

Threats and Challenges to the OSCE Area

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Abstract

In regards to the next five to ten years, the erosion of the international rule of law and the laws of war, as well as the violent struggle over territorial integrity, self-determination and role of kin-states will probably be the most important threats for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Other challenges are increasing incentives for an international arms race coupled with the introduction of new modes of warfare, as well as the spill over of the brutal conflicts in the region of Middle East and North Africa, the rising aggressiveness of authoritarian systems, looming trade and energy confrontations and the failures of social integration and inequality.

Keywords

threats – OSCE – security – foresight – Maastricht strategy

Introduction

The security environment in Europe has changed dramatically in the past year due to the crisis in Ukraine. The mood among the participating states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has not been this bad since the Cold War more than twenty-five years ago. Instead of moving towards a united Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community, new dividing lines are opening up in Europe. Indeed, there is even a risk of war.

In order to fulfill its role to promote peace and find consensus on these and other difficult issues, the OSCE needs to enhance its utility and capability as an anticipatory and proactive actor. The basis for this endeavor is a candid strategic assessment of risks and challenges to the OSCE area for the next five to ten years to come. Even though a singular focus on threats seems overly pessimistic, it is a worthwhile exercise if later followed by efforts to find common opportunities.

This article puts forward some ideas for this process. The aim is to reflect on how threats to security have evolved since the “OSCE Strategy to address threats to security and stability in the twenty-first century” adopted at the 11th meeting of the Ministerial Council (MC) 2003 in Maastricht; to look over the horizon at possible risks and opportunities emanating from within the OSCE security space and adjacent regions; and finally to propose steps that the OSCE could take to deal with long-term future challenges that are common to all participating States, to reduce risks and promote cooperation,¹ especially in the context of the Helsinki + 40 process.

Global Trends

Developments in the OSCE area should be seen in the context of global trends. While there is greater instability in Europe than at any point since the end of the Cold War, in comparison to most parts of the world Europe is stable and well developed. That said, there are ominous warning signs. While these look most likely to affect other continents (particularly Africa and Asia), because of the inter-connected nature of the international system they could also have a serious impact on OSCE participating states. Several forecasts have been made recently in an attempt to systematically anticipate trends and disruptions of the coming decades. Although they have different time

1 Comparing the threats listed in the Maastricht Document with those of today, the list of 2003 seems relevant enough to keep it to structure the following deliberations. The main threats to security and stability in the twenty-first century that were identified in 2003 include interstate and intra-state conflicts, in the OSCE area as well as in adjacent regions, Terrorism, Organized crime, Discrimination and intolerance, Challenges of social integration, Economic factors, the environment and governance; and threats of a politico-military nature.

horizons and foci, the US “Global Trends 2030”,² the European Union’s report with the same name,³ and the United Kingdom’s “Global Strategic Trends – out to 2040”⁴ point out a few principal global developments important for the OSCE and its member countries.

Overall individual empowerment through poverty reduction and globalization could contribute to worldwide stabilization. The same trends could however destabilize antiquated governance systems. The main challengers to the United States will be particularly affected. If they manage to stay stable, they will transform the international system into a multipolar system. Events in China and China’s rise will arguably have the greatest impact on world order.

Other significant global trends include growing inequality, the spread of destructive technological capacities, and new powerful ideological challengers to market-capitalism, representative democracy and older societal constructs. There is also growing urbanization (which risks creating failing cities), the wider impact of failing states (like Libya and Yemen), a revolution in health care for the rich and a spread of pandemics for the vulnerable, a rapid spread of technology (and all the benefits and threats that it brings) growing competition for food, water and energy resources, more frequent and more severe mega-disasters, and a dangerous nexus of demographic growth among the youth and unemployment. These are all challenges that require cooperation.

Inter-state Conflicts

Whereas a few years ago, OSCE participating States considered war as “unthinkable”, there is now a serious conflict in the heart of Europe, and the idea of cooperative security has been seriously compromised. In addition to the escalating conflict between Russia and Ukraine, tensions remain or increase between Russia and some of its other neighbours in Europe and Asia. Overall, in the past decade, tensions in the Balkans as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia have decreased.

