



True North in
Canadian public policy

GLOBAL SECURITY LOOK AHEAD

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Deterrence is Back: Can NATO Handle It?

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In 2002, during the NATO-Russia Council's Rome Summit, President Vladimir Putin seemed committed to peace and cooperation. In his [speech](#), he declared that "Only by harmoniously combining our actions... will we open up wide-ranging possibilities for building a single security region - from Vancouver to Vladivostok." Fifteen years later, the NATO-Russia Council's pulse is weak and the only short-term hope for recovery gained access to the Oval Office on January 20, 2017: Donald Trump. The rift between NATO and Russia is deep, however. NATO suspended cooperation with Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Ukrainian crisis remains unresolved, making a quick reconciliation unlikely. Moscow is also showing increasing unease, as NATO forces will be posted in the Baltics and Poland later in 2017. From Ukraine to the imminent NATO deployment, a range of difficult issues now consumes the sporadic meetings of the NATO-Russia Council. These political tensions feel familiar at times, a reminder that the Cold War left Russia dissatisfied with the status quo. Deterrence has indeed made a comeback and is reshaping the security environment in the Euro-Atlantic region. Although NATO never completely abandoned deterrence, the 2014 Summit in Wales marked a decisive shift and a commitment to show greater resolve when confronted with Russia's bellicose moves.

From the Russian perspective, these actions are justified and could well have been prevented. In fact, Moscow has orchestrated an intensive communications campaign to express its grievances, blaming NATO for the poor state of their relations. The biggest grievance is related to NATO's Open Door Policy, which resulted in the Alliance's enlargement. The fact that NATO proceeded with Partnership for Peace agreements with both Georgia and Ukraine was not well received and the Alliance is now officially making room for a 29th ally, after signing an Accession Protocol with Montenegro in May of 2016. Once all twenty-eight allies ratify the protocol, Montenegro will become an official NATO member state. In addition to its discontent over NATO expansion, Russia has

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hurled more colourful accusations at NATO, like the claim that it provoked protests in Ukraine, or that it intends on building a military base in Georgia. In the NATO Headquarters, these accusations were not ignored and fostered a public diplomacy effort to address 32 of these made-in-Russia myths. The result is the document [Setting the Record Straight](#), which provides detailed responses to all of Russia's accusations.

NATO is also pushing back through its summits, which provide biennial updates on the Alliance's priorities. The 2016 summit in Warsaw was an opportunity to publically reiterate NATO's disapproval of Russian foreign policy. The [NATO communiqué](#) made the point unequivocally: "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace." The political rhetoric of the last two years demonstrates the incompatibility of Russia's and NATO's strategic goals. Beyond the tense conversations, NATO has also shown its disapproval physically by strengthening collective defence and enhancing deterrence.

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Collective defence is at the heart of NATO's *raison d'être*; it is one of the Alliance's core tasks and enshrined in Article V of the Washington Treaty. However, the other two tasks, crisis management and cooperative security, had become more salient throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as the US and its allies focused on building partnerships outside of the Euro-Atlantic region and then embarked on a long, out-of-area operation with the International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan, an intervention that continues today on a smaller scale under the banner of the Resolute Support Mission. Deterrence, then, was a word that remained in the lexicon of successive Strategic Concepts and NATO summit communiqués, but which was sidelined by the missions and operations of the day. In the post-Euromaidan security environment, deterrence experts are back in business as NATO's member states can once again agree on the importance of bolstering their collective capabilities in the face of Russia's destabilizing actions. At the very least, this heightened external threat has increased alliance cohesion, strengthening the political commitment that is so important for the credibility of deterrence. The material architecture of NATO deterrence has also been bolstered. It relies on a combination of conventional capabilities, nuclear weapons, and missile defence, all of which have been given greater importance in NATO policy over the past two years, as political tensions continue to rise between Russia and NATO's 28 nations.

First, NATO's nuclear weapons policy, which was updated during the 2012 Chicago Summit with the [Deterrence and Defence Posture Review](#), quickly became stale. In the lead-up to the summit, NATO allies were openly calling for the withdrawal of the estimated 150-200 American tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. Today, the political climate is further entrenching the nuclear status quo and the debate over whether these nuclear weapons should stay or go is over. These B-61 bombs are stored on the territories of five NATO countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Turkey) and could technically be used in times of war, though this is a very remote possibility. In the US [Nuclear Posture Review](#), NATO's nuclear sharing is defined as "arrangements under which non-nuclear members participate in nuclear planning and possess specially configured aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons [which] contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners who feel exposed to regional threats." These nuclear sharing arrangements are supplemented by extended nuclear deterrence commitments resting on the strategic arsenals of the UK, the US, and France, even if the latter does not participate in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, the Alliance's main body for nuclear

consultations. Whether it is in reference to nuclear sharing or extended nuclear deterrence, the language referring to the Alliance's nuclear capabilities has been strengthened, especially during the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The 2012 *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review* needs to be rewritten.

Second, NATO's conventional capabilities have received a boost through a heightened readiness posture and what the Alliance has dubbed "an enhanced forward presence." During both the Wales and Warsaw summits, NATO outlined the contours of this plan, which includes new assurance measures for allies in Central and Eastern Europe and the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, to increase the responsiveness of NATO forces on the Eastern flank. The assurance measures are varied and range from more frequent military exercises to AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) surveillance flights in Eastern Europe. As for forward presence, the plan is to deploy four combat-ready, multinational battalions in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The battlegroups will be under NATO command, with one member state stepping in as the lead to coordinate troops that have been committed by twelve other nations. These four "framework nations," to use NATO parlance, are the UK, Canada, Germany, and the United States. Canada, for example, will send its own troops to Adazi, but will also integrate forces from Italy, Albania, Poland, and Slovenia, in its role as the framework nation for the deployment in Latvia. The biggest boost to deterrence is undoubtedly on the conventional front and represents the costliest investment and riskiest commitment by allies to collective defence and deterrence.

Third, NATO has proceeded apace with its ballistic missile defence (BMD) capabilities, one of the stated causes of the rift with Russia, which had expressed consternation at the prospects of such installations in Eastern Europe. Prior to NATO suspending practical cooperation with Russia in 2014, five BMD exercises had been held under the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, as plans were discussed for a common theatre ballistic missile defence. Instead, NATO BMD is now in a phase referred to as the Initial Operational Capability, to support the Alliance's deterrence objectives, with no prospects of including Russia now or in the future. While BMD continues to be justified as protection against a ballistic missile threat on the Southern flank, Moscow is not buying it.

To conclude, the nature of NATO-Russia relations have changed significantly during the last 15 years and it is difficult to predict if meaningful cooperation can be restored. The political crisis has translated into a renewed emphasis on deterrence, which includes both nuclear and conventional capabilities, as well as NATO's ballistic missile defence system. Perhaps most worrying from Moscow's point of view is that NATO countries have decided to establish a military presence in Poland and the Baltics. Yet there is another unpredictable variable in the NATO-Russia equation and it is President Donald Trump. Before and after the election, Trump had called the Alliance "obsolete" and indicated it was a waste of money. His tone softened during his first bilateral conversation with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg but allies continue to be on edge because of Trump's contradictory signals. The silver lining is that Trump could be successful in easing tensions with Russia, in which case we might witness a return to the kind of cooperative language that underpinned the NATO-Russia Council's Rome Summit, back in 2002 - but at what cost?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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