



STATEMENT BY THE EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY LEADERSHIP GROUP (EASLG)

Prepared for Presidents, Prime Ministers, Parliamentarians, and Publics

Advancing Strategic Stability in the Euro-Atlantic Region

2021 and Beyond

In one of the best accounts of the lead-up to World War I, the historian Christopher Clark details how a group of European leaders—“The Sleepwalkers”—led their nations into a conflict that none of them wanted. Grippled by nationalism and ensnared by competing interests, mutual mistrust, and alliances, they made a series of tragic miscalculations that resulted in 40 million casualties. One of the more sobering aspects of this period was the speed with which events transpired in the summer of 1914, following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, in Sarajevo on June 28. The subsequent ultimatums, mobilizations, declarations of war, and finally, war itself unfolded in roughly one month. Leaders of that era found themselves with precious little time for considering their decisions—and the world paid a horrific price.

In the Euro-Atlantic region today, leaders face risks of miscalculation, compounded by the potential for the use of nuclear weapons, where millions could be killed in minutes. Do we have the tools to prevent an incident from turning into unimaginable catastrophe?

While leaders, governments and publics are strained by the developing and constantly changing challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a growing risk of—and a potentially catastrophic inattention to—a more traditional security crisis involving an escalation or miscalculation leading to nuclear use. This risk is exacerbated by new technologies including cyber threats, and new military

deployments that should cause leaders to reflect on the adequacy of the decision time available to them to prevent or deescalate a crisis. Emerging technologies such as evasive hypersonic missiles or robotic nuclear torpedoes could significantly compress decision-time. When combined with artificial intelligence including machine learning, humans may be removed from being “in” or “on” the decision-making loop, especially when responding to a perceived or real attack. Amplifying these concerns is the unrelenting impact of the growth and evolution of social media, including disinformation campaigns of unknown origin in all forms. In such a world, rational and determined actions by governments have never been more important.

Des Browne, Wolfgang Ischinger, Igor Ivanov, Ernest J. Moniz, Sam Nunn, and their respective organizations—the European Leadership Network (ELN), the Munich Security Conference (MSC), the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), and the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI)—work with former and current officials and experts from a group of Euro-Atlantic states and the European Union to test ideas and develop proposals for improving security in areas of existential common interest. The EASLG operates as an independent and informal initiative, with participants who reflect the diversity of the Euro-Atlantic region from the United States, Canada, Russia, and 15 European countries.

SIX PRINCIPLES FOR ADVANCING STRATEGIC STABILITY

For decades, strategic stability between the United States, NATO, and the Soviet Union/Russia included a mutual recognition of vital interests, redlines, and the means to reduce the risks of accident or miscalculation leading to conflict, especially conflict escalating to the use of nuclear weapons. Today, however, clashing national interests, insufficient dialogue, eroding arms control agreements, advanced missile systems, and new cyber and hypersonic weapons have destabilized the old equilibrium and are increasing the risk of nuclear conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the fragility of existing international mechanisms for addressing transnational threats and the imperative for new cooperative approaches to effectively anticipate, prevent, and address them.

The unresolved conflict in Ukraine remains a potential flashpoint for catastrophic miscalculation between Russia and the West, and this tension threatens security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region more broadly. A political resolution remains fundamental to ending the armed conflict in the Donbas region, to improving prospects for constructive Ukraine-Russia dialogue more broadly including on Crimea, and to improving Euro-Atlantic security.

Governments have a shared responsibility to work together to mitigate the risks. In the mid-1980s when relations between Euro-Atlantic nations had reached their nadir, leaders played a key role in providing an accepted framework for their governments to re-engage on core security issues. Joint Statements between leaders—which included agreed principles—provided a foundation for officials and experts to re-engage and eventually make progress on arms control, economics, human rights, and bilateral issues.

No one wants a return to the Cold War. But as was true then, improving security in the Euro-Atlantic region today will require leaders to recognize their mutual interests and act boldly and together to promote them. A leader-driven framework for multilateral dialogue can advance practical ideas for improving security. In the absence of such leadership, ideas are unlikely to percolate “up” from within governments, given political and diplomatic tensions.

