



A Fateful Summit: The Future of NATO's Relationship with Russia

Russia Studies Centre
Policy Paper No. 1 (2014)

Dr Andrew Foxall

The Henry Jackson Society
September 2014

Summary

- Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 – the first outright land grab in Europe by a major power since the end of the Cold War – caught NATO off-guard and has thrown the alliance's relationship with Russia into crisis. Russia has gone from being a 'strategic partner' (albeit a difficult one) to a hostile aggressor.
- NATO must review the threat posed by Russia and consider how it would respond should the situation in Ukraine worsen or repeat itself in a NATO country. Russia perceives that NATO lacks the political will to respond to aggression, and the absence of such a review would risk confirming this.
- NATO must develop new strategies for dealing with the threat posed by Russia, including: addressing unconventional forms of warfare; undertaking a programme of rearmament to rebuild its military capacity; undertaking regular large-scale military exercises involving all levels of decision-making; developing credible conventional forces; and undertaking the forward deployment of troops to eastern Europe.
- For over two decades, NATO's security priorities had focussed on terrorism and failed states. While these remain vital, the drawdown in Afghanistan coupled to events in Ukraine mean that the alliance is required to prioritise the defence of eastern Europe against Russia in its next chapter.
- Top leadership in NATO has voiced serious concerns that the alliance would not be able to stand up to Russian aggression. This makes it imperative for NATO members to renew their commitment to spend 2% of their GDP on defence spending.
- The Wales Summit is the most important meeting – and most difficult test – for NATO in a generation. NATO must rise to the challenge provided by Russia's aggression and in doing so reassert its own credibility.

Introduction

When Prime Minister David Cameron announced in November 2013 that the UK would host the NATO summit in Newport, south Wales on 4 and 5 September 2014, few imagined that it would be a defining moment for the alliance. A summit that was expected to review the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan as it ends in late 2014 must instead offer a definitive response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. These actions threaten to replace a rules-based international order with one governed by political destabilisation techniques, military power and economic coercion.

Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014 – the first outright land grab in Europe by a major power since the end of the Cold War – caught NATO off-guard and has thrown the alliance's relationship with Russia into crisis. At the time, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen described Russia's actions as causing “the most serious crisis in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall” and declared that the alliance can “no longer do business as usual with Russia”.¹ NATO's response, however, has been limited – strengthening cooperation with Ukraine, reaffirming its commitment to defend central and eastern European allies, and rebuking Russia. On 1 April, the alliance suspended all practical cooperation with Moscow – the second time it had done so since 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia. Such words and actions, however, scarcely hide the fact that the alliance failed to deter Russia's aggression and was ill-prepared to counter Russia's use of unconventional warfare and its information war when it occurred. Even members of the alliance itself – namely, Poland and the three Baltic states – have been highly critical at what they see as tokenism in NATO's response to the Ukraine crisis.

On the eve of the Wales summit, President Vladimir Putin's intention to extend Russia's sphere of influence and position his country as an anti-Western power is not the only issue facing NATO. The rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East and the limited success of NATO's operations in Afghanistan and Libya are others factors that will determine NATO's future direction. Nevertheless, the Ukraine crisis – which will feature highly in international security debates for the foreseeable future – is chief amongst these. It poses profound and troubling questions regarding NATO's future preparedness should the situation in Ukraine worsen or repeat itself in a member state of the alliance.

¹ 'A Strong NATO in a Changed World', available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_108215.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

1. NATO'S Relations with Russia Prior to the Ukraine Crisis

NATO's relationship with Russia began in December 1991 with the inaugural session of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). The NACC, which was later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), was created by NATO leaders after the ending of the Cold War as an attempt to foster a new relationship with the states of central and eastern Europe. Although the NACC stopped short of establishing a formal relationship between NATO and Russia, it did lay the groundwork for future developments.

The relationship deepened in 1994, when Russia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP), a NATO initiative to reach out to countries that had formerly been under Soviet influence. The brainchild of US President Bill Clinton, the PfP was designed to oversee practical security cooperation between NATO and Partnership states, particularly with regards to peacekeeping operations.² In 1996, Russian soldiers were deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the NATO-led peacekeeping forces – Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilisation Force (SFOR). At the time, Russia's contribution was the largest non-NATO contingent in these forces.

