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FROM COOPERATION TO CONFRONTATION. THE NATO – RUSSIAN ROLLER-COASTER: RELATIONS AFTER THE WARSAW SUMMIT

ABSTRACT: 2016 and the Warsaw Summit have not brought anything new for the NATO-Russian relations which have been “frozen” since 2014. Although we cannot leave out of consideration the relations between the former strategic partners, especially when reading the adopted Warsaw Summit Communiqué in which – implicitly or explicitly – we can find many-many references on Russia and the threats coming from the East. By examining the relations between NATO and Russia we cannot forget the fact that the security of Europe and the entire Euro-Atlantic area cannot be separated from Russia. Moreover, the security challenges of the 21st century indeed make it necessary to involve such a meaningful actor as Russia. Nonetheless, common actions or ad hoc cooperation do not require or presume common political goals, similar values and processes. The parties have always been cooperating acknowledging these circumstances even if some actions or decisions by the other party surprise them sometimes. After the events in 2014 in Ukraine the relations reached a low point. Nowadays we can see a sort of “arms race”, a new-old “security dilemma” and we cannot predict how it will end.

KEYWORDS: NATO, Russia, conventional forces, military exercises, Warsaw Summit

UPS AND DOWNS – THE FIRST WAVES

As it is mentioned in the title, the relations between NATO and Russia can be best described as a roller-coaster, which has its ups and downs, fast phases upwards but also dangerous ways running in the deep to the point from which it is not easy to come back. The cooperation after the Cold War started slowly and uncertainly, but in the past 25 years there have been many changes. The relation of the two parties has not been smooth – not even in the „good old days”. In the middle of the political changes of the 1990s the „new” Russia tried to get up from the ruins of the Soviet Union and expected the „old” institutions of the previous era to come to an end as well. A new structure, a new initiative was supposed to get the main role in the Euro-Atlantic area: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) supposed to fill this role according to the Russian point of view, which covers the Northern part of the globe from Vancouver to Vladivostok and in which both countries, both former superpowers, the USA and Russia are equal participants. Furthermore, as a cooperative security organization, the OSCE has a looser structure. This kind of Russian attitude has been determining these relations even nowadays.¹

¹ Ponsard, L. *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security. Bridging the Gap*. New York: Routledge, 2007. 64-66.

On the contrary, NATO did not collapse but transformed, it was ready to respond to the changes of the international security environment and the Alliance took over new tasks. Russia did not consider the existence of a Cold War alliance as justified or legitimate in the post-Cold War era. Just like the Warsaw Pact, NATO was supposed to cease as well.² When that did not happen, moreover, NATO started to build partnerships not only with the Eastern European countries but also with states in the Mediterranean area, Russia saw it as expansive efforts of the USA-dominated military alliance.³ For the Eastern European countries which had been led by the Soviet Union for decades NATO became more and more attractive. No one was surprised when these nations started to declare their intentions to join the „West“. But the former superpower being in an unstable and uncertain position did not want to simply accept these countries' distancing.⁴

In spite of all these factors, following the principle of „who falls behind is left behind“, Russia wanted to be part of the platforms where the decisions of the „Western World“ are made. This is why it joined the Partnership for Peace program (PfP) in 1994 and the G8⁵ in 1997. Through these fora Russia expected to have the right and be able to influence and veto NATO's decisions, affect the „West's“ understanding and operation. This was the way Russia handled and managed the cooperation.⁶

In 1997 the NATO-Russian Founding Act was signed, which is an overarching political document introducing a framework for the parties' cooperation. This cooperation exceeded the simple political principles and included common exercises as well. The Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was formed, which became the primary forum of the dialogue besides the PfP program. The parties, however, stated that the dialogue between them will not affect NATO's and its member states' or Russia's internal affairs. Furthermore, the Act does not entitle the parties to exercise veto over the activities of the other, it will not restrict the parties' decision making mechanisms. They reiterated that the Alliance has no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members – not at the time of signature or in the foreseeable future.⁷ Regarding the deployment of conventional forces NATO confirmed that in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty – 1990) it will carry out its tasks (collective defense and other missions) transparently by reinforcing its forces in the current structure rather than permanently stationing further troops. The reinforcement - if necessary - will happen in harmony with

² Adomeit, H. „Inside or outside? Russia's policies towards NATO.“ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. 2007. http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/NATO_Oslo_ks.pdf, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

³ Ponsard, L. *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security. Bridging the Gap.* 17-18.

⁴ Russia created a particular „Monroe-doctrine“. In the countries, which Russia considers as „near-abroad“, there were 25 Million people with Russian origin. This fact provided the basis to keep these states really „near“.

⁵ The G7 (United Kingdom, USA, France, Italy, Canada, Japan, Germany) was an economic forum of 7 countries. Russia was invited to join in June 1997 and thus it became G8. See more: "Denver Summit of the Eight". <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/g7/summit/1997denver/g8final.htm>, Accessed on 5 August 2016.

