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on

Moves and Counter Moves: Between Russia and NATO

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Since 2014, the Ukrainian crisis has led to strong moves and counter moves between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Ukraine became the battleground to allow flexing of muscles on both sides, leaving the crisis in a protracted situation. Additional to the Ukraine crisis, the Syrian civil war, which started five years back and is still continuing, has further strained the bellicose relationship between Russia and the NATO.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 seemed to ruffle the feathers of both sides. Many steps were taken, which were not conducive to a positive relationship, both rhetorically and tactically, which further strengthened a confrontational attitude. The suspension of all civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia, NATO Foreign Ministers' discussion on bolstering defences in Eastern Europe and having military cooperation with the ex-Soviet bloc¹ are some of the developments that have aggravated the situation.



Source: The Risk Advisory Groupⁱⁱ

Moves and Counter Moves

A series of war games have been conducted by both sides since 2014. The war games conducted specifically on the Eastern European borders, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania show the military accessibility. A study conducted by RAND on war games showed that NATO is not in a good position to defend these countries. For Russia, it would take 36 to 60 hours to reach the borders of these countries. NATO, as it still does not have a base in these countries, will leave the alliance with negative results, such as disastrous consequences for the Baltic people, which will impact the NATO members; an open offensive conflict with Russia and escalationⁱⁱⁱ in that confrontation. Moreover, Russia would not let go of its influence in this sphere easily.

Ahead of NATO Summit at Cardiff in September 2014, the then NATO Chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that the alliance will adopt a readiness plan against Russia. In February 2015, NATO decided to double its combat forces in Eastern Europe. NATO's Rapid Reaction Force (NRF), composed of ground, sea, air and Special Forces, is to comprise of 40,000 soldiers in future (currently it is 13,000^{iv}).^v In February 2016, NATO confirmed increase in the current NRF from 13,000 troops to 40,000 and allowed for the creation of six mini-headquarters in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.^{vi} At the same time, NATO's Multinational Corps Northeast

headquarters in Szczecin, Poland, which serves as NATO's headquarters in Eastern Europe, is receiving more capabilities and upgrading its readiness to serve as a hub for regional cooperation,^{vii} and is to be further expanded.^{viii} It decided to have a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the overall NRF structure. The VJTF comprises a multinational brigade of approximately 5,000 troops.^{ix}

NATO increased (from four to sixteen) the number of fighter aircrafts in air-policing mission over Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It started regular Airborne Warning and Control System reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania and stepped up regular maritime patrols in the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. It conducted several important land, air, and maritime exercises. A few allies have taken additional steps on a national basis that complement NATO's moves, such as 160 soldiers from the US Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) have been rotating through the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania, where they train with local forces.^x

In September 2015, the NATO member states supplied Ukraine government with the weapons to fight against the Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine; NATO denies the report on supplies.^{xi} However, the Alliance sent advisors to Kyiv to work with government officials in areas, such as military organizational reform, defence education, cyber defence, command, control, and communications, logistics, and military career transition.^{xii}

In the same month of the same year, NATO members conducted a military exercise called 'Rapid Trident' with Ukraine. Ukrainian and American naval forces held joint maritime drills in the north-western part of the Black Sea. The exercise has been conducted since 2006; it did not go down well with Russia because of the fighting, which was going on between the Ukrainian government and the Russian separatists during that time.^{xiii}

In counter measures, NATO, apart from building its defences, deploying missile defence systems near the Russian borders and conducting exercises, is also trying to join hands with the ex-Soviet states like Montenegro, etc. to weaken Russia's influence in the region.

In December 2015, NATO Foreign Ministers invited Montenegro to begin accession talks to join the Alliance. According to NATO, it was to strengthen the security of Montenegro,

the Western Balkans, and NATO.^{xiv} The invitation to Montenegro and the latter's promptness has not been taken positively by Russia.

Russia's problem with Montenegro's willingness to join NATO is a threat to the former. Already, Montenegro undertook a series of political, legal, and military reforms under the auspices of NATO's Membership Action Plan, a program that offers assistance and support to countries seeking to join the alliance. The membership would also turn Montenegro into a regional leader and an example of how a small country, not even a decade old, can make great strides so long as it has enough political ambition. The move could inspire others, such as Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, to reenergize necessary reforms for eventual membership, a process that has stagnated in both countries.^{xv}

Russia conducted unannounced "snap exercises."^{xvi} Russia, in December 2015, carried out test of its new-generation Bastion coastal defense system from its Russian Black Sea Fleet, as part of naval exercises.^{xvii} In March 2015, Russian fighter-bombers used NATO warships in the Black Sea to practice attack scenarios; a Swedish recon aircraft was intercepted by Russian fighters in international airspace off Kaliningrad on October 2014;^{xviii} and in January 2015, British fighter jets intercepted Russian fighter jets as they approached UK air space for the second time.^{xix} There have been many provocative incidents between Russia and the NATO between 2014 and 2015, which have continued even in 2016.

