

NATO and Security in the Baltic Sea Region

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1. Introduction

During the Cold War, the Baltic Sea was declared a “sea of peace” by the Soviet Union - naturally in the interest of restrictions on use and access - although it was a place of confrontation. After the end of the Cold War, there was great “region-building” euphoria and hopes for the development of the Baltic Sea region into a “unified territory and exemplary project of cooperation, peace and understanding” – a “model of peaceful transformation after the end of the Cold War” (Hecker-Stampehl et al. 2004). In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, it is not only since 2014 that people have known how unrealistic this vision was.

Today, questions of elementary security have come to the fore again.

The liberation and renewed sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was a historic miracle just like, never expected, Germany’s re-unification. But in security policy there was not much time for celebrating. Safeguarding the newly independent nations’ security and independence in the shadow of Russia was a daunting task for the governments.

After an explanation of my personal interest and deep involvement in many regards, this essay covers the following aspects of a very complex subject: Russia’s increasing hostility and involvement, longstanding security concerns of the Baltic states, Crimea and Donbass 2014 as a first “wake-up call”, NATO’s response, more far-reaching proposals for Baltic security, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its background, Putin’s gross miscalculation, Baltic countries’ security policy and their cooperation, NATO accession by Finland and Sweden, the High North, and, finally, NATO’s development with regard to Russia and the North.

2. Personal involvement, subjective perspective

I will allow myself to write this essay from a somewhat individual, personal perspective: on the one hand because of my family origin that embraces the two “poles” of the Baltic Sea, and on the other hand because of my frequent personal involvement with the Baltic Sea region, with the three Baltic countries, and with NATO’s evolution and adaptation to changing circumstances..

I was born in Lübeck, and my mother’s family comes from Riga, where my 5xgreat-grandfather Adam Hinrich Schwartz was the mayor 1740-62 (and his father mayor of Narva). And since 1992, I have been assisting officials the three Baltic states time and again with advice and contact, mostly without an official mandate. I felt inspired by Foreign Minister Kinkel’s statement in 1991 about Germany as the “advocate of the Baltic states” - not always convincingly redeemed by the government. Another involvement with Northern Europe came with my doctoral dissertation about German-Swedish economic relations during the “Third Reich” (Wittmann 1978), and inside as well as from outside NATO headquarters I was deeply involved in conceptualizing arms control and confidence-building, in the Alliance’s transformation following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in devising a cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union, later with Russia.

My first experience with a Baltic state was a journey to Vilnius in April 1992, where I visited the Iron Wolf Brigade with the then commander Lieutenant Colonel Tutkus, and shortly afterwards found myself on the cover of the Army Journal with the commander. When I received the “Officer’s Cross Už nuopelnus Lietuvai” from the hands of the Lithuanian President in 2008 shortly before my retirement, Lieutenant General Tutkus said in his speech: “When Colonel Klaus Wittmann was the first NATO officer to visit Lithuania in April 1992, that was the beginning of our path into the Atlantic Alliance, which he kept accompanying with his advice.”

A little later, in the autumn of 2008, as my first retirement assignment, I received a request from the three Baltic Defence Ministers to conduct an evaluation of the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, the joint leadership academy of the three states in Tartu, Estonia, which led to a thorough reform of this institution (Corum 2019, pp. 58-61). And several times I had the honour to lecture there. Many years before, I had been given the opportunity, as Head of Strategic Planning in NATO’s International Military Staff (IMS), to attend a conference at Jurmala, the “Travemünde of Riga” in the summer of 1992 and to give a presentation to the defence ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, very young politicians at the time.

3. Russia's increasing hostility and aggressiveness

One more personal reminiscence: In October 1990, General Moiseiev, the Soviet Chief of the General Staff, visited NATO Headquarters for the first time, invited to the Military Committee's biannual Chief of Staff session. As a colonel in the International Military Staff (IMS), I had to draft for the Chairman of the Military Committee (CMC), NATO's highest military figure, the welcome speech. Years ago I told this students at the MGIMO University in Moscow and added: "I can regard myself as a contemporary witness for the sincerity of NATO's cooperation offers. Things could have moved in a different direction." I was then involved in developing the partnership between NATO and the Soviet Union, followed by Russia – not least in the creation of what we programmatically called a "strategy without an adversary", which was articulated in NATO's Strategic Concept of November 1991.

And Western readiness to integrate with Russia was much broader than Russian propaganda would have it: the G20, the IMF, the World Bank, the G8, the WTO, the Council of Europe, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. The West did not do everything wrong. (Naumann 1994). Concerned about the state of relations between NATO, or "the West" in general, for that matter, and Russia, I have for years been promoting the following simple thread of thought: Like the declining Soviet Union, Putin's Russia needs "New Thinking" in foreign and security policy as part of its urgent modernisation. The West, particularly NATO, should facilitate that by self-critically acknowledging its share of the responsibility for the consistent deterioration of the relationship over the last 20 years (although no mistakes made on the Western side justify military aggression).

Realistically, some years ago, I have come to acknowledge (Wittmann 2020, p. 33) that with the present Russian leadership and its course of action, the prospects for such a constructive approach towards cooperative security are slim, due to, inter alia, Russia's policy towards its "near abroad", its military actions in Ukraine and Syria, its treatment of critics and journalists, and its general anti-Western hostility (Wittmann 2020, p. 33).

However, in mid-May 1997, in another step towards substantial cooperation, NATO and Russia concluded the "NATO-Russia Founding Act" (Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation). It was to create a new relationship between the Alliance and Russia, and from NATO's side, it was also meant to "cushion" the upcoming first round of NATO's Eastern enlargement. In that document, pledged not to regard each other as adversaries, agreed to a broad common agenda of potentially common interests and joint activities, and established the NATO- Russia Council (then known as the Permanent Joint Council). NATO also confirmed a statement made two months before: that in the current and foreseeable security environment, it would "carry out its collective defense and other missions through interoperability, integration and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new members".

NATO's policy of democratisation and stabilisation and westward integration of the CEE countries while offering partnership to Russia has increasingly proved a failure. In the course of a renewed strengthening of the country under Putin, the idea developed there that the West had taken advantage of Russia under Yeltsin in a period of weakness. . Putin described the fall of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century", and in his famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 (which I witnessed), the humiliation complex focused on the West "doing 'what it wants'". Meanwhile, one could hear Sergei Karaganov say that Russia today is in the same position as Germany after the Treaty of Versailles - ahistorical and absurd, but indicative! But one has to take note of such sentiments. Perceptions are also powerful facts.

It is true, though, that since 1991 the systematic debate about Russia's place in the European security architecture was missed and that successful development of the NATO-Russia Council was botched. But what President Putin calls security "interests" vis-à-vis a genuinely defensive Western alliance are at best political-psychological sensitivities: a humiliation complex as loser in the Cold War, "imperial phantom pain" (dissolution of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20st century") and frustration at not being recognised as a great power – unmindful of the fact that respect is earned, not enforced.

