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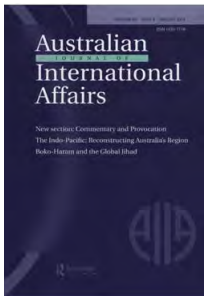
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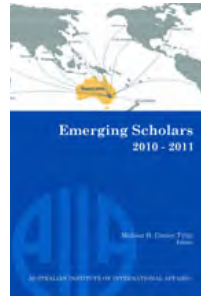
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QUARTERLY ACCESS

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Quarterly Access (QA) is the national quarterly publication of the young professionals' networks of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA).

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From the Editor-in-Chief

Dear readers,

Greetings and welcome to the first issue for 2018. My name is Tamara Tubakovic and I will be taking on the exciting role as Editor-in-Chief for Quarterly Access.

Last year was anything but calm in the arena of global politics. We witnessed the election of Donald Trump as US President, the beginning of the UK withdrawal process from the EU, Russian election interference, the rise and spread of populism and new political parties in Europe, and the continuing regional refugee crises. This year is unlikely to be any less tumultuous.

With this in mind, our first issue of Quarterly Access for the year focuses on terrorist insurgency, authoritarian leaders, despotic powers and the possibility of nuclear conflict in the Asia-Pacific region.

Matthew Mark Wilson opens the issue with a compelling exploration of the declining jihadist insurgency in Syria, and the possibility for the terrorist groups to unite and make a final last stand through guerrilla warfare tactics.

Chris Patterson investigates the implications of North Korea's nuclear weapons program for Australia's security, and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region. The inability of the US to reign in the rogue state is a cause of concern for Australia's regional security policy, with the potential that other states such as Iran and Syria may follow NK's nuclear proliferation precedent.

Alexander Thalis presents a new interpretation of Russia's intervention in Ukraine as predictable response from a State under threat. While Putin has been framed by the West as despot, and his foreign policy dismissed as aggressive, the priorities of the Kremlin can be seen as a reaction to the perceived threat of NATO's expansion in Russia's geopolitical sphere of interest.

Adam Ni explores why China's official nuclear strategy has remained unchanged in recent years, despite the country's growing nuclear capacities. The modernisations currently underway in China will undoubtedly pose new regional challenges and unsettle relationships between China and regional players, such as the United States.

We also welcome Bernadette Anvia as the new Deputy Editor for Quarterly Access and James Carey as a new addition to our hard-working editorial team.

Happy reading,

Tamara Tubakovic
Editor-in-Chief

Looking Into:
Jihadists Under One Flag?

Article by **Matthew Mark Wilson**

Matthew Wilson is an International Relations Master's student with a strong interest in national security, intelligence, and strategy; with research interests in US foreign policy and transnational terrorism.

The Syrian civil war is raging on into its seventh bloody year, with thousands of civilians either killed or displaced as numerous internal groups grapple for power and control. The conflict has been further complicated and protracted by the actions of several external actors, including the US and Russia who many believe to be engaged in a proxy war against each other under the façade of 'fighting terrorism'.[1]

Despite the convolution, and the countless actors involved, one thing is becoming clear – the power of jihadist groups in Syria is declining.[2] The two most powerful jihadist groups in the conflict, Islamic State (IS) and the constant allegiance and name-changing al-Qaeda in Syria (formerly also known as Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Nusra Front, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, Tahrir al-Sham) have lost much of the ground they had once gained in the Middle East.[3] IS has been decimated, being routed from all the major cities it once controlled in Iraq, with Iraqi Prime Minster Haider al-Abadi declaring victory over the group as the Iraqi military pursues the remnants of the group into the vast Syrian-Iraqi desert.[4] In Syria, al-Qaeda is fighting against a coalition of Syrian government forces and support groups that are using the current momentum to sweep through Syria and restore government influence and control.[5]

As each of these terrorist groups face existential irrelevancy, the possibility of their joining forces to make one last stand cannot, and should not, be ignored. There is the potential for a faltering jihadist insurgency to develop into a more irregular guerrilla warfare campaign, thereby undermining Syrian government authority and the security of the international community in the future.

Divided They Stood

IS and al-Qaeda have a strong history together, originating from the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, where al-Qaeda in Iraq fought an insurgency against the Iraqi government and the US-led occupation. In 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq merged with five other militant groups and rebranded as the Islamic State in Iraq, later expanding operations into Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring uprising of 2010.

This alliance has been largely built on strategy and convenience. Each group has many franchises or wilayats around the world, operating cooperatively and in opposition with each other as they compete for territory and resources. In the case of these two groups, cooperation is regionally based and a product of the condition on the ground, and thus often short-lived.[6] [7]

Despite having similarities in terms of ideology, their political goals are quite different, with al-Qaeda in Syria focusing on overthrowing the Assad regime and declaring their own version of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. Meanwhile, IS follows a more apocalyptic version of Islam in which their leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, claims lineage from the prophet Mohammed and aims to create a self-sustaining and expanding fundamentalist Islamic state within Syria and Iraq.[8]

Initially, from 2011-2013, the two groups carved out large pieces of Iraq and Syria as a unified entity (the then named Jabhat al-Nusra focusing on Syria, and IS on Iraq), benefitting from combined resources and campaigns to carry out various operations to strengthen the wider jihadist community. This included the 'Breaking the Walls' campaign of 2013, which saw many jihadists broken out of jails across Syria and Iraq.[9]

However, although there have been various instances of unity, IS and al-Qaeda have hitherto remained two distinctly different jihadi groups. A major point of contention between the two has been the extreme acts of IS. Al-Qaeda does not

1   Aljazeera (2017) US Deploys Heavily Armed Marines to Syria, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/marines-syria-170309014847784.html, 21 August 2017.

2   BBC News (2017) Islamic State and the Crisis in Iraq and Syria in Maps, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034, 14 August 2017.

3   Jenkins, Brian Michael (2016) What's in a Name? The Rebranding of the Nusra Front, https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/08/whats-in-a-name-the-rebranding-of-the-nusra-front.html, 14 August 2017.

4   Coker, Margaret & Falih, Hassan (2017) Iraqi Prime Minister Declares Victory Over ISIS, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/09/world/middleeast/iraq-isis-haider-al-abadi.html, 11 January 2018.

5   Shanahan, Rodger (2017) Syria: Momentum now Firmly with Assad, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/syria-momentum-now-with-assad, 11 January 2018.

6   Mohammed, Riyadh (2014) How Yemen is Making ISIS and al-Qaeda Even More Dangerous, http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2014/10/29/How-Yemen-Making-ISIS-and-al-Qaeda-Even-More-Dangerous, 16 August 2017.

7   Paton, Callum (2016) ISIS in Libya: Al-Qaeda Commander Killed in Islamist Power Struggle for IS-controlled Derna, http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-libya-al-qaeda-commander-killed-islamist-power-struggle-controlled-derna-1505385, 18 August 2017.

8   Byman, Daniel L (2015) Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets, https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/comparing-al-qaeda-and-isis-different-goals-different-targets/, 16 August 2017.

9   Lister, Charles (2014) 'Profiling the Islamic State', Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, no.13

condone IS' attacks on other Muslims and has criticised IS' refusal to accept reconciliation and arbitration with other jihadi groups.[10]

Tensions between the two intensified in 2013, when IS leader Bakr Abu al-Baghdadi tried to reign in an increasingly independent Jabhat al-Nusra, whose loyalties were to the higher al-Qaeda leadership, rather than al-Baghdadi himself.[11]

By 2014, the two groups had splintered off to pursue individual goals, after Bakr Abu al-Baghdadi refused to yield dominion to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

United They Will Fall?

