



*NATO, Russia
and European
security*



Tomas Valasek



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Centre for European Reform, 14 Great College Street, London, SW1P 3RX

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© CER NOVEMBER 2009 ★ ISBN 978 1 901 229 92 9

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Tomas Valasek

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tomas Valasek is director of foreign policy and defence at the Centre for European Reform. His previous CER publications include: ‘Obama, Russia and Europe’, June 2009; ‘What the economic crisis means for the EU’s eastern policy’, April 2009; ‘Is Russia a partner to the EU in Bosnia?’, March 2009; ‘Why Ukraine matters to Europe’, December 2008; ‘What Europe wants from President Obama’, November 2008; and ‘Willing and able? EU defence in 2020’, June 2008 (as co-author).

AUTHOR’S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to all CER staff for their support and their useful comments and editing. Special thanks to Clara Marina O’Donnell for co-writing an earlier version of this paper; and to Kate Mullineux for design and layout. Kori Schake and Ron Asmus provided invaluable advice, for which I am grateful. The views expressed in the paper and any errors are, of course, the author’s alone.

The publication of this working paper would not have been possible without the support of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF). The GMF is a non-partisan American public policy and grant-making institution dedicated to promoting greater co-operation and understanding between the United States and Europe.



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1 Introduction

How should NATO react to a resurgent Russia? Countries in Europe's north and east worry that Moscow is blundering into a confrontation with the alliance, and they have demanded that NATO start drafting contingency plans and hold exercises to rehearse a possible war. Their calls predate, but have intensified since the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, which scared allies in Central Europe in particular. Their concerns are partly shared by countries in Europe's north, like Norway. Many of its defence experts fear that Moscow may use military force to assert control over the Arctic's energy resources.

Other countries in NATO disagree. While the Central and North European countries favour military preparations, a sizeable group of allies around the UK and the Netherlands think war planning against Russia would be a distraction from Afghanistan. Others like Germany or Spain believe that fears of an attack from Russia are greatly exaggerated; and that NATO should focus on co-operating with Russia, not defending against it. The alliance started some planning for a possible conflict with Russia in late 2008, though limited in scope because of disagreements among allies.

The allies have a strong reason to resolve their differences over the next few months: at their summit in April 2009, NATO heads of state decided to produce a new 'strategic concept', the alliance's key guiding document which outlines the main threats and defensive strategies. The current strategic concept is a decade old and out of date. But there is a risk that the new one may not provide much meaningful guidance either, unless the allies craft a more common view on what sorts of risks the alliance faces from Russia, and how best to respond to them.

This paper seeks to answer five key questions:

★ **Are allies right to worry about a war?** Some new NATO countries hold fears of Russia dating back to the Cold War;

¹ *The Economist*, and it is not obvious that these can 'Have combat experience, will be "exorcised through contingency travel', March 26th 2009. planning", as one NATO insider put it.¹

Equally, the Central Europeans have suffered real harassment and occasional 'soft' attacks (like cyber-strikes) from Russia in recent years. And their worries about Moscow's intentions are shared by the Nordic countries. So can all fears of Russia be put down to historical animosities? And what precisely do the North and Central Europeans worry about?

★ **Does NATO have adequate measures in place to deter a potential conflict with Russia or defend against it?** In principle NATO's 'all for one, one for all' clause, known as Article V, should deter

² *Article V of NATO's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty, stipulates that in case one member-state is attacked each ally shall take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area".* Russia from attacking any of the allies.² And so should NATO's military superiority. But could Russia have reasons to doubt that NATO would respond collectively to an attack on a Central European ally? And what is the state of NATO's preparations for the defence of a member-state in Central or Northern Europe?

★ **What are the costs of putting in place new defences against Russia?** Moscow will view any new NATO defensive measures as an unfriendly act, and it has ways of retaliating. For example, it can suspend transit of NATO supplies to Afghanistan through its territory. But non-action also carries costs: for example, worries about Russia can paralyse NATO's (and the EU's) ability to form a common eastern policy.

★ **How can NATO form a common view on Russia?** The alliance makes decisions on a consensual basis so all allies would need

to agree to any new measures that strengthen NATO defences against Russia. But how can NATO bridge the differences between traditionally Moscow-leaning countries and the former Russian satellites?

★ **Lastly, what practical steps, if any, should NATO take to deter and defend against a possible confrontation with Russia?** The options range from rewriting some of NATO's basic documents (to clarify that NATO would act against new threats like cyber-attacks) to building military bases in Central Europe. But not all are equally practical: some could be prohibitively expensive and other too politically divisive.

This study argues that while the probability of a conflict with Russia can never be conclusively established, allies in Europe's north and east have solid reasons to want added protection. It recommends that NATO governments put in place a two-track approach to Russia. First, the alliance should take steps to address its members' sense of insecurity, mainly by putting in place reassurance measures, which would signal to countries worried about Russia that the alliance takes seriously its commitment to collective defence. The second track should consist of engaging Russia: listening to its ideas for a new European security architecture and looking for other ways to reduce its sense of isolation. Those two tracks are closely related: as long as the North and Central Europeans fear Moscow they will not support much-needed efforts to bring Russia into a more constructive relationship with NATO. Equally, allies concerned about Russia will never secure the support of all NATO governments for new defensive measures unless they are willing to support attempts to reduce tensions with Russia through co-operation.

2 Who worries about Russia and why

NATO allies worry about two different kinds of threats, military and non-military. Of those two, non-military threats – like gas and oil cut-offs, cyber-attacks or Moscow-sponsored corruption of leading politicians – resonate even more acutely than military threats. This is especially true for the Central and East Europeans. But NATO is not very well-placed to address these sorts of risk: it is a military alliance and as such it has few tools to encourage or help the allies to diversify their sources of energy, or to crack down on corruption. But the Central and North Europeans do look to NATO to address their less acute, but still real, worries about a military conflict with Russia. These will be the focus of this study.

Those fears revolve around two flashpoints. The first one lies in the Arctic, where global warming has melted icecaps and exposed new gas and oil fields, as well as lucrative new shipping routes. Russia as well as Norway, Denmark, Canada and the US claim rights to parts of the Arctic. A special UN panel is gathering evidence from countries competing for ownership of the region's resources but it is not expected to rule until well into the next decade. In what seemed like a pre-emptive move, in 2007 a Russian expedition planted a flag at the bottom of the sea near the North Pole, symbolically claiming it for Moscow. NATO's northern member-states fear that Russia will deploy military forces in the disputed areas and challenge others to accept its ownership or to dislodge Russia by force. Norway also worries about Russian bombers, which started flying close to its airspace. Oslo overturned a decision to scrap a number of naval vessels, deciding instead to keep them on hand. And Norway recently spurned a Swedish offer of new combat aircraft in favour of more

powerful US models because it considers them better able to defeat Russian ships and aircraft in a battle.