⁶ Smith, M. A. *Russia and NATO since 1991. From Cold War through cold peace to partnership?* New York: Routledge, 2006. 57-67.

⁷ It is often cited regarding NATO's forward presence in the Eastern flank and building up NATO's ballistic missile defense system.

the UN Charter and CFE Treaty. Russia agreed with this principle and stated that it will exercise similar restraints.^{8,9}

Besides the cooperative political declarations, Russia presumed adversary intentions behind NATO's operations in the 1990s, as well, because this was the only way these out-of-area operations of a collective defense organization could be considered.¹⁰ During the operations in the Balkans the diplomatic relations broke off for a few months between Russia and NATO, but it was only a little political battle over the silent practical cooperation. Russia took part in the operations in the Balkans, but Russia - demonstrating its power and showing off its status and importance - definitely surprised the international community by occupying the Slatina Airbase (Kosovo) before the NATO forces (KFOR) arrived.^{11, 12} Similarly to the "entrée" in Kosovo, later on Russia did surprise NATO very often with its decisions, steps, and measures.

The common "enemy", however, has been bringing the parties always closer. In 2001, after the terrorist attacks in the USA, NATO and Russia took actions together against terrorism. The common threats build bridges between them, so at that time both parties agreed to deepen their relations.¹³ We should not forget, that for the West this meant the acceptance of the Chechnyan Wars as anti-terrorist operations.¹⁴ The result of this course was the re-thinking of NATO-Russian relations, followed by a declaration at the Rome Summit in 2002 bringing a new quality into the relations between NATO and Russia.¹⁵ The focused cooperation areas were reflecting the new security environment and the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) as a new cooperation forum was formed, as well.¹⁶

⁸ The realization of this part has become very much questionable nowadays.

⁹ "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation – May 27. 1997. Paris". NATO. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm, Accessed on 5 August 2016.

¹⁰ Ponsard, L. *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security. Bridging the Gap.* 66-72.

¹¹ On 15th June 1999 Russian forces (originally deployed to SFOR) occupied the Slatina Airbase as a pre-emptive action. Even though it was only a symbolic step considering the number of troops involved (200), but this made the Alliance think about the relations with Russia and how to react on these events because the parties were about to start a close cooperation in KFOR.

¹² Norris, J. *Collision Course. NATO, Russia, and Kosovo.* Westport: Praeger, 2005. 237-267 and Smith, M. A. *Russia and NATO since 1991. From Cold War through cold peace to partnership?* New York: Routledge, 2006. 80-88.

¹³ The war on terrorism and the policy of president Bush brought NATO and Russia closer and at the same time it caused a lot of stress within the Alliance. According to a statement attributed to Condoleeza Rice, American national security advisor, the Europe-policy of the USA was led by the aim of "punishing France, ignoring Germany and forgiving Russia". See more: Gordon, Ph. H. „Punish France, Ignore Germany, Forgive Russia' No Longer Fits" Brookings Institution. 2007. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2007/09/europe-gordon>, Accessed on 14 March 2014.

¹⁴ See more: Ponsard, L. *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security. Bridging the Gap.* 77-85.

¹⁵ The Founding Act of 1997 remained still valid.

¹⁶ In the NRC Russia was not only an additional actor besides the NATO members as the Permanent Joint Council was designed by the Founding Act in 1997 but it was an equal member of this forum with the 19 NATO members at that time. (for further details see: Szatmári, L. „A NATO-Oroszország Tanács". *Hadtudomány.* 2008. http://mhtt.eu/hadtudomany/2008/2008_elektronikus/2008_e_11.pdf Accessed on 27 September 2016) Thus, during the sessions of the NRC not the previously agreed (as Lord Robertson, former NATO Secretary General put it, the pre-cooked) NATO position met the Russian point of view, but there were possibilities for real discussions and substantial cooperation among the NRC members.

In the 2000s – as Lord Robertson, former NATO Secretary General put it – NATO and Russia learned how to be “capable of disagreeing without falling out, of having different opinions without walking out of the room”.¹⁷

BEYOND THE BILATERAL RELATIONS

During the last two and a half decades there were several areas where NATO and Russia cooperated in practice very well but we saw many disagreements and troubles between the parties, as well, which brought the cooperation down: the Alliance’s intervention in the Balkans; the Georgian war in 2008; deployment of NATO’s ballistic missile defense system; NATO enlargements; or the out-of-area operations are only a few examples. After all these events we arrived in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, and with the support of Russian forces there has been ongoing fighting in Eastern Ukraine since then. NATO’s official response to the Russian aggression was clear and straightforward: the Alliance does not recognize the Ukrainian borders which were changed against the international law and calls for peaceful solutions. NATO suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia but it is still open for political dialogue if it leads to a solution or any positive development in this situation. NATO reiterated that without a significant change of Russian behavior it will not go back to the “business as usual”.¹⁸

