

■ AUGUST 2022

BASIC

NATO-Russia Relationship: Perspectives from Russia

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Disclaimer

This report is written based on a workshop with participation of Russian experts prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While the subsequent events following the Russian invasion have been factored into some of the analysis in the later sections of the report, it does not provide commentary on the war in Ukraine.

Introduction

This report is the second in a series of four reports that address the current threat assessments and perceptions of nuclear and conventional escalation risks in Eastern Europe and Russia. The report is part of the two-year project 'Phase 2: Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction' that BASIC is undertaking in collaboration with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹

Phase two complements and builds upon the lessons of Phase one (2019-2020) that explored risk and threat assessments in relation to the potential nuclear and conventional escalation primarily among Western NATO member-states. The main finding in Phase one was that the political tensions between Russia and NATO members were at the core of the current and near-future nuclear risks in Europe.²

Phase two continues this work of mapping and exploring risk assessments and risk reduction steps in two strands of track 1.5 dialogues with experts and officials from NATO's north-eastern flank countries and Russia. Phase two will conclude with a Strategic Dialogue in the Autumn 2022 that brings together the participants from both phases to foster mutual understanding and lay the groundwork for implementing risk reduction measures that have been identified through the workshops.³

In Phase two BASIC have published three reports covering the deliberations at pre-conflict workshop with NATO's north-eastern flank countries held online, and two reports during the current conflict. One report based on the deliberations at workshop with government officials and experts from NATO's north eastern flank countries held in Vilnius in March 2022 and one based on a roundtable held with Russian experts online in June 2022.⁴

This report specifically looks at the current threat and risk assessments in Russia. The report is based on the deliberations of a full day workshop held in December 2021 with the participation of experts from Russia. The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule.

The report proceeds in four parts. The first part presents the main findings from the workshop. The second part provides a brief commentary to these findings and the third part looks into what can be next for NATO-Russia relations. This is followed by the final part, consisting of policy recommendations.

I. Workshop Findings

The workshop took place in December 2021 with expert participants from Russia. There were six presentations covering a number of pertinent issues in relation to threat assessments and assessments of escalation risks. In December 2021 a few days prior to the workshop Russia submitted two treaty proposals on security guarantees between the Russian

¹ *Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction: Announcing Phase 2 of the BASIC-Netherlands Collaboration.*

<https://basicint.org/applying-a-systematic-approach-to-nato-russia-risk-reduction-announcing-phase-2-of-the-basic-netherlands-collaboration/>

² Marion Messmer, 'Strategic Risk Reduction in the European Context', BASIC report (BASIC, 30 June 2020).

³ Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, BASIC has not cooperated with the Russian government officials, and exclusively maintained dialogue with Russian experts.

⁴ Gry Thomasen, 'Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction: Perspectives from the North East Flank', BASIC report (BASIC, March 2022); Thomasen, 'Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction. NATO's North-Eastern Flank Reacts to the War in Ukraine', BASIC report (BASIC, April 2022); Thomasen, 'Risk Reduction and De-Escalation', BASIC Report (BASIC, July 2022).

Federation and the United States and NATO respectively.⁵ The treaty proposals were discussed throughout the full day workshop.

Taken at face value, the treaty proposals arguably reflected Russia's ideal solution to their perceived security concerns given the security environment in Europe at the time the treaties were distributed. The proposals included a NATO commitment to stop further enlargement of NATO and importantly a roll-back of NATO's force posture to the state of affairs of 1997. In this respect, it is worthwhile recollecting that NATO's current Eastern flank countries that are hosting NATO forces via the Enhanced Forward presence (eFP) and missile systems, did not become members of NATO until 1999 and onwards.