The second flashpoint lies in Central and Eastern Europe. Russia views the eastward enlargement of NATO as a threat to its security; in fact it thinks poorly of NATO as such. The new Russian security

³ *Strategia natsyonalnoy bezopasnosti Rossyiskoi federatsii do 2020 goda,* Russian security council, May 12th 2009.

strategy calls NATO's prominent role in Europe "unsustainable" and a "threat to international security".³ Moscow was particularly incensed that two of the new NATO countries, the Czech Republic and

Poland, agreed to host parts of the planned US missile defence system. Russia had threatened to target these countries with nuclear weapons, before the Obama administration decided against building the bases.

The Central Europeans have suffered several Russian 'soft' attacks in recent years. For example, in 2007 Moscow encouraged local Russians in Estonia to protest against the removal of a memorial to fallen Russian soldiers from the centre of the capital city,

⁴ *Charles Clover, 'Kremlin-backed group behind Estonia cyber blitz', Financial Times, March 11th 2009.*

Tallinn. At the same time, a cyber-attack, for which a youth group close to the Kremlin claimed responsibility, shut down the main web sites of the Estonian government and caused significant economic damage.⁴

The war in Georgia in August of 2008 made some Central and East Europeans fear that they could suffer the same fate. Although they recognise the specificities of the Georgia war, some also see similarities with their own situation: like Tbilisi, some Baltic capitals have poor relations with Moscow, and large Russian minorities on their territory could be manipulated to create grounds for a military intervention. The sort of conflict the Balts worry about begins with Moscow encouraging Russian minorities abroad to revolt. If the government of the host country used force to suppress the revolt, Russia could decide to intervene. The Balts have

noted with concern that a new law proposed by the Kremlin in August 2009 authorises the president to use force to defend the lives of Russian 'citizens' abroad. Thousands of people in Estonia, Latvia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe could technically be considered Russian citizens because Moscow has distributed Russian passports to its ethnic kin all across the region.

Disagreements or war?

The meaning of these flashpoints needs to be examined more closely. While Russia and NATO have disagreements – and while Russia has threatened NATO member-states in the past – it does not necessarily follow that Moscow is readying for a war. Bluster is an established tool of diplomacy. It is not always a prelude to conflict.

It could be argued that Russia's attitude to NATO has been essentially defensive. Moscow opposes the expansion of the alliance and its military bases towards its borders. It fought the war in Georgia in large part to stop the country from joining NATO. But it is not obvious that it would attack a NATO member-state itself. The former is an act of opposition to what NATO does, and is aimed at stopping the alliance from growing. The latter is an attack on what NATO is – an uncompromising act beyond the bounds of NATO-Russia spats of the past few years.

Even if Moscow were genuinely keen on a conflict, it should have two strong disincentives for going to war with NATO. The strongest one is this: a military confrontation involving a NATO ally in principle obliges all member-states to respond. And while Russia maintains formidable military forces, corruption and years of underinvestment have eroded their effectiveness. They could hardly match the collective US-European might, and it would be reckless to try.

Also (and related), a confrontation with a NATO member-state should in principle unite the allies in opposition to Russia. This

would not only change the balance of military power in Russia's disfavour but also run counter to the Russian foreign policy of the past few years. This has focused on encouraging and exploiting divisions among the Europeans, in order to deter them from strengthening the influence of NATO (and the EU) in Eastern Europe, and from undermining Russia's near-monopoly on energy exports from the former Soviet Union.

3 One for all, all for some?

Given that there are strong reasons against any aggressive action from Moscow, why do the North and Central Europeans worry about a war with Russia? They offer four reasons:

First, they acknowledge that Russia's attitude to NATO has been historically defensive but caution that Moscow's foreign policy has grown increasingly aggressive with time. Since threatening to target the Czech Republic and Poland with nuclear missiles in 2007, Russia has resumed bomber flights along NATO's northern borders, and hinted that it would assist ethnic Russians in Ukraine in breaking up the country if it joined NATO. In Georgia in August 2008, Russia used force outside its borders for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union; most NATO governments would have thought such an attack impossible only a few years previously. In 2009, Moscow revived 'Zapad' (West) exercises, which it had used to simulate an attack on NATO during the Cold War.⁵ To the Central Europeans and the Nordics, these events add up to a trend: they believe that the Kremlin, bent on restoring Russia's status as a pre-eminent military and political power in Europe, is becoming more confrontational with time. Central Europeans worry that NATO allies may be next in line after Georgia.

⁵ Bruce Jones, 'Russia to launch largest military maneuvers since Cold War', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, August 24th 2009.

Second, countries in Europe's north and east also warn against assuming that the Kremlin will always act rationally. While the threat of collective retaliation should deter Russia from confronting a NATO country, the Central Europeans point out that Moscow's attitude to its neighbours is driven as much by emotions as by reason. They worry this could lead Moscow to escalate future

disputes into a war, no matter how disastrous for Russia. They point to the 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute as an example. This crisis started as a commercial dispute over unresolved debt, gas prices and transit fees. When Ukraine refused to pay, Russia cut gas supplies for two weeks, leaving a number of Central European countries without gas in the middle of winter (Ukraine transports 80 per cent of Russian gas exports to Europe). Kyiv was hardly blameless in the crisis – it had failed to pay bills on time and was reluctant to remove murky gas trading companies – but Russia, in turning off gas supplies entirely, turned a bilateral dispute over payments into a gas war affecting all of Central Europe. One senior Central European official closely involved in brokering the agreement which ended the crisis blamed “Putin’s rage at Ukraine” for the escalation. Gazprom, Russia’s state-controlled gas mammoth, lost \$1-2 billion in revenue during the crisis. Since the shutoff, the EU has intensified efforts to build new pipelines to connect Europe to non-Russian sources of gas, such as the Nabucco pipeline through Turkey and the Balkans. From a commercial point of view and from the standpoint of relations with the EU, the crisis did predictable damage to Russia – yet it did take place, despite solid rational arguments against it.

⁶ Harris Interactive, ‘Europeans believe Barack Obama is best able to protect the EU’s interests from Russia while Americans think John McCain is better’, September 25th 2008.

Germany and Spain opposed fighting for the Baltic republics.⁶ In its day-to-day dealings with the EU and NATO, Moscow frequently manages to divide the Europeans. When Russian president Dmitry Medvedev floated his proposals for a new European security architecture in 2008, the governments from the larger European countries engaged in talks with him about this idea despite strong (initial) misgivings in Central Europe. “We find ways to work around the new member-states and deal

Third, some allies fear that Russia will calculate that NATO governments are not prepared to send their soldiers to die for Latvia or Estonia. A September 2008 *Financial Times* poll found that pluralities of respondents in Italy,

with the big countries directly,” boasted one Medvedev advisor in London in late 2008.

