

By Rob de Wijk*

The Role of Deterrence in a new European strategic environment

<https://doi.org/10.1515/sirius-2018-0023>

Abstract: The new Russian military doctrine from 2010, the growing international assertiveness of Russia, and eventually the annexation of the Crimea Peninsula in 2014 have forced the West to rethink deterrence strategies vis a vis Russia. Consequently, the old Cold War concept of deterrence was dusted off and the debate picked up from where it had ended in 1990. This article summarizes the end of the Cold War thinking on deterring aggression against NATO-Europe. It explains why the present Western theoretical foundation of deterrence, which still focuses on strong conventional forces backed up by nuclear weapons, no longer suffices, and argues that the new Russian concept of strategic deterrence requires a complete overhaul of the Western approach. It is not only the security of the Baltic member states of NATO or of transatlantic cables that matter, Europe has to cope with desinformation and destabilization campaigns and has to rethink its energy security strategy. Only together can NATO and EU master these challenges.

Keywords: deterrence, Russia, military doctrine, role of nuclear weapons, hybrid warfare

1 Introduction

During the Cold War, bookshelves were filled with studies on deterrence and the integration of nuclear weapons in conventional battle. But after the end of the Cold War, thinking on deterrence virtually came to a standstill. As nuclear-based deterrence has never failed, the Cold War discussions were theoretical exercises and employment doctrines were never given the opportunity to be tested. However, the relative decline of the West and the increased assertiveness of Russia in recent decades are causing a revival on theorizing deterrence of aggression in Europe. The Russian military doctrine of 2010, which in-

troduced the broad concept of strategic deterrence, was also an important impulse for the debate among Russian experts regarding the de-escalatory value of nuclear weapons.

The new Russian doctrine, together with increased Russian assertiveness and NATO's neglect of its conventional armed forces, urged NATO-member states to rethink the concept of deterrence. Consequently, the old, Cold War concept of deterrence was dusted off and the debate picked up from where it had ended in 1990. This article summarizes the state of the discussion on deterring aggression against NATO-Europe during Cold War. It explains why the present Western theoretical foundation of deterrence – which still focuses on strong conventional forces, backed up by nuclear weapons – no longer suffices, and argues that the new Russian concept of strategic deterrence requires a complete overhaul of the Western approach.

2 Deterrence during the Cold War

Traditionally, military strength is the cornerstone of any deterrence strategy. A strong and credible military force and the political will to use it, is believed to deter. As the damage inflicted by nuclear weapons is so devastating, it is agreed that those weapons constitute the ultimate deterrent. Therefore, deterrence involves attempts to punish an actor if it takes undesired negative action.

During the Cold War, two competing schools of thought emerged. One school advocated the use of nuclear weapons to deny the adversary the ability to achieve desired objectives. The other school favored the use of nuclear weapons to punish the adversary for an action they had taken.¹ The former school focused on nuclear war fighting, whilst the latter emphasized the demonstrative use of nuclear weapons. This article argues that the discrepancy of deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment not only dominated the debate during the Cold War, but is likely to dominate the new debate as well.

* **Corresponding Author:** Rob de Wijk is the founder and non-Executive Director of *The Hague* Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) and Professor of International Relations and Security at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University, email: RobdeWijk@hcss.nl

1 Representatives of the first school were Osgood (1958) and Kissinger (1957), the other school was based on thinking by Brodie (1959, 1973)

The thinking about deterrence in Europe is dominated by the United States and is still based on principles, which mainly have their origins in the strategy of *Flexible Response* codified in 1967 in a document MC 14/3 approved by NATO's Military Committee. As thinking on deterrence was both highly complex and an increasingly advanced science, it is useful to take a closer look at its evolution. MC 14/3 mentioned three types of military responses open to NATO:

1. Direct defense seeks to defeat the aggression on the level at which the enemy chooses to fight [...] successful direct defense either defeats the aggression, or places upon the aggressor the burden of escalation. [...] The direct defense concept includes the use of such nuclear weapons as may be authorized.
2. Deliberate escalation seeks to defend aggression by deliberately raising, but where possible controlling, the scope and intensity of combat, making the costs and the risks disproportionate to the aggressor's objectives [...] Depending on the level at which the aggression starts [...] escalatory steps might be selected from among the following examples [...]:
 - a. Broadening or intensifying a non-nuclear engagement, possibly by opening an additional front or initiating action at sea in response to low-intensity aggression;
 - b. Use of nuclear defense and denial weapons;
 - c. Demonstrative use of nuclear weapons;
 - d. Selective nuclear strikes on interdiction targets;
 - e. Selective nuclear strikes against other suitable military targets.
3. General nuclear response contemplates massive nuclear strikes against the total nuclear threat, other military targets, and urban-industrial targets as required ([...] It is both the ultimate deterrent and, infused, the ultimate military response.²

MC 14/3 was developed in reaction to its predecessor, the strategy of *Massive Retaliation* of the 1950s.³ In the 1950s, the Warsaw Pact was believed to be superior in the area of conventional forces. The Western inferiority of conventional forces was compensated by nuclear superiority. But in the 1960s, American nuclear superiority disappeared, leaving the West with only one option: the use of its entire nuclear arsenal in response to a conventional attack. As

massive retaliation would come close to suicide, the strategy's credibility was seriously reduced.

The critics of the strategy claimed that the strategy focused too much on nuclear weapons and that there was nothing in between conventional war and nuclear destruction. Therefore, only two options were available to political decision makers: suicide or surrender. It was believed that credibility could be regained by the controlled and limited use of nuclear weapons.

Consequently, during the Cold War, politicians, nuclear planners, and technicians constantly tried to find ways to make nuclear weapons more 'usable'. MC 14/3 was based on the idea that Western technological superiority would make the controlled and limited use of nuclear weapons possible. In theory, the new strategy solved the 'suicide or surrender' dilemma. In turn, the new strategy provided guidance for national defense planners and the development of national doctrines on 'how-to-fight' – integrating nuclear weapons in the conventional battlefield. This was, however, a major challenge. Political leaders, scholars and military planners in the United States argued that tactical nuclear firepower could be integrated in conventional war fighting. But in Europe many argued that due to its destructive nature the use of tactical nuclear weapons could not serve national objectives in the same way as conventional forces could. How should one use nuclear weapons? As a matter of fact, the debate over the implementation of Flexible Response was a debate over the nature of deterrence. American thinking stressed the importance of deterrence by the *denial* of objectives. Traditional methods of defense planning were used to integrate nuclear weapons in conventional battle. Tactical nuclear weapons were considered as an extreme form of firepower, which could provide the urgently needed tactical edge in combat power that was required to win the war. At the same time, the grave uncertainties that the use of nuclear weapons would involve were recognized. Thus, the prevailing notion in the United States was that nuclear weapons should not be employed before conventional defenses had been severely tested and found to be inadequate.

In Europe, however, politicians, scholars and military planners tended to favor a policy based on deterrence by the threat of *punishment*. They suggested a rather early resort to tactical nuclear weapons in a limited and demonstrative mode. It was argued that early first use might enhance deterrence because it would threaten the adversary with nuclear escalation. The latter, however, was precisely what American nuclear 'war fighters' tried to avoid. NATO's strategy of flexibility in response was ambiguous enough to be interpreted in both ways.

