



# ASSURED RESOLVE

## Testing Possible Challenges to Baltic Security

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## About the Authors



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### Cover Photo

For the last 10 to 14 years, Europe's security has been considered relatively stable. This no longer is the case, with Russia carrying out acts of intimidation across the continent, aiming to divide Europe internally and separate it from the United States. In February 2016, the Center for A New American Security conducted a tabletop exercise designed to help allies on both sides of the Atlantic prepare for future challenges. (CNAS adapted image from iStock)

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## I. Introduction

For the better part of the past two decades, the world's attention has been consumed by a string of crises in the Middle East and Asia. From conventional wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to Chinese acts of aggression in the East and South China Seas to the spread of radical jihadism and accompanying acts of terror, these two regions have been at the heart of U.S. national security policies and operations for some time now. Europe, by contrast, seemed to be the exception. While the financial crisis in 2008 raised serious questions about the future of the euro, Europe's security situation was largely considered stable for much of the last 10 to 14 years. It faced few, if any, existential or strategic threats and possessed sufficient capabilities to address any tactical threats. Today, however, that premise no longer holds true.

Despite countless efforts since the fall of the Berlin Wall to fold Russia into both Western institutions and a community of shared values, Russia's relationship with the West has deteriorated significantly in recent years. There were warning signs – President Vladimir Putin's fiery speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 and, more troubling, the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008. But there were also occasional breakthroughs, such as the signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 2010 that gave the West the impression that relations with Russia were, at least in broad terms, on a positive trajectory.

The hope behind such cooperative efforts and what they might deliver in the future faded to black in 2012 when Putin returned to his position as president, a post he earlier held from 2000 to 2008. Since 2012, Putin has rolled back democratic reforms at home, used force to illegally seize the territory of neighboring states, violated international norms and laws, and used economic coercion to advance his agenda. Across the European continent, Russia is carrying out acts of intimidation designed to divide Europe from within and divide Europe from the United States. Such acts regularly include snap exercises along neighboring borders; overflights into countries' sovereign airspace; efforts to incite anger among Russian minorities living in Europe; aggressive disinformation campaigns; and direct support to anti-EU and anti-immigrant parties across Europe.

In an unexpected twist, Russia has also exacerbated the threat to Europe's south – the war in Syria and the

resulting migration crisis. Putin's official line is that Russia went into Syria to fight the Islamic State group. But in truth, Russian airstrikes have targeted primarily opposition forces that the West supports, which has helped Bashar al-Assad's regime regain territory and consequently driven more migrants toward Europe. In essence, Russia has “weaponized migration”<sup>1</sup> by deliberately flooding Europe with refugees with the hope that it will break European resolve.

The West should draw a number of important lessons from the events of the last few years. First, with Russia deliberately working to destabilize the European continent, Europe and the United States need to revisit their core assumptions about European security. Second, Russia's actions reveal a proclivity for the element of surprise, for which the West has to prepare itself accordingly. Third, Russia is relying on a full spectrum of unconventional and conventional tools to intimidate and influence neighboring states, and the West needs to develop innovative ways to counter those tools.

In an effort to better prepare both sides of the Atlantic to grapple with such challenges, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) conducted a tabletop exercise (TTX) in Washington in February 2016. Spanning two days, the TTX, titled Assured Resolve, featured nearly 50 high-level participants from Europe and the United States, enabling current and former officials to identify gaps in strategy, statecraft, and capabilities. The purpose of the exercise was twofold: to explore assumptions about possible national and multinational responses to future Russian provocations and to examine in real time the threshold for action on the part of international organizations such as NATO and national capitals.

Participants were divided into five teams: the U.S. government, NATO, and the Nordics, as well as the fictitious countries of Baltia and Grosland (the aggressor). These two latter teams were intended to reflect the current dynamics between the Baltic states and Russia, respectively. All five teams were presented with three sequential moves designed to climb the escalation ladder during the two days of the exercise.