On 5-10 December, Russia focused on an exercise in Kaliningrad where 9,000 servicemen, 250 tanks and APCs, over 100 artillery units, 55 warships and the Iskander ballistic missile system were involved.^{xx} A surprise attack against a Baltic Sea nation with a brigade-size airborne unit from the 76th Guards Air Assault Division from Pskov near the Estonian border was conducted. The exercise also included sorties by nuclear-capable Tu-95 Bear strategic bombers and Tu-22M Backfire long-range bombers.^{xxi} On February 16, 2015, it conducted a "snap inspection" of its paratrooper units in western Russia.^{xxii} Meanwhile, in the Pskov region, close to the Estonian border, an exercise involving some 2,000 troops and 500 units of military equipment were conducted.^{xxiii} From March 16, 2015, without previous warning, Russia conducted a five-day 'snap exercise' in western Russia involving 45,000 troops, 3,000 vehicles, 110 aircraft, 15

submarines, and 40 surface vessels.^{xxiv} The Russian Northern Fleet was brought to full combat readiness.^{xxv}

There were announcements of 40 ballistic missiles to be added to the nuclear warheads by Russia in June 2015, which will be placed near the eastern European borders.^{xxvi}

Rhetorical Confrontations

During the Munich Security Conference on February 13, 2016, NATO-Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that ‘Russia’s rhetoric, posture and exercises of its nuclear forces are aimed at intimidating its neighbours, undermining trust and stability in Europe’. He added that all of NATO’s moves had been made in response to Russian aggression.^{xxvii} He said that Russia is destabilising the European security order. The strategy to contain Russia is through dialogue and more defence.^{xxviii}

Mr. Stoltenberg said that ‘NATO does not seek confrontation and we do not want a new Cold War’. But NATO has to respond to the Russian military build up and the willingness on Moscow’s part to use military power to change borders in Europe, such as in Ukraine. He was stressing on the modern deterrence to counter the problems of 21st century. According to NATO, deterrence is making a comeback. He said that Russia’s announcement of additional missiles to the nuclear warheads has made the international alliance increase its deterrence measures.^{xxix}

The NATO chief underlined that NATO’s deterrence apart from conventional weapons also included nuclear weapons. Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia and the West need to agree on reforms of the world order, because such NATO-centred self-conceit reflects political short-sightedness that causes severe damage to the search for responses to common real challenges.^{xxx} Russia’s National Security Council head Nikolay Patrushev said that the words about NATO’s “defensive” nature are only a cover for the alliance’s aggressive essence.^{xxxi}

NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Philip Breedlove told the House Armed Services Committee on February 25 that Russia wants to rewrite the international world orders. He said that the era of working with Russia is over. The Pentagon’s budget request

for fiscal 2017 includes a fourfold increase in funding for the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to deter an aggressive Russia.^{xxxii} Gen. Breedlove said that Russia has decided to become an adversary of the West and presents an "existential threat" to the United States and its allies. U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter, meanwhile, accused Russia of intimidating its immediate neighbours, and said that he doubted whether Moscow was still committed to strategic stability on nuclear weapons.^{xxxiii}

On the comments of 'Russia, a threat', Russia's Ministry of Defense spokesman, Igor Konashenkov said that statements warning of a so-called "Russian threat" to US security are linked to discussions in Congress on next year's military budget, noting that the idea of this "threat" has been a "top-seller" for the Pentagon. He pointed out that the idea of a so-called Russian threat is not new. Earlier in February, the Pentagon proposed a \$582.7 billion defense budget that emphasizes emerging threats from Russia, China, and Islamic State militants (IS, former ISIS, ISIL). The proposed budget would quadruple the last year's request for the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to \$3.4 billion in a bid to reassure NATO allies.^{xxxiv}

Latvia's Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said on February 26 that Latvia wants NATO to increase its security along Europe's eastern front to counter what it sees as a growing Russian menace. Alarmed by a rising tempo and intensity of Russian exercises, deployments and rhetoric just over the border, the small former Soviet republic is taking steps to harden its defenses, but NATO help is required. He said that to deter Russia in the region, NATO needs more "boots on the ground," increased and larger military exercises, deployment of military equipment and the strengthening of air defences.^{xxxv}

Russia's National Security Strategy, which was published on December 31, 2015, clearly defines NATO as a threat because the alliance is expanding its military structure towards Russian borders (a phenomenon noted as a 'concern' in the 2009 strategy). Its military doctrine of 2015 preferred to term the US and NATO activities as "dangers" (in Russian military parlance, a danger is a concern, while a threat could spark conflict), although a number of specific capabilities, such as Global Strike, were classed as threats.^{xxxvi}

Another problem that has made Russia consider the activities of the US as a threat is the spread of the US military biological laboratories near Russia's borders.^{xxxvii} In 2010, the Pentagon launched a large laboratory complex in Ukraine called Mechnikov Anti-Plague Research Institute in Odessa.^{xxxviii}