Putin's Russia has thus become an international spoiler state whose President's only real "interest" seems to be keeping democratic developments – as a threat to his power system - away from Russia's borders and its people. Aptly, his ambition has been described as "democracy containment". "Putin does not in fact fear NATO," wrote the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "He fears his own people."

After all, repression in Russia tightened after the 2011 demonstrations against the fraudulent presidential elections. That “interest” is increasingly superimposed by Putin’s flawed interpretation of the history of Ukraine as part of Greater Russia with no right to its own statehood.

In retrospect, some claim that an opportunity was missed when, in 2001, as new Russian President, Putin, made a forthcoming speech to the German Bundestag, speaking in German and appearing very civil and mannerly. However, Western offers of inclusion and cooperation followed. And I have meanwhile come to the firm view biographical evidence suggests that with his background in the KGB, the way he rose to power and in light of his bitterness at witnessing, in Dresden, the fall of communist East Germany without Soviet military intervention, Putin has been on his revisionist “path of revenge” since 1989.

Much uncertainty is associated with the further development, with Putin’s nationalist and revisionist furore, in his ethnic nationalism and even “völkisch” imperialism - in short, with his brinkmanship. Probably we all had illusions when in December 1991 the Soviet Empire went down “with a sigh and not with a bang”. I “witnessed” that in room 16 of NATO Headquarters, when towards the end of the first session of the North Atlantic Cooperating Council (NACC) at foreign minister level on 21 December 1991 the Soviet ambassador interrupted NATO’s Secretary General Manfred Wörner with the announcement that he had received instructions from Moscow that from the final declaration all mention of the Soviet Union had to be deleted. That was the Alma Ata agreement, and all witnesses had the impression to sit at the bedside of the patient and to hear his last sigh.

4. Longstanding security concerns of the Baltic states

Concerns in the Baltic states, mainly directed at Russia, existed before. Here are a few examples:

Around 2000, I was a personal witness in the office of the Chief of Estonia’s General Staff, General Laaneots, where there was great excitement, because at Pskov on the shore of Lake Peipsi during the night a rather important Russian parachute manoeuvre had taken place as a “snap exercise” without any announcement. Another experience that Estonia made in 2007 was the vast cyber-attack on its digital systems – following the dislodgment of a Soviet war memorial from the centre of Tallinn to the outskirts of the Capital.

The war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 led to newspaper headlines such as “Would NATO Defend Narva?” and Russian revisionism appeared as a newly awakened spectre. Several large exercises, for instance the Russian-Belarusian exercise “Sapad 2009” (“West 2009”), which involved 12,500 soldiers, 200 tanks and 40 aircraft, followed in later years by much bigger ones, totally lacked any announcement, let alone inspection opportunity, according to the Vienna Document. Kaliningrad is another source of concern, where, after repeated Russian threats, in 2018 short-range Iskander missiles presumably with nuclear warheads were stationed in the enclave Kaliningrad. Kaliningrad also borders on the “Suwalki Gap” (see below).

In my Jurmala presentation to the three defence ministers I opined that the security of the Baltic states had to be based on five pillars:

- own military forces in sufficient strength to make any incursion painful for the aggressor;
- close cooperation among the Baltic states;
- cooperation and interdependence in the Baltic Sea region as well as with the EU and NATO (the latter then within the framework of the Partnership for Peace/PfP founded two years later);
- clear Western warnings to Moscow (not necessarily always public) that any violent encroachment on a Baltic state would catapult us back into the Cold War;
- a view to Russia as a neighbour and potential partner.

In principle, all this is still valid today, but the situation is on the one hand better due to NATO membership since 2004 and on the other hand worse with a Russia that unabashedly uses military force to achieve its goals. Again, on the other hand, dialectically speaking, this also has its good side, because the concerns of the Baltic states are now taken seriously everywhere. If some say that the Baltic states are “indefensible”, one can only reply to that: West Berlin was also “indefensible”. But an aggressor would have been at war with the USA, the UK and France immediately.

Fears beyond “hard security” relate to “ethnic engineering” (use of the Russian minority), gaining political influence, funding of parties, economic influence and Russian history politics (or even “history wars”). There were concerns about imponderables of Russian development also in the Nordic non-NATO states Sweden and Finland, which now have reacted consequentially to the aggravation of the situation.

Norway is worried anyway about possible conflicts in the “High North” over territory, and raw materials and activities(see below). And in Iceland, during a visit there with the NATO Defence College in 2007, we were told how concerns about the resumption of strategic bomber flights were raised with Moscow and the response was: “Get used to it!”

5. Crimea and Donbass 2014 – the “first wake-up call”?

All this became highly virulent with Russia’s annexation of Crimea in violation of international law and its fuelling of the war in eastern Ukraine. Russia denied its involvement until its invasion 8 years later, but without Russian intervention, there would be no armed conflict in Ukraine. In NATO, over the two decades before, the pendulum had swung in terms of priorities and capabilities from protecting and defending member states to foreign missions beyond the borders of NATO’s territory. Territorial and alliance defence were regarded as obsolete.

Putin has taught us otherwise. But not everyone needed to be “woken up”. In 2009/2010, Ron Asmus, Juri Luik, some others and I developed a short study: “NATO, new allies and reassurance” (Asmus et al. 2010), which in sum stated that NATO failed to thoroughly study and assess security risks, ways to defuse potential crises, and means to react in the event of a conflict close to home - and that some of its members worried that the Alliance will not be able to come to their defence in a crisis. NATO Allies in Central and Eastern felt the most uneasy. NATO should take “reassurance” measures to address this spreading sense of insecurity and improve its ability to respond to crises around its borders. Reassurance would also give the new Allies the confidence they needed to support a ‘reset’ in NATO-Russia relations, and to deploy their forces outside Europe in places such as Afghanistan. Reassurance should consist of political and some military steps to discourage potential aggressors in Europe.

The Paper was published in May 2010, but Ron and I already presented it to the Albright Group at one of their workshops in Prague in January 2010. This contributed to a better balance between collective defence and foreign missions in NATO’s new Strategic Concept of November 2010 - but only on paper! In 2014 the study was eerily topical again!

Russia’s willingness to use naked (albeit partially covert) military force in the conflict over Ukraine was for many at the time a rather surprising development. Who would have believed, three years before, that the association agreement of a sovereign country with the European Union could be a reason for war? On the other hand, the response to Russian actions in 1999 (in the context of NATO’s Kosovo air campaign), 2007 (Putin’s Munich speech) and 2008 (NATO summit in Bucharest, recognition of Kosovo’s independence and the war in Georgia) might have been more realistic.

