



The Expert Dialogue on NATO – Russia Risk Reduction.

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS

In December 2020, this group of senior Russian, American and European experts offered governments a set of recommendations on Russia-NATO risk reduction. The recommendations addressed most of the areas of common ground so far sketched in Russian, US and NATO exchanges during the present crisis. Had those recommendations been acted upon, we might now be on a better path away from crisis.

We renew to all sides seven of our recommendations, updated to meet the present situation. They are simply good sense. They are modest, but they can be implemented tomorrow and would be a start on making Europe safer:

1. Regular meetings should be held between the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, reinforced by military experts, to address issues of current concern.

These meetings would not be to negotiate the present crisis but to ensure military deconfliction and day-to-day risk reduction at this time of heightened tension and military deployments. They would take place entirely separately from the series of prepared thematic meetings of the NATO-Russian Council that the NRC's Chairman has proposed.

2. In addition, NATO member states and Russia should resume contacts at the level of military representatives in the NATO Military Committee and restore the Russian military liaison mission at SACEUR Headquarters.

These steps would parallel the establishment of civilian hotline communications that Russia has proposed and the re-opening of the Russian mission to NATO and of NATO liaison offices in Moscow proposed by NATO. They would rebuild the communication that for safety and good deterrence must take place in foul weather and not just fair.

3. Russia and NATO member states could agree that both sides will conduct large-scale military exercises, as a rule, at a militarily meaningful distance from their borders, but where geography prevents this then additional measures of notification, transparency and predictability must be taken. They should consider reducing the scale and frequency of military activities with respect to numbers and geography, in particular exercises near borders. Generally, military exercises should be executed responsibly, not provocatively.

Both sides should now be seeking to communicate militarily responsible, unprovocative behavior. The definitions of meaningful distance, scale and frequency could be the subject of discussion through the military channels proposed above. Military professionals are well able quickly to judge and report good faith or the absence of it.

4. Both sides could take initial steps in the form of parallel unilateral measures that do not necessarily require conclusion of a formal agreement between NATO, or NATO member states, and Russia, which could prove politically difficult to achieve in the present environment.

The crisis means that finding joint agreement on measures both large and small between Russia and NATO will generally require protracted, painstaking negotiation. A device for getting round this obstacle, especially for military risk reduction, is for commanders to order parallel, unilateral measures based either on informal mutual understandings or as a small, clearly communicated challenge to see whether the other side will reciprocate.

5. Russia and the United States could confirm that, irrespective of the course of the present crisis, they will systematically develop their dialogue on the future of strategic stability and cyber security as agreed at their Geneva summit in June 2021.

Progress on the fundamental issue of strategic stability is crucial, has its own value, and should not be subordinated to other levels and tracks of negotiations. We wholeheartedly support the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, published on 3 January 2022, including the P5 commitment to the fundamental principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

6. Russia and NATO could immediately agree to launch negotiations on a new zero option for the deployment in Europe of US and Russian intermediate-range land-based missiles and their launchers.

In their recent exchanges Russia, the United States and NATO have all indicated that they want to see progress on ground-based intermediate-range missiles.

7. Russia and NATO member states could immediately agree to launch negotiations on a package of measures on the basis of the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements on prevention of incidents at sea and above the sea, and on prevention of dangerous military activities.

In their recent exchanges Russia, the United States and NATO have all indicated that they would like to see progress in these very practical areas of risk reduction, which are particularly relevant to periods of heightened tension.

Taken together these seven measures would materially contribute not just to a reduction of Russia-NATO tension but a reduction of Russia-NATO risk.

*Russia-NATO Dialogue Group
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