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Russia and NATO: How to overcome deterrence instability?

EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY REPORT

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Russia and NATO: How to overcome deterrence instability?

Executive Summary

The current Russia-NATO deterrence relationship is unstable, and dangerously so. Part of the problem is the deterrence and defence postures which have been developed by Russia and NATO. While they are meant to prevent war, some elements in the deterrence postures currently make this adversarial relationship unnecessarily prone to crises:

- **Russia's** "integrated strategic deterrence" envisages taking significant pre-emptive actions in all domains with an aim of dominating the early stages of any conflict. Russia seems to rely on creating a sense of unpredictability, and on keeping the opponent off-balance through statements and actions that come across as assertive or aggressive.

- **NATO's** "modern deterrence" remains work in progress. As a consequence, NATO's posture remains torn between the aspiration of projecting restraint and the concern that the current posture is too weak to deter Russia. That results in an often confusing deterrence signalling.

- The **negative 'interplay'** between the two deterrence concepts and postures and the danger of misunderstanding the other side's deterrence signalling can cause rapid and uncontrollable escalation during a Russia-NATO crisis.

The Russia - NATO deterrence relationship is at an inflection point. Between 2014 and 2018, both sides focused their attention on demonstrating their deterrence resolve and improving their ability to defend against an attack. They should now focus on making their existing deterrence postures fail-safe against the risks of incidents, accidents and inadvertent conflict in two areas:

1. **Addressing the perceived hostile intentions and minimising the likelihood of military coercion or surprise attack.**

- Russia should review its current deterrence posture, initiate early practical changes towards a less destabilising posture.
- At the July Summit, NATO should launch a review to assess the effectiveness of its existing deterrence posture and inform any further decisions about its modification.
- Both sides should work to re-introduce restraint into conventional deterrence postures through reviving the restraint pledges made in the 1990s, developing additional measures of restraint, and utilizing better the existing toolbox of confidence-building measures.
- Both sides should avoid increasing the role of nuclear forces in their deterrence postures.
- Both sides need to minimise the risk of cross-domain escalation from cyber and space operations.

2. **Creating space for crisis management diplomacy and avoiding rapid escalation.**
- Both sides should build crisis-management procedures into their deterrence postures. The need for rapid reaction cannot become an over-riding imperative for Russia and NATO.
- Russia and NATO ought to maintain multiple channels for routine and crisis communication. Effective crisis management cannot depend on the NATO-Russia Council in its present shape, nor on ad hoc emergency communication channels.

Introduction

The current Russia-NATO deterrence relationship is unstable, and dangerously so. Part of the problem is the deterrence and defence constructs which have been developed by Russia and NATO. This paper offers ways to minimize the risk factors and modify the postures in order to move the two sides towards a more stable deterrence relationship.[1]

Russia and NATO maintain deterrence postures to prevent the other side from initiating moves that could lead to a direct conflict. In case deterrence fails, these postures enable the conduct of defensive and offensive operations. At its core, a deterrence posture is about convincing the other side that taking an aggressive course of action would result in an unacceptable outcome. Deterrence is supposed to prevent war.

However, as the report will show, there are elements in the deterrence posture of Russia, but also of NATO, which currently make this adversarial relationship unnecessarily unstable and prone to sudden and acute crises. Some of these features were introduced into the postures by design, some appear to be a by-product of the developments of recent years. The presence of these elements creates friction which can make a Russia-NATO clash more likely. They also hinder the opportunities for a meaningful dialogue on crisis management and de-escalation.

Even though this report looks at both postures, the basic asymmetry of making comparisons involving Russia and NATO needs to be highlighted. At the political level, they subscribe to different values and norms of international behaviour. At the practical level, Russia is a single entity with considerable freedom of manoeuvre. NATO is a collective alliance of sovereign member states governed by consensus, grouping countries with different strategic cultures and interests. These differences have implications for all levels of NATO's and Russia's deterrence constructs from formulating policy goals, through decision-making procedures and force disposition, to the practical ability to move forces.

> *"The basic asymetry of making comparisons involving Russia and NATO needs to be highlighted."*

Another fundamental problem is the difficulty of assessing what credible deterrence really means. The judgement here depends not only on the military means and force ratios but also on the perceptions of those doing the deterring, and those who are to be deterred. The inevitable differences in perception by either side of what is credible or not result in an endless search for enhanced security. It is this dynamic of deterrence relationship and differences in perception that this report aims to identify and make better understood.

Some may argue that Russia alone is the source of instability in the current standoff as it is deliberately using a range of instruments which increase the danger of a conflict. According to this logic, there is no *Russia-NATO* deterrence instability problem, just a problem with Russia. This report treats such arguments seriously. It does not suggest NATO and Russia are both to be blamed for the present situation. It identifies the Russian approach to deterrence as much more dangerous with significantly higher escalation potential. But it argues that both sides would benefit from re-thinking the potentially dangerous elements of their own respective deterrence approaches and their interplay.

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1   The authors would like to thank Simon Lunn, Nick Williams and Ulrich Kühn for providing comments and suggestions to the draft versions of this report.

This paper starts by providing a critical assessment of the deterrence thinking and postures of Russia and NATO. It then proceeds to identify areas of friction and sources of instability in the mutual deterrence relationship, focusing on the risks of escalation during a NATO-Russia crisis. Finally, it recommends measures for modifying the deterrence postures of both sides and moving towards a more stable deterrence relationship.

1. Russia's deterrence posture vis-à-vis NATO

The Russian understanding of its relationship with NATO is of a persistent threat across all domains, predominantly military but also economic and societal. Such a viewpoint precedes the current confrontation, the starkest evidence of this being President Putin's speeches at the February 2007 Munich Security Conference[2] and at the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest,[3] in which he condemned the United States and its allies for their disregard of Russia's strategic interests.

Threat perception

The sense of threat from the West, and the need for Russia to act in its own defence, is pervasive in official Russian documents and analytical literature. Both the 2014 Military Doctrine[4] and 2015 National Security Strategy[5] identify the United States and NATO as a 'risk' and a 'threat' to the Russian Federation and its interests.

This is based on an appraisal that NATO member states, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have consistently

2   Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, President of Russia, 10 February 2007, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034

3   Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, President of Russia, 4 April 2008, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24903

4   Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, December 2014, https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2015/08/Russia-s-2014-Military-Doctrine.pdf

5   Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015, http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf

pursued unilateral foreign interventions. In several cases, these actions have bypassed international legal channels in which Russia has input, such as the UN Security Council, permitting a Russian accusation that NATO actions undermine the international legal order.

Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy notes that force as a factor in international relations has become increasingly common. It subsequently claims that the build-up in military potential of NATO, the expansion of the alliance and the extension of its military infrastructure towards Russia's borders, when combined with 'the endowment [of the alliance] with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law' poses a distinct threat to Russian national security.[6]

> *"The Russian leadership believes itself to be purposefully margenalised."*

The expansion of NATO and other Western institutions such as the European Union are also seen as having limited Russia's political and economic sphere of influence. When added to pre-existing Western dominance of key pillars of the global economic system, as well as the persistent use by the West of economic sanctions, the Russian leadership believes itself to be purposefully marginalised.

