

THE TRANSATLANTIC PROGRAM



AUGUST 2021

The need for transatlantic solidarity in the face of today's security challenges

Ralph Thiele, Andrei Sannikov and Roman Waschuk

The transatlantic has once again become a critical foundation for securing democracy and freedom in Europe. This time around, the threats are more diverse and ambiguous than the Soviet tanks of the past generation.

Our adversaries, primarily Russia and increasingly China, continue their attempts at subverting democratic institutions and societies. Their toolkit ranges from now-familiar disinformation campaigns to cyber attacks, from political warfare to corruption, as they use economic leverage, energy dependence, and critical infrastructure vulnerabilities to coerce, bribe, or corrupt business and political elites.

To shed light on these issues, we are pleased to feature analysis from key security experts. Ralph Thiele, President of EuroDefense (Germany), writes about the need to shore up solidarity amongst North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in the face of today's threats. Andrei Sannikov, a Belarusian politician and activist, turns his attention to the threat posed by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus. And Roman Waschuk, former Canadian Ambassa-

dor to Ukraine, writes on the transatlantic security challenge facing NATO's eastern flank. All three authors participated in MLI's 2021 strategic dialogue on transatlantic issues supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

NATO solidarity at risk and what to do about it

Ralph Thiele

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe wanted to join NATO as soon as possible. NATO itself hesitated for a long time. It did not feel able to guarantee their security, even against an obviously weakened Russia. The Central and Eastern European countries sought membership in the European Union first. When NATO membership for Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, and again a few years later for the Baltic and other states became possible, this was done only with Russia's virtual acquiescence.

Today, the Central and Eastern European countries once again have very concrete and numerous poor experiences with their Russian neighbour. Yet the threats are more diverse and multi-layered than in the old days. Technological advances have added new domains and operational capabilities to the battle space and enabled the expansion of grey areas between established spheres of competence within which hybrid warfare thrives. Russia can rely on modern technologies and hybrid strategies that use ambiguity not only through traditional media, but increasingly through social media and cyberspace to avoid direct confrontation. They target people, assets, critical infrastructure and, not least, the self-image and cohesion of entire societies. Combined with a rapidly accelerating innovation dynamic, the impact and reach of malicious activities are growing.

Combining the capabilities of new technologies and the evolution of operational concepts has been key to the successful rise of Russian (as well as Chinese, for that matter) military capabilities in all operational domains – space, cyber, air, sea and land. It is at the core of their excellence in hybrid warfare. It has also underpinned their development of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities, such as ballistic and cruise missiles, offensive cyber weapons and electronic warfare. They have developed the ability to protect low-intensity military and paramilitary operations with networks of sensors, air defences and offensive weapons that enable highly effective, precise attacks.

Unfortunately, NATO's technological superiority is no longer as dominant as it used to be. Developments in the context of electronic warfare are strong evidence of this. In the early 1990s, NATO forces were still the undisputed world leaders in this field. Today, their respective capabilities have atrophied,

while Russia and China have impressively developed their respective capabilities and capacities across several stages of innovation.

In addition, it is not only NATO's capabilities that are inadequate, but also its current concepts. So far, NATO commanders have not found a hinge to integrate hybrid warfare requirements into their operational planning. Intelligence agencies are still reluctant to share mission-critical information. Training and exercises still have a long way to go to be well prepared for hybrid warfare operations. Decision-making processes do not sufficiently take into account such requirements. Readiness and operational capabilities of NATO forces have improved, but significant deficits remain, such as in information warfare and electromagnetic spectrum capabilities.

The resulting inability to successfully deal with even minor military contingencies could have disastrous consequences for Alliance members. To make matters worse, a capability gap – in terms of the further development or introduction of nuclear, hypersonic, cyber and space capabilities – has also opened up at the upper end of the conflict spectrum. If the European security environment is beset by hybrid threats, adversaries can be expected to use political, informational, criminal and infrastructural means, as well as economic intimidation and manipulation – in addition to the relevant military instruments of power – to discover and exploit Western vulnerabilities.

