

RC THE RĪGA
CONFERENCE

2020



**POLICY
BRIEF**

**COVID-19,
EUROPE'S DEFENCE
AND THE RIGA TEST**

Julian Lindley-French

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2020

2020 began on a hopeful note, as all new years do. However, it soon changed to a year that brought us “the new normal” and a completely different understanding of “unusual times”.

Much has happened this year, beginning with the global pandemic, which affects all spheres of life – from healthcare, economy and politics to individual psychological aspects, not to mention the hectic U.S. presidential election campaign, unprecedented wildfires in Australia, the escalating conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the brutal and relentless suppression of peaceful protesters in Belarus in the wake of falsified presidential election, and all this against a backdrop where the international community also celebrated the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

It has been estimated that a human brain processes about 70,000 thoughts daily, and 95% of them are the same as the day before. Small wonder that so many events are being framed in the context of Covid-19 this year, and thoughts are focused on it. However, this collection of Riga Conference Policy Briefs clearly demonstrates the complexity of international affairs and the fact that focusing on one of their facets is neither productive nor rational.

The influence of Covid-19 on international processes is quite considerable – starting from the questioning of World Health Organization’s operability and reputation, confusion in the European Union and the absence of resilience and solidarity, to an Infodemic, triggered by psychological factors and enabled by technology.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has not brought substantial changes to the Euro-Atlantic security policy in its classical sense. Russia has been pursuing large scale military exercises, developing its military capabilities and maintaining an active presence abroad. Strategic rivalry between the United States and China has spilled over from issues centering on the economy and international trade into an all-embracing ideological confrontation concerning values and technological dominance. The European Union has adopted its multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 and approved a European Union Recovery Instrument; an intensive debate is underway on the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, on digital issues, development of the Single Market, solutions to migration, as well as values and the rule of law.

I urge the reader to remain open and curious about a wide range of topics in international politics and pursue their broader interests. The desire to think critically about even the simplest of issues and tasks fosters the path towards both constructive and creative solutions. Let’s work for better times together!

Edgars Rinkēvičs
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

The modern world is globally interconnected, and citizens, goods, and services are constantly moving. Therefore it is obvious to observers that Europe and the World at large are exceptionally vulnerable to the consequences of the world-wide pandemic which cuts contacts, affects business, halts economic activity and endangers the world security and peace.

Frequently, people and governments underestimate the probability of negative scenarios. Almost nobody was ready to face the sudden challenge of Covid-19. Many of us hoped for the best and totally ignored good old Murphy's Law, which says "if it can go wrong, it will go wrong". The same applies to international security issues.

Of course, there are well-known excuses why security and defence issues were not a top priority for state institutions and the public. There are numerous other issues like employment, infrastructure, education which seems more important than investments in defence or military. Younger European generations, particularly in the Western European societies, are overconfident that security is eternal and granted them for free. No wonder that under such conditions and dominating public opinion many countries across Europe are still acting naively when it comes to decision making about security and defence matters.

In the meantime, international organizations, which in many ways have been upholding the peace and post-World War II order, are increasingly dismantling or dismantled. Under such circumstances, in international relations, the role of the nation-states increases, and they are ready to rely on their economic power or even military might to reach their political goals.

Post-Cold War multilateralism is slowly shifting from institutionalism to realpolitik. COVID-19 crisis is only speeding up these changes. As an example, The World Health Organisation and the European Union, both of whom should have been at the forefront of a comprehensive international response to this pandemic, have largely taken a backseat while individual nations have responded unilaterally.

What are the ways to deal with increasing threats to global security posed by the nationalization of international politics? How to evade the principle that "Might is Right"? How to re-establish the working world order based on mutual agreement, justice, and humanity reflecting the realities and necessities of 21st. Century? These are only a few questions I hope we can tackle in Riga Conference, taking into account the number of prestige thinkers taking part in this event.

Artis Pabriks

Minister of Defence of the Republic of Latvia

COVID-19, EUROPE'S DEFENCE AND THE RIGA TEST

Julian Lindley-French

“The real threat to NATO and its cohesion are Black Elephants; risks that are widely acknowledged and familiar (the ‘elephant in the room’) - but ignored. When the elephant can no longer be ignored it is passed off as an unpredictable surprise (a ‘black swan’) by those who were slow to address it. NATO’s biggest Black Elephant is the reluctance of its member countries to spend on defence.”

Professor Paul Cornish¹

¹ The Alphen Group (close hold) record of a meeting with Mr Wess Mitchell of the NATO Reflection Group.

