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[Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, thank you for inviting me here today. It is an honor and a privilege to give testimony to this committee and I would like to thank you for this opportunity and the committee staff for their work. I will give a short oral version of my written testimony and then look forward to taking questions.]

I have been dealing with European security for more than thirty years, as an activist during the Cold War, and also as a journalist, author, analyst and consultant.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that:

- Russia is a revisionist power;
- It has the means to pursue its objectives;
- It is winning; and
- Greater dangers lie ahead.

In particular, I believe that the Baltic states are the keystones of the European security order. If they fall victim to Russian pressure, be it military, economic or political, then the rules-based system which the United States has established and defended in Europe for more than six decades is over. The consequences of this would be catastrophic, and not only on the other side of the Atlantic. America's greatness rests on its alliances: no country in the history of the world has had so many allies, and such deep ties with them. If the United States proves unable or unwilling defend its allies, the collapse in its credibility will be this country's greatest geopolitical setback since Pearl Harbor.



- **Give up any hope of a quick diplomatic fix or other deal with Russia.** This is going to be a persistent and dangerous conflict. It predates Putin and will outlast him;
- **Continue to strengthen and reassure the frontline states, in particular the Baltic states and Poland.** We have done a lot, but much more needs to happen, in particularly in increasing the credibility of our deterrent.
- **Expose and punish the Kremlin's activities in the West.** In particular we need to deal firmly with Russian intelligence operations, to counter disinformation, to intensify visa sanctions on the Russian elite, and to block passage of Russian dirty money through our financial system.

I am the author of several books relevant to today's session. The first of these, 'The New Cold War', was written in 2007, at a time when most Westerners were still reluctant to face up to the threat the Putin regime poses both to its own people, and to Russia's neighbours. Many accused me then of scaremongering. Fewer do that now.

The message of this book was not mine, and it was not new. It came as a result of my deep ties to the frontline states of Europe. In the 1990s, a time when Vladimir Putin was still an obscure official in St Petersburg, public figures such as Václav Havel of the Czech Republic, the former Estonia president Lennart Meri, and Vytautas Landsbergis, who masterminded Lithuania's independence, all warned the West that Russia was heading in the wrong direction.

They warned us of the decay of democratic life there, of election-rigging, of the resurgence of the old KGB, and of the growth of kleptocracy. They also warned us that Russia had not abandoned its arrogant, unrepentant imperialist attitudes towards the former captive nations of eastern Europe. They warned us about Russia's toxic cocktail of money, propaganda and force, and its use of espionage to find targets and exploit weaknesses. They warned us that though Russia was still economically weak back then, times would change, and trouble was on its way—not only for them, but for us.

We in the West did not just ignore those warnings. We patronized and belittled the brave men and women who delivered them. Now the warnings have been vindicated. The Baltic states, before and after their accession to NATO, have suffered repeated economic sanctions, military pressure and subversion. We in the "old" West have seen Russian mischief-making in the heart of our political systems.

Yet even now many policymakers and analysts in Western capitals still believe that containing and confronting Vladimir Putin's Russia is either unnecessary or dangerous. They take an essentially pacifist stance, that military solutions are never appropriate, and that dialog is under all circumstances better than confrontation. I explain in the course of this evidence why that is wrong. I hope that my voice may be

heard where those from the frontline states, still, are not.

In truth, **Russia is a revisionist power**. Accommodating the Kremlin's interests is not about changing outcomes within an existing set of rules. It would mean accepting new rules dictated by Russia. This is hard for many Westerners to understand, because we believe implicitly that the European security order dating back to the Helsinki process in the mid-1970s is stable, because all sides regard it as fair.<sup>2</sup> This assumption is profoundly mistaken. The Kremlin regards the Western-dominated security order as unfair and over-ripe for change. It also believes that conflict and competition are central to international relations; talk of win-win outcomes is naïve at best and mendacious at worst. As far as Russia is concerned, war of some sort with the West is inevitable; the only question is who wins. In this outlook Russia, crucially, has the advantage of strategic coherence. Its decision-makers share a similar perception of the threat from the West. They have common priorities, appetites for risk and assessments of our vulnerabilities. None of that is true on our side.