Undoubtedly, a joint or cooperative jihadist force of al-Qaeda in Syria and IS could mean a doubling of forces and manpower for the combined group. Despite dwindling numbers in their ranks, each group at its strongest had an estimated 15,000–25,000 fighters, which could significantly bolster ranks for future offensives against mutual enemies.[12] The groups could also share heavy weaponry including tanks, armoured personnel carriers, anti-aircraft guns, as well as sharing precious intelligence and learning unconventional tactics. This includes IS's successful weaponising of cheap and readily available domestic drones.[13]

Despite recent clashes between the two groups in the Syrian province of Hama, it is a distinct possibility that these groups will overlook their differences to ensure their survival. Indeed, Iraqi Vice President Ayad Allawi recently announced that he had received intelligence from Iraqi, and regional contacts knowledgeable about Iraq, that there are discussions between messengers of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, revealing that the two groups are in talks, perhaps to combine forces once more.[14]

The movement of militants and the flow of fighters under a unified banner would mean increased jihadists moving across Syria, and extra man-power and resources to bolster their multiples fronts and strongholds – as recently illustrated by the migration of a large group of Liwa al-Aqsa fighters who, after participating in rebel infighting, moved from the al-Qaeda dominated Idlib province to Raqqa to join with IS.[15]

Syria's Future

For the US-led international coalition (in which Australia plays a prominent role, flying its own air sorties and combat missions), a jihadi coalition could seriously change the momentum of the current campaign to erode the groups' capabilities. This could see a prolonging of Australia's involvement in what is fast becoming a geo-political nightmare.[16]

For the US-led international coalition and Russia, stability in the region can only emerge after extremism is eradicated, which will also contribute to the wider security of the international community.[17]

As both jihadist groups face the prospect of being defeated in the strategic long-term, they will eventually have to decide whether their similarities are stronger than their differences.[18] In this case, Assad, the US coalition and Russia may have the opportunity to hit two birds with one stone and finally dismantle both groups.

A post-jihadist Syria, if such an entity is possible, will allow for the Assad regime to consolidate its battlefield victories into stabilisation projects.

10   Byman, Daniel L & Williams, Jennifer R (2015) ISIS vs. All Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadisms-global-civil-war/, 8 November 2017.

11   Quivooij, Romain (2015) 'The Islamic State', School of International Studies, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PR150729_The-Islamic-State.pdf, 21 November 2017.

12   John, Tara (2016) Everything You Need to Know About the New Nusra Front, http://time.com/4428696/nusra-front-syria-terror-al-qaeda/, 15 August 2017.

13   Warrick, Joby (2017) Use of Weaponized Drones by ISIS Spurs Terrorism Fears, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/use-of-weaponized-drones-by-isis-spurs-terrorism-fears/2017/02/21/9d83d51e-f382-11e6-8d72-263470bf0401_story.html?utm_term=.b2c80fe7073c, 18 August 2017.

14   Al-Marjani, Alaa (2017) Islamic State Seeking Alliance with al Qaeda, Iraqi Vice President Says, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-islamic-state-idUSKBN17J1DT, 16 August 2017.

15   Charkatli, Izat (2017) Over 2,000 Rebels Defect to ISIS Following Intra-rebel Deal, https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/2000-radical-rebels-defect-isis-following-intra-rebel-deal/, 17 August 2017.

16   Westra, Renee (2017) 'Syria: Australian Military Operations', Department of Parliamentary Services, http://apo.org.au/system/files/107902/apo-nid107902-435237.pdf, 21 November 2017.

17   Kahl, Colin, Goldenberg, Klan & Heras, Nicholas (2017) A Strategy for Ending the Syrian Civil War, https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/a-strategy-for-ending-the-syrian-civil-war, 6 November 2017.

18   Jenkins, Brian Michael (2016) Could ISIS and All Qaeda, Two Giants of Jihad Unite?, https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/03/could-isis-and-al-qaeda-two-giants-of-jihad-unite.html, 6 November 2017.

What North Korea's nuclear weapons mean for Australian national security

Article by **Chris Watterson**

Chris Watterson is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney's Department of Government and International Relations, and lectures in East Asian politics at Australian Catholic University.

North Korea may have dazzled the world with diplomatic overtures and brightly dressed cheerleaders at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, but the US, keen not to lose the diplomatic initiative in its efforts to contain Pyongyang, has been striving to keep the international focus on the unique nuclear threat that the hermit kingdom poses to the Asia Pacific region.

The last six months have seen a number of major developments in North Korea's nuclear weapons program including North Korea's sixth nuclear test; the validation by the international press of North Korea's ability to develop miniaturised nuclear warheads;[1] and the successful testing of the Hwasong-15 ICBM capable of striking as far as the continental US.[2] These developments represent a significant improvement in North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities, including its much sought-after ability to strike the US mainland.

Much effort has gone into examining the implications of these nuclear developments for the US-Japan-South Korea bloc — the primary antagonists in North Korea's 70-year battle for international legitimacy and regime longevity. Much less attention has been afforded to how such developments stand to affect the national security of other regional powers, such as Australia, given its hostile relationship with Pyongyang and its longstanding security partnership with the US.

Perhaps the most salient question is whether or not Australia might be the target of a North Korean nuclear strike. This appears unlikely, though cannot be ruled out entirely.

Is Australia in the hermit kingdom's firing line?

Recent analysis on North Korea's nuclear doctrine by the European Council on Foreign Relations has shown no explicit North Korean statement of intent to strike Australian targets, though "US military bases in the operational theatres in the Pacific" have been identified by Pyongyang as potential counterforce targets.[3] This broad construct notionally includes the joint US-Australian military base in Darwin (Robertson Barracks), which Pyongyang has decried as a "front-line base for the US invasion of the DPRK", subsequently characterising Australian support of the US as a 'suicidal act' and threatening Australia with 'disaster' should such cooperation continue.[4]

Despite such indictments, there is little reason to believe that Robertson Barracks, or indeed any Australian target, would figure in a North Korean nuclear strike plan. Geostrategically, North Korea is principally concerned with preventing a US-led military attack that could threaten the survival of the Kim regime. Robertson Barracks would be marginal to any such plans, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it hosts only a relatively small contingent of US soldiers – up to a maximum of 2500,[5] compared with the tens of thousands hosted at bases in Japan and South Korea. Moreover, US bases in Northeast Asia have a specific operational focus on North Korean regime change, making them a far bigger concern for military planners in Pyongyang. In the event that North Korea finds itself fighting for its survival against a US-led invasion, it's unlikely that it would expend its limited supply[6] of nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on marginal military targets in Australia when more meaningful counterforce targets exist in South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere in Hawaii, Guam and the mainland US.

Whilst a direct nuclear strike on Australia in the context of a war on the Korean peninsula seems unlikely, Australia might still find itself subject to North Korean threats of nuclear harm. Specifically, Australia could come into a 'triangular deterrence' arrangement with the US in which North Korea uses the threat of nuclear strikes against Australian targets to deter US military adventurism in North

1   Warrick, Joby, Nakashima, Ellen and Anna Fifield (2017) North Korea now making missile-ready nuclear weapons, U.S. analysts say, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/north-korea-now-making-missile-ready-nuclear-weapons-us-analysts-say/2017/08/08/e14b882a-7b6b-11e7-9d08-b79f191668ed_story.html, 25 February 2018.

2   Panda, Ankit (2017) The Hwasong-15: The Anatomy of North Korea's New ICBM, https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/the-hwasong-15-the-anatomy-of-north-koreas-new-icbm/, 18 March 2018.

3   Duchâtel, Mathieu and François Godement (2017) Pre-empting defeat: In search of North Korea's nuclear doctrine, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/pre_empting_defeat_in_search_of_north_koreas_nuclear_doctrine, 25 February 2018.