The Kremlin is not always so successful. When Moscow behaves particularly egregiously, the Europeans tend to close ranks.⁷ All NATO allies condemned Russia over the invasion of Georgia in August 2008. But the ease with which Moscow has managed to divide the NATO governments on other occasions, and the reluctance of some West European people to fight for the Central European allies, worries the new NATO member-states. To add to their fears, the Obama administration has made better relations with Moscow a priority, and it has abandoned plans for new missile defence bases in Poland and the Czech Republic. The White House says that the two issues are unconnected but many new NATO countries worry that Moscow will see the missile defence decision as a concession, and as a sign that the US is prepared to go to great lengths to safeguard its objective of improving ties with Russia. If Obama attaches such importance to the relationship, the argument goes, would he defend Central Europe against Russia if necessary?

⁷ Charles Grant, ‘Is Europe doomed to fail as a power?’, CER essay, July 2009.

Lastly, some allies worry that the language of the North Atlantic Treaty does not provide adequate defence guarantees against new, untraditional forms of warfare. Article VI of NATO’s founding treaty specifies that the responsibility to defend an ally applies in case of an “armed” attack “on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America”. But what if that territory in question was a sliver of the Arctic of disputed ownership? Or what if the attackers came in the form of irregular forces, composed of Russian ethnic minorities in the Baltic, armed and supplied by Moscow? And what if the weapons used were not bombs and helicopters but a cyber-attack more devastating than the one suffered by Estonia in 2007? All these scenarios may fall outside the provisions of Article VI and keep NATO from agreeing a common response. Yet these are the most probable scenarios for a confrontation with Russia, far more likely than a meeting of massed armies.

4 Costs and benefits

It is impossible to conclusively establish whether tensions between NATO and Russia could turn into a conflict. But certainty is not the relevant standard. The proper question is whether allies in Europe's east and north have sufficient grounds to worry, even if one accounts for historical biases and dislikes. The answer is yes, for reasons listed in the previous chapter. While they do not assume that Russia plans for a war, they have reasons to fear that Moscow's desire to divide the Central European allies from their Western counterparts and to assert control over the Arctic will cause it to blunder into a conflict with NATO. These worries cannot be 'explained away' through discussions within NATO; they will remain as long as the underlying reasons hold.

These anxieties carry costs. There is a risk that if the alliance failed to act, allies concerned about Moscow's behaviour would use their NATO and EU memberships to 'punish' or isolate Moscow, and to call attention to their concerns. If so, the EU and NATO would find it very difficult to 'reset' relations with Russia. Lithuania's opposition in autumn 2008 to the resumption of NATO-Russia relations after the war in Georgia is a good indication of possible future difficulties.

Also, if countries on Russia's borders do not feel protected, they will increasingly look for bilateral deals to ensure their security, thus undermining the alliance. This has already started to happen. One of the key reasons why the Polish and Czech governments offered to host parts of the US missile defence system is that they had wanted to secure US military presence on their territory. The leaders in Prague and Warsaw viewed US

‘boots on the ground’ as the only sure way to guarantee that Washington would respond if the Czech Republic or Poland were to be attacked by Russia. The Obama administration’s decision to scrap the original missile defence plans has done little to change the Central Europeans’ thirst for a US military presence on their soil: the Poles seem to have secured a deal to host parts of the new missile defence system that Barack Obama announced in September 2009. NATO should be worried: the new NATO countries’ strong desire for American bases implies that they do not think NATO’s collective defence guarantees sufficiently robust. A competition of sorts among the allies is taking place, in which some will secure direct bilateral deals with Washington and others not. This threatens to divide NATO and weaken the security of the rest of the alliance.

Lastly, fears of Russia also indirectly threaten NATO’s operations in Afghanistan. The less support the North and Central Europeans feel from the rest of the allies over Russia, the more difficult it becomes to explain to their publics why they should keep forces in Afghanistan when these may be perceived as more urgently needed at home. It could be argued that such a calculus is fraught: the Latvian or Lithuanian armies could hardly prevail against Russia in an all-out conflict under any circumstances, so it may seem pointless to arm themselves for the possibility. But in the real world, voters expect their government to put in place the best possible defences, irrespective of whether they have a realistic chance of defeating the enemy. If NATO undertook defensive measures to assure the allies concerned about Russia, they would feel less obliged to spend resources on defending against Moscow, and would find it easier to send money and troops towards the allied operation in Afghanistan. As the Norwegian state secretary for defence, Espen Eide, noted, it is becoming harder to explain to the public why Norway needs to

⁸ *The Economist*, ‘Have combat experience, will travel’, March 26th 2009.

send troops to die for NATO in Afghanistan when NATO is not seen as doing enough for Norway.⁸

At what price defence?

On balance, there is a case for NATO to take measures to re-assure its member-states that the alliance is ready to defend them against Russia if necessary. This would prevent a scramble for bilateral assurances from Washington, prevent divisions within NATO, and make the new allies more confident and thus more likely to support NATO’s outreach to Moscow. But what are the risks of preparing for a possible conflict with Russia? NATO is juggling many different operations and responsibilities. If it starts devoting time and money to a possible conflict with Russia, other priorities – like restoring stability in Afghanistan – could suffer. So the alliance needs to find answers that reassure the states that worry about Russia without undermining NATO’s other important tasks and relationships.

This includes NATO’s co-operation with Moscow itself. For most of the 1990s, NATO has sought to engage the Russian government in order to wean it off its zero-sum view of relations with the alliance. To this end, NATO stopped conducting contingency planning for a conflict with Russia in the early 1990s. The allies also included Russia’s military in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. In 1997, the two sides established a high-level forum to involve Moscow in NATO’s plans and operations, the Permanent Joint Council. This panel eventually evolved into today’s NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The NRC allowed NATO and Russia, among other things, to negotiate an agreement on the transit of supplies through Russia to the NATO contingent in Afghanistan.

Several West European ambassadors to NATO argue that this co-operation, and the entire NRC framework, could be at risk should NATO start planning for a conflict with Russia. They are right to assume that Moscow will react badly to any allied preparations for a possible conflict. But it is unclear how Russia could think any more poorly of NATO than it already does.

The appearance of the NRC and NATO’s suspension of war planning against Russia did little to change Moscow’s view of

NATO as a hostile alliance. Russian soldiers withdrew from Bosnia and Kosovo in 2003, when the security situation in both countries improved, and Russia has not taken part in NATO missions since. Co-operation gradually gave way to antagonism. When in March 2009 President Dmitry Medvedev launched a new drive to modernise the Russian army, he cited the enlargement of

⁹ *Speech at an expanded session of the Russian Defence Ministry board, March 17th 2009.*

NATO as the main purpose for the re-
armament.⁹ In what was widely seen as a
signal of disinterest in co-operation with
the alliance, Moscow named a hard-line

nationalist, Dmitri Rogozin, to be its ambassador to the alliance in January 2008. He “has no interest in NATO-Russia co-operation and spends most of his time in Moscow”, one West European ambassador complained. As noted above, the Russian security strategy labelled NATO’s very existence “a threat to international security”.