Furthermore, the Russian leadership believes that NATO member states further their economic and security interests by actively undermining regimes hostile to them. Democratic reform movements and pro-western lobbies in the post-Soviet space are viewed by the Kremlin as part of an informational and sociological campaign by the West, a campaign that ultimately aims

6   Ibid, points 14 and 15

at regime change within Russia itself. The National Security Strategy explicitly refers to US and EU support for 'the anti-constitutional coup d'etat in Ukraine' as an effort to counter Russia's Eurasian integration project,[7] whilst the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan between 2003 and 2005, and the Arab Spring in 2010-2012, are cited as examples of disruptive Western policy by Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov.[8] Such revolutions are now commonly referred to by President Putin and other leadership figures as a Western policy of 'controlled chaos'.

It is in the context of the consistent threat perception outlined above that Russia analyses the military capability and deployments of NATO. The expansion of NATO to encompass the former members of the Warsaw Pact and, in the case of the three Baltic republics, former Soviet territory, was viewed with concern. However, the progressive location of NATO military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders following 2014 is now seen as creating 'a threat to national security'.[9] In particular, the deployment of ballistic missile defence systems in the east of the alliance, alongside the ongoing development of non-nuclear strategic systems, is viewed as undermining strategic stability.

Russia's "integrated strategic deterrence"

In response to this perceived threat Russia has developed a distinct concept of deterrence. Termed 'strategic deterrence' in official documents, the Russian concept is inevitably more holistic than the NATO approach, encompassing notions such as compellence and containment, as well as deterrence per se. The Russian concept is not limited to purely military means. Rather, it adopts a whole-of-government approach, summarised in the National Security Strategy[10] as:

> Interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures […] being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts.[11]

Further characteristics of Russian strategic deterrence are elaborated in the military-encyclopaedic dictionary of the Ministry of Defence, which notes that 'Strategic deterrence is directed at the stabilisation of the military-political situation' to be achieved through influencing the 'military-political leadership and the population of the potential adversary state (or coalition of states)'. Crucially, the dictionary notes that 'Strategic-deterrent measures are carried out continuously, both in peacetime and in wartime'.[12] This continuous effort to influence the decision making process

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7   2015 National Security Strategy, point 17

8   Anthony Cordesman, Russia and the "Color Revolution", Center for Strategic & International Studies, 28 May 2014, https://csis-prod. s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/ publication/140529_Russia_Color_Revolution_Full.pdf

9   Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to NATO, 26 October 2017, https://missiontonato. mid.ru/web/nato-en/-/joint-press-conference-of-russia-s-ambassador-to-nato-alexander-grushko-and-special-representative-of-the-president-of-the-russian-federation-for-afgh?inheritRedirect=true

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10   It is worthy of note that the term interpreted in the Security Strategy as deterrence is 'sderzhivanie', literally translated as 'restraining' or 'holding back'.

11   2015 National Security Strategy, point 36

12   See Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, Russian Strategic Deterrence, Survival: Global Politics and Strategy August–September 2016, https://www.iiss.org/en/ publications/survival/sections/2016-5e13/survival--global-politics-and-strategy-august-september-2016-2d3c/58-4-02-ven-bruusgaard-45ec

of adversaries encompasses older Soviet and Tsarist concepts, such as reflexive control, alongside the more commonly cited efforts at misdirection and concealment, or 'maskirovka'.

Official documents and Russian analysts also make a distinction between 'regional' and 'global' deterrence, with the former aimed at deterring localised interstate conflict with Russia or its allies, and the latter aimed at deterring possibly existential conflict between great powers.[13]

Holistic approach. This approach, alongside Moscow's perception of a perpetual external threat, combine to create a unique Russian concept that envisages significant pre-emptive actions with an aim of dominating the early stages of any conflict. Such an approach envisages forward deployment of forces and continual active measures[14] as methods to demonstrate Russia's resolve in any conflict, thus limiting the options of an adversary and ultimately deterring war.[15]

Nuclear weapons are inherent not just as a deterrent of symmetrical nuclear conflict, but also as a tool of influence at a regional level. Some US and NATO policy makers consider that so-called 'de-escalatory nuclear strikes' remain a feature of Russian regional

deterrence and warfighting doctrine, despite its absence from official documents.[16] Furthermore, the 2014 Military Doctrine introduced the notion of explicitly non-nuclear deterrence. This draws both on Russia's increasingly sophisticated non-nuclear forces and on an understanding that non-nuclear strategic systems are a more usable asset than nuclear weapons.

In practice, it is not clear whether the holistic Russian strategic deterrence concept is workable. Attempting to unify disparate government functions into a coordinated deterrence strategy runs the risk of incoherence, thus undermining the clear strategic communication on which successful deterrence is based. Some analysts have argued that Russian policy makers and commentators have failed to appreciate the reciprocal nature of deterrence, relying on an assumption that potential adversaries interpret Russian policy precisely as it was intended.

This lack of appreciation of the subjectivity of external perceptions is particularly dangerous when considered against the predilection in Russian strategic thought to fight offensively, limiting an adversary's options by forcing them onto the defensive whilst Russia interdicts their lines of supply. The pre-emptive forward deployment of forces that this necessitates, rather than signalling that Russia would have an immediate advantage in any defensive war and thus deterring one, appears aggressive, triggering a security dilemma and regional build-up of forces of the opponents.

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13   S G Chekinov, S A Bogdanov, Strategic Deterrence and Russia's National Security Today, Military Thought, http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM THE ARCHIVES_No. 1_2017.pdf p.27

14   The Russian concept of 'active measures' refers to the manipulation of the political system of an adversary state through the combined use of disinformation, propaganda, and the creation and management of subversive organisations.

15   Stephen Covington, The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare, Belfer Center, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Culture%20of%20Strategic%20Thought%203.pdf p.43

16   See Olga Oliker, Russia's Nuclear Doctrine: What We Know, What We Don't, and What That Means, May 2016 https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160504_Oliker_RussiasNuclearDoctrine_Web.pdf

Russian deterrence signalling

Russian deterrence signalling, like NATO's, consists of demonstrating the will and capability to implement its declared deterrence policy. However, due to factors including Russia's position as a unilateral actor rather than an alliance and the unique nature of Russian strategic thought, Russian signalling is of a decidedly different nature to NATO's. Russia seems to rely on creating a sense of unpredictability, and on keeping the potential opponent off-balance through statements and actions that frequently come across as assertive or aggressive.

