

OPINION

THE WEEKEND INTERVIEW with Anders Fogh Rasmussen | By Sohrab Ahmari

Waking Up to the Russian Threat

Until recently, members of the Russian delegation to NATO were free to roam at will about the Western alliance's headquarters here on the outskirts of the Belgian capital. The Russians had an awkward habit of listening intently to others' conversations at the cafeteria, yet their presence was tolerated in the name of dialogue.

Not anymore. In response to Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea, NATO earlier this month suspended all practical cooperation with Moscow. Now most of the 70 or so Russian personnel enjoy about the same level of access to the alliance headquarters as journalists. It's a small but significant sign of what NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen calls "the new security environment" in Europe.

With his salt-and-pepper hair, chiseled jaw and crisply pressed navy suit, Mr. Rasmussen, 61, cuts a handsome figure. The former Danish prime minister is also one of Europe's most serious thinkers on defense matters—a hawkish figure, by European standards, who supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan despite considerable opposition at home. His term as NATO secretary-

The head of NATO says Europe has misread Vladimir Putin for years and now must scramble to push back against the Kremlin's widening ambitions.

general, which began in 2009, was supposed to come to a close in December but was extended through September 2014 so he might oversee preparations for the alliance's September summit in Cardiff, Wales.

Mr. Rasmussen sits down with me in a meeting room decorated with solemn portraits of his predecessors—men who led NATO through the Cold War and helped usher in "a Europe whole and free," as then-President George H.W. Bush put it in a 1989 speech commemorating the alliance's triumphant 40th anniversary.

Now that vision of Europe is imperiled once more. "I see Ukraine and Crimea in a bigger context," Mr. Rasmussen says. "I see this as an element in a pattern, and it's driven by President Putin's strong desire to restore Russian greatness by re-establishing a sphere of influence in the former Soviet space."

Destabilizing Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus is a pillar of the Kremlin's strategy. "It's in Russia's interest to see frozen, protracted conflicts in the region, such as in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia,

Transnistria in Moldova, and Crimea," Mr. Rasmussen says of regions where Moscow has asserted control. "If you look at a map, you will see why it's of strategic importance for Russia."

Moscow's interfering with states on the Continent's eastern periphery prevents them from joining NATO, Mr. Rasmussen says, since the alliance is reluctant to accept new members involved with border disputes. "At the same time," he says, "it plays a role in energy security. The possibility to establish alternative pipelines circumventing Russia—including through Azerbaijan and in the South Caucasus—is very much dependent on peace and stability in that region. All this is part of President Putin's geopolitical and strategic thinking."

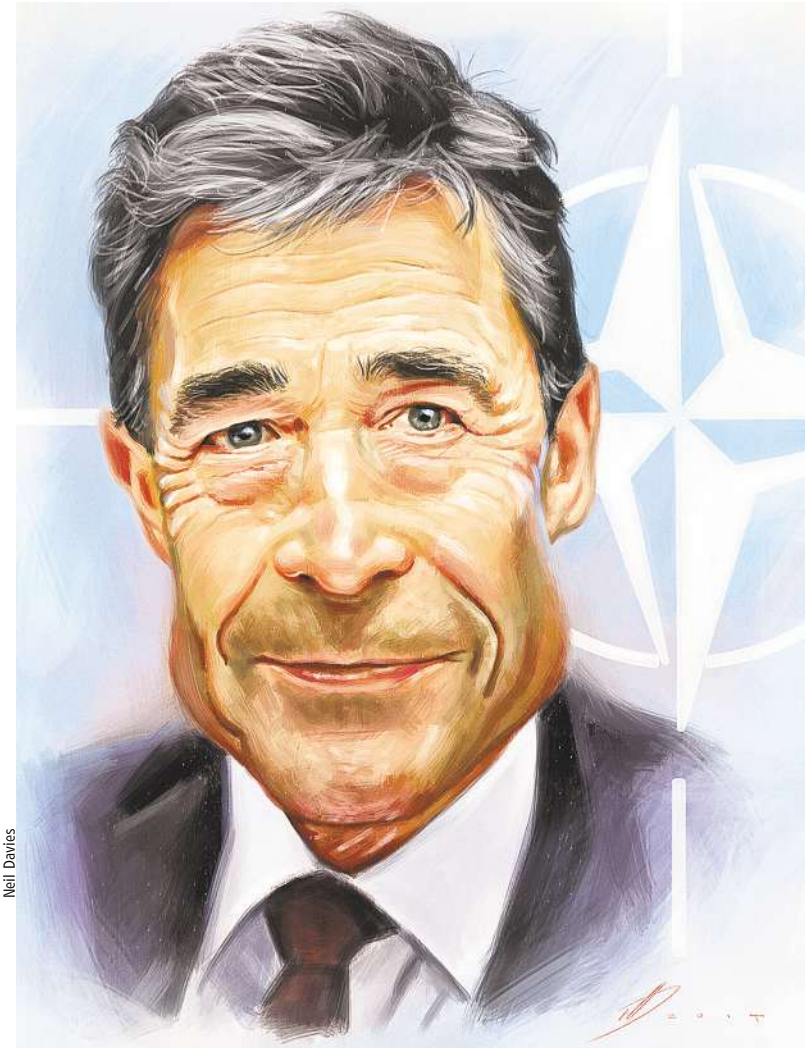
The Kremlin needs modern weapons systems and well-trained forces to realize its vision, and Mr. Rasmussen is alarmed by the improvements he has seen in the Russian military during the past few years. Contrasting Russia's military action against Georgia in 2008 with its invasion of Crimea this year, he says, "we have seen an incredible development of the Russian ability to act determinedly and rapidly. We have seen better preparation, better organization and more rapid action. They have also invested in more modern capabilities. We shouldn't underestimate the strength of the Russian armed forces." Now 40,000 of those troops are massed on the border of eastern Ukraine.

