

# Towards a NATO- Russia Basic Understanding

**TASK FORCE POSITION PAPER**

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Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe



## About the Task Force

The Task Force, a select group of senior statesmen and women drawn from the key states of greater Europe, brings forward proposals to allow all countries of the region to decisively break with the costly legacy of the Cold War and focus more effectively on meeting the emerging political, economic, and security challenges of the 21st century. It addresses the causes of current levels of mistrust between key countries and actors in the region, has trust-building as a central theme in its deliberations, and sets out a rationale and vision for a cooperative Greater Europe and a range of practical steps necessary to move the international relations of the continent in that direction.

The Task Force is supported by, and draws on, independent analytical work by the European Leadership Network (ELN), the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), and the Global Relations Forum (GRF). The Task Force is made possible by generous support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI).

The Task Force has a group of core members led by four Co-Chairs, and also invites prominent leaders and experts to participate in meetings on particular subjects. Co-Chairs:

- **Des Browne**, Former Defence Secretary (UK)
- **Igor S. Ivanov**, Former Foreign Minister, President, Russian International Affairs Council, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia);
- **Adam Daniel Rotfeld**, Former Foreign Minister, (Poland);
- **Özdem Sanberk**, Former Permanent Undersecretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Turkey)

# Towards a NATO-Russia Basic Understanding

In its last intervention - Managing the Cold Peace between Russia and the West (May 2017) – the Task Force argued that “an immediate priority is to halt the downward spiral in our adversarial relationship and manage the risks better through a stable and sustainable West-Russia security relationship”.

The relationship has not yet hit the ground. But the situation is already tense from the Arctic, through the Baltic Sea, the Ukrainian battlegrounds and the Black Sea to Syria. The risks of confrontation are acknowledged, but not necessarily managed properly.

## Our objective

As Russia enters a new political cycle after the 2018 Presidential elections, NATO prepares for its July summit in Brussels, and a Presidential US-Russia summit in Finland is in the cards, we aim to inject new thinking about how Russia and NATO could safely co-exist in the years to come and how Europe’s security could be improved as a result. Instead of assigning blame or suggesting moral equivalence for the outbreak of confrontation, we focus on what should be done to reduce mutual risks.

## Where we are now

Every single principle underpinning the mutual relationship has been violated. Trust has completely broken down. Members of this Task Force themselves hold strongly differing positions about who is to blame. For many, responsibility lies squarely with Russia and is linked with its aggression against Ukraine. Others point, for example, to NATO’s enlargement eastwards as the primary source of instability.

But focusing on mistrust or debating competing narratives do nothing to reduce rising risks. Whether one likes it or not, relations between NATO and Russia will persist. If the two sides are to mitigate those risks, they must address common crisis management goals, despite their profound disagreements.

***“There is no disciplined and results-oriented NATO-Russia dialogue.”***

The current state of affairs with regards to crisis management is deeply unsatisfactory. We can discuss endlessly about who’s more to blame. But the bottom line is that there is no disciplined and results-oriented NATO-Russia dialogue that could address the current political and military realities. The NATO-Russia Council is a shadow of its former self. With regards to the basis of NATO-Russia relations and dialogue, even a cursory look at the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA) and the 2002 Rome Declaration on “NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality” will reveal that they were indeed drafted and adopted in another era.

## Managing the relationship

Instead of accepting that there are no rules in Russia - NATO relations anymore, or waiting for the other side to fundamentally change its course, a new interim and temporary approach is needed.

Treating each other as adversaries, NATO and Russia should at the same time take precautions to ensure they do not stumble into a conflict. No new document is needed. But establishing a shared understanding about the basics of the current relationship could not only reduce risk but enable all sides

to make better progress on specific issues in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), the OSCE, and in ad hoc and bilateral settings.