As NATO expanded its membership to include former Soviet satellite states – Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary began accession talks in July 1997 and joined the alliance in March 1999 – it balanced the interests of other alliance-aspirant members with Russian concerns, namely that NATO was a military bloc hostile to Russia's interests. As a result, in 1997, NATO and Russia agreed the “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security”. The Act gave Russia the ability to sit at the same table as members of the alliance (in the “16+1” format, and later “19+1”) and, in doing so, sought to foster stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic region.³ Together with the establishment of a Permanent Joint Council (PJC), the Act outlined what NATO would and would not do. NATO committed that it would not deploy “substantial” combat forces in politically sensitive regions, and its members, the Act stated, “have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members”. This was offset by the identification of a number of areas where NATO and Russia could cooperate on practical matters – where strategic priorities and tactical challenges overlapped.

With the PJC, regular dialogue between NATO and Russia began to take place and cooperation continued over the following years – in 1998, for example, Russia established a diplomatic mission to NATO. NATO-Russia relations were, however, severely strained by ‘Operation Allied Force’ – the alliance's 1999 intervention in Yugoslavia. On 23 March 1999, the day the Operation began, Russia suspended ties with NATO and withdrew its representatives from NATO headquarters. While Russian peacekeepers were subsequently deployed, in summer 1999, as part of the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo, Russia vehemently opposed the intervention itself.⁴

² ‘The Partnership for Peace programme’, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

³ ‘Founding Act: on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France’, 27 May 1997, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

⁴ Russia's troops were withdrawn from the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in the Balkans in 2003.

When Lord Robertson became NATO Secretary-General in October 1999, he committed to breaking the alliance's stalemate with Russia over Kosovo. Six months later, Vladimir Putin was elected President of Russia and announced that he would rebuild Russia's relations with NATO "in the spirit of pragmatism".⁵ The terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, which saw the first-ever invocation of Article V of the Washington Treaty, provided the opportunity for both NATO and Russia to do this. The attacks made clear that both NATO and Russia faced common security threats – terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and instability in Central Asia. This led to the 2002 Rome Declaration, which saw the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council – a forum in which Russia and NATO members sit as equals ("27 members", rather than "26+1") and decisions are made on the basis of consensus.

The NATO-Russia Council paved the way for Russia and the alliance to cooperate in ever-closer practical military exercises. In 2004, Russia and NATO launched the 'Action Plan on Terrorism'. From 2004 onwards, there were joint exercises related to 'Theatre Missile Defence'. In 2005, the 'Counter-Narcotics Training Project' was established to address the threats posed by the trafficking of narcotics from Afghanistan. In 2006, Russia joined 'Operation Active Endeavour', NATO's counter-terrorism operation in the Mediterranean. And in April 2008, Russia supported NATO's UN-mandated ISAF mission in Afghanistan by facilitating the land transit of non-military equipment across Russian territory.⁶

Although the danger of military conflict between Russia and Georgia had flared several times in recent years, NATO was caught by surprise when, in early August 2008, Russia and Georgia went to war over the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's "disproportionate military action" in Georgia resulted in NATO temporarily suspending meetings of the NATO-Russia Council. NATO halted cooperation in certain areas, but continued in others where there was common interest, such as counter-narcotics and the fight against terrorism. Russia responded by conducting a review of its relations with NATO and suspending military cooperation. As NATO members in central and eastern Europe stressed at the time of the war and have repeatedly stressed since, the alliance's response was tepid and left them anxiously looking over their shoulders at Russia.⁷

NATO-Russia dialogue subsequently resumed in March 2009, but the relationship remained strained. In April 2009, at the alliance's 60th Anniversary Summit, NATO leaders committed to a new transatlantic approach towards Russia and eastern Europe, seeking to deepen cooperation and engagement through the NATO-Russia Council. Barely a week later, however, Russia withdrew from these efforts citing tensions over a PfP exercise in Georgia.

In December 2009, at the first NATO-Russian Council meeting since the Russo-Georgian war, NATO and Russian leaders sought to reinvigorate their relationship by agreeing to launch a 'Joint Review of 21st Century Common Security Challenges'. The Review was endorsed the following

⁵ 'BBC Breakfast With Frost Interview: Vladimir Putin, March 5th, 2000', BBC, available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/breakfast_with_frost/transcripts/putin5_mar.txt, last visited: 2 September 2014.