Moscow boosted military spending by 79% in the past decade, according to a Brookings Institution estimate, and military spending amounted to 4.5% of Russian gross domestic product in 2012, according to the World Bank. Most Western European states, by contrast, began cutting defense long before the recession and have kept doing so even as their economies have stabilized. France spent 1.9% of its GDP on defense in 2013; Denmark spent 1.4%; Germany, 1.3%; and Spain, 0.9%.

"We in Europe have disarmed too much, for too long," Mr. Rasmussen says. "We can't continue to cut defense budgets deeply while Russia is increasing her defense budget. . . . It has created a growing gap across the Atlantic between the U.S. and Europe. Today the U.S. spends around 75% of the overall NATO defense investment. I'm concerned that in the long run it will weaken the trans-Atlantic alliance if this trend continues."

Then there is Europe's reliance on Russian oil and gas. Mr. Rasmussen thinks the dependency risks interfering with Western self-defense:

"There's no doubt that Europe should reduce its dependency on imported energy from Russia," he says. So does the NATO secretary-general endorse shale-gas fracking? The drilling technique that has led to a U.S. energy boom has met much green resistance in Europe. He chuckles and declines to



Neil Davies

make specific recommendations: "It's a question of a more diversified energy supply, including the establishment of alternative pipelines."

Equally worrying is the West's drive to unilaterally disarm its nuclear arsenal just as the Russian expansionist tide rises. The U.S. Defense Department on Tuesday announced that it will disable 56 submarine-based nuclear-launch tubes, convert 30 B-52 bombers to conventional use, and remove 50 missiles from America's underground silos—all well ahead of the 2018 deadline set by the New Start Treaty with Russia and despite the crisis in Ukraine.

Reductions to Western nuclear forces "must take place in a balanced manner, based on more transparency" from Russia, Mr. Rasmussen says. "The fact is that since the end of the Cold War, NATO nuclear powers have reduced the number of nuclear weapons significantly, while you haven't seen the same on the Russian side."

The result is that "today you have a clear imbalance between the NATO powers and Russia in that respect," Mr. Rasmussen says. "And in the light of ongoing events in Ukraine, I don't think there is the right climate for moving forward when it comes to nuclear disarmament or arms control. There's no sign whatsoever that Russia will pro-

vide more transparency." (Following the interview, a NATO spokesman said Mr. Rasmussen wanted to add this clarification: "Reductions in U.S. strategic forces under the New Start Treaty do not affect the significant U.S. commitments to NATO or the U.S. nuclear-force posture in Europe.")

Behind the NATO capability crisis lies a more fundamental problem of entrenched worldviews. In the years after the Cold War, Western leaders came to believe that European security depended not on confronting the Kremlin, but on engaging it. "We were all very enthusiastic after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the removal of the Iron Curtain, and the breakdown of communism and the Warsaw Pact," Mr. Rasmussen says. "It seemed that we could develop a new vision of Europe whole, free and at peace—in cooperation with Russia."

In 1997, the alliance and Russia adopted the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, resolving to "build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security." The NATO-Russia Council was formed five years later. The council opened NATO headquarters to Russian diplomats—a step that would have been unthinkable during the Cold War.

The Kremlin seemed to respond positively at the time. "In my previous

capacity as prime minister of Denmark I have met President Putin on several occasions," Mr. Rasmussen recalls. "I still remember when we established the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. I remember a Putin who delivered what I would call a very pro-Western speech. I left with the impression that he felt strongly committed to delivering this relationship between Russia and NATO."