The violent action against Ukraine meant a paradigm shift for the European security order. The rules of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, reaffirmed and substantiated in the Charter of Paris of 1990 - sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, peaceful settlement of disputes, freedom to choose alliances - had increasingly been taken for granted and secured. They have been fundamentally called into question by Russia, just as a number of Russian-Ukrainian agreements have been violated. Fundamental trust has been destroyed. Russia sees itself in conflict with “the West”, but interpreting its actions as a reaction to actions by the West or the USA falls short.

A common “equidistant” view of the Ukraine conflict sees this country and others “in-between” as a bone of contention between Russia and the West and the dispute about Ukraine as a “Moscow-Brussels conflict”. Such patterns of interpretation quite inappropriately regard CEE states just as objects of great power interests.

NATO enlargement, which is naturally perceived as politically and psychologically undesired in Russia, was never a threat - not even an active expansion but the drive of the Central and Eastern European states and former (compulsory) Soviet republics in the Baltic region towards the West who, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, had escaped the Soviet prison of nations or the control and limited sovereignty in the Warsaw Pact and who, in view of their experiences, urgently wanted to join the West. This had reasons that should have been reflected upon in Moscow.

The CIA certainly did not bring all this about. The conspiracy theorists who think that the West wants to surround Russia with a *cordon sanitaire* can be countered by the insight that Putin wants a *cordon sanitaire* of failing states to protect his empire from the infection of Western ideas. It is about self-assertion, sovereignty and inviolability of borders, as well as every nation's, particularly Ukraine's, right to solve its problems without outside intervention.

The EU may have made mistakes with regard to the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy and the Association Agreement, but the either-or predicament for Ukraine did not come from it, but from Russia. And NATO has little to do with that development. For since its summit meeting in Bucharest in 2008, it has been clear that a conceivable NATO membership for Ukraine is a very long way off. Putin's argument that he had to intervene before Sevastopol fell into NATO hands was particularly plump propaganda. For on 27 April 2010 I witnessed how in the Werchowna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) a law was passed that sealed a new lease agreement guaranteeing Sevastopol as home port for the Russian Black Sea fleet until 2042 (25 years beyond its expiration in 2017). Propaganda is also the constantly repeated assertion that the Soviet Union or Russia had received assurances regarding the non-expansion of NATO.

No failure or misdevelopment in Ukraine and no mistake by NATO, the EU or the USA justify military intervention, smuggling in armed provocateurs, mercenaries, special forces and weapon systems, forcibly shifting borders, taking away parts of a sovereign state – let alone the present all-out invasion.

In 2014, the power that most consistently insists on "non-interference", forcibly interfered in the internal affairs of its neighbour Ukraine in a manner unprecedented in decades. And no Russian can explain to me how the harshest critics of violations of international law by the USA or the West can in good conscience use them as justification for their own actions in violation of international law. The illegitimacy and mendacity of Russia's actions in Ukraine, the unequal character of the Minsk agreements, the question of whether arms deliveries might not even have a de-escalating effect, the appropriateness of Western reactions - all this is not today's topic, or only indirectly. In any case, in the parliamentary elections of 26 October 2014, Ukraine sealed its departure from the authoritarian model. The pro-Western forces won, refuting Moscow's claim that a "junta" of "fascist coup plotters" had seized power in Kiev. The Ukrainian government faced gigantic tasks, needing EU aid on a huge scale, not least from Germany. Failure can become more expensive, I said at the time. Now we see that is true.

And the Baltic countries' worries grew, with an imaginable development vividly depicted by Sir Richard Shireff's polit thriller "War with Russia 2017! (Shireff 2016)! There is multiple speculation about scenarios: An attack on a broad front with reconquest of the Baltic states was until recently regarded as the least likely. But what are probabilities? The capture of fist pledges would be conceivable, where Russia would see NATO in a decision dilemma - "Dying for Narwa?" The most likely scenarios are so-called "hybrid" ones: the broad integrated spectrum of overt and covert military, paramilitary, civilian and propaganda measures means: in NATO terminology, "hybrid warfare", which can also be called "strategic subversion". That's where Russia would try to undermine Western responses and stay below the Article 5 threshold.

Like with the article by President Putin-turned-historian about "the historic unity of Russians and Ukrainians" in 2021 (Putin 2021), "memory policy" plays a great role in the Russian narratives, on the basis of a totally flawed interpretation of the past. Therefore, on the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in the East, the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania reprimanded in a joint newspaper article for its "disingenuous victor cult", usurping the victory and the suffering in the "Great Patriotic War" for the Russians at the expense of the Ukrainians the Belarusians, for using the war as justification for its policies and for extenuating Stalin, his rule and his entering the war as an ally of Nazi Germany (Kuleba et al. 2020).

6. NATO's response

Ukraine is not a NATO member, although one may wonder what the consultation clause in the Partnership for Peace policy document is worth. But in the case of NATO members, the Alliance's protection must be unequivocal. In any case, NATO is considered the only guarantor of "hard" security, not the EU or the CBSS. That is why the Baltic States and Poland joined the Alliance, and I remember the Polish Prime Minister telling the NATO Council in 1998: "We want to join NATO for the same reasons you don't want to leave."

NATO confronted the fundamental challenge at its summits in Wales in early September 2014 and in Warsaw in early July 2016. There, in response to the "Ukraine crisis" (actually a "Russia crisis"), its members

decided on a comprehensive adjustment of the Alliance - the most far-reaching since the transformation that followed the end of the East-West conflict. Its goal was a comprehensive strengthening of defence capabilities. Thus, Alliance defence, in the new Strategic Concept of 2010 on an equal footing with crisis management and cooperative security, became once again NATO's central core task.

At the NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the implementation of the Wales Resolutions was assessed, updated and supplemented. Their most important elements are the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and the Enhanced forward Presence.

NATO is increasing its operational readiness and response capability. It creates the conditions for the rapid deployment of troops to NATO's Southern or Eastern flanks. To this end, regional permanent reception units (NATO Force Integration Units, NFIU) with about 40 men each were initially set up in the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. They serve to rapidly deploy forces to the region and to plan and coordinate training and exercises. Regional NATO headquarters are taking on more responsibility especially that of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNK NO) in Szczecin, which would conduct Alliance defence operations in the Northeast. The NATO Response Force (NRF) is enlarged to division strength and deployed more quickly and is combined with a particularly rapid reaction unit of around 5,000 men, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), defensive but called the "spearhead".

The most spectacular decision at the Warsaw Summit was to increase NATO's "forward presence" in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland - as an unequivocal demonstration of allied solidarity, resolve and capacity to act in the face of any aggression. Multinational forces of "framework nations" with contributions from others are to consist of multinational battalions deployed on a rotational basis, interacting with indigenous troops. The "Enhanced Forward Presence" of such multinational forces, underpinned by an effective reinforcement strategy, demonstrates, and lends credibility to, the NATO principle that an attack on one ally would be an attack on all.

