August 5, 2016

Canada and Euro-Atlantic Security

It is little credit to the practice of diplomacy in Europe and North America that their military alliance has been allowed to become the primary institution through which they now seek to understand and engage Russia. NATO defines the Russian threat and prescribes the response – habitually reorganizing, rebranding, and redeploying military forces which, if they ever came to serious blows with their Russian counterparts, would leave in their wake a trail of destruction out of all proportion to the political, economic, territorial, or moral interests and values at stake. Canada, as a part of both NATO and the wider Euro-Atlantic community, has a role to play in righting east-west relations, but is a battle group in Latvia the best option?

As Germany's *Spiegel* recently put it, NATO is doing its best to persuade the western world that Vladimir Putin's Russia is poised to do what the Soviet Union of Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, and a string of other Soviet leaders would not, namely, launch a direct attack on NATO[1] – and never mind that the military balance has since the Soviet era shifted massively to NATO's favor. Stephen Kinzer, a former New York *Times* foreign correspondent and now an academic and senior fellow of the Watson Institute at Brown University, puts it bluntly: the world needs less, not more, NATO when it comes to the admittedly complicated business of dealing with contemporary Russia. That's because NATO has become a means of escalating, rather than constructively managing, conflict with Russia. Actually, he says, Russia shares with the west a host of security interests, including an effective response to terrorism and the prevention of nuclear catastrophe. The political/military differences that nevertheless stymie cooperation "cry out for creative diplomacy."[2]

Creative diplomacy

NATO was not conceived of as a vehicle for diplomacy, never mind creative diplomacy. The "Canadian Article," Article 2, emphasizes the importance of seeking political and economic cooperation among its members, but serious political engagement by NATO of its adversaries is a belated post-Cold War innovation, and even then is only sporadically applied. The NATO/Russia Council was set up in 2002 (before it there was the Permanent Joint Council[3]), as a mechanism for security dialogue with Russia – a "mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and joint action in which the individual NATO member states and Russia work as equal partners on a wide spectrum of security issues of common interest."[4] In practice, however, when the NRC has been most needed, NATO has suspended it[5] – following the autumn 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, formal meetings of the NRC were cut off, and in 2014 in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and actions in eastern Ukraine, NATO suspended "all practical civilian and military cooperation under the NRC with Russia" until an April 2016 meeting of the Council.[6]

Routine political engagement with Russia is still regarded as not routine, but as a luxury that is deemed affordable only in the good times. Hence, by mid-2016, in the context of some easing of tensions, and in recognition of the dangers of increasingly provocative military deployments, the Pentagon called for US-Russian cooperation under the 2011 OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) framework for risk reduction and confidence building measures in military operations of OSCE member states.

In the meantime, a new European Leadership Network brief[7] warns that the good times are not yet back and that relations with Russia could still get worse. So the first order of business is to understand that diplomacy is the essential instrument, especially in bad times, for repairing relations, reshaping behavior, and thereby restoring security, using any and all the venues available – the NATO-Russia Council, the OSCE, bilateral engagement, and a host of informal contacts and Track II programs.

Strategy and empathy

If empathy deficit disorder were a real condition, and at least one psychologist sees increasingly polarized social and political cultures in those terms,[8] NATO should order a full regimen of treatment. Here is Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Russia: "What we have seen is a Russia which has invested heavily in modern defence capabilities over many years, which has modernised its forces, its equipment, and has used military force against a sovereign nation in Europe, violating Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty."[9] With even the most rudimentary capacity to put oneself in another's shoes, the NATO leader would surely have recognized that Mr. Putin could credibly make the identical claim – simply substituting NATO for Russia and Serbia for Ukraine.

