

## The Transatlantic Alliance is in Trouble

By Ariel Cohen

"We lived next to Russia for 500 years—listen to what we have to say," Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski said at the Bratislava Global Security Forum on June 20. He's right. The West needs to pay attention and achieve strategic clarity in Europe and beyond before it's too late.

There are no shortage of crises and challenges—ISIS, the refugee crisis involving state failure in North Africa, Syria and Iraq, the rise of China, and Greece's potential exit from the European Union to name a few—facing the United States and its allies, but Ukraine and Russia are among the key tests to the transatlantic relationship.

Russia is becoming more authoritarian, nationalist, militarist, and expansionist. Ukraine is inching closer to an economic meltdown which is likely to translate into a greater social crisis.

Eighteen months after Russia annexed Crimea, transatlantic unity has held. But Europeans are increasingly looking inward and are in a bad mood. Pew's recent opinion poll confirms that large majorities of Europeans are unwilling to defend NATO allies, while 85 percent expect the United States to come to their rescue if attacked. NATO, the European Union, and national governments need to convince young people that their world and values are worth defending.

It's true that Europe needs economic growth to pay for its defense. Not all members are willing to spend two percent of GDP on defense as recommended by the Wales NATO summit. In fact, only five countries do: Estonia, Greece, Poland, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Greece's potential exit from the Eurozone may heighten turmoil in the financial markets and

slow growth, further diminishing commitments to robust military spending.

Europe is also internally conflicted and distracted with other pressing issues. During the Bratislava Global Security Forum, the far right in Slovakia demonstrated against accepting refugees from North Africa. Taking into account the high unemployment rate among the young across Europe, the potential for social destabilization is high and the momentum for Euro-Atlantic values is low.

There's also concern about divisions in Central and Eastern Europe. Austria and Hungary want a reliable supply of oil and gas, and Russian cash. Others, like Czech Republic and Slovakia, buy into Putin's tough image and pseudo-conservative narrative and some believe that residual pan-Slavic solidarity still applies to Russia, but not to Ukraine.

Estonian President Toomas Henrik Ilves and the former Czech Foreign Minister Alexander Vondra have warned that the European consensus on social values, including overstressing individual liberties, while neglecting one's duties to the society and the country, went over the top. Ilves cautioned in Bratislava that we should not stress the differences between old and new Europe, but find ways to unite Central and Eastern Europe with Western Europe. After all, they were a part of a whole for over 1,000 years.

The United States found a competent partner in German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and those favoring a softer approach to Putin's Russia in the German business community have been restrained. But a vocal anti-atlanticist minority in Europe, on the far right and far left, takes the Kremlin's cash and buys Moscow's message. Its message is an anti-American narrative, draped in a pseudo-traditionalist, anti-democratic values that claims to defend Christianity, while promoting homophobia and racism.

Berlin, Moscow, and Washington have prevented the conflict in Ukraine from getting out of control, but Moscow's strategic goals are far from clear. It appears that Moscow has abandoned its plans for Novorossiia—the eight provinces in east and south Ukraine.

Even though Moscow's endgame is opaque, the West needs to be prepared for a Russian offensive in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Massive military exercises suggest that Putin isn't messing around. He just added forty new missiles to his strategic

nuclear arsenal, while Russia's short-range Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad may have received nuclear warheads. By extending the Iskanders' range, the Kremlin may have violated the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Russia's incessant prodding of Western air defenses and in Finnish and Swedish waters may hint at how far the Kremlin's ambitions stretch. But it could also be mere posturing. The answers to these questions require more human intelligence gathering and strategic planning that we frankly don't do well.

One hopes that the sanctions and lower oil prices will change Russia's behavior in Ukraine and in Europe, but oil is already inching higher, and hope is not a strategy.

If the conflict in Ukraine escalates, millions of refugees will stream into Europe, and there will be no sea to stop them. NATO is rightly focused on Russia as never before. Yet it needs to put its money and muscle where its mouth is; it should pre-position military equipment in Central and Eastern Europe, as the United States plans to do, and expand military assistance to Ukraine, including defensive weapons and training.

But that's not enough. I just returned five weeks abroad and spoke with foreign leaders and policy experts in China, Israel, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Russia, and Slovakia. There is not enough clarity.

Frustratingly, we're still discussing strategic information aspects of Russia's belligerence in the Ukraine conflict. To state the obvious, policy prescriptions often get foggy without a clear strategy.

One will not develop a viable strategy, let alone win, without a deep understanding of what Russia really is, how to communicate to its elites and the public, and without an iron-clad commitment to European security and defense from the Baltic to the Black Seas.

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