



# **EUROPEAN SECURITY**

## **From Managing Adversity to a New Equilibrium**

### **Dmitri Trenin**



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MOSCOW CENTER

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**NEW EQUILIBRIUM**

Dmitri Trenin

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## British Embassy Moscow

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Carnegie Moscow Center  
16 Tverskaya Street, Bldg. 1  
Moscow, 125009, Russia  
P: +7 495 935 8904  
F: +7 495 935 8906  
[info@Carnegie.ru](mailto:info@Carnegie.ru)

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## About the Author

**Dmitri Trenin**, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, has been with the center since its inception. He also chairs the research council and the Foreign and Security Policy Program.

He retired from the Russian Army in 1993. From 1993 to 1997, Trenin held a post as a senior research fellow at the Institute of Europe in Moscow. In 1993, he was a senior research fellow at the NATO Defense College in Rome.

He served in the Soviet and Russian armed forces from 1972 to 1993, including experience working as a liaison officer in the external relations branch of the Group of Soviet Forces (stationed in Potsdam) and as a staff member of the delegation to the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms talks in Geneva from 1985 to 1991. He also taught at the War Studies Department of the Military Institute from 1986 to 1993.



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## Summary

After the end of the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic countries failed to create a regional security system that would include Russia. This failure lies at the heart of Europe's current security problem, in which Russia is challenging the world order that emerged at the end of the Cold War under American leadership. This conflict is systemic and can be defined as the Hybrid War. It is highly dynamic and is being waged in an integrated, global environment.

### Major Issues With European Security

- Given the current state of U.S.-Russian relations, a direct confrontation (either purposeful or accidental) between the two countries no longer seems impossible. The complete lack of trust in the bilateral relationship is the most serious security issue.
- Not long ago, Russia strove to become part of a Greater Europe, while the European Union (EU) was willing to share everything with Russia except its institutions. Now this foundation has been totally dismantled; Russia's relations with EU countries are generally strained.
- Eastern Ukraine remains the largest and most dangerous conflict zone in Europe, but a number of others—Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and parts of the Balkans—pose risks as well.

### Approaches to Bolstering European Security

- Preventing direct military conflict between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should be the immediate goal.
- The second most important goal is for Western countries and Russia to cooperate where their interests overlap. This would partly offset the mutual alienation, even though it would not fully remove it.
- After the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary and presidential elections, there may be a chance for de-escalating the Donbas conflict by way of implementing elements of the Minsk II accords. A sustainable ceasefire would be the first step.



- The areas of tension in the South Caucasus and Moldova require unique combinations of cooperating and avoiding provocations. Resolving any conflict could lead to further success in other areas.
- Russian-European cooperation is possible in Syria in light of Moscow's shift in focus from military operations to a political settlement and Brussels's capacity to play a leading role in Syria's reconstruction.
- In the longer term, a new foundation is needed so that European security can reach a stable equilibrium. The equilibrium would rest on NATO stopping any further enlargement into the post-Soviet space and Russia dropping its objections to former Soviet republics' rapprochement with the EU.
- As they proceed with stabilizing the standoff and crafting a new equilibrium, Americans, Europeans, and Russians need to bear in mind that long-term prospects for security in Europe will largely depend on the global security environment, which will be increasingly defined by the interaction between the United States and China. In Europe, the transatlantic alliance will come face-to-face with a Eurasian entente.

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## Introduction

European security is in trouble. The principal sources of that trouble are the confrontation between Russia and the United States/NATO; the alienation between Russia and Europe; and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions. The root cause of the confrontation, alienation, and conflict has been the failure, since the end of the Cold War, to build a security system in Europe that includes Russia.

That failure has had major consequences. The most important of them has been the resumption of great-power rivalry around the world, with Russia challenging the U.S.-built and -led post-Cold War order. In Europe, Ukraine is the geographic focus of the confrontation. Geopolitical rivalry has been amplified by a values conflict on issues ranging from family and gender to religion and governance.

This conflict is systemic, though in a different way than it was during the Cold War. The sharp ideological antagonism is gone, but current Western and Russian views of each other are incompatible. U.S. and, though to a lesser degree, European establishments deny legitimacy to the Russian authoritarian regime, while the Kremlin sees Western democracy as corrupt and hypocritical. In the same vein, while many in the West find it hard to continue tolerating Russia's practices at home and abroad, Russia's resurgence chips away at U.S. global dominance in favor of a system of several major players.

What happens in Europe is part of that global picture. Russia seeks great-power status also in Europe and full recognition of both its domestic system and its security interests, as the Kremlin defines them. This undermines Europe's NATO-centric security order that the United States has built and dominated since the end of the Cold War.

What specific issues pit Russia against the West? They include the military standoff between Russia and NATO, the Ukraine conflict, and the other protracted conflicts that involve Russia. They also include a range of domestic political issues, geoeconomic restrictions, information warfare, and the evolving situation in cyberspace.