The stakes are high. Russia does not believe that its neighbours should be fully sovereign, with the right to make independent decisions about their geopolitical future. In Russia, a former imperial power with a long history of invasion by (and of) its neighbours, such behaviour is seen as an affront.

The Kremlin does not want to reconquer these ex-colonies; that would be prohibitively costly. But it does want to constrain them. Russia particularly begrudges the former captive nations of the Soviet empire their freedom, their prosperity, and their sovereignty. Their success poses an existential challenge to the stagnant and autocratic model of government pioneered by the Putin regime. The Kremlin also believes that NATO encircles the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, a geopolitical trophy carved out of the pre-war German territory of East Prussia. This is strategically intolerable: Russia must have the capability to break this perceived encirclement. Russia's security, therefore, depends on its neighbours' insecurity.

To achieve that goal, Russia must change the European security order, replacing the rules-based multilateral system with a bilateral one in which strong countries do the deals that they can, and weak countries accept the outcomes that they must.

A precondition for this is undermining the Atlantic alliance. Russia depicts this as anachronistic, unwanted and destructive American meddling in Europe. In fact, the American nuclear guarantee to NATO counters one of the most powerful elements in the Kremlin's military arsenal: its "tactical"—ie sub-strategic—nuclear weapons. Without America nuclear, intelligence, cyber and conventional capabilities, Europe would be, at least in the short term, largely defenceless.

Russia for now is therefore concentrating on stoking anti-Americanism in Europe (such as paranoia about

NSA intelligence-gathering) and anti-European sentiment in the United States. This could be termed “system warfare”: the long-term delegitimization of the system on which Western military strength is based.

Russia controls the strategic initiative more than its relative economic and military strength would suggest. It is also in a hurry. The clock is ticking against it. Low oil prices mean that Russia cannot modernize its defence budget as it wishes. It faces continued declines in infrastructure, population, public services and competitiveness.

Russia could therefore decide accelerate this erosion of Western unity by provoking a crisis. A rapid, confusing and ambiguous series of events, quite possibly in the Baltic states, might prompt an insufficient, belated reaction from NATO and the U.S.—or none at all. Russia would then, in effect, have defeated its far stronger Western military adversaries, chiefly by dexterity and bluff.

The easiest way to beat an opponent is to break his will to resist by non-military means. That is Russia’s favoured course of action. However, if the Kremlin perceives it has a decisive military advantage, it will exploit it ruthlessly, aiming to destroy its opponents’ armed forces and war-fighting capability. This creates the danger of a “hot” war with Russia: something which Western strategic thinking has largely discounted in the past 25 years.

For this reason I particularly welcome this committee’s focus on the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As stable, prosperous, law-governed democracies, they are beacons of Western values. I do not need to remind this committee that these three countries are loyal American allies and NATO members. They are our frontline states: the future of the world we have taken for granted since 1991 hangs on their fate. If they are successfully attacked or humiliated, NATO, and the United States, lose their credibility overnight: a huge victory for Russia.

These countries are inherently vulnerable to military and non-military attack. Geography is against them: they comprise a thin, flat strip of land, lightly populated, with few natural frontiers and little strategic depth. Their economies are liable to Russian pressure. Estonia and Latvia are also potentially subject to Russian interference because of their ethnic make-up (between a quarter and a third of their populations self-identify as ‘Russian’ in some sense). Lithuania could face demands from Russia for a corridor across its territory to the Kaliningrad exclave.

Like West Berlin in cold war days, the military defence of the Baltic states is difficult, but not impossible. NATO has lately improved its plans and force posture in the region. But we should not fool ourselves: we have turned tripwires into speed bumps and road blocks. We have not committed sufficient forces in the

region to deter a full-scale Russian attack. Nor, as I argue later, should we. Our deterrent should be much wider, deeper, more resilient and more intimidating than whatever we choose to deploy in the frontline states.

Russia has **the means to pursue its revisionist approach**. Russia has a “multi-model” approach to conflict with the West, involving the flexible and adaptive use of military and non-military capabilities.

It uses **money**, bolstering self-interested commercial and financial lobbies which profit from doing business with Russia and fears any cooling in political ties. Austrian banks, German industrial exporters, French defence contractors, and a slew of companies, banks and law firms in my own country, the United Kingdom, exemplify this. Energy, economic and financial ties constrain Western responses to Russian revisionism.