⁶ These arrangements were expanded in 2010, and later updated in 2012. See, NATO-Russia Council, 'Questions and Answers on ISAF transit and Russia', 18 July 2012, pg. 13, available at: <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/2012-07-18-nrc-transit-agreement-qa/>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

⁷ Smith, J. 'The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?', Centre for Strategic & International Studies, November 2012, available at: http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/081110_smith_natorussia_web.pdf, last visited: 2 September 2014.

year, at the Lisbon summit.⁸ The Lisbon summit also saw the two entities resume cooperation on 'Theatre Missile Defence' and develop a comprehensive analysis for future joint work on the issue. Cooperation continued over the following years: in 2011, the NATO-Russia Council updated its 2004 'Action Plan on Terrorism'; in 2012, the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, General Knud Bartels, visited Russia to boost military-to-military cooperation; and in 2013, Anders Fogh Rasmussen met with Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, to discuss ways to advance dialogue on missile defence.

Then came the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014.

2. The Ukraine Crisis

The Ukraine crisis, which began with pro-democracy demonstrations on Kyiv's Maidan in late 2013, became an international crisis in late February after pro-Russian forces took control of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. Russia initially claimed that the forces were local self-defence units, but later admitted they were Russian military personnel without insignia.⁹ In early March, NATO condemned Russia's military escalation in Crimea and expressed "grave concern" at the Russian Parliament's decision - on 1 March - to give President Putin authorisation to use Russia's armed forces on the territory of Ukraine. On 11 March, authorities in Sevastopol, the capital of Crimea, declared Crimea's independence from Ukraine and, following an illegal and illegitimate referendum on 16 March, the peninsula was incorporated into Russia on 21 March.

Emboldened by this 'success', Moscow continued to destabilise Ukraine by amassing Russian military forces on Ukraine's eastern border, undertaking military exercises in western Russia, and providing support - financial, logistical, and military - to the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine, while at the same time denying that it was doing so. These separatists were almost certainly responsible for the destruction of flight MH17 on 17 July, which killed 298 civilians, including 10 Britons. Despite this, Russia has continued to provide the separatists with military support. Yet while its initial support was discreet and allowed it 'plausible deniability', it has become more brazen as the months have passed: in early August, with Russia's 'Trojan horse' convoy of humanitarian trucks waiting to enter Ukraine, 23 Russian heavy military vehicles crossed the border; and in late August, Russia sent its forces to south-east Ukraine to open up a 'third front' in Kyiv's conflict with pro-Russian separatists (it had previously been concentrated on the rebel strongholds of Luhansk and Donetsk). In case there was ever doubt, it is now clear that Russia is involved in military activities inside Ukraine.

The Ukraine crisis is a 'game changer' for NATO. For over two decades, NATO's security priorities had focussed on terrorism and failed states. While these remain important, events in Ukraine mean that the alliance must undertake a fundamental re-assessment of the threats it faces and the military capabilities it requires. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, NATO is required to prioritise the defence of eastern Europe against Russia. It must also develop a strategy for addressing unconventional forms of warfare.

⁸ 'NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement: at the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council held in Lisbon on 20 November 2010', 20 November 2010, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_68871.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

⁹ 'Putin acknowledges Russian military servicemen were in Crimea', RT, 17 April 2014, available at: <http://rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

3. NATO's Response to Russian Aggression

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, NATO's response has been largely rhetorical. In March, NATO urged Russia to take immediate steps to return to compliance with international law, to adhere to its international obligations and responsibilities, and to engage in a dialogue with Kyiv toward a diplomatic and political solution to the crisis that would respect Ukraine's internationally-recognised borders. In August, meanwhile, Anders Fogh Rasmussen called on Russia to "step back from the brink" of war.

Nevertheless, NATO has undertaken some practical steps. On 1 April, the alliance suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia. In the words of Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow,

For 20 years, the security of the Euro-Atlantic region has been based on the premise that we do not face an adversary to our east. That premise is now in doubt.¹⁰

So too, on 29 July, did the European Union (22 members of which are also members of NATO) commit to end all future arms sales to Russia. The embargo, however, does not apply to previously agreed sales.