² NATO, *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Organization Area* (MC 14/3), 22 December 1967, section 17; <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a680116a.pdf>.

³ See for the history of deterrence theory Wijk 2014, 151–155.

The new Flexible Response strategy required a broad arsenal of nuclear weapons. At the end of the Cold War, the United States possessed strategic nuclear weapons that could be delivered with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), and gravity bombs dropped by strategic bombers. Those weapons were considered weapons of last resort and would be used solely by the United States for a general nuclear response. They were the ultimate security guarantee for NATO allies in Europe. As a sign of transatlantic solidarity and a commitment to take their share of the burden, European NATO allies deployed American tactical nuclear battlefield weapons. These included nuclear landmines as well as nuclear gravity bombs delivered by tactical aircraft, nuclear tipped short-range ballistic missiles, and nuclear artillery pieces. To protect NATO's sea lines of communications (SLOCs) nuclear depth charges could be used for anti-submarine warfare.

During the 1980s, in response to the deployment of Russian nuclear intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM) such as the SS-20, the deployment of a new generation of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles – designed to bridge the gap between battlefield nuclear forces and intercontinental strategic forces – was discussed. The deployment of those weapons systems led to heated debates, but due to the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987 the missiles would never become fully operational.

Due to the end of the Cold War and new arms control treaties, the number of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons and their delivery systems was reduced with astonishing speed. In Europe unilateral but reciprocal steps led to the removal of roughly eighty percent of all tactical nuclear weapon systems, with the exception of gravity bombs. Strategic arms reduction talks greatly reduced the number of strategic nuclear weapons of both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as its successor state Russia.

During the 1990s strategic thinking virtually came to a standstill. This was reflected in NATO's 1999 *Alliance Strategic Concept*.⁴ The new strategy welcomed “increased, political and military partnership with other states, including Russia.” However, due to the instability of Russia, uncertainties about its future, and fears that terrorists and rogue states might acquire nuclear weapons from the former Soviet arsenals, the strategy stressed that

“the presence of United States conventional and nuclear forces in Europe remains vital to the security of Europe, which is inseparably linked to that of North America”⁵ and that nuclear weapons “will continue to fulfill an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies’ response to military aggression. They demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option.”⁶ At the same time NATO concluded that “the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated [...] are therefore extremely remote.”⁷ Reflecting MC14/3 the strategy observed that “to protect peace and to prevent war or any kind of coercion, the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe and kept up to date where necessary, although at a minimum sufficient level” and that “the Alliance’s conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable”⁸. There were no mentioning of political guidelines for the actual use of tactical nuclear weapons and how those weapons could be integrated in the conventional battlefield. As a matter of fact, those guidelines did not exist. During the 1990s the main concern was the safety and overall state of the former nuclear Soviet-arsenal.

3 Deterrence in the 2000s

During the 2000s the focus of deterrence shifted from Russia to rogue states and terror organizations. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared war on terrorism during a speech to Congress. A major policy change was announced during the State of the Union address on January 29, 2002. Referring to North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, Bush stated that “States like these constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be cata-

⁴ NATO, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*, Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C., 24 April. 1999, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065.d.htm>

⁵ Ibid, Paragraph 42.

⁶ Ibid, Paragraph 62.

⁷ Ibid, Paragraph 64.

⁸ Ibid, Paragraph 46.

strophic”⁹. Therefore, the President showed renewed interest in nuclear-armed missile interceptors as part of a ballistic missile defense capability (BMD). As a first step the United States withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The President also put the issue of usable nuclear weapons back on the agenda such as nuclear ground penetrators to destroy hardened underground bunkers and tunnel complexes, as conventional means would be militarily less efficient.¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, leaked excerpts from the classified Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) submitted to Congress on December 31, 2001 caused much unease among allies because it explicitly called for a capability to destroy “hard and deeply buried targets”.¹¹ In other words, nuclear weapons could be employed against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attacks including deep underground bunkers or bio-weapon facilities. This was a response to Al Qaida using tunnels for hiding which could not be destroyed by conventional means.

The NPR explicitly stated that advances in defensive technologies would allow U.S. non-nuclear and nuclear capabilities to be coupled with active and passive defenses to help provide deterrence and protection against attack, preserve U.S. freedom of action, and strengthen the credibility of U.S. alliance commitments. Active defense referred to BMD, whilst passive defense could refer to hardening.

Regarding Europe, the NPR argued that it “puts the Cold War practices related to planning for strategic forces behind us”. As Russia no longer constitutes a threat “the United States will no longer plan, seize or sustain its forces as though Russia presented merely a smaller version of the threat posed by the former Soviet Union”.

Consequently, planning shifted from a threat-based to a capability-based approach and towards adaptive planning. Regarding the latter, the NPR noted that “Adaptive planning is used to generate war plans quickly in time critical-situations [...] by identifying individual weapon/target combinations that could be executed in crises”.¹² This suggested a great amount of flexibility.

With regard to employment policies, the NPR did not constitute a watershed. The NPR noted that “composed of

both non-nuclear systems and nuclear weapons, the strike element of the New Triad can provide greater flexibility in the design and conduct of military campaigns to defeat opponents decisively. Non-nuclear strike capabilities may be particularly useful to limit collateral damage and conflict escalation”.

The real focus was terrorism and rogue states. The NPR was part of a major policy change announced during the graduation speech at the United States Military Academy West Point on June 1, 2002. Here the U.S President argued that the United States must “uncover terror cells in 60 or more countries” and that “we must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge”. In doing so, the United States must change the very foundations of strategic thought: “For much of the last century, America’s defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment [...] Deterrence – the promise of massive retaliation against nations – means nothing against shadowy terrorists without any nation or citizen to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorists [...] our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for pre-emptive action, when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives”.¹³ Thus, a new unilateralist, first-strike policy of ‘defensive intervention’ or ‘anticipatory self-defense’ was announced. As terrorist organizations could not be deterred, the new approach focused solely on states that were supposed to support terrorism. U.S Vice President Dick Cheney made this clear during a speech delivered to war veterans on August 26, 2002. He argued that pre-emption against Iraq was necessary because “there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. And there is no doubt that his aggressive regional ambitions will lead him into future confrontations with his neighbors”. Quoting former Foreign Secretary Henry Kissinger, Cheney argued that this produces “an imperative for preventative action.” In addition, “our job would be more difficult in the face of a nuclear armed Saddam Hussein”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the new strate-

⁹ G.W Bush, *The President’s State of the Union Address*, Washington DC, 29 January 2002; <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

¹⁰ Paul Reynolds, *Mini-nukes on US agenda*, BBC News, 6 August 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3126141.stm>

¹¹ The following excerpts are taken from the leaked excerpts of the Nuclear Posture Review 2001. <https://web.stanford.edu/class/polisci211z/2.6/NPR2001leaked.pdf>

¹² Ibid., pp. 46–47.

