

**North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – Article 5 and the Strategic
Dilemma that Dare Not Speak its Name**
or
How the West has got Mr Putin just where he wants them

Executive Summary.

If there is an argument raging behind closed doors in the corridors of political power in the United States of America (USA), the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) concerning what to do about Russia, it is one that has not seen much daylight. Why? Possibly because the consequences would be to publicly admit the 'West's' inherent weakness.

This commentary is a personal view that argues that currently Russia holds all the geopolitical cards and is well placed to finagle indecision by the West in favour of Russian aims and ambitions. In particular, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is becoming irrelevant because some of its constituent treaty nations lack the moral courage to act and/or are in denial as to their individual and collective responsibilities. Making this situation worse is the geographic position of some of the principal NATO nations that border Russia or its satellites - the strategic advantage being Mr Putin's when he can preposition, resupply and maintain forces at strength to threaten speedy incursion without violating the sovereign territory of a NATO state until, and when, he is ready, and decides to do so.

In other words, the geopolitical deck is stacked in Mr Putin's favour, and he knows it. The Russian Federation borders Estonia and Latvia; Russia's puppet ally, Belarus and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, border Lithuania and Poland; and Russia and Belarus share borders with Ukraine. The latter being the focus of current Russian efforts to destabilise and bring back into line a state that Russia views as in its, not the EU's, sphere of influence. Mr Putin may feel certain that the EU and NATO will not be prepared to fight over Ukraine (a non-NATO sovereign state) and that, notwithstanding NATO Article 5, they will prevaricate and then arrive too late should he enter any of the Baltic NATO states.

Introduction.

The basis and bedrock of European security since 1948 has been NATO. Although the EU Presidency, The EU Commission and certain EU states have aspirations for collective EU defence forces under the auspices of the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) little tangible in the way of resources have thus far been allocated and many of those that have are dual hatted with NATO. The latter forces being something

of a moot point because only a few NATO member states achieve the agreed 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to fund their armed forces.

What this means in practice is that few EU NATO members honour their obligations to fund self defence through NATO or demonstrate the will and moral courage to militarily aid an ally. Germany is acknowledged to have the strongest economy in the EU yet spends less on defence than one of the weakest EU economies, Greece. The USA, which provides 75% of NATO funding, is less than pleased. All of which will have been noticed by Russian Federation strategy advisers. Indeed, it can be argued that this lack of military resolve on the part of the EU, coupled to a laissez fair and naïve EU quasi foreign policy over Ukraine, and earlier, Georgia, has strengthened Russian resolve at the same time that it has antagonised Russian national sensibilities. In the blink of an eye The Crimea was annexed by Russia and the Russian speaking Eastern Ukraine encouraged to secede. This following the 2008 Russian intervention in Georgia to create a compliant new state, South Ossetia. Despite reluctant sanctions and much pseudo outrage on behalf of the EU elite, Mr Putin knows that this is the extent of European reaction. He is safe to do as he likes provided he can keep NATO allies internally incoherent by playing one EU State off against another thereby fostering a climate of indecision, in some cases engendering a climate of appeasement, anything rather than confront the reality.

How to Change the Paradigm.

To deal with this dilemma it will require all NATO states, especially those most immediately at risk – Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland – to recognise that funding forward defence (concentration of force) is essential. They must do more for themselves. Relying upon alleged rapid reaction reinforcement plans, other than as follow-on forces, is a fools errand. Russia can not only out gun and out manoeuvre NATO she can choose when to act in the Baltic region with impunity. The logistic infrastructure for Russia to do so has been in-place since the 'Cold War'. Whereas, the NATO road and rail infrastructure into the Baltic region, beyond Lithuania from Poland, is more fragile and vulnerable. NATO air and sea reinforcement options are also liable to interdiction from Russian naval and air forces stationed nearby.

