NATO on the Right Path from Assurance to Deterrence

by Tomasz Kowalik

In Brief: The NATO Alliance does not have the tools to deal with all of Europe's challenges, such as the refugee crisis. But there are threats that can be addressed by military tools — military threats from land, air, or maritime forces and also missiles, nuclear weapons, cyber attacks, and hybrid tactics like sabotage. The Allies adopted a number of important countermeasures. These measures — most centrally the Readiness Action Plan, which includes significant military steps — have gone a long way toward reassuring those individual NATO member states that are most geographically vulnerable to various military, asymmetric, or hybrid threats from state actors. NATO needs to go further to prevent and to deter another Crimea-type action in its territory. The Alliance is on the path from assurance to deterrence. Approaching the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO needs to stay this path and take further steps, five of which are outlined here, to achieve stronger deterrence capabilities.

"The security of NATO members on both sides of the Atlantic is indivisible." This sentence was adopted by the 28 NATO heads of state and government at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 as part of the current NATO Strategic Concept. With the Lisbon principle, Allies once again underscored that there is one inseparable security area for all its members, building on Article 5 of the Treaty, which remains the bedrock of NATO.

The Alliance does not have the tools to deal with all of Europe's challenges, such as the refugee crisis. But there are threats that can be addressed by military tools — military threats from land, air, or maritime forces and also missiles, nuclear weapons, cyber attacks, and hybrid tactics like sabotage. While Allies' perceptions of these threats diverge, they must nonetheless be addressed because they pose a core challenge to the Alliance. In response to the heightened threat levels felt after the forceful annexation of Crimea and the increase in size and frequency of Russian "snap" military exercises near NATO allies' borders, the Allies adopted a number of important countermeasures. These measures — most centrally the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which includes significant military steps — have gone a long way toward reassuring those individual NATO member states that are most geographically vulnerable to

various military, asymmetric, or hybrid threats from state actors.

However, Russian activity near allied territory continues and the Kremlin still invests heavily in increasing its military capabilities. Thus NATO needs to go further to prevent and to deter another Crimea-type action in its territory. The Alliance is on the path from assurance to deterrence. Approaching the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO needs to stay this path and take further steps to achieve stronger deterrence capabilities.

Alliance Reassurance after Crimea

In response to Russia's actions in Crimea the past year, NATO has undertaken a number of measures to enhance capacity. The Alliance initially introduced multiple reassurance measures to enhance its desperately needed early warning system, and subsequently adopted the RAP at the Wales Summit in September 2014. The RAP is a meaningful package, including strengthening and accelerating the NATO Response Forces (NRF), an increased number of exercises, some enhanced decision-making at NATO's HQ, and a broader (though quite thinly spread) military structure of 40-staff officer strong NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) across eight Eastern Allies' territories.[1] The NFIUs mostly situated in capitals are meant to accelerate the arrival of allied help, rather than creating local military capability.

The Alliance also rightly adopted the principle of "28 for 28," i.e. once and where NATO decides to step up militarily, all Allies contribute by filling slots or sending troops or equipment. This was the context of Luxembourg's meaningful gesture earlier this year to send officers for the first time to staff the NATO Command Structure, which remains the true linchpin of the Alliance.

1 Those have been initially established in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania, and since October 2015 also in Hungary and Slovakia.

Furthermore, at Wales the Alliance decided to enhance the readiness and enlarge the Multinational Corps North-East in Szczecin, Poland. This is now the only corps among NATO's nine such formations that is located in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It is slotted to grow significantly in size, capability, functions, and readiness between 2014 and 2018, moves designed to bring it on par with the most capable corps in the Alliance. Before the Russo-Ukrainian conflict erupted, 13 countries participated in the corps; now there are 19 states involved, and the number is growing. Most notably, the United States has tripled its participation there and has also decided to preposition heavy equipment, which roughly includes a brigade-size equivalent of Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and 155mm howitzers, in several CEE countries. This constitutes a significant military capability.

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The first ever deployment of the most advanced F-22 Raptor aircraft to Poland and the Baltic States also took place in 2015, as did the first deployment of the U.S. Abrams tank and the French Leclerc tank to Poland's proving grounds. The U.S. Aviation Detachment, which has enabled regular rotational training events between U.S. and Polish Air Forces since 2012, has also become an important piece in the overall effort. Last but not least, a persistent but modest land troop presence in some CEE countries is now provided not only by the U.S. military, but also by the United Kingdom — as announced at the October 2015 NATO defense ministerial. All those steps combined create enhanced military capability, which significantly reassures CEE

Allies and provides some essential foundations for deterrence.