4   Dziedzic, Stephen (2017) North Korea threatens Australia with 'disaster', Julie Bishop says nation is not a primary target, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-15/julie-bishop-speaks-on-north-korea/9051912, 25 February 2018.

5   Schehl, Matthew (2016) U.S., Australia delay plans to send more Marines Down Under, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2016/06/10/u-s-australia-delay-plans-to-send-more-marines-down-under/, 18 March 2018.

6   Kristensen, Hans M. & Robert S. Norris (2018) "North Korean nuclear capabilities, 2018" in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Vol. 74, No. 1, 41.

Korea.[7] It's assumed that the US would not be willing to pursue military intervention in North Korea if doing so risked the wellbeing of one of its most stalwart allies.

Such North Korean threats would be more credible than threats of direct nuclear strikes against the US for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike the US and its Northeast Asian allies, anti-ballistic missile shields do not protect Australia. This means that a nuclear strike against Australia would have a higher probability of success. Secondly, a nuclear strike against the US would almost certainly incite retaliation, leading to the destruction of the North Korean polity. Whereas the US might demure from retaliating in-kind to a nuclear strike on Australia in order to protect its own cities from North Korean strikes.

That North Korea could potentially 'get away' with nuking Australia and not the US would make the threat of doing so credible, unlike a strike on the US, which would amount to suicide. Indeed, Australia would make an appealing North Korean target for such limited nuclear strikes ('limited' in that the US would not find it of sufficient egregiousness to retaliate in-kind) given Australia's low population density which – unlike the mainland US or US allies in Northeast Asia – would mean that it could theoretically absorb a nuclear strike, at least in some areas, with limited damage to populations and infrastructure.

China's place in the nuclear equation

Despite such considerations, there are numerous reasons to doubt that North Korea would ever bring Australia in as a proxy in its nuclear deterrence strategy against the US. First, explicit nuclear threats against Australia would more than likely attract recriminations from one of North Korea's last political and economic lifelines, China, who has a vested interest in political and military stability in Australia. A nuclear strike against Australia would risk China's extensive economic interests in Australia and the large Chinese diaspora that resides in Australian cities. Credible threats of a strike could increase the potential for closer security cooperation between the US and Australia, which could ultimately also be directed toward containing China's rise in the Asia Pacific.

Second, apart from the Australian alliance with the US and activism on expanding sanctions against Pyongyang, Australia doesn't figure prominently

in North Korean strategic calculations. For North Korea to open another front on its multi-front war for survival by threatening Australia would be a backward step in its attempt to normalise its regional security environment. And last, (rather ironically), threatening Australia with nuclear strikes would be against North Korean law. In 2013 the North Korean Supreme People's Assembly introduced a law stating: "the DPRK shall neither use nukes against the non-nuclear states nor threaten them with those weapons unless they join a hostile nuclear weapons state in its invasion and attack on the DPRK."[8] As a non-nuclear state, Australia should be exempt under North Korean law from nuclear threats. Though, of course, the elite in Pyongyang could easily fabricate an instance of Australia "join[ing] a hostile nuclear weapons state [i.e. the US] in its invasion and attack on the DPRK",[9] or simply disregard this legal technicality altogether.

Thus, North Korea's threatened or actual use of nuclear strikes against Australia seems unlikely. The real threat posed to Australia by the North Korean nuclear weapons program is more indirect and long-term, yet it could ultimately prove just as disastrous.

Assessing the climate of indirect threats by North Korea

Increasing nuclear tensions in Northeast Asia stand to harm Australia's regional economic interests. Australia has over $250 billion invested in the major Northeast Asian economies, and Australian residents undertake hundreds of thousands of trips to the region every year.[10] A deteriorating regional security environment brought about by nuclear tensions on the peninsula could thus lead to real economic harm and place tens of thousands of Australians at risk, with the outbreak of an actual nuclear war spelling disaster on these fronts.

North Korea's nuclear weapons development stands to undermine the value that Australia derives from its security alliance with the US. The US' inability to reign in a despotic upstart that has, since the early 2000s, been both openly touting

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7   Frühling, Stephan (2010) "Never Say Never: Considerations about the Possibility of Australia Acquiring Nuclear Weapons" in Asian Security, Vol. 6, No. 2, 146.

8   KCNA (2013) Law on Consolidating Position of Nuclear Weapons State Adopted, http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201304/news01/20130401-25ee.html, 25 February 2018.

9   Ibid.

10   DFAT (2017) Where does Australia invest?, http://dfat.gov.au/trade/topics/investment/Pages/where-does-australia-invest.aspx, 25 February 2018; ABS (2017) 3401.0 - Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia, Dec 2016, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/products/961B6B53B87C130ACA2574030010BD05, 25 February 2018.

its nuclear weapons development and threatening the US and its allies with nuclear harm, lays bare the limits of US power in the Asia Pacific — the assumption of which has been the foundation of Australian defence policy for the last 70. US allies that face immediate North Korean threats, namely South Korea and Japan, will have to take greater measures to independently secure themselves against North Korean nuclear aggression, given the limits of US extended deterrence. As South Korea and Japan begin fending for themselves, the US' hub-and-spokes framework of regional alliances will weaken, as will the US' overall influence in the region. As Australia balances its security and economic interests between the US and China,[11] it will have to think critically about the ongoing benefits of security cooperation with the US in a period of US retreat in the Asia Pacific and consider how it might fill this strategic vacuum in the context of a rising and revisionist China.

Certainly, the North Korean nuclear breakout threatens the sanctity of the international community's non-proliferation ideal that, since

1970, has kept Australia relatively free from the dangers and strategic complexities of surviving in a multipolar nuclear world. The small dictatorship, with few allies and facing the massed pressure of the US-led international order, has succeeded in building a nuclear bomb. But what precedent does this set? If North Korea can succeed in this mission, there is a possibility for other states such as Iran, Syria, or any other rogue state to do just the same. With each new case of nuclear proliferation, the normative power of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons recedes a little more, and Australia must take more seriously the prospect of having to defend itself in a world of nuclear multi-polarity. As more nuclear poles emerge with increasingly complex alliance relationships and intersecting interests, Australia could find itself facing a more direct nuclear threat than that posed by North Korea, and doing so without the once unassailable power of its superpower patron.

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11   Di Lieto, Giovanni (2016) Trade with China or security with the US? Australia will have to choose, https://theconversation.com/trade-with-china-or-security-with-the-us-australia-will-have-to-choose-68511, 25 February 2018.

Threat or Threatened? Russian Foreign Policy in the Era of NATO Expansion

Article by **Alexander Thalis**

Alexander Thalis graduated from Sydney University with First Class Honours in Government and International Relations. Alexander also completed a Masters of International Relations Theory at the London School of Economics.