Part of the blame for this sad state of affairs lies with NATO. Allied diplomats say that NRC meetings tend to be heavily scripted, with allies unwilling to risk open conversations with Russia lest these expose differences among NATO countries. The new member-states in particular have never shown enthusiasm for engaging Russia. The US started too late to discuss its missile defence plans with Moscow at NATO. Washington put them on the NRC’s agenda only after Washington had decided on where the bases should be deployed, and by then Russia’s view of missile defence had hardened into all-out opposition.

But it is not evident that engagement, even if conducted more adroitly, would have changed Moscow’s view of NATO as its favourite bogeyman. “Western policies and attitudes can influence Russian decision-making, but only at the margins,” wrote Bobo Lo. “Irrespective of how the West behaves, Russia will see itself as an indispensable global power; regard the former Soviet space as its natural sphere of influence; view

international affairs through a geopolitical lens; remains suspicious of NATO; and conceive of the world as a competitive and often hostile environment.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Bobo Lo, ‘Russia’s crisis – and what it means for regime stability and Moscow’s relations with the world’, CER policy brief, February 2009.

A transactional, not transformational, relationship

The fraught relationship between Moscow and NATO carries one unintended benefit: it reduces the cost of a NATO shift to strengthen defences against Russia. Few areas of co-operation are at risk because the NATO-Russia relationship is so limited to begin with.

Those areas are not trivial. As noted earlier, Moscow has allowed NATO to transport goods to Afghanistan across its territory. The Obama administration would also like to involve Russia in a new, revamped US missile defence architecture; if it succeeds, NATO (which has already agreed to link missile defence to the US umbrella) and Russia may form a joint system in the future. Germany, Italy, France and Spain maintain that these areas of co-operation should be protected, and caution against NATO treating Russia as a potential adversary. Many smaller member-states, like Belgium, Luxembourg or Portugal, hold broadly similar views, as do some former communist states, like Slovakia.

They, and other NATO governments, are right to argue that the alliance should continue to engage Moscow. But they are wrong to assume that all co-operation would cease if NATO moved to strengthen its defences against Russia. What drives Moscow to work with NATO on Afghanistan is, first and foremost, self-interest. Were Islamist militants to turn Afghanistan into a safe berth for operations, they could undermine the governments in Russia’s southern republics like Ingushetia, where militants killed a government minister and nearly assassinated the prime minister in spring and summer 2009. This realisation drove Moscow to continue working with NATO even in the dark days of August

2008, when the Russo-Georgian war prompted NATO to cut all other links to Moscow.

NATO should strive to keep other avenues of co-operation open – the NRC gives Moscow important insights into NATO plans and operations, which reduces the chances of misunderstanding and conflict. The alliance rightly involved Russian officers in preparations for a NATO military exercise in Georgia in May 2009. Georgia and Russia have very tense relations and NATO must keep Russia apprised of its plans in Georgia lest it inadvertently push the two sides to war. Co-operation with Moscow also serves another, very important purpose – it sends a message that NATO's purpose is no longer a *priori* to fight Russia. While NATO will act if Moscow violates the sovereignty of a NATO member-state, the alliance prefers co-operation over war. In fact, the allies should hold out the prospect of membership to Russia, if and when it meets the conditions for entry, which include building a democratic political order and burying conflicts with neighbours.

But European governments should not let the prospect of heightened tensions with Russia keep NATO from planning for a possible conflict. The odds are that Moscow will allow NATO to transport supplies for Afghanistan through Russia anyway. And NATO should not expect its relationship with Moscow to expand much further beyond that. Russia has made up its mind: several years of western attempts at engagement have not altered Moscow's views of NATO as a hostile alliance. The NATO-Russia relationship for many years will not be transformational but transactional – the two sides will disagree on fundamental issues of European security while co-operating on the margins.

Priorities, priorities

What of the argument that contingency planning against Russia will divert resources from the war in Afghanistan? The conflict there is not going in NATO's favour. Fighting has expanded to

cover most of Afghanistan's provinces. The roughly 100,000 foreign troops are dangerously thinly spread over this vast country and casualties have risen dramatically since the summer of 2009. The cost of the war is forcing NATO ministries of defence to cut spending on weapons buys, research and training. The UK defence ministry estimates that the war in Afghanistan has left it billions short of the money it needs to finance future weapons buys (though this deficit is also a result of cost overruns).

With no end in sight to the war in Afghanistan, how much time and money should NATO spend on preparing for another conflict, which may never come? That, in a nutshell, is the question posed by the UK, Dutch, Danish, Canadian and US governments. Not coincidentally, these countries are among the most important troop-contributing countries to Afghanistan, and they have suffered the most casualties.

States in this group are broadly sympathetic to the Central and North Europeans' concerns about Russia; in fact the UK proposed in 2009 that NATO establish a new force for conventional attacks in Europe (of which Russia is the most likely source), the so-called 'solidarity force' (see 'Guns, bytes and new defences', below). But they want to limit the extent to which NATO alters its current defence plans and budgets, so that any new defensive measures against Russia do not distract NATO from the war in Afghanistan. They argue that the nimble, mobile forces developed for conflicts far from NATO's borders, and the experience of deploying those forces to Afghanistan, would serve NATO well in case of a conflict with Russia.

This argument is only partly right. Afghanistan is a far away country with non-existent infrastructure, hilly terrain, and an enemy that likes to hit and hide. To fight the Taliban, allies rely on light, easily transportable equipment such as armoured personnel carriers, pilotless 'drone' aircraft and field artillery. And they make extensive use of cargo planes and heavy lift helicopters to move troops and

equipment around the country. These would indeed be useful in case of a possible war with Russia – armies from the west and south of the continent would need to move forces to the north or east.

But the Estonian or the Norwegian armies would not need to go anywhere: war, if it comes, will come to their doorstep. Instead of investing into transport aircraft they could be better off buying anti-aircraft missiles (Russia, unlike the Taliban, has a proper air force). Equally, the front-line allies could be better served buying ground-attack aircraft (to fight off advancing infantry) rather than armoured personnel carriers (which would be easy prey to Russian tanks and aircraft). Norway and Sweden (not a member of NATO but also a country worried about Russia, and one with troops in Afghanistan) are already buying new fighter aircraft and ships, as noted earlier.