Russian Foreign and Defence Policy and Russian Perceptions of the International Order

Experts at the workshop agreed that Russian foreign and defence policy rests on five assumptions about international politics.⁶

The predominant perception of international politics in the Russian leadership is that the 21st century will be a new era of uncertainty with more challenges than opportunities. The international system is undergoing a process of rapid change, in which regional conflicts around the world, the continued arms race, international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, migration, and climate change, set a new political agenda. Russia sees international relations becoming even more complicated, and the world becoming less orderly, because the international community has not demonstrated a commitment to cooperate to meet these challenges. This line of thinking constitutes the basis of Russian foreign policy.

A second assumption is that global politics is not a clash between democracies and autocracies, but rather between order and disorder. The Russian political leadership recognises that the international order may be imperfect, with deficiencies and limitations, but nevertheless it is order. In applying this view of global politics, states are seen as being on the wrong side of history if they support disorder. States can support disorder directly and indirectly, implicitly and explicitly, for example, through disregard of international law.

The Russian perception of a battle between order and disorder relates to claims about Russian revisionism. The Kremlin however does not accept the idea that Russia is a revisionist power. Rather, Russia believes that what it is doing, and has been doing for a decade, is mostly defensive, in response to provocations or other efforts on the part of its adversaries and opponents. In this narrative, Russia was forced to react to the Western attempt to disrupt the fragile political balance in Ukraine in 2014. This was not something that Russia wanted to do, but was forced to do, because there were no other options to counter the perceived Western interference – including the EU's insistence that Ukraine's association agreement was non-negotiable. Russia thus considers itself a status quo power.

The essence of Russian revisionism is, however, difficult to entirely pin down.⁷ The timeframe, for instance, is important to take into consideration, as the Russian revisionism has not been static. The two treaty proposals that Russia issued in December 2021 reflect a longing for the status quo of 1997. At the same time, it is clear that the Russian leadership does

⁵ Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 17 Dec. 2021. <https://mid.ru/print/?id=1790803&lang=en>; Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees, 17 Dec. 2021. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/rso/1790818/. Both accessed 29 March 2022.

⁶ Throughout this report 'Russia' refers to the Russian political leadership in the Kremlin unless otherwise stated.

⁷ The concept of Russian revisionism is widely discussed, see for instance Ruth Deyermond, 'The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy', *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 6 (2 July 2016): 957–84; Roy Allison, 'Russian Revisionism, Legal Discourse and the "Rules-Based" International Order', *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 6 (2 July 2020): 976–95.

not perceive itself as trying to overcome the current rules-based order, but rather returning what had been legitimately or inappropriately taken since 1994.

A fourth assumption of Russian foreign policy is that capabilities are more important than intentions. This idea is closely associated with trust. The current leadership lacks trust in the international system. Russia does not believe in statements from Western partners or other adversaries that announce friendly intentions. Instead, Moscow considers capabilities to be a reliable indicator of abilities regardless of the political rhetoric adversaries may use. Russia, in other words, cares far more about the physical capabilities of other states, than any political rhetoric to determine the actual challenge to Russia's security.

The fifth assumption is that the protection of Russian sovereignty is crucial for national security. In this Westphalian way of thinking, sovereign states are the primary actors in the international system, and the strength of this notion explains why the Russian leadership is (overly) concerned with and sensitive to direct or indirect interference in domestic affairs.⁸

These core assumptions lead to a legalistic approach to foreign policy. President Putin graduated from Leningrad University with a law degree and the legalistic approach appears to be the approach of the President himself. The assumption is that even though states can abrogate legally binding agreements, or withdraw, it is more difficult to do this compared to the abrogation of non-binding agreements between states. The official line remains that Moscow needs guarantees, and some kind of assurances that partners will not withdraw from certain agreements, or will not violate them if they come to believe that these agreements no longer meet their interests and their security concerns. In this respect, it is important to recognise that, from a Russian perspective, the West's intervention in the Kosovo War in 1999 was in violation of the UN Charter, as was the Second Gulf War, whereas the intervention in Libya in 2011 was a significant re-interpretation of Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011).⁹ The response in Moscow to what it considers to be violations of international law is to strengthen Russia's deterrence posture.