Ramping up Exercises

In addition to increasing capacity, NATO also initiated new joint exercises. NATO's military professionals had long sought to conduct a truly large joint exercise in various geographical locations simultaneously. "Trident Juncture 15" was the first such event in magnitude and complexity since "Strong Resolve 2002." Roughly 36,000 soldiers trained in Italy, Portugal, and Spain, proving that NATO is indeed capable of conducting a large joint operation in various theaters. This was a good training event for any analogous contingency of Alliance countries. Poland has been the playground for several NATO exercises in recent years, including the "Noble Jump" Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) validation exercise in 2015, and is going to host a major multinational exercise in June 2016, a few weeks prior to the Warsaw Summit. These exercises are essential not only for interoperability, assurance, and gaining expertise in combined and joint warfare capabilities, but also for rehearsing reception, staging, and onward movement (RSOM) within the host nations. The logistics need to be run through to see where improvements are required. Another exercise worth mentioning is "Swift Response 15," which was conducted August-September 2015 in four southern European countries. It was the largest airborne troop exercise conducted by the Alliance since the end of the Cold War. Nearly 5,000 troops from 11 NATO countries operated from intermediate staging bases in Europe and conducted simultaneous airborne forcible entry and follow-on missions. Overall, with more than 300 exercises in 2015, NATO has clearly picked up the pace.

These exercises highlighted a known obstacle to NATO responsiveness. Response forces need to be able to be moved faster across the borders of European states. What does it help to reduce the troops notice-to-move and notice-to-effect parameters (which are

both costly) if they cannot cross borders within NATO territory due to administrative and political obstacles to land-troop movements in some member states? Intensive work in this domain is already under way in NATO's capitals and should bear fruit by the Warsaw Summit.

Considerations on Deterrence

The RAP measures, when implemented by the next summit, may reassure insecure Allies. However, they may fall short of effectively deterring or dissuading state actors. French strategist General André Beaufre argued in his book *Dissuasion et Stratégie* that the point of deterrence is to stop a power from making the decision to use arms. This means that once an Ally has been attacked, and Article 5 is invoked, triggering Allies to rush to help, the Alliance essentially will have failed at deterrence.

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What is the lesser evil? Not to allow an armed attack to occur, or to let it happen and then fight a war, possibly with the risk of nuclear escalation? Where would an armed conflict end if an Ally has been deliberately attacked by a state actor? To reduce these dangers, NATO needs to continue relearning what it forgot after the end of the Cold War: how to exercise effective deterrence. In order to shift from reassurance to deterrence, the following five elements should be considered in the run-up to the Warsaw Summit and beyond

as an element of the Alliance's long-term strategic adaptation.

Five Steps to Stronger Deterrence for the Warsaw Summit

First, NATO needs to step up its nuclear training and messaging. In essence, it needs to rehearse escalating from conventional to nuclear warfare. Transitioning between one type of warfare to the next needs particular practice. As U.K. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon stated in October 2015, the Alliance has to know "how they fit together, nuclear and conventional." In reality, nuclear and conventional forces are heavily intertwined, and it was an artificial division in the past years to separate them. NATO has stopped practicing with nuclear forces as a gesture of goodwill. In the new security environment, this benevolence is out of place and strategic adaptation is required. Not doing so will be perceived as weakness, and may even provoke a nuclear strike by the other side if it calculates that no response would come.

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Second, NATO needs Standing Defense Plans enabling instant deployment of NATO's military. Such plans were in place prior to 1989, with assigned troops and units covering those territories most prone to potential enemy attack.

Third, some political pre-authorization needs to be granted to NATO operational commanders for specifically pre-defined provocative scenarios and actions. Those would allow, for example, a commander to stage, alert, and deploy parts of the NRF within allied territory, such as elements of the VJTF — also known in political parlance as the spearhead force. If the VJTF, and more generally the NRF, can be inserted into a crisis early, then it could deter or contain that crisis. However, a late VJTF deployment will be left with no option but to fight. Such an authorization could also let air policing missions easily transition into air defense missions. If push comes to shove, time will be short. NATO cannot allow itself to get bogged down in discussions when obvious military developments start happening in and around allied territory.