As a military alliance, NATO is congenitally incapable of seeing the Russian point of view – of understanding what Russian threat perceptions might look like. It takes a serious case of empathy deficit disorder not to recognize, for example, that Moscow would see talk of Ukraine in NATO as challenging its centuries-old access to the Black Sea and its one warm water port.[10] When NATO's steady eastward expansion culminated with the 2008 NATO summit declaration that Georgia and Ukraine were on a path to NATO membership, a modicum of empathy would have allowed recognition that Russia might see NATO as a lot more interested in limiting Russia's political reach than Georgia's well being. The east European specialist Adriel Kasonta suggests it should have been obvious that "no Russian leader could accept [NATO] enlargement on these terms, not Boris Yeltsin, Not Vladimir Putin, and not any future leaders."[11]

Without empathy there is deepening polarization, and because military alliances are not built for empathy, escalating conflict is a predictable consequence of handing them the keys the salons of diplomacy. In Russia's world, Mikhail Gorbachev's vision of a greater Europe that would include the EU and Russia, is seen to be sabotaged by a European Union that is "increasingly subsumed into the US-led Atlantic security community." In the Washington/Brussels world, Russia's talk of a "greater Europe" is more likely to be understood as an attempt to drive a wedge into the Atlantic community.[12] US and NATO ballistic missile defence (BMD) deployments – in North America, Europe, and at sea – are similarly seen by Russia as less about protection from North Korea's faltering nuclear missiles and more about challenging Russia's nuclear deterrent. And the fact that current BMD deployments are too limited to represent a credible threat to Russian nuclear forces does little to allay Russia's fears that they are nevertheless the nascent infrastructure of a BMD force that could one day be rapidly expanded. Without empathy, those fears are dismissed as paranoia; with persistent dialogue, they stand a chance of being mollified and accommodated.

The Euro-Atlantic community is in need of an inclusive forum committed to sustained diplomacy and mutual security. The NATO Russia Founding Act of 1997 acknowledged "that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible," and NATO and Russia both committed to strengthening the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the still available forum, and declared their joint aim to forge a common European space of security and stability, "without dividing lines or spheres of influence."

Privileging military responses

But business as usual in Europe does not include the normalization of relations with Russia. Instead, military prowess is ostentatiously brandished on both sides of the divide. In advance of the 2016 Warsaw Summit, most NATO states along with Finland and Sweden joined Poland for the 2016 Anakonda exercise (one of a long list)[13] – claimed as NATO's largest war game since the end of the Cold War. Focused on integrating Polish forces into Alliance structures and operations,[14] the exercise involved 31,000 troops. To NATO's credit, the exercise was registered in advance with the OSCE, but it wasn't designed to lower tensions in the region.

The primary exhibit in NATO's remilitarization of east-west relations is its Readiness Action Plan. Approved at the Wales NATO Summit in 2014, the plan sets out a series of "assurance" and "adaptation" measures. The assurance measures involve shorter term deployments, as Canadians now know, of land forces (battalions of 1,000 soldiers each) to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.[15] Canada has agreed to lead the force in Latvia, contributing 450 troops in support of the 1,000 strong battlegroup. In addition, Canada will continue to deploy a navy frigate with NATO's standing task force in the Black Sea, and will renew its provision of six fighter aircraft for air policing operations in the Baltics. NATO's Warsaw Summit describes these deployments as an "unambiguous demonstration" of its "solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression." The Summit explained NATO's Black Sea deployments a little differently – as a "peacetime demonstration of NATO's intent to operate without constraint."

Longer term, or "adaptation," measures include expansion of the NATO Response Force from 13,000 to 40,000 troops. Within that force, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (the "Spearhead Force") will consist of some 20,000 troops, of which 5,000 are to be ground forces. These "spearhead" forces are based in their home countries but available for quick deployment.[16]

Notable in the context of NATO's decision to deploy battalions to Poland and the Baltic states is NATO's explicit commitment in the 1997 NATO Russia Founding Act not to station "permanent" or "substantial" combat forces on Russia's border. Accordingly, NATO defines the new deployments as "not substantial" and as "rotational" rather than "permanent." However, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, writing in the *Globe and Mail*,[17] characterized the forward presence of troops in the Baltics and Poland as part of NATO's "adaptation measures" (i.e. permanent), even though NATO's own backgrounder calls them "assurance" (i.e. temporary) measures.

