The Need for Cooperative Security In Europe

By Thomas Greminger | 1 December 2021

Key Issues

- Deterrence needs to be combined with détente and dialogue, as well as measures to de-escalate tensions and build confidence.

- European security can only be fostered by engaging all European countries and a wider set of actors.

- Political capital must be invested in resolving conflicts in Europe, particularly in Ukraine.

- A process should be engineered to develop a cooperative security agenda leading to a high-level meeting, at the latest by 2025 to correspond with the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, in order to restore principles for peaceful relations between states and promote joint approaches to common threats and challenges.

Security in Europe is at risk. Within the span of a generation, the new era of democracy, peace and unity declared in the 1990 Charter of Paris is under threat from authoritarian and illiberal regimes, kleptocrats, and instability. Whereas, until recently, war in Europe was considered "unthinkable", in the past two decades there have been conflicts in Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Borders have been changed unilaterally by force. The dream of a Europe whole and free has been replaced by the reality of new dividing lines, even barbed wire fences and walls. Relations are marred by distrust rather than being founded on respect and cooperation. Instead of feeling secure, populations fear a wide range of threats: from pandemics, to cyber-attacks, terrorism, organised crime, and climate change, not to mention energy and job security. Changing this trajectory will require a rethinking of European security towards a more comprehensive and cooperative approach.

The end of the End of History

After the end of the Cold War, there was a sense that we had reached the end of history. There was an assumption that Europe would develop in a linear, liberal way; countries interested in joining the European Union would start to look and act more like EU members, and the rest of the continent would go through processes of democratic transition that would lead to peace and prosperity.

Although European countries are arguably better off than they were thirty years ago, the continent is far from stable. While conflicts in Kosovo and Georgia may have looked like bumps in the road

in a normalisation of relations between Russia and the West, the crisis in and around Ukraine has demonstrated fundamental divisions, both between Moscow and Kyiv, and between Moscow and the West. Obviously, progress can only come through implementation of the Minsk Agreements – the onus is on the parties. But if the war in Ukraine has dragged on for longer than the Second World War, does the Normandy Format need to be overhauled?

Furthermore, war in Nagorno-Karabakh has called into question the effectiveness of existing mediation fora like the Minsk Process. If three permanent members of the UN Security Council (France, the United States and Russia) could not prevent a war that broke out in slow motion, who could stop it?

If the United States and Russia are looking for places to work together, then the resolution of conflicts in Europe is a good place to start. Conversely, an escalation of conflict in and around Ukraine or an accident or incident in the Baltic or Black seas could unleash a chain of events that even the great powers may not be able to control.

The COVID pandemic has demonstrated how quickly basic assumptions can change. Without being doom mongers, this shock should motivate us to be prepared for other potential game changing events like a major cyber-attack (and blackouts), man-made or natural disasters, an incident in space, and other wars. We need to think the "unthinkable" in order to be in a better position to prevent it.

Thinking wider

Rethinking European security should involve widening our horizons: in terms of what is considered "Europe", what enhances and threatens our societies, and what we mean by security. At the moment, there is a tendency to conflate "Europe" with the European Union, and to focus on Euro-Atlantic security. For example, the current process of developing an EU Strategic Compass is designed to provide a sense of orientation and direction for the EU as a security and defence actor and identify common priorities. Thus far in the consultation process, there has been little mention of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

But most of the issues that have been identified relate to threats and challenges within the OSCE area, including conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood, challenges from state actors (like Russia), threats by non-state actors, and hybrid threats. Therefore, while the OSCE may have been off the EU's radar when developing the strategic compass, once the compass is ready, it will no doubt point straight to the OSCE area. For example, in the short term, the EU will have a strategic interest in fostering stability in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. It will continue to promote security, freedom, and democracy in the Western Balkans. It will remain engaged in the South Caucasus. And it has a self-interest in enhancing security and cooperation in Central Asia, particularly to contain any spill-over of insecurity from Afghanistan. Many of these objectives can be achieved by working, *inter alia*, through the OSCE rather than just bilaterally.

We also need to think wider, in terms of what is meant by security and threats to it. Despite the tendency towards de-globalisation and states focusing on national solutions, most emerging threats and challenges transcend borders and therefore require multilateral cooperation. All countries, including great powers, have a national interest to work together on issues like climate change, pandemics, organised crime, terrorism, and migration. Indeed, they have to work together. Cooperation is realpolitik, not altruism.

Furthermore, we will need to engage a wider set of actors to work on security issues – not just diplomats, politicians, or experts from the security sector, but also scientists, the private sector, civil society, academia and youth to explain and prepare for the possible impact of disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, blockchain, and nano-technology. We also need to ensure that global governance keeps pace with innovation, for example in relation to cryptocurrencies, cybercrime or automated weapons systems.

Talk to your enemies

Sadly, there has been a tendency within the past few decades to focus on security in the narrow sense of stability. With so many problems in the world, states – including in North America and the

European Union – have tended to strike deals with leaders who promise stability. Upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as fighting corruption, are given a lower priority. However, such an approach undermines the very values on which open societies and security communities are based and can increase instability over the long term. As a result, accountable, pluralistic, democracies that protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their citizens should be the system of government that every European country aspires to.