The alliance has also reinforced its commitment to defending central and eastern Europe by undertaking a number of small-scale initiatives. These have chiefly centred on air defence and surveillance, maritime deployments and military exercises.¹¹

Air Defence and Surveillance

Since mid-March 2014, NATO airborne warning and control system (AWACS) surveillance aircraft have been conducting twice-daily flights to monitor developments in Ukraine. In April, NATO increased the number of fighter jets attached to the Baltic Air Policing mission from four to 16.

Maritime Deployments

Since late April, NATO has deployed a group of five to seven vessels to patrol the Baltic Sea. A second contingent has been deployed to the Mediterranean since May. In mid-July, a third group - comprising of four ships - participated in naval exercises in the Black Sea.

Military Exercises

Between 16 and 23 May, roughly 6,000 NATO troops participated in a military exercise - named 'Steadfast Javelin 1' - in Estonia.

Despite these initiatives, NATO must undertake a more robust demonstration of its willingness and capacity to defend its allies and its interests, particularly in eastern Europe. Russia's destabilisation of Ukraine has sharpened concerns in central and eastern Europe about President

¹⁰ 'A new strategic reality in Europe: Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow to the 21st International Conference on Euro-Atlantic Security, Krakow, Poland', 4 April 2014, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_108889.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

¹¹ See, Allied Command Operations Assurance Measures website, available at: <http://www.aco.nato.int/nato-assurance-measures.aspx>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

Putin's geopolitical ambitions in the region. For a good number of years, analysts and officials in central and eastern Europe have voiced concerns about Russia's aggressive and neo-imperialist ambitions, but these were largely ignored in the West.

4. Where Does NATO Go From Here?

NATO was caught off-guard by Russia's activities in Ukraine. The alliance's intelligence networks within Russia and eastern Europe failed to warn of the threat, and the alliance was ill-prepared to counter Russia's use of unconventional warfare and its information and disinformation war. Since February, NATO has been struggling to develop new strategies for dealing with the radically changed context – in which Russia has gone from being a 'strategic partner' (albeit a difficult one) to a hostile aggressor. In the words of Anders Fogh Rasmussen,

We have to face the reality that Russia does not consider NATO a partner. Russia is a nation that unfortunately for the first time since the Second World War has grabbed land by force. Obviously we have to adapt to that.

In this context, NATO must review the threat posed by Russia and consider how it would respond should the situation in Ukraine worsen or repeat itself in a NATO country. Russia perceives that NATO lacks the political will to respond to aggression, and the absence of such a review would risk confirming this. As a recent UK Defence Committee report makes clear, "The willingness, ability and readiness to act against common threats are vital for the future existence of NATO."¹²

Shortly after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, NATO formally re-engaged with Russia. This reflected a consensus within the alliance that a strong, cooperative relationship between NATO and Russia remained necessary for transatlantic security. It remains true that there are a number of areas of shared interest between NATO and Russia, including: arms control; counter-terrorism; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and, security in the Arctic. But after the Ukraine crisis it is clear that as well as working with Russia, NATO is required to provide a bulwark against Russian aggression in eastern Europe.

Though the alliance does not yet have an agenda or strategy to counter or roll back Russia's influence, it needs to develop one as a matter of urgency. In June 2014, Anders Fogh Rasmussen acknowledged this when he announced that an alliance Readiness Action Plan – which would allow NATO to respond quickly when and wherever it was required – was being prepared for the NATO summit in Wales. The Plan specifically examines,

[...] how we can best deploy our forces for defence and deterrence. This includes force posture, positions, and presence. We are considering reinforcement measures, such as necessary infrastructure, designation of bases and pre-positioning of equipment and supplies. We are reviewing our defence plans, threat assessments, intelligence-sharing arrangements, early-warning procedures, and crisis response planning. We are developing

¹² House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO', Third Report of Session 2014-15, 31 July 2014, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmslect/cmdfence/358/358.pdf>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

a new exercise schedule, adapted to the new security environment. And we want to further strengthen our NATO Response Force and Special Forces, so we can respond more quickly to any threat against any member of the alliance, including where we have little warning.¹³

Developing this, in early September 2014, NATO officials announced that the alliance would form a “spearhead” high-readiness force of 4,000 troops – drawn on a rotational basis from alliance members – that could be deployed “within 48 hours” to eastern Europe in order to protect members states against Russian aggression.¹⁴ As well as providing a threat against conventional warfare, the force would also be trained to deal with Russia’s unconventional warfare.