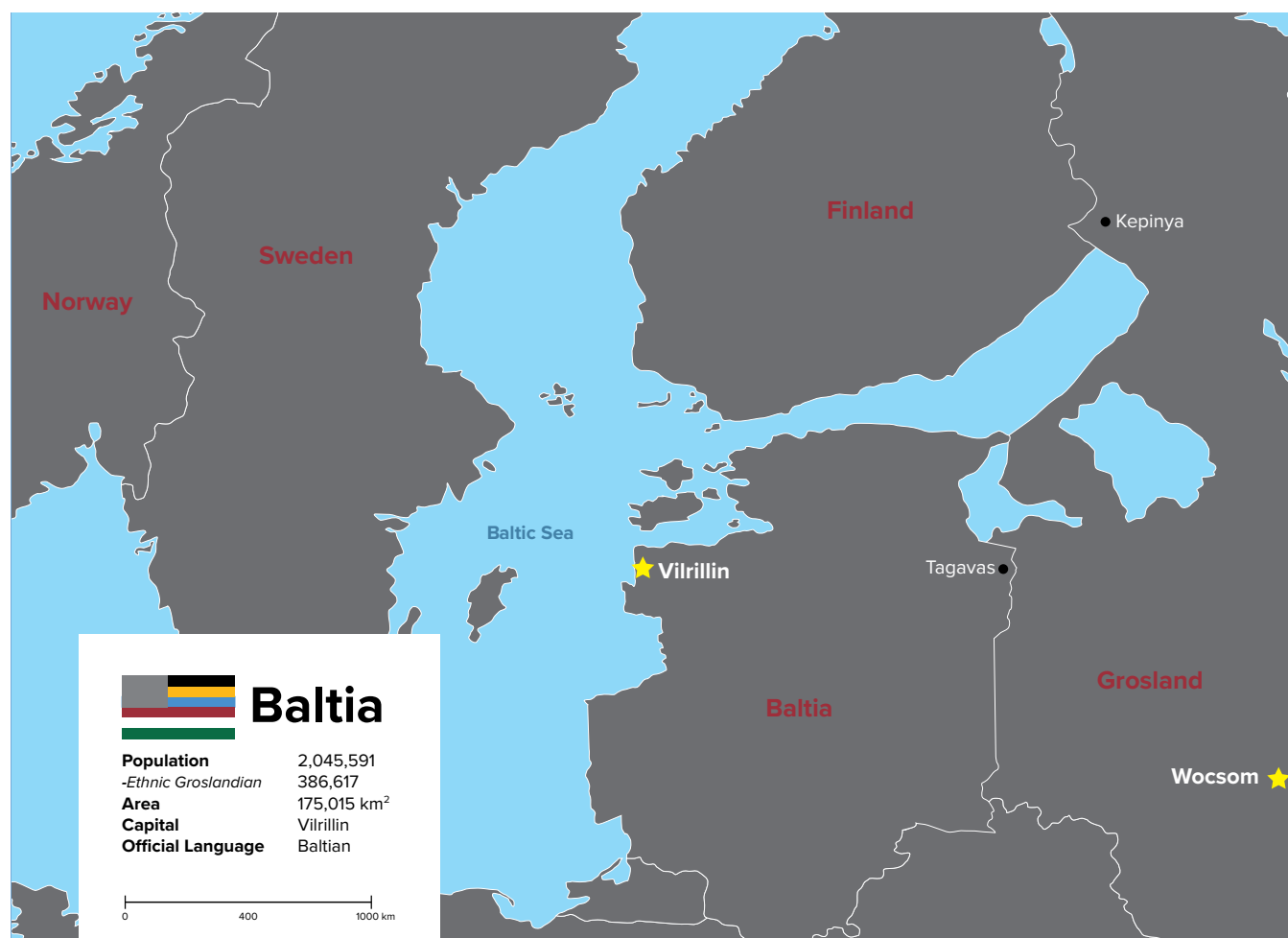
Move One began with lower-level conflict inside Baltia that featured a Groslandian incitement and strategic communications campaign to test Western responses



to the provocative actions. To determine the viability of bilateral Nordic partnerships with the Baltic states and broader regional dynamics, Move Two presented participants with three near-simultaneous incidents: Groslandian threats to cut off energy supplies to Baltia paired with a Groslandian cyber provocation in the face of oil price disputes between the two countries and the unintentional downing of a European commercial airliner (caused by a Groslandian jet that had turned off its transponder on a probing mission). Finally, Move Three introduced a conventional but accidental military conflict after Groslandian troops entered Baltian territory during a training exercise and Baltian troops tried to arrest them. Teams met in two-hour blocks for each move, developing their responses and interacting with one another through face-to-face meetings. At the end of each two-hour block, participants convened as a group to share insights, responses, and challenges with each individual move.

This report captures the key insights and recommendations from Assured Resolve for policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic. While it is impossible to predict the future, we believe that tabletop exercises like this are a useful, underutilized, and unique way to test assumptions, expose policy shortcomings, assess risk, and generate new ideas and solutions. CNAS plans to continue to refine and expand this project model to look at other regions and challenges around the world.

***Both Europe and the United States need to revisit their core assumptions about European security.***



*In order to examine potential scenarios of conflict and identify areas of tension, the Assured Resolve tabletop exercise created the fictitious country of Baltia, blending together many of the attributes of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. (CNAS)*

## II. Key Insights

Foremost among the takeaways from CNAS' Assured Resolve exercise is that the target of Russian action is the alliance itself; specifically, the critical bonding and mutual reliance among NATO members and their partners. There is no higher grand strategic goal of Putin's foreign policy than the weakening and ultimate dissolution of the NATO alliance through the undermining of mutual trust and respect among its members. Conversely, from the vantage point of the NATO members and even the non-NATO Nordic nations, there is no higher security interest among the North American and European powers than affirming the enduring central importance and strength of the alliance and transatlantic unity.

However, aspirational language aside, it is clear that at present NATO and a number of its partners offer an alluring target for Putin's machinations. Russian activities across the span of its borders, from Georgia to Crimea, from Ukraine to Syria, have revealed a two-tiered structure within the NATO alliance. On the one side are those members that would take an active role in confronting Russian aggression. On the other are those that, not feeling immediately threatened or being otherwise occupied with other fiscal, social, and security challenges, would prefer to defer response until the threat is more immediate. The schism between the two camps generally breaks down between NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom previously toiled under the lash of the Soviet Union, and those in Southern Europe that are literally watching thousands of migrants arrive on their shores as a result of the ongoing instability in North Africa and the Middle East.



*NATO member states remain divided on the most pressing threats they face, with some focused to Europe's East and others more concerned with threats from the South. Here, Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Philip Breedlove and Germany's Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen discuss NATO issues at the February 10, 2016 defense ministers meeting in Brussels. (Reuters)*

The fact is, Europe, the United States, and the institutions they built 60 to 70 years ago, most notably NATO, are not institutionally structured to accommodate this schism. The founding governing principles of NATO, implicitly based upon consensus, conceived by a small number of Western European and North American nations, appear unwieldy when applied by a larger number of nations across the span of the Northern Hemisphere. An additional complication derives from the fact that NATO as a whole has underinvested in its military forces for decades and thus finds itself now ill-prepared to deter Putin or respond effectively should Russia launch a large-scale or even small-scale invasion of an alliance member. NATO is also ill-equipped to deter and recover from any number of low-level hybrid tactics currently on display through Russian actions in the region. This sad state of affairs represents the culmination of a series of trends within the alliance.