So what changed? "I think he changed his worldview," Mr. Rasmussen says of the Russian leader. "We still remember his famous speech at the Munich Security Conference, at which he stated that the breakdown of the Soviet Union was the biggest tragedy of the last century. That was the first indication that he had changed his worldview, and now we have seen it implemented in practice, first in Georgia in 2008 and now reaffirmed in Crimea."

The Kremlin and its Western apologists attribute the shift in Russian behavior to NATO expansion in the early 2000s. Mr. Rasmussen rejects this line of thinking. "I hope that Mr. Putin doesn't believe his own words," he says. "He can't seriously consider NATO as an enemy, as a threat. We have never had an intention to attack Russia."

States on Europe's periphery are eager to join NATO, Mr. Rasmussen says, "because we represent basic values that people desire to see implemented in their countries, such as individual liberty, democracy, the rule of law and on top of that economic opportunities, because our community of nations also represents economic freedom. . . . So while Putin tries to establish his Eurasian Union using pressure, not to say oppression, people are queuing up to join our organization voluntarily."

NATO's outreach to Russia, meanwhile, didn't stop even after Mr. Putin bared his fangs in the South Caucasus. "Despite the setback in 2008—the Georgia crisis—in 2010 at the NATO-Russia Summit we decided to develop what we call a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia," he says. "We invited Russia to cooperate on missile defense. You will see during these post-Cold War years we have done a lot to promote NATO-Russia cooperation."

Has NATO's engagement and cooperation with Moscow paid any security dividends? "Obviously not," Mr. Rasmussen replies without hesitation. "We have seen a revisionist Russia trying to redraw the European map by force. That's a wake-up call. That's a completely new security environment and of course we have to adapt to that." He adds: "This goes far beyond Crimea."

Mr. Ahmari is an editorial page writer for The Wall Street Journal Europe.

Oregon's GOP Senate Race Suddenly Gets Lively

Monica Wehby is a pediatric brain surgeon running for the Republican Senate nomination in Oregon. She has never sought elected office before. But she is off to a well-financed and highly touted start. The reason: She has the support of GOP political operatives in Washington as the Republican with the best chance of unseating Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley.

Jason Conger is an Oregon legislator who is also seeking to win the Republican primary on May 20. He has won two state elections, ousting an entrenched Democrat in his first race.

Mr. Conger doesn't have the backing of Republican strategists in Washington and his campaign is barely heralded at all. He trails Ms. Wehby badly in fundraising.

The Washington practice of intervening in Senate and House primaries, privately or publicly, is hardly a new one. Incumbents are routinely backed by party campaign committees. But intruding in challenger contests or races for open seats is controversial, especially when Republicans in Washington insist—as they do in supporting Ms. Wehby—that a less conservative candidate is more electable.

This was famously the case in Florida in 2010. The National Republican Senatorial Committee rushed to endorse then-Gov. Charlie Crist over Marco Rubio, his conservative rival for the Senate. It backfired. Mr. Rubio soared past Mr. Crist, who quit the GOP and ran (and lost) as an independent. Mr. Rubio won the Senate seat. This year Mr. Crist is running for governor as a Democrat.

In Washington, Ms. Wehby, 51, is viewed as well positioned to compete with Mr. Merkley, despite her lack of electoral experience. Her pro-choice stance on abortion and fuzzy but sympathetic view of same-sex marriage are seen as assets for a Republican in a blue state like Oregon. And perhaps they are, though Mr. Conger doesn't think so.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee hasn't endorsed her, but it tells anyone who asks that she's the strongest GOP contender. This has boosted her fundraising. She has received numerous contributions from political-action committees, while only

a single PAC, Oregon Right to Life, has donated to Mr. Conger's campaign. A social conservative, he is opposed to both abortion and same-sex marriage.

Until recently, the road to the Republican nomination looked paved for Ms. Wehby. She had been endorsed by America's most celebrated brain surgeon, Ben Carson, who is also a noted critic of the Obama administration. Lars Larson, a popular conservative radio talk-show host in Portland, noted that she has operated on baby's brains "the size of walnuts." That, he told her on the air, "means you have all the experience you need to work with Democrats in Washington."

Then, a week ago, came a poll with two big surprises. A Republican survey firm, Harper Polling, found that Mr. Merkley is more vulnerable than expected. He has a 39% favorability rating. On the generic ballot question, a Democratic candidate for the Senate was favored by just three percentage points over a Republican.

The other surprise: Mr. Conger, according to the poll, fared better against Mr. Merkley than Ms. Wehby did. He trailed the senator, 47%-40%. She was behind, 46%-34%. And that wasn't the only bad news for Ms. Wehby. The poll showed that she was less popular among Republican voters than Mr. Conger. An earlier poll conducted for the National Republican Senatorial Committee found that neither GOP candidate has strong name recognition. Given the sad Republican record in Oregon, unseating Mr. Merkley is still a long-shot. Republicans haven't won a statewide election since 2002, when Sen. Gordon Smith won a second term. He lost to Mr. Merkley in 2008 and now heads the National Association of Broadcasters in Washington. No Republican presidential candidate has won Oregon since Ronald Reagan in 1984. No Republican governor has been elected since 1984 either.