The short- and medium-term outlooks for European security are bleak. Underlying the confrontation, alienation, and conflict is the complete breakdown of trust between the two sides. This has left a vast void. No basis exists yet on which these relationships can be repaired and put on a firmer footing.

Yet there is an opportunity to prevent escalation to a full-scale conflict in Europe. A set of measures, from incident prevention to de-conflicting to selective collaboration, can be applied to seize that opportunity. Avoiding a collision that ideally neither side wants and that could only happen due to a misunderstanding or brinkmanship is the immediate objective.

The intermediate goal should not, in fact, be restoring the partnership between Russia and the West, which is wholly unrealistic for the foreseeable future. Rather, it should be reducing tensions to stabilize the standoff through limited arrangements in a number of areas.

Building any amount of trust will take a very long time. It will likely be preceded and conditioned by developments—both global and domestic, including reassessments of foreign policies—within the countries that presently find themselves in confrontation.

Russia's integration into the West cannot become the new basis for European security. Rather, it could be based on positive coexistence: an equilibrium founded on yet-to-be-agreed rules of behavior within a global system that includes the United States and China.

## The State of Play and Current Trends

The year 2014 marked the end of the post-Cold War order in Europe. The immediate cause was the Ukraine crisis, but the underlying reason was the inability of the West and Russia, over the quarter century that had elapsed since the end of the Cold War, to build an inclusive security system on the continent in terms acceptable to all parties. The 2008 five-day war between Russia and Georgia was a warning that the situation was not sustainable; the 2014 Ukraine conflict finally put an end to the Russian-Western partnership.

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### The Central Conflict and Hybrid War

The ongoing conflict in and over Ukraine is central to Europe's current insecurity, but as before the main issue is conflict over the regional and global security order. This conflict's primary players are the United States and Russia. Washington insists on a European security order centered on NATO, while Moscow prioritizes building geopolitical buffers in Europe to protect itself from NATO. Moscow does not view European NATO members as neutral but as secondary players in the conflict. And although Russia and the United States are again the prime adversaries, Europeans and Russians have become mutually alienated.

While this conflict is cold, it is not a new Cold War: the political, economic, social, and ideological environment of the twenty-first century is very different

than that of the 1940s–1980s, a fact that makes a close comparison misleading. Rather, this different type of conflict may be called the Hybrid War.<sup>1</sup> This new asymmetrical confrontation features political adversity and mutual moral rejection, economic restrictions, intense information warfare, and cyber and other forms of sabotage. Its salient features are an undivided space—no Berlin Wall—where the action takes place and the wide application of advanced technology, from social media to cyber capabilities. Unlike in the second half of the twentieth century, this fluid conflict is happening in an integrated, global environment. The risk of an armed conflict between Russia and NATO is much lower—although it is not negligible. There is already a military standoff along Russia’s western border. The implicit dividing line runs not so much across Europe as between it and Russia, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Crimea’s incorporation into Russia is not recognized either by Ukraine or by other countries. The armed conflict in Donbas is not completely frozen and could escalate into full-scale war. These situations invite the risk of incidents between Russian and NATO aircraft and ships and of miscalculations on behalf of their military or national authorities.<sup>2</sup>

The Hybrid War is not a short-term phenomenon but likely to last many years. Even though the balance of power and capabilities—economic, financial, technological, informational, conventional military, and so on—is vastly in the West’s favor, the conflict’s outcome is not preordained. Power asymmetries are matched by the asymmetries of the stakes for the two sides.

For the Russian leadership, the stakes are much higher. Western political systems are far more resilient to outside subversion than the popular narrative suggests; their real problems are indigenous. The Russian political regime, in contrast, is facing a serious test in the medium term—the next five to seven years—and certainly in the longer term, the next ten to fifteen years. The major challenges include the absence of an economic development model; uncertainties about the political transition after Vladimir Putin; and the low quality of the Russian elite, mostly focused on their private or clan interests and utterly lacking in responsibility to the nation.

The Kremlin, accused by the West of political interference, is particularly wary of Western interference inside Russia.<sup>3</sup> It sees U.S. policies as being aimed at putting ever-increasing pressure on the Russian system until it cracks. The sanctions, in particular, are seen as an instrument to drive wedges between Putin and his inner circle, the Kremlin and the oligarchs, and the Russian regime and the bulk of the Russian population more broadly.

Yet American and European political systems and societies are going through their own transformations, which are likely to impact U.S. foreign policy and the transatlantic relationship. The United States is transitioning from global dominance to something like being the first among equals. It is facing more

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international competition and has decided to focus more on domestic issues than on maintaining the global system it has led since the end of World War II. The European Union (EU) is grappling with the need to reconfigure itself, relaunch the European project, and accommodate its very different members and increasingly skeptical publics. With a more introverted America, Europe may also begin to think of itself as more independent in strategic terms. Thus, the Hybrid War's outcome is likely to be decided by future domestic developments within Europe, Russia, and the United States.