The most important inter-state trend for the OSCE has been the first gradual, now staggering, erosion of international law. It could be argued that in the past decade all ten principles of the Helsinki Final Act have been violated. This is a process that started with the Kosovo and Iraq wars, but has reached a new level with the annexation of Crimea. Instead of moving towards the vision of a united security community⁵ sharing a “community of values” based on international law, the OSCE area runs the risk of splitting into two blocs – a mostly democratic Euro-Atlantic region centred around the European Union (EU) and NATO, and a mostly authoritarian Eurasian half, some of them part of the Eurasian (Customs/Economic) Union (EEU). This may lead to further proxy and hybrid wars and tensions along the fault lines that run between the EU’s (new) neighbourhood and Russia’s near abroad. Inter-state and intra-state conflict settlement will be more dynamic because of these tensions; they may be lifted onto a regional or international level with mixed results and more risk of violence. Also conceivable is that the main democratic protagonists may seek a degree of “peaceful coexistence” with authoritarian regimes, not least for the sake of economic expediency. For their part, authoritarian regimes may try to more actively contain democracy, working with like-minded countries in their region (and others outside it like China), supporting their peers who may curtail certain freedoms for the sake of “stability”, and putting forward new narratives for justifying

2 Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds, National Intelligence Council (NIC), December 2012.

3 Global trends 2030 – Citizens in an interconnected and polycentric world, European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), October 2011.

4 Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040, UK Ministry of Defence, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), January 2010.

5 as envisioned in the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration.

their undemocratic forms of governance.

The erosion of international law interacts with a geopolitical shift in the balance of power in the past decade. The world's centre of gravity has shifted away from the Euro-Atlantic area to the Pacific, particularly to China; moving Central Asia from the margins to the centre of attention. While the role of the United States has diminished, the EU (while riven by internal divisions) has become a stronger player, and Russia has become more assertive (also in reaction to EU enlargement in its traditional sphere of influence). Also, Turkey has increased its political and economic influence. It is in no way clear if the powers in a future multipolar system will adhere to one set of laws.

Although consensus-building will become more difficult in this environment, consensus orientated inter-governmental organizations in general (and the OSCE in particular) will probably become more relevant for promoting dialogue and reducing the risk of conflict.

Intra-state Tensions

Ethnically or religiously framed conflicts that flared up after the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia are mostly contained or settled. Most independence movements in Western Europe are being channelled and mitigated via constitutional and inclusive political processes. That said, the clash between the principles of self-determination and the territorial integrity of states has yet to be reconciled.

Events like the economic downturn or larger geopolitical struggles will give populists and other agitators the chance to repackage old divisions into new resentments. The Arab spring and the crisis in Ukraine have again highlighted that the inability to reform under pressure is very dangerous for countries in transition. Therefore in the coming years there might be less incentive for these countries to reform through long-term strategies and more through populist reform dissipating public pressure. Third, leadership contests – particularly in countries where the head of state has been in power for a generation – as well as elections that are perceived to be unfair may cause considerable instability in the next years.

As for now and until the relaxation of tensions between Russia and the West, most internal conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as in Eastern European countries with sizeable Russian-speaking populations will have to be seen in the framework of this broader struggle and states will have their independent conflict settlement capabilities severely limited.

Adjacent Regions

The OSCE area will stay vulnerable to conflict and instability in neighbouring regions, especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak), Syria, Libya and Iraq, the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Mexico and Central America, and the Arctic. Many have and will become virtual no-go zones for public service and aid due to rising violence, which will further increase migratory and refugee pressure that occurs due to the economic and political attraction of many parts of the OSCE region. The Arctic, MENA and AfPak region have both potential for cooperation and competition for OSCE participating states and external players.

In contrast to 12 years ago, conflicts with Western participation in the wider Middle East – Iraq and Afghanistan – have mostly turned into regional wars in the wider context of a “pan-Islamic” conflict zone between Sunnis and Shia, or Islamists and the anti-Arab-spring restoration movement, side-lining reformers. Therefore the potential danger today and in the future comes from the OSCE area's reduced ability to influence the wider world. To the contrary, now and in the coming years the OSCE area is very much more affected by what goes on in other parts of the

world, raising tough questions about the relationship between the costs of either engaging or staying out of such situations.