Mr. Conger, 45, disputes the view that a conservative can't win in Oregon. He points out that no conservative has been a statewide candidate in decades. And nearly every Republican candidate has been pro-choice on abortion. Gordon Smith, though consistently pro-life, was a moderate.

Both Republican candidates have riveting personal stories. Mr. Conger describes his as "homeless to Harvard." His parents belonged to the hippie

generation. When Mr. Conger was a young child, the family lived in a pickup truck. He dropped out of school and left home at 16, worked numerous jobs, got married at 20, went to night school, then graduated from Humboldt State University in northern California in 1997. On the strength of high scores on

Republicans in Washington picked an 'electable' primary candidate. They may need to rethink what that means.

law-school entrance exams, he got into Harvard Law. He graduated in 2000.

Ms. Wehby's medical practice "has defined her career," Jeff Mapes of the (Portland) Oregonian wrote. "Oregon has more members of Congress—seven—than it does pediatric neurosurgeons, one of medicine's most demanding fields." She was president of the

Oregon Medical Association and was elected to the board of the American Medical Association in 2007. She's not entirely a political novice. She led the campaign for a tort-reform initiative in 2004. It lost narrowly. She has four children (Mr. Conger has five) and lives near her ex-husband.

She and Mr. Conger are fiercely opposed to ObamaCare, which Mr. Merkley voted for. But they disagree about their records on health care in Oregon. Mr. Conger says his opponent backed legislation proposed by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, that resembles 90% of ObamaCare. Ms. Wehby defends the Wyden legislation as "a market-based approach" and told the Oregonian she was never committed to the entire plan, especially its individual mandate and use of tax credits to get the uninsured to obtain insurance. Mr. Conger supported Cover Oregon, the state exchange for implementing ObamaCare that has failed spectacularly. He tells me he backed it as preferable to an exchange run by the Obama administration.

Hike the Minimum Wage? Show Me How

By Robert Stack

The debate over increasing the minimum wage might seem inconsequential to many Americans. After all, no one would dispute that those employees currently earning the minimum wage constitute less than 2.9% of the total U.S. workforce. One side of the argument talks about fair pay; the other focuses on the potential damage to employment and the economy.

As the head of a national nonprofit organization celebrating 25 years of supporting thousands of people who have severe developmental disabilities, I thoroughly endorse raising the minimum wage to the proposed \$10.10 per hour for our thousands of employees who provide this care—with an important caveat. Show me where to find the money.

The majority of my 2,045 direct caregivers make around \$8 per hour. Add to this amount fringe benefits such as health-care insurance, overtime and other insurance, and you've got \$9.80 per hour. Our national budget is close to \$100 million. The majority of our revenue is derived from Medicaid billable hours for the people with severe disabili-

ties that we help. Over the past quarter of a century, our organization has essentially broken even—which is the point of a nonprofit. There are many times when we run into a deficit; this is why we fundraise. If we ever have excess income, it is used to develop additional facilities to meet some of the needs of the national waiting list for housing for people with disabilities. There are more than 500,000 people on the list.

If President Obama's advocacy for increasing the minimum wage succeeds, without a calibrated increase in Medicaid rates, we would be forced to shut down in most of the states where we pay \$8 an hour. Why? Because the increase would add \$3.1 million to our costs. Monday-morning managers who suggest that I cut executive staff are off base. Even if my executive staff works for free, that would still not cover the cost. We'd have to pull out of states like Texas, Kentucky, Tennessee, New Mexico and South Carolina, and we'd never open in Mississippi, where we know that our organization's services are much needed. Other states in which we operate, such as New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, will see services com-

promised, as there are caregivers we now employ who will gravitate toward other industries, like food and hotels, where the pay will be higher.

This is not some political argument. This is the reality of our situation and that of many other nonprofits. We are highly regulated to provide documented care. We aim to do a great job, but that will be difficult to accomplish if we have to compensate the majority of our workforce with a 25% increase.

We serve people, not burgers. If the minimum wage is increased, we cannot pass the added cost onto our customers. Paradoxically, our customers are for the most part indigent. The federal and state government picks up their tab. Government sets the rates, not the nonprofit, and if we can barely make it now, I don't know how anyone expects us to do this without a rate adjustment. Yet Medicaid spending is already an enormous part of the federal budget, and an increase to address this problem seems unlikely. What should I tell the families and the people with disabilities in our care?

Mr. Stack is president and CEO of Community Options.