Finally, status is another important objective for Russia. Its participation in international institutions, including and above all, its seat as permanent member of the UN Security Council cements Russia's status in the international system. However, Russian abilities and capacity to work within these institutions appears to be a challenge to Russian diplomacy that has had little success in achieving its goals in international diplomacy.

Arms Control

In terms of arms control, Russia's position has been significantly affected by the US withdrawal from a number of international treaties, including the ABM Treaty, the INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty. Russia is so focused on legally binding agreements because, ideally, these agreements should not and cannot be renegotiated. Arguably, legally binding agreements remain the sacred cow of arms control.

Yet, while these agreements are perceived as an important part of Russian foreign policy and a desirable goal, arms control is not indispensable in Russian security thinking. The perception is that some arms control is better than none, yet if the aims are unattainable, Russia attempts to be in a position to provide for its security by other means, primarily through continued defence developments.

There is, however, a strong revisionist school in Moscow currently that argues that legally binding agreements are already dated and unlikely to be successfully negotiated in the current political environment; instead, they advocate that Russia should think in different terms, such as parallel actions, voluntary limitations by participating sides, and more flexible

⁸ Deyermond, 'The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy'.

⁹ Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011).

arrangements, many of which should not be shaped in the form of rigid bilateral or multilateral agreements. In addition, there is a school of 'soft arms control', although it is still in a minority position.¹⁰

The Pre-Conflict Situation Between Russia & NATO

There was agreement among participants that the pre-conflict stand-off situation between NATO and Russia cannot be understood separately from the events following the end of the Cold War in Europe. The enlargement of NATO in the late 1990s and early 2000s added a military dimension to the current crisis that, in Moscow's view, was initially a political crisis around joint decision making in Europe.

While NATO's perception of this period and of its own behaviour may be that the alliance was cautious and tried to take Russia's concerns into account, this is not the understanding in Russia. Moscow believes that it has been quite sensible and restrained in trying to be accommodating to NATO, whereas its perception of NATO is that it has been abrasively moving forwards. In other words, there is a major misperception on both sides about the evolution and status of the post-Cold War order.

Treaty Proposals of December 2021

Participants were in agreement that the two draft treaty proposals Russia put forward in December 2021 should be viewed against this historic background. To a large extent they should be considered a wakeup call to change the pattern of behaviour between NATO and Russia that has developed since the 1990s, which has led to the breakdown of structures that ensured the implementation of treaties and, importantly, the isolation of Russia from the larger European community.¹¹ The contents of the treaty proposals are not new and have been on the table for years – if not decades, reflecting both this historical link and Russia's decision to put the proposals forward publicly. Participants remarked that it is more difficult to ignore or distort published treaty proposals.

The two draft treaties should therefore be seen as an attempt to renew the dialogue on security issues in Europe (although the arms control component of the treaties may be considered on its own). They can also be considered a serious wakeup call, as the situation between NATO and Russia at the time of the workshop was considered to be more alarming than at any time during the Cold War by all participants.

That being said, the two treaty proposals could – and largely should – be viewed as a typical negotiating position of requesting more than what Russia actually expects to get. Most likely, Russia mainly attempted to achieve:

- To end – or to prevent – further expansion of NATO
- To prevent the spread of offensive military systems to the territories or to the countries that are adjacent to the Russian Federation.

It was however raised that the timing of these proposals was puzzling – yes, Russia may very well be fed up with the current situation, yet these treaty proposals could have been tabled earlier. It was suggested that this behaviour was an attempt to create noise and not a genuine effort to present a sustainable policy that would promote dialogue with the United States and NATO.

¹⁰ 'Soft law' refers to non-binding instruments. Richard L Williamson Jr, 'Hard Law, Soft Law, and Non-Law in Multilateral Arms Control: Some Compliance Hypotheses', *Chicago Journal of International Law* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 59–82.