Key countries in the next years will be Iran and China. Iran's future will be of extreme importance for the OSCE, especially in regards to Russia and Central Asia, energy and the economy, and the spread and financing of separatism, terror and anti-Semitism. China will economically dominate Central Asia and therefore, maybe against its will, rival Russia's sphere of political and economic influence. Mitigating factors could be the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), even though China's Silk Road Economic Belt strategy envisions economic interaction with countries all along the southern underbelly of Russia right up until Greece and acquisitions of strategic infrastructure. This makes a long lasting and meaningful alliance between the two improbable.

Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Islamic terrorism has been a constant global threat in the past fifteen years. Heightened security and active engagement has left Europe relatively safe in the last few years, while at the same time raising questions of the balance of security vs. liberty, home grown terrorism and new terror strategies respectively. Classical left and right-wing terrorism is on the rise since at least the financial crisis, but has a much lower disruptive power.

It is yet unclear if some of the more potent new groups like ISIL or Boko Haram are still as interested in the global war against the West as was Osama Bin Laden's original al-Qaeda. There might be a shift back towards regional terrorism and an attempt to hang on to territory, i.e. to build the Caliphate. There is a danger of more sophisticated attacks as jihadists from OSCE participating States return from battlegrounds such as Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and most of all Syria, using their newfound military expertise, functioning networks, recruitment capabilities, finance and logistics for attacks. "Lone wolf/ wolf pack" terrorists like Anders Breivik in Norway or the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris remains an uncontrollable risk.

State-sponsored terrorism has been declining in the OSCE region for some time. The biggest remaining sponsors are either involved in fighting for their survival (Syrian regime) or in a regional conflict over dominance over the Middle East (Iran & Saudi-Arabia), using most of their leverage in the region. It is however unknown how the current conflicts affect the danger of proliferation of ABC technology to terrorists.⁶

There is a widening split between the United States and EU member countries on what might be considered legitimate means of reaching their common goals of fighting terrorism, including issues such as the militarization of the police, violation of civil liberties, use of torture and unlawful detention, data collection and mass surveillance.

In several OSCE participating States, the war on terror has been used as an excuse to crack down on political opponents and civil society and limit civil liberties. It has also been used as an argument in favour of refolement in parts of Central Asia,⁷ also involving the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),⁸ which in turn polarizes remaining

6 The National Interest, Low-Tech Terrorism, March-April 2014 Issue. Last accessed February 12 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/low-tech-terrorism-9935>.

7 Amnesty International, Eurasia: Return to torture: Extradition, forcible returns and removals to Central Asia, 3 July 2013, Last accessed February 1 2015, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR04/001/2013/en>.

8 Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights: The Impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Human Rights in China, November 25, 2013, Last accessed February 1 2015, <http://www.hrichina.org/en/publications/hric-report/counter-terrorism-and-human-rights-impact-shanghai-cooperation-organization>.

opponents. Especially in Central Asia, Islamist terrorism grows due to the harsh persecution of civil opposition and may internationalize due to the in and outflow of Chechens and Caucasians into and from the Syrian conflict.⁹

New threats emanating could be cyber-terrorism, a new form of asymmetric response to the superiority of western technical abilities by attacking dependencies, especially critical civilian infrastructure. There is a danger of a fluid transition between protest and terrorism in cyber space, especially with network-centric organisations like Anonymous. The problem of attribution enables state-sponsored attackers to hide behind independent actors and vice versa. In general, due to the increasing impact and availability of information fewer people have far greater potential to produce damage.

Organized Crime

Organized crime is an even greater threat than it was a decade ago. The OSCE area is still a major market for trafficking in human beings (THB) and drugs. It is also a major source for the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, and increasingly the smuggling of migrants. The smuggling of nuclear material has probably declined in the last decade but still remains a risk.