The Russians, for their part, have doubled their Barents and Baltic patrols and reconnaissance flights and have moved additional combat aircraft into Crimea.[18] In March Russia launched an exercise in the Arctic involving 80,000 personnel that expanded to include all of Russia, leading a European Leadership Network study to conclude that the scale and scope of the exercise represented a simulated war against the US and NATO.[19] Focused on eastern Europe, as well as the Arctic, the exercise included operations in Russia's east for the purpose of demonstrating that even in the context of all-out war with the west, Russia would still have the means to counter "opportunistic" attacks from the east by China or Japan.

Military exercises do not reflect an *intention* to go to war, but it's not at all surprising that the Nordics and Baltics are nervous,[20] or that Russia regards NATO's heightened operations on its frontier as less than benign and consistent with two decades of provocative expansion to Russia's doorstep.

The central reality of the current remilitarization of the east-west divide is that it heightens tensions but does little for heightened security. Even the chairman of NATO's Military Committee, General Petr Pavel, dismisses the military importance of the Baltic battalions, calling them a political rather than a military deterrent. He goes further to insist "it is not the aim of NATO to create a military barrier against broad-scale Russian

aggression, because such aggression is not on the agenda and no intelligence assessment suggests such a thing."[21] Part of the rationale for the battalions deployed to the Baltics and Poland is that they will serve as tripwire forces. Though they would themselves not offer any credible resistance in the event of an invasion, once engaged, they would trigger a full NATO response. But NATO's Article 5, that an attack on one is an attack on all, is already there to trigger a full alliance response in the event of attack – what then is the point of a tripwire force? In other words, the deployments are a case of rather expensive, and not very nuanced, messaging. of theatre.

Theatre is one thing, but direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia in Europe is quite another. Indeed, it must be unthinkable inasmuch as it would inflict a price dramatically out of proportion to any grievance or foreseeable outcome. It should be axiomatically understood that no military confrontation that unleashed the advanced and massively destructive conventional arsenals of Russia and NATO against one another, and that risked escalation to nuclear weapons use, could ever by justified by the political, economic, territorial, or moral issues at stake. The destruction that would be wrought within a matter of hours, never mind days or longer, if Russia and NATO were to launch into all out armed conflict, would be so extensive and so consequential as to mean that it could not ever be seriously entertained. And yet, both still assume that the one true antidote to vulnerability is to threaten such total destruction. And so, both NATO and Russia keep very busy preparing for the unthinkable.

NATO and Russia are now together "busily undoing one of the post-Cold War's most important accomplishments – the dismantling of the military confrontation in Central Europe." So says Columbia University academic Robert Legvold.[22] The "larger tragedy," he says, "is in challenges that they will not be addressing together: the increasingly complex and dangerous dynamics in what is now a multipolar nuclear world; the resource conflicts sure to follow if climate change goes unattended; the risk that the Arctic, the world's new energy frontier, will become an arena of competition rather than cooperation; and the prospect that dealing with turmoil in and around Eurasia will remain a source of rivalry rather than the basis for constructive partnership."[23]

Implications for the Arctic

Until now the Arctic has remained largely free of the diplomatic standstill and risky military maneuvers that characterize contemporary Europe. Even though some of the same states are obviously involved, in the Arctic they have declined to replicate the tensions spawned by the crisis in Ukraine. But one of the more pessimistic observations (and alarming, if it is even partly correct) triggered by NATO's Warsaw Summit is Prof. Rob Huebert's prediction that it is now "highly unlikely that the cooperation of the last decade and a half between Russia and the Arctic NATO countries – Canada, United States, Denmark, Norway and Iceland – can be maintained." An internationally regarded expert on Arctic security, Huebert argues the summit's fulsome denunciation of Russia's "provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory," along with the decision to deploy troops to the Baltic states and Poland, will drive Russia to reject "business as usual" Arctic cooperation.[24]