Was this "sabre rattling" and "war cries" (German Federal President Steinmeier commenting the NATO exercise "Anaconda" in Poland 2016)? Was NATO turning the "escalation screw"? No, the measures were the minimum of what NATO owes to the Eastern Allies and to itself. No one in Russia could feel threatened by these minimal steps. And if the - completely transparent - "Anaconda" was criticised, it should have been compared with the number, scope, locations, scenarios and surprise character of Russian military exercises over the years.

With the Warsaw Decisions, most Allies clearly wanted to stay within the constraints of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. This was to be preserved, even if Russia violated it in letter and spirit - "for better times". However, it is not true that the agreement "prohibits" the stationing of NATO troops in Central and Eastern European alliance countries. Politicians and journalists who claim this should look at the text of the document, where in careful wording a unilateral NATO self-restraint is reproduced, to repeat it here: "NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance performs its collective defence and other tasks by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration and reinforcement capability rather than by permanently deploying additional substantial combat forces." This allows for a lot of flexibility; a US brigade and some battalions are certainly below this threshold.

The Warsaw Summit also took decisions on so-called "hybrid" warfare, which envisages closer cooperation with the European Union in this area and places a high priority on the "resilience" of societies, infrastructure and supply systems.

Germany played an important conceptual role in all of these decisions, which is worth mentioning here. Years before, Germany was still regarded by some in the Alliance as a shirker and free rider, who through constant repetition had devalued the historically appropriate maxim of the "culture of military restraint" and made it appear as an evasion. But it has played a major part in the reorientation of NATO and has also initiated a "turnaround" at home in terms of personnel strength ("end of the reduction") and the defence budget. (although all this is only a tendential compensation for the downsizing over many years). This however, did not hold very long, and a new runup was started after the Ukraine invasion. The Bundeswehr is now to be better equipped, but the promised weapon aid to Ukraine is late, irregular and scarce.

7. More far-reaching proposals

There are thorough studies by qualified experts, some as recent as last year, with professional analysis of the security situation of the Baltic countries under the shadow of Russia that appeared darker than ever before following the 2014 events. Now, after Russia's full-blown invasion of Ukraine and its subjugation war with most ruthless methods, these expert views are not overtaken, but even more topical. Therefore some of the findings will be expounded in the following paragraphs, mainly drawing on a 2016 Report by three former high NATO Generals and a former foreign minister (Clark et al. 2016) "Closing NATO's Baltic Gap", on the recent analysis by General Hodges and analyst E. Lucas "Close to the Wind. Baltic Sea Regional Security" (Hodges and Lucas 2021) and on an equally recent Report by A. Fałkowski "Building Security in the Baltic Sea Region (Fałkowski 2021)

The CEPA report presents a critical analysis of the situation, aiming to "forge a "focused, forward-looking transatlantic security agenda for the Baltic Sea region" (Hodges and Lucas, p.1). It characterises the Baltic Sea Region as "part of a wider landscape, ranging from the Arctic to the Black Sea, in which the United States and its allies are in an existential struggle against determined adversaries — a destructive Russian Federation and a rising China" and states: "The road to defeat is short for the Baltic Sea region and all the countries of the Euro-Atlantic community. If by military bluff, intimidation, or actual attack Russia can challenge NATO and U.S. regional security guarantees, it can upend the post-1991 security order in Europe in a matter of hours. Nothing else in Russia's military toolbox offers such a prospect of speedy and decisive geopolitical victory."

"Still", it continues, "many are complacent about the military danger from Russia. Since 2008, Russia has strengthened its quantitative and qualitative advantage in the Baltic Sea region and could potentially muster around 125,000 high-readiness ground forces in the region in 14 days. About one-third of the Russian armed forces are ready to operate within 24 hours to 72 hours, and the Kremlin has a proclivity for operating unexpectedly. Locally, Russia has absolute supremacy in terms of offensive equipment: tanks, fighter aircraft, and rocket artillery. In the past decade, it has also set up three army commands, five new division headquarters, and 15 new mechanized regiments in the Western Military District (MD). Zapad exercises exemplify Russia's ability to rehearse large, combined operations, including live-fire and realistic, unscripted scenarios, and Russia's dominance of the escalation ladder."

Adding to this Russia's naval, air, air defence and electronic warfare assets as well as the military potential in Kaliningrad, the report lists the following shortcomings: differing threat assessments, chiefly at a political level; gaps in intelligence collection, sharing, and fusion; lack of trust among some regional countries; divergent economic interests; differences and shortcomings in air and maritime strategies; limitations on military mobility; inadequate Air and Missile Defense (AMD); multiple non-synchronized command structures; lack of realistic exercises; fragmented security cooperation; overreliance on the United States as the linchpin of regional security.

Its recommendations are manifold and extensive, i.a. on the political side: enhance political cohesion by developing a common threat assessment for the Baltic Sea region; aim for total (comprehensive) defense to increase economic, social and political resilience of regional nations; credibly depict the adaptation of the region's deterrence and defense posture in the new NATO Strategic Concept and the European Union's strategic Compass; for exercises: improve the scope, tempo and depth of exercises in the Baltic Sea region; regarding capabilities and security assistance: increase contributions to air and missile defense (AMD) in the Baltic states, particularly from countries with a stake in regional security, such as Germany and the Netherlands; transform Baltic Air Policing (essentially a peacetime employment) to Baltic Air Defense: improve intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the region; overhaul the rules, classifications, clearances, and procedures around the data transfer and processing to ensure seamless information sharing; maintain and provide more predictable, sustainable and durable long-term US security assistance to the Baltic states and surrounding countries; for command, planning and readiness: accelerate the Alliance's speed of decision-making by streamlining command structures related to the region; adapt the Alliance's reinforcement plans flowing from NATO's new Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA); increase the Alliance's speed of assembly through enhanced readiness, in addition to improved plans; to leverage regional frameworks such as the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force; the EU's Eastern Partnership Program (EaP), and the Three Seas Initiative.

A very ambitious catalogue of far-reaching recommendations indeed, to which one would now add reinforcement of the Enhanced Forward Presence multinational battlegroups in the three Baltic countries and Poland probably to brigade size. And it has to be seen what changes Finland's and Sweden's NATO

accession will bring about for the situational assessment and for the recommendations.

The 2016 ICDS report, prepared prior to NATO's Warsaw summit meeting, already at that time sees from Russia a serious threat to NATO, particularly to its Eastern-flank Allies. It has labelled NATO as an adversary, developed a mix of capabilities required for confronting it, created and exercised offensive plans targeting the Alliance, and is engaged in provocative and irresponsible military behaviour towards it. The regime has shown its willingness and ability to use military force, or the threat of it, to achieve its political objectives and, in the case of Ukraine, flagrantly violated the existing international order and fundamental principles of European security. It has also shown a taste for high-risk opportunistic gambling and the ability, time and again, to surprise the West. To prevent such a surprise from happening in the Baltic area, where the regional balance of conventional forces greatly favours Russia over NATO, the Alliance's strategy and posture need to be adapted."