But let's be honest; not every country in wider Europe – in the OSCE area – fits that description. Yet that should not stop non-like-minded countries from talking to each other. As Desmond Tutu said, "If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies."

However, there are few places left where Russia and the West can meet and talk. The NATO-Russia

countries have common interests. Our hope is that this can feed fresh ideas and a more constructive approach into the inter-governmental process, building up to a high-level meeting on European security, to correspond with the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025.

But hope is not a strategy. If there is to be a more cooperative approach to security in Europe, a process will have to be engineered. Some building blocks are already in place, like the Structured Dialogue process in the OSCE in Vienna, and the strategic stability dialogue in Geneva between Russia and the United States, as a follow-up to the Summit between Presidents Biden and Putin. Finland, as a possible chair of the OSCE in 2025, could play a key role in restoring the "spirit of Helsinki".

Some may say that the time is not ripe to talk about cooperation because relations between Russia and the West are so bad. But precisely because relations are so bad, the case needs to be made for

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Council and formal EU-Russia consultations have broken down, and there is less military-to-military dialogue than during the Cold War. The OSCE is one of the few remaining multilateral forums to discuss European security issues and manage relations peacefully. Yet, even here, there is no sense of common purpose and no vision for the future.

The Geneva Center for Strategic Policy has, therefore, launched a track 1.5 process to explore options and test ideas for promoting a more cooperative approach to security in Europe. Our intention, in 2022, is to bring together experts from around the OSCE area, particularly from the United States, the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe, to look at process design and identify security issues on which

cooperative security; not necessarily as an alternative to deterrence, but certainly as a complement to it.

This logic is not new. It was at the heart of NATO's doctrine in the late 1960s when Europe stood in the crossfire of mutually assured destruction between the USSR and the USA. In his 1967 report on "The Future Tasks of the Alliance", the Foreign Minister of Belgium Pierre Harmel observed that "military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complementary". He stated that "the way to peace and stability in Europe rests, in particular, on the use of the Alliance constructively in the interest of détente" and that "the participation of the USSR and the USA will be necessary to achieve a settlement of the political problems in Europe".

What is cooperative security?

For many in the West, Russia's annexation of Crimea, its pressure on Ukraine, and the recent behaviour of the leadership in Minsk, call for deterrence rather than détente. But unless we want to risk a massive war in Europe, dialogue will have to be part of the solution. The alternative to an escalating series of increasingly dangerous tit-for-tat reprisals is cooperative security.

Cooperative security is an approach for improving relations between states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, which is based on the premise that we need "security with each other, rather than from each other". A good example is the Schuman Declaration of 1950 – the birth of what would later become the European Union. On the 9th of May 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community. He said that the solidarity of producing steel for construction rather than munitions would "make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible". As difficult as relations can sometimes be within the EU, we should be thankful for the more than 70 years of peace among its member states.

But Europe is wider than the boundaries of the European Union – it includes the Balkans, the Caucasus, Turkey, Russia, and all countries in-between. How can so many states with such different perspectives and national interests work together? An advantage of cooperative security is that it is inclusive. Cooperative security frameworks, like the OSCE, do not presuppose that there is consensus among its members. Rather, they aim to build it. This can be difficult, especially in an organisation with members that have significantly different, and even competing, security policies.

Therefore, forging cooperative security depends on dialogue and compromise. Such dialogue can identify red lines, keep open channels of communication, and make relations more predictable. It can lead to agreement on common principles and commitments, and to joint action.

In short, cooperative security promotes consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, and prevention rather than coercion. In our complex and inter-dependent world, such an approach is badly needed.

Repairing the safety net

Russia and the US may disagree on many things, but one would hope that they can both agree on the need to prevent war.

At a minimum, states need to exercise restraint. Another priority must be to restore the safety net of confidence- and security building measures (CSBMs) and arms control agreements that helped to reduce tensions and increase transparency in the 1990s. Chief among these are the Vienna Document on CSBMs and the Open Skies Treaty; they were designed to prevent and de-escalate the very type of situation that we see in an around Ukraine.

Military-to-military dialogue is also vital, for example, on practical modalities for preventing and managing incidents and accidents – particularly over the Baltic and Black Seas, but also at land. In time, discussion should be initiated on arms control, focusing on destabilising weapons systems, capabilities, and broader limitations for conventional military posture.

Furthermore, states should seek to engage on issues where their interests overlap, for example; stabilising the situation in and around Afghanistan; cooperating against transnational organised crime; dealing with cyber threats; preparing for future pandemics and disasters; regulating potentially disruptive technologies; and ensuring the peaceful use of outer space.

Conclusion: towards a cooperative security agenda

In short, it is time to rethink European security; to have an inclusive pan-European process of dialogue and engagement; to cover a more comprehensive and future-oriented set of security issues; to take measures to de-escalate tensions and improve trust and predictability; and to develop a common agenda based on common principles and converging interests to be implemented in a cooperative way.

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