Russia practices **information warfare** (propaganda) with a level of sophistication and intensity not seen even during the Cold War. It uses the immediacy, anonymity and ubiquity of the internet to confuse and corrode Western decision-making and public life.

Russia is prepared to threaten and use **force**, ranging from assassination to intimidation and military saber-rattling. In some countries it works closely with organized crime networks. Where necessary—as in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria—it uses straightforward force of arms, backed up with huge military exercises to deter any outside interference.

This toxic combination of money, information and force is often called “hybrid war” Russia wages it both in the physical world and in cyber-space. Russia’s well-financed, tightly focussed and increasingly capable intelligence agencies play a leading role in selecting targets and carrying out operations.

**So far, Russia is winning**. Even after the invasion of Ukraine, the response from the West has been weak, late and disunited. The United States is distracted by multiple urgent problems elsewhere and many Americans rightly question why their country should be borrowing money to pay for security in bigger, richer Europe.

That gives Russia, with its bold decision-making and high tolerance for risk and pain, great scope for future action. Foreign policy adventures—whether in Georgia, Ukraine or Syria—play well at home, where they distract attention from the Putin regime’s failure to modernize the economy, infrastructure or public services.

Russia has a notable military advantage over us in the Baltic Sea region. It has A2AD (Anti-Access Area Denial) capabilities, based on sophisticated air-defence systems, which create formidable “domes” or “bubbles” over territory in which we need to operate. In effect, Russia could during a crisis declare a

“no-fly” zone over the Baltic sea, forcing us to consider whether we want to put our planes and pilots at risk, to launch a full-scale attack on Russian bases in Kaliningrad and western Russia, or to acquiesce.

Russia itself does not know if, how or when it might start such a conflict; we cannot know this either. We can say confidently, however, that both the timing and the means of the Kremlin’s next adventure will be unpleasant and unexpected. A central thread in Russia’s approach is surprise. The new cold war is not like the old one. Past events—including recent ones—are little guide to the future.

I do not, however, believe that a military conflict over the Baltic states is imminent or even probable. It is far more likely that the Putin regime, at least initially, tests our will-power elsewhere, perhaps in the Western Balkans (where Russia recently tried and failed to mount a coup in Montenegro), or perhaps in an ex-Soviet country such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan or Moldova.

Any such move would be a serious problem, and I would suggest that this committee urgently schedules a further hearing to take expert evidence on how the West should counter such gambits. But the damage to us, and the gain to Russia, will be greatest if Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are the targets. We must do a lot more to guard against that eventuality.

### **Recreating our strategic culture**

The first task is to see clearly what has happened. This conflict is under way. We can contain it, but not end it, because continued confrontation with the West has become an domestic political imperative for the Russian regime. At best we can deter its escalation. But the European security crisis will not be fixed with a few deft diplomatic touches and clever compromises. Coping with a revisionist Russia requires a fundamental overhaul. Politicians, such as those on this committee, need to explain to voters and taxpayers that we have moved into a new, costly and uncomfortable era, but we will never go back to business as usual. Anything else paves the way for future defeats, and sends a message that the kleptocratic regime in the Kremlin understands all too well: crime pays.

We should not assume that we can manage this conflict with the tools we used during the old Cold War. Russia believes it faces an existential threat from the West, and that it has for now the upper hand in dealing with it. It will not agree to accept limits on the interior movements of its forces, for example, or in the reductions of the weapons that give it superiority. At best we may be able to pursue a limited arms-control agenda, build better military-to-military relations, improve transparency and lessen the danger of war breaking out by accident. That will be desirable, but it will not solve the conflict.

Nor should we assume that “dialog” is the answer. We should indeed talk to the Russian leadership—far more than we do so at the moment. But we should first make sure we have something clear and useful to

say. We need to understand the Kremlin's strategic calculus and to make sure that they understand ours. We should make it clear that our aim is simple. We will boost our security and that of allies, to safeguard them from anything our opponents can do. We did not start or seek this conflict. But if the Kremlin treats us as an enemy, we help nobody by pretending otherwise.