Zones of instability within the OSCE area remain attractive to criminal groups due to weak governance and corruption. Recent instability might increase this trend in the coming years. Especially worrisome are strategic partnerships between drug traffickers and state actors around the exploitation of drug rents in Central Asia.¹⁰

Organized Crime will increase its access to illicit sources through an expanding nexus of global crime nourished by a global unregulated black market that is enhanced by the Internet, as the recent example of the Silk Road network demonstrated.

Cyber-crime now poses a threat to security on a much larger scale than a decade ago, as ICT-based banking, consumer trade, knowledge sharing and industrial processes have made it easier to interfere. There is a deficit in acknowledging this vulnerability by industries and governments. Less developed OSCE countries face particular challenges due to more limited knowhow. Here it is hard to draw the boundaries between organized crime, intelligence gathering, terrorism and warfare. For example, botnets are being used for organized crime and political purposes.

Discrimination and Intolerance

Discrimination and intolerance remain a steady concern throughout the OSCE area. Anti-Semitism, racism, extreme nationalism, violence against citizens with migration background and foreigners, especially Muslims, minorities in general, but also other vulnerable groups has been and will stay a constant worry.

European parties that question the integration of Muslims into their respective countries have gained in most elections in the last ten years, especially since the Euro-crisis. At the same time, Anti-Semitism has been on a rise.

9 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, A Chechen al-Qaeda?, SWP-Aktuell 2014/A 40, June 2014 (in German, original: Eine tschetschenische al-Qaida?) Last accessed February 1 2015, http://www.swp-berlin.org/de/publikationen/swp-aktuell-de/swp-aktuell-detail/article/tschetschenen_im_aufstand_in_syrien.html.

10 F. De Danieli, 'Beyond the drug-terror nexus: Drug trafficking and state-crime relations in Central Asia', in International Journal of Drug Policy, Volume 25, Issue 6, November 2014, pp. 1235–1240.

In 2012, a European survey estimated that 76% of all European Jews believed anti-Semitism had increased since 2007.¹¹ The attacks in Toulouse 2006, Marseille 2012, Brussels 2014 and Paris 2015 show a rise in anti-Semitic violence, especially with people of Muslim background.

As with other forms of discrimination, state-controlled gender-based and LGBT violence is on the rise. Especially “Russia’s 2013 anti-gay “propaganda” law has served as a tool for anti-gay discrimination”.¹² In the course of a broader cultural war on “Western” values and in tandem with the rise of populist and extreme right movements espousing “traditional values”, violence towards LGBT individuals and organizations may become more state-centred and systematic. This might further increase the division in Europe and confirm prejudices and destructive narratives. The Internet and especially social media have multiplied the platforms of hate speech and discrimination. Most surveys have reported a heightened level of aggression through the mostly anonymous cyber space.¹³

Fears of Islamic radicalism and of the consequences of the economic crisis have created a backlash in a number of countries. Extreme nationalism and xenophobia have manifested themselves in a number of OSCE participating States. Recently, these bear worrying signs, such as uniformed, organized and militarized (youth) cadres.

Related to intolerance and discrimination is the general securitization of the public sphere, with the police, intelligence, diplomacy and government in general – sometime unconsciously – becoming more militarized and destroying the bond between citizen and state. People on the periphery of society and minorities bear the bulk of these state actions. This trend is increasing throughout the OSCE area.

Failures of Social Integration

Today, around 214 million people migrate internationally each year.¹⁴ Failure to connect the ageing developed world with the educated youth bulge of the developing world might destabilize both, fuelling the anger of hopelessness and inequality on one side while the other loses competitiveness and zeal. It is estimated that the population of the developing world will rise considerably, with an estimated additional one billion people in the next decade, while the developed world will peak at today’s 1.3 billion.¹⁵

Immigration from non-EU countries into the EU peaked in 2008 at 1.8 million people,¹⁶ since then declining by 12%.¹⁷ But there is a record number of displaced people on the move, including a growing number in the OSCE (for example due to the crisis in Ukraine), or trying to reach the OSCE area. A record number of refugees arrived

11 B. Bell, ‘Anti-Semitism “on the rise” say Europe’s Jews’, BBC News, 8 November 2013, Last accessed February 1 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24857207>.

