



CENTRE FOR

International and Defence Policy

**SPECIAL  
POLICY  
REPORT**

JULY 2017

## DETERRENCE IS BACK, CAN CANADA HANDLE IT?

Stéfanie von Hlatky, *Queen's University*

In 2002, during the NATO-Russia Council's Rome Summit, President Vladimir Putin seemed committed to peace and cooperation. In his speech, he declared that, "Only by harmoniously combining our actions [...] will we open up wide-ranging possibilities for building a single security region – from Vancouver to Vladivostok." Fifteen years later, the NATO-Russia Council's pulse is weak and Donald Trump's arrival into the Oval Office has not mended the rift between NATO and Russia. NATO suspended cooperation with Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Ukrainian crisis remains unresolved, making a quick reconciliation unlikely. Moscow is also showing increasing unease, as NATO forces are deploying to the Baltics and Poland. Deterrence has indeed made a comeback and is reshaping the security environment in the Euro-Atlantic region. Canada seems at ease with the idea of reintegrating deterrence as part of its defence lexicon.

NATO is also pushing back in the context of its Summits, which provide biennial updates on the Alliance's priorities. The 2016 Summit in Warsaw was an opportunity to publically reiterate NATO's disapproval of Russian foreign policy. The NATO communiqué made the point unequivocally:

Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a

source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

The Trudeau government echoed this kind of language as Canada justified greater investments to support Operation Reassurance, which now includes its deployment to Latvia, as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP). Through this commitment, Canada is making a high-visibility contribution to collective defence through the prism of deterrence. This is only one facet of NATO deterrence, which relies on a combination of conventional capabilities, nuclear weapons and missile defence.

First, NATO's nuclear weapons policy, which was updated during the 2012 Chicago Summit with the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, quickly became stale. In the lead up to the Summit, NATO allies were openly calling for the withdrawal of the estimated 150-200 American tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, which was consistent with Canada's anti-nuclear stance. Today, the political climate is further entrenching the nuclear status quo and the debate over whether these nuclear weapons should stay or go is over. Whether it is in reference to nuclear sharing or extended nuclear deterrence, the language referring the Alliance's nuclear capabilities has been strengthened, especially during the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review is in need of a



SCHOOL OF  
POLICY STUDIES



Centre for International and Defence Policy  
Robert Sutherland Hall, Suite 403  
(613) 533-2381 | [cidp@queensu.ca](mailto:cidp@queensu.ca)



CENTRE FOR

# International and Defence Policy

## SPECIAL POLICY REPORT

JULY 2017

rewrite, but Canada would do well to avoid this debate and to emphasize the conventional nature of its contribution to deterrence.

Second, NATO's conventional capabilities have received a boost through a heightened readiness posture and what the Alliance has dubbed Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP). During both the Wales and Warsaw Summits, NATO outlined the contours of this plan—which includes new assurance measures for allies in Central and Eastern Europe and the establishment of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force to increase the responsiveness of NATO forces on the Eastern flank. The assurance measures are varied and range from more frequent military exercises to AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) surveillance flights in Eastern Europe.

As for forward presence, it includes four combat-ready, multinational battalions in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The battlegroups are under NATO command, with one member state stepping in as the lead to coordinate troops that have been committed by twelve other nations. Canada is one of these four “framework nations,” to use NATO parlance. Other such states include the UK, Germany and the United States. Canada is sending its own troops to Adazi, but will also integrate forces from Italy, Albania, Poland, and Slovenia in its role as the framework nation for the deployment in Latvia (what has been dubbed Noah's Arc by military observers). The biggest boost to deterrence is undoubtedly on the conventional front and represents the costliest investment and riskiest commitment by allies to collective defence and deterrence. This is where Canada can join the rank of top-tier states and make an impactful contribution.

Third, NATO has proceeded apace with its ballistic missile defence (BMD) capabilities, one of the stated causes of the rift with Russia, which had expressed consternation at the prospects of such installations in Eastern Europe. Prior to NATO suspending practical cooperation with Russia in 2014, five BMD exercises had been held under the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, as plans were discussed for a common theatre ballistic missile defence. Instead, NATO BMD is now in a phase referred to as the Initial Operational Capability, to support the Alliance's deterrence objectives with no prospects of including Russia now or in the future. While BMD continues to be justified as protection against a ballistic missile threat on the Southern flank, Moscow is not buying it. For Canada, BMD discussions can be awkward given its own stance on missile defence, an anachronism from Paul Martin's short time as Prime Minister. The NATO-Russia rift creates the right political climate to revisit this decision and Canada should engage bilaterally with the US on missile defence, to be able to politically endorse NATO BMD without any apparent contradiction.

To conclude, the nature of NATO-Russia relations has changed significantly during the last fifteen years and it is difficult to predict if meaningful cooperation can be restored. The political crisis has translated into a renewed emphasis on deterrence, which includes both nuclear and conventional capabilities, as well as NATO's ballistic missile defence system. Perhaps most worrying from Moscow's point of view is the fact that NATO countries have decided to establish a military presence in Poland and the Baltics. Canada has adapted rather skillfully by securing a top role as a Framework Nation of EFP. Nevertheless, Canada will have to work that into a new Defence Policy statement—expected next week—without sounding any Cold War alarm bells.



Centre for International and Defence Policy  
Robert Sutherland Hall, Suite 403  
(613) 533-2381 | [cidp@queensu.ca](mailto:cidp@queensu.ca)