We also need to rebut the phoney *Realpolitik* arguments, which advise us to make the best of a bad job. We should accept the loss of Crimea, so the argument goes, do a deal with Russia over the future of Ukraine, and get used to the new realities, of a Russian *droit de regard* in neighbouring countries.

Such an approach would be morally wrong and strategically stupid. Securing a Europe whole and free after 1991 has been a magnificent achievement in which the United States, including you, Mr Rohrabacher, played a notable part. True: we made mistakes. We tried too hard to pander to Russia in the Yeltsin era, ignoring the growth of corruption, authoritarianism and revanchism. We overlooked Russians' resentment as their country drifted from the European mainstream and our vulnerability to the steps they could take in response. We neglected Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the countries of the Caucasus. We were bewitched by the Putin regime's offer of cooperation against Islamist terrorism in 2001. We have been frequently dazzled by the spurious commercial prospects offered by Russia.

But having made these mistakes is no reason to compound them now, by retreating into a grubby defeatism. Legitimising Russia's land-grab in Ukraine would fly in the face of historical justice. Are we really proposing that nations which paid the greatest price for the mistakes of the 20th century, and which the past masters of the Kremlin occupied and despoiled, should be once again subject to outside interference and oppression?

Russia is an integrated part of the world economy and of international decision-making on everything from space to sub-sea minerals. It cannot be simply isolated and ignored. But that does not mean that we cannot raise the cost of doing business for the Putin regime, both for its behaviour so far—and with sharpened intensity if it menaces our allies.

As an immediate measure, in response to the continuing aggression against Ukraine and provocations elsewhere, we should greatly extend the use of sanctions against individuals. The furious Russian reaction to the American imposition of even a handful of visa bans and asset freezes on those responsible for the death of the whistle-blowing auditor Sergei Magnitsky shows the effectiveness of this approach. Estonia has commendably and bravely taken similar steps. My own country is belatedly introducing Magnitsky sanctions at the behest of Bill Browder, the American-born financier and activist who employed Mr Magnitsky and has championed his cause.

The scope of such sanctions should be widened to include hundreds or even thousands of Russian decision-makers and policy-makers. It could include all members of the legislature (Duma and Federation Council), all members of the General Staff, military intelligence (GRU) domestic security (FSB), foreign intelligence (SVR), the interior ministry (MVD) and other ‘power agencies’, the presidential administration, and presidential property administration (and companies which represent it abroad), companies run by personalities linked to the Putin regime, and any banks or other commercial institutions involved in doing business in occupied Crimea. Such visa bans and asset freezes could also be extended, where appropriate, to the spouses, parents, children and siblings of those involved.

This would send a direct and powerful message to the Russian elite that their own personal business in the West—where they and their families shop, study, save and socialize—will not continue as usual. The more countries that adopt sanctions, and the longer the list of those affected, the more pressure we are putting on the Putin regime to back off.

The United States should also urge allies to apply much tougher money-laundering laws to keep corrupt Russian officials out of the Western financial system and capital markets. We can tighten rules on trust and company formation agents to make it harder for corrupt Russian entities to exploit and abuse our system. It is often said that offshore financial centers are beloved by the Russian elite. But the shameful truth is that it is onshore centers in Britain and the United States that make life easiest for them.

We also need to improve the West’s resilience and solidarity in the face of Russian pressure. We need to press home the dramatic changes which the European Union has enforced in the market for natural gas, and discourage Russia from using its close ties with Germany to build new market-distorting pipelines.

European, British and American regulators are rightly concerned about the way in which Russian companies operate in the world energy market. We should intensify investigations of Russian energy companies which have mysterious origins, shareholders or business models. There are grave suspicions of price-fixing, insider trading, money-laundering and other abusive and illegal behaviour. My own researches suggest that these suspicions are amply justified, though writing about them is hampered by the costs and risks imposed by English libel law. In the course of researching the defence in a libel case, I met several potential witnesses who were frightened for their physical safety if they cooperated with us. The more that the our criminal justice systems can do, through prosecution, witness protection and plea bargains, to deal with the Russian gangster state, the safer the world will be.