The events in Ukraine, however, bring us far beyond the change in NATO-Russian bilateral relations. The Alliance had to review not only its approach to Russia, but also its own situation after the “strategic surprise” in 2014. Although the three core tasks (collective defense, crisis management, cooperative security) defined in 2010¹⁹ have not been changed, NATO’s member states undoubtedly turned back to the Alliance’s very fundamental function, to prepare for collective defense. The threat perception of the „Eastern flank”, especially of Poland and the Baltic states, is driving NATO towards strengthening its deterrence and defense capabilities and emphasizing its credibility. Important topics like political and legal consequences of territorial defense, necessary military (and non-military) capabilities, the old-new operational planning and resilience came up and highlighted NATO’s very serious problems in these fields. NATO at the Wales Summit in 2014 tried to find the way to solve all these issues. The Heads of State and Government adopted several short term and long term measures. In the short run NATO’s reassurance measures (including the Readiness Action Plan – RAP, enhanced NATO Response Forces - eNRF), common exercises, enhanced air policing and naval presence have to be realized. In the long run, the main goals are the adaptation to the emerging threats and changed security environment and finally the

¹⁷ Lord Robertson, former NATO Secretary General’s statement at a press conference 13. May 2003.

¹⁸ “Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers”. NATO. April 1. 2014 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108501.htm?mode=pressrelease Accessed on 5 August 2016.

¹⁹ See more: „Lisbon Strategic Concept 2010. Strategic Concept For the Defense and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – Active engagement, modern defense”. NATO. <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

transformation of the Alliance.²⁰ We cannot forget however, that even if the Eastern threats were the catalyzers in the decision making, NATO is going to use the same tools against the threats emanating from the South.²¹

To sum up, the year 2014 and the Wales Summit were a turning point in the Alliance's history, even if it made it harder than ever to achieve a consensus among the member states.

The threat perception of the "Eastern Flank" tried to lead the Alliance in the direction to strengthen its defense and deterrence capability and also to emphasize its credibility. In the last two years these issues remained in the focus of the Alliance. The most important question was how these decisions could be implemented. There were more and bigger military exercises than ever since the Cold War years. Although the numbers of exercises are not objective factors to describe the armed forces' readiness or capabilities, still, they show the Allies' intentions and the so called "exercise-gap" which have been experienced between NATO and Russia since 2014.²² At NATO's (and multinational) exercises transparency (the announcement of the exercises, invitation of international – including Russian – observers etc. in accordance with the Vienna Document of OSCE) is highly important for NATO. The Allies wanted to avoid any kind of conflicts and escalation because of misunderstandings or miscommunication. This is the reason why the Allies (especially the United States) see only the rotational presence as a possible solution on the territory of the eastern member states – in order to prevent the provocation of Russia.²³ This way the strategic communication of NATO has nowadays probably a bigger role than during the Cold War.

Increasing the defense budgets of NATO countries could be the basis to realize the decisions made in Wales, which was also agreed by the Defense Ministers in September 2014.²⁴ After the global financial crisis in 2008 the defense expenditure of NATO countries – contrary to the Russian military budget – faced drastic cuts, including that of the wealthy countries as well, which should be stopped by all means. Regarding the defense budgets, not only the quantity is important, but much more the issue how the money is spent. Most member countries were unable to maintain their armed forces or spend any money on developments. The defense investments a few years ago targeted mostly deployable and sustainable capabilities necessary for expeditionary operations (counterterrorism, peace-building, humanitarian intervention), while (more heavy) capabilities for territorial defense

²⁰ „Wales Summit Declaration.” NATO. September 5. 2014 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm Accessed on 1 August 2016.

²¹ For further details and analysis of the Wales Summit see: Szenes, Z. "Előre a múltba? A NATO Wales után". *Külügyi Szemle*. 2014 Autumn. 3-25. <http://kki.gov.hu/download/9/1a/c0000/Szenes.pdf> Accessed on 5 August 2016. and Davis, I. and Chamberlain, N. "An evaluation of the Wales Summit: NATO builds coalitions for conflict on multiple fronts." *NATO Watch*. Briefing Paper No. 54., 10. September 2014. http://natowatch.org/sites/default/files/briefing_paper_no.54_-_the_wales_summit_final.pdf, Accessed on 30 September 2016.

²² See more: NATO Wales Summit Declaration. September 5. 2014 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

²³ Brzezinski, I. and Varangis, N. "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap." Atlantic Council. 2015. <http://www.atlantic-council.org/blogs/natosource/the-nato-russia-exercise-gap>, Accessed on 2 August 2016.

²⁴ It is worth to compare with related paragraphs about deployment of conventional forces in the NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997.