### Strategy

It is now clear that, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the growth of the alliance was not accompanied by a necessary robust debate among the NATO members as to how the alliance's strategy, procedures, and tactics should evolve in the face of new members and new threats. Assumptions of continued Russian weakness have proved false, and the previous consensus, which centered on an anti-Soviet strategy, dissolved without the formulation of a suitable replacement. In fact, the ability to reach agreement on the nature of the threat and the appropriate strategy, even one as seemingly benign as deterrence against attack, appears to be the largest challenge facing NATO as an institution – a challenge that is exacerbated by the internal difficulties of its disparate members. This inability to achieve a new strategic vision and equilibrium has numerous secondary and tertiary effects.

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During the Assured Resolve exercise, it quickly became apparent that the traditional balance among deterrence, response, and escalation is dangerously offset. During



*Former members of the USSR that lie along Russia's border are concerned by Moscow's large-scale and well-coordinated military exercises, which often take place on short notice and to the surprise of Russia's neighbors. Here, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives at Kirillovsky Test Grounds to observe Western and Central Military District Force exercises. (President of Russia Official Photo)*

the first move – a hybrid, low-level scenario designed to stimulate discussion about when and whether Article 4 or Article 5 conversations would be appropriate – the Baltian and U.S. government teams each reacted aggressively by immediately invoking Article 5 with very little preliminary consideration or discussions among the participants. The NATO team, in keeping with reality, proceeded cautiously, slowly, and deliberately.

Those representing some of the larger NATO members recommended that the Baltian power reconsider its request for Article 5 consultations. It was not until U.S. representatives inveighed upon the NATO team that its members shifted their focus to active support of consultations. The lesson was clear; in the absence of strong U.S. leadership there was risk aversion and reluctance to act.

The arc of deliberations during this move revealed the degree to which Russian activities, beginning with the invasion of Georgia in 2008, have sensitized the nations along the Russian border, all of which struggled under Soviet domination in the past. These states are on hair trigger to respond quickly and strongly in order to deter Russian aggression and avoid sliding back under Russian dominance. This sense of urgency is not shared by all members of the alliance. During Assured Resolve, there was a considerable variation of views as to what should follow initial consultations and invocations of security agreements.



Such fissures across the alliance have resulted in both differing interpretations of the meaning of Article 5 as well as alternative response plans to invoking it. Nations in the Southern region, and even some in Western Europe, are quick to point out that invoking Article 5 does not necessarily commit member nations to take armed action in support of the attacked member. Rather, their interpretation is that each member of the alliance must consider what actions each must take, individually and as a group, in response to aggression. Countering this interpretation is the assumption held by Central and Eastern European members that all members would come to their aid if they are “attacked.” Such differing interpretations risk allowing for both confusion and delay of such duration as to permit Russia, or any other nation, to gain a foothold and establish a new status quo while NATO anxiously considers its options. And by that point the crisis may have escalated beyond the means of the alliance to respond in a meaningful way with the policies and forces at hand. This conclusion places a special burden on the United States, which must be prepared to proactively fill the vacuum with policy, initiative, and active movement of military units under its control should NATO fall into the chasm of endless debate.

In sum, NATO members and their partners, such as Sweden and Finland, lack an agreed-upon grand strategy to confront Russia or any other outside aggressor. These allies’ militaries are generally underfunded, undermanned, and undercapitalized, and the alliance as an institution is not procedurally or structurally organized to move swiftly to head off threats at the outset. Under the current system, time is required for consensus building and organizing; in parallel, Putin has demonstrated he is well aware that the ability to rapidly create new facts on the ground puts time on his side.

## Posture

This time and space gap highlights another significant finding of CNAS’ Assured Resolve exercise: the lack of available military capabilities and troops in the Central and Eastern European area of operations. Due to U.S. military drawdowns, as well as sustained commitments elsewhere in the world, the complement of U.S. forces on the European continent is notably smaller than at any other time in the post-Cold War era.<sup>2</sup> When combined with Europe’s chronic underfunding of defense budgets, resulting in steadily decreasing allied defense forces, NATO finds itself with an insufficient supply of ready troops and materiel to respond to emergency situations.

The utility of the newly created and much discussed Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is indisputable, but largely untested and un-exercised.<sup>3</sup> During Assured Resolve the authors observed, however, that the VJTF is too small to meet large threats and yet too large to respond rapidly to smaller crises. Its deployment can also create controversy, as some members worry that the VJTF might escalate an already tense environment between Russia and the West. Regular exercises of the force could mitigate this perception but thus far have not been pursued. The VJTF is therefore at risk of becoming the proverbial “Ferrari in the garage” or a high-end instrument in search of a mission.

TTX discussions regarding the potential to flow forces into Europe from the United States revealed that such contingencies play into Russian hands, as time/space restrictions would leave the United States largely outside of Europe looking in during the critical opening hours of a crisis. There was a strong desire among all participants for more combat-ready forces on the continent during embryonic stages of conflict. Furthermore, there was recognition that the NATO commander currently lacks sufficient authorities to move troops and materials on his or her own authority or to conduct snap exercises among the partner nations both for training and deterrence.



