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TIME FOR A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR NATO AND EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

Selected Eastern Partnership Countries' Expertise Can Help Shape New European Security Strategy



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by Jeff Lovitt

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Jeff Lovitt is the founding Chair of New Diplomacy, a new initiative launched in 2015 to address the policy challenges facing global and regional policymakers in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of the European Union, not least the insecurity in the post-Soviet space and the crises of democracy and instability in the Middle East (www.newdiplomacy.net).

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The EU Global Strategy and the NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué Lay the Groundwork for Design of a Comprehensive NATO-Led Security Framework, Supported by More Proactive EU Diplomacy, to Defend Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty, and Human Rights in Europe.

Balancing Interests in a Comprehensive Strategy

The run-up to the NATO Warsaw Summit saw the European Union's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy launched barely a week after the United Kingdom's referendum decision to leave the EU. While the decision of UK voters on 23 June rather overshadowed the Global Strategy announcement on 28 June 2016, it represented a stark reminder of the steep climb the EU faces to overcome differing national interests.

According to the new Global Strategy, "there is no clash between national and European interests".¹ Even though the strategy rightly stresses shared interests and values, the EU needs to admit and face the divergent interests of its members, and apply those shared values and long-term interests to reduce and, over time, minimise the policy challenges posed by different interests. It will be no easy task.

¹ Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, European Union, June 2016: https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/about/eugs_review_web_4.pdf

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The European Union (EU) and NATO need to build on the decisions of the Warsaw Summit to restore confidence in Europe's security architecture, backed up by unequivocal strength in defence and deterrence capacity, and energetic sustained diplomatic engagement to reduce tensions and resolve ongoing conflicts. The resources and mandate of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia should be strengthened.
- The governments of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine need to complete radical reforms of their own security sectors, and bring their own expertise in hybrid warfare and counterintelligence into a mutually beneficial partnership with EU and NATO members, providing strengthened early warning of threats, and increasing their own strategic communications to place security co-operation at the top of the agenda in their relations with the West.
- The EU can build on the EU-NATO declaration issued at the Warsaw Summit by establishing "a Centre of Excellence for countering hybrid threats" and working closely with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in developing joint strategies to counter hybrid warfare.
- Ukraine and Georgia should be embraced as partners in planning the NATO maritime mission in the Black Sea, building on the model of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian military brigade.
- The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum should embrace the commitments to support civil society in the new EU Global Strategy, and actively campaign for a new, full-fledged Eastern Partnership Platform on Common Security and Defence Policy.
- It is in NATO's own interests to elaborate and present to three Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) a roadmap for further co-operation with a membership perspective.
- The EU member states should recognise the achievements of Georgia and Ukraine in meeting the technical and political criteria for visa liberalisation, and grant their citizens visa-free travel to the Schengen area before the end of 2016.

Clearly, the UK is not the only EU member to weigh national interests against European, or EU, interests. Just as the interests of Italy, France, and Spain are inevitably shaped and influenced by developments in the Middle East and North Africa, so Poland and the Baltic states have an interest in improving relations with the EU's Eastern neighbours, and in strengthened security on NATO's Eastern flank.

It is hard to reconcile the different interests of, for instance, Poland and Germany, let alone Ukraine, over Gazprom's plans for the Nord Stream 2 energy pipeline from Russia to Germany, deemed by Poland's Anti-Trust Office as a threat to competition in energy supplies to the EU since it would concentrate Russian energy exports to the EU in one route, bypassing Ukraine's transit network and cutting off energy customers in Central Europe.²

Just as different EU and NATO members place different emphasis on the threat to Europe from ISIS and conflict in the Middle East, so they also view the threat from Russian aggression through different perspectives and relationships. Indeed, the post-Brexit EU may see greater moves on the part of France and Germany towards a deeper political union, and a stronger EU defence arm, but the EU is also more likely to dampen hopes of an EU membership perspective for Turkey and it will be harder to sustain EU sanctions against Russia without the voice of the UK.