²⁵ NATO countries expressed their intention with the "Defense Investment Pledge" to increase (or at least not decrease) their defense budgets in the coming years and thus to move towards the guideline of 2% of GDP within a decade. Furthermore they will make efforts to use 20% of defense budget for major equipment, research and development. At the very beginning many countries introduced certain measures in order to achieve this aim, however, it is doubtful how much of these will be realized in 10 years.

did not have such an important role.²⁵ Decreasing the manpower of the armed forces is not contributing to the development either.²⁶

It is not surprising that since Wales NATO's main capability development goals have been almost the same as the Russian capability priorities. The biggest difference, however, is that the conventional Russian offensive capabilities did not go through such cuts and reductions as the European armed forces did. Moreover, the development of Russia's armed forces continued even after the global financial crisis in 2008. After 2014 three new army divisions were established at the western borders (at the eastern borders of NATO). These units (together with the air and space capabilities) are fully manned and fully equipped. Certain combat support capabilities (like combat engineering, bridge construction units) disappeared during the 1990s, but they are needed again, just like urban warfare units. Some other capabilities are also very important priorities for Russia: CBRN²⁷ defense, spetsnaz (special operations) capabilities, electronic warfare, heavy equipment and especially the JISR²⁸ capabilities. Even if the Russian defense budget and the proportion of capability development is – in comparison to the sum of NATO countries – very small, the integrated development concepts, coordinated decisions and the possibilities of national defense industry bring Russia in a very advantageous position compared to the fragmented European efforts.²⁹

NATO's priority is – besides the capability development – to increase the readiness and responsiveness of forces, especially because the decision making process of 28 countries and the decision about using/deploying armed forces cannot be as quick as in case of a single country. To realize responsiveness, the Alliance enhanced and renewed the NATO Response Force (NRF). The enhanced NRF (eNRF) with its approximately 40,000 troops has the following elements: a spearhead force – the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) with 2-7 days "notice to move" (NTM); the Initial Follow-on Forces Group (IFFG) with a bit lower readiness; and finally the Follow-on Forces Group with an NTM between 1-2 months.

The NRF concept is not a new initiative; there were similar examples in NATO's history. The NRF concept was born in the early 2000s concentrating on out-of-area operations. This way it was the eNRF's predecessor only by name. For a similar content we need to go back to the Cold War years. The multinational, rapidly deployable Allied Mobile Forces (AMF) was supposed to defend NATO's flanks from 1960. The AMF consisted of enhanced infantry

²⁵ Sutyagin, I. "Russia confronts NATO. Confidence Destruction Measures." RUSI, 6 July 2016. <https://rusi.org/publication/briefing-papers/russia-confronts-nato-confidence-destruction-measures>, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

²⁶ In order to turn back this process some nations, like Germany made a decision to increase their armed forces. Furthermore, Germany considers the possibility to recruit not German citizens into the Bundeswehr. See more: "Verstärkung für die Truppen". <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/bundeswehr-349.html> Accessed on 30 July 2016. and *Weissbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*, 2016. https://www.bmvg.de/resource/resource/MzEzNTM4MmUzMzMyMmUzMtM1MzMzMyZTM2MzIzMDMwMzAzMDMwMzAzMDY5NzE3MzM0Nzc2YzYyMzcyMDIwMjAyMDIw/Weissbuch2016_barrierefrei.pdf, Accessed on 15 September 2016.

²⁷ Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear

²⁸ Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

²⁹ Sutyagin, I. "Russia confronts NATO. Confidence Destruction Measures." RUSI, 6 July 2016. <https://rusi.org/publication/briefing-papers/russia-confronts-nato-confidence-destruction-measures>, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

battalions whose task was primarily to defend Norway and Turkey in case of border violations and minor conflicts in the border areas.³⁰

The AMF concept was initiated by General Norstad³¹ (Supreme Allied Commander in Europe). The allies established a multinational, highly mobile, and high-readiness unit which consisted of ground and air forces in order to prevent the escalation of minor-scale local conflicts into a general war. These forces were not the main element of NATO's defense but they meant to be a way to avoid the confrontation of the two superpowers on the flanks. The army element of the AMF was deployed at a military base in Germany (GDR), and the position of its commander was filled by the participating nations in rotation. The air force element, however, was only exercising together. The AMF troops in the highest readiness category were deployable in 72 hours, the whole AMF could have been in theatre of operations in 13 days with 7 days of supply. The AMF was not deployed at all during the Cold War. In the 1990s the possibility for a potential use of AMF increased. In 1995 the ground forces of AMF were transformed into Immediate Reaction Force (IRF), and the air force elements were disbanded. AMF Land was disestablished in 2002.³²

As the AMF, the eNRF is rather a political and symbolic tool than means of credible deterrence.³³ If Russia were intended to, it could occupy the three Baltic States in 36-60 hours. NATO would be forced to overlook helplessly the Russian movements. This timeframe is far from enough for the Alliance to get the political authorization and continue with the actual military movements, redeployment of forces and equipment. The previous statement, which is not surprising at all, comes from Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the Commander of United States Army in Europe.³⁴ The only surprising factor is that in 2008 Alexander Motyl, a historian and political scientist at the Rutgers University, wrote about the occupation of Narva, a little ("negligible") town at the Estonian-Russian border, by Russia in a (unexpectedly) negative

³⁰ Bieri, M. et al. "Die NATO und Russland: Verteidigungsplanung 2014-2016." ETHZ CSS. June 2016. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/9b3ec631-1927-4b1e-98e2-be5b176a5b44> Accessed 1 August 2016. and Ruiz Palmer, D. „Az AMF-től az NRF-ig." *NATO Tükör*. 2009/2. <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2009/0902/090204/HU/index.htm> accessed on 28 September 2016.