¹¹ Additionally, one participant highlighted that the current generation of leaders in the collective West arguably grew up viewing Russia as something of the past, militarily and economically incapable and stricken by corruption making the requirement of a change of mentalities evident.

The requirement of security guarantees was also odd, in the sense that currently there are a number of effective instruments, for instance, the US-Russian dialogue track, including the strategic security dialogue, the New START Treaty, as well as a number of agreements between Russia and European countries.

Prospects of Arms Control

When discussing the prospects of arms control with Russia, the workshop deliberations revealed that while there is a complete lack of trust in relations between Russia and the collective West, there is a shared view in Russia that currently the security situation is very risky, unstable and challenging, leading to a sense that 'it is time to turn the page' when it comes to arms control. This is clearly reflected in the two draft treaties.

Yet, in Moscow there also appears to be some divergence. Arguably, there is no commonly shared understanding of the extent to which multilateral diplomacy is important for arms control. In the same manner, there is divergence on the value of confidence building measures and more broadly, the value of international regimes, as well as less clarity about Russia's position on bilateral agreements in comparison to multilateral agreements.

The issue surrounding bilateralism versus multilateralism also relates to the Russian attitude to the collective West and Russia's understanding of who its counterpart really is. For example, is the West orchestrated by the United States? If so, is it then proper to communicate directly and exclusively with the United States, as the will and position of the collective West is nothing but a by-product of the US position? Or are there independent European states that form and inform the EU and NATO, and therefore there should be different channels of communication?

Against this background, the workshop found that the two Russian treaty drafts can be interpreted – in terms of reaching an agreement with the United States and NATO – as a demonstration of good faith and an invitation to dialogue. The initiative could also be viewed as an invitation to revive the habit of attentive, inclusive, respectful dialogue. Participants agreed that the proposals could be interpreted as an attempt to reaffirm rules, clarify the language, clarify the understanding of concepts like indivisible security, inclusiveness etc. and as an invitation to transform the patterns of relations. Yet, participants underscored that the 'clock is really ticking' to get negotiations started.

Perceptions of NATO

Russia's perceptions of NATO are closely associated with the issues surrounding bilateralism and multilateralism. Russia has a preference for negotiating with the United States for two reasons.

First, there is precedent for bilateral agreements between Moscow and Washington on issues relating to and affecting the entirety of Europe, such as the INF treaty. Russia is attempting to use the same format of negotiating with the United States and let them deal with the NATO allies.

Second and perhaps more importantly, there is also an argument in Moscow of bureaucratic inertia when it comes to NATO. Russia believes that it is in fact quite impossible to talk to NATO. In Moscow's view, NATO's consensus-based decision-making means that it takes a very long time for the organisation to make decisions. Furthermore, Russia believes that several states, mostly Poland and the Baltic states, tend to block engagement with Russia. Engagement also puts Russia at risk of being accused of attempting to split the alliance if it attempts to talk directly with, for instance, France or Germany. Moreover, Russia believes that if NATO does make a decision after lengthy debates and compromises, no one in NATO is willing to revise the decisions because Russia is not satisfied. This results, in Moscow's view, in NATO often having a 'take it or leave it' attitude, perhaps because the decisions are a true representation of NATO's policy – or simply because revising it would be very difficult.

Entanglement of Conventional and Nuclear Weapons in Russia

The entanglement of conventional and nuclear weapons plays a major role in Russia's regional deterrence. In Russia, regional deterrence is largely understood to be based on non-strategic nuclear weapons.¹² Russia's regional deterrence is also not only directed at NATO. In Russian thinking, having nuclear options contributes to deterrence. But here, it is important to recognise the differences between the regional or tactical sub-strategic level and the strategic level.