Fourth, Central and Eastern Europe needs a more robust allied forces presence. It is a difficult decision to make, and some U.S. and U.K. assets — as earlier discussed — have been already earmarked and declared in this respect. But nothing deters better than the "28 for 28" principle and boots on the ground. Who would want to draw the ire of 28 capitals by engaging troops from those countries? They would essentially serve as a trip wire, which would be an insurmountable obstacle and at the same time an unspeakable signal of ultimate allied solidarity.

In this context, it is essential to debunk a frequently propagated myth. NATO *did not* agree in 1997 in the NATO-Russia Founding Act — which has no binding treaty status — that it would never place any military forces in the new Alliance territories. What NATO agreed was to: "in the current and foreseeable security environment" carry out its collective defense and other missions "by ensuring necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of *substantial combat forces*" [emphasis added].

There are two important aspects linked with this paragraph that are pertinent for today's considerations. First, did the security environment change in the past 18 years to such an extent that the Act could be considered void? Most security experts would argue, clearly, yes. And second, the parties never defined what "substantial combat forces" encompasses (and

are unlikely to do so as this would require unanimous agreement of all capitals) but all military activity mentioned in this paper falls well below the measure of substantial combat forces. Furthermore, the Founding Act includes another sentence in the same paragraph: "Russia will exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe," which stretches all the way to the Ural Mountains. Contrary to that, over the past 18 years, Russia has undertaken substantial force enlargements in its Western Military District, providing effective anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) for potential allied reinforcements in the Baltic region. In other words, they have built up a "bastion defense" of pockets of advanced weapon systems that would inflict heavy losses on any military reinforcement near the pockets.

Fifth, NATO should invest in infrastructure for effective quick forward movement (RSOM) in and between Allied states (particularly in Central and Eastern Europe). Prepositioning, air strips, logistics and fuel depots, harbor modifications, and radars for enhanced early warning constitute domains where the NATO Security and Investment Programme (NSIP) should be focused on operational assessments made by NATO's Commanders. In this context a more evenly distributed NATO Command Structure, whose current footprint does not necessarily reflect today's requirements, should also be considered. After all, the operational area has significantly grown since 1997 due to NATO's enlargements.

Those five measures — along with the already ongoing full RAP implementation — will diminish the probability of a state-on-state conflict as it would display determination and strength that is well understood and respected by state actors.

Homework for Central and Eastern Europe

The Allies from CEE need to play an important role in this equation. A Polish 20th century strategist, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, stated: "Poland could count on

the help of Allies only when it is willing and capable of defending itself, and when it gains its own deterrence capabilities." This principle applies to the entire CEE region. In a nutshell, CEE states should not ask Western Allies to provide extra security and deterrence measures while not themselves fulfilling the 2 percent Wales Defense Pledge. Defense expenditures have rightly grown significantly across the region in the last two years, but they need to continue to reach the 2 percent mark at a minimum very soon. Poland and Estonia are the countries to follow in this respect, both having reached the mark in 2015. Naturally, the spending proportions need to be right; at least 20 percent should be earmarked for defense procurements and modernization. It is, however, also important to note that CEE states have become active security providers over the past decade, having deployed significant numbers of troops to NATO operations, in many cases without restrictions and thus having made large sacrifices.

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The southern flank of the Alliance — especially after the Russian direct intervention in Syria has led to further destabilization in the region — is undoubtedly also facing challenges that need to be dealt with. Some of them through military means such as air policing, surveillance, reconnaissance, or maritime assets. The most recent multiple violations of Turkish airspace, which eventually led to the downing of a Russian military aircraft, are a case in point. But again, sound

military operational analysis should be the foundation for any Alliance reaction and measures. Once operational needs for military reposturing are identified and agreed upon, again the "28 for 28" principle should apply across the whole Alliance, as the security of all NATO members remains indivisible.

The Warsaw Summit needs to send a clear message: do not mess with the Alliance. Respect its territorial integrity and population. In this sense, a solid deterrence base will do the trick. Deterrence is no longer an old-fashioned Cold War concept. The Alliance must not be afraid to protect itself by deterring an attack.

About the Author
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