In 2011, it opened the Lugar Bio Laboratory in Tbilisi, Georgia.^{xxxix} In 2010, the Pentagon commissioned a centre in Kazakhstan, Central Reference Laboratory, in Almaty. This is a project under the Pentagon program, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.^{xl} The Laboratory in Almaty, scheduled to become operational in 2016 under the management of the Kazakhstan government, will also be capable of detecting and responding. (By 2018, the respective governments will assume full ownership and funding responsibilities of the labs).^{xli} Another new disease detection early warning station situated in the populated area of Otar (supposedly on the basis of agricultural research institute – DNISHI) will add to its capability. It was supposed to have been operational since 2014.^{xlii} In 2012, the modernisation of a bio laboratory in Azerbaijan was carried out, also with the support of the US.^{xliii} The individual program of cooperation with the US in the military-biological field also involves Armenia and Uzbekistan.^{xliv}

Kazakhstan in 2013 clarified to some journalists that there would be no development of biological weapons. In 2015, the laboratory clarified to some Russian journalists about the civilian nature of the laboratory. In 2015, Batu Kutelia, Georgia's former ambassador to the United States and deputy secretary of Georgia's National Security Council, published an article dismissing Russian claims that the Lugar Centre threatened the health of Georgian citizens. Officials of Georgia and Kazakhstan have provided journalists, scientists and foreign officials with regular access to the sites.^{xlv} A film crew from Russia had visited the Tbilisi centre and prepared a note for the Russian Foreign Ministry, reporting on the civilian nature of the laboratory contrary to the apprehension Russia had.^{xlvi}

Nevertheless, in a journal, a piece was carried dated January 2016 where it said that bio-chemical warfare "medical research" facility, like the one in Tbilisi, is almost the same as a fully-fledged bio-chemical warfare production facility. Russia sees these researches and the breaking of diseases as apocalypse for Europe and Russia and is concerned. It is apprehensive because of the funding these laboratories are getting from the US Army.^{xlvii}

One problem for Russia is that Russian representatives are not allowed to visit the facilities used by Americans abroad.^{xlvi} Russia includes this threat as a 'new' threat in the concept of National Security Strategy.^{xlix} According to the Russian sanitary service, known as Rospotrebnadzor, epidemic of African swine fever in Russia in 2013 was a planned act of economic sabotage.^l It is cautious because although the US military base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan is closed, but America investing in and opening biological laboratories under military projects in Kazakhstan^{li} depicts a kind of strategy to contain Russia. Moscow sees these as threats posed by the laboratories to its national interests.

Similarly, during the 2008 Georgia War, the then President Medvedev said that Russia terminated the "eastward expansion of NATO" by going to war with Georgia in August 2008. According to him, if Russia had wavered, then the geopolitical layout would have been different. A range of countries, which the NATO tried to artificially "protect", would have been within it. It was believed that at the Bucharest Summit of NATO in 2004, the US bowed to the pressure of some of its key European NATO allies, such as Germany and France against the accession of Georgia and Ukraine to the Pact, as the Western Europeans were fearful that such a move could anger Russia. Mr. Medvedev said that Russia and the alliance had "turned back on direct rivalry."^{lii}

Also the problem over Ukraine has not been new. In 2008, Mr. Medvedev had said that the NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia could threaten European security and undermine attempts to improve trans-Atlantic relations. He said, "We consider it extremely troublesome for the existing structure of European security. No state can be pleased about having representatives of a military bloc to which it does not belong coming close to its borders."^{liii} He made clear Russia's unhappiness with US plans to site parts of a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe.^{liv}

Russia's annexation of Crimea is seen as the undermining of Europe's security architecture. Similarly, any attempts by NATO's enlargement threaten Russia's security architecture. Russia's reaction to any attempt to deploy foreign troops near its borders is exactly the same as Washington reacted in 1961 when Russian troops had landed in Cuba.^{lv}

The conciliating approach by the US towards Cuba and attempts to build a constructive relationship with the latter can be linked to the insecurity within the US, which can be taken advantage by Russia.

Problematic Relationship

According to Article I of the Helsinki Final Act, which established the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 1975, every country has the right 'to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance.' "All the OSCE member states, including Russia, have sworn to uphold those principles. In line with these principles, the NATO, for example, feels that Ukraine has the right to choose for itself whether it joins any treaty of alliance, including NATO's founding treaty.^{lvi}

The former Soviet Union and its successor Russia has always opposed NATO's enlargement.^{lvii} In the latter half of the 1990s, when NATO was preparing to expand its membership, Russian officials claimed that the entry of former Warsaw Pact countries into NATO would violate a solemn "pledge" made by the governments of West Germany and the US in 1990 not to bring any former Communist states into the alliance.^{lviii} In 1995, Russia stated that if NATO agrees to admit the Baltic republics, Russian Federation Armed Forces will immediately be moved into Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Any attempt by NATO to stop this will be viewed by Russia as the prelude to a world nuclear catastrophe.^{lix} NATO's expansion has led to the complications currently with its impact over Syria, Arctic and Antarctica region too. For example, during May 2015, NATO held a major air exercise over far northern Europe. Norway was the host country and Russia shares the border with the country. The military exercise which went till June 6, 2015 included the operations over northern Norway, Sweden and Finland as well as the Arctic Ocean, all areas a short flying time away from northern Russia and critical military bases such as Murmansk, headquarters of the Russian Northern Fleet.^{lx} Russia's updated maritime doctrine, which was published in 2015, emphasized the Arctic as another front to counter NATO influence and expand Russian naval presence in potential new shipping lanes opened by receding sea ice.^{lxi}

Russia is also serious about its strategic interest in Antarctic. In 2009, during the Antarctica-2009 expedition, accompanied by fellow parliamentarians, explorer and Member of Parliament, Arthur Chilingarov, the Russian president's special representative for international cooperation in the Arctic and Antarctic, said, "We are definitely showing the whole world that we have serious plans to continue polar research."^{lxii} In January 2016, the region saw the arrival of an oceanographic research ship, Admiral Vladimirsky, on a mission backed by Russia's navy.