³¹ Lauris Norstad was a general of the United States' Air Force, between 1956-1963. he was the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe

³² SHAPE. "The ACE Mobile Force, 1960-2002" 2012. 3340/SH-SPS-HIS/2012-08 (Gregory Pedlow)

³³ The multinational forces embodied a strong link and close cooperation among NATO members, but exactly this multinationality carried with it such political difficulties and technical issues, which the former NRF concept did not show. Crossing the borders of NATO countries, movement and rapid deployment of forces and equipment are only a few of the questions which are mostly of a legal nature but strong political support is needed to solve them. The AMF from the 1960s had the same problems as the eNRF has nowadays. Although the standardization has reached a higher level in the last decades which make an effective cooperation among states easier, but the command and control (national vs. SACEUR's responsibility), interoperability, cooperation of forces, rapid deployment and national caveats are still problematic. Not to mention all the other issues like enhanced exercise activity, operations, national obligations (in case of Hungary it is contribution to border control and migration) for instance which mean big burdens for the European armed forces and make it very hard to fill the long term rotation plan for eNRF. See more: Bieri, M. et al. "Die NATO und Russland: Verteidigungsplanung 2014-2016." ETHZ CSS. June 2016. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/9b3ec631-1927-4b1e-98e2-be5b176a5b44> Accessed 1 August 2016.

³⁴ "Baltikum ist laut US-Befehlshaber kaum zu verteidigen." *Die Zeit*. 2016. <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-06/anakonda-nato-russland-militaer> Accessed on 1 August 2016.

way, whereas nowadays the occupation of the three Baltic states are visioned similarly in case of a Russian aggression.³⁵

These thoughts lead us to a much more serious question, which has been raised by more and more experts: is there a possibility that tactical nuclear weapons could be used in a conflict violating a NATO member's territory? Fortunately, since the end of the Cold War nuclear issues have not been in focus unless it was about disarmament or reduction. Although the topic has been raised more and more often in connection with Russian war gaming. The annual military exercise, "Zapad" (West), always includes a nuclear scenario, but in a real situation the question of using sub-strategic nuclear weapons was never a crucial issue, not even in a political context. In 2013, exercise Zapad³⁶ – most probably because of the sensitiveness of the current situation – did not include a nuclear scenario.³⁷ Russia wanted to avoid bringing a nuclear scenario into the exercise in order to avoid misunderstandings and possible provocation or escalation, as well. Although it did not diminish the significance of the exercise, whose primary "addressees" were Poland and the Baltic states.³⁸

NATO puts a special emphasis on transparency regarding military exercises, which is required also by OSCE in accordance with the Vienna Document³⁹ adopted in 2011 (which is binding Russia, as an OSCE member as well). The Vienna Document obligates the member states to notify each other (42 days in advance) about exercises involving more than 9,000 troops. However, Russia did not communicate its exercises with 40-50,000 troops (with combat support and combat service support forces altogether some 90,000 troops were involved) to the international community as they would not have exceeded the limits described in the international agreement.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, there is no question that NATO's exercise activities are not comparable with the volume of Russian military exercises as it is depicted in the first figure.

³⁵ See more: Motyl, A. "Would NATO defend Narva?" Atlantic Council. 2008. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/would-nato-defend-narva>, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

³⁶ Most probably the Zapad 13 was the last exercise. In Russian and English language media there are references of an exercise in 2015, however, considering the international political and security situation it was apparently not executed. Many sources are mentioning the preparations for the exercise in 2017, though.

³⁷ See more: Zdanavičius, L. and Czekaj, M. "Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise. Lessons for Baltic Regional Security." The Jamestown Foundation. 2015. http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Zapad_2013_-_Full_online_final.pdf, Accessed on 1 August 2016.

³⁸ Bieri, M. et al. "Die NATO und Russland: Verteidigungsplanung 2014-2016." ETHZ CSS. June 2016. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/9b3ec631-1927-4b1e-98e2-be5b176a5b44> Accessed 1 August 2016.

³⁹ The Document obligates the OSCE member states to exchange information annually on their military forces, concerning organization, manpower, major weapon and equipment systems, defense planning, procurements, defense budget and certain military events if they involve at least 9000 troops including support troops. See more: "Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures". OSCE. <http://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true>, Accessed on 30 September 2016., para 40.1.1.