Next, we need to revive our information-warfare capability. We won the Cold War partly because Soviet media lied as a matter of course, and ours did not. They tried to close off their societies from the free flow



of information. We did not. In the end, their tactics backfired. Just as we have underestimated the potential effect of Russian energy, money and military firepower, so too have we neglected the information front. Russian propaganda channels are well-financed and have made powerful inroads into our media space. They create a subtle and effective parallel narrative of world events, in which the we in the West are the villains, mainstream thinking is inherently untrustworthy, and Russia is a victim of injustice and aggression, not its perpetrator.

Combatting this will require a major effort of time, money and willpower, involving existing media outlets, government, non-profit organizations and campaigning groups. We need to play both defense and offense. We need to begin to rebut Russian myths, lies and slanders, highlighting the factual inconsistencies and elisions of the Kremlin narrative, and its dependence on fringe commentators and conspiracy theorists. We should raise the cost of doing business for Russian propaganda outlets, by applying regulatory pressure—for example requiring them to register as lobbyists—discouraging advertisers from buying space on their websites, and by social and professional ostracism. Anyone thinking of starting a career in the media by taking a job with an outfit like Sputnik or RT should be aware that this will not be their first job in journalism, but their last.

We also need to start rebuilding the trust and attention we once enjoyed inside Russia. The collapse of respect and affection for the West inside Russia over the past 25 years has been a catastrophic strategic reverse, all but unnoticed in Western capitals. After the fall of communism, Russians believed we stood for freedom, justice, honesty and prosperity. Now they all too often believe the message they here from the Kremlin: that we are hypocritical, greedy, aggressive custodians of a failing economic system.

More broadly, we need to reboot the Atlantic Alliance. As memories fade of the Normandy beaches, of the Berlin airlift and the fall of the wall, and the sacrifice and loyalty of past generations, our reservoir of shared sentiment is running dry. Without economic, political and cultural commonality, the Kremlin's games of divide and rule will succeed. This will require renewed and extraordinary efforts on both sides of the Atlantic.

As I have argued, Russia is far too weak for a full-scale military conflict with the West. Instead it uses the more potent weapons, of the kind already seen in Ukraine: the confusing and fast-changing combination of regular and irregular forces, economic sanctions, energy blockades, political destabilization, attacks on computers and networks, and information warfare. In other words, the Kremlin chimera blends military, criminal, intelligence, business, diplomatic, media, cyber and political elements.

Traditional defence planning struggles to deal with this. We are scrambling to create the new,

sophisticated and resilient means of defending ourselves that we need. We have plenty to learn from the frontline states here. All three Baltic countries have intelligence and analytical insights into Russia which big Western services struggle to match. Estonia's work on cyber-resilience, Latvia's on analysing Russian propaganda, and Lithuania's on visualising information-warfare attacks are among the best anywhere in NATO. I am proud that CEPA this week is hosting colleagues from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga; we will jointly be briefing the National Security Council, the State Department, Congressional staffers and other parts of the U.S. government.

Our military presence in the Baltic states has become better since Russia's attack on Ukraine, but the steps we have taken consist of necessary rather than sufficient conditions. The Enhanced Forward Presence deployments in Estonia (led by Britain), Latvia (Canada) and Lithuania (Germany) still lack air defences. Many other gaps need to be plugged.

Russia complains about what have done and are planning to do. This strengthens, not weakens, my argument. The fact that the Kremlin is unhappy when its neighbors gain even modest improvements in their security is telling. We should explain to the Russian authorities and to our own public that when NATO expanded in 2004, we did not even draw up contingency plans for the military defence of the new members, because we assumed that Russia was a friend, not a threat.

It is Russia's behavior which has changed that. Ever since 1991, Russia has systematically menaced the Baltic states with air-space violations, propaganda and economic warfare, and state-sponsored subversion. The Kremlin launched a crude cyber-attack on Estonia in 2007. It rehearsed the invasion and occupation of the Baltic states in 2009, in the Zapad-09 exercise (which concluded with a dummy nuclear strike on Warsaw). Zapad-13, four years later, displayed a much higher level of military capability, particularly in moving large numbers of troops and equipment over long distances in short time periods. Zapad-17, this year, is still more troubling.