Vladimir Putin's portrayal in the Western media often resembles that of a comic book villain. The Russian President tends to be characterised as a threatening Machiavellian tactician who, driven by extreme nationalist fervour, is seeking to restore Russia's status as an empire and a great power. Writing in The Guardian, Anthony Julius claims, "the threat of Russian imperialism is real, and the armoury at Putin's disposal formidable... Putin is a master tactician – able to deploy the right weapon at the right time."[1] The Sydney Morning Herald's Peter Hartcher adopts a similar tone stating that "he wants conquest... If Putin ever seems to offer a concession, it's either a tactic or a ruse."[2]

The basis for Putin's notoriety hardly needs to be restated here – of chief importance is his decision to annex the Crimean Peninsular in February 2014 and his subsequent orchestration of a war by proxy in Eastern Ukraine. Not only are these events commonly taken as evidence that Putin has territorial ambitions, but some have argued that they're merely the prelude to the Russian President's imperialist grand strategy. The Economist issued us with a dire warning:

> "Nearly a quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West faces a greater threat from the East than at any point during the cold war."[3]

David Blair's unsubtle comparison of Putin with Hitler in The British Daily Telegraph reflects the extent to which the popular narrative has framed the Russian President as a formidable and calculating threat. Blair writes that the crisis in Ukraine "was never about Ukraine alone..."[4]

Vladimir Putin is a brutal autocrat and the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine undoubtedly constitute a gross violation of international law. However, the popular

characterisation of Putin's grand strategy as imperialist is erroneous. Russia's primary foreign policy objective regarding the Ukraine has been to prevent the country joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the world's most formidable military alliance, which Russia justifiably regards as dire threat to its security. In a Foreign Affairs article entitled, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault", John Mearsheimer explains that "[Russian leaders] would not stand by while their strategically important neighbour turned into a Western bastion."[5] Within the Australian media, Tom Switzer has been a rare voice of thoughtful moderation on Russia, observing that Putin has been, "protecting legitimate security interests", and that his, "objectives are limited."[6]

It is vitally important that the West understands that Russia's conduct in the Ukraine is a rational response to the strategic pressure that has been placed on the country by an encroaching military alliance, NATO. The Kremlin's foreign policies conform to the expectations of defensive realism. A defensive realist foreign policy prioritises state security, which is maximised when a stable balance of power is established in the international system.[7] Defensive realists advise against imperialism and aggression, but they do advocate power projection by threatened states to the extent that is necessary to restore the international system to a stable state of equilibrium.[8] As Robert Person argues, Putin has been pursuing a defensive realist strategy because his, "ultimate objective is to maximize his security, not his power."[9] NATO's hubristic expansion has destroyed the balance of power that existed in Europe during the Cold War and engendered feelings of insecurity and vulnerability in the minds of Russia's leaders. These attitudes are rooted in a rational conception of the international as a realm

1   Julius, Anthony "Dreams of empire strike back", in The Guardian: London, 23/01/2009. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jan/23/russia-alqaida-putin-bin-laden>

2   Hartcher, Peter "World wilts before Putin's iron fist", in The Sydney Morning Herald: Sydney, 29/07/2017. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/world-wilts-before-putins-iron-fist-20140728-zxqql.html>

3   The Economist "From cold war to hot war", in The Economist: Brussels, London and Moscow, 12/02/2015. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21643220-russias-aggression-ukraine-part-broader-and-more-dangerous-confrontation>

4   Blair, David "The ambition masked behind Putin's smile", in The Telegraph: London, 13/02/2015. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11408584/The-ambition-masked-behind-Putins-smile.html>

5   Mearsheimer, John (2014) "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin", in Foreign Affairs, Vol. 93, No. 5. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

6   Switzer, Tom "Russia isn't the bad guy you've been led to believe it is", in The Sydney Morning Herald: Sydney, 09/01/2017. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/russia-isnt-the-bad-guy-youve-been-lead-to-believe-it-is-20170106-gtmzvc.html>

7   Waltz, Kenneth (1979) "Theory of International Politics", Addison-Wesley, Reading.

8   Zakaria, Fareed (1999) From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

9   Person, Robert (2017) "Balance of threat: The Domestic Insecurity of Vladimir Putin", in Journal of Eurasian Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 49.

in which the threat of war is constant and each state must take responsibility for its own survival.

To say this is not to condone the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine on an ethical level. But the righteous condemnations of Russia in the Western media have only served to obscure the origins of the Ukraine crisis and potential strategies for mediating it. If peace and stability are to be re-established in Eastern Europe, then it is vital that we look past the scaremongering and hyperbole, and re-examine the origins of Russia-NATO antagonism.

New Russia, Same Old NATO Mentality: A Lost Opportunity for Détente

NATO was founded in 1948 to balance the power of the USSR and its communist allies in Eastern Europe. The organisation's founding members were the United States (US), Canada and ten Western European nations. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it seemed that the nascent Russian state would soon be integrated into the US-led world order. NATO appeared obsolete and some predicted that it would be disbanded.[10] So how did we get to a situation where Russia and NATO are once again at loggerheads?

To understand the re-emergence of NATO-Russia antipathy, we have to return to the final years of the Soviet Union and a meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and then US Secretary of State, James Baker. On February 9, 1990 in the Kremlin's St. Catherine's Hall, Gorbachev made a stunning concession to Baker, agreeing to allow East Germany's incorporation into NATO.[11] The Soviet leader pledged to withdraw 380,000 troops from East Germany and approved the reunified, remilitarised Germany's incorporation into a hostile military alliance. In return for his cooperation, Baker promised Gorbachev that, "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east."[12] But by 1993, the Clinton administration had already embarked on plans to renege on Baker's promise and extend NATO membership to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech

Republic.[13] Whilst Baker's promise was not legally binding, NATO's willingness to disregard Russia's preferences and take advantage of the country's weakness would set the tone for future interactions between the two entities.

In 1994, Russia began trying to marginalise NATO by promoting the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)[14] as the continent's preeminent collective security body. Russia pushed for the deployment of CSCE peacekeepers within the post-Communist world and even allowed a CSCE force to be sent into Chechnya in 1995.[15] Though these actions did to an extent empower the CSCE, the organisation soon became subordinated to NATO when addressing large-scale issues of European security.

During the latter stages of the Bosnian War in 1994-5, NATO carried out airstrikes against Russia's allies, the Serbs, in spite of Russian protestations.[16] At the conclusion of the conflict, NATO insisted that it, rather than the UN, be charged with the implementation of the Dayton Accords. In 1999, NATO again intervened in Serbia, bombing the country for 78 days until Belgrade was forced to grant de facto independence to Kosovo.[17] NATO's war, which it dubiously justified as a humanitarian intervention, undoubtedly had much more to do with asserting the alliance's preeminence in Eastern Europe than assisting Serbia's oppressed Kosovar Albanian minority.[18] NATO's wanton use of force so close to Russia's border alarmed the Kremlin, with Russia's Foreign minister Igor Ivanov warning NATO's actions risked ushering in a new Cold War.[19]

In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were also incorporated into NATO, as the alliance moved ahead with plans to admit the Baltic

10   Mearsheimer, John (1990) "Back to the Future – Instability in Europe After the Cold War", in International Security, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 5.

11   Asmus, Ronald (2002) Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era, Columbia University Press: New York, pp. 5.

12   Asmus, Ronald (2002) Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era, Columbia University Press: New York, pp. 5.

13   Cohen, Roger "Yeltsin Opposes Expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe", in The New York Times: New York, 02/10/1993. Accessed 25/10/2017.

14   Since renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

15   Ghebali, Victor-Yves (2005) "Growing Pains at the OSCE: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Pan-European Expectations", Cambridge Review of International Affairs, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 377.

16   Donaldson, Robert & Nogee, Joseph (1998) The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests, M. E. Sharp, New York, pp. 207.

17   Biddle, Stephen (2002) "The New Way of War? Debating the Kosovo Model", in Foreign Affairs, Vol. 81, No. 3, pp. 140.

18   Chomsky, Noam (1999) The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo, Pluto Press: London.

19   Levitin, Oleg (2000) "Inside Moscow's Kosovo Muddle", Survival, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 136.

states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.[20] Whilst NATO has justified its expansion as a means for promoting freedom, democracy and human rights,[21] the alliance's enlargement had the effect of entrenching a formidable Western military presence in Central Europe.