### **U.S.-Russian and EU-Russian Security Relationships**

In the meantime, trends in the U.S.-Russia relationship, already adversarial, will continue to worsen, at least for the next five to seven years. The scandal over Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections has compounded the acute political crisis within the United States following Donald Trump's victory. Until this issue is resolved and the U.S. political system rebalances, any positive change in the U.S. approach toward Russia is unlikely. Moscow, for its part, would like improved relations,<sup>4</sup> but any U.S.-Russian compromise under the present circumstances would favor the Kremlin and would be politically impossible for U.S. politicians to defend.

The level of forces and the numbers and capabilities of the weapons systems deployed between Russia and NATO, although still moderate, are likely to increase. Both the United States and Russia are preparing to field more arms and more troops in the region,<sup>5</sup> and the U.S. missile defense systems in Poland and Romania, as well as the Russian Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, exemplify this new trend. NATO's Cold War-era concerns over the Fulda Gap are being revived in Suwalki, Poland, which separates Russia's Kaliningrad region from its military ally Belarus. As for Kaliningrad itself, it is being turned into a military stronghold inside NATO territory, a latter-day replica of West Berlin.

Arms control, by contrast, is becoming a thing of the past. Crucially, the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is in trouble and might be abrogated by the United States over alleged Russian violations. If this happens, Europe might, like in the early 1980s, see the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles with short flight times to their targets. Sensing a strategic disadvantage, Russia is likely to respond with measures that would put the United States under a similar kind of threat.

Strategic stability might also be dealt a crushing blow—the more so now that the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which is due to expire in 2021, may not be extended or replaced by a follow-on agreement. If this reality comes to pass, strategic nuclear relations between the United States and Russia are likely to become virtually unregulated—for the first time since the early 1970s. Security in Europe will be affected, as the remaining vestiges of predictability from the two nuclear superpowers are phased out.

Relations between Russia and a number of its immediate western neighbors are worse than they have been in living memory. Poland and the Baltic states see Russia as a historical enemy and a potential aggressor. Moscow, in turn, sees them as virulently and incorrigibly Russophobic.<sup>6</sup> The official reassessment in Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine about the Soviet Union's role in World War II—essentially putting the USSR in the same category as Nazi Germany—makes any reconciliation unlikely for the foreseeable future.<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite the fears expressed by many politicians and opinion leaders in the Baltic countries and some in Poland, these countries have not been in any real danger in the wake of the Ukraine conflict. The ethnic Russian populations in Estonia and Latvia, while still not fully integrated into those countries, have remained loyal to their states of residence. To bolster collective defense commitments, European NATO members deployed forces in the three Baltic countries, and Poland hosted a troop contingent from the United States.<sup>8</sup> Moscow, for its part, has continued to pay only scant attention to its Baltic neighbors, for example by making little extra effort to highlight the fact that, more than twenty-five years after independence, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia still lack citizenship, or that Russian-language education is progressively curtailed.

When considering Ukraine, Russians see a country that seems to be at war with them. Instead of the “single Russian-Ukrainian people” that Putin and others have referred to,<sup>9</sup> a political nation is emerging in Ukraine that rests on a clear anti-Russian platform.<sup>10</sup> To aid this development, the Ukrainian government is progressively severing its remaining transportation and cultural links with Russia. The continuing impasse in Donbas, with its steady stream of casualties, will perpetuate instability, for which Russia is solely blamed. Ukraine will not accept losing Crimea and will see Russia as a threat and an adversary. Hostile attitudes toward Russia will prevail there for decades.

Russia's relations with the European Union are cool but uneven. The previous basis for that relationship—Russia's desire to become part of a Greater Europe and the EU's willingness to share everything with Russia except membership—has completely vanished. The EU is still Russia's principal trading partner,<sup>11</sup> but the sanctions regime is restricting further deepening of economic ties. The EU-Russia modernization partnership, announced less than a decade ago, looks like a relic from a bygone era. Russia's relationship with Germany, which has been a mainstay of European security since the Cold War's end, is badly damaged. Relations with France, Russia's historical ally, are contentious but benefit from strong pro-Russian sentiment among some segments of the French political and business elite. Trust between Russia and the EU's leading nations has completely broken down.<sup>12</sup>

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Sweden and Finland, which are not members of NATO, have become more suspicious of Russia. Alarmed by the developments in Ukraine and the breakdown in U.S.-Russia relations, Sweden once again sees Russia as an adversary. Finland maintains an active dialogue with Russia, but it too is concerned about its security. At the same time, a number of EU member states, such as Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, and Italy, are being friendlier toward Russia. This discrepancy produces tensions within the EU, and concerns in the more Russoskeptical countries about the union's capacity to stand up to Moscow. Their fear that Russia may undermine the EU's unity works to further exacerbate the relationship between the European Union and Russia.

### **Other Conflicts Affecting Europe's Security**

The Donbas region is the principal conflict zone in Europe today, but several other conflicts also carry a real risk of escalation.