12 Russia: Anti-LGBT Law a Tool for Discrimination, Human Rights Watch, June 30 2014, Last accessed February 4 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/29/russia-anti-lgbt-law-tool-discrimination>.

13 Fundamental rights: key legal and policy developments in 2013 – Highlights 2013, FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, p. 19, Last accessed February 2 2015, http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-annual-report-highlights-2013-0_en_0.pdf.

14 Focusing on new trends in migration, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 19 April 2013, Last accessed February 2 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/cpd46-trends-in-migration.html>.

15 Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2045, The United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence, April 30, 2014, pp. 3–4, Last accessed February 2 2015, http://espas.eu/orbis/sites/default/files/generated/document/en/MinofDef_Global%20Strategic%20Trends%20-%202045.pdf.

16 Migrants in Europe, 2011 edition, A statistical portrait of the first and second generation, Eurostat, Statistical books, 2011, pp. 16–18, Last accessed February 2 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/pdf/migrants_in_europe_eurostat_2011_en.pdf.

17 Is migration really increasing? Migration Policy Debates, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), May 2014, Last accessed February 2 2015, <http://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%201.pdf>.

by boat on Italian shores last year.¹⁸The us-Mexican border is also a major trafficking and smuggling route where many people attempting to make the journey die of exposure due to the extreme heat. 1.6 million Hispanics have been deported in President Obama's two terms alone. Current violence and poverty in Central America has resulted in even higher immigration numbers.¹⁹

Remittances have been used as leverage in the conflict between Russia and the West lately, with Russia using labour legislation restricting workers from Central Asian and Caucasian countries to block the EU Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements. Also, failed social integration and disenfranchised minorities could be used by countries of origin and others as a means to exert political pressure. The policy by Russia but also Hungary and Romania of handing out passports and/or vowing to protect citizens in other countries (i.e. in Ukraine or Georgia) is a perversion of the Responsibility to Protect, and, as seen in the case of Crimea, can lead to serious conflicts.²⁰

Social mobility and migration lead to high rates of urbanization. This might easily become a threat in regards to health, crime and pollution. As seen in some Western European cities (including London and Paris), there is also a risk of violence in some neighbourhoods spiralling out of control. Calculating dynamics since 2012, the National Intelligence Council estimates a doubling of the population in cities by 2030 to over 60% worldwide. In the OSCE area, Tashkent grew from 1.5 million inhabitants in 1991 to 2.2 million today. The population of the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, has nearly tripled in twenty years.

Economic and Governmental Challenges

Economic challenges are much greater than a decade ago. The world has yet to recover from the 2008 global financial crisis. The subsequent European sovereign-debt crisis further weakened the EU and destabilized the wider OSCE area. Growing unemployment, disillusionment with mainstream "corrupt" elites and a decrease in public spending have led to widespread social discontent in, for example, Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Russia, Bosnia and Ukraine. There has also been a resultant increase in support for populist parties. This downward spiral will probably increase with greater austerity measures, growing public debt and rising public anger.

Rising inequality between and within states is not only leading to discontent, but also to a renewed interest in new concepts of rebalancing freedom and equality. Furthermore, the crisis and the rise of China have also fuelled support in some quarters – Russia, Hungary and Turkey leading the way – for authoritarian capitalism, the belief that a free market economy functions better under strong leadership rather than good governance.

While the Ukraine crisis has again demonstrated the appeal of the EU, countries like Turkey and Serbia might reposition themselves while others in the Black Sea area might see their freedom to choose limited. The creation

18 Amnesty International slams EU migrant policy in 'Fortress Europe' report, Deutsche Welle, July 9 2014, Last accessed February 2 2015, <http://www.dw.de/amnesty-international-slams-eu-migrant-policy-in-fortress-europe-report/a-17769353>.

19 J. M. Krogstad, A. Gonzalez-Barrera and M. H. Lopez, Children 12 and under are fastest growing group of unaccompanied minors at U.S. border, Pew Research Center, July 22 2014, Last accessed February 2 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/22/children-12-and-under-are-fastest-growing-group-of-unaccompanied-minors-at-u-s-border>.