¹³ G.W. Bush, *Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy West Point*, New York, Washington DC, 1 June 2002; <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>.

¹⁴ D. Cheney, *Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention*, Washington DC, 26 august 2002; <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>.

gies accepted that terrorists and rogue states could not be deterred by nuclear forces alone. This would require a wider range of capabilities.

The policy change was codified in the National Security Strategy (NSS), published in September 2002.¹⁵ President Bush officially put aside the traditional doctrines of deterrence and containment and replaced them with new doctrines of preemption and preventive interventions: “We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends. Our response must take full advantage of strengthened alliances, the establishment of new partnerships”.

However, “while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country”. It is a view that can be described as unilateral if necessary and multilateral if possible. This was a clear expression of the unipolar world that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In sum, during the 2000s deterrence was based on a wide range of offensive, defensive, and conventional nuclear capabilities, as well as flexible or adaptive planning. The NPR indicated that adaptive planning can still integrate nuclear weapons in the conventional war scenario, but specific employment guidelines and a conceptual framework for its use such as MC 14/3 was absent.

4 Deterrence in the 2010s

Employment guidelines were also absent in President Obama’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). The Obama administration also associated rogue states, proliferation, and terrorism with possible nuclear threats: “[...] it is essential that we better align our nuclear policies and posture to our most urgent priorities – preventing nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation”.¹⁶ The NPR reflected the idea that BMD would play an important role in deterrence: “By maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent and reinforcing regional security architectures with missile

defenses and other conventional military capabilities, we can reassure our non-nuclear allies and partners worldwide of our security commitments to them and confirm that they do not need nuclear weapons capabilities of their own.”

The NPR concluded among other things that the United States will: “Retain the capability to forward-deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on tactical fighter-bombers and heavy bombers, and proceed with full scope life extension for the B-61 bomb including enhancing safety, security, and use control” and “continue and, where appropriate, expand consultations with allies and partners to address how to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of the U.S. extended deterrent”.¹⁷ The upgrade of the B-61 transformed it into a smart bomb with adjustable tail fins and a guidance system to direct it to its target. Moreover, the bomb got adjustable yield. It could be used with a 340-kiloton detonation for counter-city targeting or a 0.3-kiloton detonation for battlefield use. Similar innovations were planned for new cruise missiles.¹⁸

This stood in sharp contrast with President Obama’s pledge to work towards a nuclear free world, which helped him to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Guided by the concept of deterrence by denial, he embarked on a nuclear modernization program for making nuclear weapons more accurate, more deadly, and more usable. He not only modernized the B-61 for making it more usable on the tactical battlefield, but modernized America’s strategic delivery systems as well. For example, he ordered to completely rebuild the Minuteman III ICBM and the Trident SLBM. Furthermore, he approved the upgrade of the relatively new B-2 bomber, and planned a new strategic bomber, the B-21, as well as a new Long Range Stand-Off Weapon to replace the Air Launched Cruise Missile.

In addition, due to changes in the security situation in Europe, for the first time in nearly two decades, Congress discussed non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons. The discussion addressed the imbalance in numbers between U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals and the increased reliance of Russia on these weapons to compensate for the weakness of its conventional forces.¹⁹ Indeed, the war with Georgia as well as the wars in Chechnya revealed the weakness of Russian forces. This led to wide-reaching in-

¹⁵ Text in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>.

¹⁶ The President of the United States of America, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, Washington, April 2010; https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Scot Paltrow, *Special Report: In modernizing nuclear arsenal, U.S. stokes new arms race*, Reuters, 21 November 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nuclear-modernize-specialreport/special-report-in-modernizing-nuclear-arsenal-u-s-stokes-new-arms-race-idUSKBN1DL1AH>

¹⁹ William J. Perry, Chairman and James R. Schlesinger, Vice Chairman: America’s Strategic Posture, The Final Report of the Congress-

initiatives to overcome the disastrous situation among Russia's armed forces through modernization and renewed reliance on its nuclear arsenal.

Undoubtedly, August 2008 was a turning point when Russia waged war with Georgia in response to Georgian provocations and NATO's pledge during the April 2008 Bucharest Summit to accept Georgia and Ukraine as members if they fulfill specified criteria. After the war, the 2010 the Lisbon Summit called on Russia "to meet its commitments with respect to Georgia, as mediated by the European Union on 12 August and 8 September 2008".²⁰ Acting as a peace broker during the war the EU, under French presidency, managed to negotiate a cease-fire between the conflicting parties. After the war the EU established monitoring and fact-finding missions to Georgia and together with the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) hosted peace talks in Geneva.

In response to new security challenges the heads of state and governments "tasked the Council to continue to review NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance, taking into account changes in the evolving international security environment". The review should be undertaken by all allies on the basis of the principles agreed in NATO's Strategic Concept, taking into account WMD and ballistic missile proliferation.

However, the principles spelled out in the new 2010 Strategic Concept *Active Engagement, Modern Defence* were vague and included general observations such as "the conventional threat cannot be ignored", that "deterrence remains an essential element of the overall strategy" and that it should be based on "an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities".²¹ The new strategy did not mention the Russian nuclear threat, but identified the proliferation of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, terrorism, cyber-attacks, and fundamental environmental problems as new and emerging threats.

The resulting *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review* (DDPR) was published in 2010.²² The review confirmed that nuclear weapons remain "a core component of NA-

TO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defense alongside conventional and missile defense forces!. The DDPR said little about the way nuclear weapons could be used: "Allies are committed to providing the resources needed to ensure that NATO's overall deterrence and defence posture remains credible, flexible, resilient, and adaptable, and to implementing the forward-looking package of defense capabilities".

In 2018, President Donald J. Trump embraced the nuclear modernization program of his predecessor. However, his new NPR differed in tone and language. The new NPR was the Administration's answer to the deteriorated security situation, in particular "Russia's adoption of military strategies and capabilities that rely on nuclear escalation for their success".²³ The NPR stated that Russia was transforming its nuclear arsenal and supporting deployment doctrines with nuclear war fighting in mind: "These developments, coupled with Russia's seizure of Crimea and nuclear threats against our allies, mark Moscow's decided return to Great Power competition." The new security situation called for "a flexible, tailored nuclear deterrent strategy", and a "diverse set of nuclear capabilities that provides an American President flexibility".²⁴

The NPR mentioned the modernization of Russian nuclear weapons that actually can be used in Europe as a key challenge: "This includes the production, possession, and flight testing of a ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the INF Treaty. Moscow believes these systems may provide useful options for escalation advantage".²⁵ However, the lack of options in case of an escalating conflict and the limited early first use of nuclear weapons by Russia would suggest "a mistaken expectation that coercive nuclear threats or limited first use could paralyze the United States and NATO and thereby end a conflict on terms favorable to Russia".²⁶ Consequently, the NPR called for a *tailored deterrence strategy* "designed to communicate the costs of aggression to potential adversaries, taking into consideration how they uniquely calculate costs and risks".²⁷ This requires the United States to maintain "the capability to forward deploy nuclear bombers" and to improve "the readiness, survivability, and

sional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, Washington, DC, April 2009, 12–13, 21. http://www.usip.org/files/America's_Strategic_Posture_Auth_Ed.pdf.