COVID-19 AND THE RIGA TEST

What are the implications for the Allied defence of Riga of COVID-19? Defence budgets will probably be plundered in many European countries to pay for 'human' (health) security, the growing gap between Allied defence, deterrence and threat will further increase, a further European retreat from defence commitments will exacerbate transatlantic tensions over burden-sharing, post-Brexit Britain will further retreat from the land defence of the Continent, and the conditions could be created for a high-end defence emergency in which the people of Riga would be particularly vulnerable. If the provision of defence continues to decline in both relative and absolute terms then radical approaches will be needed to re-forge credible defence and deterrence. Have a nice day!

For many years I have had the honour of being an invited guest of LATO to the wonderful Riga Conference. Every year I set what I call the Riga Test: are the good citizens of Riga more or less secure than they were the last time I visited Latvia's beautiful capital city. In so doing I try to place myself, a Western European, in the position of my friends in the Baltic States. It is with regret that this year the answer is no. Why? COVID-19, like a major war, has accelerated a shift in the plate tectonics of defence geopolitics and that shift is not in Europe's favour.

Imagine this! Deep in a dark 'wet market' a virus leaps from a bat to a human. A year or so later much of European defence and its assumed funding and investment plans are broken. What is now clear is that civilianistic societies of which contemporary Europe is rightly proud will shift much of the burden of investments away from national security to health security, whilst militaristic societies will do the opposite, whatever the health consequences for their peoples. One tragic irony is already apparent. Whilst Europeans could be on the verge of abandoning serious defence, with profound consequences for the people of Riga, Latvia and all the Baltic States, Beijing forges ahead with a massive military modernisation programme that could, in time, stretch the armed forces of Europe's critical friend and ally the United States to breaking point. In September, China 'tested' DF21D and DF-26 anti-ship missiles simply

to make that very point. Moscow? No doubt China's satellite Russia will endeavour to do the same thing because that is what militaristic societies do in crises – double down on force!

For NATO, in particular, the implications are profound. Since the 2014 NATO Wales Summit much has been made by Alliance leaders of the valiant Harmelian trinity of enhanced burden-sharing, adaptation and dialogue. The first two depend on enhanced European defence investment whilst the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has surely convinced even the most ardent of Russophiles that dialogue with Russia can only ever take place from a position of legitimate Allied defence strength. However, even before the pandemic European states were back-sliding on the commitment to spend 2% GDP of which 20% per annum would be on new military equipment to underpin that strength. Now?

RIGA, ENERGY CONTAINMENT AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF COVID-19

The pressure on European defence budgets is being further complicated by the future war challenge it must confront and the choice between who to defend and who to secure implicit in both NATO's Concept for the Defence and Deterrence for the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) and the 2019 Military Strategy. These are heralds of NATO's shape-shifting as it seeks to become not just a 360 Degree Alliance geographically, but also technologically and across the future war mosaic of hybrid-cyber and hyperwar. All of that effort begs very big questions that must be addressed: what if the worst-case for which a COVID-19 weakened Alliance is designed happens all at once? What if US forces suddenly find themselves engaged in a major crisis in the Indo-Pacific just as engineered crisis also breaks out across the Middle East and North Africa and on Europe's eastern flank? After all, NATO's enemies are not going to make life easy for the Alliance. In such a strategic context the rush of many European states to reduce already cash-starved defence establishments would accelerate the possible conditions in which a Putin or a Xi might be tempted to undertake a

military adventure. COVID-19 has come as a shock. It would be the poorest of statecraft to so miscalculate its consequences as to create the conditions for another even more profound strategic consequence.

The danger of miscalculation must not be under-estimated. In a comment to Foreign Policy John Allen, President of Brookings, even suggested that history would be written by the 'victors' of the COVID-19 crisis, which is accelerating geopolitical change.² Indeed, fast, unstable change seems to be hard-wired into contemporary geopolitics whilst too much of the strategic discourse and narrative in Europe suggests otherwise. Between 1914 and 1945 World War One, Spanish flu, the Great Depression and World War Two completely transformed geopolitics and Europe's place within it. COVID-19 may well be having the same effect. The challenge for all Europeans is thus to have the courage to look that change in the eye and make the appropriate choices for their security and defence.

There is a flip-side to much of the other-worldly nature of the European strategic debate in the midst of the pandemic: fatalism. Many in the European Kommetariat seem to believe that inevitably China will emerge 'victorious' from COVID-19 and that, as a consequence, Beijing's client state Russia will also see its regional-strategic influence strengthened. Indeed, Moscow seems to be counting on such fatalism to create the space for its continuous application of complex strategic coercion across much of Europe through the use of disinformation, deception, destabilisation, disruption and implied or actual destruction (5D warfare). China's adoption of aggressive so-called "wolf warrior" diplomacy is doing much to foster such a belief enabling an essentially broke and broken Russia to ride the wave of Chinese influence like some geopolitical surfer. President Xi has set a goal for China to become the dominant global power by 2049. By riding such a wave could Russia become the dominant European power by then? Only if the transatlantic relationship collapses, democratic Germany refuses to fulfil its obligations as Europe's leading power, France

2. John Allen, „The History of COVID-19 Will Be Written by the Victors”, Foreign Policy, March 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/world-order-after-coronavirus-pandemic/>

and Italy retreat into strategic pretence and Britain withdraws from the Continent, breaks up or both.

