

## **U.S. Security Strategy and Policy in Europe**

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### **The Russian Challenge**

Three years ago this month, Russia illegally annexed Crimea and laid the groundwork for its campaign to destabilize Ukraine. That moment marked the end of a period of more than twenty years when the countries of the West looked to Russia as a partner. Of course, even before 2014, Russia had demonstrated a pattern of destabilizing countries in its neighborhood, particularly Moldova and Georgia. But Russia's aggression against Ukraine – including the first changing of borders by force in Europe since World War II – represented a new strategic reality, and a wake-up call for the United States and its NATO Allies.

That new strategic reality is even starker today: Russia has not only continued to undermine the post-WWII and post-Cold War international order – an order based on respect for the sovereignty of nations, and the rule of law– through its illegal occupation of Crimea and its ongoing war of aggression in Eastern Ukraine; Russia has also engaged in political aggression against our societies, using cyber-attacks, disinformation, propaganda, and influence operations (what the Soviets called “active measures”) to affect the outcome of elections and to undermine confidence in our democratic institutions.

In essence, Russia is trying to undo decades of progress toward a more stable and integrated Euro-Atlantic community. It wants to turn back the clock to a time when Russia dominated neighboring countries through force and coercion. Using military intimidation, economic warfare and “active measures,” it aims to weaken and divide NATO and the European Union, which it sees as the main obstacles to its expanded power in Europe, and to reduce their attractiveness to other European nations. It openly works to destabilize countries that seek closer ties to the Euro-Atlantic community, as we are seeing in the Western Balkans, even sponsoring an armed coup d'état in Montenegro last year to derail its accession to NATO. All of this is driven by a determination to preserve the Putin regime's grip on power by discrediting any Western-oriented alternative and distracting the public from Russia's economic decline.

And Moscow's challenge to the international rules-based order now extends beyond Europe to Syria and the broader Middle East. As Russia has provided greater levels of military support for President Assad – including bombing moderate opposition groups and critical infrastructure, and driving tens of thousands of civilians from Aleppo and other cities – it has made it even more difficult to find a long-term end to the war in Syria, while contributing little to international efforts to defeat ISIS. Now, Russia may be seeking a foothold in Libya, putting at risk international efforts to support the government of national accord and end the civil war.

All of this has occurred against the backdrop of a massive upgrading of Russian military forces, both conventional and nuclear. After their forces' poor performance against Georgia in 2008, Russian military spending has increased by one-third and its modernization programs have transformed Russian capabilities in every domain. At the same time, Russia continues to flout many of its obligations under arms control and transparency regimes, as we have seen with the recent news about the deployment of a long-range ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the INF Treaty.

### **Guiding Principles**

While we should always seek constructive relations with Russia, we must approach the relationship without illusions. We need to recognize that it is Russia's actions which have fundamentally changed our relationship, and that any change for the better depends on changes in Russian behavior. Meeting the Russian challenge in the years ahead calls for a comprehensive strategy, building on the combined material and moral strength of our close Allies and partners in Europe and around the world.

To achieve a more stable and constructive relationship with Moscow that is sustainable for the long term, we must speak with Russia from a position of strength. During the Cold War, a strong deterrence paved the way for détente, for arms control agreements, and for our relatively predictable and stable relationship with the Soviet Union. Our situation today is different, but it requires a similar approach. A combination of strength and engagement is the best way to bring Russia back to compliance with international law and with Helsinki principles.

### **Elements of a Strategy**

A comprehensive strategy for meeting the Russian challenge should have many elements, including: bolstering our defense and deterrence against potential Russian threats; supporting Russia's neighbors in their efforts to build strong, resilient societies and defend their sovereignty; countering the Russians' revisionist, anti-Western propaganda and other forms of "hybrid" warfare aimed at undermining our democracies; and continuing to support the aspirations of the Russian people for freedom and democracy over the longer term. In all of these lines of effort, we have a greater chance of success by working closely with our European allies and partners.

### ***Bolstering Defense and Deterrence***

When it comes to bolstering defense and deterrence, the NATO Alliance today is in a much stronger position than it was three years ago to meet the Russian challenge. Since the Wales Summit in 2014, NATO has carried out the most significant increase in its collective defense posture for a generation. Allies have begun to reverse the decline in defense spending, with total spending up by 3% last year. Through the Readiness Action Plan, Allies have increased their ability to reinforce any Ally at short notice with a much larger NATO Response Force of 40,000 troops and a quick-reaction Spearhead Force, ready to move within days to wherever it might be needed. They also increased the scale and frequency of military exercises, developed a strategy for countering "hybrid" warfare, boosted NATO's cyber and ballistic missile defenses, strengthened intelligence sharing within the Alliance, and introduced measures to speed up decision-making in a crisis.