At present, there is a serious risk that Russia will be able to essentially undermine the solidarity of NATO allies and partners through hybrid means. Closing the existing gaps should be a top political and military priority, as it could take a decade or even longer to do so.

Against this backdrop, NATO is preparing for change to meet future tactical, operational and strategic challenges in this new security environment. In early 2021 NATO adopted the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) that addresses different aspects of the Alliance's approach to warfare development and warfighting over a 20-year horizon. Clearly, NATO understands the requirement to adjust to the convergence of physical and non-physical domains, in which non-physical domains, such as cyber and the pervasive information environment, constitute new challenges for warfighting. NATO aims to out-think, out-excel, out-fight, out-pace, out-partner, and out-last any threat or challenge. The challenge is to reflect this understanding in new, cohesive concepts across all operational domains.

Getting there is essential to ensure the security of NATO allies from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Three main recommendations are offered for the consideration of policy-makers:

Build multi-domain situational awareness and cross-domain intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities

Decision-makers can only make accurate decisions if they fully understand the operational environment and all relevant domains. This includes cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, outer-space, and the global media landscape, which itself includes an endless variety of social media, outlets and actors. Operational planning and intelligence cycles need to be synchronized and enabled to better support superior decision-making. As prototypes and related technologies are already available, the task now is to kick-off and track the process. Why not begin at NATO's Eastern frontline of democracies?

Prepare political, civil and military elites through serious gaming

The uncharted territory of warfare in the information age requires a serious move vis-à-vis the decisive, educated leadership of malicious opponents. Their ambition to outmanoeuvre capable opponents raises the stakes for our own decision-making. New technological possibilities are available and affordable. The Baltic Defence College could be a good institution to start this process.

Drive innovation via projects with high disruptive potential

Innovation acceleration requires focus and competence. As the challenges cross NATO and European Union responsibilities and capabilities, the close cooperation of both organizations' lead agencies has become indispensable. The NATO Science & Technology Organization, the European Defence Agency, and the EU Joint Research Centre should focus on furthering highly disruptive projects (i.e., identifying and funding programs and projects with high disruptive potential in the areas of applied research, technology and product development). In delineating and establishing an orchestrated, well-defined role for these agencies, experiences from the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) model should be customized for the NATO/EU framework. Lead projects should focus on NATO's Eastern flank.

NATO and its members have left too long the race for new, disruptive technologies to third parties. The task now is to develop a sense of urgency for closing existing capability gaps and accelerating the pace of innovation in the Alliance. Resilient solidarity with the countries on the Alliance's Eastern flank should become a visible focus.

—

Ralph Thiele, *retired Colonel, is President of EuroDefense (Germany), Chairman of the Berlin-based Political-Military Society, and Managing Director of StratByrd Consulting. In his 40-year military career in the German Armed Forces, he has held key national and international positions and offers advice in his honorary and business functions on defence innovation in times of digital transformation.*

Time is ripe for finding a solution for Belarus

Andrei Sannikov

For a year now Belarusians have been protesting against the loathsome regime of Alexander Lukashenko. At the peak of the protest, over a million people were in the streets all over Belarus, the biggest numbers taking to the streets of Minsk.

The regime managed to stifle the mass protests but not the protests per se: it continues in the streets of Belarus in the form of small scale “partisan” acts with the white-red-white national flag, and on the Internet where the identities of the “siloviki” are being revealed. The repression that was unleashed against innocent citizens are rightfully compared by many Belarusians to the times of the Nazi occupation of Belarusian territory.

The scale of repression is horrendous. Since May 2020, more than 37,000 Belarusians have been detained for political reasons. More than 4600 cases of torture have been documented and confirmed. At least 10 people were killed as a result of excessive and unmotivated violence by the security forces. The number of citizens who are involved in politically motivated criminal cases has exceeded 3000 people. As of today, 4200 politically motivated criminal cases were opened, 803 cases against 1116 persons are sent to courts and 955 persons have been tried.