In theory NATO countries could equip their forces for both the Afghanistan war and for a possible conflict with Russia. In practice, no NATO ally can afford to build forces for two types of conflict. So it makes perfect sense for the Central and North Europeans to demand that NATO as a whole prepare for the possibility of a war. They can only afford to keep up their contributions to Afghanistan if they feel certain that the alliance has the plans, the resolve, and the materiel to come to their aid if attacked.

The allies concerned about Russia agree with the Netherlands and the UK that NATO needs to do its utmost to win in Afghanistan. A loss there would make future terrorist attacks on the West more probable; it would also harm NATO's reputation and touch off recriminations among the allies. This would hurt countries on the border with Russia more than others: squabbles in NATO would give Moscow additional reasons to think that the allies would not summon a common response to an attack.

This explains why allies who worry the most about Russia also take active part in NATO operations in Afghanistan. Although they send

relatively few soldiers in absolute numbers (because of their small populations), Norway, Estonia and Latvia are among the highest contributors to the Afghanistan operation on per capita basis, along with the UK, Canada and Holland (see table). The real laggards in Afghanistan are allies like Greece, Portugal and Spain, which seem interested neither in Afghanistan nor in preparing for a possible conflict with Russia; they seem to see little use for NATO at all.

European countries with most troops in Afghanistan, relative to their population

Country	Population	Soldiers in Afghanistan (October 2009)	Ratio (per cent)
UK	61,113000	9000	0.015
Denmark	5,500000	700	0.013
Estonia	1,299000	150	0.012
The Netherlands	16,716000	1770	0.011
Norway	4,661000	485	0.010
Latvia	2,232000	265	0.007

The North and Central Europeans are also among the countries least afraid to put their troops in harm's way. When the US and UK troops launched large operations against the Taliban in June 2009 (operations 'Khanjar' and 'Panther's Claw') the Estonians fought with them. The reason they put troops in harm's way is to uphold the principle that if one or several NATO allies are attacked, the whole alliance should respond. By the same logic, they expect the rest of the alliance to offer assistance against their principal concern: Russia.

5 Compromise and consensus

The Central and North Europeans' proposals for new defensive measures against Russia must clear a double hurdle. They must be strategically shrewd – assuaging allies' fears without unduly raising the temperature in Moscow – but also carefully calibrated to win universal support in NATO. Because NATO makes all major decisions by consensus, the Norwegians, Poles and others must convince those countries that prefer to focus on Afghanistan, like the UK, as well as the traditionally Russia-leaning Germany or Italy. This will be difficult but not impossible if the countries concerned about Russia think creatively.

As a guiding principle for NATO deliberations on the subject, the less the allies talk about Russia the better. This sounds counterintuitive and vaguely dishonest: if the purpose of any preparations is to steel NATO's defences against Moscow, surely it is only right to call things by their proper name. But discussions about whether Russia is a threat tend to have a terribly divisive effect on the alliance; a debate (of the sort offered in this paper) would lead to acrimony and ruin the chances of agreeing a common definition of threat, much less a common response.

The North and Central Europeans should make a 'Russia-neutral' case: they should lay out the nature (but not the source) of threats they worry about, and steer NATO towards a debate on proper responses. The Norwegians set a good example: they lead the calls for the alliance to focus on the possibility of a conflict in the Arctic. In private they admit that Russia is the source of their worries. But

¹¹ Thorvald Stoltenberg, 'Nordic co-operation on foreign and security policy', proposals presented to the extraordinary meeting of Nordic foreign ministers, February 9th 2009.

the recent Norwegian-Danish-Swedish-Finnish-Icelandic 'Stoltenberg' report, a high-level study that sets out priority areas for Nordic co-operation, never mentions Russia as a threat.¹¹

The Nordic approach offers another useful lesson: the Norwegians and others make sure to keep Russia apprised of their efforts, and to involve it in military-to-military co-operation. The Stoltenberg paper calls for the Nordics to intensify information exchanges with Russia, and to include the country in

¹² Thorvald Stoltenberg, 'Nordic co-operation on foreign and security policy', proposals presented to the extraordinary meeting of Nordic foreign ministers, February 9th 2009.

a joint search-and-rescue scheme for the Arctic.¹² In doing so, the Nordics hope to discourage Russia from ratcheting up tensions; they are also discreetly letting Moscow know that the Nordics are ready to meet a possible threat. The Central Europeans increasingly take their cue from

their northern neighbours – the Polish foreign minister Radek Sikorski, for example, has made a far greater effort than his predecessor to brief Russia on Poland's missile defence talks with the US. It is doubtful that he hoped to succeed where the Americans had failed – in convincing Russia that missile defence was not aimed against it – but he was right to try nevertheless. Full transparency makes it difficult for Russia to misrepresent western military plans. By going to Moscow, Sikorski also sent a signal to the rest of the alliance that Poland wants to have a productive relationship with Russia.

This is important: Warsaw is gradually changing the Central Europeans' image from that of Russophobes to constructive partners, even on the historically sensitive subject of Russia. That is an absolute precondition if NATO is to find a consensus on military preparations for Russia. The rest of the alliance will want to see from the Central Europeans a greater effort to reduce tensions with Moscow. They should show more support for NATO's (and the

EU's) efforts to engage Russia in a constructive relationship with the West. In fact, no proposals that strengthen NATO defences against Russia will secure NATO-wide support unless they are presented as a part of a broader package of measures reducing tensions with Russia.

The Latvian and Estonian governments, like the Poles, have toned down their rhetoric on Russia over the past few months. They should also try more visibly to patch up relations with the Russian-speakers living on their territories. Estonia and Latvia have large Russian minorities amounting to 25 and 38 per cent of their total populations, respectively. Initially, when the two countries broke free from the Soviet Union in 1991, they made it difficult for ethnic Russians to become citizens, provoking protests from Moscow. Over time, the two Baltic capitals softened their stance, and more and more Russians are becoming citizens. But to this day, many ethnic Russians in these countries feel disenfranchised, and their perceived plight serves as a rallying cry for Russian nationalists. Estonia introduced a new programme in 2008 aimed at bridging the divide between ethnic Estonians and Russians. More effort of this sort is needed.

What about enlargement?

A crucial element in NATO's attempt to forge a consensus about Russia will be the question of whether, and how, to pursue NATO enlargement. Moscow strongly opposes further NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia in particular, and the issue frustrates all internal NATO discussions on Russia.

There is a strong case for continuing enlargement on the grounds that each country that desires to join and qualifies for membership, and whose accession would strengthen NATO, should be free to enter. But the pace of enlargement has divided the allies. Berlin and Paris fell out with the US and the Central European allies in April 2008 at the alliance's summit in

Bucharest. The American and Central European governments pushed for Georgia and Ukraine to be awarded a ‘membership action plan’ (MAP), a halfway-step towards full membership. Berlin and Paris felt that neither Ukraine nor Georgia had demonstrated enough political and military progress to qualify. They were particularly angry with President George Bush for publicly stating his view that Georgia and Ukraine should be given MAP at the time when last-minute talks on a compromise were still under way.