At the Warsaw Summit last July, Allies took even more far-reaching decisions to strengthen deterrence for the long term. Allied leaders decided that, with Russia's continuing military

build-up and its growing anti-access/area denial capability, it is not enough to rely on reinforcements alone. Credible deterrence also requires additional forces on the ground. So at Warsaw, NATO leaders agreed to enhance NATO's forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance with the deployment of multinational battalions in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and to increase its presence in southeastern Europe as well. So, should any country act aggressively against a NATO Ally, they would immediately face troops from across the Alliance, from both sides of the Atlantic, rather than just the national forces of one country.

The United States is playing a key role in implementing these decisions, serving as lead nation for the multinational battalion in Poland, and contributing additional combat capabilities as part of the billion-dollar European Deterrence Initiative. The EDI (and its predecessor, the European Reassurance Initiative) have ensured an almost continuous presence of U.S. combat forces across NATO's eastern flank – reassuring our Allies, enhancing interoperability and readiness, and leaving the Russians in no doubt that they would pay a heavy price for testing Alliance resolve. EDI is critical to the credibility of NATO's defense and deterrence posture, and I hope it will continue to receive full support from the new Administration and the Congress.

When it comes to the eastern flank, the United States is not bearing an outsized share of the burden. American contributions are being matched by increased efforts on the part of the European Allies and Canada. The UK, Canada and Germany have taken the leading role in NATO's enhanced forward presence in the three Baltic States, reinforced by units from 12 other Allies. And seven European Allies are serving in succession as lead nation for NATO's rapidly deployable "spearhead" force. This is a good example of transatlantic teamwork.

Nevertheless, there's more that needs to be done in the coming years. For example, while our Allies have stepped up by providing forces for the eastern flank, they will also need to do their share in fielding the follow-on forces – ground, air and naval – and the critical enablers needed to back up these "first responders." Right now, the U.S. provides the majority of these forces, and allies should commit to shouldering at least 50% of the burden within the next few years.

Allies will also need to do their part in countering the Russians' growing anti-access and area denial capabilities in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, which could seriously impede NATO's ability to bring in reinforcements. This means investing more in air and missile defense, precision strike, and anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Allies will also need to commit more assets to the standing NATO maritime groups to ensure that the Alliance is able to maintain freedom of navigation in the North Atlantic. And despite the renewed emphasis on territorial defense, Allies need to maintain and strengthen their expeditionary capabilities so that NATO is fully equipped to fight terrorism and manage crises beyond NATO's borders.

All of this requires additional resources. Allies must not only adopt concrete plans to fulfill the pledge to raise defense spending to 2% of GDP by 2024, as Secretary of Defense Mattis called for in February; they should accelerate these efforts if possible. And they should also speed up efforts to meet the even more important target of devoting 20% of their defense budgets to new equipment and R&D – a benchmark now met by only ten of the 28 allies.

### ***Enhancing the Resilience of Allies and Partners***

Spending more on defense is vital, but it is not enough. Russia exploits the weakness and vulnerabilities of our societies and uses cyber-attacks and propaganda to turn a country's citizens against their own government and toward Russia. Allies must therefore strengthen their

resilience in key practical areas. Governments must ensure that their cyber defenses are strong, that they have a high degree of civil preparedness, and that their critical national infrastructure is protected. Resilience is the essential first rung of the deterrence ladder.

Moreover, we can't just circle the wagons and strengthen the resilience of NATO's 28 members alone. Allies also need to bolster the capabilities of Russia's neighbors who are threatened by Moscow, and strengthen NATO's partnerships with other European partners, such as Sweden and Finland, who can help the Alliance in key regions like the Baltic Sea.

NATO has been engaged for many years in assisting Georgia and Ukraine to carry out defense reforms, to raise the proficiency of their armed forces, and to bring them closer to NATO standards. Since 2014, NATO has expanded these efforts through the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine, and it has deployed a team of resident defense advisors to each country. But both these efforts are relatively under-resourced in comparison to European Union efforts in the police and judicial sectors, and I recommend that the Trump Administration push for their expansion.

Bilaterally, the U.S. has provided non-lethal defensive weapons assistance to Ukraine, and together with Canada, offered valuable training to Ukrainian armed forces. This has helped them prevent further Russian incursions in the Donbas. We should consider expanding this support both quantitatively and qualitatively, to include lethal defensive weapons such as anti-tank weapons and air defenses, if Russia continues its aggression in Eastern Ukraine.

When it comes to strengthening its neighbors, NATO needs to look South as well as East, by doing more to project stability to its partners in the Middle East and North Africa. Helping Middle Eastern neighbors build reliable defense institutions, secure their borders, and fight terrorism in their own regions is the best way to prevent them from becoming failed states and safe havens for ISIS. It would be a tangible way for NATO to address the root causes of the migration crisis and home-grown terrorism in Allied countries. It would also reduce opportunities for Russian meddling. In many areas, such as North Africa, defense capacity building could be done in partnership with the European Union. It makes no sense to compete with one another, when there is more than enough work to go around for both organizations.