*Transnistria:* Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has been involved in the conflict between Moldova and its breakaway Transnistria region. Today, Moscow is competing with the European Union and NATO for influence in Moldova.<sup>13</sup> True, the conflict has remained frozen for twenty-five years, and the competition, so far, has been nonviolent. Even if a head-on collision involving a small Russian garrison in Transnistria and the Moldovan/Ukrainian forces is unlikely, the tug-of-war in Moldova contributes to a climate of rivalry and insecurity.

*Abkhazia and South Ossetia:* Following the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized by Moscow as independent states.<sup>14</sup> Russia has turned them into its military protectorates, and it maintains military forces in both. Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's borders with Georgia are, in effect, controlled by Russia. This situation benefits Moscow. The base in Abkhazia establishes a glacis south of Sochi, the Russian president's favorite residence and the country's informal third capital, while South Ossetia places Tbilisi—an hour's drive from the border—and the main highway linking Georgia's east to its west within striking distance of Russian military forces.

Russia has achieved its key geopolitical goals in the region—preventing Georgia's entry into NATO and protecting pro-Russian Abkhaz and Ossetians, as well as covering its own flank in the western section of the North Caucasus. Yet Georgia, while seeking a modus vivendi with Russia, still aims to join NATO and the EU.<sup>15</sup> There is very little chance of a resumption of overt hostilities in the region. That said, for the foreseeable future there is no chance of



conflict resolution between Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia on one side and Georgia on the other.

*Nagorno-Karabakh:* Some 20,000 troops are confronting each other along the line of contact between the Armenians and the Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh. Since it first erupted in the Soviet Union in 1989, the conflict's technological level has grown immensely. Both parties now have weapons, including aircraft and missiles, that can hit the enemy's capitals and vital infrastructure assets, such as Azeri oil fields, refineries, and pipelines, and Armenia's nuclear power station. Should this conflict escalate, it might draw in outside players, such as Russia and Turkey, and present a real danger to the Caucasus region and beyond.<sup>16</sup>

*The Balkans:* Presently, there are no running conflicts. Kosovo and Serbia are struggling to manage their differences even as both seek membership in the European Union. Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a well-functioning federation, due to the persistent differences among its constituent parts, and each community there—the Muslims, Croats, and Serbs—is essentially inward-looking. International news headlines recently featured reports of Russian interference in the region: staging a coup in Montenegro, using Serbia as a regional influence hub, and building alliances with various political groups in the neighborhood, including the right-wing government of Hungary, Bulgaria's Socialists, and the leftist leadership in Greece.<sup>17</sup>

Russia's previous interest in the region—most of which it dominated only a few decades ago and which was a focus of its foreign policy for an extended period in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—is hardly surprising. What is striking is the palpable decrease in that interest in the early twenty-first century. Russia unilaterally withdrew its peacekeepers from both Bosnia and Kosovo in 2003 and, under pressure from the EU and the United States, had to abandon its South Stream gas pipeline project in 2014. It is not entirely absent from the region, of course, but the suggestion that the Balkans is a priority in Russia's attempts to undermine the European Union and NATO is an exaggeration.

That said, there are serious security concerns in the region linked to the growth of Islamist extremism in Kosovo, interethnic rivalry in Macedonia, and the structural weaknesses of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### **Domestic Political Interference**

Even though a solution to the 1974 conflict that divided Cyprus has proven elusive, it is unlikely that either side will resort to violence again. Russia maintains warm relations with both the government of the Republic of Cyprus and its closest partner, Greece, while it also partners with the Turkish



government—although Russia has no formal links to the Turkish-Cypriot administration of Northern Cyprus.

With regard to potential departures from the EU, there have been allegations that Russia supported those who advocated a “no” answer in the 2016 referendum on UK membership in the European Union.<sup>18</sup> Russia is also accused of supporting other Euroskeptics in various national elections held in 2017, with the aim of causing an EU breakup. Russia’s widely publicized contacts include Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, France’s Front National led by Marine Le Pen, the Netherlands’ anti-immigrant movement founded by Geert Wilders, Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland, Austria’s Freiheitspartei, and others. The only European governing party that is openly challenging Brussels with its quasi-authoritarian policies and yet is exempt from accusations of close links with Moscow is Poland’s PiS, which is Russophobic.

Moscow is evidently maintaining links to a number of groups like these, which position themselves outside of Europe’s political mainstream. It tries to build bridges to groups that profess an understanding of aspects of Russia’s foreign policy and that share the Kremlin’s criticism of current liberal trends, such as supporting multiculturalism, encouraging immigration, and rejecting traditional family values. In the Russian leadership’s view, connecting with these groups is no different from Western governments’ contacts with, and support for, Russia’s own liberal opposition and its media. While this cross-interference in domestic politics is a fact, there is still no hard evidence to suggest that Russian contacts were a decisive factor in the UK vote or any other

election recently held in EU countries. By the same token, U.S. and European political influence inside Russia was very strong in the 1990s, was curbed in the 2000s, and was virtually stamped out by the 2010s.