The public and vitriolic exchanges in Bucharest left the supporters and the opponents of further enlargement bitter and wary of one another. That must change if NATO is to find agreement on new measures to shore up allied defences against Russia. Supporters of further enlargement need to acknowledge that Ukraine and Georgia are still falling short on several criteria, including unresolved border issues, the reform of the militaries, political stability or (in Ukraine’s case) public support for NATO membership. Neither may be ready for many more years. Demands for their speedy inclusion harden the opposition from sceptical countries like Germany and make Berlin and others less willing to agree to the North and Central Europeans’ demands for strengthening NATO defences against Russia. The countries most concerned about risks from Moscow will need to show patience and tactical flexibility on issues like enlargement if they are to bring other allies to their point of view.

The 800 pound gorilla

As often in NATO, the US view will be crucial to determining whether NATO finds a consensus on strengthening defences for a possible conflict with Russia. At first glance, President Barack Obama seems an unlikely champion of such a cause. He has offered to ‘reset’ ties with Russia, signalled that he wanted to slow down NATO enlargement, and cancelled George Bush’s missile defence plans for Central Europe. This seems to suggest that he is

accommodating Moscow – and this has unnerved many in the new NATO countries, so much so that in July 2009 a group of senior Central Europeans wrote an open letter to Obama urging him not to ignore the region.¹³

¹³ *An open letter to the Obama administration from Central and Eastern Europe, Gazeta Wyborcza, July 16th 2009.*

On closer inspection, the US policy is less Russia-centric than it appears. Obama has not only said on numerous occasions that he rejects Russian ‘spheres of influence’ in Europe, but the US administration also proved the point by insisting in May 2009 that NATO go ahead with a long-planned military exercise in Georgia, to which Moscow vigorously objected. Even more to the point, Obama strongly suggested, in a speech in April in Prague, that he wants NATO to resume defence planning against Russia.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Remarks of President Barack Obama in Prague, Czech Republic, April 5th 2009.*

The US will not be sympathetic to all proposals on strengthening NATO’s defences in Northern and Central Europe. For example it is likely to oppose moves to build new NATO bases or improve existing ones in Central Europe, for fear of undermining the growing US-Russian defence collaboration. But US diplomats want NATO to develop plans to defend the Balts, and support calls for the alliance to hold military exercises to rehearse such plans. Americans familiar with Obama’s thinking say that the president has asked NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, US Admiral James Stavridis, to make drafting of defence plans for the Balts his priority.

6 Guns, bytes and new defences

What would the ‘reassurance measures’, which this study has repeatedly called for, look like in practice? And what would it take to convince the allies concerned about Russia that NATO would come to their aid if attacked?

During the Cold War, NATO’s reassurance worked along the following lines: NATO’s Article V and VI committed all allies to take steps to defend one another in case of a specific form of aggression (armed attack on the territory of a member-state). Once a year, NATO’s military and intelligence experts reviewed the most worrying risks to NATO and produced a ‘threat assessment’ which listed the risks in the order of urgency. Military planners drafted blueprints for a response to those threats, and calculated what sort of forces NATO would have to deploy to prevail. The alliance subsequently issued ‘guidance’ to the member-states, advising them what sort of equipment they needed to maintain or buy in order for NATO to be able to repulse the most likely threats. The allies regularly held field (or virtual) exercises to rehearse defence against the most probable forms of attack; and they often stationed weapons, ammunition and fuel stocks near the areas where conflict was most likely to occur.

This process guaranteed that at any given time NATO member-states had enough forces, and of the right kind, to repel an attack. To give themselves the ability to decide quickly on whether to use those forces, NATO diplomats met regularly, reviewed potential enemies’ actions and intentions, and discussed whether and how NATO needed to respond.

The system was never completely foolproof – legal minds point out that Article V merely obliges allied capitals to “take any steps they deem necessary” to help other allies, not to actually die for them. But it did what it was supposed to do: it put beyond doubt NATO’s resolve and readiness to defend all its member-states.

Virtually all the pillars of this complex reassurance edifice have eroded in recent years. It is not clear whether NATO’s Article V applies to the sort of conflicts the North and Central Europeans worry about. NATO has refrained from naming Russia as a threat even though a third of its member-states think of it as such. The alliance has no explicit plans for defending its most vulnerable members, the Baltic states, against Russia. The weapons and equipment NATO instructs its member-states to buy are suited for operations like Afghanistan but not necessarily useful for the defence of Northern and Central Europe. And while NATO has upgraded some military installations in the new member-states of Central Europe, it is not obvious that those bases could accommodate the sort of reinforcements that may be needed in case of a conventional war. The alliance has never held a military exercise in Central Europe to simulate a potential conflict with Russia. The alliance’s central command, SHAPE, is so busy directing the war in Afghanistan that it spends very little time thinking about other possible threats to the alliance. And Germany (sometimes in company with others) has in recent years blocked all discussions of Russia at NATO’s highest political body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC).

This is not a call for NATO to return to building defence plans around a conflict with Russia, like it did during the Cold War – that is neither feasible nor desirable. NATO rightly remains focused on operations in Afghanistan, and most allies will prioritise the needs of this war over all other scenarios. Nor would the Cold War-style defence planning be relevant to Estonia’s and Norway’s worries – at no point during its standoff with the Soviet Union did NATO make plans for cyber-defence, for example.

But NATO should explore how the experience and hardware designed for missions in faraway places like Afghanistan could also be used closer to home, in case of a conflict with Russia. And it should also study possible gaps in its ability to respond to such a scenario: does the alliance have enough equipment, and of the right kind, to reinforce the allies on the borders with Russia? And does it have enough knowledge of Russia’s capabilities and intentions? Where it finds its defences lacking, NATO should plug those gaps by developing new weapons and expertise, and by rehearsing defence against the most likely forms of conflict with Russia. Moreover, the allies should once again begin discussing not just current operations but also future possible concerns, including Russia.

The new approach would contain the following elements:

- ★ NATO needs to make it easier for individual allies to bring their worries to the attention of NATO as a whole. This can be done in several ways. The allies could change the rules governing deliberations of the North Atlantic Council to make it impossible for one or a small group of countries to block debates of sensitive subjects. Alternatively, the allies could create a whole new body composed of military experts, tasked with monitoring future threats and drawing up recommendations for a NATO response, as Ron Asmus, a NATO expert and former senior US diplomat proposed.
- ★ The alliance should also take immediate steps to improve the ability of new members to receive military reinforcements. This does not mean building new bases. But NATO should co-finance improvements to existing ones. Much money has already gone into modernising infrastructure in those former communist countries that joined NATO in 1999, namely Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. But by the time the Balts joined in 2004 money had become more scarce and NATO had become more averse to irritating Russia, so the most recent entrants received far less support in upgrading

their bases. NATO should make sure that the Baltic bases, ports and airfields are upgraded enough to receive western reinforcements during a possible conflict with Russia. This will not be cheap so NATO will have to compensate by cutting elsewhere in its budgets (see ‘How much will it cost’, below).