Realising that NATO enlargement would antagonise Russia, the distinguished American diplomat George Kennan opposed the strategy from the beginning. As the chief architect of the Marshall Plan and one of the original advocates for US containment of the Soviet Union in the immediate aftermath of WWII, Kennan was nothing if not tough on Russia.[22] But in 1997 he wrote "expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the post cold-war era"[23] such a move might "impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking."[24] In a prescient 1998 interview Kennan explained that such a decision "shows so little understanding of Russian history and Soviet history. Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are - but this is just wrong."[25]

The Arrival of Putin: Conciliation Fails Amid NATO Provocations

When Vladimir Putin came to power in January 2000, relations between Russia and NATO were at a very low ebb. Yet far from exhibiting any anti-Western tendencies, Putin initially attempted to facilitate rapprochement between Russia and the West. Putin characterised NATO as a minimal threat to Russia's security, and even went as far as to suggest that Russia may still consider joining

the alliance in the right circumstances.[26] NATO responded with a conciliatory gesture of its own, establishing the NATO-Russia Council in November 2001.[27] However, Putin's overtures failed to dampen the alliance's expansionist zeal.

From 2003 to 2005 the West extended its influence further into Eastern Europe by aiding revolutions against pro-Russian regimes in Georgia and the Ukraine. Between 1993 and 2003, $700 million in US aid and $420 million European Union (EU) aid was directed into Georgia.[28] Most of this money was channeled through Western NGOs and was used toward electoral and judicial reform and citizen mobilisation.

Vote rigging by Georgia's pro-Russian government in 2003 sparked widespread protests against the incumbent President Eduard Shevardnadze. Western NGOs played a key role in financing opposition parties and organising demonstrations.[29] When popular pressure forced Shevardnadze to resign, he was succeeded by the pro-NATO Mikhail Saakashvili. Voter fraud orchestrated by the Ukraine's pro-Russian President, Victor Yanukovich, in 2004 sparked similar protests in the Ukraine. Again, state-funded Western NGOs played a central role in mobilising anti-government demonstrators. Protestors were entertained with rock music, provided with free food and tent accommodation and even paid small amounts of money for attending rallies.[30] When popular pressure prompted Ukraine's Supreme Court to annul the election result and order a revote, the Western-backed Victor Yushchenko was elected President.

In March 2004 NATO accepted seven new member states including the three Baltic states. For the first time, NATO was right on Russia's border.[31] Twelve hundred miles had separated Saint Petersburg from NATO during the Cold War, but that distance had

20   Simon, Jeffrey & Spero, Joshua (2011) "Security Issues: NATO and Beyond" in Wolchik, Sharon & Curry, Jane eds. Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy, Rowman & Littlefield, Plymouth, pp. 148.

21   Talbott, Strobe "Why NATO Should Grow", in The New York Review of Books: New York, 10/08/1995. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/08/10/why-nato-should-grow/>

22   Gaddis, John (2005) Strategies of Containment, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

23   Quoted in: Carroll, Eugene "NATO Expansion Would Be an Epic 'Fateful Error'", in The Los Angeles Times: Los Angeles, 07/07/1997. Accessed 25/10/2017:

24   Quoted in: Carroll, Eugene "NATO Expansion Would Be an Epic 'Fateful Error'", in The Los Angeles Times: Los Angeles, 07/07/1997. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/jul/07/local/me-10464>

25   Friedman, Thomas "Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X", in The New York Times: New York, 02/05/1998. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>

26   BBC (2000) "Transcript: Interview with David Frost", BBC. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/breakfast_with_frost/transcripts/putin5.mar.txt>

27   Smith, Martin (2010) "NATO-Russia Relations: Will the Future Resemble the Past" in Aybet, G. & Moore, R.R. eds. NATO in Search of a Vision, Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, pp. 109.

28   Tudoroiu, Theodor (2007) "Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The Failed Post-Soviet Revolutions", in Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 323.

29   Tudoroiu, Theodor (2007) "Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The Failed Post-Soviet Revolutions", in Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 324.

30   Lane, David (2008) "The Orange Revolution: 'People's Revolution' or Revolutionary Coup?", in The British Journal of Politics & International Relations, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 527.

31   Gidadhubli, Raghavenbrarao (2004) "Expansion of NATO: Russia's Dilemma", in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 19, pp. 1885.

been reduced to less than one hundred miles. Later that year Georgia and the Ukraine signed Individual Partnership Action Plans, and joint NATO-Ukraine military exercises in Crimea soon followed.[32]

Whilst Putin downplayed the importance of these events, others in his administration expressed much alarm. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned "we cannot, of course, watch impartially the military structure of the alliance moving ever closer to our borders."[33] It was quite reasonable for the Kremlin to view NATO's incorporation of the Baltic States as an outright threat. Unlike the existing NATO members and former Warsaw Pact states, the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, which was designed to prevent any country from amassing the weaponry required to launch an offensive war, didn't bind the Baltic nations.[34] NATO now held the legal right to deploy an unlimited quantity of troops and military hardware in the Baltic.[35] Plans were made for the Baltic states to accede to an adapted CFE treaty, but a series of diplomatic stalemates resulted in the US and its NATO allies refusing to ratify the new agreement.[36]

In 2007, the Bush Administration announced plans to construct a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe.[37] The pretext for this decision was that it was necessary to protect Europe from an Iranian nuclear attack. However, Moscow quickly realised that the shield would have the potential to undermine and perhaps even neutralise Russia's nuclear deterrent. Putin suggested an alternative, namely the construction of a joint Russia-US radar warning system in Azerbaijan, but the US rejected this proposal.[38] At this point, Putin was forced to

abandon his conciliatory approach. In his 2007 State of the Nation Address, the Russian President characterised NATO as, "a real threat".[39] Russia formally suspended its observance of its CFE treaty obligations a month later.

At a summit in Bucharest in April 2008, NATO released a statement affirming that Georgia and the Ukraine would be offered membership.[40] US pressure was the chief driver of this decision, as several Western European alliance members expressed opposition to the plan.[41]

This was NATO's most threatening and provocative move towards Russia yet. Ukraine, as the biggest country is Europe, constitutes an important strategic buffer between Russia and NATO. Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine Germany, and Nazi Germany all invaded Russia through southeastern Europe and consequently, the Kremlin is extremely reticent to allow the armies of those countries to once again be stationed there. Georgia borders Russia's volatile Caucasus region, already rife with minority nationalism and secessionist sentiment. Furthermore, both Georgia and the Ukraine are proximate to Russia's Volga region, its agricultural heartland and its access point for Caspian Sea oil. The Kremlin cannot and will not risk its control over these assets being compromised.

The Fight over Georgia and the Ukraine: Russia's Militarist Turn

It was only a matter of time before tension between Russia and NATO over the status of Georgia and the Ukraine spilled over into conflict. After winning wars of secession against Georgia in the early 1990s, the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had enjoyed de facto independence from Tbilisi.[42] Both had been reliant on Russia for strategic and financial support, though Russia still formally recognised them as part of Georgia. In May of 2008, when Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili requested that Russian peacekeepers

32 Pouliot, Vincent (2010) "International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy", in Cambridge University Press: New York, 222.

33 Quoted in: Pouliot, Vincent (2010) "International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy", in Cambridge University Press: New York, pp. 222.

34 Kimball, Daryl & Reif, Kingston (2012) "The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Adapted CFE Treaty at a Glance", in Arms Control Association. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe>

35 Kimball, Daryl & Reif, Kingston (2012) "The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Adapted CFE Treaty at a Glance", in Arms Control Association. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe>

36 Kimball, Daryl & Reif, Kingston (2012) "The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Adapted CFE Treaty at a Glance", in Arms Control Association. Accessed 25/10/2017: < https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe>

37 Kay, Sean (2010) "Missile Defences and the European Security Dilemma", in Aybet, G. & Moore, R.R. eds. NATO in Search of a Vision, Georgetown University Press: Washington DC, pp. 132.