⁴⁰ According to Russia, they were not obligated to inform the OSCE countries. The rationale behind this was that the forces involved were organized in smaller units, battalion groups whose structure was flexible and of an ad hoc nature. In one particular military district the exercise involved less than 9,000 troops except one occasion when Russia avoided the applicability of the Document with the reasoning that the voluntary military forces did not leave the barracks at all, so officially they were not part of the exercise. The related forces were not subordinated to a central commander, so this condition did not activate the Document either – according to the Russian explanations. (for more details see Sutyagin, I. "Russia confronts NATO. Confidence Destruction Measures." RUSI, 6 July 2016. <https://rusi.org/publication/briefing-papers/russia-confronts-nato-confidence-destruction-measures>, Accessed on 1 August 2016.)

Power Projection. Comparing Russian and NATO Military Exercises

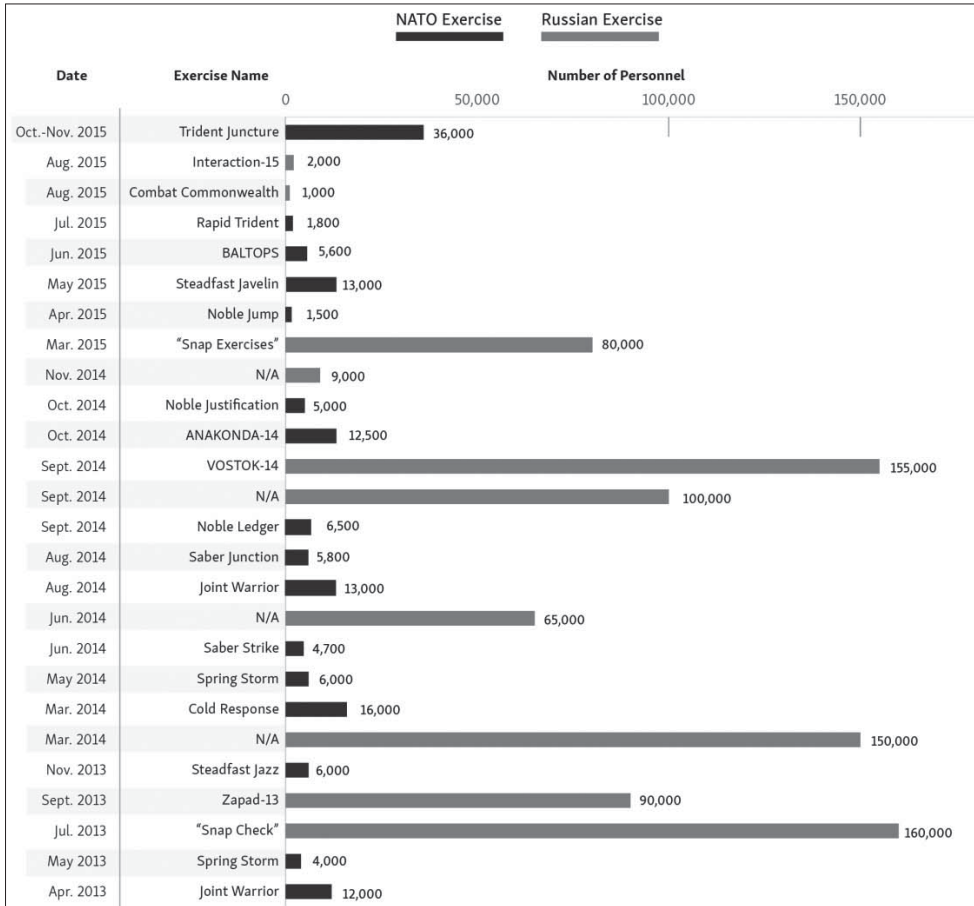


Figure 1. Russian and NATO military exercises in numbers of personnel 2013–2015⁴¹

The geographical location and concentration of Russian exercises are well illustrated in the second figure, in contrast to NATO’s activities, which were – in the spirit of political consensus and solidarity – much more divided between the Eastern and Southern regions.

⁴¹ Source: RFERL <http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/data-visualization-nato-russia-exercises/27212161.html>, Accessed on 3 August 2016.

How do recent NATO exercises compare with Russian ones?