Origins of the 2020 protests and regime brutality

Both the large-scale and long-term protests of the people and the outburst of violence from the Lukashenko’s regime were not unexpected. For many years, the opposition has been organizing street protests as the only form of non-violent resistance to the regime. Despite efforts by the regime to exercise full control of political life in Belarus through violence and the infiltration of opposition political groups, civil society and independent press, the street protests have taken place each year.

It has become clear that Lukashenko lacks any solutions for Belarusian development, not only political, but economic and social as well. After he was deprived of Russian cheap oil (since 2008 during the global financial crisis), he was left with only one instrument to rule the country – mounting the pressure on the people.

The shape of the events of the year 2020 was discernible already in 2017, when people revolted against the infamous Lukashenko’s decree on “social parasites.” That decree forced the unemployed to pay taxes. Protests took place in over 20 cities across Belarus. And people were outraged by the hostility of the authorities towards them. The next indicator was the political cam-

paign during “parliamentary elections” at the end of 2019. The opposition took part in the campaign, mostly to probe what could be expected during the “presidential election” scheduled for 2020.

Unfortunately, during this critical period, the regime in Belarus received unexpected support from the West. Despite the fact that the human rights situation didn’t change or was getting even worse, the European Union in 2015 decided to suspend the sanctions imposed in 2011 after a brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrations. By early 2016, it lifted all of them. Canada followed the EU decision in 2017 when it removed Belarus from the Area Control List (ACL), thereby lifting sanctions that had been in place since December 2006.

That was not a naive or nearsighted decision; it was a betrayal of the Belarusians democrats and people, since that decision meant that all those guilty of serious crimes – election fraud, fabricated criminal cases against innocent civilians, arbitrary arrests and detentions, tortures in prison facilities, etc. – were declared innocent by the democratic world.

The argument behind the decision to lift sanctions was both strange and naive. The EU hoped that Lukashenko could play a constructive and stabilizing role in the region after Russia annexed Crimea and occupied Donbas in 2014. This argument was an unfortunate demonstration that the West was completely unaware of the nature and political preferences of the regime – one that was, from the geopolitical and military point of view, completely controlled by the Kremlin.

In brief, complete bankruptcy of the regime, absence of badly needed economic reforms, aggressiveness of Lukashenko against the people and his inability to cope with mounting crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, led to today’s unprecedented anti-Lukashenko movement in Belarus.

The Western factor

After so many years with Lukshenko in power, the West still was not prepared for the turn of events that started in Belarus in late spring 2020. There was almost a mysterious belief that Lukashenko would control the situation, no matter what. Indeed, the West was actively helping Lukashenko gain strength, which was used for a new and much stronger wave of repression.

After sanctions against the regime were lifted in 2016, Lukashenko had an unprecedented number of high-level meetings with politicians and world public figures. He received invitations to visit Europe, and in 2017 he travelled Austria where he “taught democracy” to the Austrian leadership.

The regime also received unprecedented amount of credits from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and European Investment Bank.

Besides political and financial support, the regime was armed, literally, with

munitions from the West that were used against protests. Polish rubber bullets, Czech stun grenades, American surveillance technologies and the water cannons manufactured by the Canadian company Streit Group were used against peaceful demonstrators.

The politicians in the West were not prepared for the strong expression of the people's will to get rid of Lukashenko, and therefore didn't react appropriately. The lack of strong reaction to the regime led to more repression, beatings and even the killing of innocent people. One of the frequent arguments in the West, used to justify the weak reaction, has been the fear "to upset an apple cart", i.e., fear to provoke Russia into aggressiveness towards Belarus.

The Russian Factor

Russia is no doubt a dominant force in Belarusian politics. However, it has no real policy in Belarus. First, the Kremlin doesn't regard Belarus as an independent country and hence doesn't feel that it "deserves" a specific policy. Second, Lukashenko was the only ruler in the European part of the former socialist camp who demonstrated his support of the Kremlin's policies.