Therefore, the EU and NATO must accept the strategic reality that enlargement has created. Namely that the Baltic states are surrounded by Russian land, sea and air power. [See Maps 1 and 2 below – Russian Logistics Routes into the Baltic and EU/NATO Contiguous Borders with Russia, Kaliningrad and Belarus]



[Map 1- Russian Reinforcement Links to the Baltic]



[Map 2 – EU/NATO Contiguous Borders with Russia, Kaliningrad and Belarus]

What all this boils down to is that the EU is in no position to defend the

Baltic states nor, in reality, does it have the forces or will to do so. Only NATO can defend Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but only if sufficient force is funded and prepositioned ahead of hostilities.

Therefore, if the USA, EU, NAC and FCO are indeed discussing what to do about Russian intentions then a scenario that points to the Baltic States being at high risk of occupation by Russia must be high on the agenda. In current circumstances, notwithstanding EU bluster over obligations under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, such a scenario, if honestly examined, must conclude that NATO planning and funding is way behind the drag curve. With this in mind one can imagine three scenarios arising:

- NATO must accept the potential loss of the Baltic States without military opposition relying upon international law – only United Nations, NAC and EU righteous anger being the response.
- NATO will fight knowing it will lose and that its reinforcements will be destroyed piecemeal and likely have to concede within 72 hours of a surprise Russian assault.
- The Baltic States fund appropriate levels of home self defence and NATO forward-bases large forces and pre-positions heavy armour weapons and ammunition in the Baltic and Poland to match and hold any Russian incursion until rapid reinforcement can arrive.

Options one and two would, rightly, be unacceptable to NATO, most especially Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. However, despite EU Commission rhetoric the fact remains that without massive NATO intervention, earlier rather than later, the result of a surprise Russian assault is not in doubt. In a 2016 Rand Corporation report '**Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank**' the following conclusion was made:

"As Presently Postured, NATO Cannot Successfully Defend the Territory of its Most Exposed Members

- *Across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours.*
- *Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad.*

It Is Possible to Avoid Such Consequences

- *A force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armored (sic) brigades — adequately supported by air power, land-based fires, and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the*

onset of hostilities — could suffice to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states.

- *While not sufficient to mount a sustained defense (sic) of the region or to achieve NATO's ultimate end state of restoring its members' territorial integrity, such a posture would fundamentally change the strategic picture as seen from Moscow."*

Conclusion.

If the EU Commission and its acolytes have their way then collective European defence will be weakened not enhanced by being side tracked and seduced by the CSDP. Rhetoric and hubris will be substituted for action. Only NATO has the command structure and force cohesion to provide credible deterrence but only if the political will and moral courage to take the hard decisions and fund the required military formations and dispositions is acted upon. The reality of the current European geopolitical situation is that Mr Putin is calling the shots knowing that he has an advantage that his EU/NATO opposite numbers are ill equipped or unwilling to challenge. NATO can gain the advantage but in order to do so will need to change the way the game is played – it must replace the deck with one of its choosing.

- Each national member of the NAC must accept that effective military deterrence requires resources and must fund their armed forces to at least 2% of GDP as a minimum.
- The Baltic States and Poland must be recognised as the new front line and be significantly reinforced (corps strength) and on a permanent basis have supporting armour, heavy artillery, anti-aircraft and combat air power pre-positioned.
- The Russian's must not be allowed a veto and this will require strong cohesive political leadership from across the NAC/EU.

Finally, it must be accepted that Ukraine may in the near future be annexed, politically and/or militarily, by Russia. That NATO/EU will not be able, or in combat terms, willing, to prevent it happening. In such a scenario the borders of Mr Putin's Russian Federation will, like the former Soviet Union, once again be fully contiguous with that of Poland. Next stop Germany. There will be no buffer state and the Polish border will become for NATO like that of East Germany during the 'Cold War'. This must be recognised as potentially the single most important paradigm shift for NATO in the first quarter of the 21st Century and dealt with – all else is secondary. Daesh can hurt NATO States, Mr Putin can destroy them.