With the invitation to Montenegro by the NATO, tension between the organisation and Russia has been aggravated. In fact, every invitation by NATO to Russia's neighbours will add on to the tension between the organisation and Russia.

Any expansion will be a problem for NATO (for the time being at least) because of Russia's proximity to the territories. From Russia's border, Ukraine is 490 km, Tallin is 200 km and Riga is between about 210 and 275km. From the Polish border to Riga, for instance, the distance is about 325 km, to Tallin almost 600 km. In a time of crisis, NATO has to transit the Kaliningrad corridor; a 110-150km long stretch.^{lxiii} Kaliningrad is an enclave that borders Lithuania and Poland. Since 2013, Russia is undertaking large-scale military exercises.^{lxiv} Russia's advantage in terms of intervention will be quicker than NATO in a time of crisis between these powers.

Russia's forces are motorized, mechanized and tank units. It enjoys an advantage in tactical and operational fields. The Russian order of battle includes ten artillery battalions (three equipped with tube artillery and seven with multiple-rocket launchers). Meanwhile, NATO has no independent missiles, and the light units involved in the fight are poorly endowed with artillery. NATO has light forces, which can be outgunned by the heavier Russian units. NATO's airpower to be effective needs to be backed by ground forces, which in comparison to Russia is low.^{lxv} Russia has in its Western Military District—the command that would fight a Baltic war—65,000 ground troops, 850 pieces of artillery, 750 tanks, and 320 combat aircraft. In comparison, NATO forces rely on 10,450 men on the ground, 158 pieces of artillery, three tanks, and no aircraft in this part of the region.^{lxvi} NATO air policing facilities involve an Air Surveillance and Control System (ASACS), an Air Command and Control (Air C2) structure and QRA (I) aircraft [Quick Reaction Alert (Interceptor)] which are available on a 24/7 basis. For member

nations not having the full range QRA(I) assets in their own militaries (Albania, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Slovenia), agreements exist to ensure a single standard of security for NATO's member Nations.^{lxvii} However, the NATO began to move alliance assets into the region. In 2015, the US began to preposition heavy armour, such as M1 Abrams battle tanks, in Estonia, and NATO boosted the size of its Eastern European rapid response force to 13,000 men.^{lxviii}

The minimum force requirement by NATO to counter Russia in this region are seven NATO brigades, including three heavy armoured brigades – adequately supported by air power, land-based fire support and troops ready to fight at the onset of hostilities. Adding three US Army armoured brigades, with associated artillery and enabling units, would come with an up-front price tag of about \$13 billion. Annual operating cost would be roughly \$2.7 billion.^{lxix}

Russia against Enlargement

Since 1994, Russia's policy has been to denounce enlargement, warn of its negative impact on Russia's relations with the West, and threaten specified or unspecified counter-measures. Some of these threatened measures included non-ratification of the START II treaty, abrogation of the CFE Treaty, increased defence spending, stationing of tactical nuclear weapons on Russia's borders, targeting new NATO members with strategic nuclear weapons, establishing a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) defense union or at least a Russia-Belarus defence union, and forging alliances with China, India, Iran or other countries.^{lxx}

By using these tactics, Russian officials apparently hoped to convince some European NATO countries that enlargement could spark renewed confrontation with Moscow. At the very least, it was hoped that adopting a tough stance would provide Moscow maximum leverage in possible Russia-NATO negotiations on enlargement. NATO enlargement is viewed by Russian elites as the clearest sign yet that the West is not really interested in an equal partnership with Russia, particularly if Russia's views of its security interests in Europe do not correspond with what the West feels they should be.^{lxxi} On 19 May 1997, in an address to the Russian parliamentary leaders, the then former president Yeltsin warned that Russia will "revise" its relations with NATO and the agreement with it, if

NATO "starts admitting" former Soviet republics such as the Baltic states.^{lxxii} Although a rapprochement with the West has been seen after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the main objective is to regroup itself economically. However, growing Russian disillusionment with the West increases Russia's tendency to show its independence from the West whenever possible.^{lxxiii}

