

RESPONDING TO RUSSIA

Sir Michael Fallon MP, Clovelly Lecture 29th September 2018

It's a pleasure and an honour to be invited to give this lecture to such a distinguished audience and to follow such distinguished predecessors.

Policy towards Russia would be a fitting topic at any time – Russia has been one of the most persistent threats to our country since the end of the Second World War – but especially now. Just two counties and a hundred and seventy miles away, a British citizen was murdered this spring by a Russian colonel. In one of our cathedral cities he and his colleague attempted to kill two others, and only by chance didn't poison dozens more. This was not in the Ukraine, not in Syria but here in Salisbury, on our soil. A truly shocking assault on us and our way of life.

This is the right time, therefore, to consider whether our response to Russia is the right one, and whether we are giving the Russian threat the priority that we should, given all the other threats that we face.

To assess this properly, we need to look back. It's often claimed that there has been some recent step-change in Russian behaviour, that since the invasion of Crimea, Russia has become bolder, more assertive. Or that Russia is suddenly reverting to the worst behaviour of the Stalinist or Breshnev eras.

I suggest to you that both are wrong. In fact, Russia's behaviour has been remarkably consistent in flouting the norms by which countries live together. Take, for example, the many international agreements that Russia has signed but has subsequently breached.

In 1999 Russia was one of 30 signatories to the Istanbul Agreement on the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. Under it Russia agreed to withdraw all its troops from Moldova by the end of 2002: some are still there. Russia agreed to reduce troop and equipment levels in Georgia but in fact retains the Gudauta airbase in Abkhazia, with T-62 tanks and a sophisticated air defence system.

In 2002 Russia signed the Open Skies Treaty, under which the major military powers permit notified inspection flights over each other's territory. Russian planes regularly exercise this right over UK and US airspace. Russia has now violated the Treaty by restricting allied flights within 500 kilometres of Kaliningrad and within a 10 kilometre corridor along the Russia-Georgia border. Russia observer planes are also in breach of the Treaty in using more advanced cameras and sensors than allowed.

Russia is also in breach of the Vienna Agreement, last revised in 2011, under which in order to reduce tension and escalation NATO and Russia agree to notify large-scale military exercises to each other. Exercises involving over 9,000 troops must be notified in advance; those involving over 13,000 troops must permit observers. Russia has notified none, despite the massing of thousands of troops prior to the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In my time, major exercises like Kavkaz in 2016 and Zapad last year involved tens of thousands of troops massing on NATO's borders were not notified at all.

Russia's annexation of the Crimea and the incursion of Russian troops into the Donbas in the Ukraine are both major violations of international law. Russia is the successor signatory to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 which requires its signatories "to respect the rights

inherent in sovereignty, not to use force or threaten to use force, to treat borders as inviolate, to uphold the territorial integrity of states, and to settle disputes peacefully”. Moreover, Russia the United States and the UK signed the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 which in return for the Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakstan giving up nuclear weapons specifically required its signatories to respect the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of those three countries.

Russia has also shown equal disregard for the arms reduction agreements it has signed. In 2014, 2015 and 2016 the US declared Russia’s development and flight-testing of its new SSC-8 cruise missile to be in breach of the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces.

Most relevant to us has been the clearly established breach of the Convention on Chemical and Biological Weapons. The USSR signed the Convention in 1972 and agreed to discontinue its testing programme. We now know that Novichok, the killer poison used in Salisbury, was manufactured in Russia in the 1980s, and that the Shikhany laboratories some 500 miles south-east of Moscow continue to test its delivery to this day. Russia has indeed refused to confirm that previous stocks have been destroyed. It was no surprise too to find Russia conniving at the appalling use of chemical weapons by

Assad against his own civilians in Syria over the last four or five years of the civil war there..

What has changed is not the breaches of international law but the development of two new weapons: misinformation and cyber. Since Soviet times Russia has always deployed deception as a tactic but in the last few years this has become much more sophisticated and involved the extensive use of modern social media techniques. From countless examples, we recall the attempt to claim that MH17, the Malaysian airliner shot down over the Ukraine by a Russian missile in July 2014 with the loss of ten British lives, was in fact shot down by the Ukrainian military; the dismissal of our own thoroughly independent and rigorous inquiry into the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 as “the theatre of the absurd”; the suggestions that the Skripals were poisoned by (a) terrorists, (b) allies or (c) Julia Skripal’s future mother-in-law; and the claim that the Salisbury murderers were civilian tourists, when we now know that one was Colonel Chepiga, a special forces veteran decorated for service in Chechnya and the Ukraine.

This isn’t the old-style Soviet deception known as *Maskirovka*. This is *Vranyo*, where we know they are lying, they know that we know they are lying but they keep on lying anyway. And they do it persistently and broadly enough to ensure that at least some are taken

in. In the era of fake news, Russia has weaponised misinformation and is deploying it ruthlessly, creating false social media activity alongside the output of its own media such as Russia Today and the Sputnik news agency.