*Over the past few years, Russia has tested its neighbors’ air, land, and sea defenses, often flying military aircraft with their transponders turned off into sovereign Baltic territory. As a measure of both deterrence and reassurance, NATO conducts air policing missions over Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In support of this mission, a U.S. Air Force F-15C Eagle takes off from Siauliai Air Base, Lithuania, in 2014. (U.S. Air Force/Airman 1st Class Dana J. Butler)*



## Capabilities

Conversations during Assured Resolve confirmed that Russian investments in new anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, to include new surveillance and reconnaissance systems, advanced missiles such as the SA-400, and the Iskander tactical ballistic missile – combined with Europe’s consistent defense underfunding – have left NATO bereft of key capabilities required to confront a newly aggressive Russia. Aircraft and other weapons systems capable of operating inside an A2/AD environment are scarce. The United States purchased fewer than 200 advanced, fifth-generation F-22 Stealth fighters, and there are not yet enough new F-35s to make a difference. Additionally, from a temporal perspective, both would have to come from the United States with tanker support to be effective, a time-consuming evolution to be sure. Submarines capable of operating inside of an A2/AD bubble are also in short supply. The United States fields 55 nuclear attack submarines, down from a Cold War inventory of nearly 100. These silent warships can operate submerged and undetected while carrying Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles, but the force is not of sufficient supply to be consistently present in order to meet NATO’s security needs. The European nations in NATO have not yet purchased fifth-, let alone sixth-, generation aircraft and predominantly operate diesel submarines that lack the capacity to launch land attack missiles. As a result, the alliance writ large is not well positioned to uphold security guarantees to its members in the new A2/AD environments.<sup>4</sup>

***Individual nations within NATO, as well as nations not in NATO but in the European Union, possess critical intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance capabilities, but these are more often than not duplicative and [unintegrated] more concerning, not integrated.***

The lack of integration of intelligence efforts among the allies and partners is also troublesome. In particular, there are significant institutional stovepipes between the EU and NATO. Individual nations within NATO, as well as nations not in NATO but in the European Union, possess critical intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance capabilities, but these are more often than not duplicative and, more concerning, not integrated.



*The EU and NATO are two important institutions, yet their officials rarely have opportunities to share information and assess risk in a joint manner. The EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg are seen here holding a press conference together – a good start but not enough to bridge gaps in cooperation. (NATO)*

The assumption that such integration will automatically or even easily occur at the advent of a rising crisis is not held up by history or recent experience elsewhere in the world. Although the EU-NATO relationship is often lauded as a “strategic partnership,” it is not effective in practice. During Assured Resolve, the EU was represented as a floating “sixth team,” helping to facilitate conversations among the Nordic countries and Baltia and expand the range of tools and policies available to the various teams. The EU proved useful in serving as a convening authority for non-NATO nations, such as Finland and Sweden, and offered assistance in the form of technical experts to investigate an explosion at a decommissioned nuclear plant. The EU also issued warnings to Grosland about an energy contract violation and proposed a new investment plan for three liquefied natural gas ships. Non-NATO countries were also able to work with the EU during Assured Resolve to provide critical assistance through the EU’s Solidarity Clause<sup>5</sup> and Mutual Assistance Clause.<sup>6</sup> But the lack of an adequate mechanism for *all* the crucial players to discuss the security environment, conduct forecasting assessments, share intelligence, and take actions to confront an array of low-level hybrid threats hampered the West in creating a unified response.

Recent Russian operations in Georgia, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine have also highlighted the West’s inability to create and execute an effective strategic communications campaign that can counter Russian disinformation efforts. This gap can be attributed to both

an insufficient investment in intelligence and warning capabilities and the lack of a proactive plan to refute Russian propaganda, thus allowing the Russians to “win” the news cycle.

In all three moves of the exercise, participants were on the defensive, scrambling in real time to identify and establish facts on the ground in the early hours of the given crisis. There was significant confusion vertically within nation states and horizontally across the alliance and partners, as well as among the United States, NATO, the EU, and Russia. At each stage of the conflict, Russia consistently created uncertainty with aggressive disinformation campaigns, leaving the West with few tools to counter the Russian narrative or even determine the ground truth. There were also unanswered questions among the TTX participants regarding the formulation of a strategic communications response: who would convene the Western nations and under what institution or mechanism to both establish and deliver the facts on the ground; who would be responsible for organizing the details of such an information campaign; and how would individual countries’ capabilities feed into this central forum. As a result, neither institutions such as NATO and the EU nor national governments could successfully confront this aspect of Russian hybrid warfare successfully.



*Although neither Finland nor Sweden is a NATO member, both countries contribute actively to the international security community. Here, members of the Finnish and Swedish militaries join their American, Estonian, Danish, and Lithuanian counterparts for the opening ceremony of the Admiral Pitka Recon Challenge in Estonia, a competition featuring over two dozen teams that complete various objectives. (U.S. Army Europe Images and Estonian Defense Forces Media Center/ Flickr)*

## Alliance Partnerships

Assured Resolve deliberately included a strong contingent of players from Norway, Sweden, and Finland in order to examine the security relationships that these countries share with one another as well as the relationship each Nordic country has with the Baltic states (represented in the exercise as a single country called Baltia). When questioned directly both during and after the exercise, the two non-NATO members, Sweden and Finland, expressed confidence that they possessed capabilities in sufficient numbers to respond to an array of nonconventional and conventional threats. As for their relationship with the rest of Europe, one of the delegation’s leading members stated the condition succinctly, “We will be there for you, and we hope you will be there for us.” To their credit, throughout the exercise, all three of the Nordic nations responded quickly and resolutely with air and naval forces to disrupt and degrade Russian efforts to establish preponderance and control in the region. They were, at all times, supportive of their Baltic neighbors and conveyed that support in a manner that implied the actions taken would, in fact, be the actions pursued in a real-world crisis.

Assured Resolve did reveal one policy gap concerning Sweden and Finland. In cases where the United States decides to respond unilaterally to a conventional military scenario as NATO deliberates, Sweden and Finland may very well find themselves on the receiving end of requests for support. Those requests might include permission to fly through Nordic airspace or use Nordic airfields for refueling. While the exercise showed that Sweden and Finland would do what they could to accommodate such requests, it became clear that looking at potential scenarios like this was a useful exercise. The more the United States can do in advance to clarify what it might need/require in the future, the better prepared the partner nations will be in the face of an actual crisis.