Apart from seeking to destabilize the EU, Russia is also accused of trying to undermine the individual integrity of the union’s member states. In 2017, Moscow’s hand was suspected in Catalonia’s tug-of-war with Madrid.<sup>19</sup> Some

have also speculated that Russia supported Scotland’s secession from the United Kingdom,<sup>20</sup> as well as various pro-independence movements in Italy’s northern Lombardy and Veneto regions. Whatever the merit of those claims, Russians have not forgotten the West’s enthusiasm for the breakup of Yugoslavia, its support for separatism in Chechnya, or the NATO-led operation in Libya. In principle, the Hybrid War has led to a no-holds-barred environment. Yet, like populism and immigration, separatism in Europe has its own, deeper roots.

### **Beyond a New Cold War**

Many of the flashpoints that emerged after the Cold War are effectively frozen. One exception is Nagorno-Karabakh, which could erupt at any time, but the major players there—Russia, the West, and Turkey—are, for the most part,

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cooperating. However, conflicts in the Hybrid War era are serious and fraught with danger. Above all, this relates to the potential for escalation in Ukraine and for incidents involving Russian and NATO military assets. Even though the possibility of a Russia-NATO regional war in Ukraine or the Baltic region is negligible, it cannot be entirely dismissed.

Indeed, the Hybrid War is more fluid and, in some ways, more dangerous than the Cold War was, even from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. This is due to the glaring asymmetries in power and consequently in tactics that disallow any equilibrium, the lack of even a tacitly recognized status quo, and the absence of de facto agreed-upon rules governing the behavior of the parties. The new dividing line in Europe runs along Russia's own western border; Russia's defense budget is roughly equal to Britain's and is dwarfed more than a dozen times by America's.<sup>21</sup> There is no Berlin Wall, but interference in domestic political affairs now occurs on a reciprocal basis; even as conventional arms control is dead and there are doubts about the longevity of Cold War-era nuclear agreements, cyberspace operations are free to run unrestricted.

Since this is not a new Cold War, dealing effectively with Europe's security today requires a different approach, different methods, and a different toolkit. The following sections will describe what can and should be done to manage and reduce risks in the short term and to arrive at partial fixes for the medium term. With regard to the longer term, there is only a general outline of what a new basis for security in Europe might look like.

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## The Immediate Objective: Avoiding the Worst

The extant objective for all those concerned with European security is avoiding a direct military collision between Russia and NATO. The U.S.-Russian relationship has reached a point at which a head-on collision is no longer unthinkable.

A particularly dangerous situation might arise in the case of a military conflict erupting on the Korean Peninsula, in which the United States would participate directly from the beginning, and into which China and Russia could be drawn. Essentially, Washington is facing a difficult choice in accepting North Korea's deterrent toward the United States or acting militarily to prevent this. There are widespread hopes that the Trump administration chooses the former, but there is no certainty about how events will play out.

Under the present circumstances in Europe, a direct collision is most likely to grow out of an incident or a series of incidents—which may not all be accidental—involving Russian and NATO aircraft or naval ships, particularly in the Baltic and Black Seas areas, or—less likely but more consequentially—an escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Incidents involving Russian and U.S. armed forces in Syria might also lead to escalation.

Since neither Russia nor the United States seriously intends to attack the other, avoiding war through incidents or miscalculation should be relatively straightforward in principle. However, the total lack of trust between Russia and NATO presents a serious challenge.

The two sides should take a number of steps to deal with the issue:

- strengthen and update, as necessary, the existing agreements on preventing incidents between Russia and NATO members;
- establish and maintain reliable round-the-clock communications between the Russian Defense Ministry and the General Staff, on the one hand, and the U.S. Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, on the other; and
- make those two aspects a prime task for the Russian mission to NATO.

Confidence-building measures designed to assure transparency remain important, and must be fully implemented. However, they are not enough on their own: purely technical arrangements do not fully protect against the logic

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of political escalation. Ukraine remains the sore point where such escalation might break through the safety net of precautionary measures.

Escalation in eastern Ukraine can best be avoided by imposing a ceasefire that holds. Making a ceasefire dependent on restoring Ukrainian sovereignty along the entire length of the Ukrainian-Russian border in Donbas means that there will be no ceasefire. Ensuring that there is no

shelling or shooting across the line of contact in Donbas should be treated as a priority, and not tied to a political settlement, which is unlikely to be reached anytime soon. If fielding an interposition force capable of assuring a real truce is impossible, Russia will need to make sure that the Donetsk and Luhansk forces observe the ceasefire, while NATO powers do the same in regard to the Ukrainian forces.

The provision of U.S. lethal weapons to Ukraine is now a done deal.<sup>22</sup> Although it is unlikely to change the military balance in the region, it marks a deeper and more direct U.S. involvement in the conflict. A line has been crossed, and follow-on steps in the same direction in addition to Russia's countermoves will lead to increased tensions. This is likely to result not only in increased and more capable weapons holdings on both sides, but also in attempts to change the status quo in Donbas. Those interested in de-escalation need to realize that such a situation makes a direct Russian-Western collision in the region more probable and need to exercise restraint.