²⁰ NATO, *Lisbon Summit Declaration*, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon, 20 November 2010.

²¹ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,, Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, 2010.

²² NATO, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*, Brussels, 20 May 2012.

²³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, February 2018, p. I.

²⁴ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. II.

²⁵ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. 30.

²⁷ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. 26.

operational effectiveness” of those bombers based in Europe.

Most controversial was the NPR’s pledge to “modify a small number of existing SLBM warheads to provide a low-yield option, and in the longer term, pursue a modern nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile”. By arguing that “a low-yield SLBM warhead and SLCM will not require or rely on host nation support”²⁸ Trump precluded on a possible political decision to deny Dual Capable Aircraft (DCA) basing rights in one or more European NATO-member states. Consequently, consistent with the doctrine of deterrence by denial, the new weapons were not meant to enhance deterrence in Europe, but to prevent escalation from tactical nuclear war in Europe to inter-continental nuclear between the United States and Russia. This was consistent with Trump’s American First pledge.

In sum, after the end of the Cold War the nuclear gravity bomb was the only NATO nuclear battlefield capability in use by the United States and its European allies. This capability was complemented by American strategic forces and by British and French nuclear weapons that could be delivered by SLBM and nuclear capable aircraft. Due to the new unipolar world, which emerged after the end of the Cold War and optimism about the security situation in Europe, traditional concepts of deterrence were considered something of past times. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the nuclear debate focused on the security of Russian nuclear weapons. During the first decade of the new century, the focus was on nuclear terrorism and rogue states. But by the end of the first decade of the new century changes in the security situation triggered a new, more traditional debate within NATO. For the first time in nearly two decades, deterrence was again discussed in the context of a reemerging Russian threat. Nevertheless, adaptive planning, which included the possibility of battlefield use against buried and hardened targets that could not be destroyed by conventional bombs, still guided the actual use of nuclear employment. Adaptive planning also applied to strategic nuclear weapons, which would be used in escalating conflicts. Furthermore, more emphasis was put on ballistic missile defense. Consequently, it came as no surprise that President Trump embraced the Obama nuclear modernization program. The real novelty of the NPR 2018 was an America First approach of adaptive planning, or tailored deterrence, that tried to find an answer to changes in Russian military doctrine.

5 Russian Military Doctrine

As late as 1990 there was no equivalent of U.S. nuclear doctrine in the Russian military doctrine. This did not mean, however, that the Soviet Union did not integrate nuclear weapons into its operational plans. On the contrary, more and more analysts have come to the conclusion that the Soviet Union did so to an even greater extent than the United States.²⁹ Soviet analyses considered nuclear weapons useful for both surprise and preemptive strikes.³⁰ Reflecting Russian military weakness after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1993 Russia rejected the Soviet Union’s no first use pledge. Russian theorists were also shocked by the superiority of American air power, specifically precision airstrikes during the Gulf War of 1991. In 1999 Russia concluded that through ‘illegal’ interventions such as the Kosovo War, NATO was willing to harm Russian interests as well. This underscored worries about the enlargement of both NATO and the European Union with former member states of the Warsaw Pact, and new discussions on ballistic missile defenses. As a matter of fact, there was a widespread feeling among Russia’s elite that the West had taken advantage of Russian weaknesses following the collapse of the Soviet Union.³¹

As Russia’s conventional capabilities were deteriorating, this would leave Russia extremely vulnerable. Nuclear weapons were now considered defensive weapons that would not be used for preemptive attack. Consequently, the Russian Federation was forced to increasingly rely on nuclear deterrence. Russian military weakness and worries about any threat to its deterrence capability by NATO BMD greatly influenced the debate among Soviet analysts. During the latter half of the 2000s, failure to agree on the new counting rules and verification regime of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty accelerated the debate on both sides. Unsurprisingly, due to the deteriorating security situation in 2008, Russian assertiveness and rhetoric increased. In 2009 the head of the Presidential Administration Nikolai Patrushev suggested the possibility of preemptive nuclear strikes.³² In addition, in the 2000’s Russian analysts started to focus on the combined use of nuclear and conventional weapons.

The new Russian Military Doctrine, published in 2010, reflected Russian fears about the security situation and

²⁸ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018*, p. 78.

²⁹ Cf. Nielsen 1998, Lunak 2001, Wenzke 2010, Mizokami 2016, Woolf 2017.

³⁰ Mizokami 2016

³¹ For more details see Wijk 2015, 119–129.

³² David Nowak, ‘Report: Russia to allow Pre-emptive Nukes’, *Associated Press*, October 14, 2009.

hinted at increased Russian assertiveness. The doctrine was explicit about the dangers for Russia. It included, among other things, “the desire to endow the force potential of NATO [...] and attempts to move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation”, as well as “the creation and deployment of strategic missile defense systems undermining global stability and violating the established correlation of forces in the nuclear-missile sphere”.³³ This was further elaborated in the National Security Strategy of 2015.³⁴ Both documents, however, did not mention pre-emptive strike.

The new doctrine was explicit about the use of nuclear weapons. On nuclear weapons, the doctrine stated that they “will remain an important factor for preventing the outbreak of nuclear military conflicts and military conflicts involving the use of conventional means of attack.” Unlike the American doctrine, the use of nuclear weapons was not envisioned in case of a large-scale conventional attack. At the same time the doctrine explained that the “prevention of a nuclear military conflict, and likewise any other military conflict, is the Russian Federation’s main task”.³⁵ In addition, nuclear weapons can be used in case of the prospect of defeat by conventional aggression. This was made explicit in the 2014 version of the Russian military doctrine.

Although absent in the military doctrine of 2010, Russian experts believed that the limited use of nuclear weapons might de-escalate the conflict.³⁶ This reflects the concept of deliberate escalation of MC14/3 and European preoccupation with deterrence by punishment. However, as Russia does not distinguish between tactical and strategic weapons, in contrast to NATO, intercontinental missiles might also be used for a tailored nuclear response. The idea is that the consequence of any nuclear strike is so horrific that it would deter the adversary to either escalate or continue.

Following the Russian annexation of the Crimea, President Putin made clear that nuclear weapons were a vital part of Russian deterrence. On August 14, 2014, he declared: “Our partners, regardless of the situations in their countries or their foreign policies, should always keep in mind that Russia is not to be messed with. I want to

remind you that Russia is one of the largest nuclear powers. This is reality, not just words; moreover, we are strengthening our nuclear deterrence forces”.³⁷

As mentioning nuclear weapons and their possible use was a taboo during the Cold War, this statement was a break from the past. Indeed, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter responded by saying that there was no need to say this, as everyone was well aware of Russian nuclear might.³⁸ Former Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, argued similarly that there was no need for nuclear saber rattling.³⁹

The Russian scholar Alexey Arbatov, however, argued that the statement convinced many Russian experts “to complement official military doctrine with ideas of selective use of nuclear weapons and as a “show of resolve” or for the de-escalation of conflict.”⁴⁰ He argued that Soviet and Russian strategic thinking was very different from that of the United States and its allies. However, in reality, the new thinking reflected the discussions that took place in NATO in the 1960s and resulted in MC 14/3. The cruise missile that could violate the INF-treaty mentioned above, as well as new nuclear weapons designed to circumvent American Ballistic Missile Defenses announced by President Putin in March 2018 reflect the wish for more flexibility in targeting and nuclear battlefield dominance. The new RS-28 Sarmat, a land-based ICBM, was said to be able to arc over the North Pole as well as over the South Pole to strike the American continent, and the Status-6, a nuclear-powered unmanned, nuclear armed underwater drone that could be launched from a submarine might hit the United States from long distance.⁴¹

Unlike NATO during the 1960s, the Russian debate is to be seen against the backdrop of a broad and generic understanding of ‘conventional inferiority’ and a somewhat artificial notion of ‘encirclement’: there is no massing of foreign troops on the immediate border of Russia as it was the case with Germany and its allies during the period of the Cold War.