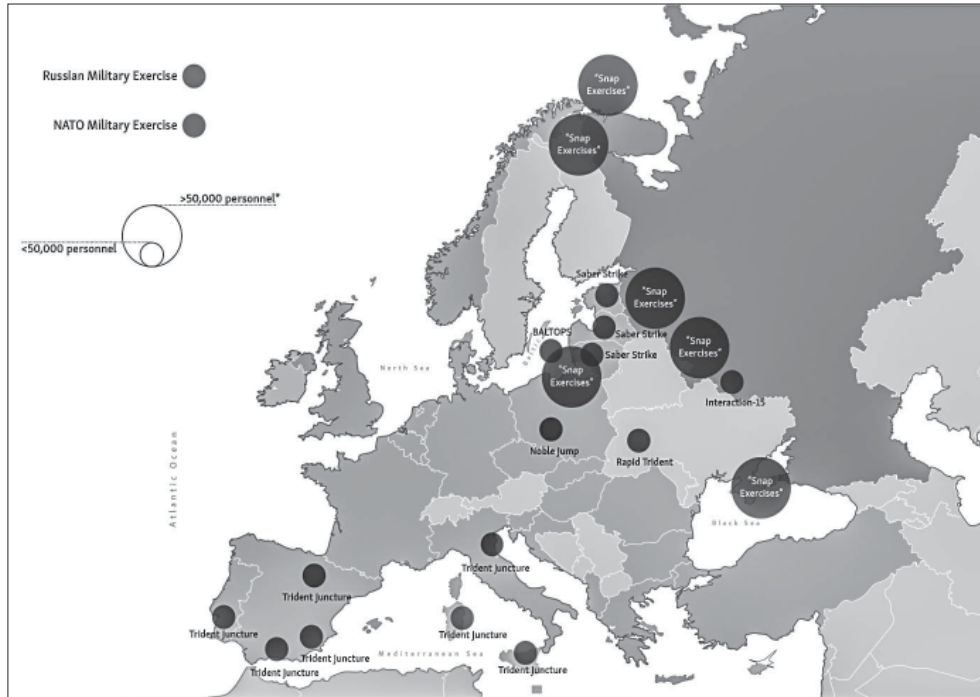


Figure 2. Russian and NATO military exercises compared by their location and size in 2013–2015⁴²

Even though military exercises are not objective measures of readiness and capabilities of armed forces, but these numbers are demonstrating very well the seriousness of intentions and the exercise-gap between NATO and Russia.⁴³

2016: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

The heads of state and government of NATO countries at the Summit in Warsaw in July 2016 discussed again the challenges, risks, and threats which the Alliance faces and where Russia has an important role. The main goal of the summit was to continue and further develop the decisions made two years ago in Wales. The countries' representatives reiterated that NATO does not seek a confrontation and poses no threat to any country, including Russia, but they are ready to “deter and defend against potential adversaries and the full spectrum of threats that could confront the Alliance from any direction.”⁴⁴

⁴² Source: RFERL <http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/data-visualization-nato-russia-exercises/27212161.html>, Accessed on 3 August 2016.

⁴³ Brzezinski, I. and Varangis, N. "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap." Atlantic Council. 2015. <http://www.atlantic-council.org/blogs/natosource/the-nato-russia-exercise-gap>, Accessed on 2 August 2016.

⁴⁴ „Warsaw Summit Communiqué.” NATO. July 9. 2016. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm Access on 1 August 2016.

The adopted summit communiqué is (considering the high level of the summit) unusually long and detailed – 139 paragraphs. In 23 out of 139 Russia is explicitly mentioned besides the parts where collective defense, NATO's resilience, and the decisions made in Wales are elaborated and which are doubtlessly responding to the threats posed by Russia.⁴⁵

We can see interesting changes in the wording of these documents. The Communiqué uses the expression „potential adversary” many times. The 2010 Strategic Concept however uses the word „adversary” only one time, in the paragraph which reads „The alliance does not consider any country to be its adversary.” The Wales Summit Declaration in 2014 mentions Russia in 19 paragraphs, but does not use the word „adversary” at all. In these 19 paragraphs related to Russia international law, condemnation of the events in Ukraine, NATO's concerns and avoidance of confrontation are in the focus.

Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and Bulgaria try to make the Alliance give priority to the eastern flank when deciding about NATO's future steps. However NATO insists on its 360 degree approach. Regarding Russia, NATO's main tools are transparency, predictability and foremost, avoiding misunderstanding and escalation. The Alliance after the Warsaw Summit continues its path started in Wales. The first core task, defense and deterrence, has grown in importance. The unity of the Allies on that is crucial, although, now it is more difficult to achieve than ever. Europe is facing many security challenges (terrorism, migration, etc.) nowadays, which are affecting the member states in different ways and to varying extent and which might not be answered by NATO. Accordingly, NATO members have different priorities. NATO continuously maintains its “dual-track” approach which means they will not get back to the former “business as usual” unless there will be a significant change in the Russian behavior regarding the situation in Crimea in order to solve the problems peacefully and in accordance with international law. NATO is still open for political dialogue, since this is the only way to find a solution together and make the situation better.⁴⁶