- ★ There is a strong case for resuming contingency planning for a possible conflict with Russia. Contingency planning essentially means that the allies think through the different forms that a conflict might take, agree the appropriate scale and sequence of responses from NATO member-states and identify the necessary resources needed to respond to attack. Since the war in Georgia, NATO has already begun drafting limited plans for certain types of contingencies (the alliance does not say which ones). Planning for a full spectrum of possible contingencies involving Russia requires the unanimous backing of all allies. However, Germany, Italy, Spain and others have blocked agreement on the subject. They should reconsider.
- ★ NATO should start carrying out military exercises to rehearse territorial defence. NATO’s exercises since the early 1990s have focused on peacekeeping or post-conflict reconstruction, not on actual fighting. This needs to change. But NATO will have to tread carefully. Exercises are contentious, and NATO must ensure that Russia does not interpret them as a sign of escalation. To minimise unnecessary grievances, the consensus within NATO is moving towards carrying out ‘table-top’ exercises alone: that is a sensible option, which involves officers in simulation rooms rather than armies moving on the ground. But there is another useful approach: NATO could hold full-blown exercises resembling defence against Russia but hold them far away from Russia, so as to make them less irritating to Moscow.
- ★ NATO should maintain its air patrols in the Baltics. These patrols, flown by aircraft from a variety of NATO member-states on a rotating basis, have guarded Baltic airspace since

the three republics joined NATO in 2004. Although some allies wanted to phase them out to save money, NATO recently rightly extended the patrols until 2014.

- ★ The allies need to build the much-maligned NATO Response Force (NRF) into a credible fighting body. The allies launched the NRF in 2002 to give NATO the ability to call on 10,000 troops at very short notice; these were to be used in case of natural disasters, humanitarian crises and other contingencies. In 2009, NATO also tasked the NRF with mutual defence duties (after generous prodding from the UK, which originally proposed that a separate ‘solidarity force’ should be built to defend the Central and North Europeans). In doing so, the allies have turned the NRF into the first responder in a possible NATO-Russia conflict. But that alone will do little to re-assure the new allies because the NRF has never really worked as advertised. Allied governments were supposed to train and equip new forces for the NRF, and to keep them in reserve for contingencies. In the event, few did. At any given time since its launch, up to half the NRF existed only on paper. The Central and North Europeans will be anxious that allies begin properly staffing and equipping forces for the NRF because their security now depends on it more than before.

How much will it cost?

The debate on reassurance in NATO takes place during the worst economic crisis in decades. Virtually all allies are running uncommonly high budget deficits; some are facing massive debt. Four NATO countries – Iceland, Hungary, Latvia, and Romania – were forced to seek help from the International Monetary Fund to stave off default. Those governments that have fared better have done so by dramatically cutting public spending, including defence spending – in some cases by as much as 30 per cent year on year. Allies will be reluctant to agree new reassurance measures unless they can finance them with savings from other parts of the budget

– and even then they may prefer to use such savings to reduce their deficits rather than spend them on new defences against Russia. This would make it difficult to, for example, hold field exercises (those involving troops rather than computers) rehearsing a possible conflict with Russia. Participating states bear the costs of such exercises – but the odds are that many would rather stay away than run up a massive bill in the midst of an economic crisis.

The states concerned about Russia will have little leverage to compel the rest of NATO to pay for new reassurance measures such as military exercises. But they can set an example to others by cutting unnecessary parts from their militaries and applying the savings towards new defensive measures. The new member-states in particular have done too little since joining NATO to reform their rusty Cold War militaries – many insist on keeping scores of aging tanks that are of no use against Russia or any other conceivable threat. Most have decided, against NATO's recommendations and at great expense, to upgrade existing fighter airplanes or buy new supersonic aircraft such as the F-16s. But the handful of planes will be of little use for defending countries like the Czech Republic and Hungary, and the money could have been better used buying surface-to-air missiles, making sure the creaky Central European airfields can receive western reinforcements, or training and equipping soldiers for the NRF. After NATO produces military plans for the possible conflict with Russia, it will also issue new 'guidance' to member-states on what sort of equipment is needed to properly execute the defence plans. The new member-states in particular should take the guidance to heart and make sure that their militaries are properly reformed and in top fighting shape.

The economic crisis also threatens to drain NATO's common funds. These funds, to which each ally contributes on the basis of the country's size and wealth, cover only a small portion of the expenses related to NATO defence but they should in principle finance some of the reassurance measures listed above. For example, upgrades to

military infrastructure are usually covered by a fund called 'security investment programme'. But at the time of writing, NATO was due to discuss dramatic cuts in its budgets.

This would seem like an inauspicious time to propose new spending from the common funds – but the reality is that NATO could save hundreds of millions of euros each year by cutting unnecessary infrastructure. The alliance has kept nearly intact its Cold-War network of military commands around the world. For the past two decades, reform-minded allies like the UK, France and the US have tried to cut those commands that are of least use to today's conflicts. These attempts were foiled by countries hosting the commands, which are keen to preserve the income, jobs and prestige that those commands generate. Turkey, Germany and Italy are among the worst offenders, NATO insiders say.

The economic crisis should prompt the allies at last to properly reform the command structure, and to shut down the unnecessary bases. If it were to do so, the alliance would generate savings far in excess of what is needed to pay for the reassurance measures proposed above.

Principle v practice

Should the alliance also change the wording of Articles V and VI to include new possible forms of conflict such as cyber-attacks? The Estonians have opened a debate on the subject in NATO. Their defence minister, Jaak Aaviksoo, likened virulent cyber-attacks targeting sensitive sites like power and water utilities or banks to the 19th and 20th century practice of besieging enemy ports.

But there will be little appetite among the allies for rewriting its founding treaty to include cyber-attacks, for several reasons. Because hackers usually hijack computers to commit the assaults, it is difficult to finger the actual perpetrators. While Estonia

suspects the Russian government of orchestrating the attacks in 2007 (and, as noted earlier, a Russian nationalist youth group

¹⁵ *Sverre Myrli, 'NATO and cyber defence', NATO Parliamentary Assembly report 027 DsCFC 09 E, 2009.* affiliated with the Kremlin claimed responsibility), the only person ever convicted of the assault was an Estonian citizen of Russian origin;¹⁵ the Estonians

lacked evidence to conclusively pin the blame on the Kremlin. And without a government to blame, it is equally unclear against whom NATO should retaliate in case of future cyber-attacks.