³³ Text of the *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, approved by Russian Federation presidential edict on 5 February 2010.

³⁴ *Russian National Security Strategy*, December 2015. <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>

³⁵ *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2010. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_militaryDoctrine.pdf

³⁶ Bruusgaard 2016, 12.

³⁷ Quoted by Arbatov 2017, 33.

³⁸ Margaret Brennan, ‘Carter Laments Putin’s “Loose Rhetoric” on Nukes’, *CBS News*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ash-carter-russia-vladimir-putin-loose-rhetoric-nuclear-missiles-nato/>.

³⁹ ‘Nato Chief Says Russian Nuclear Threats Are “Deeply Troubling and Dangerous”’, *The Guardian*, 28 May 2015.

⁴⁰ Arbatov 2017, 33.

⁴¹ Andrew Osborn, “Putin, before vote, unveils ‘invincible’ nuclear weapons to counter West”, *Reuters*, 1 March 2018.

6 Strategic deterrence

The key innovation, however, was not innovative thinking on the use of nuclear weapons, but the much broader concept of strategic deterrence. As Kristin Ven Buusgaard put it: “doubts about nuclear deterrence have contributed to the creation of a more comprehensive concept, aimed at offering Russia more than tactical nuclear options”.⁴² This approach was aimed at finding solutions for what Russia calls non-military warfare, which includes sanctions and other threats to the Russian economic base, cyber and disinformation campaigns by foreign powers, and the consequences of relatively peaceful Color Revolutions that took place in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia and could trigger similar reactions in Russia.

Consequently, the concept of deterrence now included non-nuclear and non-military options. The 2010 doctrine’s adherence to the emphasis of political, diplomatic, legal, economic, environmental, informational, military, technical, and other instruments for the protection of national interests hinted at the emerging concept of strategic deterrence. The doctrine mentioned that one of the Russian Federation’s main tasks in deterring and preventing military conflicts is “to neutralize possible military dangers and military threats using political, diplomatic, and other nonmilitary means”.⁴³

The Russian National Security Strategy of December 2015 was more explicit on strategic deterrence and defined the concept as “interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures are being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts. These measures are intended to prevent the use of armed force against Russia, and to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts are achieved by maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence at a sufficient level, and the Russian Federation Armed Forces, other troops, and military formations and bodies at the requisite level of combat readiness”.⁴⁴

The new concept of strategic deterrence included offensive and defensive, military and non-military deterrent tools and was nothing less than a comprehensive concept

for cross-domain coercion, one that combines all instruments of power in a single concept. This concept of strategic deterrence would greatly enhance the policy options for Russian leaders.

The concept of strategic deterrence reflects the centralized and autocratic nature of the Russian political system in more than one sense: First, it reflects the fact that Russia is being ruled by an autocratic and partially kleptocratic elite, which is increasingly being dependent on emphasizing international tensions and conflicts as an instrument of maintaining its domestic legitimacy. Secondly, this system allows the Russian leadership to develop doctrines aimed at achieving unity in effort that cannot be achieved in democracies. Strategic deterrence merges coercion with deterrence and can be applied in times of peace and war. In this context, the main task of the armed forces was “to ensure strategic deterrence, including the prevention of military conflicts”.⁴⁵ Alongside military power, other important factors allowing states to influence international politics are taking center stage, including economic, legal, technological, and IT capabilities. Using these capabilities to pursue geopolitical interests is detrimental to efforts to find ways to settle disputes and resolve the existing international issues by peaceful means on the basis of the norms of international law. Analysts in the West labeled the concept of strategic deterrence “hybrid warfare” and concluded that this would be the main threat in peacetime and during wars.

In addition to traditional methods of diplomacy, the concept of ‘soft power’ has become an integral part of Russia’s efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives. Soft power was aimed at the civil societies of the West and could be strengthened by various methods and technologies, including (dis)information and communication. The concept was introduced in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 as a complement to diplomatic methods and was linked to Russian views on ‘controlled chaos.’ President Putin first used the latter term in 2012 when he was arguing that the West was using various methods to destabilize Russia.⁴⁶ Controlled chaos adequately describes the nature of modern coercion as an ongoing effort to destabilize the opponent through subversion and economic means in peacetime and a combination of regular and irregular warfare operations in wartime by regular forces alongside rebels, criminal gangs, terrorists, and secret operations with Special Operations Forces and Spetsnaz.

⁴² Bruusgaard 2016, 10.

⁴³ *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2010, paragraph. 19.b.

⁴⁴ Translation of the *Russian National Security Strategy*: <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>. The original text: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/18iXkR8X-LAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>.

⁴⁵ *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 25 December 2014. <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>

⁴⁶ Persson 2017, 7.

The new doctrinal thinking on strategic deterrence, soft power, and controlled chaos raises questions in regard to NATO's ability to deter and defend itself against cross-domain coercion.

7 Can the West counter strategic deterrence?

There are strong indications that NATO cannot cope with cross-domain coercion and strategic deterrence, which can be summarized as war via the 5Ds: de-stabilization, disinformation, strategic deception, disruption, and destruction.⁴⁷ First, understanding cross-domain coercion requires the kind of doctrinal thinking that is absent in NATO. Deterrence theory in the West is primarily considered as a military strategy for conflict prevention and the control of escalation if conflicts break out. For Western military thinkers' deterrence is about symmetric responses during crises and war in a clearly defined theater of operations. Moreover, the West's deterrence theory largely ignores non-military aspects of power. Second, there is the political dimension, which is linked to alliance solidarity. President Trump's rhetoric caused uneasiness in Europe about the credibility of America's commitment and consequently of extended deterrence. Before and during his first weeks in office, Trump said that NATO was obsolete, but during his first meeting with NATO leaders in Brussels he pledged that NATO was no longer obsolete. This therefore reflects Trump's inconsistent and mixed views on the alliance.⁴⁸ Third, European solidarity has weakened. Regarding refugees and immigration there is a lack of solidarity between the north and the south. In addition, as northern EU member states accuse southern member states of not transforming their economies enough, there is also lack of economic solidarity. Regarding security there is a lack of solidarity between western and eastern EU and NATO member states. In case of Russian aggression against the Baltic States, this could raise doubts about solidarity, especially if the aggression does not constitute a clear-cut violation of the collective defense pledge of Article 5 of the NATO-treaty. This could be the case if Russia carries out a cross border operation to protect Russian minorities in the Baltic States. Such an aggression will undoubtedly go hand in hand with fake

news and propaganda aimed at undermining alliance solidarity.