> *"Russia seems to rely on creating a sense of un-predicatability and on keeping the potential opponent off-balance."*

Nuclear signalling. Statements by the Russian leadership referring to Moscow's willingness to use nuclear weapons in defence of Russian interests (including the extension of Russia's nuclear guarantee to occupied Crimea) go beyond mere demonstrations of will. The bombastic rhetoric favoured by some lower governmental figures and the more cautious, yet still forthright, remarks by senior figures, including President Putin, propagate a general sense of resolve but also of ambiguity as to Russia's nuclear thresholds. Such a policy fits with the holistic nature of the Russian strategic deterrence concept, inhibiting the planning and decision making processes of potential adversaries.

This sense of unpredictability is reinforced by the heavily publicised deployment of dual conventional/nuclear weapons systems to geopolitically sensitive areas, most prominently Iskander missile systems to the Kaliningrad region (similar deployments to Crimea have also been mooted). Russian strategic aviation has also been used in a similar manner.

Brinkmanship. The aggressive behaviour of Russian fighter aircraft and naval vessels towards NATO and third party units in the vicinity of Russian territorial waters has also been identified as a potential signalling method. Close passes of NATO ships and aircraft carry an inherent escalation risk, whether accidental or otherwise. It is plausible that this risk is being instrumentalised by Russia to deter NATO and third parties from operating too close to its territory, whilst demonstrating a lower risk threshold on the part of Moscow.

Exercises. Large-scale military exercises within Russia also encompass a signalling aspect inseparable from their role as a training and capability assessment programme. Russia's demonstration of its military readiness and combined arms capability serve to demonstrate Russia's ability, if attacked, to dominate the early stages of a conflict and, as far as possible, keep an adversary on the defensive.[17] The nature of Russian military exercising is also indicative of the leadership's perception of the most probable military threats, whilst demonstrating to potential adversaries the Russian ability to respond effectively.

The Zapad 2017 exercise demonstrates this well.[18] In the Russian conception, demonstrating a rapid, aggressive response to a simulated NATO-backed incursion

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17   The Evolving Russian Concept of Strategic Deterrence: Risks and Responses, Anya Loukianova Fink, Arms Control Today, July/August 2017 https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-07/features/evolving-russian-concept-strategic-deterrence-risks-responses p.16

18   Michael Kofman, Zapad watch – summary of 'post exercise' exercises (the Zapad hangover), Russian Military Analysis, https://russianmilitaryanalysis.wordpress.com/2017/09/23/zapad-watch-summary-of-post-exercise-exercises-the-zapad-hangover/

into Belarus, followed by an assault on the NATO basing area (in this case the Baltic States), whilst all the while fighting a high intensity precision weapons campaign, serves a deterrent purpose. Yet, this creates a destabilising dynamic: Russia's wish to be able to signal domination of the early stages of a conflict may seen by NATO as preparation for the initiation of a conflict.

2. NATO'S deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia

The annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the war in eastern Ukraine and more aggressive Russian rhetoric combined with Russia's military build-up and increased activities in the Euro-Atlantic area are among the key catalysts that reshaped NATO's deterrence posture following 2014. During the past four years, the Alliance underwent a transition from heavy emphasis on out-of-area crisis management operations to a greater focus on collective territorial defence.

NATO's deterrence construct is significantly different from the Russian one. As this chapter shows, NATO's approach to deterrence of Russia has plenty to do with managing inter-alliance politics and utilising its limited military resources. This shapes decisively the conceptualization of the posture itself and deterrence signalling. The nature of the Alliance's policy-making also means that the challenges and weaknesses of the NATO approach are discussed much more openly than in case of Russia.

Threat perception[19]

The events of early 2014 played a critical part in creating and solidifying an Alliance-wide sense of vulnerability and urgency to respond to Russia's actions. While actual threat perception varied between the members, there was a shared appraisal of the need to move to a deterrence relationship as Russia 'fundamentally challenged [our] vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace'.[20] This drove a return to emphasis on credible

deterrence and, if deterrence were to fail, the ability to defend the territory of the member states - primarily in the context of Russia but also other threats, such as from the southern strategic direction.

A major Russian attack leading to the immediate activation of Article V, NATO's collective defence clause, and subsequent all-out war can be seen as improbable. Yet the threat perceived by some NATO members stems from a potential opportunistic Russian attempt to use local and regional superiority against an Ally to quickly achieve a *fait accompl*i on the ground. Such a tactical victory could have strategic consequences because failure to reverse the *fait accompli* would mean destruction of the Alliance. The related concern is the possibility that Russia can use military coercion or non-military tools to exert pressure on a NATO member, and be ready to use force if it fails to achieve its objectives through other means.

NATO's "modern deterrence"

The Alliance published its Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) in 2012 and is committed to the development of "an appropriate mix" of conventional, nuclear, and ballistic missile defence capabilities to ensure the security of its member states.[21] While the document complements the Alliance's Strategic Concept,[22] it provides clarity on the basics rather than offering operational guidance in response to specific external factors such as Russia's activities. In that regard, the two communiqués issued at the Wales and Warsaw NATO Summits

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19   Even while NATO is as a rule discussed in the report as a coherent whole, it consists of 29 independent member states which have their own approaches to Russia and their own views on deterrence.

20   Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, Available

online: http://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

21   NATO Official Website (2012) Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, Available here: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm

22   NATO Official Website (2014) Strategic Concepts, Available here: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm#

in 2014 and 2016 respectively offer more substantive direction on NATO's deterrence posture.

The **modern deterrence posture** features a small forward presence in the countries closest to Russia and emphasises the Alliance's unity and ability to reinforce its forward deployed forces in case of aggression - coupled with increased resilience of frontline members.[23] In practice, such a configuration significantly differs from the more substantial Cold War deployments of troops and equipment. It is designed to deliver the same deterrence value as the 'traditional' approach without requiring NATO members to reorient their defence postures or significantly step up their defence expenditures or acquisition of capabilities.

Such measures seem to allow characterisation of the current NATO approach as an evolving mix of deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment, with stronger emphasis so far on the latter. Given the difficulty of preventing an attack against certain parts of NATO territory, greater emphasis has been placed so far on inflicting costs on Russia. The increased readiness, preparation and equipping of follow on forces is seen as strengthening NATO's deterrence, ensuring collective response to an attack against an Ally.[24]

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23   Doorstep by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, NATO website, February 2016, Available online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_127825.htm, Accessed 6 March 2018

24   Such is the key message of all statements by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the Alliance deterrence posture. Please see press statements from July 2016: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_133260.htm, February 2017: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions_141340.htm, and June 2017: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/opinions_145381.htm.

Flexibility. NATO's approach is designed to address the wide array of threats to the east and south. Even though the majority of steps adopted at the Wales Summit and elaborated at the Warsaw Summit are de facto deterrence measures against Russia, the Alliance continues to remain involved in other theatres, such as the Balkans, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. This flexibility is reflected in the defence planning and capabilities procurement processes, which need to accommodate a multitude of operational demands.

"At the heart of NATO's concept is a clear political mandate requiring the deterrence posture to be reactive and non-escalatory."