Written before NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence decision, the summary goes on: "NATO's current posture, which is reliant on the reinforcement of the Baltic states, lacks credibility. The Alliance would be unable to deny Russia a military fait accompli in the region and, given Russia's "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) capabilities, to rapidly deploy additional forces there. While sharing about 1,400 km of land border with Russia and Belarus, the Baltic states are linked to the rest of the Alliance only by a 65 km-wide land corridor from Poland to Lithuania. Twenty-five NATO Allies can be reinforced by NATO even if Russia activates its A2/AD capabilities, while the three Baltic states cannot."

With the reference to 65 km-wide corridor, the authors of course mean the so-called "Suwalki gap", i.e. the area around the border between Lithuania and Poland, which is the only land connection between the Baltic states and the other NATO partners and which separates the territory of the Russian exclave Kaliningrad from Belarus.

From this flow the following proposals: Transition from assurance to deterrence, to be made credible with a more substantial forward presence in the most exposed NATO Allies and an effective counter-A2/AD strategy; while avoiding the debate about permanence (because a number of Allies wanted to stick to NATO's self-restraint according to the NATO-Russia Founding Act), a continuous presence of combat-capable forces should be ensured through rotation; deployment of, as a minimum, a multinational "battalion-plus" battle group with a range of enablers and force multipliers in each of the Baltic states, with one nation or an established multinational formation providing its core. Together with the additional US Army presence, such a NATO force would be able create a "speedbump" for Russia, and not act only as a "tripwire". As is well known, this proposal was successful and led to the main summit decision. Still the authors argued for later building its forward presence towards a multinational brigade in each of the Baltic states.

Further proposals: In addition to land presence, the maritime and air dimensions of NATO's deterrent posture, as well as the availability of key enablers also need to be addressed. Quick reinforcement of the Baltic states by the Allies should be made more credible by pre-positioning equipment much closer to the frontline than 1,600 km away from it as currently planned. During the Cold War, this distance was only 300 km. The former REFORGER exercises should be revived. NATO's nuclear deterrent should be strengthened by signalling to Russia that Moscow's strategy of using sub-strategic nuclear weapons to de-escalate conflict would be a major escalation and would warrant the Alliance's nuclear response. An approach should be adopted to cyber weapons similar to the existing one on nuclear weapons, stating that the Allies' offensive cyber capabilities have a deterrent role even if NATO as an organisation does not pursue an offensive cyber strategy. NATO must signal to Russia that, in case of aggression against any NATO Ally, there is no such thing as a limited conflict for the Alliance, and that it will contest Russia in all domains and without geographical limitations.

And a recommendation that will soon - hopefully - be overtaken by the development: NATO's plans should take into account the possible contribution of Sweden and Finland, including prudent planning for assisting these countries, as a way of reassuring them that their support for NATO would not leave them exposed to Russia's punitive military action.

The report concludes will the call for the Alliance to "act with a sense of urgency when it comes to reinforcing its deterrence posture in the Baltic states, where NATO is most vulnerable. NATO has too often acted like a homeowner who sets the alarm once the burglars have left. A general change in mindset is needed—a culture of seizing the initiative and actively shaping the strategic environment should become the Alliance's modus operandi. The Alliance's decision-makers and general public must realise

that the costs of credible deterrence by denial pale in comparison to the costs of deterrence failure." (Clark et al., p. 7). It is a good example of experts' advice, which is successful, because it is practical and focused on one set of issues.

The Fałkowski report, finally, presents a good overview of the Russian threat to the region and of the decisions by the NATO Summits since 2014. It argues for more in-place forces, development of the total (comprehensive) defence concept, rightly emphasises the importance of developing resilience, and makes a case for "whole of government training and exercising (p. 13).

8. Russia's invasion of Ukraine 2022 and its background

With its gradual military encirclement of Ukraine over many months 2021-2022, Russia gave an extended warning of more violence to come. When the German Green Party politician Robert Habeck returned from a Donbass visit in May 2021 and proposed to send defensive Weapons to Ukraine, I supported him publicly and argued that militarily reinforcing Ukraine's defensive capability could have a de-escalatory - i.e. deterrent - effect (Wittmann 2022). This was to no avail. Most in the West refused to expect a full-fledged invasion, top politicians went to see President Putin only to be lied to, and it was hoped that this show of force was merely a way to exert pressure on Ukraine.

What President Putin was out for far beyond Ukraine had, however, been communicated in letters to the U.S. and to NATO in mid-December, accompanied by draft "treaties". They included so-called security guarantees with the USA and NATO establishing in Europe Russian and American zones of influence. Washington and the other NATO members were to commit themselves not to accept any more new members. In addition, the Alliance would have to reduce its military infrastructure to the level of 1997, i.e. before the 1999 and 2004 enlargement rounds. And the USA would have to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe.

If the draft treaties were implemented in their current form, from the Russian perspective, a security buffer zone would be created on NATO's Eastern territory and not along its external borders. The states in Moscow's immediate neighbourhood could no longer count on Western support. There were no Russian counter-offers for this. Both draft treaties were formulated in such a way that Moscow would not have to withdraw any of its positions, from the deployment of troops on the Russian-Ukrainian border to the Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad. They only offered to revive the NATO-Russia Council and other consultation mechanisms.

It is clear to all concerned, most likely also in the Kremlin, that neither Washington nor its European Allies could go along with these proposals. The drafts mix elements that are quite interesting from a Western perspective (arms control, confidence-building, reviving of consultation fora, limits on stationing of short- and medium-range missiles within territorial range of the contracting parties) with totally unacceptable ones such as a principled renunciation of enlargement, meaning nothing less than a dramatic amendment of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The Russian Foreign Ministry published both drafts only two days after they were handed over to the American side, pushing for speedy reaction and thus giving them the character of an ultimatum. Thus It almost seems as if the Kremlin wanted to bring about the rejection of its proposals in order to further deepen the rift between itself and the West. It was quite clear that these maximal demands were unacceptable both to Washington and to NATO, so presumably this "negotiation offensive" (Fischer 2021) served to provide a pretext for further aggressive steps.

Since 2020, there was much to suggest that the Russian president wants to settle once and for all what, in his view, has not been settled in recent decades: Although the constitutional reform of 2020 enables Putin to remain in power until 2036, the political opposition has meanwhile been all but eliminated and critical civil society is being squeezed harder and harder. Now it is time to move on to foreign and security policy issues - and the enforcement of Putin's international order, first in Ukraine, where negotiations were blocked and Russian influence was waning, but then beyond.