At the strategic level Russia remains committed to having all strategic nuclear weapons explicitly nuclear, with one notable exception of long-range strategic bombers. Yet, Russia has publicly stated and published on the concept of non-nuclear deterrence. Although there are limited details, it is known that non-nuclear deterrence is considered an example of a heightened nuclear threshold and that it is based on long-range precision weapons. The problem is that the same platforms, such as Iskander or Kalibr cruise missiles, are dual-capable, or at least perceived to be so. Thus, for Russia to make its non-nuclear deterrence more credible, it might be in Russian interest to actually disentangle the dual-use weaponry from their non-nuclear deterrence.

It was also mentioned that Russia has never historically differentiated or discerned between nuclear and conventional systems. In Russian and Soviet military thinking, nearly all systems are dual capable. This in turn means that should the West decide to deploy INF range conventional weapons in Europe, it does not matter for Russia whether they are conventional or nuclear. In this sense, it would be best to refrain from deploying in Europe.

Belarus

The so-called Union State of Russia and Belarus had, at the time of the workshop, taken a significant step forward towards deeper integration between Belarus and Russia according to participants. Belarus and Russia signed 28 Union programmes in October 2021 that embrace almost all economic activities in the region. The stated aim of the Union is to deepen the relations between the two states in economic and defence policies. The State Union is also considered to be one of three pillars of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The intention is that the State Union's integration can later be applied to the EEU.

According to workshop deliberations, there has been a substantial shift of Minsk's position on Crimea as Lukashenka has recognised Crimea as part of Russia. Minsk was, at the time of the workshop, in the process of removing the principle of a multivector foreign policy and removing a paragraph noting aspiration for neutrality from its constitution. Since the workshop, Lukashenka's regime has amended the constitution to allow for the stationing of nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil and removed the aspiration to neutrality.¹³

As part of the 28 Union programmes, Belarusian military doctrine has been approved although this is mostly a symbolic gesture according to participants, as the Doctrine most likely is the same as Russia and Belarus agreed to years ago. Belarus provides strategic depth for Russia; it has a significant role in Russian early warning systems and for the system of communication with Russian SSBNs. In return for this, Moscow provides a security guarantee to Minsk which includes an extended deterrence. In addition, the military-industrial complexes of the two countries are deeply intertwined.

Moscow is also interested in the political stability of Belarus. While Russia has been a staunch ally of Minsk, behind the curtains Moscow has allegedly consistently attempted to motivate Belarus to constitutional reform, to modernise its system of governance, to introduce personal changes in the leadership and urge the leadership to broaden civilian dialogue.

¹² Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, 'If War Comes Tomorrow: Russian Thinking About "Regional Nuclear Deterrence"', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 1 (2 January 2014): 163–88.

¹³ Reuters: Belarus referendum approves proposal to renounce non-nuclear status – agencies. 27 February 2022.

The NATO Brussels Summit Communiqué issued in June 2021 identified the military integration between Russia and Belarus as a threat to NATO's security and there is, according to participants, a high probability that the forthcoming NATO Strategic document will depict Russia and Belarus as a combined challenge.¹⁴

II. Status

The deliberations at the workshop made it clear that Russia is preoccupied with its status in not just European politics, but also global politics. As mentioned during the workshop, Russia's seat at the UN Security Council, and the sense that Russia has been excluded from its rightful participation in the European security architecture since the end of the Cold War, has arguably reinforced a Russian preoccupation with retrieving status as a power to be reckoned with in European and global politics.

But what is status? And what happens if states are denied status in international relations?

Status is a state's standing or rank in a hierarchy of states. Status seeking behaviour can be an equally important driver of war and conflict as quests for territory or raw materials.¹⁵ However, as most states are seeking status in one form or another in international politics constantly, it is important to clarify first of all that status seeking does not automatically lead to conflict. The question then becomes when and under which circumstances can status seeking lead to conflict?