In 1999, when NATO bombed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia without taking in confidence Russia, it was a shock to the latter. The use of force without the express sanction of a United Nations Security Council resolution dramatically devalued not only the right of Russian veto, but also the former superpower's actual international weight. Moscow was shown to be incapable to prevent a major international military operation in an area, which it traditionally regards as crucial to its entire position in Europe. The adoption of NATO's new Strategic Concept at the Washington summit a month later and the alliance's stated willingness to intervene anywhere in Europe to uphold stability and human rights raised dark suspicions about where NATO might strike next, perhaps even closer to Russia's borders. Such suspicions were only strengthened when, while Russia declined the invitation to attend the Washington summit, the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUUAM) chose to attend and decided to use the US capital as the venue for a meeting among themselves.^{lxxiv}

In between 2000 to 2008, there was no overt tension although Russia was uncomfortable with the Colour Revolution of Ukraine in 2004, but militarily, it was not aggressive. However, trouble started covertly between them after Russia's military action in Georgia in 2008. NATO found Russia's military action in Georgia to be "disproportionate and inconsistent with its peacekeeping role, as well as incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution set out in the Helsinki Final Act, the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration." But in 2009, it decided to resume practical and political cooperation. At a NATO-Russia Council held during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO leaders and former President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to embark on "a new stage of cooperation towards a true strategic partnership," based on the goals and principles of the Founding Act and the NATO-Russia Rome Declaration.^{lxxv}

In fact, former President Medvedev called for revamping European security, which he first announced before the Georgia war. It would have been useful not so much because he called for a new, legally binding treaty on security, but because it represents a de facto invitation to an ongoing dialogue, a new legally binding one.^{lxxvi} In the following years, NATO and Russia worked together in support of the Afghan army's helicopter fleet, conducted joint counter-piracy and submarine-rescue exercises, and discussed a joint military mission to help dispose of Syria's chemical weapons in 2013 and early 2014.^{lxxvii} However, the Ukraine crisis of 2014 was the trigger point of the current crisis, which led to open confrontational rhetoric and increase in military build-up between Russia and NATO.

Russia is trying to reconfigure the balance of power in an effective manner in the strategic Black Sea region. Russia plans to spend \$2.4 billion on the Black Sea Fleet by 2020, including the most modern surface ships and submarines, as well as integrated air-defence and amphibious-landing capacities. On the fleet, the then-commander of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Masorin had said during a speech at the Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol, Ukraine, in 2007 that "the operational zone of the fleet extends across the Black Sea and the Mediterranean all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. It is at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and here we must re-establish the permanent presence of the Russian Navy." According to Western analysts if Russia completes the upgrade of its military base at Tartus, Syria, its dominance of the Black Sea will enable Moscow "to sustain a much larger force in the Mediterranean" in the long term. The Black Sea is "the main logistical platform" for Russian actions in West Asia, enabling Moscow to maintain 10 ships in the eastern Mediterranean.^{lxxviii}

Russia is planning to form four new divisions of ground forces in 2016 in response to "intensified" NATO military exercises. One of the divisions will be stationed with the central group of forces, while three will be with Russia's western group of military forces.^{lxxix}

The new National Security Strategy of Russia, published in December 2015, also prioritizes Russia's defence sector as a driving force for domestic industry's modernization. A new addition to it is the need to diversify the economy, remove the

dependence on raw materials, switch to a new level of technological development and rational import substitution. Although the reason behind modernization is given as economic, but it is also a fear regarding the encirclement of Russia by NATO. Russian Security Council Chief Patrushev said that the threats connected with NATO's activity represent a great danger for Russia. He said that the urge to boost and modernize offensive potentials, deploy new types of armaments, create a global missile defense system, including around Russia, erodes the structure of global security. He also said that the US, supported by a number of Western countries, plans to retain its domination in global affairs, so it is making attempts to restrict Russia's independent foreign and domestic policy.^{lxxx}

Reasons for Fear: Russian Perspective

The NATO's enlargement process to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has become a dominant concern in the evolution of Russia. On 15 September 1993, former President Boris Yeltsin wrote a letter to US President Clinton and other Western leaders in which he opposed the possible admission of the Central and Eastern countries to NATO. He pointed out that such a decision would provoke a negative response on the part of Russian society. He drew attention to the fact that the enlargement would be illegal because the treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany signed in September 1990, particularly those of its provision that prohibit stationing of foreign troops within the FRG's eastern lands, excludes, by its meaning, the possibility of expansion of the NATO zone to the East. Russia interpreted the Partnership for Peace (PfP) agreement between both as a confirmation from the NATO of dissuasion from expanding to east.^{lxxxi}

Russia, since the formation of the NATO, has been uncomfortable, given the basic founding principle of the organisation, which is to contain communism. Another insecurity on Moscow's side, which has been there since the emerging of the US as a superpower, is the unilateral dominance of America over the world and curtailing Russia's ambitions and power.