In June 2016, the EU agreed to extend sanctions until January 2017. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has insisted that sanctions can be eased only if the Minsk Agreement, which calls on Moscow and Kyiv to withdraw troops and military equipment from eastern Ukraine, is implemented, but the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has called for a gradual lifting of sanctions.³ The absence of Britain could also see a decline in the level of EU support to civil society and for essential governance reforms in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The stabilisation of the current security climate on NATO's Eastern borders will require strong strategic planning and

² *Russia to build Nord Stream 2 despite Polish objection*, EUobserver, <https://euobserver.com/economic/134694>

³ *Germany's Steinmeier favors gradual phasing-out of Russia sanctions*, Reuters, 19 June 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-germany-steinmeier-idUSKCN0Z50AI>

implementation on the part of the EU, NATO, and also on the part of those neighbouring Eastern Partnership countries that are not tied into a security alliance with Russia.⁴

Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank

The anticipated strengthening of NATO's Eastern flank was confirmed at the Warsaw Summit that took place on 8-9 July 2016. Four battle groups (of up to 800 troops each) will be based in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, under the command of respectively the US, the UK, Canada, and Germany. The US plans to rotate an additional heavy brigade of about 3,500 troops to training areas, and NATO's support for Ukraine will be boosted with a Comprehensive Package of Assistance to the reform of security structures.

Alexander Grushko, the Russian Ambassador to NATO, criticised the alliance's moves to build up its forces in the Baltic region, arguing that the NATO forces would amount to two brigades in the region on a permanent basis, in violation of a 1997 agreement between Russia and the alliance.

NATO must keep its ears and eyes open, and cannot let such claims stand. In a sign of welcome straight talking, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said after the NATO-Russia Council meeting on 13 July 2016 that it was "obvious" that NATO's actions came as "a direct response to the actions of Russia in Ukraine, illegally annexing Crimea".⁵

NATO is strengthening deterrence by providing multinational defence forces whose composition reinforces the message that Article 5 on collective defence means an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all – but in a manner that in no way represents an attack capability against Russia, which has increased its ground forces, and sea and air defences, in Kaliningrad in the Baltic Sea, as well as further fortifying its military presence in Crimea since its 2014 annexation of the Ukrainian territory.

⁴ Both Armenia and Belarus are members of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The CSTO charter stipulates that aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all.

⁵ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_134102.htm

NATO's modest, but multinational, deterrent force is a strong diplomatic answer to the Russian responses that NATO is encircling Russia.

Concerning the defence of the Baltic states, the battalions further reduce the likelihood of any military incursion by Russia into the Baltics, since it would immediately result in clashes with multinational NATO forces. However, NATO has also to ensure that its forces can access the Baltic region in the face of Russia's radar and air defence systems (known as Anti-Access Area Denial systems). Such access will be crucial also in the Black Sea region.

Another significant challenge is hybrid war, infiltration of Russian-speaking communities and subversion through propaganda. This will be a test of the democratic systems in the Baltic states to stand up for human rights and democracy, and for integrity in the face of uncompromising information warfare. As Eugene Rumer argues, in the event of an uprising driven by disinformation, "NATO would lack clear evidence of Russian aggression, thus running the risk of confusion and controversy among the allies with respect to military action in defence of the Baltic states in accordance with the alliance's Article 5 guarantees."⁶

But the task of countering disinformation should not sidetrack the Alliance from the need to set the agenda in line with its own long-term strategy to forge a more effective, sustainable security architecture for NATO and its Eastern neighbours. President Vladimir Putin of Russia would be delighted if he could keep NATO busy monitoring and responding to disinformation. It is more important to convince and persuade through long-term strategic action and leadership than through reactive posturing.

NATO and the Eastern Neighbourhood

Article 5 of the Warsaw Summit Communiqué does not mince words: "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military

⁶ *Russia and the Security of Europe*, Eugene Rumer: http://carnegeendowment.org/2016/06/30/russia-and-security-of-europe-pub-63990?mt_kt_tok=eyJpIjoiTWpVNU1qZGIOVEUwTUROaylsInQiOijxVlwvdkj5NnplK1ILXC9nZXMrT1wvUnVKMjZkK2dFT-DA3MnZicmwzOVIROTIxQVV2b1h5WHBxVNZUG85bkxi-bHpaTFBhZVY2b2pweURWbEhXdfwvaXVnd1hYZklYMXNmRytR05CSmY2MHpuZX9In0%3D

activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace."⁷

The Warsaw Summit saw NATO agree on a twin-track policy of "deterrence and dialogue" with Russia, including the insistence that Moscow must abide by the Minsk agreement on Ukraine before sanctions will be lifted.

