of the host nation consent principle is a red line issue.

There may be calls to widen the scope of the discussions with the inclusion of naval forces. These are unlikely to gain agreement.

There is also the question of systems which because of their dual capability are relevant to NSNW's. NATO members will be determined to avoid any inclusion of nuclear weapons or related systems and to insist that consideration of NSNW's belong in bilateral negotiations between the US and Russia.²¹

Discussions may also want to include lessons from arms control arrangements elsewhere, for example, those that followed the Dayton agreement in regulating forces in the volatile Balkan region.

Perhaps the most effective lesson to be drawn from the latter is that it reinforces the traditional qualification that should underpin all discussions of arms control; namely the oft repeated recognition that arms control agreements cannot of themselves solve underlying problems. At best, they contain and prevent the exacerbation of critical situations by putting in place regulations and constraints on armed forces that minimise the room for suspicion

21 NATO members have said that they are willing to discuss transparency and confidence building ideas with Russia in the NRC on the respective NSNW postures. Work on developing these proposals is underway in the new NATO “Special Advisory and Consultation Arms Control, Disarmament and Non Proliferation Committee”.

and provide a degree of predictability and reassurance – especially through the creation of a forum and command format for discussion of military matters.

These are some of the elements that will need to be considered in developing a new framework for CAC in the Euro-Atlantic region. In these discussions two aspects dimensions merit particular attention: NATO's input and Russian security concerns.

The HLTF

The diversity of views that will exist in the all-inclusive forum means that the role of the HLTF takes on a special significance. NATO members will endeavour to speak with one voice and, therefore, provide a core input through the HLTF and the NATO caucus in Vienna.

Discussions in the HLTF will rehearse the full range of Allied concerns, perspectives and priorities. Each NATO member will have its national interest and red lines to protect. For most, there will be a premium on protecting the collective defence mission and NATO's ability to carry out its Article 5 commitments as well as the ability to undertake out-of-area operations – and area of major concern to Russia. All members will be aware of the need to seek constraints which do not at the same time restrict their own freedom of action.

NATO members have sharply differing views on the relevance of the flank limits and the need for zones of special restraint and additional transparency. Turkey's geostrategic location means it has long standing interests and concerns in the CFE Treaty, particularly the flank limits covering its neighbourhood throughout the trans-Caucasus, which it will seek to safeguard. Norway also has flank concerns. For their part, the Baltic States will bring their own perspectives and a concern to maintain flexibility for the Article 5 commitment, and the elements that are involved, reinforcement capacity, host nation support and exercises. According to officials they are not in favour of special limits or inclusion in any flank arrangements, reflecting the potential for improving their military capabilities in the future.

The HLTF brings together 28 NATO members. There is the question of whether and at what stage they should involve other non-NATO interested countries to participate in their work?

The NRC

The most significant question is whether Russian concerns can be addressed or explored separately. The problem is that Russia has shown no willingness, thus far, to engage in these discussions, and represents the biggest obstacle to solving its own problem. Russian officials have stated that the CFE Treaty is dead and they will not return to it.

The NRC is an obvious candidate for such discussions. As US Acting Under Secretary Rose Gottemoeller has emphasised, “As providers of security, NATO and Russia have unique assets and resources. Ours is a special club and the responsibilities are great. We should strive, together, for high achievements in the NRC.”²²

Could the NRC be used to engage Russian military officials and experts in a dialogue on mutual concerns and to establish a common baseline of assumptions and indicators? As noted earlier, exchanges on military structures and doctrines took place during the last phases of the Cold War. Such a dialogue in current conditions could facilitate the development of agreed indicators to increase warning and decision time for political leaders, a substantial contribution to strengthening security and stability.²³

Dialogue in current conditions could facilitate the development of agreed indicators

The NRC working group on Defence Transparency, Strategy and Reform has been used for exchanges on doctrine and related defence issues. It offers a forum for an open and focussed exchange of views of these basic defence issues at 29.²⁴ However, the German experience with their initiative called “the Common Space of Trust” is a worrying example of the lack of priority Russia accords to military transparency.²⁵

This episode had the dual effect of confirming fears of Russian unwillingness to embrace reciprocated transparency, and also reinforcing the caution of some NATO members towards new initiatives particularly those, as in this case, negotiated initially bilaterally and without full NATO participation.

In theory, the NRC should be an ideal venue for the exploratory exchange of ideas on these aspects and extensive efforts have been made to initiate a dialogue on enhancing transparency; with little effect. Many blame Russia for this lack of progress.²⁶ Others point out that some NATO members are also reluctant to move in this direction either because they do not see the need or because they believe Russia is not ready or willing to reciprocate.

22 Remarks at the NATO–Russian Council Ambassadorial Annotated Agenda. July 24 2013.

23 See the essay by Senator Sam Nunn in the Report “Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe”. Edited by Steve Andreasen and Isabelle Williams. The Nuclear Threat Initiative. Washington DC.

24 For discussion of the potential and limitations of the NRC see the “Role of the NRC”, European Leadership Network, forthcoming.

25 After negotiating the Common Space of Trust principle with Germany for a year, Russia finally declined even its limited scope – discussing only past exercises and not upcoming ones – in the context of the NRC. For a full account see the authors report on the NRC, *ibid*.

26 However, a recent briefing to the NRC by Russian Deputy Defence Minister Antonov on ZAPAD 2013 was well received as an indication of a more open cooperative approach to greater transparency.

In looking at a potential role for the NRC as a venue for discussions on conventional armed forces relevant to CAC it is important to note that some NATO members will seek to preserve the sanctity of the HLTF on conventional arms control.

In view of the success of the CFE Treaty the development of a new CAC framework tailored to contemporary conditions is a logical, but challenging, task. The relative simplicity of the Cold War has been replaced by a complex landscape in which the roles of armed forces are difficult to define and to quantify. The tensions of that period may have faded; but they are present in the relationship between NATO and Russia, and linger in certain regions. The challenge lies in designing a framework which responds to, and accommodates, the multiple security interests, and reinforces stability and security throughout the Euro-Atlantic region

The complexity of the search calls for multiple efforts at all levels official and unofficial. This is an area where organisations outside the formal process can play an essential role by bringing together officials, academics, military and civilian, the retired and the active to exchange perceptions, priorities, and concerns, and to establish the level playing field of agreed analysis essential for the construction of a new CAC framework. ■

About the Author

Simon Lunn is a Senior Associate Fellow for the European Leadership Network (ELN). He served as Secretary General to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly 1997-2007 following 8 years as the Deputy Secretary General where he initiated and implemented the Assembly's program of partnership and assistance to the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe.

From 1983-1989, he was Head of Plans and Policy on NATO's International Staff and was involved in all aspects of NATO defence planning. He was also a member of the High Level Task Force on preparations for the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) negotiations.

Between 1979-81 he worked at the US Congressional Research Service writing reports for Congress on NATO strategy on the 1979 INF decision. He also participated in the Senate hearings on the ratification of SALT II.

During the 1970s, when he was Director of the North Atlantic Assembly's Defence Committee he worked extensively on the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy.

He has a BA (Hons) in History from the University of Wales and an MA in War Studies from Kings College, London University. He attended the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst 1960-62 subsequently serving as an officer in the British army. He is currently a Senior Fellow at DCAF in Geneva and a consultant with NTI in Washington DC.

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