Restraint. Also at the heart of NATO's concept is a clear political mandate requiring the deterrence posture to be reactive and non-escalatory in nature. It is consciously intended to be less provocative to Russia than the old Cold War model of the static, permanent deployment of large numbers of divisions. In line with NATO's obligations, deterrence measures were shaped in accordance with the NATO-Russia Founding Act (with no permanent stationing of significant combat forces and no deployment of nuclear weapons or nuclear storage sites on the territory of new members) and are implemented in a way that does not undermine existing arms control regimes, most notably the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Cost-efficiency. While most officials refrain from commenting on the place of defence in the setting of national priorities, the deterrence posture is obviously shaped to a considerable extent by the ability and readiness of individual NATO members to commit resources. Domestic political sensitivities with regards to financial investment in military potential, especially

in Germany, combined with differing overall threat perceptions and differing national attitudes towards the Alliance have a significant impact on the Alliance deterrence posture - even if the post-2014 deterioration of the security environment made investment in deterrence less contentious than it was earlier.

NATO deterrence signalling

Since 2014, NATO's deterrence posture has continued to evolve and the Alliance leadership is working on the most effective and cost-efficient response to Russian actions without provoking escalation. Unlike Russia's established deterrence posture, NATO's modern deterrence seems to be work in progress. This has a major impact on the shape of the Alliance deterrence signalling.

"Unlike Russia's established deterrence posture, NATO's modern deterrence seems to be work in progress."

Through its declarations and actions since 2014, NATO been communicating to Russia primarily that any attempt to challenge the territorial integrity of any Ally would be met with a response from NATO as a whole, and NATO would have both the political will and the adequate military capabilities to react. Hence, the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in the north-east comprising multinational battalion-size battlegroups, and the Enhanced Tailored Presence (ETP) in the south-east, are multinational and meant to provide a speed bump and a tripwire to deter and respond to any potential aggressor.[25] The same logic of signalling the readiness to react to Russian actions in a crisis or

conflict drove the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a 5,000-strong brigade, and an increase in size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to 40,000 personnel to provide the necessary military capabilities in a short timeframe.[26] Both force structures are to signal improved readiness and deployability as the first line of collective defence. In addition, having lost some of the expertise in practising large-scale defence activities against a strong state opponent, NATO is in the process of re-learning them through more regular, visible and robust exercising. A number of Allies consider that NATO's political and deterrence messages sent since 2014 have led to a steadier relationship with Russia.[27]

One of the major remaining challenges to effective deterrence is the potential inability of NATO members to reach **political consensus** in a crisis. Such an inability might stem from diverging assessments of the situation, the perceived reluctance of some decision-makers to provoke Russia, or the concerns about control of escalation of a potential crisis, but it may be one of the main factors that can debilitate NATO's ability to react. It can also be a source of instability, hampering the projection of confident strength, inviting probing and wedge driving, and increasing the incoherence of signaling and action.

Speed of decision-making is another challenge first acknowledged by the Wales Summit Communique, which formally announced that 'decision-making for the Response force [is] to be improved'. This has led to the decision to grant SACEUR the authority to increase the readiness level

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25   Official Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast, March 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm, Accessed on 6 March 2018

26   Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, NATO Response Force / Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, Accessed on 6 March 2018, https://shape.nato.int/nato-response-force--very-high-readiness-joint-task-force

27   Feedback from interviews with NATO officials

for units without a North Atlantic Council decision. However, lack of politically pre-authorised Allied responses to predefined scenarios is frequently defined as a weakness.

In certain cases, national legislation for participating in and facilitating Allied operations can also hamper rapid responses. The decision-making mechanisms vary from country to country with military deployments being the prerogative of the executive or subject to legislative approvals. While this would be difficult to address or circumvent at the intergovernmental level, it remains one of the focal points of discussion about possible changes of national practices and regulations.

Readiness and military mobility. Closely related to the evaluation of individual member states' role in strengthening NATO's deterrence posture is the state of their national infrastructure. Ports, airfields and rail links in the east and south require substantial upgrades to adequately facilitate troop and equipment mobility.[28] Moreover, internal regulations, transit and border check procedures and customs control have been raised as one set of the most critical issues affecting military transit.[29]

Such bureaucratic and logistical difficulties have implications that go beyond the challenge of transporting troops and equipment in peace time, which were the subject of an initial effort to establish a "military Schengen zone" in Europe. In the case of an active operation near or within the territory of the Alliance, the follow-on forces would be significantly slower than the opponent's given the practical obstacles to deployment in the east and south.[30] Past experience from exercising scenarios shows a 14-day deployment time for the main NRF elements.[31] While there will certainly be greater urgency to an NRF deployment in case of aggression against an Ally and in light of the improved readiness levels, such a situation is seen a window of vulnerability.

Capabilities and reinforcements. According to some experts, NATO's current deterrence

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28   Private conversations. For more information also consult US Army in Europe Briefing, ENABLING NATO RESPONSIVENESS THROUGH FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, The Three Swords Magazine, 2016, Available here: http://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/_news_items_/2016/Freedom_of_Movement.pdf.

29   Daily Finland, NATO to build new command centers in Europe , November 2017, http://www.dailyfinland.fi/worldwide/3024/NATO-to-build-new-command-centers-in-Europe, Herszenhorn, D, Call for 'military Schengen' to get troops moving, Politico, September 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/call-for-military-border-schengen-to-get-troops-moving-nato-eu-defense-ministers/, Vandiver, J, Mattis, Allies Eye Faster Military Movement Across Europe,

Military.com, February 2017, http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/10/25/mattis-allies-eye-faster-military-movement-across-europe.html, ADVISORY COUNCIL ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (2015) DEPLOYMENT OF RAPID-REACTION FORCES, http://aiv-advies.nl/download/1ebd8d2b-037e-433e-8d6f-7a53c6b8db72.pdf, Spiegel Online, NATO Grapples with Serious Organizational Shortcomings, October 2017, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-faces-serious-shortcomings-in-command-revamp-a-1173947.html, Accessed on 6 March 2018

30   For more information please see Kramer, F and Binnendijk, H (2018) MEETING THE RUSSIAN CONVENTIONAL CHALLENGE EFFECTIVE DETERRENCE BY PROMPT REINFORCEMENT, Atlantic Council, Available here: http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Meeting_Russian_Conventional_Challenge.pdf, Accessed 7 March 2018

31   Abts, Jan, NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force: Can the VJTF give new élan to the NATO Response Force, NATO Defense College, Research Division paper, February 2015, Available here: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/189415/rp_109.pdf, Accessed on 6 March 2018

posture may require further recalibration to effectively counter Russia's capabilities to rapidly concentrate forces and support effective deterrence signalling.

On balance, in defence of the Baltics the Alliance can mobilise a number of battalions comparable to Russia in terms of manpower.[32] However, the majority of the Russian units have greater firepower, including modernised artillery and heavy armoured vehicles with support from combat aircraft and assault helicopters.[33] Combined with the new Russian offensive capabilities and the A2/AD installations in Kaliningrad, these assets present a significant military challenge.