He could be right, with tragic consequences for the Arctic, but probably won't be. The Arctic is not torn by competing visions or ideologies, and while geography means that Russia dominates the region, all other Arctic states enjoy centuries of separate identities and traditions that are not susceptible to destabilization and absorption by a dominant Arctic culture. Norway's shared border with Russia makes it more wary, but there is no significant Russian speaking population within Norway (as there is in Ukraine and the Baltics) for the Russians to leverage when local governance proves especially inept (as in Ukraine, but certainly not in Norway). In 2015 Norway's Defence Minister told NATO's Parliamentary Assembly that Norway does "not see a military threat against Norway" from Russia. He did describe the situation in the Arctic as "uncertain" and

spoke of "the need for predictability and stability in our relations with Russia,"[25] and although he would not agree, one of the things that aids predictability and stability in the Arctic is the deliberate absence of NATO from the Arctic. Norway would welcome a NATO presence in the high north, but neither Canada nor the US have much interest in importing the increasingly unwieldy alliance politics into the Arctic. A NATO presence would bring nothing to Arctic security, but it could drive Russia to further militarize its Arctic operations and shift them from their present two-fold orientation – first, as a maritime infrastructure, and second, as a base of operations for strategic forces oriented to competing with the US at a strategic level far beyond the Arctic – to focus more on Arctic combat capabilities.

Arctic cooperation has been driven by a strongly shared climate of pragmatism. It is an environment that demands cooperation. Conflicts linked to territorial claims are subject to a judicial process that all Arctic states welcome. There are no credible scenarios in which those competing claims could lead to military competition. The Northern Sea route will, to the extent that the Arctic becomes a significant global waterway, certainly be dominated by Russia, but both regional and shipping states welcome Russia's capacity to anchor the international infrastructure for maritime regulation and emergency response operations that a major international maritime thoroughfare will require.

That said, Huebert's conclusion (warning?), can hardly be ignored: "It is difficult to think of any meaningful areas of cooperation that will not be impacted by the new tone presented in the Warsaw Communique and inevitable Russian reaction."[26] While the Arctic is as much a unique political/security environment as it is a unique ecological/climatic environment, it remains to be seen how long it will be able to resist the destabilizing consequences of North Atlantic states making NATO their primary vehicle for conducting security, political, and economic relations with Russia.

Vulnerability to interference

The Warsaw summit certainly confirmed NATO's persistent remilitarization of the North Atlantic community's relations with Russia: "NATO has responded to this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defence posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and by suspending all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia, while remaining open to political dialogue with Russia. We reaffirm these decisions."[27]

But it is a posture that misses a central reality of security and vulnerability to military interference. And that fact is that vulnerability to attack and interference owes much more to political weakness than to military weakness or to the lack of formidable friends. In other words, preserving national sovereignty and defending against foreign predators – in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – depend much more on the quality of their governance than on military preparedness and defence.

When Russian Parliamentarians, demonstrating that the art of provocation in Russia is not the exclusive property of its president, recently questioned the constitutionality of the process by which Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania gained their independence after the fall of the Soviet Union,[28] it did not have a calming effect on the Baltics. Like Ukraine, they too have significant Russian-speaking populations (about one-quarter of the populations of Estonia and Latvia, and about six percent in Lithuania) that the Russian President insists are deserving of his protection.[29] They prefer to look to NATO for protection from Russian interference, but the real story of post-Cold War military interventions, unilateral and multilateral, is that they occur almost exclusively in contexts of chronic political instability. Almost always interventions occur in and around the world's most intractable trouble spots, against states that are internally divided, and against (or sometimes in support of) governments with little or no internal legitimacy. The context for military interventions is invariably political, not military, vulnerability. Attacks by individual states or multilateral military coalitions of

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the willing alike are launched into situations of advanced conflict, including levels of violence that equate to war, in which violent conflict is symptomatic of an utter lack of national consensus. Look at these post-Cold War invasions: multilateral interventions in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, Serbia (re Kosovo), and Libya; unilateral interventions by the US in Panama and Somalia, by Russia in Georgia and Ukraine, by Ethiopia in Somalia, by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, and by Iraq in Kuwait. Common to all of the invaded states (with the exception of Kuwait), were conditions of advanced internal division and crisis.

The point obviously is not that internal crises justify invasions – this is not a matter of blaming the victims and justifying the exploits of major powers. Politically chaotic states are still sovereign, and their weaknesses are typically the product of a myriad of forces – some internal but many well beyond their control – and invading any state outside of self-defence or without explicit United Nations Security Council approval is still a flagrant violation of international law. And, by the way, as the record also shows, such invasions are much more likely to exacerbate discord than end it.