### III. Recommendations

As policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic struggle to address today's complex global security environment, a common refrain is that the West needs a new strategy – for the Middle East, for an aggressive China, for a resurgent Russia, and the list goes on. It is an overused term, often conveyed as a way to express either dissatisfaction with the current approach or frustration with the West's inability to shape outcomes. In a small number of cases, however, the need for a new strategy is abundantly clear. Assured Resolve confirmed for the authors that one of those cases is the transatlantic alliance. Here, emphasis should be placed not just on what Europeans and Americans are fighting against but what they are fighting *to preserve*. With Europe facing monumental internal and external pressures (a historic migration crisis, a potential exit of one of the EU's largest members, counterterrorism challenges, and weak economies, to name just a few) and Russia actively working to destabilize the continent, both sides of the Atlantic need to reinvest in a shared vision of their core interests, principles, and values and how they plan to defend them. They can then use that strategy to shape future policy decisions about posture and the full spectrum of required capabilities.

#### A New Transatlantic Strategy

A new transatlantic strategy should focus on three pillars: transatlantic unity, deterrence, and resilience. In light of the countless transatlantic achievements since the end of World War II – the institutions and treaties that make up the liberal order, the policy victories in the areas of democracy and human rights, and the joint military missions around the world – making transatlantic unity the first pillar of a new transatlantic strategy may seem superfluous. In truth, though, both sides of the Atlantic have lost sight of the importance of maintaining this unity.

Over the last two decades, Americans have been distracted by a string of crises in the Middle East and Asia, which has drawn their attention away from Europe. Europe has also been distracted, by a compounding list of economic, identity, and military challenges that vary by country. In addition, both sides of the Atlantic have experienced generational shifts that have ushered in a new cohort of practitioners who lack both the personal relationships and historical context that have served as the bedrock of the transatlantic relationship for decades. The rationale that drove the founders of the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and NATO to create such institutions is often lost on many members of today's society. The end result is a transatlantic relationship that has become much more transactional and more susceptible to fissures and neglect.

Putin is capitalizing on these divisions – both within Europe and across the Atlantic. That is why Europe and the United States need to reaffirm their commitment to transatlantic unity this summer. In between the EU Summit in late June and the NATO Summit in early July, heads of state and government associated with both institutions should do the unthinkable and meet in a joint session somewhere in Europe. Given the complexities associated with EU-NATO cooperation and the finite resources available, no one should expect this meeting to produce a long list of flashy and expensive policy proposals or new capabilities. Instead, the meeting should unveil a strategy that outlines strategic priorities and sends a series of targeted messages to publics on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as adversaries.

***A new transatlantic strategy should focus on three pillars: transatlantic unity, deterrence, and resilience.***



Leaders should start by stressing their unwavering commitment to solidarity in the face of a wide range of security threats. They should state their determination to stand together to address all of Europe's threats, not just the ones that affect their particular neighborhood. In that vein, transatlantic leaders should remind the European public about the dangers of splitting the alliance or the EU over short-term and parochial interests. Washington should also use this opportunity to issue promises of sustained U.S. engagement on European issues. While U.S. policymakers should certainly keep trying to persuade Europeans to take more responsibility for their own security, no one should assume that European security issues can be resolved without steady political, economic, and military engagement from the United States.

The second theme of this new transatlantic strategy should be deterrence, which sat at the core of Europe and America's strategy during the Cold War. But since then, in the face of what appeared to be a Russia that was genuinely interested in enhancing ties with the West, the two sides of the Atlantic allowed a number of their deterrence measures to atrophy and age out. The transatlantic partners must therefore redefine and reinvest in deterrence for the 21st century. Admittedly, this makes some allies queasy. They worry about escalating an already fragile situation in the region and often argue that Russia would never dare touch NATO territory. If there is one thing learned in recent years, though, it is this: Trying to predict Russian behavior is a fool's errand. From its swift annexation of Crimea to its sudden military engagement in Syria, the only thing the West can predict with any certainty is Russia's preference for the element of surprise. It is therefore imperative that the transatlantic allies build a strategy that prepares for but also seeks to deter unanticipated outcomes.



*Given the severity and variety of today's global challenges, it is all the more important that Europe and the United States remain in lockstep. Recently, President Barack Obama visited Estonia where he spoke alongside Estonian Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas during a troop event in Tallinn. (U.S. Army Europe/Flickr)*



Putting an emphasis on deterrence does not necessarily have to translate into deploying thousands of troops into Central and Eastern Europe (although as explained in this report, Assured Resolve highlighted the need for additional posture in the region). Deterrence should start, though, with a clear signal to Russia and other potential adversaries that the United States and Europe have returned their focus to the European neighborhood and are investing in the necessary policies and capabilities to ensure that they can monitor suspicious activity, rapidly establish facts on the ground, mobilize a vast network of allies and partners in Europe's neighborhood to present the true facts, and counter any disinformation campaigns that adversaries might pursue. Russia in particular should understand in no uncertain terms that the United States and Europe have recommitted themselves to preventing, investigating, attributing, and countering acts of intimidation.

Finally, a new transatlantic strategy should focus on resilience, which is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, investing in resilience would improve Europe and America's ability to anticipate and resolve disruptive challenges to their critical functions. Assured Resolve made clear to the authors that Europe, particularly the Baltic states, needs to do more to prevent but also contain and recover from Russian attempts to disrupt the core functions of society. For instance, an attack within the cyber realm can and should be met by the alliance providing lines of communications through other routes; rapidly reinitiating basic and increasingly complex networked services; rebuilding disrupted services such as electricity, water, and communications; and repairing any infrastructure damaged by a cyberattack.

Focusing the strategy on resilience also stresses the necessity of pooling the capabilities and expertise of a wider range of actors that stretch beyond the NATO alliance. A comprehensive and effective resilience strategy requires the inclusion of other organizations, such as the European Union, but also civil government institutions and the private sector. It will also require institutions such as the European Union and NATO to break down long-standing barriers to cooperation and jointly address the wide range of hybrid tactics on which Russia is relying.