Therefore, a real danger of COVID-19 is the creation of a new and dangerous strategic vacuum across much of Central and Eastern Europe that given even half a chance Moscow will seek to exploit. That is why events in Belarus in the wake of what passed for presidential elections in August is about so much more than even the sorry lot of the Belarussian people. One need only look at a map to see the importance of Belarus to the strategic stability of Europe, to a credible NATO defence and deterrence posture and as the base of a vital land link between Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

COVID-19 has also accentuated the changing geopolitics of energy for which Europeans are ever more reliant on ever more vulnerable sources of supply.

First, in geopolitical terms the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa are not 'over there' anymore. They are all part of one geostrategic space called EMMENA – Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa. Moscow understands that which is why it is investing so much political and military energy to increase its influence across the 'region'. Second, the changing geopolitics of energy has also revealed the depth of the abyss that is European strategic ambition and imagination. As ever, Europeans are too fond of grand declarations (Barcelona Process, Union for the Mediterranean?) of limited impact. The consequence is that too much of what is a vital effort for Europe is left to front-line states such as Italy further undermining NATO's unity of effort and purpose where it matters. 360 Degree NATO?

In many ways, the new geopolitics of energy look frighteningly like the old geopolitics. The people of the Middle East and North Africa continue to suffer, and Europeans will face the dangerous consequences of growing systemic instability, entrenched terrorism and the dangerous geopolitics therein. It has already started. On August 13th, the oil and gas rich United Arab Emirates (UAE)

signed an historic peace agreement with Israel. Tel Aviv agreed to suspend its formal annexation of the West Bank in return for UAE recognition of Israel. The UAE is only the third Arab country so to do. Critically, the UAE would not have

done this without the “cautious welcome” for the agreement by regional energy superpower Saudi Arabia, recognition of an emerging tacit anti-Iranian bloc.

On August 25th, Greece and the UAE began joint military exercises in the Aegean Sea, close to where a Turkish frigate collided with a Greek ship close to Crete where Turkey is surveying for hydrocarbons. Turkey is perhaps the biggest change factor in the new geopolitics of energy. Ankara's ambitions are extensive and of particular concern to France and Greece even if they remain, nominally at least, NATO allies. Paris has even increased its military presence on Cyprus and expressed particular concern that TOTAL, a French energy company, is repeatedly being subjected to 'harassment' by Turkish warships.

Implications for Riga? Much divides Russia and Turkey, but for the exercise of Realpolitik much does not. Russia would love to impose energy containment on Europe, and there are reasons why it might succeed. Ankara believes it has been systematically excluded from potential energy discoveries because of deals done between Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, whilst France's actions imply EU backing for Greece and Cyprus, both member-states. This infuriates Ankara pushing the Turks further towards the Russians. In July, Iran, Russia and Turkey issued a joint statement condemning Israeli action in Syria after three military strikes which they attributed to Tel Aviv. This is in spite of Ankara's support for forces trying to overthrow the Moscow and Tehran-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad. It is also in spite of Russia and Turkey competing with each other in Libya to end the civil war therein and reap what they both see as economic benefits, including the vast energy reserves therein. In short, Moscow (with Iranian help) could not only exert undue control over much of the oil and gas supplies upon which Europe depends, but also threaten the supply lines upon which Europeans also depend. If successful, not only will this make Europeans more dependent on Russian energy (the geopolitics of NORDSTREAM 2), but it would also push up the price of hydrocarbons thus

benefitting the sorely-tried Russian economy and affording Moscow influence over European policy, in much the same way as China uses debt.

RIGA AND THE GEOECONOMICS OF COVID-19

Perhaps the most dangerous consequence for Rigans is the effect COVID-19 will have on Europe's economy and, by extension, the security and defence of Europeans.

This is because such crises tend to make civilianistic societies more civilian but militaristic societies more military. According to the IMF growth in the so-called Advanced Economy Group contracted by 6.1 percent in 2020 with the US contracting by 5.9 percent, Japan 5.2 percent, UK 6.5 percent, Germany 7.0 percent, France 7.2 percent, Italy 9.1 percent, and Spain 8.0 percent.³ In November 1956, at a reception at the Polish Embassy in Moscow and in an address to Western envoys Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was blunt: "About the capitalist states it does not depend on you whether or not we exist. If you don't like us, don't accept our invitations, and don't invite us to come to see you. Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!" There are clearly those in the Xi and Putin regimes schooled in the dark arts of Leninist influence campaigns who would sorely like to create a similar sense of historic fatalism in the minds of today's Western 'bloc' by waging a permanent and constant war at Europe's many seams.⁴