While continuing to operate within the framework of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and 2002 Rome Declaration, such a NATO-Russia understanding could include the following elements:

1. Re-affirmation of the language of the Founding Act and Rome Declaration that the NATO-Russia Council will remain the “principal structure and venue” of consultation between NATO and Russia “in times of crisis or for any other situation affecting peace and stability”. The NRC would become an all-weather crisis management body, with increasing the level of military predictability and transparency as its most urgent task;
2. Acknowledgement that the current confrontation requires NATO and Russia to focus their attention on addressing the dangers of inadvertent or accidental escalation and creating a limited space for interaction to mitigate this threat;
3. Commitment to refrain from the threat or use of force against each other and to resolve any military crises or incidents peacefully;
4. Commitment to work constructively to resolve existing conflicts in Europe, with priority given to supporting the establishment of a UN-mandated peacekeeping mission in Eastern Ukraine;
5. Commitment to implement all relevant bilateral and multilateral agreements on crisis management and incident prevention, as well as update existing and work on new ones (e.g. Incidents at Sea agreements);
6. Commitment towards military restraint and strict sufficiency in military activities, exercises and deployments, in the conventional and nuclear spheres, along the NATO-Russia borders.

Given the state of the relationship, it is unlikely that NATO or Russia will be ready to define “restraint” and “strict sufficiency”, or offer specific pledges regarding the limits on combat forces in the border areas. However, restraint (or its absence) can be observed on the ground. If it is demonstrated by all sides over some time, this could pave the way to discussion of more detailed arms control arrangements.

7. Acceptance that the NRC could establish ad-hoc working groups to deal with specific crisis management issues and develop confidence-building proposals, exchange information and conduct additional consultations on military doctrines, exercises, deployments, etc.

Such a solution would not violate NATO’s decision to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia and its more recent agreement that it will do “no business as usual” with Russia. It would increase opportunities for progress on specific risk management issues in the existential interests of both sides and under the control of the respective political leaderships.

8. Establishment of channels for regular and emergency military-to-military contacts, involving the military leaderships of the Alliance and the Russian Ministry of Defence.

The aim would be to build a trusted mechanism for military crisis management, managed by military professionals. It could involve

occasional high-level contacts between NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe or Chairman of the NATO Military Committee and Russia's Chief of the General Staff, more regular meetings at deputies level, as well as mechanisms and procedures for emergency direct contact. This would be part of making NATO-Russia communication "all weather".

9. Agreement to maintain, on a reciprocal basis, the Russian representation at NATO Headquarters and NATO representation in Moscow at a level that would allow them to fulfil the tasks stipulated above.

## Value added

Implementing these measures would serve to prevent or manage crises and modestly increase military predictability and transparency, thus helping to stabilise the NATO-Russia relationship, with positive consequences for the greater Europe area. Any progress should be used to support a broader agenda of risk-reduction, mutually agreed restraint, and arms control - if the political will for this grew on both sides.

***"Russia and NATO need to be much more imaginative in creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue."***

Reaching such a basic understanding on the interim "rules of the game" would not constitute a reset of NATO-Russia relationship, nor would it supplant or set aside the NATO-Russia Founding Act. It would also not resolve the main disagreements. But it would open the way for more transparency, predictability and risk reduction and for the avoidance of misunderstanding, miscalculation and unintended escalation

- which seems to be the minimum that Russia and NATO can agree on in the current circumstances. It could thus provide both a foundation for a safer adversarial relationship in the short term and an opening for eventual return in the longer term to the cooperative and inclusive security model envisioned in the Founding Act and the Rome Declaration.

Our proposals should not be interpreted as acceptance or endorsement of the state of affairs in Europe. We remain hopeful about the return of peace to Europe. But in order to find the way out of the current predicament, Russia and NATO need to start being much more imaginative and forthcoming in creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue and working towards stabilization of their confrontation.