Another factor undermining deterrence credibility is the issue of heavy reinforcements. A RAND estimate suggested 'six to seven brigades, including at least three heavy brigades, backed by NATO's superior air and naval power' could mount a credible resistance against a Russian incursion in the Baltic States area.[34] The more difficult factor in current planning for sustainable defences is the lack of readily available forces that can match Russian firepower. The timeline for sending a combined arms battalion from Germany to eastern parts of the Alliance is approximately seven to ten days. But a critical

mass of European Allies are not capable of providing larger or more capable units which would be crucial in the case of a sustained attack; half of NATO members' active armies are less than 20,000 soldiers.[35] Current estimates suggest that it will take months to build 'sufficient U.S. and allied heavy combat and sustainment forces in Eastern Europe'.[36] Moreover, even if NATO members are capable of mobilising sufficient firepower to respond to a potential attack, it is unlikely that that their deployment under effective command would be done in an effective manner without prior training and exercising.[37]

The response to Russia's nuclear posture. Another challenge may be how to improve the effectiveness of NATO's nuclear posture and specifically deny Russia an advantage under its alleged logic of "escalate to de-escalate / win". For some, this points to the key challenge for nuclear planning. As it stands, according to some experts the Alliance thus needs to improve its "capability to assure a response to a limited nuclear attack, without resorting to the strategic nuclear forces of the Allies".[38]

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32   Sokolsky, R, The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security, Carnegie Europe, March 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/13/new-nato-russia-military-balance-implications-for-european-security-pub-68222, Accessed on 6 March 2018

33   For full analysis of capabilities see Schlapak and Johnson, 2016, Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics, RAND, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

34   Schlapak and Johnson (2016) Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics, RAND, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

35   See Soesanto S (2015) Europe needs less soldiers – but more European ones, NATO Review Magazine, Available here: https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Also-in-2015/europe-defense-budget-military-soldiers/EN/index.htm

36   H. Hicks, K and Sawyer Samp, Lisa (ed) March 2017, Recalibrating U.S. Strategy toward Russia: A New Time for Choosing, Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 104 Available here: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6sQpDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false

37   Braw, E, Russia Has 100K Troops On the Move. Here's Why NATO Can't Do the Same Defense One, September 2017, http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/09/nato-russia-military-mobilization-zapad/140747/

38   Corbett, Andy, Deterring a Nuclear Russia in the 21st Century: Theory and Practice, NDC Research

Integration of different domains. In response to Russia's progress on cross-domain coercion and hybrid warfare, NATO is yet to develop a defence and deterrence doctrine that can adequately address the integration of multiple deterrence domains in a crisis.[39] By increasing the broad non-military measures of strategic influence, Russia is understood by some to be gaining an edge over NATO's military and political capacities to protect its citizens. Given the limits of what the Alliance can do in other spheres, it is important that the Allies are prepared and able to increase their own resilience and strengthen their ability to counter propaganda and subversive social interference.

"Broader questions about the end-goal of NATO's policy towards Russia remain unanswered."

Relationship between deterrence and dialogue. Broader questions about the end-goal of NATO's policy towards Russia remain unanswered. It appears that the primary objective of NATO's deterrence strategy at the moment is the containment of Russian actions and provocations. However, the Alliance has also indicated a desire to bring Russia back into compliance with international norms and the rules-based security system of Europe.

Report 2016

39   Adamsky, D, Cross-domain coercion: The
Current Art of Russian Strategy, November 2015, IFRI,
https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/
pp54adamsky.pdf

3. Current deterrence postures: sources of instability

As shown in Chapter 1, longstanding Russian traditions of strategic thought put emphasis on the need to dominate the early phases of a conflict, reducing the adversaries' freedom of manoeuvre and available responses. In order for the Russian military to be certain of early phase dominance vis-à-vis NATO, it must forward-deploy large numbers of modern units with sufficient firepower in close proximity to NATO's borders, and prepare their further reinforcement. Russia is also prone to signal assertively its readiness for a military conflict and accept more risks in terms of brinkmanship.

As shown in Chapter 2, this approach causes concern especially among NATO's easternmost member states, in that they are now vulnerable to a Russian assault or coercion (a concern given greater credibility by Russian interventions in Georgia and Ukraine). This substantiates calls for further reassurance measures from NATO. It also creates a powerful pressure on NATO, its members and its structures to do more to strengthen forward-deployed units, beef-up main reinforcement forces, speed up the decision-making, increase readiness and facilitate fast movement of forces.

These NATO responses fuel the Russian General Staff's demands for the additional capability to dominate the early stages of a conflict, leading to additional Russian deployments. This, in turn, is seen by NATO as confirmation of Russia's preparations for offensive war-fighting.

Rapid and uncontrollable escalation during a Russia-NATO crisis is thus made more likely by the negative 'interplay' between the deterrence concepts and postures of both sides and the danger of misunderstanding the other side's deterrence signalling.

Crisis dynamics

The Russian deterrence construct has the biggest potential to trigger unintended rapid escalation during a crisis. Regardless of the source of the crisis and the stakes involved,[40] Russia is likely to signal its resolve in a decidedly forthright manner, deploying its full range of military and non-military capabilities. This forecast fits both with the political aspect of integrated strategic deterrence and with Russian military thought, that favours the offensive and pushing the adversary back to limit their decision making scope and coerce them to stand down. It is likely that any crisis would see not only wide-ranging Russian deployments, but also a significant increase of informational and cyber operations.

Further into a crisis, any perception of the threatening alteration of the situation or change to the local balance of forces (that mobilisation of NATO's forces or reinforcement of eastern members by individual allies would likely represent), would place great pressure on the Russian military to reinforce its own deployments in order to maintain its superiority. It might also push the military to demand authorisation from the Russian leadership to act before Russia loses its advantageous position.

With regards to NATO, initial Russian actions would likely be seen as a part of a plan to challenge the Alliance, thus raising alarm and prompting the mobilisation of the alliance's response and main forces. From the perspective of NATO's current modern

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40   In a recent study, Ulrich Kühn analyses three scenarios of a Russia-NATO crisis in the Baltic Sea area, drawing attention to the complicated interplay between the actors involved and the possibility of inadvertent or accidental escalation. See: Ulrich Kühn, Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook, Carnegie Endowment, March 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/preventing-escalation-in-baltics-nato-playbook-pub-75878

deterrence construct, delay in activating its forces and bringing reinforcements too late could seriously undermine its ability to control and de-escalate a crisis, given the inadequacy of the forward-deployed forces. Delaying the activation and deployment of the response forces might be seen by Moscow as weakness (and provoke further escalation or attack) or might become ineffective because of Russian counter-measures. Yet, early activation of NATO forces is also likely to pose a challenge from the viewpoint of the Russian deterrence construct: Russia would have either to move to block the reinforcements and double down with its own military build-up, or give away the initiative in the crisis. Even if it is seen by NATO as a move to bolster deterrence, the loss of an early operational advantage that Russian commanders see as fundamental to their doctrine would necessitate a response, most likely an aggressive one.