China is key again (as it is for so much these days). Beijing poses a much more structural threat to Rigans than Russia over time because of the impact of China's rise on the United States and its defence choices. Indeed, only China can create the conditions in which Moscow might be able to act

³ See "IMF cuts growth forecast following advanced economy slowdown," www.world-economy.com, May 10, 2020, <https://www.worldfinance.com/markets/imf-cuts-its-growth-forecast-following-global-economic-stagnation>

⁴ "We will Bury You!," Time Magazine, Vol LXVII, Vol. 26, November 26, 1956.

with some confidence of success. The nature of China's rise explains much about contemporary Chinese policy and the shift from dogmatic, self-harming ideology to pragmatic power cynicism. The first phase of China's post-1989 growth came under a pragmatic oligarchy. However, in 2012 China, or rather the Chinese Communist Party, abandoned the oligarchy for something much more akin a Stalinist cult of the personality, a much higher military-profile in the state and a marked shift towards one-strong-man rule. Since then the regime has become progressively more rigid, a rigidity the COVID-19 crisis seems to have reinforced. Party officials who have not Kow-Towed to Xi have been purged, whilst huge numbers of members of the Uighur, Kazakh and Muslim minorities have been sent to 're-education' camps. The Chinese economy has become progressively more centralised, with ever more state-owned 'enterprises' doing the bidding of what is today the ultimate control freak state.

Over time there is every reason to believe the economic dynamism and freer spirit of the US and its allies would again prevail. However, these are not normal times and a combination of COVID-19, the vulnerabilities it has exposed, particularly in Europe, and a West that is only beginning to wake up to the dark side of globalisation and China and Russia's successful exploitation of Western knowledge and technology. Thankfully, the age of naïve globalisation is coming to an end, in no small part due to COVID-19 which has revealed the true nature of Chinese state. However, China and Russia are only exploiting vulnerabilities which are the results of the West's own conceits and self-deceit. For example, it is a conceit to believe America does not need allies, just as it is self-deceit that there can be any meaningful European defence forged from free-riding on the US. US leadership of the free world is not a burden on the US, but rather a vital American interest that is becoming more so with each passing day. Since the late 1940s when President Harry S. Truman first stepped up to provide post-war American leadership to the free world key advisers, such as Paul Nitze and George Kennan, knew only too well that such leadership was in the American interest. What was true then is true today. However, Americans also have a right to demand of their European Allies strategic responsibility and a proper understanding of the role of sufficient and appropriate Allied force in Europe's own defence.

EUROPE, LEADERSHIP AND THE CURSE OF SHORT-TERMISM

Power is rarely ethical and almost always amoral. Like all such pandemics past and present, COVID-19 has accelerated strategic, political, economic, even social change.

It is also accelerating a shift in power. This is by no means to downplay the severity of the crisis or the very significant loss of life but both Beijing and Moscow will have observed how relatively easy it has been to paralyse much of Europe. By any contemporary European standards the behaviour of both China and Russia during this crisis has been unacceptable. The use of fake news, 'vaccine diplomacy', threats of coercion all point to states that whilst not enemies of Europe are clearly not friends either. And yet, it is Europe that has made itself uniquely vulnerable to Chinese influence, even embracing China-empowered globalism. This is because for many European states still grappling with the austerity consequent to the banking and financial crisis of over a decade ago, Chinese money has appeared to offer an economic lifeline for damaged political careers. The danger now is that COVID-19 will accelerate the short-termist rush towards such dependency. The naiveté with which many Europeans have embraced Chinese globalism also seems to have gone hand-in-hand with the emergence of a kind of European strategic woke power in which virtue-signalling is more important than power and influence.

Given the strategic consequences of COVID-19 logic should suggest that Europeans should adopt a much more comprehensive concept of security and defence. However, such a vision would require of European leaders, eastern European leaders in particular, a capacity to look out beyond the pandemic to the medium to long term implications of it. The danger is that the opposite will happen. As the popular and political clamour grows in Europe's democracies for more to be spent on 'human security' in the short to medium term a marked

reduction in the public good that is security and defence is far more likely. This is not all the fault of COVID-19. Too many of Europe's post-Cold War schooled leaders see defence as a cost rather than a value, and peace as somehow a permanent state. It is not. Russia and China take a very different, hard-line, ultra-realist view of power, war and peace and are only too happy to encourage Europeans to adhere to their folly.

There is another factor that will weigh heavily on the good citizens of Riga: American leadership.