Obviously acceptance of such demands would also heighten the threat to the Baltic countries, who would be deprived of NATO's protection.

According to *ius ad bellum* (justification of aim and purpose) this war is criminal and in the light of *ius in bello* (international law of war), the Russian armed forces as well as the so-called "separatists" are heaping

war crime on war crime. Apart from the shelling of entire residential areas, schools, kindergartens and hospitals, the treatment of the populations in occupied areas is powerfully telling for any people that might become Putin's next target.

9. Putin's gross miscalculation

Apparently, the Russian President, isolated in the Kremlin, unaware of Ukraine's development over the past 30 years, giving orders to his top generals across a distance of 10 meters, has badly miscalculated: about the unity of NATO, the EU and the G 7; about condemnation by large parts of the international community (141 votes in the UN General Assembly); about the severity of financial, economic and individual sanctions. And above all about Ukraine's military capabilities, preparations and determined resistance. So, the original plan for a "subjugation blitzkrieg" failed, logistics were not put in place for such long distances over such an extended period, reconnaissance and tactics were poor, and Russian soldiers' morale is pitiable. The charismatic President Zelensky has become the face of freedom, while Putin appears as the incarnation of the "folly of tyrants".

In his frustration, the Russian President has moved to the Grozny and Aleppo type war against cities, terrorising the civilian population and continuing with war crimes. But even if he has already lost the war as it was envisaged, he can still inflict immense damage and suffering, dismember the country, send in Syrian, Chechen and Wagner militia fighters and try to hunt down the Ukrainian leadership. But Ukraine will not capitulate – between self-assertion on the one hand and neutrality with demilitarisation on Putin's terms on the other, a diplomatic compromise is unimaginable. Still, in fire power Russia is vastly superior, while personnel seems to become scarce, given that the entry age for Russian *kontraktniki* has been extended from 40 to 65.

For the West this means continuing and even reinforcing military support to Ukraine with all the necessary weapons, maintaining and intensifying the pressure on Russia, sustaining its own cohesion, organising cooperation between NATO and the EU and increasing the credibility of its deterrence posture as well as defence preparations. The protection of all Allies must be unquestionable. Furthermore, Allies should stop being deterred (and proclaiming this all the time) by Putin's tempers, bullying and threats for fear of "provoking" him. For his long-planned war against the "brother nation" he did not need any "provocation" in the first place!

The fear of a nuclear strike by Russia, particularly in Germany, I call "self-deterrence". Nuclear weapons are no longer usable for war-fighting. Presidents Biden and Putin, in Geneva almost one year ago, repeated the Reagan-Gorbachev formula that a nuclear war "cannot be won and must never be fought". This was then once again unanimously confirmed by the UN Security Council. Not useful for warfighting I said, but very efficient for blackmail against those who allow themselves to be blackmailed!

It is clear that the future shape of Europe depends on whether and to what extent Putin's criminal goals will be achieved. Ukraine needs all military assistance possible, and it has no time. Should the support be too weak, today's failure cannot be repaired tomorrow.

The Baltic countries' response to the aggression was fearless, and their support for Ukraine comprehensive: unconditional solidarity of nations who know what it means if a dictatorship invades a sovereign country, eradicates an entire nation, and constrains its freedom to choose its future (Baukuskaitė 2022). They support Ukraine politically, economically, and militarily and with humanitarian aid, and they maintain advocacy for pressuring Russia to withdraw and for ever tighter sanctions.

10. Baltic countries' security policy and their cooperation

Of course, security in the comprehensive sense cannot be the responsibility of NATO alone, but the EU Security Strategy has no maritime component, security is underexposed in the EU's "Maritime Strategy", this is also the case in the EU Baltic Sea Strategy. The EU acts on security issues on a case-by-case basis, and the Council of the Baltic Sea States deals at best with "soft" security issues. NATO and the EU have different "security cultures" and their complementarity is in demand, but for security in the narrower sense, NATO is looked to.

In the Baltic Sea region, there is a great complexity of institutional arrangements, a diversity of institutions,

not to mention non-governmental organisations, foundations and initiatives of a regional policy nature. One speaks of the “synergy of the 4 Councils” - Nordic Council, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Barents Council and Arctic Council, and there is the EU with its “Nordic Dimension” and NATO. And one must know that since the failure of the Nordic Defence Union in 1949, “hard” security was excluded from Nordic cooperation. Only with the Stoltenberg Report 60 years later there was a return of security policy issues.

However, the accession of the Baltic states to NATO already coincided with the increasing realisation that the optimism about Russia’s democratisation and willingness to cooperate was unjustified, at least premature or exaggerated. However, from Moscow’s point of view, the EU and NATO have encroached on Russia’s sphere of influence - there are always two perspectives.

The strategic goal of all three states was the now completed integration into the West, the clear affiliation to the peace and stability area of Europe. In the beginning, that process was burdened by the financial and economic crisis. Defence budgets had to accept cuts, for example Lithuania and Latvia had even withdrawn their military attachés from most capitals.

Important for small states is regional cooperation. During my abovementioned Jurmala lecture in 1992, I said to the ministers: “You will have noticed that I almost always take the time to speak of ‘Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania’ instead of saying ‘the Baltic countries’, ‘the Baltics’ or even ‘the Balts’ - because I know that your national identity deserves respect. But let me also say that none of your countries would count for anything in security policy, should you want to go it alone in this area.”

Of course, I was not the inventor of this maxim, but in the following years I observed with satisfaction the development of joint projects. The motives for this were common interests, regional synergy, saving resources, functional pooling of capabilities, the motto “together to the West” and (probably still important within NATO as well) the weight of the Baltic States, which is more significant together than individually.

These so-called BALT projects were mainly the following:

- the Baltic Battalion BALTBAT, established in 1994 and headquartered in Ādaži, Latvia, as the core of a Baltic peacekeeping capability;
- the trinational squadron BALTRON (for Baltic Squadron), created in 1998;
- the Baltic Defence College, which has existed in Tartu, Estonia since 1999;
- the Baltic Air Surveillance Network BALTNET with its coordination centre in Karmėlava, Lithuania;
- the BALTNET communication system.

Apart from the motives already mentioned, these projects have provided triple benefits: the participation of established NATO nations with access to their expertise and experience, a catalytic effect for the development of the Baltic forces and the promotion of interoperability within the three Baltic states and with partners.

Therefore, project-based cooperation takes place in many fields. And the cooperation is steered by a multi-level bureaucracy: Committee of Defence Ministers, Military Committee, Baltic Management Group. And although the BALTBAT has not existed since 2003, a joint army doctrine has been developed, for example.

After NATO accession, one could see the importance of the cooperation projects diminished. That would be wrong. Also wrong would have been a race of individual Baltic states for recognition, visibility, popularity and commendation within the Alliance – which was avoided.