38 Kay, Sean (2010) "Missile Defences and the European Security Dilemma", in Aybet, G. & Moore, R.R. eds. NATO in Search of a Vision, Georgetown University Press: Washington DC, pp. 144.

39 Putin, Vladimir (2007) "Transcript: Annual Address to the Federal Assembly", The Wayback Machine. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://web.archive.org/web/20080504052130/http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/04/26/1209_type70029type82912_125670.shtml>

40 NATO (2008) "Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008", NATO. Available: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm>

41 Pouliot, Vincent (2010) International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy, Cambridge University Press: New York, pp. 222.

42 Emmanuel Karagiannis (2013) "The 2008 Russian–Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism", European Security, Vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 78.

in Abkhazia be withdrawn and replaced by either EU or NATO forces, Russia responded by increasing the size of its force.[43] In June, Georgia detained Russian peacekeepers stationed in Abkhazia. Then on August 7 Georgia launched an attack on South Ossetia, killing numerous civilians and 12 Russian soldiers.[44] A day later, Russia sent ground troops into the secessionist territories and began bombing Georgian military and industrial targets. After five days of fighting, Moscow forced Tbilisi to agree to a ceasefire on Russian terms. Russia formally recognised the two breakaway polities as sovereign nations and announced that a force of 7,600 would remain in the territories indefinitely for their "protection".[45]

Russia's strong-arming of Georgia was the Kremlin's way of signaling to NATO that it would not tolerate any further expansion of the alliance. Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev evoked a siege mentality, stating that "we do not have any illusion of partnership [with NATO]... Naturally we are not happy with being surrounded by military bases."[46]

Russia's war succeeded, as NATO's plans to extend membership to Georgia were put on an indefinite hold. The alliance could hardly incorporate Georgia when Tbilisi had no sovereignty over 20 percent of its territory. Nonetheless, the West continued to put geostrategic pressure on Russia. NATO suspended the Russia-NATO Council, established a permanent military presence in the Baltic and, in December 2009, refused a Russian proposal to replace the CFE treaty.[47] In 2010 the US relocated a Patriot missile battery from Germany to Poland and, in 2012, opened phase one of its European Missile Defence Shield.[48]

With tensions high and the issue of Ukraine's NATO membership still unresolved, another conflict always seemed likely. Ukrainian society is deeply divided between pro-Russian and pro-Western

segments, and voting in the country tends to follow this division.[49] The Westernisation of Ukraine had been stalled by the election of the pro-Russian Victor Yanukovich in 2010. On 25 November 2013, Yanukovich delayed his decision to sign an Association Agreement with the EU which would have forced the Ukraine to sever all economic ties with Russia. Instead, Yanukovich signed a deal with Russia whereby the Kremlin would buy $15 billion of Ukrainian bonds and cut its gas prices to the country by one third.[50] This decision angered pro-Western Ukrainians, who took to the streets in protest.

As civil unrest grew, police began to crack down violently on demonstrators.[51] On the 21 February 2014, after three months of protests, Yanukovich fled to Russia and, in what can only be described as a coup, a new pro-Western government took power in Kiev.[52] The full extent of US involvement in the coup is at this stage unknown, but a leaked conversation between US assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to the Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt suggests it could have been substantial. During the conversation, Nuland expressed her support for regime change in Ukraine and her desire to see Arseniy Yatsenyuk become the country's new Prime Minister – which he did.[53]

Russian troops moved into the Crimean Peninsular on 22 February. Putin chose to take Crimea primarily because it contains the strategically important Black Sea port of Sevastopol, which Russia had been leasing from the Ukraine since the end of the Cold War.[54] The annexation of Crimea was a warning that Moscow would not tolerate the Ukraine slipping out of its orbit. On the day of the Crimean annexation, Putin warned NATO not to "make itself at home in our backyard or in our

43   Emmanuel Karagiannis (2013) "The 2008 Russian–Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism", European Security, Vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 79.

44   Antonenko, Oksana & Giegerich, Bastian (2009) "Rebooting NATO-Russia Relations", in Survival, Vol. 51 No. 2, 14.

45   Antonenko, Oksana & Giegerich, Bastian (2009) "Rebooting NATO-Russia Relations", in Survival, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 15.

46   Quoted in: Ratti, Luca (2013) "Resetting NATO-Russia Relations: A Realist Appraisal Two Decades after the USSR", in Journal of Slavic Military Affairs, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 144.

47   Ratti, Luca (2013) "Resetting NATO-Russia Relations: A Realist Appraisal Two Decades after the USSR", in Journal of Slavic Military Affairs, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 146

48   Reif, Kingston (2017) "The European Phased Adaptive Approach at a Glance", in Arms Control Association. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe>

49   White, Stephen, McAllister, Ian & Feklyunina, Valentina (2010) "Belarus, Ukraine and Russia: East or West?" in The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 344 – 367.

50   Nechepurenko, Ivan "Putin Wins Over Ukraine with Gas Deal and $15Bln Bailout", in The Moscow Times: Moscow, 18/12/2013. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-wins-over-ukraine-with-gas-deal-and-15bln-bailout/491805.html>

51   Ivhenko, T. (2013), "'Don't Beat Us - Love and Protect Us'", in The Current Digest of the Russian Press, Vol. 65, No. 50, pp. 3.

52   Ivhenko, T. (2014), "New Leaders in Kiev, Unrest in Crimea", in The Current Digest of the Russian Press, Vol. 66, No. 9, pp. 3.

53   BBC, "Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call", in BBC: London, 07/02/2014. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26079957>

54   Gorenburg, Dmitry (2010) "The Future of the Sevastopol Russian Navy Base", in Russian Analytical Digest, Vol. 75, No. 10, pp. 11.

historical territory."[55] Russia then orchestrated a proxy war in Eastern Ukraine, arming pro-Russian rebels and probably also deploying several hundred Special Forces soldiers in Eastern Ukraine to aid them.[56] In May, Ukraine elected a pro-Western government that renounced the country's non-aligned status and signaled its desire to join NATO.[57]

Russia's militarist tactics were once again successful in stalling NATO's advance. In March 2016, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker affirmed that the Ukraine would not gain NATO membership within the next two decades.[58] However, since 2014, NATO and the Ukraine have conducted numerous joint military exercises and NATO has committed $5.4 million to assist with the modernisation of Ukraine's army.[59] The alliance has also increased its troop presence in the Baltic and conducted a military parade in Estonia less than a kilometer from Russian territory.[60] In 2016, the US completed phase two of its missile defence shield, opening a weapons system in Romania and announcing that a similar system will be opened in Poland in 2018.[61] Russia, meanwhile, has ensured that Eastern Ukraine remains in a state of frozen conflict and has effectively consolidated its control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[62]

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55   Shuster, Simon "NATO too Wary of Russian Threats to Let Ukraine Join", in Time: New York, 04/09/2014. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://time.com/3271057/nato-ukraine-membership/>

56   Golts, Alexander (2014) "Russia Bound to win its Proxy War in Ukraine", in The Current Digest of the Russian Press, Vol. 66, No. 19-20, pp. 3.