***Investing in resilience would improve Europe and America's ability to anticipate and resolve disruptive challenges to their critical functions.***

## Posture

NATO as an alliance should take aggressive steps to readjust its posture, both in terms of capabilities and quantities, in Europe. First, NATO needs to evolve to recognize the changing nature of war and adjust its strategy accordingly. Russian aggression has recently taken the form of hybrid warfare in Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine. The alliance should consider and incorporate its own form of hybrid warfare that takes advantage of its innovative culture, its unique climate and geography, its strong technology base, and its recent experiences in Afghanistan to exploit the critical seams in Russia's security posture to its own advantage. Such a NATO posture, strategically communicated, would convey that Russia would have to pay a strong domestic price in terms of its own internal cohesion and security, a price that might very well be too much to bear. Effectively communicated, such an approach would assure Russia that all of the Baltic nations are and will remain "indigestible."

The European nations should continue to pursue paths to increased defense spending. But decisionmakers in the United States should also acknowledge other issues that occupy Europe's attention today and be prepared to work within the boundaries of reality. The recent increase in U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) spending on the



*Conducting exercises is a key part of demonstrating NATO members' capability, capacity, and resolve to assist allies and partners. NATO's Combined Resolve III, for example, gathered more than 4,000 participants, including U.S. and Moldovan soldiers. (U.S. Army/Sarah Tate/Flickr).*

European Reassurance Initiative,<sup>7</sup> from \$789 million to \$3.4 billion, in President Barack Obama's budget proposal to Congress is a good first step, but additional actions are required, including the return of two armored brigade combat teams to Europe that were removed in 2012. However, assurance cannot stop with additional ground forces. U.S. air forces – including maritime patrol aircraft in Iceland and Lajes; F-35As as they become sufficiently available in Germany and Poland; naval forces, including the basing of fast-attack submarines and guided-missile submarines, perhaps at Kinloss, Scotland; and intelligence and cyber assets, as well as new, cutting-edge unmanned and man-machine-teamed technologies – should all be increased in the European theater in the near term. This would provide a persistent presence, demonstrate U.S. resolve and focus, and deter incipient aggression through an increased exercise schedule within the NATO alliance.

For the allies to be effective as a group, they must increase the intensity of their exercise schedule and focus it on realistic threats that test its capabilities and coordination. Only by working together on a consistent basis can they learn to seamlessly integrate their disparate capability sets and form a truly effective combat team. It should be recognized, however, that not all exercises are created equal. Well-planned and long-scheduled exercises play an important role in bringing nations together in an organized manner that seeks to maximize training opportunities for all, but they are also unrealistic with regard to their timetables and real-world threats. An incursion by an outside power against a NATO member will be timed for when that member and NATO as a whole are least prepared to respond. To better confront this contingency, NATO must empower the supreme allied commander in Europe (SACEUR) with the authority to call snap exercises for the alliance to test and build

the organization's ability to respond in crisis. By doing so the organization will take a strong step toward more effective conventional deterrence as well as provide a realistic path toward a robust crisis response in the earliest moments of friction, when adroit movements of forces and capabilities can have the maximum effect.

In addition, the supreme allied commander in Europe should draw upon his or her dual authorities as SACEUR and as the American European combatant commander to quickly aggregate rapid-response task forces, both for alert exercises and real-world crises. These should include the VJTF but also other standing U.S. and alliance forces on the continent. Such exercises are already executed by standing naval forces in the region and should be duplicated in land and air domains. Creating and exercising rolling-start solutions that are unplanned and unpredictable can only serve to introduce doubt and caution into the minds of aggressor nations. Such aggregations can begin under the nominal aegis of national commands, with a process in place to transfer operational control to NATO as the situation matures.

### **Conventional Defense Capabilities**

For much of its history NATO chose to emphasize capabilities over mass, depending upon technological advantage to offset higher troop levels in its opponents. Budget shortfalls and a general failure to replace aging systems on a one-for-one basis have caused NATO to shrink to a point where even the highest capabilities may not overcome the numbers it will face in battle. NATO must also seek to strengthen and enlarge the existing Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. Providing SACEUR with additional authorities to exercise forces under his or her command would go far in mitigating response-time concerns, but two additional reforms are required. The first should be a commitment by Europe to double the forces assigned to the VJTF on a rotating basis, strengthening its maximum deterrent and kinetic effects. Critics might point out that for a formation that is already cumbersome, an increase in size might only exacerbate its ineffectiveness. NATO can assuage these concerns by developing and exercising an ability to aggregate and disaggregate the VJTF across the theater, providing SACEUR with the ability to tailor force packages rapidly in response to threats. These are actions that can be taken within the next few years.

In the longer term, the nations of Europe, including those Nordic nations that lie outside of NATO, should not only seek paths to increase investment in defense, but must take care to invest in the right aspects of defense. The rising powers of Russia and China have embarked on a revolution in military affairs that seeks to nullify the West's ability to project power swiftly and effect regime change. Emerging A2/AD capabilities, such as the SA-400 surface-to-air missile, and the Iskander surface-to-surface missile can target aircraft, ships, and ground forces at great range, imposing greater risk on NATO forces. NATO must prioritize investments in those systems that would allow it to operate within this challenging environment.

***Bringing NATO into the third offset during the takeoff stage would allow the United States to fully leverage the innovative technology centers of Europe, but also, most importantly, ensure that the alliance is able to operate seamlessly in future conflicts.***

Such systems would include fifth- and sixth-generation aircraft, unmanned or man-machine-team platforms, quiet submarines, and long-range precision strike weapons. These capabilities, along with many others, have been bound up in a basket of initiatives that former U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel described as the "third offset strategy." This initiative provides an excellent opportunity to avoid a mistake of the "second offset strategy," which placed the United States in a position of having capabilities that it could no longer easily integrate with NATO allies and partners during Desert Storm in 1991 and Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003. Bringing NATO into the third offset during the takeoff stage would allow the United States to fully leverage the innovative technology centers of Europe, but also, most importantly, ensure that the alliance is able to operate seamlessly in future conflicts. While most NATO members lack the resources to field expensive, high-tech capabilities on their own, they should seek collaborative solutions that would enable them to develop joint concepts of operations and pool resources to acquire new capabilities. Such moves would allow NATO nations to hold Russian political, economic, and military targets at risk at great range and cause Putin to pause in his own strategic calculations.