The Baltic Defence College is the common Baltic project I know best from the 2009 evaluation. This joint Baltic military command and staff academy is of great importance for the training of a “NATO-compatible” future leadership and the practice of Western military leadership culture. From my report at the time: “The Baltic Defence College has unique features: the multinationality of staff and course participants from NATO and the PfP area, teaching in English, participation of Western nations also with course members, great attractiveness for Western Balkan, Caucasian and other PfP countries not least due to the increased emphasis on ‘small state security’, the transmission of NATO standards and Western values to participants from these nations.”

All the motives and benefits mentioned remain valid. However, the interdependence between the three Baltic states and their NATO partners has become ever closer. Moreover, important NATO facilities (centres of excellence) were established: in Tallinn for cyber defence, in Riga for strategic communication, and in Vilnius for energy security.

All three Baltic countries are firmly integrated in NATO, their personnel is recognized, interoperability is much advanced, their foreign and defence ministers are authoritative and respected figures in the Alliance, NATO defence plans are in place, multinational NATO battle groups are stationed on their soil (soon probably larger and permanent as opposed to rotational – the self-limitation by NATO in the NATO-Russia Founding Act needs no longer to be respected), reinforcements are coming after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, soon they will be united in NATO with all Baltic Sea neighbours – and their security concerns are taken more seriously than ever by the other members of the Alliance.

Also, their own efforts are impressive: All three meet or overfulfill the NATO commitment of 2% of the GDP to defence. Multilaterally, they contribute to NATO operations around the world. And in accordance with the total defence approach, their societies have started mobilizing too. Societal activities are on the rise, such as enlisting in volunteer defensive organizations, and joining cyber-brigades to help Ukrainians counter Russian hacking and disinformation attempts. Internally, with NATO help and coordination, “resilience” of society, systems and infrastructure are of the essence – as a protection against what some see as “open flanks”, such as cyber vulnerability, ethnic minorities, energy dependence (Lang 2020).

11. NATO accession by Finland and Sweden

Russia’s war of aggression on Ukraine has changed the security situation in Northern Europe within a few weeks (Bundt 2022). The two non-aligned countries in the region, Finland and Sweden, want to become NATO members as soon as possible. In his letters on 17 December last year, Vladimir Putin called for a halt to future NATO enlargements and tried to deter both countries from it. With this and its brutal war of aggression, the Kremlin has now achieved the opposite. It has united NATO, strengthened the Alliance’s military presence near the conflict zone and made the two countries give up their longstanding policy of military non-alignment. Particularly in Finland public support jumped to a record high (76 %). Finland’s President Sauli Niinistö said, if Putin wanted know who brought this about, “Look in the mirror.” Soon Russia will have an additional 1,340-kilometre border with NATO.

In Finland, the memory of the Winter War is still alive, after which Moscow imposed a pact of “friendship, cooperation and assistance” on the country, which had to commit itself to non-alignment. For Sweden, NATO membership shakes the identity and self-perception left by 200 years of non-alignment and peace. But here, too, Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine strongly influenced public opinion and leading politicians. Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said after the Riksdag decision to join NATO that it had become very difficult for Sweden to stand alone as an outsider country in an increasingly tense security situation.

The Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO is a game changer. The strategic hole that characterises the North is plugged and replaced by a depth that facilitates the defence of the Nordic and Baltic states. With all five Nordic countries in NATO together with the Baltic countries, the Baltic Sea for NATO becomes a *mare nostrum*. And Denmark is expected to vote in a referendum on 1 June to lift its reservations about the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy.

Both Sweden and Finland are politically stable democracies, well-entrenched constitutional states and militarily strong. A united North in NATO increases the Alliance’s military capacity and collective defence readiness. The membership of the two countries will strengthen NATO as a community of values and increase the political weight of the North in the Alliance. The two countries’ military clout increases NATO’s deterrence and defence capability in a region of strategic importance to the Alliance. Intelligence cooperation will also be greatly facilitated and a better understanding of the situation will be made possible. The strategic map of Northern Europe has thus changed completely within a few months.

In terms of military strategy, the Finnish and Swedish formations can be easily integrated into NATO. The armed forces of both countries are already NATO-compatible, having participated in multinational operations and exercises for decades in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Norway, among other places.

In the next few years, the Nordic countries will build up a significant fleet of modern combat aircraft.

In total, Norway, Finland and Denmark will then have about 150 F-35 fighter aircraft and Sweden a considerable number of JAS 39 Gripen. That is an impressive military air capability. With this comes significant potential for cost-effective cooperation in bases, logistics and training and education. There will be a comprehensive and robust deterrence regime in Northern Europe, which also increases NATO's ability to protect the sea lines across the North Atlantic, important for reinforcements from North America.

Russia, of course, does not like Finland's and Sweden's change of defence policy at all, and in the short term increased tensions with Russia are to be expected. But a large part of Russia's formations are tied up by the war in Ukraine. The Kremlin could of course use hybrid means, cyber-attacks and border violations in the air space or in the Baltic Sea. But a united Nordic-Baltic region will cope with that.

Moscow may try to influence the ratification process within NATO, aided by Turkey with its oppositions to the fast-track admission procedure for the two countries envisaged by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The Turkish government claims that Sweden and Finland are "a home for Kurdish terrorists". But like with its opposition to Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO Secretary General (2009) or against activating a defence plan for Poland and the Baltic states (2020), in the end Turkey will hopefully give way - for a price.

12. The High North

It has often been said that Norway is "NATO in the North". With Finland and Sweden in NATO, Norway - as the only Atlantic coastal state bordering on Russia and with responsibility for an enormous maritime area seven times larger than its mainland - will receive considerable additional support (Bundt 2022). Already since the Russian war against Ukraine and then its illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass the situation in the Arctic, for a long time characterized by peaceful cooperation, had fundamentally changed. In the "High North" Russian military activities cumulate.

Those are increasingly in contrast with the general interest of littoral states of the Arctic Ocean, who strive for keeping the Arctic in a state of peaceful cooperation. This would also be in Russia's interest, given its economic dependence on raw materials, i.e. fossil energy sources. But: "Apparently Russia wants to be able to increase or reduce the level of cooperation at its own discretion." (Paul and Swistek, p. 6). The systemic rivalry and politico-military competition has extended to the Arctic with the worsening of the relations between the West and Russia resp. China. More military presence, more military manoeuvres, latent conflicts over resources and marine spaces have created an unwanted dynamic and created what experts call the "Arctic security dilemma" - meaning growing insecurity as well as uncertainty about the further development. The "security dilemma" leads to the "typical reaction that insecure states feel compelled to strengthen their military capabilities. This creates a spiral of power competition and leads to a reduction rather than an increase in the security of all actors involved". (Paul and Swistek, p. 36).