“ America must learn again to lead the free world for its own sake as well as Europeans. ”

If America has the necessary vision it is the natural hub for a world-wide web of interlocking and mutually reinforcing democracies. And yet, the Great Republic seems to be lost in ever-decreasing circles of introspection. Clearly, Europe is in no place to lead, but could Americans and Europeans together forge a new strategic agenda that would help prevent complicity in the creation of danger? That hope begs a further question; what do 'we' want? precisely? The answer should be clear. First, a shared understanding that whilst China is the main external strategic challenge to the world's democracies, Russia poses the greatest danger to Europe. Second, a shared Allied recognition that the 'relationship' with China has become dangerously unbalanced and is too close to dependence, with too many Western supply chains now dependent on a country that is as much predator as partner. Third, the future transatlantic relationship needs to be seen against the backdrop of such challenges, with Europeans willing to do far more for their own defence, irrespective of COVID-19 and the debt spike it is generating. Fourth, and perhaps most important of all, Europe's intergovernmental institutions need to become far more robust in the face of the kinds of shock this new strategic environment could generate.

RIGA, BIG COUNTRY POLITICS AND BAD ALLIED STRATEGY

COVID-19 has also acted as a magnifying lens for all and any defence decisions with profound consequences for the people of Riga. A prime example was President Trump's decision to suddenly withdraw 9,500 of the 34,000 US troops in Germany, some 28% of a force that is the core of NATO deterrence. Immediately after the decision Moscow announced it would reinforce the Western Military District.

The decision was a classic case of big country politics before sound Allied strategy. In other words, if the US president sneezes it is the people of Riga who catch a cold. As soon as Joe Biden was confirmed as the Democratic Party nominee for the US presidential elections the White House went into full campaigning mode. The Trump decision to 'bring the boys (and girls) home' (and move a few to Poland) was, indeed, politics before strategy. The danger for Europeans, particularly those who live in countries at the edge of democracy, is that such decisions are used perversely by too many Europeans as an alibi for their own inaction. In fact, there are a host of deeper structural pressures which are growing on the US and its forces that Europeans must not discount if the people of Riga are to be defended. The rise of Chinese military power in East Asia is already forcing uncomfortable choices on Washington over where and how best to use its increasingly over-stretched armed forces. Unfortunately, too many Europeans have for too long come to believe that the purpose of the US military is to act in their interests even if, at times, it may conflict with the American interest. Ideally, President Trump's decision should have served as a warning to Europeans for the future because other administrations could well take similar action, but given the distraction of COVID-19 it is not at all clear that such a warning will be heeded.

There is another danger to the transatlantic relationship that could in time prove even more dangerous in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the growing rift between its two most important powers America and Germany. In May, the US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell accused Berlin of refusing

to support NATO's policy on nuclear deterrence. This followed calls by Rolf Mutzenich, the SPD leader in the Bundestag, for Germany to insist upon the removal of US nuclear weapons from German soil. It would be relatively easy to dismiss this latest Geremo-American spat as irrelevant. However, recent Pew research suggests growing German ambivalence about the wider transatlantic relationship, and not just the presence of American nukes, Trump or no Trump.⁵ Interestingly, the 'ever helpful' President Putin immediately moved to increase the political pressure on Germany by announcing that Russia might resort to a first strike nuclear policy in the event of a conventional military attack on Russia.

It is the context of such frictions that make them so potentially dangerous for the people of Riga. Much of Western Europe is distracted and disrupted by the COVID-19 emergency. Worse, the traditional transatlantic relationship is in urgent need of a makeover, not least because it relies on an essential (it is certainly not 'special') strategic relationship between the US and Germany and a special relationship with a Britain in precipitous strategic decline. A Britain that in 2019 effectively abandoned the land defence of continental Europe by withdrawing the bulk of its forces from Germany. Sadly, in the wake of Brexit and COVID-19 London is fast hunkering down behind its nuclear shield and has little or no influence on European affairs, and less and less influence even over British affairs for that matter. President Macron? For all his bullish talk of European strategic autonomy France is mired in deep debt and only has influence if Germany agrees. The rest of Western Europe is either not defence serious, has abandoned statecraft, or enjoys an uncomfortably close relationship with Moscow that might even compromise the ability of the Alliance to act in an emergency. Turkey is now so alienated from the rest of Europe it can no longer be relied upon at all to act during an Alliance emergency, and even if it did for which side?

5 John Gramlich, "Fast facts about how Americans and Germans see security issues amid Trump's plan to reduce troop levels," Pew Research Center, June 8, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/08/fast-facts-about-how-americans-and-germans-see-security-issues-amid-trumps-plan-to-reduce-troop-levels/>

JUST WHAT A THREAT IS PRESIDENT PUTIN?