'Status dissatisfaction' denotes the level of concerns states have with their relative status in international politics. It explains how states compare themselves in so-called status communities of peer competitors that can lead to heightened concerns for status and crucially reveal a status deficit in the community. Status deficits can lead to conflict, where conflict becomes a way states seek to change the beliefs or perceptions of the other states in the international community. It is thus not an irrational or frustrated act, lashing out in response to lost international status. Some research has suggested that countries that start and win conflict not only get a significant bump up in the hierarchy of states, but also that this status increase is quite lasting - even beyond 10 years.¹⁶

That being said, status is not something that derives simply from what one state thinks about another state. Status is something that requires many other states' blessing, so to speak. It derives from a common or shared belief among many states about a particular state. Take the Cold War, for example. The Soviet Union and the United States alone could not provide each other superpower status, it took at least all of Europe to give them both the status or rank they enjoyed as superpowers in the international hierarchy.

Status and Order

In this perspective, Russia suffers from a severe case of status dissatisfaction. Scholarship has discussed this and while it is clear Russia is status seeking, it remains unclear how the relationship between seeking status and security is balanced - which is more important, security or status?¹⁷

¹⁴ NATO: Brussels Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021.

¹⁵ Jonathan Renshon, 'Status Deficits and War', *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): 513-50.

¹⁶ Götz, 'Status Matters in World Politics'; Renshon, 'Status Deficits and War'.

¹⁷ See for instance Olivier Schmitt, 'How to Challenge an International Order: Russian Diplomatic Practices in Multilateral Security Organisations', *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (September 2020): 922-46; Pål Røren and Paul Beaumont, 'Grading Greatness: Evaluating the Status Performance of the BRICS', *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (4 March 2019): 429-50.

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has arguably failed to retain or gain the status in global politics, and in Europe in particular, that Russia believes it should have. As participants agreed, the current situation has its roots in the problems of the immediate post-Cold War period, which were never resolved satisfactorily for Russia. NATO enlargement remains the single most important cause for dissatisfaction. Indeed, what started out – as one participant noted – as a political crisis around ‘joint decision-making’ in Europe – that is, joint agreement to ensure a sufficient place for Russia in Europe and in the European decision-making process, has become militarised as Russia perceived that it was denied a voice in the matter. According to the participants, the two draft treaties were an attempt to deal with this problem.

Status seeking could also explain why Russia has adopted a legalistic approach to foreign policy. This approach can arguably be seen as an attempt to codify Russia’s status in the international hierarchy, as mentioned during the workshop, most importantly and ‘above all’ is Russia’s seat as permanent member of the UN Security Council. This undoubtedly sets Russia apart from other states, on par with the United States and crucially above and beyond the former Warsaw Pact countries and most other NATO states.

Another rather convenient aspect of Russia’s legalistic approach to its relations with other states, is that, as states cannot easily withdraw or abrogate from treaties, Russia can ‘lock’ states into the very system that provides status as well as if states do leave, they lose status. The legalistic approach in this perspective is quite instrumental in ensuring Russia’s status.

As emerged at the workshop, Russia found the West’s many humanitarian interventions in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya without a Security Council mandate – or in the case of Libya, a liberally re-interpreted mandate – to be in breach of international law. Perhaps more importantly, the humanitarian interventions can be seen as threatening the normative system in which Russia found status. As workshop participants noted, the Russian perception of the international system is Westphalian, and the humanitarian turn in international law in the 1990s and onwards clearly undermined state sovereignty, thus interfering with Russia’s ability to gain status in the system by undermining the core principle of state sovereignty in that system.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Russia has criticised these interventions numerous times for their breach of the UN Charter.

The United States remained Russia’s peer competitor immediately following the end of the Cold War. Recent research has shown that there were two lines of thinking around NATO during the Yeltsin government (1991-1999) and the first Putin government (1999-2008) that rested on concerns surrounding Russia’s status in Europe. Indeed, both Yeltsin and Putin advised that they foresaw Russian NATO membership in the future provided it would be the key ally and the primary partner to the United States, thus underscoring that Russia’s status in the alliance was well above the other members of NATO and importantly well above the former Warsaw Pact countries’.¹⁹

In this light, the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty, which affected Russian security, was a double affront to Russian status. Not only did Russia lose its status within the arms control regime as a key upholder of the order on par with the United States, but it was arguably done in blatant disregard by its peer competitor. As noted during the workshop, the US withdrawal from the treaties ‘significantly affected’ Russia’s position and the reintroduction of treaties is the key component for Russia’s quest to roll back the state of affairs in Europe.