While these initiatives are to be applauded, there remains more that NATO can do. By way of practical measures, NATO could undertake the following:

4.1 Re-Arm

If NATO is serious about deterring Russian aggression, then it must undertake a programme of rearmament to rebuild its military capacity.

Every NATO member has committed, by virtue of being a member of the alliance, to spending 2% of its GDP on defence. Of the alliance’s 28 members, however, only four countries do this: the US, the UK, Greece and Estonia.¹⁵ Between 2008 and 2013, alliance members on average decreased their defence spending by 20%, while some cut their defence budgets by up to 40%.¹⁶ There has, in short, been a progressive dismantling of military capability in Western Europe since the end of the Cold War.

This stands in stark contrast to Russia. While Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia was a military success, the operation revealed serious failures in the command and control of Russian forces. Russia learnt from this, and has made considerable new investments and dramatically improved its capabilities. Since 2012, expenditure on the military has increased and, between 2013 and 2017, defence expenditure will amount to 4.8% of Russian GDP.¹⁷ Russia has embarked on a US\$720 billion weapons-modernisation programme which aimed to increase the 10% of equipment it classes as “modern” in 2012 to 70% by 2020.

NATO was unable to deter Russia from annexing Crimea and, as things currently stand, the alliance would be unable to stop a Russian conventional military invasion of either Ukraine or eastern Europe. To quote General Sir Richard Shirreff, former NATO Deputy Supreme Commander, speaking in August 2014,

¹³ Rasmussen, A. F. ‘The Future of NATO: A Strong alliance in an Unpredictable World’, Chatham House, 19 June 2014, available at: http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20140619Rasmussen.pdf, last visited: 2 September 2014.

¹⁴ ‘Nato to create high-readiness force to counter Russian threat’, The Guardian, 1 September 2014, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/01/nato-high-readiness-spearhead-force-counter-russian-threat>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

¹⁵ It should be noted that Turkey, Poland, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania have promised to reach the 2% of GDP-level by 2020.

¹⁶ ‘Information of Defence Expenditures’, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49198.htm, last visited: 2 September 2014.

¹⁷ Cooper, J. ‘How Sanctions Will Hit Russia’s Rearmament Plans’, Chatham House, 13 August 2014, available at: <http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/15523>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

The reality is that NATO would be very hard pressed and they would find it very difficult to put into the field, at sea or into the air the means required, particularly on land I would assess, to counter any form of Russian adventurism.¹⁸

Without significant support from the war-weary and increasingly isolationist US, western Europe would not be able to defend itself from Russian aggression, no matter how unlikely that scenario seems.

4.2 Military Exercises

NATO needs to undertake regular large-scale military exercises involving all levels of decision-making. The alliance has not practised large-scale exercises and large scale armoured movements for over two decades. The largest NATO exercise over recent years was ‘Steadfast Jazz’, which took place in Poland and Latvia in 2013 and involved a force of only 6,000 troops.

By contrast, Russia has demonstrated its increased military effectiveness through a number of initiatives over recent years: since 2005, Russia has simulated strategic bomber strikes against north-western Europe; in 2007, Russia was most probably responsible for a cyber-attack on Estonia; in 2009, Russia exercised a scenario in which three NATO-like brigades invaded western Russia and it simulated a nuclear strike on Warsaw, Poland; in 2010, Russia simulated a number of nuclear-strike scenarios; and in 2013, Russian warplanes staged simulated bombing attacks on Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden.

Russia has also undertaken large-scale military exercises, most notably ‘Zapad-2013’. Held jointly with Belarus, the exercises stretched from the Arctic in the north to Voronezh in the south and involved manoeuvres along the borders of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, and in Kaliningrad, Russia’s enclave that sits between Poland and Lithuania. Estonia too was affected, as Russian strategic bombers skirted its airspace en route to Kaliningrad. The exercises involved all branches of Russia’s armed forces and special forces, as well as logistical, medical, and other personnel. Officially, almost 12,000 troops were involved, while Western estimates suggest the actual number was closer to 70,000 troops.¹⁹

In theory, ‘Zapad-13’ was a counter-terrorism operation targeting “illegal armed groups”. In practice, it was oriented toward fighting conventional armies in Europe. According to reports, the military training scenario featured an attack by “Baltic terrorists” targeting Belarus from the Baltic Sea coast.