But what made states vulnerable to invasion was unstable internal political conditions, not a lack of military defence. Most were places of extreme human rights violations and among the world's primary producers of IDPs (internally displaced persons) and refugees, and most showed little prospect for an early return to political stability. The primary lesson to be drawn from the past quarter century of military interventions in unstable states is therefore actually about politically stable states – that is, politically stable states, with national institutions that enjoy the legitimacy that comes from broad public trust and support, are largely immune to military attacks and intervention, regardless of their size or military strength or lack of it. Only one politically stable (though not democratic) state was invaded in the past quarter century, Kuwait, and in that case it was the attacker that was ultimately destroyed.

It's a lesson that the Baltic States and NATO ought to take special note of in the face of a heightened sense of vulnerability to Russia. Baltic states do not fit the model of invaded states – they are not riven by intractable political disarray, they are competently governed spaces that enjoy political stability, and each sustains a strong national consensus in support of independence and the prevailing political order. Of course, if the Balkan states were to substantially fail in fully integrating and holding the support and confidence of their Russian minorities, then they would indeed become much more vulnerable to interference – a vulnerability against which there is certainly no military defence

The great folly in the prevailing Euro-Atlantic security discourse is the assumption that without demonstrations and threats of NATO military action the Baltics are defenceless. The opposite is true. The Baltic States have ready access to the most effective and proven defence against military invasion – namely, strong and respected governance and a buoyant national consensus in support of the prevailing order.[30] The front line of Baltic, and Arctic, for that matter, security is constructive governance that keeps on winning the support of all segments of their populations. It is the legitimacy of inclusive internal political processes in the Baltics, not military threats that no sane leadership would ever carry out, that will ultimately protect them from the Russian "help" they don't want.

Pursuing mutual security

While the US through NATO draws influence and a measure of agenda control in the North Atlantic from sustained confrontation with Russia, many west Europeans see little advantage and lots of danger in demonizing the Russians and remilitarizing engagement with them. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in particular has criticized NATO's decision to stage military maneuvers in eastern Europe, warning such moves could worsen tensions with Russia: "What we shouldn't do now is to inflame the situation by loud saber-rattling and shrill war cries. Whoever believes that symbolic tank parades on the alliance's eastern

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border will bring more security is mistaken. We are well-advised not to create pretexts to renew an old confrontation."[31]

As analyst and former CIA official Graham Fuller points out, EU states are more inclined than are Americans to see advantage in forging strong diplomatic and institutional links with Russia as it now is.[32] Thus there remains in Europe at least some recognition that sustainable security in the Euro-Atlantic requires an understanding that security has to be mutual, that the security of some depends on the security of all the others. As long as some, east or west, feel threatened, as long as some remain convinced that their own vital and long-term interests are being ignored, and as long as suspicion trumps all other perceptions of the actions of others, insecurity will prevail, militarism will rise, and a heightened sense of insecurity will be the result. It's the kind of understanding that can come only from ongoing political engagement and confidence building actions on the ground.

The Warsaw Summit of NATO noted the importance of "talking to Russia," but its vision of dialogue is shaped by its military mandate and thus focuses on talks designed to "avoid misunderstanding, miscalculation, and unintended escalation" linked to its escalated military operations and deployments. That's an important, essential, risk reduction agenda, but it falls short of exploring the kind of common security that "embraces the ancient truth that a person or a nation cannot be secure if their actions lead their neighbor or rival to be more fearful and insecure."[33]

The OSCE was designed to pursue that latter agenda, along with a mission of conflict prevention and crisis management, but has been pushed aside and rendered less than effective by a North Atlantic focus on NATO. Particularly in the wake of 9/11, a broadened security agenda has allowed NATO to dominate the security agenda and that has in turn further sidelined the OSCE.[34]