During a speech at the House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations on the US Policy of NATO Enlargement in 1996, Mr. Rudolf V. Perina, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs, Department of State, said that NATO

remains the foundation of American policy in Europe. It is the essential organisation for peace in the continent. The enlargement process and peace in the region serve political and security interests of America in the 21st century. He said that NATO enlargement will serve to erase the “illegitimate lines”^{lxxxii} drawn during the Cold War. It is to protect the democracies in Europe. According to the NATO Enlargement document of 1996, America reserves the right to station nuclear forces on the territories of the new members (who were included in the 1995 Enlargement Process). Also, Mr. Perina said that NATO had not made any commitments towards non-enlargement of members to Russia. James Leach, Representative from Iowa, said that NATO is sensitive to Russia’s concerns but, at the same time, has understood that Russia will never agree to the organisation’s enlargement in the region.^{lxxxiii}

During the hearing before the Committee on International Relations, United States House of Representatives 104th Congress, Second Session in June 1996, Frank Koszorus Jr., President of the American Hungarian Federation of Metropolitan Washington, DC, on behalf of the Hungarian American and Central and East European Coalitions, said that the Coalition strongly believes that the long-term national security and fiscal interests of the US requires strong commitment to the transition of Central and East European countries to fully democratic and free-market nations. The Committee said that the commitment requires an active US engagement in the region. It also believed that with the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, the objectives of peace, stability and democracy in Europe are achievable. According to it, to achieve all these successfully, the US and West’s continued engagement, support and assistance is important. The Committee believes that the stability and security of the region can be best accomplished through the expansion of NATO.^{lxxxiv}

According to it, the collapse of the Soviet Union had left a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, hence rapid reintegration with the West was in the interest of NATO. The Committee believed that the integration with the West would provide these countries with a sense of security and help in stabilizing democracy. The Committee’s focus was on the countries that were committed to the concepts of democracy, market economies, civilian control of the military and human and minority rights that would serve the foreign policy interests of the US too. In the enlargement process, the Committee was clear that Russia

should not have any veto power in it. A word of caution from them was that if the West was indecisive, then it would encourage the Russian nationalists to assert expansionist tendencies and cause the US and the West to lose credibility.^{lxxxv} All the Warsaw Pact members except Russia joined NATO. The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, in the alliance's first round of post-Cold War enlargement.^{lxxxvi} In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the alliance.^{lxxxvii} The way Russia has its fears, the NATO has its own fears from Russia.

Reasons for Fear: NATO Perspective

The threats and the counter threats from Russia and NATO to each other are not new. It is because of the deep entrenched mistrust between Russia and NATO, which is embedded in the relationship since the formation of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact.

The main danger to Europeans now is an “alternative Europe with alternative values,” such as isolation, intolerance and disrespect to human rights.^{lxxxviii} However, apart from these concerns, the main factor of not being able to come together in a genuine cooperation is the complexity attached to the power symbol and mistrust. Russia wants to be treated as an equal and respected partner while the West is not ready to either let go of its ambitions of influencing and containing Russia’s power in its neighbourhood or accept Russia on an equal footing.

NATO is uncomfortable with Russia’s geopolitical significance as a long-standing bulwark against Western imperialism that propelled the centuries-old confrontation.^{lxxxix} Since its emergence as an organized state, Russia has collided with the West. For over a millennium, the two have clashed economically, politically and militarily, using the countries that form the buffer between them as a staging ground for their rivalry. A containment policy to curb the influence of Russia during the 20th century, initiated by the US, has always been present. The geopolitical imperative underpinning the US’ containment policy—blocking the rise of regional hegemony on the Eurasian landmass that could challenge the Western alliance structure—never disappeared. Thus, NATO and the European Union continued to expand.^{xc} Russia, because of its economic development due to the revenue it was receiving as a result of high energy prices helped it to re-emerge as a regional power, which does not go down well with the West.

NATO is uncomfortable about Russia destabilizing the West through its support to disruptive politics with non-Russian speaking minorities in Europe and compatriots policy towards Russian speaking minorities.^{xcii}

Given the belligerent atmosphere prevailing over Europe due to the Ukraine and Syrian crises that have opened up many cracks in the relationship between Russia and the West, it would be easy to presume that Russia's moves on Ukraine and its latest in Syria have been behind the rhetoric of the NATO. However, from a close look, it appears that the problem is not new, but the root cause lies in the reason behind the formation of NATO.

During the meeting at the 52nd Security Conference in Munich, Germany on February 13, 2016,^{xciii} US Secretary John Kerry said that the US and Europe would stand up to the repeated aggression of Russia and noted that in addition to a joint focus on Ukraine, Washington plans to quadruple spending to help European security. That will allow the US to maintain a division's worth of equipment in Europe and an additional combat brigade in Central and Eastern Europe.^{xciii}

NATO is worried about the "hybrid war"—a blend of hard and soft power^{xciv} that Russia has started to prefer, especially as seen during the Ukraine crisis.

Faultline Lies

The faultline of rivalry between Russia and NATO lies in their ambitions to be the hegemon and contain each other. The containment policy apart from the hegemonistic tendencies within both is also because of the embedded mistrust between the two.