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) – after a two-year break – had two meetings this year, the first in April and the second one after the Warsaw Summit, in July. Nonetheless the very fact that the parties sat down to talk again can be seen as a step forward, but besides the maintenance of the dialogue there have been no significant results. In April the main topic of the NRC meeting was Ukraine and the implementation of the Minsk Agreement, in July they concentrated on NATO's forward presence and talked about how to avoid the “incidents” in the border regions. Another important issue for the NRC is the situation in Syria or Afghanistan, both of them could be the basis of future practical cooperation.⁴⁷ Not only the Alliance but Russia also took the initiative. The Russian Deputy Minister of Defense raised the issue during a meeting of foreign military attaches and offered a possibility for consultation to the Ministries of Defense of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Finland. He suggested managing together mutual concerns caused by military activities in

⁴⁵ For further detailed analysis of the Warsaw Summit see Szenes, Z. "Meglpetések nélkül: A varsói NATO csúcs értékelése." 2016. <http://biztonsagpolitika.hu/kiemelt/meglpetesek-nelkul-a-varsoi-nato-csucs-ertekelese/>, Accessed on 7 August 2016. and Stavridis, J. "The NATO Summit's winners and losers." *Foreign Policy*, 11 July 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/11/the-nato-summits-winners-and-losers/>, Accessed on 30 September 2016.

⁴⁶ „Warsaw Summit Communiqué.” NATO. July 9. 2016. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm Access on 1 August 2016.

⁴⁷ Alexe, D. "After Warsaw: second NATO – Russia Council in two years". 2016. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/warsaw-second-nato-russia-council-two-years/>, Accessed on 4 August 2016.

near-border areas and preventing air and sea “incidents”.⁴⁸ It is too early to state whether or not this initiative will lead to a real cooperation or it is only a well communicated political maneuver of Moscow.

WHAT'S NEXT?

According to the researchers of the SWP⁴⁹ institute in Berlin, the time of the NATO-Russian “strategic partnership” is over, it failed, and the future path for the development of these relations is very narrow. The experts described three possible scenarios for the near future.⁵⁰ In the first scenario the two parties will confront each other as a result of misunderstanding, lack of trust, or escalation of miscommunication. The second possibility foresees ad hoc (practical) cooperation in some cases between NATO and Russia but they will not be able to solve the main issues. According to the third scenario they will be able to get over their differences, they will cooperate but at the same time it means they would de facto recognize and/or approve all the events and actions taken in the past.

In the author’s view (knowing the past of these relations) we cannot expect a long-term confrontation, as it would deliver too serious consequences for both parties. Furthermore, we should not forget that NATO members have different views regarding Russia. This was reflected among others in the speech of the French president, Francois Hollande in Warsaw: “*NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe’s relations with Russia should be. For France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat. [...] Russia is a partner*”⁵¹ The second and third scenarios could be both realized. However, if we take the Alliance’s “no business as usual” approach seriously (and NATO will go with it), we can count only on the second scenario to come true. Later (maybe after the elections in the United States) the international security situation may change and the cooperation between NATO and Russia may be needed and desirable again. This way the Alliance will justify implicitly and de facto recognize what happened in Ukraine, just like it did one and a half decades ago with the Chechen Wars.

SUMMARY

After all we can only predict that any prediction for the future would be irresponsible. The ongoing processes which we can observe nowadays are unprecedented in the post-cold war era, extraordinary and were unforeseeable. Russia’s role and behavior in international relations has not changed in the past decades, but the usual way how Moscow used “soft power” to push its interests (see the Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes) were altered surprisingly by

⁴⁸ Anatolij Antonov, the Deputy of the Russian Minister of Defense came up with the idea of rethinking the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI), cooperation against ISIL/DAESH and offered the opportunity to the military attachés of NATO countries to attend Russian military exercise events including the Kavkaz 2016 exercise in September 2016. See more: „Russian military ready for consultations with Baltic states on near-border activities”. TASS. August 1. 2016. <http://tass.ru/en/defense/891876> Accessed on 12 August 2016.

⁴⁹ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

⁵⁰ Klein, M. and Major, C. „Perspektiven der NATO-Russland-Beziehungen”. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. September 2015. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2015A81_kle_mjr.pdf, Accessed on 2 August 2016.

⁵¹ Quoted by Peterson, N. „Russia Threat Takes Center Stage at NATO’s Warsaw Summit”. The Daily Signal, 10 July 2016. <http://dailysignal.com/2016/07/10/russian-threat-takes-center-stage-at-natos-warsaw-summit/>, Accessed on 12 August 2016.

engaging the country in military actions not only in Ukraine but in Syria as well. NATO has always been concerned about the Russian way of conflict management in Eastern Europe but the events in the last two years radically changed the tone. NATO was forced into a new situation, the Alliance's policy needed to be re-oriented, re-defined. If NATO insists on its approach and does not activate the cooperation with Russia nor diminish the Ukrainian situation for another issue (which could be seen as more important at the moment – may it be for fight against terrorism, for Syria or the Middle East), the currently frozen relations between them cannot be expected to change in the near future. From the Russian side there will be no new course of action because it would mean the loss of its prestige and position against the “West”, unless the Russian internal affairs do make it necessary.

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