The second new weapon is cyber. The use of offensive cyber is now part of the military armoury: the coalition used it successfully in the campaign against Daesh terrorism in Iraq. But Russia deploys cyber against democracy itself. We saw cyber attacks in the Netherlands in 2016 to try to scupper the Dutch referendum on the EU-Ukraine agreement; the president of Bulgaria complained of the “heaviest and most intense” use of cyber in their election; there were, we now know, cyber attacks on key candidates in the recent US elections. Cyber appears to have been used in the attempted coup in Montenegro in 2016 on the eve of that country joining NATO, and to have been suspected too in last year’s German election.

Many will find all this shocking, that in our new century after the horrors of two world wars and the end of communism in all but a handful of countries we should find democracies and the rule of international law under such direct attack. Of course, we wanted Russia to be different to the Soviet Union that we distrusted so much. We wanted to believe Russia was different.

Ever since Margaret Thatcher concluded that Gorbachev was somebody we could do business with, we hoped that Russia would become our partner, not our competitor. So we welcomed Russia into international organisations like the WTO. For fifteen years there was a place for Russia, by no means the eighth biggest economy, at the G7 top table: the UK itself hosted the first G8 summit in Birmingham in 1998 and the last at Lough Erne in 2013.

Bilaterally, European leaders – Blair, Merkel, Sarkozy - cultivated Moscow in pursuit of deeper trade and cheaper energy. We did too: as Energy Minister I signed an Agreement with the Russian nuclear agency Rosatom, enabling it to partner with Roll Royce in bidding for power station contracts in Turkey and the Czech Republic.

All of us wanted to believe that we were dealing with something different. We were in fact like the prisoners in Plato's cave, mistaking the shadows for the substance. That substance has not changed: Russia is not a democracy, it is an autocracy sustained by a kleptocratic elite; it does not tolerate, even to the point of murder, opposition politicians, investigative journalists or whistle-blowing businessmen who challenge the presidential power; it is not a friendly power, and it does not hesitate to intervene with force way outside its borders; and whatever the state of its economy, continuing to spend massively on conventional, nuclear and cyber weapons.

So how to respond. First, and necessarily, there has to be some level of dialogue. We have to deal with Russia where it matters: to reduce tensions around overflights and naval movements, and we did talk to the Russian military to deconflict operations in the campaign against Daesh in the Middle East. We also need to try to harness Russian influence for the good, in countries where it has strong interests, such as Syria.

So there is some dialogue. The NATO-Russia Council met three times in 2016 and in 2017, and has met once this year. Despite the travel bans on our own defence chiefs and some ministers, I authorised low-key annual meetings with senior Russian military. We have also encouraged the resumption of talks between the US and Russia towards the new strategic arms reduction treaty; these have a political as well as military importance.

But alongside dialogue there has to be better calling out. With all these agreements we must put verification, inspection and challenge front and centre; we must call out Russia for each and every breach, and we need to do so more quickly and more loudly. After the shooting down of MH17 back in 2014, it has taken four years for the

Dutch investigation to confirm formally what I knew the following morning, that the plane was hit by a Russian missile, fired from a Russian launcher that had crossed from Russia into Ukraine immediately before.

There are always good reasons for not revealing the sources or methods of specific pieces of intelligence and imagery but those four years enabled Russia to perpetuate a series of lies and black propaganda in an attempt to avoid the blame for killing 298 entirely innocent civilians. We have to find, and use, a faster truth. If the material proof is there, we have to deploy it immediately we are sure.

That can be done. Our own Foreign office moved quickly this summer to ensure that at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Russia was specifically named and blamed for the use of Novichok in Salisbury.

Third, we need to hit Russia where it really hurts – here in London. Putin and his circle certainly respect our rule of law: that's why so many of his cronies shelter their wealth here. Our estate agents, advisers, banks, accountants and lawyers have benefited hugely. But we have far too lax about the uses of that wealth, and the extent to which it has helped to underpin the Russian military apparatus. We

have been careless about the flotations and other investments channelled through the City of London; that needs to stop.

The United States has also led the way with its Magnitsky legislation, sanctioning those responsible further down the line for human rights violations. It's inexcusable that five months after Parliament passed a similar amendment to our Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill that we still have no date for implementing the Magnitsky law here with our own list of banned persons.

Fourth, we shall have to work hard to ensure that our departure from the European Union does not weaken its stance on the sanctions in effect on Russia for Ukraine. We must not allow our partners to use Brexit as an opportunity for dialling down the specific bans and freezes. I want the UK-EU Future Framework Agreement to include appropriate machinery for co-ordinating our legal responses to the continuing failure to abide by the Minsk Accords.

We know that sanctions work. They've hit the Russian economy and slowed its GDP growth. They've also reduced the share price of quoted Russian companies like Rusal, and they've impacted raw material prices. It's possible that they have also had an impact on the

fighting in the Ukraine itself, making it less likely that Russian troops will interfere further outside the Line of Control.