### ***Defending our Societies and Countering Russian Disinformation***

Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election last year and its similar efforts to influence the outcome of European elections call for a strong response at the national level, but there is also a role for NATO and the EU as well.

Nationally, we need to ensure the integrity of our election processes and institutions against cyber-attacks and foreign manipulation; we should devote additional resources to detecting and analyzing Russian propaganda and influence operations; we should work with social media platforms to label or take down false stories before they go viral; and we should expand radio, television and internet broadcasting aimed at debunking disinformation and "fake news." We shouldn't fight propaganda with propaganda, however, but project a positive narrative, one that conveys what the West stands for, to our own publics and to Russian-speaking audiences.

Multilaterally, we should urge our NATO allies to support a bigger Alliance role in countering influence operations, disinformation and "active measures" by Russia. These are not traditionally problems within NATO's mandate, but defending our societies is just as important

as defending our borders. Here too, closer collaboration between NATO and the EU would make sense – in countering propaganda and disinformation, in sharing intelligence about cyber and other asymmetric threats, and in conducting joint exercises to ensure that “little green men” are not able to do to our countries what they did to Ukraine. I hope the Trump Administration will give its full support to the development of an integrated NATO-EU strategy for countering hybrid warfare, building on the Joint Declaration by NATO and EU leaders issued in Warsaw.

### ***Principled Engagement with Russia...starting with the Ukraine crisis***

The last, and most challenging, piece of a new political strategy for the United States and its Allies is how to engage with Russia, even as we seek to deter and counter the multiple threats it poses. Relations with Moscow are at their lowest point in decades, and President Trump is certainly right in wanting to explore possibilities to reduce the risk of conflict, lower tensions and find areas for mutually beneficial cooperation. But it is essential that any engagement with Russia be based on a unified approach with our democratic allies, one that is consistent with our shared values and principles. Most importantly, engagement should address head-on the fundamental reason why relations have deteriorated in the first place – Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and its violation of the rules that have kept the peace in Europe in the decades since the end of World War II.

Recently, Russia has increased its military and political pressure on the ground in Eastern Ukraine while using multiple levers to undermine and discredit the Ukrainian government and its policies of reform. The Minsk process, led by Germany and France, has been useful in preventing a further deterioration of the situation, but does not provide sufficient leverage to induce Russia to reconsider its approach and withdraw its forces and its proxies from the occupied territories. Stronger, high-level U.S. diplomatic engagement, working in close coordination with Kyiv, Berlin and Paris, may be necessary to achieve real progress and avoid another intractable frozen conflict. Time is of the essence.

If the Trump Administration wants to pursue improved relations with Russia, solving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine should be the litmus test and the essential first step. Any “bargain” with Moscow should be contingent on full implementation of the Minsk agreements and restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty over the Donbas, including control of its international borders. Anything less would reward Russian aggression and only embolden Putin to further destabilize his neighbors. Trading away Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence in return for greater cooperation against ISIS would be a devil’s bargain, and it would ultimately fail: the 45 million people of Ukraine will not quietly accept being consigned to a Russian “sphere of influence.” Indeed, if Putin remains intransigent, we and our Allies should be prepared to increase the pressure on Russia even further by tightening sanctions and stepping up military and economic assistance to Ukraine.

### **Challenges to Transatlantic Unity**

Pursuing a strategy along the lines suggested above would provide the foundation for engaging Russia in a dialogue that upholds our values and restores the credibility of the international rules-based order. But as noted previously, success depends on Western unity and resolve. That unity is being tested not just by external challenges like Russia and ISIS; it is also threatened from within.

NATO has not been seriously affected by Brexit or the refugee crisis, but Alliance cohesion and solidarity could be challenged in several ways: by a failure of Allies to follow-through on rectifying the imbalance in defense spending; or by an inability to maintain the balance in addressing threats from the East and the South that is essential to Allied cohesion. The latest, and perhaps the most serious, challenge comes from a Turkey that seems to be drifting away from Western values and developing closer links with Moscow. As in the past, U.S. leadership will be essential in holding NATO together and ensuring that decision-making by consensus is not paralyzed.

For its part, the European Union will be increasingly preoccupied by negotiations over the terms of Brexit, while struggling to manage popular dissatisfaction over illegal migration and feeble economic growth. The perception that the Trump Administration is skeptical about the whole European project could exacerbate internal divisions within Europe and provide openings for Russian mischief-making. The United States needs to demonstrate, in word and deed, that it supports a strong, united Europe as an indispensable partner in dealing with Russia and other challenges, even as we work to overcome differences over trade and refugee policy.