57   Nikitin, Maxim "Ukraine to Initiate Cancellation of Ukraine's Non-Bloc Status, Seek NATO Membership", in ITAR-TASS News Agency: Moscow, 29/08/2014. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://en.itartass.com/world/747206>

58   Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2016) "Juncker Says Ukraine Not Likely to Join EU, NATO For 20-25 Years". Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.rferl.org/a/juncker-says-ukraine-not-likely-join-eu-nato-for-20-25-years/27588682.html>

59   112 International (2016) "NATO launches five trust funds for € 5.4 million for the Ukrainian army". Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://112.international/ukraine-and-eu/nato-launches-five-trust-funds-for--54-million-for-the-ukrainian-army-868.html>

60   Birnbaum, Michael "U.S. military vehicles paraded 300 yards from the Russian border", in The Washington Post: Washington, 24/02/2015. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/24/u-s-military-vehicles-paraded-300-yards-from-the-russian-border/?utm_term=.99cf76d3a198>

61   Reif, Kingston (2017) "The European Phased Adaptive Approach at a Glance", in Arms Control Association. Accessed 25/10/2017: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe>

62   Freeman, Colin "Russia signs integration deal with South Ossetia", in The Telegraph: London, 19/03/2015. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/11484030/Russia-signs-integration-deal-with-South-Ossetia.html>

Russia and NATO: Where to Next?

Winston Churchill once famously remarked that Russia is, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."[63] However, since the end of the Cold War at least, the Russian mindset has been remarkably easy to understand.

Russia regards NATO, the world's most powerful military alliance, as a dire threat the its security. Russia's goal of trying to halt NATO's eastward march is rooted in a defensive realist view of international politics. The Kremlin is attempting to safeguard its security; it is not looking to reclaim lost status or recapture an empire. Analysts such as Derk Eppink have contended that, "Putin's mind-set is largely rooted in the 19th century. Politics [for him] is about power."[64] Those who dismiss this worldview as outdated would do well to remember that Russia was almost destroyed twice in twentieth century by invasions through Eastern Europe. At least twenty-seven million Russians were killed during WWII, roughly one third of the war's overall death toll.[65] It should hardly be surprising that a sense of vulnerability still pervades Russian strategic thinking today.

It is also worth noting that the US' worldview is not significantly different to that of Russia. The US has pursued the Monroe Doctrine for almost two centuries, often employing violence and subverting democracy to prevent foreign powers from establishing a presence in the Americas.[66] As John Mearsheimer explains, "this is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory... Imagine the American outrage if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico."[67]

As the Ukraine continues to suffer through a protracted civil war, what can be done to ameliorate

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63   Quoted in: Cowell, Alan "Churchill's definition of Russia still rings true", in The New York Times: New York, 01/08/2008. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/01/world/europe/01iht-letter.1.14939466.html>

64   Eppink, Derk (2014) "'Energy NATO' could rein in Putin", London Centre for Policy Research. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://www.djeppink.eu/en/blog/energy-nato-could-rein-putin>

65   Haynes, Michael (2003) "Counting Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note", in Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 55, No. 2 pp. 308.

66   Gilderhus, Mark (2006) "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications", in Presidential Studies Quarterly, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 5–16.

67   Mearsheimer, John (2014) "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin", in Foreign Affairs, Vol. 93, No. 5. Accessed 25/10/2017:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

the tension between Russia and NATO and restore stability in Eastern Europe? Stephen Walt proposes that NATO should strike a deal with Ukraine and Russia that enshrines the status of the Ukraine as a non-aligned buffer state.[68] Striking a similar deal regarding Georgia would also be prudent. Furthermore, NATO should support the incumbent government in Ukraine, whilst at the same time discouraging it from adopting a provocative stance towards Russia.

Crimea will never be returned to the Ukraine, but NATO may be able to help the Ukraine regain sovereignty over its war torn eastern provinces by encouraging Kiev to cooperate with Moscow. Additionally, the US should discontinue its plans to expand its missile defence shield in Europe. This is a misguided policy that incentivises Russia to increase its reliance on tactical nuclear weapons and risks sparking another nuclear arms race. Paradoxically, Europe is safer without the shield.

Finally, NATO should propose a replacement to the CFE treaty and guarantee that its nuclear arsenal will move no closer to Russia's borders. In return for these assurances, Russia may be willing to downsize its nuclear armoury in Kaliningrad or even make concessions on the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

With neither side having shown much interest in diplomacy so far, it is hard to know how much can be achieved through negotiation. But the dangers entailed by the current standoff are alarming. Russia and NATO control the overwhelming majority of the world's nuclear weapons and whilst the likelihood of an all out war is low, this risk cannot be ignored. Russia and NATO are never going to see eye to eye on some issues, but tensions cannot be allowed to escalate any further. Western leaders are loathed to make any concessions to Russia, but peace can only be re-established in Eastern Europe through compromise.

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68   Walt, Stephen "NATO Owes Putin a Big Thank-You", in Foreign Policy: Washington DC, 04/09/2014. Accessed 25/10/2017: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/04/nato-owes-putin-a-big-thank-you/>

China's modernising nuclear forces and implications for China's nuclear strategy

Article by **Adam Ni**

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At the recent Munich Security Conference in February, a top Chinese diplomat reaffirmed China's long-held non-first-use commitment with respect to its nuclear weapons.

"China maintains a very small nuclear arsenal, and China follows the policy of self-defence and minimum deterrence,"[1] said Fu Ying, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People Congress, China's legislature.

However, while China's official nuclear strategy has remained largely intact in recent years, there has been a rapid modernisation of its nuclear forces, which have become increasingly diverse, resilient and effective. This modernisation drive has greatly enhanced China's nuclear deterrence capabilities and will continue to transform its nuclear forces in the years ahead. Without a doubt, this will have important implications for strategic stability between China and other great powers, especially the United States. It may also lead to changes in China's nuclear strategy.

China's modernising nuclear forces

China's ongoing nuclear modernisation effort has substantially increased the size and quality of its nuclear forces. China's nuclear arsenal is estimated to have almost doubled in size in the last decade or so, growing from around 145 warheads in 2006[2] to 270 in 2017[3]. While this increase is significant, it should be kept in perspective: China's nuclear arsenal remains dwarfed by American and Russian arsenals, which consist of 6,800 and 7,000 warheads respectively.[4]

This disparity can be partially explained by China's nuclear strategy, under which it has committed not to use nuclear weapons first. According to its latest defence white paper published in 2015, China's Military Strategy, "China has always pursued the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons and adhered to a self-defensive nuclear

strategy".[5] Under this policy, China's nuclear forces aim to provide minimum deterrence in the form of a credible second-strike capability. For minimum deterrence to be effective, China's adversaries must believe that China would be able to counterattack and inflict an unacceptable level of damage in response to nuclear attacks against it.

Perception is key. An important reason for China's continuing nuclear modernisation is its perception of what is required to maintain minimum deterrence in the face of advances made by its competitors, especially the US, and to a lesser extent Russia and India. China is particularly worried about progress in the US's missile defence systems,[6] conventional global precision strike capabilities, and advanced space-based reconnaissance platforms. Beijing believes that these capabilities may undermine the credibility of China's nuclear deterrence.

China's growing arsenal has been accompanied by significant advances in delivery platforms and related technologies, including: intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs), multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs), manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles (MaRVs), hypersonic weapons and penetrative aids. The deployment of these technologies has made Chinese nuclear forces more diverse, mobile and effective.

Late last year, Chinese state media reported that China's latest and most advanced ICBM, the DF-41, is nearly operational and will be deployed in early 2018.[7] The DF-41 rivals the state-of-the-art capabilities of American (LGM-30 Minuteman) and Russian (Topol-M) ICBMs. It has a range in excess of 12,000 kilometres and can deliver up to 10 warheads to different targets with a precision of fewer than 100 metres.[8] In addition to silo-based launchers, the DF-41 can be launched from road and rail-mobile platforms, which makes it harder to target. Once deployed, the DF-41 will be a powerful addition to Chinese nuclear strike capabilities.

