

Commandant's Foreword

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When the final touches were being added to the last edition of the Conference on Russia Papers in late 2021, Russia had just released its ultimatum to the United States and the wider Western world, demanding that Ukraine be relegated to the status of a buffer state and that NATO forces be moved back to where they had been stationed in 1998 – and no later. Any additional actions that were seen to be ‘threatening’ to Russia’s security were also to be always under consideration. Some were too naïve to believe that this would lead to a full-scale war, others did not wish to believe that Russia would take such irresponsible and drastic actions, instead dismissing Russian rhetoric as a negotiation tactic, while others still stoically waited and watched to see exactly when the opening salvo would be fired, plunging Ukraine and Europe into a completely different world. The birth pangs of this completely different world came to a crescendo on 24 February 2022, and while Estonia celebrated its independence on that frosty morning, Ukraine was forced to stalwartly defend their own.

In the midst of these paradigmatic shifts and the still-ongoing battle to uphold the rules-based international order that is being tirelessly fought for the entire Western world by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the constancy of the Baltic Defence College’s mission has remained firmly in place. We continue act as a beacon of solidarity and multilateralism, educating the future generation of military and policy leaders of the three Baltic states, transatlantic allies, and other likeminded partners. In this vein, and as Thucydides once wisely wrote, “The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools.” Condensed briefly, our mission is exactly to shape these scholar-warriors to be able to make those complex decisions in the field and formulate those well-informed arguments in the halls of power, if the need be, *semper ad securitatem patriarum*.

The Conference on Russia, as well as this parallel publication, smoothly fits within the College’s mission. Due to our joint historical experiences and our location in Tartu, Estonia, we have striven to be a centre of expertise and knowledge on Russia, our neighbour with which we have always had a

difficult relationship. Over the almost decade of running the Conference, this relationship could be characterised as cold at the best, but in 2023, we can unequivocally state that it is adversarial. In such a context, our discussions both in this volume and at the Conference become even more significant.

This volume speaks of Russia's futures, to be understood in a hypothetical plural. We cannot predict these futures, but I hope that you find these expert opinions from policy practitioners, academics, and other specialists informative and useful for hypothesizing how our continent will look like in the next decades vis-à-vis our troubled eastern neighbour. Scenario forecasting cannot be predicated on wishful thinking, as it was in December 2021, and we need to take such estimations of the future into consideration in safeguarding our own security and resilience.

I would additionally like to take this opportunity to thank the editors of this volume, Dr. Sandis Šrāders and Mr. George Spencer Terry, as well as all of the contributing authors, for all of their hard work and dedication that led to the compilation of this volume. It is exactly due to their diligence that we can freely read through such estimations in the chapters that follow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'V. Šrāders', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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Tartu, Estonia