

Deterrence or Resilience?

NATO's Defence Posture to Russia after the Warsaw Summit

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Rather than deploying ground forces on its Eastern flank, the Alliance needs to embrace more sophisticated deterrence measures to dissuade Russia from its disruptive activities. NATO can do this through increased emphasis on resilience, but it must ensure that it also engages with Russia.

The Warsaw summit took place at a time when the Euro-Atlantic community faces diverse security challenges ranging from provocative military intimidation on its doorstep to hybrid warfare and cyber threats as well as instability in several of its neighbouring regions. The deteriorating security environment accompanied by social and political frictions across the transatlantic space led some policymakers (e.g., Polish President [Andrzej Duda](#) or [Lithuania's Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius](#)) to put high hopes into the Summit. Although some expectations were fulfilled (e.g., permanent presence of NATO's troops on Polish soil and in the Baltic), the result of the meeting is not as ground-breaking as could have been expected.

Analysis: More Deterrence than Resilience

If we were to pin down two keywords which framed the Summit, we would probably end up with **deterrence** and **resilience**, albeit with the accent on the former. A key decision of the Summit is to reinforce NATO's collective defense by enhancing its forward military presence in Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – the Alliance members which are most vulnerable to Russia's renewed geopolitical ambitions. To both deter Russia and assure NATO eastern members, four battalion-sized battle groups will be permanently deployed to the Eastern flank of the Alliance. Furthermore, the local Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast in Bucharest will be granted higher authority in order to react more swiftly and firmly to Russian military activities in the Black sea. Standing naval forces and ballistic missile defense will also be enhanced. Based on the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) adopted during the Wales Summit in 2014, member states consented to more ambitious exercise programs and balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities along with the pledge to prevent [defence budgets from declining](#).

Given the Russian subversion efforts in eastern Ukraine (and the tactics of Islamic State in Iraq), it comes as no surprise that hybrid warfare emerged as another key defence challenge for the Alliance. Member states agreed to beef up the Alliance's resilience against hybrid warfare by affirming NATO's willingness to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty even in the case of [hybrid threat](#). This provision should strengthen collective defense efforts and dissuade potential adversaries from engaging in mixed military tactics. Since one of the components of hybrid threats is cyberwarfare, the measures designed to remain as much resilient to cyber attacks as possible were also adopted. This intention was underpinned by both the joint decision to recognize cyberspace as [a fifth domain of operations](#) and the pledge to adjust cyber defense doctrine to current threats. For this purpose, the Alliance signed a Cyber Defense Pledge requiring member states to allocate adequate resources to cyber defense and to [foster cyber education](#).

It is laudable that NATO will enhance the strategic partnership with the EU to fend off hybrid attacks. Similarly, the intention to trickle down the responsibility for crisis management to the European External Action Service and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe also deserves praise. Yet responsibility and intelligence sharing is necessary, it is not a sufficient tool for promoting successful resilience.

Outlook: Balancing Deterrence with Resilience – and Engagement

Despite some well-designed alterations in NATO's defence posture, the communiqué adopted at the Summit puts too much emphasis on deterring aggression at conventional level without satisfactorily addressing deterrence at lower levels of disruption and violence. There is little question that Russia's large-scale military exercises near NATO's border, provocations in the Baltic region, swift annexation of Crimea, and military presence in eastern Ukraine required such significant adjustments to NATO's defense posture. From this perspective, the decision to deploy 4,000 troops near Russian border seems to be a rational step to make the Alliance's deterrence credible.

Nevertheless, NATO should act with prudence and be considered in the measures it employs to stand up to Russia. NATO's strategy against Russia should combine [deterrence and engagement](#) without over-emphasizing sabre-rattling. For this reason, the joint declaration that dialogue via the NATO-Russia Council and engagement with Russia depends upon substantial [changes in Russia's policy](#) is rather unwise. Such policy has the potential to further alienate both sides. For instance, the security situation in NATO's Eastern flank could escalate, a pathway to a Ukrainian settlement can be a long way off, and there might be no progress on negotiating peace in the Syrian conflict. Likewise, excessive conventional deterrence would disrupt common efforts in counter-terrorism, combating transnational crime, and preventing uncontrolled proliferation of weapons – areas which Russia appears [willing to cooperate on](#).

Although delegates at the meeting pledged to make the Alliance more resilient against hybrid warfare by reinforcing intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities as well as building cybersecurity networks, additional "soft" provisions must be adopted. The Alliance should adequately respond to activities in which Russia is good at - subversion, espionage, and propaganda. Thus, investing into [financial monitoring](#) or fighting media manipulation would pay off in the long-term. Adequate resources should be also allocated to strengthening [civil society and law enforcement](#) capabilities in countries with the high likelihood of Russian subversive actions. Similarly, a joint effort to address existing and potential grievances among alienated parts of Alliance members' populations represents another way to keep boost resilience against manipulation and deception.

Given that the Baltic countries (all EU members) are among the most endangered, although far from the only alliance members affected by Russian disruption, EU-NATO cooperation in this area is essential and offers potential synergies, particularly in light of the focus on state and societal resilience in the recent [EU Global Strategy](#).

Recommendations:

- ◆ NATO should ensure that its forward military presence on the NATO's Eastern flank is transparent and largely symbolic, albeit **proportional to the need to re-assure its members**;
- ◆ NATO should work **to restore meaningful dialogue with Russia** through some form of a military line of communication via the NATO-Russia Council.
- ◆ NATO should be more **engaged in nuanced deterrence-through-resilience measures** ranging from counter-intelligence to strengthening civil society and law enforcement instead of over-emphasizing conventional deterrence.

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