20 "In general, Europe has an issue with many double nationalities, which might become a problem one day. This is true for Germany and Turkey, but especially for the Balkans. Hundreds of thousands of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina hold Croatian citizenship as a result of their ethnic Croat identity. Over 50,000 Macedonians also became citizens of Bulgaria after declaring themselves to be ethnically Bulgarian. Recently, Serbs from Bosnia (and elsewhere) have been able to become Serbian citizens by declaring their loyalty to Serbia (...). Nearly a million Moldovan citizens have applied for Romanian passports and over 100,000 have been granted EU citizenship, on the grounds that they are descendants of former Romanian citizens who lost their Romanian citizenship when Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944." F. Bieber, The Risks and Benefits of Ethnic Citizenship, op-ed, 10 November 2011, Citizenship in South East Europe, Last accessed February 3 2015, <http://www.citsee.eu/op-ed/risks-and-benefits-ethnic-citizenship-florian-bieber>.

of the Eurasian Economic Union is both a risk and an opportunity for pan European trade. A European trade architecture between the EU and the EEU would simplify trade and finance. At the same time, it would give Russia more leverage to dictate energy and commodity prices and control over their nearabroad. Russian political leadership could scare off most of its (possible) members. Further economic integration in the OSCE might be a way to overcome current challenges, but effects on Russia have shown to be severely limited.

Another economic risk for the whole OSCE region is the temporary fallout due to the drop in foreign aid from 2008 to 2013. The MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa need bigger investments in preventive action, but funds are hard to come by. Also, Chinese investment has raised the possibility of a more confrontational struggle for political influence through aid policy.

Technological advancements in the hydrocarbon sector have opened new opportunities previously not available. Competition for natural resources is a rising conflict factor in i.a. Cyprus, the Caspian or Arctic sea, leading to minor naval arms build-ups, but also to gateways for cooperation. Energy security in regards to supply and control over pipelines and markets has become a tangible issue since the gas dispute of 2005, as (mainly eastern) parts of Europe are dependent upon Russian energy. With the Ukraine crisis and instability in North Africa there is a renewed effort by the EU to shift strategy in its energy policy, for example through the energy union.

Some parts of the OSCE area face serious challenges of governance. Authoritarian regimes will have to deal with succession crisis when their old and long-serving rulers pass away or step down.

Corruption continues to be a problem in many countries in the OSCE area. Corruption in the arms trade especially accounts for approximately 50 per cent of all corrupt transactions globally.²¹ Some OSCE countries currently find themselves in the bottom tier of the Corruption Perception index. This creates significant disincentives for investors in the long run, shifting foreign capital to regions with more stable and transparent business opportunities and leading to economic hardship and potential social unrest. It can also lead to the fall of governments.

After money laundering and tax evasion scandals, Germany and the US had increased their pressure on financial hubs and tax havens. Here the financial crisis has had the positive effect of drying up safe havens of wealthy tax avoiders, organized crime and corrupt elites.

Internally, many OSCE governments have shut down (partially) independent media outlets. The biggest drawbacks have been in television, less stringent limitations of the freedom of press can be observed online and in newspapers.²² It will be interesting to see in how far censorship will be effective. Even more interesting will be the future of social media as tool for freedom, propaganda and incitement.

Environmental Risks

Environmental issues have a higher profile and a greater impact than in 2003. Over the past decade, there have been a growing number of natural and manmade disasters. Recent natural disasters and insufficient preparedness have resulted in humanitarian disasters, displacement and even political unrest.

Environmental disasters, whether man-made or natural, are rarely limited to national boundaries. Long-term

21 Why we need a global Arms Trade Treaty, Oxfam, no date, Last accessed December 16 2014, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/conflict/controlarms/why-we-need-global-arms-trade-treaty>.

22 Eurasia, Freedom House, Last accessed December 21 2014, <http://freedomhouse.org/regions/eurasia>.

projections on flood damages, wild fires and extreme storms rise in terms of frequency and damage. Oil spills might have grave effects in the Arctic and they are very probable in the Caspian sea, due to the appalling state of transport facilities and refineries. A 21st century disaster might also be impacted by cyber-resilience and critical infrastructure. Involuntary breakdowns of industrial control systems could produce blackouts lasting for a longer period and producing secondary effects, as the breakdown of the cold chain and of police and emergency services.