At the same time, while Russia's relations with the OSCE are also fraught,[35] and while the OSCE had become a "backwater of international diplomacy" according to some analysts, the Ukraine crisis has actually "revived the OSCE's political relevance, as the organization offered the best available framework for managing the crisis and avoiding further escalation."[36] The Carnegie Endowment's Stefan Lehne recounts OSCE leadership in mediation efforts on Ukraine and in its monitoring mission to supervise the ceasefire. The OSCE, he argues, has potential to push for more comprehensive arrangements through which Ukraine could develop mutually beneficial relations with both Russia and the European community. His point is that the OSCE has become relevant again – "not because the West and Russia have overcome their differences, but because their relations declined to a point at which both sides needed to turn to the organization's crisis management tools to contain the risks of a dangerous escalation."[37] The OSCE is the one Euro-Atlantic institution that has the potential to address a broad range of east-west relations issues – conflict early warning, crisis management, reviving confidence building measures and conventional arms control efforts, responding to terrorism and organized crime, and promoting good governance – from the Baltics to Central Asia, says Lehne. That's an extensive agenda that won't be easily or quickly taken up, but the point is that it is the OSCE, not NATO, that offers the credible mechanism for addressing current east-west conflicts and tensions, as well as future Euro-Atlantic relationships.

While NATO and its military machinations continue to dominate the east-west landscape, former Canadian Disarmament Ambassador Chris Westdal argues that, at a minimum, any Canadian deployments in eastern Europe should be complemented "with active diplomacy in a quest for better relations with Russia" – a quest that should include multilateral and bilateral engagement.[38] He approvingly notes Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan's call for renewed dialogue and his assurance that here has in fact been "behind the scenes" work toward that end: "This really is the most critical piece," says Sajjan. "Dialogue is extremely important. We need to make sure the tensions are reduced because it doesn't help anybody."[39]

It is a sentiment echoed in the European Leadership Network's (ELN) new study of Russia-EU cooperation.[40] The first imperative is for both NATO and Russia to "exercise…restraint regarding the strengthening of military posture along the EU-Russia border, including Russia refraining from introducing additional nuclear weapons[41] in the area." It is time to end "the current action-reaction cycle between Russia and NATO regarding military deployment and activities."

The ELN calls for a renewed commitment, through the OSCE, to transparency and confidence building measures in the region, and sees headway on the Ukraine conflict as an important element of improving overall Euro-Atlantic relations. Implementation of the second Minsk agreement, which followed the collapse of the original, needs to be a priority, including a ceasefire monitored by the OSCE, the pull back of heavy weapons from the front lines, releasing prisoners of war, and reforming the Ukraine constitution.

The ELN report also argues that European tension can also be eased by Russia/EU cooperation on other issues – from Syria, to counter-terrorism, to Iran and DPRK nuclear issues, climate change mitigation measures, and cooperation in the Arctic.

The potential for programs to support people-to-people contacts, and especially support for Track II dialogues, is also recognized, and the ELN makes a compelling case for EU-Russian dialogue on key fundamentals, to better understand and reconcile competing narratives toward a stable Europe-wide order. It identifies two key questions. One is on the nature of sovereignty and conditions for legitimate intervention in the national affairs of sovereign states (examples include Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, Iraq, and Libya). The second relates to the territorial integrity of states and requires honest exploration of the circumstances under which self-determination and secession are legitimate objectives within the Euro-Atlantic (e.g. Serbia/Kosovo and Ukraine/Crimea).

The ELN also calls for ongoing high-level diplomacy between the EU and Russia: "the EU and Russia are neighbors, share the same strategic space, disagree about many things, face many of the same threats, and by working together could improve the lot of all Europeans."

Overall, Canada can best support enhanced security throughout the Euro-Atlantic arena through a primary focus on dialogue and diplomacy that promotes empathy and mutual understanding across the region. For mutual understanding to mature and endure, it needs to be supported by concrete initiatives and mechanisms – for early warning of conflict, prevention of armed conflict, crisis management, emergency response, confidence building action and processes, arms control, and the promotion of good governance.

Notes

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[41] The Euro-Atlantic nuclear confrontation adds exponentially to the danger of current Euro-Atlantic security dysfunction and will be the focus of a separate briefing.

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