A few words about the importance of order in Russian thinking: As mentioned in the deliberations at the workshop, Russia sees global politics as a clash between order and disorder and not as a clash between democracy and autocracy. In a recent article, Flockhart and Korosteleva discuss order and argue that the global politics are moving towards multi-order

¹⁸ Deyermond, ‘The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy’.

¹⁹ The other line of thinking opposed Russian membership of NATO and further NATO expansion that would lead to encroachment of Russia and Russian interests and position in Europe Radchenko, “Nothing but Humiliation for Russia”; Jakub Kulhanek, ‘Russia’s Uncertain Rapprochement with NATO’, *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 1 (1 February 2011): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2011.559977>; Ratti, “Resetting” NATO–Russia Relations’.

rather than multipolarity.²⁰ They see the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the recent monumental shift in German foreign policy – the so-called *Zeitenwende* – as a clear indicator that the world is moving into a state of multi-orders. They identify a set of four orders of which the liberal international order led by the United States and the Eurasian order led by Russia are clearly emerging. Whereas the liberal order appears to have come together in wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has proven itself viable despite the internal crisis within the order brought on by for instance Polish or Hungarian disregard of liberal values, the Eurasian order is still in a contested making.

In this view, Putin's invasion of Ukraine, his ever-closer relationship with Belarus, as discussed at the workshop, and the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to name a few examples, are all attempts to build this Eurasian order under the Kremlin's leadership.

There are two implications of this. On one hand, nothing in theory hinders the orders co-existing in a stable relationship provided that all orders adhere to the principles of the current rules-based order based on the principle of sovereignty. The Russian invasion appears to be a rejection of sovereignty, however. On the other, the durability of the Eurasian order is directly related to – according to Flockhart and Korosteleva – how the order is built and attempted to be upheld. The use of force and subjugation, for example, are hardly sustainable principles for the durability of any order and it is quite telling that the Russian invasion of Ukraine remains overwhelmingly unpopular in Putin's most important collaborator in the war, Belarus. This clearly signals that Russia is not accepted as the leader of any new order in the Belarussian population.

III. What Could Be Next?

Russia's concerns with its status in the international system and the potential clash of orders arguably remain a necessary component for NATO to take into consideration in a post-conflict scenario. While it remains uncertain how and when the current conflict will end, as well as it being unclear which political leadership there will be in Moscow, Russia will have concerns around its status in the global system.

Olivier Schmitt in a recent article discusses the policy implications of this.²¹ On one hand, according to Schmitt, if Russia's primary concern is status and not security, traditional means of solving the security dilemma, such as risk reduction and arms control measures will have little impact on Russia and Russian foreign policy. On the other hand, appeasing Russia's status concerns is equally difficult and problematic from NATO's point of view, as adopting policies that could alleviate Russia's status concerns could undermine NATO's security through a 'decline of material power and normative influence'. Schmitt also notes that even if states wished to accommodate Russia's concerns, it is not as if Moscow has a wish list of status increasing initiatives. Arguably, the draft treaties introduced in December 2021 may constitute such a wish list.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that forecasting options for the political relationship between NATO and Russia after the end of the war remains speculative.

Yet as Russia's concerns around status may remain in place post-conflict, it will be an important aspect to consider for NATO member states in their dealings with Moscow. In this instance, the very first question that needs to be explored is which balance post-conflict Russia strikes between status and security. Of course, status and security are connected in such a way as status or high standing in the hierarchy allows for states to shape security arrangements to suit their national interest, yet, dealing with a state that is the most concerned with security means that the diplomatic task remains focussed on reducing a states' security concerns.²² In other words, identifying this balance will have fundamental implications for how NATO-Russia relations can be developed. As Schmitt notes, traditional means of managing the

²⁰ Flockhart and Korosteleva, 'War in Ukraine'.