Naturally, it is the looming presence of President Putin that exercises the minds of most Europeans. On the one hand, President Putin is again facing a difficult domestic agenda and recently declared a COVID-19 state of emergency. Russia's critical export of hydrocarbons has been crippled by the collapse of the oil and gas price and is unlikely to recover soon. On the other hand, it would be a profound mistake to believe as many in the West do that Russia is about to collapse and/or the Putin regime fail tomorrow. Applying the standards of Western European liberal democracies to Putin's Russia is a fool's errand. Since the bungled invasion of Georgia Putin has rebuilt the Russian Armed Forces at great cost mainly because Russian nationalism is just about the only 'populist' policy the Kremlin has to offer. It is an expansion that has taken place in parallel with a marked increase in the powers and capability of the security state. This is because the main mission of the Russian state is to preserve the Russian state as defined and controlled by Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

Whilst a few activists such as the brave Alexei Navalny might speak out it is also a mistake to believe his view is shared beyond a few salons in Moscow and St Petersburg by the mass of the Russian people beyond the traditional disgruntlement of the muzhik. The real dangers for the people of Riga from Russia are thus twofold. First, the narrow pillar of power atop which President Putin sits and the lack of any meaningful succession strategy lends itself at some point to a power struggle from within the Russian power elite. Second, if an autocratic state builds a hammer it then tends to look for a nail to strike. This reinforces a use it or lose it mentality, particularly if a state is in any case prone to power paranoia or the force is approaching peak capability. Adventurism, Russian nationalism and militarism are hard-wired into the contemporary Russian state, even if only as a last resort for one group of oligarchs to defend themselves against another.

However, with the US increasingly unsure of itself and its leadership and Europe COVID-19 impotent there is a growing danger of a perfect storm in which West-

ern incompetence and catastrophe meets Russian opportunity and local power superiority leading to a maelstrom of miscalculation. Another miscalculation would be for Europeans to believe the Americans will always be there to ride over the Western horizon to ride to their rescue. The entire point of Sino-Russian collaboration is to create opportunity for both. In the worst-case that would mean the people of Riga are at a Russian spear-tip of multiple engineered crises in the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa and Europe, all of which are designed to ensure US forces are insufficiently strong in anyone place to guarantee domain superiority.

To reassure Rigans this is still a worst-case. Intelligent Russian autocrats such as President Putin (and he is) who see themselves as indispensable to Mother Russia also understand that there are limits even to their military ambitions if the economy continues to decline and critical foreign-derived income dries up. It still remains unlikely that Russia would act through a direct force-on-force attack on NATO as it would be deemed too dangerous. Whilst Putin may hint at such an attack there will still be over 50,000 US personnel in Europe even after President Trump's rashness. However, the COVID chaos across much of Europe at worse could make such a disaster more likely and at the very least leaves Rigans vulnerable to the exercise of complex Russian strategic coercion through the applied use of 5D warfare – deception, disinformation, disruption, destabilisation and implied and even actual destruction.

Another 'benefit' of Sino-Russian collaboration is that it already forcing the Alliance to consider what support Europeans might afford Americans in the Indo-Pacific to demonstrate a fairer sharing of the burdens of European defence. This is dangerous nonsense. Russia's Western Military District stretches from Norway's North Cape to Ukraine's Donbass, where it abuts the Southern Military District and the Black Sea Region. President Putin is increasing Russia's military mass roughly halfway along that border by exploiting the political crisis in Belarus precisely so he can coerce the democracies to the north or south of Lukashenko's benighted state.

RIGA, BLACK ELEPHANTS AND THE EUROPEAN FUTURE FORCE

There are two Black Elephants. The only way the Americans will enable NATO to stand up a credible Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) in the decade to come will be if Europeans do far more for their own defence and that of Riga. The problem is not just strategic but political.

“ In certain respects the fundamental COVID-19 threat to NATO and its cohesion are so-called Black Elephants; risks that are widely acknowledged and familiar (the ‘elephant in the room’) but ignored.

When the elephant can no longer be ignored it is passed off as an unpredictable surprise (a ‘black swan’) by those who were slow to address it. NATO’s biggest Black Elephant for the past decade has been the reluctance of its member nations to spend on defence, which COVID-19 will intensify.

The American Black Elephant is a growing ends, ways and means crisis that the new Administration will need to address. It is a crisis (for that is what it is) that will also have profound implications for the future defence of Europe because it will put transatlantic burden-sharing front and centre of the US policy agenda. Washington will have no other choice. Indeed, without Europeans doing far more for their own defence. Therefore, if the people of Riga are to be defended it is Europeans who must act in spite of COVID-19 and build a NATO Europe Future Force worthy of the name. Such a European force would also need to be deterrence credible and defence compatible: a deeply joint, multi-domain, multi-national force plugged into a tight command security and defence apparatus (an adapted NATO?). Britain, France and Germany would also need to act as the combined ‘high framework powers’ by enabling force generation, command and control of coalitions and, if needs be act as autonomous command hubs. To that end, Brexit must be taken out of the equation,

but that also will need France to play nice... a big if. Only if Britain re-commits to a leadership role within the Alliance will the forging of high end adaptation be possible.