> *"Early activation of NATO forces is also likely to pose a challenge from the viewpoint of the Russian deterrence construct."*

In practical terms, confronted with rising tensions combined with a visible and continuous Russian troop presence near national borders, a concerned Ally or Allies will most likely request early consultations and action. This may result in the "preventive" deployment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the preparation for deployment of the NATO Response Force (NRF). Under the circumstances of multiple threats below the threshold of open aggression, a military force on the ground would be 'operating in a grey area between internal and external threats.'[41]

At the same time, the interaction of NATO and national-level signalling and parallel activities on the ground executed by different Allies could quickly lead to incoherence and confused outcomes. Diverging threat perceptions and national priorities exacerbate the difficulty of maintaining a unified NATO approach,[42] as individual member states can favour using more - or less - assertive crisis management tools, or see the need for displaying more - or less - offensive capabilities. Initiatives to move units or equipment closer to the Russian border may be implemented by individual countries or a group of Allies, but may not have Alliance-wide support.[43] Russia may not be able to distinguish or properly "read" such developments.

In this particular scenario, the characteristics of both deterrence constructs, and not the stakes involved, can be decisive for turning a crisis into a conflict. The postures of both sides currently gear them towards rapid reaction and seem to be based on the assumption that a show of resolve should be sufficient to terminate a crisis or resolve it on advantageous terms. At the same time, they make it more difficult for political leaders to pause and re-assess the situation if the crisis is not resolved but is instead aggravated. Russia could decide that the only way to re-establish deterrence with NATO is through an offensive action, and might assume that internal weaknesses and inconsistencies in NATO's deterrence posture would make the Alliance more likely to back off. The North Atlantic Alliance, despite likely problems with generating a coherent response and

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41   Zapfe, M, NATO's "Spearhead Force", CSS Analysis in Security Policy, May 2015, Available online: http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse174-EN.pdf

42   Kacprzyk, A and Karsten F, Adapting NATO's Conventional Force Posture in the Nordic-Baltic Region, PISM, August 2017, Available online: https://www.pism.pl/Publications/PISM-Policy-Paper-no-156

43   See https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/IMG/2017/Publications/ICDS_Policy_Paper_European_Deterrence_Initiative_Eerik_Marmei-Gabriel_White_December_2017.pdf.

reinforcing deterrence, could nevertheless be expected to conclude that it needs to resist Russian actions with all its forces, or risk political collapse. Most significantly, at this point the origins and stakes of the crisis may become less important than acting according to the logic of each side's deterrence constructs.

Other Destabilising Factors

The extension of deterrence to include the **domains of cyber and space** presents a considerable additional challenge to the management of any such a crisis, whether intended or otherwise.

NATO has offered some clarity in its approach to these new cross-domain relationships by adopting cyber as a formal domain of operations and declaring that a cyberattack on an ally may be a cause for triggering Article V, and thus possible retaliation by conventional or nuclear means. Yet there has been no clarity as to the threshold that would trigger such a response. Even if deliberate, this ambiguity speaks to a significant problem inherent to modern deterrence, namely managing escalation across domains. Whilst the Russian deterrence concept is holistic by design, it is not clear that Russian planners have taken into account the possibility of the adversary's misperception regarding their actions in the cyber or space domains and their effects on strategic or conventional escalation.

The secretive nature of these capabilities complicates their use as a deterrent. The clarity upon which classical deterrence is based, a combination of public resolve and the demonstration of practical capability to back it up, is absent from the cyber domain.

It is also easy to misperceive one's own strengths. A belief that the adversary's command and control network has been so thoroughly infiltrated that in the event of conflict aspects of it may be rendered inoperable,[44] whilst believing one's own network to be secure, may instil a false sense of security and might encourage escalatory measures in a crisis that might otherwise be considered reckless.[45]

"Cyber activities are an integral part of preparation of the battlefield, but they must be conducted on a continuous basis, irrespective of peacetime, wartime, or crisis."

In modern state-on-state warfare, cyber activities are an integral part of preparation of the battlefield, but by necessity they must be conducted on a continuous basis, irrespective of peacetime, wartime, or crisis. Such methodology is explicitly acknowledged in Russian doctrine and strategic thought (and increasingly through military recruitment and procurement), leading to ambiguity as to whether cyber activities constitute preparatory or defensive measures, or the initial steps of a first strike.[46]

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44   See Beyza Unal & Patricia Lewis, Cybersecurity of Nuclear Weapons Systems: Threats, Vulnerabilities and Consequences, Chatham House, January 2018, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2018-01-11-cybersecurity-nuclear-weapons-unal-lewis-final.pdf ; Andrew Futter, Is Trident safe from cyber attack?, European Leadership Network, February 2016, https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Is-Trident-safe-from-cyber-attack-1.pdf

45   Why Our Nuclear Weapons Can Be Hacked, The New York Times, 14 March 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/opinion/why-our-nuclear-weapons-can-be-hacked.html

46   See Jen Weedon, Beyond 'Cyber War': Russia's Use of Strategic Cyber Espionage and Information Operations in Ukraine, in Kenneth Geers (ed.) Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Aggression Against

NATO and its member states have also begun more readily to acknowledge this process,[47] but its escalatory potential is still poorly understood. Indeed, efforts by NATO member states to deter and counter Russian cyber-activity have failed so far.[48]

As with cyber programmes, much of the **space architecture** on which modern systems rely is dual use (civilian and military). This creates an inherent linkage between interference with space assets, whether in orbit or on earth, and critical cyber systems that manage everything from nuclear command and control to precision farming, as well as to the conventional military domains. The reliance of the US and its allies on network-centric methods of war following the revolution in military affairs (RMA) has created a reliance on space infrastructure unprecedented in history, a reliance that an increasingly technologically advanced Russia is emulating. During a crisis, that may create incentives to target space assets early and decisively, especially since it is unclear what the symmetrical or cross-domain response to their destruction or incapacitation would be.

Ukraine, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence Tallinn, Estonia, 2015, pp.73-74

47   See Thomas Marino, Maintaining NATO's Technological Edge: Strategic Adaptation and Defence Research and Development, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Science and Technology Committee, 8 October 2017, https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2017-11/2017%20-%20174%20STC%2017%20E%20bis%20-%20MAINTAINING%20NATO%27S%20TECHNOLOGICAL%20EDGE.pdf

48   Peter Singer, The 2018 State of the Digital Union: The Seven Deadly Sins of Cyber Security we Must Face, War on the Rocks, 30 January 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/2018-state-digital-union-seven-deadly-sins-cyber-security-must-face/?lipi=urn%3Ali%3Apage%3Ad_flagship3_feed%3BBsQo71goRIGJoeTjEAW9%2BA%3D%3D

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Russia and NATO see each other as adversaries and potential military opponents. Both sides have developed specific deterrence postures designed to prevent war, but have also started a race for competitive advantage. These deterrence constructs are distinct but, taken together, they have led to a state of self-perpetuating instability. Both sides are concerned that their postures are not credible in the eyes of the opponent or include fatal vulnerabilities. They are thus primed to continue building up their deterrence and defence capabilities.