²¹ Schmitt, 'How to Challenge an International Order'.

²² Götz, 'Status Matters in World Politics'.

security dilemma, such as risk reduction measures have little impact on Russian foreign policy and behaviour if Russia becomes status preoccupied. For NATO to be able to reach a negotiated understanding with post-conflict Russia, determining the balance between security and status in Moscow's thinking is therefore crucial.

In addition to 'status', the potential of an emerging multi-order world is important to recognise as NATO moves ahead in a presumably new global setting. Whilst the Eurasian order are in the making, other orders are also coming into being, such as the Chinese led Belt and Road order. A multi order and specifically the relationship between the orders can be cooperative, conflictual or competitive the crucial point is that the orders subscribe to the rules-based order for it to be cooperative or stable.²³ Placing NATO in relation to these emerging orders appears to be a crucial policy objective.

Lastly, the workshop also offered a few insights that may be relevant to the arrangement and agreements that can follow the end of the conflict in relation to arms control. Most promising is the potential for devising arms control agreements differently. As mentioned, there was at the time of the workshop a strong revisionist school in Moscow that broke away from the traditional arms control thinking. Instead, this school of thought considers that arms control could be thought of as parallel actions, voluntary limitations by participating sides and more flexible arrangements, not necessarily shaped as bilateral or multilateral agreements. This in turn also opens the possibility of a far more assertive European role. As other participants raised, the collective West is no longer seen as exclusively led by the United States in many Russian circles. The EU and Europe was at the time of the workshop looked more to as a potential collaborator on these issues than previously.

IV. Recommendations

1. Post-conflict NATO should identify in dialogue how status ranks in Russian foreign and defence policy. In understanding how important status is in the Kremlin's thinking, the post-conflict NATO-Russia relationship may rest on a far more sustainable premise that allows NATO to explore different and tailored routes to solve the security dilemma.
2. Recognising that a new multi-order may be on the horizon and for this multi-order to be stable it requires that NATO to support and safeguard the rules-based order, in particular the principle of sovereignty.
3. Post-conflict, NATO should explore the possibilities for non-traditional arms control agreements with Russia. These could be based on greater European collaboration and may prove less difficult to accomplish than traditional bi- or multilateral treaties.

²³ Flockhart and Korosteleva, 'War in Ukraine'.

Acknowledgment

This report is part of BASIC's project Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction that is generously funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The report does not directly reflect the views of the Dutch government. BASIC is grateful for the financial support received for this project.



**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands**

Dr Gry Thomasen is a Senior Policy Fellow at BASIC. Gry is Programme Manager of BASIC's programmes on Risk Reduction and Nuclear Disarmament. Gry's background and expertise is in the evolution of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and nuclear risk reduction. She is also an expert in Arctic security. Gry currently researches risk assessments and policy options for risk reduction in the EuroAtlantic area and the Arctic. In 'Applying a Systematic Approach to NATO-Russia Risk Reduction', she researches current risk assessments in Russia and Eastern Europe, including NATO's north-eastern flank countries, and explores policy options for risk reduction measures. Gry also leads research on risk assessment and policy options for risk reduction in the Arctic region in relation to strategic resources, sea routes and human security. Gry holds a PhD in contemporary international history from the University of Copenhagen and was awarded a postdoc grant from the Carlsberg Foundation to undertake research into the evolution of the nuclear non-proliferation regime at the Danish Institute for International Studies. Before joining BASIC Gry has been a visiting postdoctoral research fellow at the Cold War History Research Centre in Budapest and a visiting research fellow at King's College London, Centre for Science and Security Studies. In addition, Gry holds an MA in History with Russian from the University of Copenhagen and a BA in History and Russian from the University of Copenhagen and the Moscow State University, MGU.