‘Zapad-2013’ clearly demonstrates to NATO the sort of conventional military operations Russia is capable of mounting. As things stand, NATO would not be able to mount a sufficient defence against these.

4.3 Credible Conventional Forces

NATO needs to develop credible conventional forces to deter Russian aggression. While the alliance does possess a Response Force - created in 2002, it is a technologically advanced

¹⁸ ‘Nato would be powerless to stop a Russian invasion of Eastern Europe, says top British general’, The Daily Mail, 27 August 2014, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2735501/Nato-powerless-stop-Russian-invasion-Eastern-Europe-says-British-general.html#ixzz3BmBakPsb>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

¹⁹ The figure of 12,000 is important as it is below the 13,000-troop threshold wherein Russia is obliged to invite outside observers to its exercises.

multinational force of up to 25,000 troops that could stand up sufficiently against localised Russian aggression – the Force has never been deployed because all 28 member states have not been able to reach a consensus.

The alliance relies too heavily on the nuclear deterrent, which – although an important symbol of the US's Article V commitment to the security of its NATO allies – lacks credibility in response to all but the most serious of attacks and would be politically difficult for many NATO allies. Furthermore, in the recent past, several NATO members in Europe have called for a reduction in the number of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.²⁰ Led by Germany and supported by Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway, the members have advocated an open dialogue on ways to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in NATO.²¹ The US contributed to this pressure for nuclear disarmament in Europe when President Barack Obama gave his “Global Zero” speech in 2009 and by negotiating the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) in 2010.

In this context, it is necessary for NATO to follow through on the ‘smart defence’ initiatives that it committed to at the 2012 Summit as well as expanding its current plans for a ‘Framework Nations’ concept, in which allies combine capabilities, improve upon operational readiness, and undertake smarter defence spending. In addition, the alliance should go further by upgrading existing capabilities, such as: combat aircraft, including fighter and air-ground capability; precision strike capacity; and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

4.4 Forward Deployment of Forces

NATO should position troops and equipment in eastern Europe to ensure that this region is not viewed as an ‘easy target’ by Russia. This would increase NATO’s credibility in the region.

Since the ending of the Cold War, NATO has acknowledged Russia’s concern that the alliance might one day base its soldiers on the territory of eastern Europe by downplaying the threat that this would pose to Russia. In 1997, an agreement – subsequently codified in the NATO-Russia Founding Act – was reached between the alliance and Russia limiting the stationing of NATO combat forces in countries that joined after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The deployment of NATO troops, the alliance argued, was not directed at Russia and did not mean the alliance was surrounding Russia. Over recent years, the US had been keen to emphasise that the opposite is true; the US’s own defence transformations meant it was withdrawing troops from Europe. The number of US troops in Europe has fallen from around 400,000 at the height of the Cold War to 67,000 today.²²

Russia’s invasion of Crimea, however, has made the 1997 agreement null and void. And Russia’s aggressive behaviour and blatant disregard for international law and global security means that NATO is required to deploy forces in eastern Europe against Russia. The alliance must demonstrate its commitment to its eastern Europe members.

²⁰ It should be noted that the opposite is also true. France, for example, is sensitive to any development that could be seen as weakening the role of nuclear weapons (even though its own weapons are independent of NATO), while members from central and eastern Europe advocate keeping the deterrent as a last resort against Russian aggression.

²¹ See, Nichols, T., Douglas Stuart and Jeffrey D. McCausland (eds), ‘Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO’, Strategic Studies Institute, April 2012, available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1103.pdf>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

²² Cooper, H. and Steven Erlanger, ‘Military Cuts Render NATO Less Formidable as Deterrent to Russia’, *The New York Times*, 26 March 2014, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/world/europe/military-cuts-render-nato-less-formidable-as-deterrent-to-russia.html>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

A FATEFUL SUMMIT

On 27 August, Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that NATO would deploy its forces at new bases in eastern Europe in an attempt to deter Russian aggression toward the Baltic states. Rasmussen said,

In order to be able to provide [...] rapid reinforcements you also need some reception facilities in host nations. So it will involve the pre-positioning of supplies, of equipment, preparation of infrastructure, bases, headquarters. The bottom line is you will in the future see a more visible NATO presence in the east.