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As Christopher S. Chivvis puts it, "explicit or implicit Article V commitments must remain limited to the Alliance itself, but how NATO responds to Russian aggression in Ukraine and any other country with which it has a close partnership will inevitably inform the Kremlin's interpretation of NATO's collective strength and will – and these will have implications for the effectiveness of deterrence within the Alliance itself. In other words, deterrence in Central Europe is inextricably linked with NATO policy in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia due to the commitments NATO has made to these countries in the past, above all to Georgia and Ukraine at the 2008 Bucharest Summit."⁸

At the Warsaw Summit, NATO did not even get to the planning stage concerning the formation of a Black Sea fleet to contain Russia in a way that would reduce tensions

⁷ *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016: <https://nato.usmission.gov/warsaw-summit-communique/>

⁸ "NATO's New Challenges", Christopher S. Chivvis, in *Beyond NATO's Eastern Border. Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova*, Christopher S. Chivvis, Andriy Shevchenko, Eka Tkeshelashvili, and Igor Munteanu, Foreign and Security Policy Paper 2016 No. 26, German Marshall Fund of the United States, <http://www.gmfus.org/file/8704/download>

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in the region. Romania did not receive a guarantee that a NATO Black Sea fleet will be established; instead a strengthening of the maritime and air presence of NATO in the Black Sea region will be “analysed”. The Black Sea is a region of strategic importance for NATO – and it will be essential to include Georgia and Ukraine in plans to stabilise the region, and this is recognised in the summit communiqué.

The ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh brings in another important dimension, namely the need to defuse tensions between post-Soviet states, notwithstanding the continuing role of Russia both as the supplier of arms to both sides (Armenia and Azerbaijan), and as a military ally of Armenia. Russia is involved in all the ongoing conflicts in the South Caucasus, as well as in Moldova and Ukraine, and firm, but transparent engagement with Russia will be essential to their peaceful resolution.

Time for an Updated Security Framework

A plethora of initiatives have explored the shifting relations and partnership between the EU and NATO. According to a Franco-Finnish Declaration on Strengthening the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, published on 15 June 2016, “while NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defence, the EU's role as a security and defence provider both within Europe and abroad needs to be reinforced, including through a more strategic approach to its relations with NATO”.

The declaration argues that “a Centre of Excellence for countering hybrid threats could support both EU and its member states, and enhance EU-NATO co-operation”. At the Warsaw Summit, NATO and the EU did indeed sign a joint declaration on co-operation in areas such as maritime patrols and hybrid warfare.⁹

Within a few days of the Summit, a German white paper on defence was published – outlining a vision of permanent structures for decision-making on security policy in

the EU, but also envisaging that the German military should broaden its own range of capabilities and engagement.

While the EU-NATO joint declaration addresses the “unprecedented challenges emanating from the South and East”, the main focus is on the East, and this focus is addressed first:

“We are convinced that enhancing our neighbours' and partners' stability in accordance with our values, as enshrined in the UN Charter, contributes to our security and to sustainable peace and prosperity. So that our neighbours and partners are better able to address the numerous challenges they currently face, we will continue to support their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, as well as their reform efforts.”

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In fulfilling the objectives above, the first priority targeted is the need to “boost our ability to counter hybrid threats, including by bolstering resilience, working together on analysis, prevention, and early detection, through timely information sharing and, to the extent possible, intelligence sharing between staffs; and co-operating on strategic communication and response. The development of co-ordinated procedures through our respective playbooks will substantially contribute to implementing our efforts.”

The reference to “bolstering resilience” reiterates the thrust of the new EU Global Strategy, which argues that “state and societal resilience is our strategic priority in the neighbourhood”.