It should be understood that such weapons cannot be effective on their own. Aircraft cannot target unknown enemies. Intelligence capabilities, in space, in the cyber domain, in the air, and on the ground, are necessary to provide targeting packages. Such intelligence, integrated and disseminated among the allies, can create the situational awareness necessary to effectively and efficiently target enemy formations. If built robustly, they can also help clarify confusing information, be it in the cyber domain or on the ground among protest groups, as to who is behind critical movements within a hybrid war scenario. Early recognition and public attribution of Russian efforts to undermine local governments could have gone far toward early termination of activities in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

The EU and NATO should also align their maritime strategies in the face of ongoing Russian probing in the Baltic Sea.<sup>8</sup> Doing so would enable all of the countries in the Baltic region – those in and outside the NATO alliance – to determine future courses of action, test assumptions, and establish a division of labor and best practices. As prior counterpiracy missions off the coast of Somalia demonstrated, both the EU and NATO have critical capabilities that they can dedicate to maritime challenges. When those assets are utilized in a coordinated fashion, the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

### Nondefense Capabilities

As stated previously in this report, Russia's actions in recent years have revealed a sophisticated and multipronged approach to achieve its political objectives. As such, the West needs to ensure that it is prepared to counter such tactics with its own equally sophisticated toolkit. That means thinking beyond the military capabilities of the NATO alliance and focusing on developing new sets of relationships between organizations such as the EU and NATO, across public and private sectors, and among nations that fall inside and outside of NATO/EU channels. It also means investing in resilience to thwart adversaries and reduce vulnerabilities. Special emphasis should be placed on cybersecurity, border control, enhanced intelligence, and continuity of government in the face of a crisis. This is an ideal area of focus for the European Union, which could make some low-cost, high-impact investments of its own and also partner with other organizations and groups in innovative and important ways.

***Assured Resolve highlighted the critical importance of establishing the facts on the ground as soon as possible and countering any disinformation campaigns that may be launched by an adversary.***

One specific proposal would be for the EU and NATO to develop joint “resilience response teams.”<sup>9</sup> Such teams could pair the unique capabilities that both institutions can apply toward hybrid threats. In the area of cyber, for example, both institutions could determine in advance what types of experts to deploy to a particular country in the face of either a distributed denial-of-service attack or an advanced persistent threat. The two institutions should predetermine which organization possesses the most suitable capabilities for various scenarios, how areas of responsibility will be divided between the two, and how the two organizations can swiftly and effectively share information in the face of a fast-moving crisis. They should also exercise various unconventional scenarios in advance and test assumptions about the ease with which they might address attribution issues and restore critical functions.

Another area that merits more attention by both defense and nondefense organizations is strategic communications. Assured Resolve highlighted the critical importance of establishing the facts on the ground as soon as possible and countering any disinformation campaigns that may be launched by an



*At the stroke of a keyboard, both Baltic and Nordic countries have experienced multiple cyber intrusions from unknown sources. Although in most cases the source goes undetermined, many security experts believe Russia is behind such attacks. (Wikimedia Commons)*



adversary (most notably Russia, which has considerable skill and capacity in this area). The EU and NATO should be running scenarios that can test their ability to communicate in a crisis and capitalize on the expertise and innovation that reside outside of the public sector. Do they possess the technology and know-how that would enable them to maximize their collective situational awareness and response plans? Do they need a common operations center to manage strategic communications challenges? If not, do they at least have procedures in place that will allow the two organizations to amplify each other's messages in a timely fashion? As the EU prepares to draft its new Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, it should include policy prescriptions in this arena.

Finally, while the United States and its European allies have worked tirelessly over the years to fine-tune their ability to respond to crises, they should do more to prepare for them. To be sure, no one has the ability to predict the future. But the West certainly has the ability to assess risk. Unfortunately, none of the existing international organizations is fulfilling this role in any substantial way. The next U.S. president may therefore want to consider creating a forum that would identify emerging threats, conduct risk assessments, and host tabletop scenarios to highlight policy and capability gaps (much as Assured Resolve did). Such a forum could also test common assumptions about fielding an international response. Membership could start with the Group of Seven along with a collection of other important partners. Imagine how helpful such a forum might have been in examining the potential consequences of the Ukrainian government's failure to sign the EU Association Agreement (which led to widespread protests in the streets of Kiev). Would the West have predicted that Russia would annex Crimea in the face of those protests? Probably not. But the West should have been monitoring the situation more closely as a group and should have tested assumptions by jointly outlining the worst-case scenarios.

### **Alliance Partnerships**

Sweden and Finland will have to decide for themselves whether and when they might want to join the NATO alliance. In the meantime, there are a handful of actions those two NATO partners could pursue to strengthen their already strong relationships with NATO. First, the two countries should ensure that they have a detailed understanding of what types of requests they might

receive should the United States or a small coalition of countries opt to act unilaterally in their neighborhood in the face of Russian aggression. Bilateral consultations (with the United States and other European countries with quick reaction forces) aimed at examining scenarios in which a coalition acts before NATO catches up should be a top priority.