In Syria, the military defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic State has ushered in a new phase of the conflict in which Damascus and its allies, on the one hand, and the armed Syrian opposition, on the other, compete for a resolution that suits their particular interests best. In this contest, Russia and the

United States are backing different groups. In this new environment, Moscow and Washington should continue to practice deconfliction between their own forces while doing their utmost to make sure that their allies on the ground do not attack Russian and U.S. assets. To the extent possible, the two countries need to cooperate toward a negotiated political settlement in Syria or at least toward a ceasefire that lasts.

With militarization of the dividing line between Russia and NATO in Europe already an unwelcome reality, efforts must be made to limit any further military buildup there.

The deployment of more forces and weapon systems in Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, and western Russia should be discouraged, as well as holding military drills in the area, flying too close to each other's borders, and related actions. Both Russia and NATO have made their points about their willingness and readiness to defend their ground absolutely clear. Now, they need to stabilize the standoff.

With the central security relationship in Europe—the one between Russia and NATO—very tense, it is important to keep secondary issues, such as the frozen conflicts, from boiling over and drawing in the principals.

Nagorno-Karabakh is potentially the most dangerous conflict in that category. However, it also offers the best possibilities for Russian-Western collaboration. The Minsk Group co-chairs, France, Russia, and the United States, need to work closely to help avoid a resumption of large-scale violence in the region. Such cooperation might also have a positive impact on the Russia-NATO relationship elsewhere.

The situation between the Russian-Abkhaz and Russian-Ossetian forces, on the one hand, and the Georgian troops, on the other, should remain calm and free of provocative moves by the parties involved. It is important to make sure that South Ossetia does not merge with North Ossetia and that it is not incorporated into the Russian Federation.

The political standoff in Moldova, where notionally pro-Western and pro-Russian groups are competing for power, should not undermine the status of the small Russian military garrison stationed in Transnistria. As long as Moldova's state sovereignty and formal neutrality are not in question, tensions in the region will continue to be manageable.

While contact between political groups across the new dividing line should not be restricted, both Russia and the West need to avoid using local political actors as proxies, which could give the impression of conducting subversive activities against each other. They need to acknowledge that such moves are usually counterproductive: they do not buy more influence and largely serve to discredit anti-establishment opposition groups in the relevant countries and provoke domestic witch hunts.

In the cyber domain, writing and accepting the rules of the road will take a major effort and would only succeed under propitious circumstances, which

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do not yet exist. In the meantime, all parties need to cease taking steps that are likely to greatly exacerbate tensions, such as attacks against critical infrastructure, interference in national elections, and so on.

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The steps proposed here do not address the sources of the current confrontation, nor do they offer paths to resolving conflicts or even easing tensions. They are simply designed to avoid an escalation of the already dangerous confrontation and prevent a direct military collision between Russia and the United States or NATO. This is what makes them indispensable.

## The Intermediate Goal: Reaching Partial Agreements and Engaging in Selective Collaboration

Europe is still too far from any comprehensive agreement on a new security regime. The regime that existed from the end of the Cold War until the Ukraine crisis cannot be restored. A new general understanding, sometimes referred to as Helsinki II, is not realistic at the moment. Yet partial agreements may become possible in the medium term should political changes in Russia and the United States allow them. These agreements will require a measure of Russian-Western collaboration in a number of areas, even if adversity and alienation in other areas and the overall relationship still rule the day.

In Ukraine, after the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2018–2019, it might become possible to begin moving toward a provisional settlement in Donbas on the basis of the Minsk II agreement. Such a settlement would be based on a lasting ceasefire, as discussed above. Ukraine would give Donbas a form of constitutional autonomy in exchange for the region's reintegration into Ukraine's humanitarian, economic, and political space. Free and internationally observed elections in Donbas would return power to regional leaders who are capable of a productive dialogue with the central authorities. Ukrainian sovereignty would be restored along the full length of the Ukrainian-Russian border in Donbas.

The likely demise of the INF Treaty and the problematic extension of New START—not to mention the fading likelihood of U.S.-Russian negotiations on a new agreement—point to the need for a twenty-first-century strategic stability regime. Traditional arms control makes less sense in a multipolar nuclear world in which China rises to the position of the world's second military power; in which numbers matter far less than capabilities; and in which an isolated, third-tier country such as North Korea can effectively deter the United States with its nuclear missiles. The unregulated strategic environment is obviously fraught with many dangers that will push the United States and Russia to open

a new comprehensive dialogue on various aspects of strategic stability. Such a dialogue would cover nuclear and non-nuclear strategic systems, offensive and defensive arms, and cybersecurity.