Though exact details are expected to be announced after the Wales Summit, Poland, which has had its longstanding concerns regarding NATO capabilities confirmed by the Ukraine crisis, would be a natural host to forward-deployed forces. Poland hosts NATO's only headquarters in eastern Europe at Szczecin and has the greatest military capacity in the region. Furthermore, Poland is geographically close to other concerned members of the alliance and, of course, to Russia itself. As General Sir Richard Shirreff noted recently,

[...] there is a Russian aviation base within 40 minutes' flying time of Riga [the capital of Latvia] so, unless NATO has stationed forces in the Baltic states, I think it is highly unlikely that NATO could respond quickly to a sudden, surprise attack.²³

Without the forward deployment of NATO forces to eastern Europe, the alliance would find it almost impossible to respond to Russian aggression.

²³ Quoted in: House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two - NATO', Third Report of Session 2014-15, 31 July 2014, pg. 22, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/358/358.pdf>, last visited: 2 September 2014.

Conclusion

Over recent years, NATO has faced an identity crisis. An ambiguous post-Cold War role, falling defence spending amongst its members, and the absence of conventional threats all contributed to a sense that the alliance may be irrelevant in the second decade of the 21st Century, despite its counter-terrorism operations after 9/11 and intervention in Libya. No more. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilisation of Ukraine give NATO renewed purpose. The threat posed by Russia - a long-time key NATO partner and a crucial country for transatlantic and global security - is a powerful reminder that NATO's top priority is the security of its member states. Together with Moscow's use of energy supply as a geopolitical weapon, invasion of Georgia in 2008, and manipulation of so-called 'frozen conflicts' as to weaken smaller states on its borders, Russia's recent behaviour demonstrates an aggressive and neo-imperialist agenda toward eastern Europe.

But with this renewed purpose, NATO faces difficult questions. Russia's annexation of Crimea demonstrated the effectiveness of unconventional warfare tactics and the inefficiency of the alliance's conventional deterrence. NATO is required, therefore, to develop a way to deal with unconventional threats. But it is unlikely to be able to do so alone. NATO can rebuild its own military capacity, but individual governments - together with the EU - must strengthen their resolve against Russian aggression, whether through hard power or soft power. They can fight corruption, promote the rule of law, and challenge monopolies that will lessen Europe's dependence on Russia, particularly in the energy sector.

Nevertheless, a strong NATO - the pre-eminent global democratic military power - will send the clearest message possible to Russia that it cannot continue to act as it has in Ukraine. It is imperative that NATO stays true to its founding pillar - its commitment to collective security enshrined in Article V.

The NATO summit in Wales will be the alliance's most important meeting - and its most difficult test - in a generation. NATO will have to engage in strategic debate about why defence matters and what members should do to uphold Transatlantic security. But above all, at all costs the summit must make clear to Russia that NATO is ready to protect itself and the established rules of the post-Cold War international system in the face of aggression.



About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free - working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



About the Russia Studies Centre

The Russia Studies Centre is a research and advocacy unit operating within The Henry Jackson Society dedicated to analysing contemporary political developments and promoting human rights and political liberty in the Russian Federation.

About the Author

Dr Andrew Foxall is Director of the Russia Studies Centre at The Henry Jackson Society. He holds a BSc (Hons) from the University of Plymouth, an MSc from the University of Birmingham, and a DPhil from the University of Oxford. Andrew is the author of numerous articles, book chapters, policy reports, and opinion pieces on Russia. His first book, *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia*, will be published by Routledge in 2014.



The Henry Jackson Society
8th Floor, Parker Tower,
43-49 Parker Street, London, WC2B 5PS
Tel: 020 7340 4520

www.henryjacksonsociety.org
Charity Registration No. 1140489

The views expressed in this publication are those
of the authors and are not necessarily indicative of
those of The Henry Jackson Society or its Trustees

© The Henry Jackson Society, 2014
All rights reserved