Unfortunately, for too many Allies NATO has become a metaphor for “after you, please”. Or, to put it another way, “we can no longer really afford to do this or that, so you our allies will have to do it”. The problem is that every European ally is doing the same thing in one way or another. The result is a NATO that is fast beginning to look like one of those Soviet propaganda movies of old which were all façade and no substance in which the illusion of solidarity and cohesion are far more important than defence itself. There could come a day when the unthinkable Black Elephant sees NATO due to an unnecessary combination of American military over-stretch and European military weakness. The ensuing communique would no doubt state that in spite of the ‘set back’ the Alliance maintained its ‘cohesion’ and it was no-one’s fault.

RIGA AND THE FUTURE NATO

How can Rigans be defended in the post COVID-19 European strategic environment? NATO is the lodestar for modern defence and deterrence. At the very least it is vital the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) is implemented in full. At the core of the effort is the modernising enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF). The Alliance faces two possibly existential challenges: the now war and the future war. The now war is already underway and stretches across the 5Ds of complex strategic coercion. In an October speech General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the UK Defence Staff acknowledged as much in his vision of a new British Integrated Operating Concept (IOC). What he was describing was, in effect, a future defence against future war, the deterring of which will become NATO’s primary mission over the next decade. Deterring such a war will see speed of command accelerate exponentially as super-computing steadily gives way to quantum computing which in turn drives forward increasingly intelligent and autonomous artificially intelligent drones and other systems.

Much of the effort will come down to the effective mobilisation and generation of European forces and resources. It can be assumed that in spite of the growing threat to Europe from the likes of China, Russia and a host of global reach, catastrophe-seeking terrorist groups, Europeans are not going to opt for what would, theoretically at least, be the most efficient application of limited security and defence resources – a common defence. Given that, the only logical way for Europeans to close the yawning gap between the defence Rigans need and the defence Rigans and other Europeans can afford is to forge a much closer collective defence 'identity' through NATO.

This is because only NATO can ensure force standardization and military interoperability, which are the two key pillars of military readiness and responsiveness and thus central to Allied defence and deterrence that in turn strengthens the all-important Allied deterrent: high-end military interoperability with the US future force. The purpose of NATO of standardization and interoperability should thus be the creation of that robust, digitized, high-end, first responder, multi-domain fully autonomous (if needs be) NATO Europe Future Force. A force that is able to operate alongside US forces in an emergency and deal with the most pressing of contingencies in and around the Euro-Atlantic air, sea, land, cyber, space area of operations if US forces are busy elsewhere. Critically, such a force must be ready by 2030 at the very latest. If not, then Europeans could be complicit in creating the conditions for future war and the loss of Riga through the de facto appeasement of a fast changing and dangerous reality and the slow retreat of NATO forces into deep vulnerability via the Maginot Line cul-de-sac that is low-end force 'co-operability'. COVID-19 or no it is just such a challenge NATO Europeans must meet.

The EU? It certainly has a role to play in the defence of Riga. PESCO, the European Defence Agency, the European Defence Fund and the Co-ordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD) are all important 'synergizers' of effort and will be more so in the face of constricted post COVID-19 European defence budgets. Several EU and NATO countries will be keen for such an effort to be focussed on the Union simply to 'protect' their respective legacy defence industries. The hard truth is over the next decade the equivalent of seventy years of past military technical advancement will be crammed into the coming ten years. Europe?

Furthermore, if standardisation is EU-led it will inevitably be more to the analogue rather than the digital end of the future tech spectrum of industrial standards that will increasingly shape the future force. This would lower the capability centre of gravity of the European Future Force and weaken interoperability in the future complex battlespace between the US future force and European forces, thus further undermining Allied defence and deterrence. Such an approach would also inevitably place US forces under even more pressure to be in the vanguard of all Allied military engagements. Enemies will know this and thus seek to create as many simultaneous attacks as possible to expose NATO's critical and growing vulnerability: US military over-stretch and an inability of non-US forces to withstand shock or generate a meaningful response in the wake of a high-end attack in Europe.

Will European defence industries play ball? NATO "S" and "I" must be as much about shaping and exploiting industrial tech standards as building the future force. To that end the NATO Industrial Advisory Group (NIAG) has a vital role to play. However, the age of naïve globalisation must also be brought to an end and Allied governments together convince the West's civilian tech-industry to be a little less global and little more Western when it comes to future defence and deterrence. After all, that is precisely what China has done by investing in the 'Chinatisation' of its tech and the standardization and joint interoperability of its own increasingly impressive future force and the power and influence projection it affords Beijing.