The Founding Act between them also shows it clearly. There have been times when Russia tried to be a part of the alliance. After the first rejection during the Soviet Union's time, Russia sought again in 1990s and also in the early part of this decade.^{xcv} On December 21, 1991, former Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrote to NATO saying that Russia hoped to join the alliance sometime in the future. In his letter, Mr. Yeltsin said: "This will contribute to creating a climate of mutual understanding and trust, strengthening stability and cooperation on the European continent. We consider these relations to be very serious and wish to develop this dialogue in each and every direction, both on the political and military levels. Today we are raising a question of Russia's membership in NATO, however

regarding it as a long-term political aim."^{xcvi} In 1998, Russia joined the G8. The then former US President Bill Clinton thought that admitting Russia to the exclusive club would lend the country international prestige and encourage its first post-Soviet leader, Yeltsin, to consolidate democratic gains and grow close to the West. He also believed that the membership would help mollify Russia as the NATO security alliance opened its doors to former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe.^{xcvii} To initiate a positive engagement between the two, in December 1996, NATO foreign ministers agreed to seek an agreement with the Russian Federation on arrangements to deepen and widen the scope of NATO-Russian relations, primarily to offset the largely negative impact on those relations caused by NATO's decision to enlarge. In May 1997, Former Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton along with 15 other members of NATO signed the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation." The objective of the Act was "to overcome the vestiges of past confrontation and competition and to strengthen mutual trust and cooperation."^{xcviii}

The Act "defines the goals and mechanism of consultation, cooperation, joint decision-making and joint action that will constitute the core of the mutual relations between NATO and Russia." The Act establishes a NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council.^{xcix} The objective behind this Council was to hold regular sessions to give Russia a forum to raise issues and allow the two sides to cooperate in several regions, including the Balkans.

The Act also contains NATO's qualified pledge not to deploy nuclear weapons or station troops in the new member states and refines the basic "scope and parameters" for an adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.^c As explicit reassurance to Russia, the NATO Foreign Ministers also adopted the so-called three 'No's—NATO countries have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members nor any need to change any aspect of NATO's nuclear posture or nuclear policy – and we do not foresee any future need to do so. Another unilateral NATO statement of March 14, 1997, declared that in the foreseeable security environment NATO would carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring interoperability, integration and capability for reinforcement rather than by "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces." NATO was endeavouring to reassure Russia that enlargement would not pose an objective military threat or concern.^{ci}

The Act elaborates the basic principles for establishing common and comprehensive security in Europe. These principles include strengthening the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), responding to new risks and challenges "such as aggressive nationalism, proliferation..., terrorism, [and] persistent abuse of human rights...", and basing NATO-Russian relations on a shared commitment to democracy, political pluralism, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the development of free market economies. NATO and Russia also pledge to refrain from the use of threat or force against each other or other states, to respect the independence and territorial integrity of all states and the inviolability of borders, to foster mutual transparency, to settle disputes by peaceful means and to support, "on a case-by-case basis", peacekeeping operations carried out under the UN Security Council.^{cii}

The Act specifies potential consultation, cooperation and increased transparency in theatre missile defence, exchanges of "information in relation to air defence and related aspects of airspace management/control," and "reciprocal exchanges... on nuclear weapons issues, including doctrines and strategy of NATO and Russia." In the Act, NATO restates that it has "no intention, no plan and no reason," to deploy or store nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.^{ciii} However, the Act is complicated.

The first problem of this Act is that it is not legally-binding and NATO did not make a binding commitment not to move its military forces (conventional or nuclear) closer to the Russian border.^{civ} Another challenge of the Act is that even if the agreement was legally binding, Russia did not have the veto right.^{cv} In a clear reference to Russia, the study of NATO's Enlargement in 1995, stressed that 'no country outside the alliance should be given a veto or droit de regard over the process and decisions of enlargement'. During the first half of 1997, the Russian negotiators, led by Yevgeny Primakov, focused on three principal objectives - no extension of NATO "infrastructure", though what was meant by this was left deliberately vague; a final NATO-Russia agreement which would be legally binding; and a new Russia-NATO institutional forum where Russia would have the right of regular consultation and, ideally, a right of veto. For its part, NATO countries were willing to make concessions to Russia so long as they did not breach the "five no's"—no Russian expectation of a delay in the process of enlargement itself; no Russian veto either over NATO enlargement decisions or over NATO internal matters; no exclusion of any state

over the longer term from the process of enlargement; no second-class membership for the new members; and no interference in NATO decision making, which encompassed no subordination of NATO to the UN Security Council or any other forum.^{cvii} Russia would have a veto on actions if it were a Party to the North Atlantic Treaty; all NATO members have veto power since NATO operates by consensus. Members of the OSCE (including Russia) have a veto; however, this right was not provided in the Founding Act. To give Russia a veto would defeat the purpose of an organization established to defend against an armed attack by the Soviet Union (now Russia) or its allies in the North Atlantic territories of the Parties.^{cvii}

Henry Kissinger was not satisfied with the Act. In his op-ed in *The Washington Post*, he wrote, "I am gravely concerned that the so-called Founding Act between Russia and NATO, signed recently with much fanfare in Paris, seeks to reconcile Russia by diluting the Atlantic Alliance into a UN-style system of collective security." He further noted, "I confess that had I known the price of NATO enlargement would be the gross dilution of NATO, I might have urged other means to achieve the objective."^{cviii}