The decision of the U.S. and Russian presidents to extend the New START Treaty for five years confirms that nations can act to advance their common interests, including reducing nuclear risks. It is also an opportunity to move the world in a safer and more hopeful direction. Governments in the Euro-Atlantic region should build on this achievement and work to advance strategic stability

and reduce the risk of miscalculation by agreeing to these principles:

- **Restore dialogue.** We cannot have strategic stability without dialogue. The absence of dialogue erodes stability. The tools of communication are not being used as they should be. Dialogue and diplomacy have become a reward, not a tool. This lack of dialogue hinders our ability to understand the perspective of others, sharpens mistrust, and increases risks. Across the region, dialogue now between leaders remains essential to creating the political space for civilian and military officials to engage. The June 16 meeting between the U.S. and Russian presidents in Geneva, Switzerland, offers the opportunity to begin an important new dialogue on strategic stability.
- **Manage instability—and build mutual security.** In the near-term, dialogue now at all levels should be focused on managing instability. We do not, however, want dialogue simply to reinforce the status quo; rather we need to define where we would like to be in, for example, 5–10 years—a vision centered on building mutual security—and identify the tools necessary to get there.
- **Increasing leadership decision time.** Creating robust and accepted methods to increase decision time for leaders, especially during heightened tensions and extreme situations when leaders fear they may be under threat of attack, could be a common conceptual goal that links both near- and long-term steps for managing instability and building mutual security.
- **Manage and control emerging threats and technologies.** The risks and challenges to Euro-Atlantic and global security today are broader than existential nuclear threats, and engage increased numbers of players including constellations of nation-states and the private sector. Underlined by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, risks have changed and are higher in today’s world, including the challenges that come with emerging technologies, such as cyber and hypersonic capabilities, which can dangerously compress decision-time.
- **Identify and advance areas of existential common interest.** We have existential common interests where we can and must work together across the Euro-Atlantic space. These include preventing both the use of nuclear weapons and the erosion of arms control agreements that for decades have reduced nuclear risks.
- **Increase transparency and predictability.** Steps that increase transparency and predictability are essential to reduce near-term risks, and over the long-term, restore cooperation and trust.

A leader-driven framework for multilateral dialogue can advance practical ideas for improving security. ... A new strategy for managing instability and building mutual security in the Euro-Atlantic region can reduce the chances of conflict and catastrophe and build a more secure and promising future for all.

EIGHT STEPS FOR MANAGING INSTABILITY AND BUILDING MUTUAL SECURITY

Consistent with these principles, governments should work to identify elements of common ground, including near-term steps for reducing nuclear risks now, and long-term steps contributing to a comprehensive approach to building mutual security—one that emphasizes both a synergy between process and substance, and is likely to yield concrete results. The near- and long-term steps could include the following:

Near-Term Steps for Reducing Nuclear Risks Now

- **Step 1: Reinforce the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.** This principle—articulated at the height of the Cold War by leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union and embraced by all European countries—was an important step in ending the Cold War. Today, it would clearly communicate that despite current tensions, leaders recognize their responsibility to work together to prevent nuclear catastrophe. Agreement on this key principle also could be a foundation for other practical steps to reduce the risk of nuclear use and avoid an arms race, and it would signal the commitment of nuclear powers to build on past progress toward disarmament—a vital demonstration of leadership that would strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Extending this step to include the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the P5) would be an especially powerful statement in the NPT context.
- **Step 2: Deepen U.S.-Russia and West-Russia crisis management dialogue.** Leaders should direct their respective governments to renew dialogue on crisis management—both bilaterally and multilaterally, for example via the NATO-Russia Council, or as a separate

working group. In either case, the mandate should be focused on addressing concerns generated by day-to-day military events and activities, not political or strategic issues.