These observations raise important questions about the effectiveness of deterrence, in both Article 5 and non-article 5 situations. The key question is what to deter. A limited attack on the Baltic States is a remote possibility, but one which military planners must consider. This requires classical, straightforward deterrence with strong conventional forces backed up by nuclear weapons.

A second scenario is fabricated unrest in the Baltic States or in one of the so-called frozen conflicts, as part of a plan to establish a neutral buffer zone. As this scenario will not necessarily trigger Article 5 of the NATO treaty, it requires a completely different approach to deterrence.

The same holds true for the third scenario, i. e. a subversion aimed at weakening Transatlantic and European solidarity. This scenario could precede the first two scenarios.

A fourth possible scenario is a Russian attack on undersea cables. As those cables transmit 97 percent of global communications and about \$10 trillion in daily financial transactions, the economies of NATO member states could be hit catastrophically. For this reason Air Chief Marshall Sir Steward Peach, the Chief of the British Defense Staff, said that NATO should prioritize protecting the lines of communication.⁴⁹ Depending on the disruption of economies, the attack on undersea cables might constitute an Article 5 situation, one that could ultimately require a very strong response.

How credible are NATO's forces if solidarity is not the issue, subversion has no effect, and NATO is willing to use force? To deter aggression against the Baltic States, NATO faces four important challenges: readiness, deployability, access, and maldeployment:

- **Readiness.** A series of war games conducted between summer 2014 and spring 2015 by the RAND Corporation found NATO cannot successfully defend the Baltic States: “using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours”.⁵⁰ Another study found that only Britain, France, and Germany could each deploy and sustain a heavy brigade, albeit at different rates.⁵¹ Britain and France would be able to deploy and sustain a battalion sized combined arms battle group

⁴⁷ Allen/Breedlove/Lindley-French/Zambellas 2017, 11.

⁴⁸ Jenna Johnson, Trump on NATO: ‘I said it was obsolete. It’s no longer obsolete.’ *The Washington Post*, 12 April 2017.

⁴⁹ ‘Russia a “risk” to undersea cables, defense chief warns’, *BBC*, 15 December 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42362500>

⁵⁰ Shlapak/Johnson 2016.

⁵¹ Shurkin 2016.

within a few weeks. It would take a few weeks for France to deploy a brigade and possibly more than a month for the Brits and the Germans. A positive development is NATO's decision at the 2014 Wales Summit to incorporate a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the overall NRF structure. Simultaneously, the NRF was increased to 40,000, providing NATO with flexible air, land, maritime, and Special Forces packages. Nevertheless, the number of high readiness forces remains limited. Reinforcing the Baltic States raises important questions on crisis stability. For example, waiting to reinforce the Baltic States until an escalating crisis mounts will most likely trigger preventive or preemptive attacks by Russia and will thus weaken crisis stability and lower the nuclear threshold.

- **Deployability** is the ability to move troops across the European theater. In times of crises the member states are likely to remove all the 'roadblocks' such as border controls and infrastructure issues to be able to quickly move troops to the Baltic States. But removing the roadblocks during escalating crises could weaken crisis stability. Thus, NATO needs a military Schengen Zone; one that allows the free movement of troops in Europe to ensure that units and equipment arrive in the right time and place. Military mobility will be dealt with in the new EU program on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).
- **Access** is the third challenge. A military Schengen Zone is useless if NATO does not have access. NATO is seriously challenged by anti-access and area denial capabilities (A2/AD) which could affect NATO's response in both Article 5 and sub-Article 5 situations. A2/AD consists of a vast array of Russian offensive and defensive military capabilities against the enemy's ground, naval, and air forces, including capabilities for electronic warfare that constitute 'bubbles', 'bastions' or exclusion zones around the Kola peninsula, Kaliningrad, the Crimea and western Syria. Effective A2/AD prevents NATO from deploying forces in the Scandinavian waters and the Baltic States and will deny NATO air superiority.⁵² Consequently, both classical deterrence and collective defense can only be strengthened when NATO decides to modernize its armed forces to counter the A2/AD challenge.
- **Maldeployment** is the fourth challenge. During the Cold War maldeployment referred to the imbalance of troops between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Soviet

numerical superiority was balanced by better quality of the West's conventional forces and better nuclear flexibility. Unfortunately, maldeployment is a more urgent challenge today than during the Cold War. In those days NATO had a layered defense along the inner German border and a nuclear strategy of deliberate escalation. But 'the correlation of forces' (on land) in the Baltic area is very unfavorable. The VJTF comprises of a multinational brigade (approximately 5,000 troops), with up to five maneuver battalions. The VHRF and other forward deployed troops, together with the armed forces of the Baltic States, are no match for the forces stationed in the Russian Western Military District (WEST) which was established in September 2010 and includes the military district of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Northern and Baltic Fleets, and the 1st Air Force and Air Defense Command. WEST comprises approximately some 400,000 troops with some 65,000 troops including tanks and artillery pieces in close proximity to the Baltic States. As the Baltic States are unable to cope with the Russian threat, armed forces deployed in the Baltic States are tripwires in case Russian arms start attacking NATO territory. These tripwires, however, are not very credible. As sufficient reinforcements are unlikely to arrive in time, rapid reinforcement does not constitute credible deterrence. It does not even constitute an instrument for crisis management if NATO cannot solve the issues of readiness and access.

To deter Russia, NATO has three theoretical options, all of which have their advantages and drawbacks:

- **Conventional deterrence** is NATO's preferred option. This is about deterrence by denial, but it is difficult to understand how this type of deterrence can be credible if insufficient numbers of troops are available for the defense of the Baltic States. To credibly deter by denial, European NATO member states need to address the four challenges mentioned above. In addition, the United States will need to deploy an additional division in Poland. In the future, the Prompt Global Strike or conventionally armed Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) could provide extra flexibility. The same holds true for conventionally armed ballistic missiles and cruise missiles deployed in Europe.
- **Nuclear response.** If conventional deterrence is not credible, the nuclear threshold will be lowered. In addition, the vulnerability of European and American DCA for A2/AD might lower the threshold for a strategic nuclear response. As this is an unattractive

⁵² Much has been written about the A2/AD challenge. A good overview is Fruhling/ Lasconjarias 2016.

prospect, renewed interests in intermediate range nuclear and conventional missiles in Europe can be expected. Another trigger for such a debate is the deployment by Russia of dual capable missiles in Kaliningrad and the development of a new intermediate range, nuclear capable cruise missile that could violate the INF treaty.

- **Asymmetric deterrence.** In case of aggression against the Baltic States, NATO could refrain from fighting Russia in the Baltic States, but respond asymmetrically with all power instruments available. This could also involve deterrence by punishment, i. e. limited nuclear strikes to convince Russia to terminate hostilities.