Against this background, five themes are of interest: the geostrategic significance of the Arctic for both NATO and Russia; the threefold importance particularly for Russia: great power status, fossil resources and strategic bastion for military activities; the importance of the Northern Sea Route as transport way for fossil energy sources, which causes military defence preparations against fictive adversaries; for Russia, a perceived loss of security by the shrinking of the ice; and finally the abovementioned "security" dilemma".

Dialogue and cooperation, confidence building and arms control don't have great chances with Russia's present war. One concrete implication of the aggression is the discontinuation of the participation by seven of the eight members of the Arctic Council, which is chaired by Russia until May 2023. A lot of research in various fields has thus come to a standstill. It is an open question whether, and when, the Arctic will again become a region of cooperation. So for the time being, military cooperation, also in the armaments sector, exercises, intelligence exchange and deterrence will be in the foreground - and that in closer cooperation with the future NATO members Sweden and Finland.

13. NATO's development with regard to Russia and the North

The "NATO 2030" Report, result of the Alliance-internal "reflexion process" that followed President Macron's vitriolic statement, in 2019, that NATO was "brain dead", already takes a rather clear stance on the increasing security challenge posed by Russia (NATO 2020, p.25): "After the end of the Cold War, NATO attempted to build a meaningful partnership with Russia, based on dialogue and practical cooperation in areas of

common interest. But Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, followed by its ongoing military build-ups and assertive activity in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, in the Eastern Mediterranean, Baltic, and in the High North, have led to a sharp deterioration in the relationship and negatively impacted the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Russia routinely engages in intimidatory military operations in the immediate vicinity of NATO and has enhanced its reach and capabilities for threatening airspace and freedom of navigation in the Atlantic. It has violated a number of major international commitments (...)

Following the illegitimate and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Alliance has maintained a united front to Russian aggression, both militarily, in improvements to NATO's deterrence posture along the eastern flank, and politically, in the solidarity that Allies have shown in response to Russia's orchestration of the Salisbury nerve agent attack, breach of the INF Treaty, and other aggressive actions. (...) To date ... Russia's ongoing assertive policies and aggressive actions—including a hybrid campaign to undermine faith in democratic institutions in the Alliance—have proven persistent obstacles to meaningful dialogue. Looking out to 2030, Russia will most likely remain the main military threat to the Alliance. It confronts NATO with the risk of a *fait accompli* or with sustained and paralysing pressure in a crisis situation. Faced with such an actor, NATO will have to show diligence and solidarity, while it maintains openings for dialogue in the event that Russia's leaders choose a more constructive path."

The recommendations contain, i.a., continuing the dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue and responding to Russian threats and hostile actions in a politically united, determined, and coherent way; clearly communicating the indivisibility of the security of the Euro-Atlantic area as well as maintaining adequate conventional and nuclear military capabilities. They call for possessing the agility and flexibility to confront aggression across the Alliance's territory, including where Russian forces are either directly or indirectly active, particularly on NATO's eastern flank.

Probably overtaken by events for some time is the plea that "NATO should remain open to discussing peaceful co-existence and to react positively to constructive changes in Russia's posture and attitude. To be productive, such dialogue must be firm on principles and conducted from a position of unity and strength. The Alliance should continue to treat the NATO-Russia Council as the main platform to deliver political messages to Russia". The same goes for the advocacy of confidence-building measures, while de-confliction will still be important.

Without doubt, NATO's new Strategic Concept, being prepared for the upcoming June summit meeting of the Alliance, will have much tougher and consequential language on Russia, which in the extant Strategic Concept (of 2010) still figures as a "partner". And since a quite different interaction with Russia will be needed, the last recommendation may be in order: "NATO should designate a special unit within the JISD to monitor and assess how Russia-China cooperation in the military, technological and political fields, including coordination in disinformation and hybrid warfare, impacts Euro-Atlantic security, and provide regular updates to the NAC."

Apart from the changed perspective on aggressive Russia, the Baltic Sea Region and the High North which the Report mentions only in passing and in the "partnership" section (e.g. NATO 2020, pp. 16 and 59), it would be right to pay them as much attention as "The South" (pp. 34, 35).

Incidentally, in light of the present dangers and the importance of Alliance cohesion and unity, I have proposed to complement the three NATO "core tasks" in the present Strategic Concept (NATO 2010, Para 4) - Collective Defence, Crisis Management and Cooperative Security - with two additional ones: Consultation and Resilience (Wittmann 2021b).

14. Conclusions

President Putin's war of aggression and subjugation has dramatically changed the security landscape. For the time being its overtly criminal leadership has excluded Russia from the community of civilised, peaceful, rules-abiding nations – as a revisionist, even revanchist, imperial rogue state, destroyer of the European security order. It must be defeated and clearly shown its limits.

Of course, eventually Russia will stay where it is, the largest country of the world, with a huge nuclear arsenal and gigantic internal, economic and societal problems. One day a *modus vivendi* for continued coexistence in the future must be found.

If only Russia - under a new leadership - could be helped to recognise its real interests! For the mantra is

correct that in the long term security in Europe can only be achieved *with*, not *against* or *without* Russia. But Russian policy and aggression has for the foreseeable future made security *from* Russia the priority. In the long run that is not in Russia's proper interest.

Among other things, President Putin has been frustrated about not being recognized by the West, primarily the United States, at an equal level, and President Obama's rather harmless remark - in reply to a reporter's question - that Russia was just a "regional power" was blown up to gigantic dimensions, reinforcing Russia's "victim cult". Much more harshly, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt at his time called Russia an "Upper Volta with atomic rockets"!

Putin craves for "great power" status. But his claim is not true that the USA wants to "keep Russia down" or even "destroy it". I think that very welcome even as a great power would be a Russia that (as in the quite singular case of Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions) participated constructively in global and regional problem-solving - instead of relying mainly on disruptive potential, preventive power, regional military superiority, surprise manoeuvres, destabilisation, fear of its neighbours, and now brutal military aggression.

If it is true that Putin's imperial, revisionist plans extend much beyond Ukraine, the Baltic countries are particularly exposed with their geographic location, their limited armed forces, and also their minorities, who now appear to be well anchored in the societies, but whom Putin would certainly like to include in his self-commitment "to protect Russians wherever they live".

But the entire region will be better off with Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession and with the Baltic Sea as a *mare nostrum* for the Alliance. Apart from that, reassurance for the Baltic countries is growing for several reasons: common awareness for their concerns, increasing NATO military presence, tendential realisation of expert recommendations (such as Hodges and Lucas), cohesion of all Nordic and Baltic countries as well as recognition of their brave and positive role in supporting Ukraine's struggle for survival.

Hopefully, the Baltic Sea region will receive appropriate attention at the upcoming Summit and in the new Strategic Concept.

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