The dialogue can be helped by U.S.-Chinese-European-Russian cooperation on the issue of nonproliferation, particularly with respect to Iran and North Korea. Keeping the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement between the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, on the one hand, and Iran, on the other, is a major prerequisite for such cooperation. Stabilizing the standoff on the Korean Peninsula and between Washington and Pyongyang is another major task in which Russia and Europe have roles to play, as well as China, South Korea, and Japan. Cooperation there can also lead to more understanding between Russia and the West on global strategic stability issues.

Conflict settlement in the Middle East, particularly Syria and Libya, presents another challenge while simultaneously offering opportunities. With Russia's role having changed from prosecuting a military campaign in Syria to hammering out a political settlement and if Europe takes a leading role in Syrian reconstruction, there is a potential for not only competition but also collaboration. In Libya, Russia and European countries, such as Italy, are already working together toward a political reconciliation.

The Arctic, so far, has been left out of the headlines about the broadening conflict between Russia and NATO. Russia has partially restored and expanded its defense infrastructure in the region,<sup>23</sup> but the level of confrontation has so far not risen much. Any claims to territorial shelf and exclusive economic zones are being dealt with through international bodies, such as the United Nations. This situation should be preserved. Practical needs in a harsh climatic environment require a modicum of cooperation. Despite the existing restrictions, various economic, transportation, and logistical projects in the region can be best realized through international efforts. The Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council should remain free from political confrontation and focus on practical issues.

Even though international terrorism is ranked lower in the order of threats to the United States and Russia than each other, counterterrorism will remain an area of limited cooperation between Russia and the West.<sup>24</sup> The Islamic State's military defeat in Iraq and Syria will likely lead the threat to mutate, not to its end. Other countries in the Middle East, Africa, or South Asia may be the next sources of extremist danger and may stimulate Russian-Western collaboration. At the same time, Western and Russian intelligence services, despite their never-ending competition, will need to share some information about suspected terrorists and their plans. Stopping this very limited collaboration for political reasons would not be advisable.

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Cyber weapons now are approximately at the level of development and integration into policy planning where nuclear weapons were in the early 1950s. It will take some time for all countries building cyber arsenals and perfecting relevant practices to open a serious dialogue on basic rules for cyberspace. However, regulating cyberwar practices is likely to become a necessity at some point, and certain agreements may become possible. Along with Western countries and China, Russia will probably participate and become a party to any agreements flowing from the dialogue.

With the Hybrid War no longer new and emotions surrounding its outbreak subsiding, Russian and Western leaders need to take a calmer approach toward the sources, the results, and the costs of their confrontation. Not believing their own propaganda—whether state-ordered or mainstream-media-driven—will be crucial here. Another major step would be to stop imitating each other's worst practices, such as seeking to retain a monopoly on information or branding organizations or people as "foreign agents." A more self-critical approach would be necessary to move to the next stage: crafting a new equilibrium as a basis for European security. This can only be achieved through negotiation and compromise.

## Toward a New Equilibrium

Comparisons of the Hybrid War to the Cold War should not succumb to fatalism. The current Russian-Western discord is much weaker than the hostility between the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist West during the Cold

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War. Even though the future of the international order is at the center of the current confrontation, Europeans, Americans, and Russians most care about domestic issues, not foreign affairs.

Yet caution should not feed into illusions. There can be no perfect relationship between Russia and the United States, or Russia and Europe. Neither a Euro-Atlantic security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok nor

a Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok will be possible for many years. In other words, Russia's integration into the West, as it was promoted in the 1990s, will not happen. Russia will remain essentially European, but it will not be part of Europe. This fact means a new foundation for European security needs to be developed.

Such a foundation could be defined as equilibrium. On the basis of recent historical experience, it would recognize the principal difference between Russia and all other states in Europe: Russia will not join institutions led by others—and it will not be accepted by those others, should it try. Russia's surviving great-power ambitions, its authoritarian domestic political system, and its often traditionalist societal values and practices will differ from those of Europe and the United States. Clearly, all these elements will continue to

evolve, as they will also evolve in the West, but the gap will remain. That gap needs to be recognized and accepted.

Russia's interests will also differ from those of the European Union, its member states, other countries in Europe, and the United States. For equilibrium to be maintained, a basic security compromise will be necessary. The compromise is obvious to virtually all serious observers, but hard to admit in public and impossible to codify. The West needs to decide whether it is resolved to fight a war with Russia over Ukraine in case the country is fast-tracked to join NATO. Russia, for its part, would need to decide whether it is worth blocking not only Ukraine's, Georgia's, and Moldova's, but also Belarus's and Armenia's progressive rapprochement with the European Union. In other words, the compromise's formula might be: no further NATO expansion into former Soviet space and no restrictions on former Soviet republics moving closer to the European Union.