8 Towards a new concept of deterrence

The United States and its European allies in Europe have no other choice but to give up traditional thinking of deterrence and develop a new concept, one based on asymmetry and cross-domain coercion and one that can be applied both in Article 5 and sub-Article 5 situations. This requires understanding of the concept of coercion. I define coercion as the deliberate and targeted use – or threat of use – of power instruments to manipulate and influence the politico-strategic choices of an actor defined as an entity that plays an identifiable role in international relations.⁵³ The actor could be a state or a non-state actor. Deterrence requires military and non-military, defensive and offensive measures. This requires close cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

Improving defensive measures requires state leaders as well as NATO and the EU to enhance societal and physical resilience. An EU study defined resilience as “the capacity to withstand stress and recover from shocks during or crises”, which should strengthen “critical infrastructure networks (e.g. energy, transportation, space), protecting public health and food security, enhancing cybersecurity, tackling radicalization and violent extremism, strengthening strategic communication, developing relevant defense capabilities, and improving relations with third countries”.⁵⁴ Enhancing resilience requires close cooperation between the public and private sectors to protect, for example, cyber-infrastructure.

As a first step, enhancing resilience requires journalists and experts to expose disinformation. Tech companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Facebook should remove fake news and bot-generated contents and ban political advertisements.

Reducing dependence on Russian imports of oil and gas is a drastic way to enhance resilience. The EU imports more than half of the energy it consumes and many member states are heavily reliant on Russian imports. Import reductions or import stops constitute a powerful instrument of coercion. The European Commission recognized this after the annexation of the Crimea in March 2014 with the release of its Energy Security Strategy. The strategy called for energy security stress tests to simulate drops in the import of Russian natural gas. Based on the strategy and analyses of the stress test, the EU proposed measures to reduce energy dependency from Russia through diversifying supplier countries, the development of renewables, and increased energy efficiency.⁵⁵

Regarding offensive measures, the new concept of deterrence should spell out how the politico-strategic choices of Russia can be manipulated with a broad range of instruments of power, including political, diplomatic, military, economic, legal, informational, and other instruments. This approach is the NATO and EU equivalent of the Russian concept of strategic deterrence and cross-domain coercion. Moreover, the concept must explain how NATO and the EU might defend against Russian cross-domain coercion or hybrid threats through asymmetric response.

Asymmetric deterrence is not only about military responses, but also about NATO cross-domain coercion with other instruments of power. In case of an Article 5 contingency, maldistribution, the lack of readiness, and deployability as well as the need to save a NATO member state from destruction, an answer could be found by an asymmetric attack on high value target. For example, intervention in the Baltic States could be answered by attacks on Russia’s military bases on the Crimea with standoff weapons, devastating economic sanctions, and cyber-attacks, electronic warfare aimed at destroying the adversary’s capabilities for command, control, communications, intelligence and surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR), and ultimately the demonstrative use of nuclear weapons. A devastating Russian attack on undersea cables could trigger a similar asymmetric response.

⁵³ Wijk 2014, 16.

⁵⁴ Pawlak 2017.

⁵⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, *European Energy Security Strategy*, Brussels, SWD(2014) 330 final, 28 May 2014.

In sub-Article 5 situations the number of options is larger. Attacking or blocking its lifelines or inter-connectivities will damage or even destroy the Russian economy and is likely to change the strategic calculus of its leadership. Coercion requires the concerted use of ‘instruments of disruption’ for blocking Russia’s free flow of forces, goods, data, and economic and financial transactions. This could require the use of force, sanctions, boycotts, cyber-attacks, the banning foreign direct investments (FDI) and state owned enterprises (SOE), the disruption of financial networks, denying imports and exports of raw materials and energy, the blocking of physical transport links, restricting the movement of people and information operations.

In practice, asymmetric deterrence means that economic sanctions can be answered with cyber-attacks; fake news and propaganda can be answered by targeted cyber strikes and blocking the Internet; and political interference can be answered by targeted sanctions. This requires, however, a degree of strategic thinking that is absent in the Western world.

9 Precedents

Interestingly, asymmetric deterrence has recent precedents. On 17 April 2014, following the annexation of the Crimea, the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution opposing the South Stream gas pipeline and recommended alternative gas supplies for the EU. Subsequently, the European Commission used the laws of the EU’s Third Energy Package, a collection of laws that took effect in September 2009 with the aim of opening up European gas and electricity markets that bans suppliers from owning pipelines, to attack Gazprom’s South Stream pipeline. The proposed pipeline was to provide gas from Russia to Bulgaria, Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia and Slovenia by circumventing Ukraine. As a matter of fact, the European Union’s laws would in particular affect the South Stream pipeline, in which Russia’s Gazprom holds a fifty percent stake. European officials warned Gazprom it would have to allow third-party gas producers to use the South Stream pipeline. Despite a complaint filed at the World Trade Organization by Russia, president Putin had no other choice but to give up the entire project, blaming Western sanctions and EU’s competition rules, thus acknowledging that sanctions were successful.

Second, in response to the annexation of the Crimea, subsequent troop build-ups and fears that Russia might carry out an intervention in Ukraine to establish a land corridor to the Crimea, both the EU and the United States

discussed whether Russia could be denied access to the SWIFT financial messaging system. Potentially, this could have crippled the Russian economy. At the time, few people knew about the plans to decouple Russia from the SWIFT network.⁵⁶ Only in Ukraine did rumors circulate that the main Russian bank in the Crimea was informed that the connection to the SWIFT-network would be terminated as of 31 August 2014. In an official statement on 6 October 2014, SWIFT acknowledged that it “and its stakeholders have received calls to disconnect institutions and entire countries from its network – most recently Israel and Russia”. SWIFT said it regretted the pressure, as well as the surrounding media speculation, “both of which risk undermining the systemic character of the services that SWIFT provides its customers around the world”. Swift itself “has no authority to make sanctions decisions (...) Any decision to impose sanctions on countries or individual entities rests solely with the competent government bodies and applicable legislators. Being EU-based, SWIFT complies fully with all applicable European law”.⁵⁷

It is hard to judge if coercive action did indeed deter Russia from further actions in Ukraine. But both cases make clear that the EU is capable of coercion and asymmetric responses. Needless to say that for democracies it is extremely difficult to counter hybrid threats collectively and in a concerted way. Democratic checks and balances, stove piped bureaucracies, and national priorities prevent the development and implementation of a Western equivalent of the Russian concept of strategic deterrence. This was demonstrated in Afghanistan and Iraq. Concepts such as the Whole of Government Approach and Defense, Diplomacy, and Development demanded a level of unity in command that could not be achieved due to the restricting caveats demanded by politicians and bureaucrats.

⁵⁶ Brett LoGiurato, ‘The UK Has A Plan To Cut Off Russian Businesses From The Rest Of The World’, *Business Insider*, 29 August 2015 <http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-sanctions-swift-banking-ban-ukraine-putin-2014-8?international=true&r=US&IR=T> and Kenneth Papoza, ‘Russia To Retaliate If Bank’s Given SWIFT Kick’, *Forbes*, 27 January 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2015/01/27/russia-to-retaliate-if-banks-given-swift-kick/#6ba4634c652e>

⁵⁷ SWIFT statement of October 6, 2016. <https://www.swift.com/news-events/press-releases/swift-sanctions-statement>.