In addition, China is applying MIRV technology to existing missile models, including the DF-5

1   "China reiterates non-first-use principle of nuclear weapons", Xinhuanet, 18 Feb 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/18/c_136982260.htm (date accessed: 20 February 2018)

2   Hans, M., Norris, Robert, S., and McKinzie, Matthew, G., (2006), Chinese Nuclear Forces and U.S. Nuclear War Planning, pp 42, 43, 145, https://fas.org/pub-reports/chinese-nuclear-forces-u-s-nuclear-war-planning/ (date accessed: 5 December 2017).

3   Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2017), Global nuclear weapons: Modernization remains the priority, https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2017/global-nuclear-weapons-modernization-remains-priority (date accessed: 5 December 2017).

4   Arms Control Association (2018), Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance, https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat (date accessed: 10 February 2018)

5   Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (2015), China's Military Strategy, http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm (date accessed: 5 December 2017).

6   Kulacki, Gregory. (2014) Chinese Concerns About U.S. Missile Defense, Union of Concerned Scientists, Cambridge: MA.

7   Sun, Wenyu, "China's latest intercontinental ballistic missile expected to be deployed next year", People's Daily Online, 28 November 2017, http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1128/c90000-9297997.html (date accessed: 20 November 2017).

8   Sun, 2017.

land-based ICBMs. In early 2017, China tested a new variant of the missile, DF-5C, using 10 inert warheads.[9] The number of Chinese nuclear warheads is likely to increase as China produce smaller warheads for its new MIRV-capable missiles, although based on past experience[10] it will unlikely produce all the warheads necessary to fully arm these new missiles.

Another technology that China is actively pursuing is hypersonic glide vehicles, which are manoeuvrable, extremely fast, and capable of penetrating existing missile defence systems. To date, China has conducted at least seven successful test flights of its hypersonic glide vehicle, WU-14 (also known as DF-ZF).[11] Moreover, it is building the world's most advanced hypersonic wind tunnel for research and weapons development.

China is not the only one developing hypersonic technology for military purposes. The US and Russia are both investing heavily in developing hypersonic weapons.[12] While still years away from being operational, hypersonic missiles would pose a challenge to strategic relations between China and other great powers once developed because they would negate existing missile defence systems and greatly compress the timeframe available for response by the side under attack.

In addition to land-based nuclear deterrence, China is developing its first credible sea-based deterrent capability in the form of four JIN-class (Type 094) SSBNs, each capable of carrying 12 JL-2 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). The JL-2 missiles are MIRV-capable and have a range of 7,200 kilometres. China's next generation SSBN, the Type 096, is currently being developed with construction set to begin in early 2020.[13]

9   See, Gertz, Bill, "China Tests Missile With 10 Warheads", Washington Free Beacon, 31 January 2017, http://freebeacon.com/national-security/china-tests-missile-10-warheads/ (date accessed: 5 December 2017).

10   See Hans, Norris, and McKinzie (2006), Chinese Nuclear Forces and U.S. Nuclear War Planning.

11   Chen, Stephen, "China builds world's fastest wind tunnel to test weapons that could strike US within 14 minutes", South China Morning Post, 16 November 2017, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2120072/china-builds-worlds-fastest-wind-tunnel-test-weapons (date accessed: 18 November 2017).

12   See Speier, Richard H., Nacouzi, George., Lee, Carrie., and Moore, Richard. (2017) Hypersonic Missile Nonproliferation: Hindering the Spread of a New Class of Weapons. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2137.html (date accessed: 21 March 2018)

13   Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States Department of Defense (2017), Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017, p. 24. https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF?ver=2017-06-06-141328-770 (date accessed: 5 December).

Implications for Chinese nuclear strategy and regional stability

Despite the substantial development in both size and technological sophistication of China's nuclear forces over the last decade, China has not officially shifted away from its no-first-use commitment. The lack of an official policy change, however, does not indicate consensus or a lack of incremental changes in nuclear strategic thinking among China's military planners and experts. In fact, there are continuing debates among Chinese strategists on the nuances and merits of adhering to the no-first-use commitment.

Some Chinese strategists argue that the no-first-use commitment is untenable in its strict form because it would not be effective in deterring conventional attacks against strategic targets, such as military command and control systems and key infrastructure.[14] In addition, conventional attacks, which under the current policy would not rise to the threshold of warranting a nuclear response, may also be used to degrade China's nuclear deterrence capabilities.

Other Chinese strategists argue that moving away from the no-first-use commitment would destabilise US-China strategic relations, leading to a nuclear arms race.[15] They argue that without this commitment, escalation could be riskier as adversaries cannot be sure as to whether China would resort to a nuclear first-strike or not. Hence, these strategists argue, given China's inferior nuclear forces compared to the US (and Russia), it's not in China's interest to destabilise strategic relations by introducing additional uncertain.

However, new technologies and capabilities coupled with emergent threats to China's strategic interests may lead to incremental changes in Chinese nuclear thinking. This could include changes to the conditions attached to China's no-first-use commitment, and even movement towards allowing the deployment and use of tactical nuclear weapons. China may decide, for example, that the no-first-use commitment should be modified to exclude circumstances where its military and nuclear command and control systems come under conventional or electronic attack. This may

14   See, Xia, Liping, (2016), "China's Nuclear Doctrine: Debates and Evolution" Regional Insight (a blog by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/china-s-nuclear-doctrine-debates-and-evolution-pub-63967 (date accessed: 10 December 2017).

15   See for example, Li, Bin. and Tong, Zhao, (eds.) (2016) Understanding Chinese Nuclear Thinking, Carnagie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/28/understanding-chinese-nuclear-thinking-pub-64975 (date accessed: 10 December 2017).

also extend to other strategic targets that come under non-nuclear attack, including important cities, space systems, large dams and other key infrastructure.

In addition to the no-first-use commitment, Chinese nuclear thinking could also evolve towards a new limited nuclear warfighting posture allowing it to field tactical nuclear weapons. There are signs that the technological and doctrinal barriers of adopting this approach are become increasingly less problematic. In the words of one scholar, these changes could "presage a paradigm shift in China's long-standing nuclear posture and the nuclear balance in Asia."[16] Importantly, if China deploys tactical nuclear weapons, it would be riskier and more complicated for the US to intervene in Asia, such as in scenarios involving Taiwan, the Korean peninsula or the South China Sea.

China's rapidly modernising nuclear forces, along with possible future shifts in China's nuclear

strategy, could have profound implications for the stability of US-China strategic relations, especially given that broader trends are pushing the two powers towards strategic competition.[17] Indeed, China's nuclear modernisation may trigger increased investment in military capabilities by the US to counter Chinese advances, which may kick off an intense arms race between the US, China and other Asian powers. Potential shifts in China's nuclear strategy could create strategic uncertainties and make escalation riskier.

Increased military competition, lower levels of strategic trust and possible misunderstandings during a crisis situation, could have grave consequences for China, the US, and Asia more broadly, especially given the role of the US in providing extended deterrence in Asia to its allies. The US and its allies, such as Australia and Japan, will need to carefully monitor China's nuclear modernisation and be on the lookout for signs of any shifts in China's nuclear strategy.

16   Johnson, James, S., (2018) "Chinese Evolving Approaches to Nuclear "Warfighting": An Emerging Intense US-China Security Dilemma and Threats to Crisis Stability in the Asia Pacific", Asian Security, DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2018.1443915 (date accessed: 21 March 2018).

17   See, Heath, Timothy, R., (2017) "Trump's National Security Strategy Ratchets Up U.S. Competition With China", World Politics Review, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/23889/trump-s-national-security-strategy-ratchets-up-u-s-competition-with-china (date accessed: 10 January 2018).