As described in the previous chapters, the characteristics of these deterrence postures play a major role in perpetuating the current Russia-NATO tensions and can make conflict likely in the event of a crisis. Instead of protecting against threats, the deterrence postures increasingly themselves become sources of threats. **Russia and NATO need to deepen their understanding of the other side's deterrence posture and reflect on why their own posture is seen at threatening by the other side.** The basic disconnect between the two side's approaches to deterrence, as described above, is inherently escalatory. Inadequate understanding of the other side's motivations for developing a particular model of deterrence, its decision making calculus and its culture of strategic thought not only leads to planning on erroneous assumptions but also serves to reinforce the inflated sense of threat and pushes both sides towards a less stable deterrence relationship.

One does not need to read the adversary fully correctly to successfully deter it. During the Cold War, both the Warsaw Pact and NATO grossly over-estimated the military capabilities of the other side and, in some phases of the confrontation, its readiness to initiate a conflict. It may also be argued that it is better to over-react to the other side's offensive doctrine than to suffer the costs of deterrence failure. After all, inadvertent escalation due to misreading the opponent was avoided during the Cold War, with some problematic episodes such as the 1983 Able Archer war scare. However, the current situation is more challenging than the Cold War due to the multitude of players involved (including third countries and non-state actors), the broadening of the crisis spectrum to cyber and space domains, advances in conventional and nuclear prompt strike capabilities, and geopolitical changes which have created new areas or domains where one side can rapidly gain advantage over the other. The fact that deterrence worked during the Cold War should not be a reason for complacency.

The Russia - NATO deterrence relationship is at an inflection point. Between 2014 and 2018, both sides focused their attention on demonstrating their deterrence resolve and improving their ability to defend against an attack. Assuming that the other side did in fact had such intentions or plans - which is debatable - this task has been essentially achieved. NATO has been successful in deterring / dissuading Russia from an armed attack against NATO-protected territory, while Russia has deterred / dissuaded the US and NATO from initiating any aggressive actions against the Russian Federation. There are no grounds to assume that this mutual deterrence relationship is at risk of failing for reasons other than mismanagement of a crisis or a dramatic misreading of the other side.

One possibility for Russia and NATO is to continue along the current lines in their quest for "better" or more credible deterrence - which will continue to cause instability. Another is a focus on making their existing postures fail-safe against the risks of incidents, accidents and inadvertent conflict and on lowering mutual friction.

The following recommendations are aimed at moving the Russia-NATO relationship from the zone of instability described above,

towards a stable mutual deterrence. These recommendations address two aspects of the existing postures: the potential for rapid military escalation of a crisis and inadequate crisis management arrangements.

1. Addressing the perceived hostile intentions and minimising likelihood of military coercion or surprise attack.

Russia should review its current posture and move towards changing it, starting with practical measures to reduce friction with NATO.

The broad Russian approach of "integrated strategic deterrence" is aggravating problems rather than serving Moscow's security interests. Over-reliance on brinkmanship, assertive signalling and preparations for early massive cross-domain operations against NATO have resulted in a mobilisation of the Alliance and a number of non-aligned countries in Europe against Russia, additional deployment of US and other forces near Russia's border and a build-up of military capabilities in a number of "frontline" states.

> *"Russia's reliance on un-predictability and surprise could be self-defeating in a crisis."*

The starting point for Moscow could be a critical re-assessment of Russia's threat perception and related deterrence requirements, as it now worryingly misjudges the intentions, policy and specific actions of NATO and its members, fuelling Moscow's assertive posture. Russia's reliance on unpredictability and surprise could be self-defeating in a crisis. It is unclear if there is a feedback loop informing Moscow's leadership of the results of Russian deterrence policy, or that there is any official-level reflection on the effectiveness of the current approach.

In would be desirable for Russia to consider the benefits of adopting a narrower deterrence concept that focuses on punishment (including nuclear), not on early denial or assertive brinkmanship. However, such a fundamental change remains unlikely: the current approach appears deeply rooted in the Russian tradition of strategic thought and seems to be still considered by the political and military leadership as a useful tool in securing Russia's international position and its security going forwards.

A more realistic approach may be to identify measures within the framework of the existing Russian deterrence construct which would reduce unpredictability and potential for crisis instability, creating the basis for a more stable deterrence relationship with NATO. In practical terms, Russia should:

- abstain from further increasing its offensive military potential in the Western strategic direction, as its current capabilities already serve the purpose of deterring an attack on Russia;

- decrease the scale and frequency of its major exercises in the vicinity of NATO territory, and refrain from conducting snap exercises simulating massive concentrations of forces against NATO as they add to instability and blur the gap between peacetime and crisis;

- re-think some forms of brinkmanship, for example its assertive interdictions of NATO and partner aircraft and ships in the vicinity of Russian territory, airspace violations, or its operations in cyberspace;

- strengthen its military's institutional capacity to understand NATO's deterrence activities and predict the likely response to any strengthening of Russia's deterrence posture.

NATO should launch a review process to assess the effectiveness of its current deterrence posture and inform any further decisions about its modification.

In the context of the upcoming Summit in July 2018, the NATO leadership should launch a review of the effectiveness of its current approach to deterrence and assess its future deterrence and defence needs. That would build on and supplement the work done in the framework of the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review initiated at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 and finalized in 2012, but not initiate a new DDPR process. In practical terms:

- the Alliance should continue with the current plans for optimising reinforcement capability, but examine whether what is already in place and planned is sufficient to signal resolve and maintain deterrence credibility vis-à-vis Russia;

- the review should not start with the assumption that the current posture is insufficient, but assess as objectively as possible its credibility in the eyes of Russia, and the current ability of NATO to "read" the Russian deterrence posture and signalling, and of Russia to understand NATO's signalling;

- the review should analyse the impact of adopting different types of deterrence postures across domains for overall military balance and for the stability of the relationship with Russia, including for the dynamics and escalation potential of any future crisis;

- NATO should assess carefully the pros and cons of models of future deterrence posture that would prioritise massive peacetime forward deployments or aim to mimic the Russian rapid decision-making and early escalation approach - two measures that could significantly add to the instability caused by the Russian deterrence construct;

- the review's findings should inform the decisions of NATO leaders on further developments of its deterrence posture beyond the Warsaw summit agenda, which may be taken at the next summit-level meeting.

Both sides should work to re-introduce restraint into their conventional deterrence postures.