10 EU-NATO cooperation

Outsourcing the response to NATO or the EU is equally difficult. Both NATO and the EU are collections of sovereign states that are reluctant to give up sovereignty in the field of security and defense policies. Consequently, if well executed by Russia, neither NATO nor the EU could have an adequate answer to this challenge. As strategic deterrence blurs the distinction between war and peace, additional challenges will be created because aggression does not necessarily constitute an Article 5 situation that would automatically trigger collective defense.

Strategic deterrence or hybrid threats force both the EU and NATO towards closer cooperation, especially for countering non-Article 5 threats. NATO is a military alliance focusing on deterrence with hard power including offensive cyber operations, whilst the EU deters mainly using soft power, rules, and economic instruments. Both organizations are complementary and together they are ideally suited for cross-domain coercion and asymmetric deterrence. As this is recognized by both organizations, new initiatives have been taken including:

- A common strategy to counter hybrid threats: In July 2016 EU-NATO adopted a joint declaration on countering hybrid and cyber threats in the margins of the Warsaw NATO Summit.⁵⁸ Subsequently, both organizations adopted measures to ensure better coordination, situational awareness, strategic communication, crisis response, and bolstering of resilience. Interestingly, Finland established the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in 2017. Finland, which is not a member of NATO, invited both EU and NATO member states to sign a memorandum of understanding.
- Initiatives to counter subversion: Both the EU's European External Action Service East StratCom Task Force and the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence in Latvia play an important role in combatting propaganda and fake news. For countering fake news and disinformation a common EU and NATO narrative and strategic communication must be developed. This should be complemented by similar initiatives at a national level.
- Initiatives on cyber security: In 2013 the EU adopted its Cyber Security Strategy of the EU titled *An Open, Safe and Secure Cyber Space*. In July 2016, NATO Allies

recognized cyberspace as a domain of operations in which NATO must defend itself collectively and effectively. NATO signed a Technical Arrangement on cyber defense cooperation with the EU in February 2016, committing them to enhance information-sharing and mutual assistance in preventing, mitigating, and recovering from cyber-attacks. In July 2016 NATO member states made a Cyber Defense Pledge to enhance their cyber defenses

Crucially, crisis stability should figure prominently in the upcoming strategic debate on deterrence. First, crisis stability should be discussed in the context of reinforcing the Baltic States and exercises. Second, crisis stability requires dusting off of the crisis management mechanism developed by the member states of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) during the Cold War. This includes in particular non-military confidence building measures, military security building measures, arms control, early action and crisis response, mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and early warning on security concerns. Third, crisis stability requires knowledge about deterrence and cross-domain coercion. Unfortunately history demonstrates that most decision makers lack a fundamental understanding of the nature of crisis and crisis escalation. Effective crisis management requires investing in crisis informatics, the development of metrics of effectiveness for crisis intervention and a doctrine of asymmetric deterrence that builds on concepts such as coercion and escalation control.⁵⁹

11 Conclusion

The West's thinking on deterrence is still rooted in the Cold War. But the Russian concept of strategic deterrence or hybrid warfare requires a complete overhaul of NATO's traditional theories of deterrence, which are based on the more or less symmetric use of conventional force backed up by nuclear weapons as the ultimate security guarantee. The Russian concept of strategic deterrence focuses on Article 5 and non-Article 5 situations, as well as the prevention of conflict and escalation control if conflict breaks out with military and non-military means. Interestingly, the Russian concept of strategic deterrence provides many clues on a future response by NATO that should be based on a similar idea of cross-domain coercion and the use of military and non-military instruments of power. Crucially,

⁵⁸ Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw, 8 July 2016. https://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

⁵⁹ See Sweijts/Usanov/Rutten 2016, 55–62.

as the defense of the Baltic States will remain impossible solely by military means in the foreseeable future, the new concept should be based on the principle of asymmetric deterrence. As a new concept of deterrence involves both military and non-military means, the development of such a concept is a challenge that should be accepted by the present NATO and EU leaderships.

Literature

- Allen, John/ Breedlove, Philip M./ Lindley-French, Julian/ Zambellas, George (2017): Future War NATO? From Hybrid War to Hyper War via Cyber War. Bratislava; GlobSec (NATO Initiative), <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GNAI-Future-War-NATO-JLF-et-al.pdf>.
- Arbatov, Alexey (2017): Understanding the US-Russian Nuclear Schism, *Survival*, 59 (2) 33–46.
- Brodie, Bernard (1959): *Strategy in the Missile Age*. Princeton; Princeton University Press.
- Brodie, Bernard (1973): *War and Politics*. London: Collier.
- Bruusgaard, Kristin Ven (2016): Russian Strategic Deterrence, *Survival*, 58 (4) 7–26.
- Fruhling, Stephan/Lasconjarias, Guillaume (2016): NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge, *Survival*, 58 (2) 95–116.
- Kissinger, Henry A. (1974): *Kernwaffen und auswärtige Politik*. München; Oldenbourg.
- Lunak, Petr (2001): Planning for Nuclear War. The Czechoslovak War Plan of 1964. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, (Zürich: ETHZ) 12–13, 289–298.
- Mizokami, Kyle (2016): Revealed: How the Warsaw Pact Planned to Win World War Three in Europe. *The National Interest*, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/revealed-how-the-warsaw-pact-planned-win-world-war-three-16822> ;
- Nielsen, Harald (1998): *Die DDR und die Kernwaffen. Die nukleare Rolle der Nationalen Volksarmee im Warschauer Pakt*. Baden-Baden; Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Osgood, Robert E. (1958): *Limited War. The Challenge in American Strategy*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press.
- Pawlak, Patryk (2017): *Countering Hybrid Threats: EU-NATO Cooperation*. Brüssel; European Parliamentary Research Service, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599315/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)599315_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599315/EPRS_BRI(2017)599315_EN.pdf)
- Persson, Gudrun (2017): *The War of the Future*. Rom; NATO Defense College.
- Shlapak, David A./ Johnson, Michael W. (2016): *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.
- Shurkin, Michael (2016): *The Abilities of the British, French, and German Armies to Generate and Sustain Armored Brigades in the Baltics*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.
- Sweijts, Tim/ Usanov, Artur/ Rutten, Rik (2016): *Back to the Brink: Escalation and Interstate Crises*. Den Haag: HCSS StratMon.
- Wenzke, Rüdiger (Hrsg.) (2010): *Die Streitkräfte der DDR und Polens in der Operationsplanung des Warschauer Paktes, Potsdam; Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*.
- Wijk, Rob de (2014): *The Art of Military Coercion*. Amsterdam; Amsterdam University Press.
- Wijk, Rob de (2015): *Power Politics: How China and Russia Reshape the World*. Amsterdam; Amsterdam University Press.
- Woolf, Amy F. (2017): *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons*. Washington, D. C.; Congressional Research Service.