For almost 26 years, we have heard that excessive pressure on Lukashenko might lead to the incorporation of Belarus into Russia. Another assertion was that Lukashenko is probably the only politician capable of defending the independence of Belarus and counter all Russian plans. Yet Lukashenko, as dictator, defends only his power and his regime and it was under his leadership that Belarus became completely dependent on Russia, mostly in terms of cheap fuel. Both these assertions rely on false assumptions and that became very clear last year, though they still are referred to as being realistic

Simply put, Russian *Anschluss* with Belarus is a scarecrow used both by Lukashenko and the Kremlin against the West. It is unlikely the Kremlin will pursue such union at a time when the risk of huge losses both political and economic is at its height.

Window of Opportunity

Belarus' revolution that began in 2020 has to be regarded in the context of the second wave of liberation of Eastern Europe. The first wave started in the mid-1980s and led to the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian state and the demolition of "the socialist camp," though its promise has long remained unfilled within the borders of the former USSR itself. Now the second wave has started and is gaining momentum with the transformation in Ukraine, the events in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and the revolution in Belarus.

The Kremlin apparently realizes the potential of the second wave and is therefore demonstrating its support for anti-democratic forces in order to preserve its "spheres of interest." In fact, it's a battle for values where the aggressiveness of the Kremlin stands no chance if the values are supported and not betrayed. In this context, Belarus is a linchpin for the regional, European and

international security.

Undoubtedly, Lukashenko's regime today is a threat not only to the Belarusians but to the international security more broadly, as noted in recent statements by many Western leaders. This point should be taken seriously and be addressed accordingly. After all, this is a unique moment when Lukashenko threatens the interests of all major actors in the region – and this is not limited to the European Union (EU), US, and Canada.

Even for the despots in Russia and China, the Lukashenko regime poses significant problems owing to the possibility of creating a bottleneck for trade and commercial transit. For example, Lukashenko recently threatened to stop transit incoming from Germany. And both Russia and China reacted negatively to this unpredictable dictator's behaviour.

The situation in Belarus requires a coordinated international effort to get rid of the murderous dictator. The goal set by the Belarusian people, Lukashenko's resignation and a new election under international observation, is valid and quite realistic. Importantly, an international consensus seems to be emerging on the problem of the regime in Belarus – a regime that is already accused of crimes against humanity by the international community and human rights defenders.

Of course, the West has to take the lead in organizing conditions for Lukashenko's resignation and new election. The recently created Friends of Belarus congressional caucus in the US Congress has accurately identified a framework for major actors, including the US, EU and Canada. Naturally, the UK and Norway have to be on board as well.

In view of the unprecedented wave of repression unleashed by Lukashenko's regime in Belarus, strong international sanctions are not only required but are a necessity from a moral and legal point of view. They are badly needed to save people's lives and to show that the perpetrators do not enjoy impunity.

The West needs to apply strong coordinated sanctions, sectoral and personal, against Lukashenko and his Russian financial supporters, while involving Russia and international organizations to help reach a negotiated solution. The time is ripe for a solution in the case of Belarus.

–

Andrei Sannikov *is a Belarusian politician and activist, Deputy Foreign Minister (1995-1996), presidential candidate (2010), political prisoner (2010-2012). He is also Chairman of European Belarus Foundation (Poland/Belarus).*

Working with the grain: Canada and transatlantic security on the eastern flank

Roman Waschuk

In early August, Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics told the *Financial Times* that, between Belarus weaponizing illegal migration to generate a border crisis, and the massive upcoming Russian-led *Zapad* military exercise, the Baltic region is at growing risk of an “incident” between NATO and Russian/Belarusian troops (Milne 2021). Shortly thereafter, Latvia declared a state of emergency in its regions bordering Belarus, seeking to stem a flow of migrants being flown to Minsk from Iraq, and then being pushed across the Baltic borders.

You could reframe this opening sentence in Canadian terms: The foreign minister of Latvia, where our troops are deployed in a lead forward defence role on NATO’s eastern flank, has warned that current hybrid warfare and conventional armoured manoeuvres could combine, however inadvertently, to generate conflict – and all this on Canada’s watch. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, Canadian media did not so much as cut and paste this item, let alone analyse its implications for our country’s contribution to transatlantic security. Instead, media and punditry revolved around National Peacekeepers’ Day and regrets about all the selflessly noble missions that we aren’t undertaking.