***Sweden and Finland should do everything they can to ensure that they have the ability to receive, process, and share information from and with NATO allies in real time.***

Sweden and Finland should also do everything they can to ensure that they have the ability to receive, process, and share information from and with NATO allies in real time. These two countries currently have dedicated staff to the NATO Intelligence Fusion Center in the United Kingdom. But as Edward Lucas outlined in a 2015 report he authored for the Center for European Policy Analysis, that Fusion Center may want to consider dedicating a specific cell to tracking Russian aggression toward the Baltic region.<sup>10</sup> Such a cell could include all of the current members of existing Nordic-Baltic cooperative efforts and rely on a range of classified and open-source information. Finland joined two of NATO's Centers of Excellence (CoE) – the Cooperative Cyber Defense CoE and the Strategic Communications CoE, which focus on counterinformation warfare, cyber defense and counterdisinformation strategies. Sweden should continue to work toward formalizing its relationships with both centers.

Lastly, Sweden faces a unique challenge that merits both U.S. and NATO attention. The island of Gotland sits literally at the center of the Baltic Sea, which gives it enormous strategic importance should a conflict erupt between the Baltic states and Russia. In a military conflict, the island could be a powerful center for anti-submarine warfare and A2/AD technologies. Because it is currently unprotected and because Sweden lacks the Article 5 guarantee associated with NATO membership, Russia might assume that it could easily grab the island in a crisis. Sweden, the United States, and NATO should start examining ways in which they might defend Gotland in such a scenario and whether some collection of NATO partners and allies should start exercising on and around the island.

## IV. Conclusion

The CNAS Assured Resolve exercise convened a distinguished group of individuals and presented them with three sequential crises that built successively upon each other. The teams received emerging facts on the ground, creating the uncertainty that prompted participants to recognize the realistic nature of the scenarios. The net result was a series of stark conclusions, so stark in fact that they cannot be ignored. First, there is a significant gap in threat perception that falls along geographical lines. The alliance has grown so large, and its individual national security interests so varied, that it is increasingly difficult to reach consensus on the challenges facing these countries. Secondly, NATO is no longer as strong or resilient militarily or institutionally as it should be. Its disinvestment in force structure over the past generation, even as its core decisionmaking bodies have become calcified in their approaches to challenges, have left the organization inflexible in the face of emerging hybrid threats. Lastly, the alliance has become increasingly aware that it no longer has a coherent strategy to confront a rapidly changing world, and that the world knows it. This conveys a sense of institutional vulnerability, inviting a response. Russia's aggression on the eastern flank of Europe and the unrest in the Middle East with its ensuing migration crisis both reflect the strategic vacuum that is Europe, drawing in conflict as a black hole draws in matter. NATO must gather its collective wisdom and present a united strategic front to the world.

Despite this grim forecast, however, the two days that the group spent together were also encouraging in many ways. The seriousness with which current and former officials participated in the exercise and some of the bold ideas put forward in a simulated series of crises were nothing short of extraordinary. It is commonplace today to find members of the transatlantic community feeling rather pessimistic. But throughout the Cold War and in the years since, the two sides of the Atlantic marshaled the right mix of innovation, initiative, and ambition to tackle an array of global threats and challenges. In the face of today's resurgent Russia, they must return to that playbook once again.



## Endnotes

1. General Philip M. Breedlove, Commander, Supreme Allied Command and U.S. European Command, used this term in his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, on February 25, 2016.
2. The United States has reduced its presence in Europe from 300,000 American troops during the Cold War to 30,000 today. Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, commanding general, U.S. Army Europe, quips that “the task force is to make 30,000 look and feel like 300,000 in terms of our strategic effect.” NPR interviews him in Mary Louise Kelly and Renee Montagne, “U.S. Presence In Eastern Europe Is Vital, Commanding General Says,” npr.org, February 5, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/02/05/465672051/u-s-presence-in-eastern-europe-is-vital-commanding-general-says>.
3. The VJTF is a 13,000-strong spearhead force able to deploy on short notice at the head of a more capable NATO response force.
4. Over the course of several months, Rand Corp. conducted multiple war games that each came to the same conclusion. Dan De Luce, “If Russia Started a War in the Baltics, NATO Would Lose – Quickly,” ForeignPolicy.com, February 3, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/03/if-russia-started-a-war-in-the-baltics-nato-would-lose-quickly/>.
5. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union’s Article 222 is the Solidarity Clause. It states: “The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster.” For additional information, see Title VII, “Declaration on Article 222” of the treaty, <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union-and-comments/part-5-external-action-by-the-union/title-7-solidarity-clause/510-article-222.html>.
6. The Treaty of the European Union’s Article 42.7 is the Mutual Assistance Clause. It stipulates: “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations charter.” For additional information, see the European Council on Foreign Relations, “Article 42.7: An explainer,” ecfr.eu, November 19, 2015, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_article\\_427\\_an\\_explainer5019](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_article_427_an_explainer5019).
7. The European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) made its first appearance in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget as a response to Russian aggression and a signal of U.S. commitment to European allies and partners after Moscow’s seizure of Crimea. Each subsequent budget has sought ERI spending, including a \$3.4 billion request for Fiscal Year 2017. Although the request is divided among five categories – presence, exercises and training, pre-positioned equipment, infrastructure, and building partner capacity – the focus is on equipment, particularly for the Army. For additional details on ERI, see Lisa Sawyer Samp and Mark Cancian, “The European Reassurance Initiative,” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 9, 2016), <http://csis.org/publication/european-reassurance-initiative>.
8. Magnus Nordenman has made this recommendation in his report, “The Naval Alliance: Preparing NATO for a Maritime Century” (Atlantic Council, June 2015).
9. Frank Kramer, Hans Binnendijk, and Daniel Hamilton outlined the need for “NATO Resilience Support Teams” in their report, “NATO’s New Strategy: Stability Generation” (Atlantic Council, September 2015).
10. Edward Lucas, “The Coming Storm: Baltic Sea Security Report” (Center for European Policy Analysis, June 2015).



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