Parochial Euro-Atlantic defence industrial protectionism will thus need to be removed with the NATO Europe Future Force also a driver of defence technological and industrial innovation via better aligned US and European security and defence industrial interests. That will mean a host of projects that see US tech opened up with better European access to US 'black box' technology, far earlier industrial involvement in both European-led and US-led project specifications (e.g. a much better version of the F35 programme), with Europeans far more willing to buy far more off the US shelf without inflated US servicing contracts. Finally, Europeans will need to create a much wider concept of what is the 'defence' industry in the 2020s. The British 'Aircraft Carrier Alliance' (ACA) is a case in point. To build the new 75,000 ton

ships which last month saw the creation for the first time in forty years of a high-end UK carrier strike group the ACA sought to exploit much of the national supply chain and far beyond. It was lumpy and costly but important lessons about innovation were learned. In return the US must commit to buy far more European equipment with the NATO Europe Future Force again a vehicle for the development of much more European 'kit' the US might want to buy. That means a European Defence and Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB) that is far broader, far more responsive, and far better at fielding advanced 'make a difference' equipment than today, as well as agile enough to support a host of new technologies (AI) and the start-up companies that drive much of the innovation.

Innovative and creative thinking about the use of existing supply chains and critical systems and architectures will also be needed, which will change the way NATO does business. For example, enhancing and improving military mobility during a crisis in Europe will be vital. Indeed, it is impossible to discuss the future of standardisation and interoperability without also considering military mobility. This is because the ability to move forces and resources quickly is an essential component of credible defence and deterrence. Frankly, until the European allies share roughly the same strategic assessment with each other, and more or less that of the US, the danger is that little will move beyond a series of partial, tactical-level projects to becoming part of the Alliance's future strategic defence and deterrence architecture.

Perhaps by introducing other adaptive instruments such as military mobility to the 'S & I' debate, and linking all of it to a new narrative about the enhanced civ-mil crisis mobility it fosters, the Allies will begin to draw their own conclusions about how best to meet their NATO obligations in the most efficient and effective manner possible in the changed and fast changing post COVID-19 strategic environment.

The alternative? A herd of Black Elephants awaiting the arrival of a herd of Black Swans.

NATO 3.0 AND THE RIGA TEST

NATO will only pass the Riga Test if it goes beyond adaptation and embraces transformation – NATO 3.0. In short, NATO's ability to fight its now and future war will need nothing less than the re-balancing of the ends, ways and means of NATO itself. To achieve that given the pressures COVID 19 will generate the Allies have to become far better at dividing the political from the structural and anything which prevents the proper assessment of what NATO will need from its nations in the decade to come. This means moving the NATO debate beyond the stale question of whether Allies spend 2% of GDP on defence by 2024 of which 20% per annum must be on new equipment. Rather, the debate must become far more focussed on the best application of collective resources in pursuit of NATO's future defence and deterrence architecture. Here, it is the responsibility of the Alliance to offer political leaders, and indeed the citizens of Riga a clear vision of such an architecture so that everyone knows what they are being asked to pay for post COVID-19 and why. In return the Alliance must go significantly further than both the Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) document or the 2019 NATO Military Strategy. NATO needs a new Strategic Concept for a new Strategic Architecture! Dissenters? Bypass them.

Critical to the entire strategy (Strategic Concept?) will be a much clearer NATO strategic narrative about the how, why, when and where of future collective defence in the face of COVID-19. A new narrative which states unequivocally that in spite of COVID-19 not only are Europeans moving to do more for our own defence they are determined to build together a new digitised defence within the framework of a NATO Integrated Operating Architecture. And, that Europeans fully understand that NATO defence and deterrence cannot be separated from global peace for which a strong US remains essential. For that reason Europeans together recognise the urgent need to ease pressures on US forces by building the first responder, high end, cross domain NATO Europe Future Force.

Next steps? Last month, for the first time, the new British heavy aircraft-carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth took on a full air wing of F35 Lightning 2 strike aircraft and Merlin helicopters as part of NATO Exercise Joint Warrior. The force is comprised of aircraft from RAF 617 (Dambusters) Squadron, the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm and, critically, US Marines Corps strike aircraft from (VFMA) 211 Squadron. It is an example not just of deep standardization and interoperability, but the deep joint and combined force operating concept that must be a central pillar of NATO's 2030 defence and deterrence architecture. Such interoperability will be vital to enabling the US to make better use of its forces and resources the world over and keep a strong deterrence presence in Europe with allies. Burden-sharing in politically demonstrable action.

“Ultimately, the defence of Riga will depend on a new transatlantic strategic security and defence ‘contract’ – NATO 3.0.”

Under the contract the US will continue to guarantee European defence in return for Europeans not only doing far more for their own defence, but helping the Americans to help them. Over the next decade the world-wide web of democracies of which NATO is a critical part will face the most profound of choices: do Europeans choose to be strategic prey or at least become herbivores with teeth? Do Europeans have the political courage to face collectively the world as it is, not as they would like it to be? Can Europeans strike a new balance between health, human and national security? Above all, are Europeans willing to make the collective sacrifices needed to keep our Alliance strong and defend their fellow citizens in Riga?

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