Our national inability to see these Euro-Atlantic developments – in a region where Canada is a co-lead, has its greatest concentration of military deployments, and most binding security commitments – is part of a broader problem: We tend to shy away from the realities of renewed great power competition and the trade-offs imposed by situating our values in a time and place somewhere around the globe.

Even where we do commit, and the completion of a permanent Canadian headquarters building in Riga suggests we’re in Latvia for the long haul, the security component of our contribution is not really part of our narrative, at least beyond the professional military media. Of the 196 vignettes about international engagement published on the Global Affairs Canada website over the past three years, not one portrays Canada’s role as a transatlantic security actor. And yet we do have a compelling story to tell – one that also addresses themes such as Women Peace and Security in tangible, practical ways.

With so much going right, why the under-the-radar and off-the-mental-map academic, pundit and public perception issues? For one thing, comparative success is less compelling than stumbles or failures. For another, there are at least three Canadian opinion-shaping constituencies that find it hard to warm to this regional engagement:

- Progressive normative idealists for whom transatlantic engagement with New Europe seems too reminiscent of Old Canada, and no longer relevant to a demographically changing country;
- Hyper-realists who join Washington in focusing on China as the rising systemic rival, and share the desire to “park” the main Euro-Atlantic threat, Russia, as an irritant to be contained, not resisted;
- Climate emergency advocates who insist that traditional state-centric concerns about territorial defence, conventional force postures, and even the odd annexation of a peninsula pale before the threat of an inexorably warming planet.

There are, of course, answers to all three sets of concerns:

- Coalition-building across multiple linguistic, cultural and religious divides along NATO’s eastern flank is a skillset of diverse Canadian civilian and military teams that is valued in the region;
- Renewed great power competition affecting Canada has more than two actors. However painfully we feel squeezed in the US-China pincer now, our transatlantic engagement is valued in Washington and helps to deter Russia – a malign actor that may be economically weaker than China, but more prone to roll the dice using hard power;
- Responsible climate policies, where European partners are global emissions reduction leaders, require stable domestic frameworks for implementation; deterring encroachment makes it easier to focus on doing the right thing for the planet.

Advocates of a realist Canadian foreign and security posture like to make light of exaggerated but under-resourced claims to leadership. But our operations along NATO’s eastern flank are sizeable enough that we have other nations embedding with us, not vice-versa.

As the framework nation for the enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) Battlegroup in Latvia, Canada provides 540 troops and integrates smaller contingents from eight countries: Albania, the Czech Republic, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Importantly, exactly none are of the Anglo-American “usual suspects” of previous joint deployments. Blending rotational force contributions from these countries, while coordinating every move with host nation Latvia, is military multilateralism in action. Considering that the other eFP country leads in the Baltics are Germany and the UK, this puts us into the category of the “high-capacity democracies” that John Ikenberry (2021) sees as increasingly indispensable as American hegemony wanes.

Canada’s *Operation Unifier* military training mission in Ukraine has also become multinational. Denmark and Sweden have chosen to embed with the

force that has the largest footprint in the country (both geographically and thematically), as well as a partnership-friendly organizational culture for like-minded states. The RCAF's annual air policing stint in Romania has built new Canadian relationships in Southeast Europe. And having Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 under Canadian command from the bridge of HMCS *Toronto* leading a ship visit to Odessa (along with British and Spanish ships) in the summer of 2019 was a gesture that registered around the Black Sea.

Given that the long-term effectiveness of NATO's post 9/11 out-of-area missions has been increasingly questioned, Canada's contributions to the core Euro-Atlantic regional mandate over the past three decades have largely stood the test of time. In the Western Balkans, most regional countries are now allies, while the rest remain (sometimes tenuously, but still peacefully) on an EU membership track.