The scenario of a sudden concentration of the opponents' forces followed by either strategic coercion or an attack continues to influence deterrence postures. Instead of increasing the strength of forward deployed forces on both sides of the border, a better way to address the threat of surprise attack may be through the mutual development of restraint measures that can impede any sudden concentration of forces or a surprise attack, including through the following measures:

- **Reviving past restraint measures.** The 1997 NATO and NATO-Russia Founding Act restraint pledges, and the commitments made by Russia at the 1999 OSCE Istanbul summit with regards to Kaliningrad and Pskov oblast, have become increasingly side-lined. They were based on a common vision of the shape of European security architecture that may have become outdated by now. Yet, they remain important as examples of mutual restraint pledges regarding the military postures and deployment of additional forces in the border areas by both NATO and Russia. These pledges could be re-examined and adapted to the 21st century situation, including through work on a modern definition of the size and kinds of forward-deployed forces or reinforcements that can be destabilising.

- **Developing new specific proposals on restraint.** Both sides are concerned about certain activities and features

of the opponent's deterrence posture and both accuse the other of breaking previous restraint commitments. A useful starting point would be for NATO and Russian experts to initiate a dialogue - in a realistic and serious fashion - about what exactly they would expect from the other side as practical manifestations of restraint. Measures to be discussed might include a freeze on additional deployments in specific areas; restraint in terms of developing, introducing or forward-deploying of specific offensive or defensive systems or in exercising; a decrease in combat readiness levels; limits on or reductions of crucial enablers (e.g. land, air and sea lift capabilities). The identified list of restraint measures could then be jointly discussed with the aim of creating a balanced and mutually acceptable package.

- **Utilising the existing CSBM toolbox.** A number of restraint mechanisms, risk reduction devices and transparency proposals have already been developed as Confidence and Security Building Measures in the CSCE/OSCE process or have been proposed there. These ideas can be used to identify restraint measures for Russia and NATO and its members.

Both sides should not increase the role of non-strategic nuclear forces in their deterrence postures.

The role of nuclear weapons in Russia's deterrence posture, despite the development of a supplementary conventional capability, remains significant, and NATO is considering the effectiveness its nuclear deterrence. At the same time, any detonation of nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the nature of a conflict and open the doors to a full nuclear exchange. Recognising the contribution of nuclear weapons to deterring existential threats, Russia and NATO should avoid integrating them closer

in their operational planning and exercising. In practice, that would necessitate a review of existing nuclear doctrines by Russia and, for NATO, maintaining the "firewall" between the nuclear and conventional domains. As suggested in a recent UNIDIR study,[49] NATO and Russia should also consider measures to physically confine non-strategic nuclear warheads deployed in Europe to storage sites with no option of quick or undetected deployment to combat units.

Russia and NATO need to minimise the risk of cross-domain escalation from cyber and space operations.

Recognition of the escalatory potential of cyber and space activity is the first step towards minimising risk. A simple, mutual acknowledgement that limiting cyber espionage and cyber interference during periods of potential crisis, such as around large military exercises, would reduce the risk that such activity could be mistaken for the beginnings of a cyberattack. This would be a net gain for Euro-Atlantic security. Similarly, mutual recognition that any interference with space assets (not just their physical destruction) carries cross-domain escalatory potential would be a contribution to reducing risk in times of crisis.

2. Creating the space for crisis management diplomacy and avoiding rapid escalation.

Both deterrence postures are driven by the aspiration to allow rapid decision-making and rapid reaction to the military challenge from the other side, which the planners consider crucial for the credibility of deterrence. This

49   Podvig, P and Serrat, J (2017) Lock them Up: Zero-deployed Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe, UNIDIR study, Available here: http://www. unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/lock-them-up-zero-deployed-non-strategic-nuclear-weapons-in-europe-en-675.pdf, Accessed online 7 March 2018

is an area in which NATO is seen as lagging behind Russia and further work towards increasing early warning, responsiveness and readiness is to be expected. Yet NATO-Russia crisis management mechanisms have received far less attention than they ought to. This augments the risk that Russia or NATO could inadvertently move into a crisis or initiate hostilities because of incorrectly reading the actions of the other side <u>and</u> lack of communication. Worryingly, both sides may assume that any diplomatic communication during a crisis would either be a waste of time or be initiated by the opponent as part of a propaganda effort or deception operation to cover movements on the ground.

Both sides should build crisis-management procedures into both deterrence postures.

"There needs to be space created for political re-flection on the situation, internal and external con-sultations and diplomatic interactions."

The need for rapid reaction cannot become an over-riding imperative for Russia and NATO. There needs to be space created for political reflection on the situation, internal and external consultations and diplomatic interactions in all phases of a crisis. Given the fear of Russian rapid deployment capability, there are suggestions for NATO to provide its military commanders with broad pre-authorization to implement additional measures such as forward movement of forces, without further political decision. These proposals should be carefully examined against the need to ensure political control of crisis developments. The Russian civilian leadership should be correspondingly aware that what its military commanders may consider automatically implementable tactical moves to strengthen deterrence (e.g. activation of its A2/AD complexes or forward movement of forces) could push Russia into an escalating crisis with NATO.

Crisis management procedures should assure tight political control over military activities, especially measures in the early stages of a crisis which could be seen as escalatory. They also need to assign adequate time and give authorisation for relevant political and military leaders to engage in interactions with the other side with the explicit aim of terminating the crisis. In NATO's case, the procedures also need to clarify and resolve in advance any conflicts over parallel political decision-making and diplomacy activities and military signaling at national and NATO levels.

Russia, NATO and NATO members need to maintain multiple channels for routine and crisis communication.

Effective crisis management cannot depend on the NATO-Russia Council in its present shape, or on *ad hoc* emergency communication channels. The foundation needs to be established pre-crisis. This process would not start from scratch. Russia, NATO, and some NATO partners maintain such contacts. Procedures for NATO-Russia "hotline" communication have apparently been tested and are considered appropriate.

But this may not be sufficient. Interaction in the NATO-Russia Council remains limited to the Ambassadorial level, and interactions between the respective military establishments are infrequent and restricted. The fact that only a small group of interlocutors engages in such contact could become a serious problem during a crisis, when the same group of top military leaders would most likely be involved in planning operations and might not be available for crisis management contacts. Multiplying and diversifying the political-military and military-to-military communication channels at NATO-Russia and bilateral levels, utilising lessons learned from US-Russia deconfliction agreements in Syria, should be seen as a priority.

Implementing the recommendations in this report would create a more stable environment without endangering the basic security interests of NATO or Russia. Both sides would still maintain contingency plans in case of an attack, they would prepare and exercise reinforcement operations and be able to make adjustments to their forward-deployed forces. They would, however, refrain from relying on hair-trigger response postures, reject extensive pre-delegation of authority to military commanders, show restraint in major forward-deployment of forces, and invest in joint crisis-management mechanisms. In practical terms, that would mean Russia moving closer to the philosophy of the current NATO deterrence posture, and NATO not replicating the most destabilizing features of the Russian posture.