On March 3, 1998, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved by a vote of 16-2 a resolution that states that it requires the President to certify that the Founding Act and the PJC do not provide Russia a veto over NATO policy, or any role in the North Atlantic Council or NATO decision-making. The President must certify that no issue will be discussed within the PJC before NATO's North Atlantic Council first adopts a common position on the question. The Senators felt that enlargement will not threaten democracy in Russia, but will bolster it by denying "nationalists and imperialist forces within Russia the legitimacy needed to thrive." Senator John Warner, during a Senate floor debate on the enlargement resolution on March 18, 1998 had said that enlargement may create an "iron ring" of countries facing Russia.^{cix}

Russian President Vladimir Putin in his first term at the office in 2001 had said on July 18, 2001, that his country should be allowed to join NATO or the alliance should be disbanded and replaced by a new body that includes all of Europe and Russia. In his first major Kremlin news conference, Putin also said that Russia has no plans for a joint response with China to counter US moves to build a missile defence system. He said that the US-led NATO

alliance has outlived its usefulness, having been created during the Cold War to oppose the Soviet bloc.^{cx}

According to him, with the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is no threat to the West, hence the validation of NATO becomes nullified. He had called instead for the creation of a "single security and defence space in Europe," which, he said, could be achieved either by disbanding NATO, or by Russia joining it, or by the creation of a new body in which Russia could become an equal partner.^{cxii}

On 28 May 2002 in Rome, NATO leaders and President Vladimir Putin signed a declaration, "NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality," establishing the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) as a consensus-based body of equal members.^{cxiii} This agreement was signed with the aim of enhancing Russia and NATO's ability to work together in areas of common interest and to stand together against common threats and risks to both the sides' security. The declaration reaffirmed the signatories' adherence to the goals, principles and commitments of the Founding Act, and established the NATO-Russia Council as a unique body of equal members, which would take decisions by consensus.^{cxiii} They reaffirmed the goals, principles and commitments set forth therein, in particular their determination to build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security and the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible. In this context, both the parties determined that they would observe in good faith their obligations under international law, including the UN Charter, provisions and principles contained in the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE Charter for European Security.^{cxiv}

The NRC led to stronger cooperation in areas including counter-terrorism, crisis management, arms control and theatre missile defence. NATO and Russia cooperated to support the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The joint work included Russian provision of transit routes for ISAF, counter narcotics training for police and customs officers from the region and support for the Afghan army's helicopter fleet.^{cxv} In the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, NATO member states and Russia will work as equal partners in areas of common interest.^{cxvi} The NRC has been built on the Founding Act of 1997 to enhance their engagements. One difference is that the NRC depicts a strong and assertive

Russia (the country was going through a strong economic development due to its energy revenue) which was not the case during 1997, as it was still trying to grapple with its economic and political problems. However, this goodwill has been short lived due to the entrenched mistrust and hegemonic ambitions between both sides.

Conclusion

The relationship between Russia and NATO has not been a conducive one and it threatens the peace and stability of the region, whose repercussions will be felt all over the world. The situation is grim as both sides, apart from building up defence mechanisations, have resorted to strong rhetoric, making the situation in the region favourable for confrontations.

According to Russia, the US is using NATO as an instrument of its influence in Europe.^{cxvii} The US Secretary said that if Russia wants an end to sanctions, it has the “simple choice” of fully implementing the Minsk peace accord agreed upon in 2015. According to the Obama administration and the West, they expect Russia to prove by its actions that it would respect Ukraine’s sovereignty, just as it insists for itself.^{cxviii}

A new strategy that Russia has adopted towards the West, especially the US is the “cold shoulder”^{cxix} or “hybrid war”. The “cold shoulder” strategy will be more problematic for the West as it will be a mix of hard and soft power, which might take the West by surprise. Russian President Putin in order to protect his country’s image would do everything. He is aware of the sunk cost that is involved in any conflict; using nationalism, he will garner support from his people. The Russian people, to a large extent, are anti-West due to the sanctions that they are reeling under. With the extension of the sanctions till 2017, things won’t improve between both sides as it might be reminiscent of their hardships under the Soviet Union. The main problem for Russia is the continuation of its predecessor, which is its equation with the US.

The West, led by the US, does not seem to be eager to offer a platform of equality to Russia, due to the clash of interests. It’s seen that whenever Russia is given importance as a powerful player in the world order by the US, Moscow has helped in resolving challenges threatening world peace and stability. For example, Russia played an important role

during the resolution of Iran nuclear deal.^{cxx} If the West treats Russia as an equal partner and does not expand across its sphere of influence, then Kremlin would partner with the West in the challenges, which the world is facing, including the ISIS. However, the lynchpin has to be genuine trust and confidence building from NATO's side. If the West is successful in building a genuine and trustworthy relationship with Russia by giving the country its due respect, then it would be easier for the world to uphold the universal human values of peace, stability, democracy, mutual prosperity, human rights, etc. which, for the time being, seems to be in a fragile condition.

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^{cxi}Although there are many factors involved in the resolution of the Iranian nuclear deal, but Russia's role cannot be overlooked.