Right now, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, we are working with the grain, in countries committed to improving their own defence capabilities, and with disproportionate skin in the game. Canadian forward defence and training deployments are welcomed by host country populations. It took me two years to convince Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) planners and commanders that Ukraine was not Iraq or Afghanistan in terms of operational security (and that the main physical threat was excessive local hospitality). Wearing a Canadian military or police uniform on the street is now seen as adding to personal security. Security relations align with strengthened economic connections – the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement in the case of the EU, and the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement in the case of Ukraine.

In values terms, this is a region in transition (not always unidirectional), but one where the human and social capital exist to act on key Canadian themes such as Women, Peace and Security. Women in key security-relevant political leadership roles across the Baltic states, from the presidency on down. A good example is Vaira Vike-Freiberga, formerly of the Université de Montréal, and now the regional pioneer as President of Latvia 1999-2007. In Ukraine, a string of female Canadian mission commanders have served as role models, encouraging the opening of partner forces to women in combat and senior command roles. Witness the recent appointment of a woman as the Ukrainian Armed Forces Chief of Medical Command.

Across the region, we see the growing role of women as political change agents (Belarus, with its all-female leadership trio challenging the dictatorial rule of Lukashenko) and as negotiators and stakeholders in peace processes and national dialogues.

With over half of our international deployments (and our only bilateral police mission) along the eastern edge of the Euro-Atlantic region, Canadians and their government need to wake up to what we're achieving, rather than suffer phantom regrets for where we're not. But this also means taking a whole-of-

government approach to seeing this commitment in its entirety – and leveraging it more effectively with Washington, Brussels, Paris, London and Berlin as a key card to play in pursuit of broader Canadian interests and values.

I've already seen it done in real time around the North Atlantic Council ministerial table by Chrystia Freeland as foreign minister. Upping our political game to be consistent with our substantive contribution needs to be a consistent concern for Canadian diplomacy.

–

Roman Waschuk *is the former Canadian ambassador to Ukraine (2014-2019). He retired from Global Affairs Canada in December 2019.*

References

Ikenberry, G. John. 2021. "Preserving Liberal Internationalism in the 21st Century." CDA Institute, July 27. Available at <https://cdainstitute.ca/g-john-ikenberry-preserving-liberal-internationalism-in-the-21st-century/>.

Milne, Richard. 2021. "Latvia warns of risk of 'incident' between Nato and Russia." *Financial Times*, August 8. Available at <https://www.ft.com/content/d8566dc5-6818-4d9b-830b-eedcb9c8103e>.

constructive *important* *forward-thinking*
high-quality *insightful*
active

Ideas change the world

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT MLI

The Right Honourable Paul Martin

I want to congratulate the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** for 10 years of excellent service to Canada. The Institute's commitment to public policy innovation has put them on the cutting edge of many of the country's most pressing policy debates. The Institute works in a persistent and constructive way to present new and insightful ideas about how to best achieve Canada's potential and to produce a better and more just country. Canada is better for the forward-thinking, research-based perspectives that the **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** brings to our most critical issues.

The Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has been active in the field of Indigenous public policy, building a fine tradition of working with Indigenous organizations, promoting Indigenous thinkers and encouraging innovative, Indigenous-led solutions to the challenges of 21st century Canada. I congratulate **MLI** on its 10 productive and constructive years and look forward to continuing to learn more about the Institute's fine work in the field.

The Honourable Irwin Cotler

May I congratulate **MLI** for a decade of exemplary leadership on national and international issues. Through high-quality research and analysis, **MLI** has made a significant contribution to Canadian public discourse and policy development. With the global resurgence of authoritarianism and illiberal populism, such work is as timely as it is important. I wish you continued success in the years to come.

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has produced countless works of scholarship that solve today's problems with the wisdom of our political ancestors. If we listen to the **Institute's** advice, we can fulfill Laurier's dream of a country where freedom is its nationality.

M A C D O N A L D - L A U R I E R I N S T I T U T E



323 Chapel Street, Suite 300,
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
613-482-8327 • info@macdonaldlaurier.ca



[@MLInstitute](https://twitter.com/MLInstitute)



facebook.com/MacdonaldLaurierInstitute



youtube.com/MLInstitute



linkedin.com/company/macdonald-laurier-institute