- **Step 3: 1,400 in 2021.** With New START extended for five years, Washington and Moscow should commit to further reduce U.S. and Russian deployed strategic nuclear weapons while working urgently to establish the mandate for and scope of a successor agreement to New START. As a first step, given that both nations have declared their deployed strategic warheads to be well under the New START limit of 1,550 for the past three years,¹ a voluntary non-binding commitment not to exceed, for example, 1,400 deployed warheads by the end of 2021 should be feasible and would be symbolically important for the NPT Review Conference. This should be followed over the long-term by a successor nuclear reductions agreement before New START expires.
- **Step 4: Conduct internal “fail-safe” reviews.** All nuclear weapon states should commit to conduct internal reviews of their nuclear command and control systems, including “fail-safe” steps to strengthen safeguards against cyber threats and unauthorized, inadvertent, or accidental use of a nuclear weapon. These reviews should also include options for increasing warning and decision time for leaders, both unilaterally and in concert.

Long-Term Steps toward a Comprehensive Approach to Strategic Stability

- **Step 5: Open a new dialogue.** Direct a new strategic dialogue among Euro-Atlantic states about building mutual security—in both new and existing tracks, such as the Russia-NATO Council and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This new dialogue must be mandated by political leaders to address core security issues and divides within the region. It should identify risks and challenges associated

¹ As of March 2021, the United States reported 1,357 warheads, Russia 1,456 warheads. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/new-start-treaty-aggregate-numbers-of-strategic-offensive-arms/>

with strategic stability today, including those arising from new types of nuclear and non-nuclear strategic weapons, emerging technologies, missile defense, cyber, and space.² It should also focus on conflict areas and identify potentially destabilizing features of military strategies in the Euro-Atlantic region, including nuclear doctrines and practices that increase risks of accident, miscalculation or blunder leading to a military conflict. It should reduce misunderstanding to prevent future conflicts. The EASLG can provide a foundation for this work, which should involve the planning and strategy departments of foreign affairs and defense ministries from across the region.

- **Step 6: Agree to ban INF-range missile deployment.** Implement a ban on the deployment of Russian and U.S. land-based INF-range missile systems that would apply to the Euro-Atlantic region and, when possible, more broadly. Otherwise, leaders could once again become consumed with fears of a short-warning nuclear attack that could decapitate a nation's command and control, which would greatly increase the risk of catastrophe in the event of false warnings. This will require an agreement on the systems to be banned and accompanying verification measures.
- **Step 7: Establish cyber nuclear “rules of the road.”** The risk of any one incident or set of circumstances leading to nuclear escalation is greatly exacerbated by new hybrid threats, such as cyber risks to early warning and command and control systems. Cyber threats can emerge at any point during a crisis and trigger misunderstandings and unintended signals—magnified

by the difficulties in attribution and real-time attack assessment—that could precipitate war. Initiatives to establish rules of the road or red-lines precluding cyberattacks on nuclear facilities, nuclear command-and-control structures, or early warning systems would reduce fears of being blinded in the early stages of a crisis or conflict, and help maximize decision time.

- **Step 8: Establish a Joint Data Exchange Center.** The United States, Russia, and NATO should commit to updating the June 2000 U.S.-Russia agreement to establish a joint data exchange center for the exchange of data from early warning systems and notifications of missile launches to include all of NATO (or perhaps implement the center concept “virtually”). The new U.S.-NATO-Russia center could be expanded over time to include other nations facing missile threats, including China, making it a truly global center for nuclear threat reduction. A clear benefit of the center would be to bring together U.S.-NATO-Russia personnel in “day-to-day” operations on a dedicated joint activity. The center could also have potential for cooperation in other related areas, including cyber and space.

One of history's lessons is how quickly nations can move from peace to horrific conflict. In the aftermath, we have looked back and wondered not only how it could have happened, but how it happened so quickly? A new strategy for managing instability and building mutual security in the Euro-Atlantic region can reduce the chances of conflict and catastrophe and build a more secure and promising future for all.

² See “Building Mutual Security in the Euro-Atlantic Region: Report Prepared for Presidents, Prime Ministers, Parliamentarians, and Publics,” for a more in-depth discussion of missile defenses (pages 15–17), cybersecurity (pages 24–25), and space (pages 26–27), along with nuclear weapons, prompt-strike forces, and conventional forces. Available at: <https://www.nti.org/analysis/reports/building-mutual-security-euro-atlantic-region-report-prepared-presidents-prime-ministers-parliamentarians-and-publics/>

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