Fifth, we need to keep strengthening our NATO Alliance. At the Wales Summit David Cameron, President Obama and I got each NATO member to accept the 2 per cent spending target. Four years only five of the 29 meet it: the United States, ourselves, Poland, Estonia, and Greece which has conscription. Though most are increasing their defence budgets, 16 countries still don't spend 1.5 per cent, and 4 (Spain, Belgium, Slovenia and Luxembourg) don't even spend 1 per cent. For the equally important second target, 13 spend less than 20 per cent of their defence budget on equipment, and 5 spend less than 10 per cent.

But it isn't just money. The Alliance also needs to be better prepared militarily and politically. Its forces need to be able to move more quickly across internal NATO borders and to access more easily the aerodromes and ports that they need. There are too many headquarters and bases positioned for political reasons rather than with military logic. The political decision-making needs to be streamlined to allow more rapid deployments in times of escalating tensions.

A stronger Alliance also needs stronger communications. We need to remind the world that NATO is a defensive organisation that poses no threat to anyone. The Warsaw summit in 2016 specifically declared that “The Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia”. Nor does an enlarged NATO really confront Russia physically: NATO countries share only 6 per cent of Russia’s 20,000 kilometre frontier, and comprise only 5 of its 14 immediate neighbours.

NATO enlargement is of course voluntary, the result of decisions by sovereign states. 29 have joined over 65 years; none has left. And in joining countries are exercising their right under the Helsinki Acts “to belong or not to belong to international organisations, to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance.” That must mean that we can accept no veto by Russia over future membership. Equally, I always argued that in terms of candidates applicants must meet NATO standards in full: there should be no shortcuts to membership and the guarantees that come with it.

That’s because membership carries obligations as well rights. As NATO grows it’s important to recognise that those obligations grow too: that a Scottish or Welsh or Devonian rifleman is expected if

necessary to lay down his life not just for his country and sovereign but for Estonia or Albania. We do perilously little in this country to educate our public about just what NATO membership entails.

Finally, we need to look to our own defences. Talking up our NATO contribution isn't enough. Britain is expected to lead in NATO, not least by the United States: we should aim always to be the biggest European contributor. The NATO target of 2 per cent of GDP is of course a minimum: we meet it but we can and we should do better. On my watch our defence budget began increasing from April 2016. It now needs to increase again. Russia by the way is spending well over 5 per cent, and spending it on conventional and nuclear forces, on hybrid as well as electronic warfare.

Let me put that in context. In the last year of the last century, 1998-99, the Blair Government was spending 2.7 per cent. Increasing our spending from 2.16 to just 2.5 per cent would give our armed forces an additional £7.7 billion a year. There would be no need for further cuts in Army numbers or amphibious forces.

Now the Chancellor is not going suddenly to find an additional £7 billion a year for defence. But equally nobody suggested that our armed forces were overfunded in 1999. And remember, this was

before 9/11, before the Islamist attacks on Paris and Marseilles, on Manchester and London. This was before Russia went to war in the Ukraine. Before the cyber attacks on our health service, on our companies, on our Parliament. Before Kim was able to fire missiles over Japan with the range to hit London.

Yes, the military can always be more efficient and they should be. Radical ideas like pre-positioning ships in the Gulf and doing more training with allies closer to home should be followed through. But in the end defence needs a bigger budget because the threats are real and growing: they are at our borders, across our waters, on our streets, even in our cathedral cities.

This is about standing up to those threats and keeping our people safer. It's also about who we are and our ambition. Another similar sized European country, France, operates a dual deterrent at sea and by air, shares our campaign against the Daesh, commits troops to fight as well as train in Africa, and has presence in Asia Pacific. If we are to make a success of a post-Brexit Britain, confident, outward-looking, standing up for our values and our allies and for democracies in danger, then we have to avoid becoming a bit-part player, a part-time champion of liberty. That means stronger defence at home and abroad, and alongside our allies. The government should now set that higher target, 2.5 per cent, to be reached by the end of this Parliament.

Strength is also what Russia understands the best. We've seen how Russia has tested all of us, in different ways: Europe, the United States, and now the United Kingdom, have all witnessed Russian aggression in different forms.

So we need to sharpen our response. Salisbury should be a wake-up call for us all. Yes, international and home-grown terrorism will always be with us. Yes, there are growing threats from China and there is continuing instability in the Gulf. But the lesson from Salisbury is clear and unequivocal: Russia is ready to do us harm, and doesn't fear our reaction. And if this is how Russia treats us, how might it treat Estonia, Montenegro, Georgia, even Poland in future? If it can intervene in Syria, why not elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean? If it can interfere in the US Presidential election, why not in our next General Election?

We have no quarrel with the people of Russia: indeed, we rightly continue cultural and educational links. But we must use the levers that we have – political, financial and military – to raise the price of malign Russian activity, and to ensure that each time its actions have consequences.

So, any engagement with Russia must be matched by a constant readiness to challenge its behaviour and call out its breaches of international law and norms. We should close the City of London to any financing that bolsters the Russian military machine, and use the Magnitsky law to list all those involved. We should agree new arrangements to continue European sanctions after Brexit. We must do more to modernise NATO and to explain its purpose. And we should use the Spending Review to get our own defence spending back up to what we spent twenty years ago. Russia wasn't a threat then, we thought: it certainly is now.