Such an understanding based exclusively on mutual restraint will not take the form of a legally or politically binding agreement. NATO would have no reason to enlarge further, knowing that this would only produce a conflict much worse than in 2014—into which the West itself would be drawn; Russia, for its part, would hardly want Belarus to become another Ukraine, Armenia, or Georgia. The formula's implementation would have to be preceded by a resolution in the Donbas conflict on the basis of the Minsk agreement. In Crimea, the status quo will continue indefinitely. Ukraine is unlikely to accept the peninsula's loss for decades, if it ever will.

The compromise outlined above will not turn Russia and the West into close partners. Friction with the United States and alienation from Europe will persist. However, the rapidly changing international environment and domestic needs will push both sides to upgrade their statecraft. Europe, America, and Russia will need to define their strategic goals and develop strategies geared to them. They will have to learn to strike a more favorable balance between great-power competition and cooperation, understand the consequences of the diffusion of power, recognize the importance of geoeconomics, and acknowledge the impact of new technologies on international affairs.

Over time, a new generation of leaders in America, Europe, and Russia will have to reassess their countries' national interests in the rapidly changing world. Not being directly responsible for the breakdown in relations, they may be more open-minded to their opponents, seeing not only adversity but also opportunity in pursuing relations with them. It needs to be stressed, however, that Russia's surrender to Western pressure is very unlikely. The example of the Soviet Union dismantling itself at the end of the Cold War will almost certainly not be repeated. The Hybrid War may become toned down, but the rivalry will continue for a long time. Going forward, the best one can realistically hope for is regulated—though inherently unequal and asymmetrical—competition along with growing elements of cooperation.



Forging these rules will not take place at some new international conference like Helsinki. Some rules, like those for cyberspace, will be new and codified in a document; others will be more informal, based on experiences in the years after 2014. These rules will be commonly arrived at, rather than imposed uni-

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laterally by the West. They will also be different from the rules operating in relations among Europe's countries, and more like the ones that exist between the West and China.

There are multiple uncertainties. The world order continues to be in transition. The United States is searching for a new global role: preeminence rather than dominance. The European Union is looking for a new internal configuration and possibly also for more independence on the

world scene. The United Kingdom, having decided to exit the EU, will be trying to strike a new global posture. In Russia, the political transition to a post-Putin regime will result in a new balance among the principal stakeholders, and a new set of policies across the board.

European security, a twentieth-century phenomenon and obsession, will be just one of a growing number of regional situations in an increasingly integrated global system. In that system, neither Europe nor Russia will be the top players. In security matters, Europe will continue to follow Washington's lead, while Moscow will move closer to Beijing. It is America and China that, ten to fifteen years from now, will largely define the global security landscape. In Europe, the transatlantic alliance will have to deal with a Eurasian entente.

## Conclusions

Ideal security for Europe means the total exclusion of violence or threat of violence in relations among the region's countries. This state of affairs currently exists in the European Union and NATO. A security community embracing all of Europe would only be possible if Russia were included. This, however, is unlikely. The new confrontation between Russia and the West, the Hybrid War, is systemic and will continue for many years. It has deep roots and will not be resolved quickly or easily.

The situation could change as a result of major shifts on the world scene. Even more important and crucial, however, will be the changes that occur domestically within all three players: the European Union, Russia, and the United States. As the twenty-first century unfolds, each party is facing very serious challenges, and they can only respond effectively to those challenges by changing. If, as a result of those domestic changes, the players involved could find a way to reconcile themselves to their differences, a new equilibrium in Europe might follow.

For practical purposes, bolstering security in Europe comes down to taking precautions against incidents, miscalculations, or other occurrences that could

escalate conflict and lead to a direct military collision between Russia and NATO. The first order of business for all those concerned is to ensure things do not deteriorate any further. National leaders and their aides need to realize that the threat of a collision is not negligible, and posturing can result in tragic consequences. In particular, the failure to impose a lasting ceasefire in Donbas is fraught with the highest risk.

The second order of business is for the West and Russia to find ways to cooperate where their interests warrant it and thus launch a countervailing trend that might moderate their larger conflict. Areas of such potential cooperation exist within Europe, such as Nagorno-Karabakh; on the periphery, from the Middle East and North Africa to the Arctic; and elsewhere in the world. Nuclear nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity are the functional areas where a degree of cooperation is possible. None of this will eliminate the adversity, especially between the United States and Russia, but it might lead to understanding where the other side is coming from and what it really seeks. This, in turn, could lower tensions in Europe.

Finally, in the long term, Europe might find a new equilibrium that could serve as a basis for its security. Since Russia's submission to current Western demands is unlikely, that equilibrium would have to rest on a geopolitical compromise. The NATO alliance would stop admitting new members from the former Soviet Union, which it does not intend to do anyway. Russia would stop opposing its ex-Soviet neighbors, which are members of the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP), from expanding and deepening their ties to the EU. Those EaP members that are also members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) could even serve as a bridge between the EEU and the EU.

The envisioned equilibrium in Europe could be an element of the new global order in which the United States and China would play the salient roles. In this Europe of the future, the transatlantic security system will meet its Eurasian counterpart in the Sino-Russian entente.

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## Notes

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