

## Considering NATO's Long-Term Revitalization

Written by Joshua Spero

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JOSHUA SPERO, JUL 30 2014

Could NATO's long-term revitalization result from the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict? The prevailing argument concerning NATO's long-term revitalization stems from NATO's newest Allies wanting their borders reinforced militarily against the non-NATO nation in the East, particularly after resurgent Russia annexed Crimea in the spring of 2014 and fighting erupted in Eastern Ukraine. Most of the older NATO members remain wary of countering Russian aggression with measures that go beyond force increases on allied territory bordering Russia, more NATO or non-NATO partner nation military exercises, and US and European anti-Russian economic sanctions. In the aftermath of the downed Malaysian airliner over East Ukraine on July 17, more serious sanctions may ensue but NATO Allies still debate the most effective ways to implement further measures. While arguments abound about better ways to achieve more balanced burden sharing and planning by NATO toward non-NATO nations, the potential reviving of the Alliance in the long term seems most centered on the Russian aggression. However, the stark reality for Ukraine – and, potentially, for NATO – arises from the intensive territorial fighting between pro-Western Ukrainians and pro-Russian separatist Ukrainians.

If NATO's twenty-first century role now appears more dependent on the revival of a larger Eastern threat to secure more European-led NATO leadership, if not define NATO's survival, serious change is necessary to remedy historic drawbacks for the Alliance's future. Consequently, NATO's long term revitalization relies on the next debate, revision, and implementation of its all-encompassing Strategic Concept. Given the Russia-Ukraine conflict and NATO's phase-out of its most recent top priority – the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan operations at the end of 2014 – the revision of the Strategic Concept may occur sooner than planned. Finally, before serious expansion of current missions and careful deliberation about any further out-of-NATO operations, NATO must address critically new ways for burden sharing, mainly since long-term US national interests increasingly concentrate on Asia and the Persian Gulf region.

### **NATO's Next Strategic Concept and Russia's Aggression Westward**

Although Russia's military strength remains significantly less ominous compared to NATO members, NATO nations believe that Russia threatens the territorial integrity and even sovereignty of those non-NATO independent partner nations bordering Russia's West. Considerations for NATO's next Strategic Concept, if primarily based on the revived Russian threat, must also consider Russia's military limitations and its spring 2014 invasion of Eastern Ukraine potentially backfiring – and possibly causing Russia's break-up. Yet, those most recent NATO members – about a dozen nations still trying to integrate effectively into NATO's military command structures for nearly 20 years – need to contribute their force and economic commitments to the efforts of NATO's long-time members. Politically, these nations, such as Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania, as the foremost new Allies, remain greatly committed to NATO's long-term revitalization. They border either Russia or Ukraine, or both in Poland's case (Kaliningrad is still Russian territory). Thus, these new NATO nations understand most starkly the possible ramifications of the unfolding civil war among Ukrainians and are keenly aware of Russia's role supporting the pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists. Furthermore, these considerations explain why the newer NATO Allies publicly put on the agenda some of the tougher realities for all NATO nations regarding Alliance force commitments and true burden sharing. That is also why any thought-provoking debate among Allies regarding the revitalization of NATO in the long term originates with a revised Strategic Concept, planning process, and a discussion on whether to consider Russia a realistic threat to the territories of these newer NATO nations.

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For NATO truly to revive, debating a revised Strategic Concept should reassess fundamentally how to deter a resurgent Russia differently than since the Cold War's end. Such a comprehensive strategic reconsideration and threat assessment epitomizes how differently NATO may need to implement its 1949 Article V collective defense treaty obligation. Should NATO Allies pledge larger long-term resources to educate, train, equip, exercise, and operate collectively to defend Allied nation territories – without predominate American force contributions – then such significant measures might effectively impact subsequent collective actions. Of course, allied determination must originate within the Alliance, but such long-term strategic considerations should factor what non-NATO partner nations contribute to non-Article V cooperative security missions and operations outside NATO territory.

Essentially, non-NATO partners that may qualify for future NATO membership should plan transparently with Allies via the membership process. They clearly need to delineate what their tangible force contributions would entail as they would need to become integral to the Alliance's command, control, communications, and intelligence force structures. If a Russian threat to the territorial integrity of NATO member states becomes publicly acknowledged, the member states would have to address it as part of a new Strategic Concept. This approach would become NATO's overriding reason to exist. Further, such a strategy would need to defend Alliance territory adequately and enable enduring Alliance cohesion. Future NATO membership need not only focus on Ukraine and Georgia, but also on other non-NATO Partner nations such as Finland, Sweden, or Austria. The latter three nations would likely integrate into NATO's force structures quite rapidly, contributing immediately to a revised Strategic Concept's collective defense priorities.