## Signed

1. **Des Browne** – United Kingdom – Chair, European Leadership Network; Vice-Chair, Nuclear Threat Initiative; Former Defence Secretary, Co-chair of the Task Force
2. **Özdem Sanberk** – Turkey – Former Ambassador to the United Kingdom; Former Under Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Co-chair of the Task Force
3. **Bert Koenders** – Netherlands – Former Foreign Minister
4. **Alexey Gromyko** – Russia – Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences
5. **Vincenzo Camporini** – Italy – Former Chief of the Joint Defence Staff, Former Chief of Staff of the Air Force
6. **Borys Tarasyuk** – Ukraine – Member of Parliament; Former Foreign Minister
7. **Ruslan S. Grinberg** – Russia - Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Economics, Corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences
8. **Paul Quilès** – France – Former Defence Minister
9. **Hikmet Cetin** – Turkey – Former Foreign Minister

10. **Benoit d'Aboville** – France - Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative to NATO, Vice President of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique
11. **David Richards** – United Kingdom – Former Chief of the Defence Staff
12. **Anatoliy Adamishin** – Russia - President of the Association of Euro-Atlantic Cooperation; Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation
13. **Stefano Stefanini** – Italy – Former Permanent Representative to NATO; Former Diplomatic Advisor to the President of Italy
14. **Nathalie Tocci** – Italy – Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, Special Adviser to Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative and Commission Vice-President
15. **Igor Yurgens** – Russia - Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Contemporary Development, Vice President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs
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18. **Vitaly Zhurkin** – Russia - Director Emeritus of the RAS Institute of Europe, RAS Full Member

## Task Force Membership

The Task Force has the following confirmed membership:

- **Des Browne**, Former Defence Secretary (UK) (Co-Chair);
- **Igor S. Ivanov**, Former Foreign Minister, President, Russian International Affairs Council, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia) (Co-Chair);
- **Adam Daniel Rotfeld**, Former Foreign Minister, (Poland) (Co-Chair);
- **Anatoliy Adamishin**, President of the Non-Governmental Organization “Association of Euro-Atlantic Cooperation”, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation;
- **Tarja Cronberg**, former Member of the European Parliament (Finland);
- **Ruslan S. Grinberg**, Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Economics, Corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, (Russia);
- **Alexei Gromyko**, Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IE RAS), (Russia);
- **Pierre Lellouche**, former Secretary of State for European Affairs and Foreign Trade (France);
- **Paul Quilès**, former Defence Minister (France);
- **Malcolm Rifkind**, former Foreign and Defence Secretary (UK);
- **Volker Ruehe**, former Defence Minister, (Germany);
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- **Igor Yu. Yurgens**, Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Contemporary Development, Vice President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Russia);
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- **Sir Tony Brenton**, former UK Ambassador to Russia (UK);
- **Georgy Mamedov**, former Russian Ambassador to Canada, and former adviser to President Putin (Russia);
- **Hikmet Cetin**, former Foreign Minister (Turkey)
- **Borys Tarasyuk**, former Foreign Minister (Ukraine)
- **Klaus Wittmann**, former General; Senior Fellow at the Aspen Institute (Germany)
- **Angela Kane**, former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs & Under Secretary General (Germany)

***Please note that not all members of the Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe have officially endorsed this paper.***

## About the ELN

The **European Leadership Network (ELN)** works to advance the idea of a cooperative and cohesive Europe and to develop collaborative European capacity to address the pressing foreign, defence and security policy challenges of our time. It does this through its active network of former and emerging European political, military, and diplomatic leaders, through its high-quality research, publications and events, and through its institutional partnerships across Europe, North America, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region.

The opinions articulated in this report represent the views of the signatories, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Leadership Network or any of its (other) members. The ELN's aim is to encourage debates that will help develop Europe's capacity to address pressing foreign, defence, and security challenges.

## Enquiries

This paper is published in the name only of those Task Force members who have signed it, and not on behalf of the Task Force in its entirety.

Updates on project activities will be placed on the ELN, IAI, RIAC and GRF websites at the following addresses: [www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org); <http://www.iai.it/en>; [www.russiancouncil.ru](http://www.russiancouncil.ru); [www.gif.org.tr](http://www.gif.org.tr).

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