The nexus between energy, food and security will have a significant influence on the development of transition countries in the OSCE area, with the biofuel dilemma and the buying-up of land having already led to violence, polarization and misinformation. Since the food crisis in 2008, food security in Central Asia, especially Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, has been deteriorating. Rising food prices are mostly related to global factors, but also inefficient (regional) management. The same factors also make Central Asia all the more vulnerable to the consequences of global climate change. The impact ranges from agricultural uncertainty to the collapse of the fishing sector²³ and repercussions when the Southern Aral Sea eventually runs dry. National dam and power plant projects aggravate the resulting water scarcity in Central Asia and failure in water distribution will lead to a rise in tensions.

New health challenges have arisen which can have a massive impact on security. Viruses (like Ebola and H5N1) spread quickly and mutate to be more resilient, as congested urban areas grow and global transportation becomes increasingly available. Also, global diseases that might already have plateaued or were thought to be close to extinction – like polio – might re-emerge due to the combined effect of instability, insufficient access to health care, and lack of political will.

Politico-military Nature

Threats of a politico-military nature persist, but emphases have shifted: from dealing with the remaining weapons of the Cold War to coping with new weapon systems and broader trends in guerrilla warfare, robotics, ICT and surveillance; from nuclear proliferation to the proliferation of high technology and sophisticated weapon systems. The arms trade treaty and many international efforts have diminished small arms and light weapons (SALW), heavy conventional, or even nuclear weapons smuggling. In the past decade, there has been an intensification of the arms races between Armenia and Azerbaijan; distrust between the Russia and NATO regarding missile defence; and a collapse of arms control talks (particularly concerning the Adapted CFE Treaty). The recent crisis in and around Ukraine has led to a renewed build-up of military activity between Russia and some of its neighbors, particularly the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine. The crisis between Russia and Ukraine has also raised the new challenge of hybrid war.

Small arms and light weapons proliferation persists since the 1990s as a particular concern in the Western Balkans, to a lesser extent in South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.²⁴ Now, though, the MENA region and its conflicts are both suppliers and receivers of SALW.

Regarding conventional weapons, a worrying trend is the new aggressiveness of Russian strategic bombers and fighter planes to scout eventual gaps in the air and fleet defence of NATO members as well as non-allied states and navy fleets. Also, the current situation in Europe might motivate certain states to reinvest in battle tanks and

23 Factsheets: Climate Change Impacts – Central Asia, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), March 2009, Last accessed February 3 2015, <http://www.ifad.org/events/apr09/impact/central.pdf>.

24 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference 2013, Special Session 6 Transcript, Countering Illicit SALW Trafficking, September 30 2013, Last accessed February 5 2015, <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/eu%20conference/sections/eu-conference-2013-ca57/special-sessions-3818/special-session-6-d94f>.

attack helicopters, sparking a new conventional arms-race in Europe. Under these conditions, it will be next to impossible to revive the CFE treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe and to expand it to new forms of important conventional hardware like unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), unless this is part of a broader agreement on a range of issues to promote stability on the continent.

There has been a boomerang effect in regard to increased weapon sales by western countries. Some of the sold weapons have been used by terrorists and rogue states against western militaries and their allies (is in Iraq using us armoured vehicles and howitzers). Some might have helped China and other countries to rebuild them for their own armies. Leftover weaponry from the ISAF drawdown and arms for Syrian rebels might also backfire.

Russia's annexation of Crimea will make it harder to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. The us, Russia and Great Britain already have discussions on reviving nuclear research and the development of new systems. This also reduces the chances of tactical nuclear weapons being included in a future arms control accord. Existing nuclear arms control agreements might be openly called into question. The misunderstandings involving the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (inf) Treaty could reopen the door towards newer, smaller models of nuclear weapons.²⁵ Missile defense has the potential to upset mutual assured destruction and might lead to renewed nuclear testing and an arms race. In general, new defensive missile technology – like iron dome – and tested laser technologies have the potential to shift the balance between defence and offense, which might have arms race effects in both conventional and nuclear arms production and the militarization of space.