⁹ Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 8 July 2016: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

According to the new Global Strategy, managing the EU's relationship with Russia represents "a key strategic challenge".

It continues: "A consistent and united approach must remain the cornerstone of EU policy towards Russia. Substantial changes in relations between the EU and Russia are premised upon full respect for international law and the principles underpinning the European security order, including the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. We will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea nor accept the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. We will strengthen the EU, enhance the resilience of our eastern neighbours, and uphold their right to determine freely their approach towards the EU. At the same time, the EU and Russia are interdependent. We will therefore engage Russia to discuss disagreements and co-operate if and when our interests overlap."

Respect for international law and principles must indeed underpin an updated security framework in Europe. It must be a cornerstone of dialogue and diplomacy; it is not a strategy, however.

The EU is better at diplomacy than strategy, and both the EU and NATO need to finally take a lead on designing a new security framework that can build a peaceful, stable international community, and deter aggression against the EU's neighbours, not just against NATO members. Until the West takes up this challenge, President Putin, or for that matter his successor in the Kremlin or other autocratic leaders and rogue regimes, can carry on springing unpleasant surprises with relative impunity.

EU Diplomacy Can Bolster NATO Strategy

The EU and NATO need to work together to avoid duplication, for instance on hybrid warfare assessments, but above all to work with other international organisations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to build confidence in a revised European security architecture. The architecture needs to be reshaped to address the post-Cold War era, the perils of nuclear proliferation, and threats to sovereignty, territorial integrity,

and human rights. But it also needs to be backed up by solid defence and deterrence capacity, led by the "hard power" of NATO.

An immediate priority for NATO, for instance, should be a high-profile information campaign to compel Putin to abandon the policy of first use of tactical nuclear weapons – a policy that can escalate a low-level conflict into a nuclear conflict spiralling out of control and with untold cost to human life.

A strategic approach to enhancing security must rebuild confidence that such rogue policies will not be tolerated. Only NATO can lead and enforce such a campaign against what Article 10 of the Warsaw Summit Communiqué calls Russia's "irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric, military concept and underlying posture".

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In tandem, the EU Global Strategy needs to be followed up with sub-strategies and specific objectives and targets. A priority should be a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) strategy, including building co-operation and capacity with partners, and building early warning systems, backed up by corresponding budgets. Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership countries should welcome the commitments to support civil society in the new EU Global Strategy, but also strengthen and contribute its own expertise on the security sector.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and its national platforms in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine can also work at the national and international level to campaign for a new, full-fledged Eastern Partnership Platform on Common Security and Defence

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Policy, and engage with the EU around the defence review now underway within the EU following the NATO Warsaw summit and the Brexit vote. It is particularly important to ensure that the EU's defence focus addresses the Eastern neighbourhood, not only the Southern neighbourhood of the EU.

Similarly, while the Warsaw Summit did not demonstrate that NATO has a comprehensive strategy to contain and deter Russia, there were signs that the Alliance recognises the importance of containing risks, for instance working with Russia to strengthen transparency and build confidence to ensure that accidents and misunderstandings do not occur.

This was built upon at the 13 July meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, where Moscow proposed to require all planes flying in the Baltic Sea region to operate with their transponders turned on (transponders help civil aviation authorities track and identify planes). NATO officials in the past have criticised the Russian practice of turning off transponders, resulting in near-collisions of NATO and Russian aircraft. While that proposal did not result in an agreement, minimum standards must be agreed to avoid such misunderstandings and provocations.

However, NATO needs to have a sustained, long-term strategy to build a new security framework for Europe – not only to contain Russian aggression through effective deterrence, but also to embrace its Eastern neighbours who want closer co-operation and even membership in the Alliance – the best guarantee that there would not be further aggressions such as the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, or the annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014.

NATO 'Open Door' Policy

The invitation to Montenegro to join NATO shows that the open door membership policy continues, but in the case of Georgia NATO members first have to overcome the concerns that not only would its membership antagonise Russia, but that NATO could not defend Georgia militarily against Russia (which already has its military installed in the unrecognised territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

The perspective of membership must be considered, therefore, as part of a new security framework – one that inspires trust among NATO members and potential adversaries, such as Russia, that international law and sovereignty will be respected and defended, human rights will be protected and defended, and that there are clearly agreed defence guarantees and deterrence mechanisms to back up the security framework. The OSCE must also be a partner in the design of the new security framework, but NATO must provide the backbone of the security guarantees.