Naturally, the political and economic consequences of a future NATO membership would induce a serious debate in these nations, especially if their reasoning relies on the resurgent Russian threat. Subsequently, prioritizing any future NATO non-Article V missions or operations, both with Allies and Partners, would remain secondary to the Alliance's long-term future, as Allies would need first to secure greater resource commitment by Europeans for collective defense. This resource priority remains crucial to the Alliance even if no new NATO membership invitations occur for some years. These points underscore a perennial challenges for NATO's European Allies since many of those same Allies have not yet mobilized even substantial capabilities for their long sought European Union (EU) missions or operations, let alone for considerable future NATO efforts.

### Long-Term European NATO Alliance Leadership

After President Obama's European trip and coordination with EU and NATO leaders on 26 March this year, NATO Allies and Partners have taken steps to enhance the Alliance. They've set the stage for its long term development and, conceivable revitalization, including the international community's recognition that heartland Europe remains key for long term peace and prosperity – by acting as a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe and beyond. If NATO's crisis management mechanisms can continue to anchor heartland Europe's integration, then Allies like Germany and Poland in the heart of Europe, along with France, Turkey, Italy, and Great Britain on NATO's periphery, might promote consultations between Russia and Ukraine, as Allies strengthen their collective defense. If such Allies – old and new – can avoid inter-alliance discord to encourage Russia-Ukraine dialogue, then more European Allies' initiatives, building from this past June's US-NATO enhancements, might advance NATO's collective defense in the long term. Such a US-NATO "European Reassurance Initiative" entails key measures for enhanced collective defense: "...review of ... threat assessments, intelligence-sharing arrangements, early-warning procedures, and crisis response planning." As a result, if non-US NATO Allies can truly advance collective defense, then NATO's European leadership may bolster the Alliance even with the US military reductions in Europe. This latter argument needs to be clearly recognized by non-US NATO Allies in order to strengthen the Alliance capabilities without the typical US reinforcement expected for Alliance initiatives such as the NATO Response Force. Thus, non-US Allies' mobilization allowing the US to maintain its Alliance reinforcement at a lower level and to focus on its Asia priority "pivot" may eventually help NATO to help itself – and effectively operate in the long term.

Collectively, NATO's European Allies stand at another of their many crossroads with this September NATO Summit in Wales. Should increased resources assessed by NATO military planners and agreed on by political leaders yield stronger defense of new allied territories, demarcating new markers for collective defense, then NATO's European Allies need to lead that debate. Consequently, European NATO leaders would empower the Alliance to continue its

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long term European crisis management commitment so that its partnership to the East could evolve more effectively as a cooperative security linchpin to bridge Europe's divide. How European democratization continues eastward depends on the developments between Russia and the NATO nations, and particularly on a new Strategic Concept accounting for those independent nations in between the East and the West. Given the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 – and, potentially, beyond – the possibility for greater regional conflict likely will shape NATO's next Strategic Concept. Yet, even as the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict rages, the Alliance still must help Europe consolidate its security, avoid conflicts on the continent, and defend its members against international terrorist networks. Moreover, the next Strategic Concept must account for how NATO deploys its forces significantly outside its territory as it did in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya since the mid-1990s.

Consequently, membership in NATO, for all its costs, remains necessary for becoming part of democratized Europe in the twenty-first century, as Article X of NATO's 1949 Treaty articulates. Even if potential NATO nations – current NATO Partners – continue to face challenges consolidating durable political democracies in the coming decade, but become more significant players in expanding European stability as NATO pushes the boundaries of Europe eastward, then the Alliance should accept them as new members. Ultimately, the year 2014 may become pivotal for NATO's renewed collective defense as part of a new Strategic Concept for the next decade. NATO's long term revitalization may well solidify because its new and old members together moved to demonstrate that stronger collective defense signifies better coexistence with Russia. For great powers and international institutions struggling to defuse the Russia-Ukraine conflict, such efforts by a Poland-Germany bridge-building process within NATO toward Ukraine and Russia may undergird West-East consultations. In fact, the Poland-Germany heartland bridge greatly influences the next NATO moves towards Ukraine and Russia.

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