A further vital military component of security in north-eastern Europe is the closest possible integration of non-NATO Sweden and Finland into the alliance's planning and capabilities. These countries are not members of the alliance, so they cannot formally be part of its command structure. But we should make every effort to maximize their involvement and intensify cooperation. We cannot defend the Baltic states or Poland without their help.

But we should not allow Russia to frame the problem for us. If we over-focus on the tactical military difficulties we face in the Baltic region, we risk neglecting the revolution in our strategic thinking needed to prepare our countries and our armed forces for the task ahead. Our job is not the military defence of the

Baltic states on the spot. It is the defence of all NATO allies through **deterrence**.

The best analogy for this is West Berlin during the cold war. We did not build a Maginot line around the American, British and French sectors of Berlin. We did not stockpile vast amounts of weaponry there. Instead each country placed a brigade in its sector to show that an attack would not be a military push-over. These forces' mission was to keep fighting for long enough for us to implement the contingency plans drawn up by the LIVE OAK planning staff: a counter-attack from West Germany—with nuclear weapons if necessary.

This was secret, but the Soviet Union knew at least in outline what would happen if it attacked West Berlin. It could have overrun the city's Western sectors at any point from 1948 onwards. But it wisely decided not to do so. The question now facing the United States is how best to make it clear to Russia that an attack on the Baltic states is similarly unwise.

This does not require us to match Russia militarily in the Baltic. Nor does it require us to match Russia at every rung on the “escalation ladder”. Russia depends heavily on the early use of small “battlefield” (often described as “tactical”) sub-strategic nuclear weapons. Western countries have other effective deterrents, including for example, the JASSM and Storm Shadow missiles—stealthy, stand-off weapons, with large conventional payloads, to which Russian A2AD has no answer. Having worked out our military, cyber and other deterrents, we also need to work on the messaging: how to make it clear to Russia that any mischief-making in the Baltics will be unbearably costly.

Such specifics aside, better deterrence also requires:

- Better information—so that Western military and political leaders are not caught by surprise, or confused by a “hybrid” attack;
- Speedier decision-making—so that Russia has no chance to quickly create “facts on the ground” before the West has a chance to respond
- A clear US commitment—although the NATO brand is strong, the U.S. one is better. **My single most important recommendation today would be that this country deploys additional American tripwire forces in the three Baltic states, in addition to the excellent work already under way in Poland.**

A final footnote: whereas Russia once regarded the collapse of the Soviet Union as a liberation from communism, the regime there now pushes the line, with increasing success, that it was a humiliating geopolitical defeat. That is not only factually false; it is also a tragedy for the Russian people. They overthrew the Soviet Union, under which they had suffered more than anyone else. But they have had the

fruits of victory snatched away by the kleptocratic ex-KGB regime. The bread and circuses it offers are little consolation for the prize that Russians have lost: a country governed by law, freed from the shadows of empire and totalitarianism, and at peace with itself and its neighbors. Our endeavors to defend our allies may also bring that day a little nearer.

## Endnotes

1. I have worked as a foreign correspondent for among others the BBC, the *Independent*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Economist*, and written for American news outlets including the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico* and the *American Interest*. In 1989 I was the only journalist from the English-speaking world living in Communist-era Czechoslovakia and saw the regime there tumble in the Velvet Revolution. I was the last Western journalist to be expelled from the Soviet Union, having received in March 1990 the first visa given by the new, and then-unrecognised, Lithuanian authorities. In 1992 I founded and ran the first English-language weekly in the Baltic states. In 2010 I coordinated the defence for my employer, *The Economist*, in a high-stakes libel action brought against us by a Russian tycoon who denied that his fortune benefited from his association with Vladimir Putin. I know Russian, German, Polish, Czech and some other languages. As well as the 'New Cold War', I am the author of 'Deception' (a book on east-west espionage) of 'The Snowden Operation' (on the NSA defector) and of §'Cyberphobia' which deals with internet anonymity and privacy.

2. The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 established that borders in Europe would never again be changed by force. The Paris Charter of 1990 established common principles of political freedom, human rights and the rule of law. The Soviet Union signed both. The Russian Federation is its the legal successor and is bound by the same undertakings, as well as the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, which guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for its renunciation of its nuclear arsenal. Russia has flouted all these undertakings, and more besides.