Nor is it obvious whether there is a military response to a large-scale co-ordinated cyber-attack. Colonel Charles Williamson, of the intelligence and surveillance division of the US Air Force, wrote that America “needs the ability to carpet-bomb in cyberspace”.¹⁶ But he does not explain

¹⁶ *The Economist, 'Marching off to cyberwar', December 4th 2008.* whom to carpet bomb given that most cyber-attacks cannot be traced back to their perpetrators.

It may be better for NATO to focus on strengthening its cyberdefences. For this, the alliance does not need a new Article V or VI. In fact, NATO is already working to strengthen its computer systems and it is building the capacity to help member-states attacked by hackers. NATO set up a new research centre – fittingly, in Estonia – to study cyber-threats and to provide real-time advice to countries under cyber-attack. In 2008, NATO also created a Cyber Defence Management Authority, a command centre of sorts, tasked with co-ordinating national responses to a potential cyber-attack.

NATO's cyber-activities are an example of a policy that works better in practice than in theory. The allies have put in place a number of measures to defend against cyber-attacks without rewriting Articles V and VI, and nor should they try – it would merely detract attention from the more pressing task of finding practical responses to cyber-attacks.

Money, oil and gas

The measures above are meant to address the allies' fears of a possible military conflict with Russia. But as noted earlier, the Central Europeans also fear Russian pressure of the non-military kind: through oil and gas embargoes, Russian purchases of key energy assets, or through bribery of key politicians. Most Central Europeans acknowledge that these non-military forms of pressure are far more likely to occur than military ones, and that they can be just as damaging to the economy and the countries' sense of security.

The new allies have tried hard to involve NATO in addressing non-military forms of security, with limited success. For example, the alliance has held inconclusive discussions on energy security for years. It is simply not very obvious what a military alliance can do to lessen the vulnerability of those countries that largely depend on Russian oil and gas supplies and which, like Bulgaria, found themselves cut off in recent years. Nor can NATO do much to address the fears of some Central Europeans that Russia is corrupting their politicians through bribery; other organisations may well be better suited to monitor and address political corruption, like the EU or the OSCE.

The allies should acknowledge that while NATO remains the world's pre-eminent military alliance, it will not have answers to all – in fact most – non-military sorts of threats. In fact, the reason why most Central Europeans persist in pushing NATO towards addressing non-military risks has little to do with NATO's capabilities: they want the alliance to help because it includes the US, and because they do not trust the rest of Europe to take their worries as seriously as Washington does.

But surely the right approach lies not in trying to get NATO to do what, as a military alliance, it is incapable of doing, but in raising the awareness in Europe and elsewhere of the nature of the Central and North Europeans' worries about Russia. A Slovak diplomat

and sociologist, Martin Bútorá, recently offered one useful approach: he suggested that NATO and the EU should form a ‘wise men (and women)’ commission to study Russia’s ‘Europe’ policy, and particularly its designs and plans for Central Europe. Such a commission should also propose ways in which the European Union in particular can respond if Moscow attempts to undermine

¹⁷ Charles Grant with Tomas Valasek ‘Preparing for the multipolar world: European foreign and security policy in 2020’, CER essay, December 2007.

the sovereignty of Central European states. The measures could include denying access to the advanced technology that Russia needs to explore its mineral resources, or freezing relations with the EU, as Charles Grant has suggested.¹⁷

7 Conclusion

The recommendations made in this paper should be understood as only one part of a broader western approach to Russia. Defence will never be as effective as conflict prevention – and to prevent a conflict between Russia and its western neighbours, the EU and NATO must try harder to reduce Moscow’s anxieties about European and NATO policies.

The allies have re-doubled efforts to engage Moscow in recent years. The Obama administration has rightly offered to ‘reset’ US-Russian relations; the Bush administration engaged Russia “too grudgingly and selectively”.¹⁸ The US and Europe have engaged in

talks with Moscow on new Russian proposals for a European security architecture, which President Medvedev floated in August 2008. In less guarded moments senior Russian officials admit that one of the purposes of the proposals is to weaken the EU and NATO.¹⁹ But the allies are right to give the proposals their full attention anyway, because parts of the proposals, like new limits on conventional forces on Europe, make much sense, and even a partial agreement with Russia on the proposals would decrease Moscow’s sense of isolation.²⁰

¹⁸ Constanze Stelzenmüller, ‘Germany’s Russia question: A new Ostpolitik for Europe’, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009.

¹⁹ Presentation by senior Russian diplomat, London, February 2009.

²⁰ For more on the proposals see Bobo Lo, ‘Medvedev and the new European security architecture’, CER policy brief, July 2009.

But the allies should remain sceptical of their ability to fundamentally change Russia’s view of the world. Even after the European countries engaged in talks with Moscow on the new security architecture, President Medvedev announced a plan to

re-arm the Russian military citing NATO as Russia's primary threat.²¹ And while

²¹ *Speech at an expanded session of the Defence Ministry Board, March 17th 2009.*

²² *Dmitri Rogozin, 'Missile defence as a common cause for all', Jane's Defence Weekly, October 21st 2009.*

Russia has welcomed president Obama's decision to scrap George Bush's missile defence plans, the Kremlin has already signalled it may oppose the new, slimmed-down architecture with as much vigour as the original 'star wars' proposal; the Russian ambassador to NATO has called Obama's plans "evasive".²²

These contradictory signals suggest that the relationship with Russia will be difficult and will require the West to pursue a two-track policy, which both engages and guards against Russia. The US and Europe should neither fall into the trap of assuming another Cold War is unfolding, nor expect engagement to eliminate fully the risk of conflict with Russia. Engagement must be the preferred approach. But NATO should strengthen its contingency plans for Central and Northern Europe nevertheless: this would provide a backup in case engagement fails, give the Central European allies the confidence they need to support western efforts to engage Moscow, and signal to the allies near Russia's borders that NATO remains committed to defend them even while it fights in Afghanistan.

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NATO, Russia and European security

Tomas Valasek

Countries in Europe's east and north worry that Moscow is blundering into a confrontation with NATO. They have begun demanding that the alliance start preparing for a possible conflict. But are they right to be concerned? Would military preparations not make Russia more suspicious of NATO? And should the alliance not focus on the war in Afghanistan? Tomas Valasek argues that allies in Central and Northern Europe have good reasons to worry. And he cautions that unless NATO takes measures to reassure the governments concerned about Russia, the alliance will have trouble 'resetting' relations with Moscow and maintaining public support for the war in Afghanistan.

Tomas Valasek is director of foreign policy and defence at the Centre for European Reform.

ISBN 978 1 901229 92 9 ★ £5