Russian soldiers that invaded Crimea and fight in Ukraine have put into practice long discussed features of hybrid warfare. Although national Special Forces have fought without markings in wars before, never has this been done to the extent witnessed in Crimea. This again highlights the decline of international law, in conflict as in peace, as all these measures are forbidden under the Geneva conventions. Not only has the rule of law been eroded, the rules of war have also become less clear. This also includes anti-insurgency warfare and the acceptance of collateral damage and targeted killing without due process, as well as the privatization of warfare with pirates and armed non-state actors on one side and private security and military companies on the other.

In some OSCE participating States, police forces and other actors with a right to use force still lag behind in their knowledge and usage of human rights and modern police techniques, which leads to abuses and heavy handed tactics that create popular dissent, and even terrorism.

New threats finding use around the world are improvised explosive devices (IEDs), originating from 21st century asymmetrical battlefields and influencing possible terror tactics in the OSCE area, UAVs and their overuse of surveillance and anti-insurgency roles that counteracts OSCE rules,²⁶ smart biological weapons and nano weapons, as well as robotics, aiding humans in warfare or acting as so-called autonomous weapons.

Cyber war has not really been used as a separate weapon in war until now, rather as a facilitator for attacks by conventional means (e.g. the blocking of Syrian air defense by Israel), sabotage (Stuxnet), show of force (shutdown of web access of Estonian government), information warfare and intelligence. The grave danger lies in the potential for escalation and the effect on soft civilian targets.

25 M. R. Gordon, 'U.S. Says Russia Tested Missile, Despite Treaty', New York Times, January 29 2014, Last accessed January 13 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/30/world/europe/us-says-russia-tested-missile-despite-treaty.html?hp&_r=1.

26 That said, UAVs open up new possibilities for peace operations, force protection and humanitarian assistance.

Reducing Risk Requires Multilateral Cooperation

OSCE participating states face a wide range of risks, arguably more diverse yet inter-connected than those identified in the 2003 Maastricht Strategy. Counteracting them individually seems impossible, but the OSCE as a regional and global actor can respond accordingly.

First of all it is imperative that the OSCE as an organization becomes quicker in adapting to change and more aware of challenges before they arise.


Therefore, the analytical capability of the Secretariat to fuse information from a variety of sources (OSCE executive structures, partner organizations, open sources) needs to be strengthened. Also, future OSCE foresight projects need to be inclusive and creative in order to find common ground, and should be the first step to building common visions to many of the above-mentioned challenges, as well as enhancing the capacity to prepare for and, where possible prevent, many of risks and challenges identified in this paper.

Secondly, potential “bridge builders”, high-level mediators and chairmanships should assert a stronger and more permanent role in preparing ideas for long-term steps towards a European security architecture. They might be the optimal caretakers of long lasting processes of change.

Thirdly, long-term thinking only makes sense if it is channelled into discussions on institutional change, prioritization, planning, reframing difficult discourses, steps against duplication, and horizontal cooperation inside the organisation as well as with many other actors, especially non-governmental ones.

Finally, constructive long-term work needs to strengthen OSCE's role as an inclusive forum for high-level dialogue. Discussing ideas for common longterm challenges keep channels of communication open, create common understandings, reduce tensions, and create a degree of predictability in relations between participating States. Indeed, focusing on some of the trends and challenges in this paper could bring participating States to the realization that they have greater common challenges than the bilateral issues that currently divide them. Furthermore, it should lead to a sense of solidarity since threats and challenges to security within the OSCE area as well as those originating from outside it can only be dealt through multilateral cooperation.

It is impossible to predict what will happen and hard to prevent risks and challenges from threatening the stability of states. However, by being better aware of the risks and challenges, OSCE participating States can work together to reduce vulnerability, strengthen resilience, and better adapt to change. This will encourage cooperative security, and create a more robust system – in line with the vision of a European security community.



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Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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