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Indeed, it is in NATO's interest to forge closer relations with partners that have first-hand knowledge of the tensions, threats and military tactics that have destabilised their countries, in particular the experience of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova in the unresolved conflicts on their territories. NATO should present Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova with roadmaps for further co-operation and a NATO membership perspective.

As stated in Article 111 of the Warsaw Summit Communiqué, “At the 2008 Bucharest Summit we agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO with MAP [Membership Action Plan] as an integral part of the process; today we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions.”

EU Diplomacy Can Lead on Resolution of Territorial Conflicts

The governments of Georgia and Ukraine should complete radical reforms of their own security sectors, and work together with EU member states and civil society to strengthen co-operation and shared know-how to tackle hybrid warfare threats, including disinformation.

Likewise, EU member states should recognise that Georgia and Ukraine have met the technical and political requirements of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, and grant their citizens visa-free travel to the Schengen area before the end of 2016. The decision to open the EU's borders to Georgia and Ukraine will send an important signal to the two countries' citizens, and will send a strong political message to reform-minded politicians in Georgia and Ukraine to build on their achievement and to continue along the path of closer integration with the EU.

Any effective strategy will require EU members of NATO to increase their defence commitments and to raise their capacity and co-operation on intelligence-sharing to counter hybrid warfare. But the strategy will require NATO to have the hard power in air and naval resources to prevent military incursions, and deter provocative air activity or impediments to free naval passage in the Baltic and Black Sea regions. Confidence-building measures are necessary now; in the long term, NATO needs to restore its hard power advantage to build lasting confidence. That restoration needs to start now.

While NATO builds up its deterrent forces and air defences to reduce tensions – to a point where any Russian countermeasures (such as amassing military equipment and ground forces, or use of Anti-Access Area Denial systems) pose no significant threat – in turn, the EU can focus on the diplomatic side of the equation.

Just as Russia has been weakened by economic sanctions, so the EU should continue to build a proactive policy of engagement with Eastern Partnership countries. The EU is right, for instance, to continue to build the elements of an Association Agreement (minus deep and comprehensive free trade for now) with Armenia. The EU is also right to push forward

with closer co-operation in its relations with Belarus and Azerbaijan, so long as support for human rights, freedom of expression, and the engagement of civil society remains central to the EU's approach.

The successful implementation of the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine requires intense co-operation and pressure from the side of the EU to strengthen the rule of law, to fight corruption, and to foster independent, high-quality media in all three countries. But the EU can also take a lead on laying the ground for easing tensions and opening space for dialogue to resolve the ongoing conflicts and territorial disputes in the Caucasus, and of course the Transnistria conflict in Moldova and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The EU is well placed to insert itself as the first point of call for the governments of the region when conflicts flare up, and to re-energise the diplomatic processes to forge agreements and eventual settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh and the other unresolved conflicts. Resolution of these conflicts will require pro-active, sustained engagement over a long time, alongside innovative diplomacy that steadily diminishes the leverage and disruptive influence of the Kremlin. A first step should be to strengthen the resources and mandate of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

Since the NATO Warsaw summit, a Franco-German proposal, and later an Italian informal paper, have argued for the establishment of an EU military headquarters, but focus more on crisis operations in the Middle East than on deterring the threat on the EU's eastern borders.

The EU's defence review, which gathered pace under the Slovak EU Council Presidency after the UK's Brexit vote, will – to be credible – need to focus on strengthening the EU member states' contribution to NATO, and on supporting a new NATO-led security architecture through sustained and principled diplomatic engagement in the Eastern Partnership countries.¹⁰ This is essential to the security of the EU, and also to the sustainable democratic development of the EU's Eastern neighbours.

¹⁰ Italy lays out 'vision' of EU army, EUobserver, 26 September 2016, <https://euobserver.com/uk-referendum/135235>

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