

Restoring the Spirit of the Elbe Meeting

By [Kevin Ryan](#)

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On the eve of the NATO summit in Chicago on May 20–21, it seems that the rhetoric from both the United States and Russia has returned to a more combative past. Deep-seated disagreements over missile defense and so-called frozen conflicts in Georgia have renewed suspicions and battered trust between the countries. This corrosive situation is only amplified by the fact that both countries are in an election year when moderation is viewed as a weakness and hyperbole is the norm.

So it is surprising that a low-profile group of retired general officers from the United States and Russian military and intelligence services should be a voice of reason. Their recommendation is to shift competition away from the military sphere and to seek trust and strategic stability in our relations. The Elbe Group, which is named after the place where U.S. and Soviet forces linked up on April 25, 1945, at the end of World War II, has been formed to achieve this goal.

The Elbe Group consists of retired three- and four-star generals from the U.S and Russian military, CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, Federal Security Service and GRU, the military intelligence branch. These agencies were for many years the hot spots during the Cold War.

The GRU was so secretive that the Soviet government did not even admit that it existed until after the Cold War ended. In most cases, we meet in third countries because some members of the Elbe Group cannot get visas to each other's countries. These officers are patriots of their nations but are united by the same goal: to find solutions to our common problems.

Russian members include former Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, former GRU head Valentin Korabelnikov and former FSB deputy head Anatoly Safonov. U.S. members include the former commander-in-chief of Strategic Command, General Eugene Habiger, and the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Michael Maples.

The Elbe Group has met three times, its most recent session being in March outside Larnaca, Cyprus. The group adopted as its first mission statement in 2010 to focus on the prevention of nuclear terrorism and worked with experts at Harvard Belfer Center and the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies in Moscow to publish the first joint assessment of this threat. This joint assessment, published in English and Russian, made clear in an unclassified booklet the very real danger that dedicated terrorists could obtain or make a nuclear device. The group also authored a joint article in advance of the nuclear security summit in Seoul last month with recommendations for U.S. and Russian cooperation in preventing nuclear terrorism.

But the issue that most concerns Elbe Group members is the lack of trust that still affects the strategic dialogue. The lack of trust is at the heart of disagreements over subjects like missile defense. Russian strategists doubt U.S. statements about the intent of its missile defenses, and U.S. leaders fear integrating their missile defenses with Russian ones.

As a result, the Elbe Group agreed to the following statement on strategic stability at the Cyprus meeting and recommends it to policy makers in both countries:

"The Elbe Group recognizes that strategic stability and trust between the world's two strongest nuclear powers will continue to play a vital role in providing security for both our countries and the entire world, including our ability to resist terrorism. It is in neither the United States' nor Russia's best interests to attempt to gain a strategic military advantage over the other.

"We have emerged from the Cold War and continue to face new complex problems, but the strategic stability we achieved should not be lost as a result of our actions. Unlike the Cold War era, our mutual desire to achieve strategic stability today can be realized with less emphasis on the use of military force. The use of any force today, let alone nuclear weapons, is disproportionate to the existing or potential issues in U.S.-Russia relations. This concept should be reflected in the military strategies and doctrines of both our countries."

The members of the Elbe Group draw their inspiration for collaboration from their predecessors who found a way to overcome many differences to achieve victory and peace over a common enemy in World War II. In one week, we will mark the 67th anniversary of the end of the last great war in Europe. The peace that was won by force can best be preserved by cooperation.

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and the organizer of the Elbe Group.

Participants in the Elbe Group

General of the Army (ret) Anatoliy S. Kulikov, former Minister of Interior;
General of the Army (ret) Valentin V. Korabelnikov, former Head, GRU;
General Colonel (ret) Anatoliy E. Safonov, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;
General Colonel (ret) Viktor I. Esin, former Chief of Staff, Rocket Forces;
General Colonel (ret) Fedor I. Ladygin, former Head, GRU;
General Colonel (ret) Vladimir N. Verkhovtsev, former Head of 12th GUMO Nuclear Directorate;
General Major (ret) Vladimir Z. Dvorkin, former Director, Fourth Central Research Institute;
General Major (ret) Pavel S. Zolotarev, former Defense Council of Russian Federation;
Colonel (ret) Vladimir Y. Goltsov, former Ministry of Interior;
General Eugene Habiger USAF (ret), former Commander in Chief, Strategic Command;
Lieutenant General Franklin Hagenbeck USA (ret), former Superintendent U.S. Military Academy;
Lieutenant General Michael Maples USA (ret), former Director, DIA;
Mr. Robert Dannenberg, former Chief of Operations for Counterterrorism, CIA;
Mr. Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, former Director, Intelligence and Counterintelligence, DOE;
Brigadier General Kevin Ryan USA (ret), former Defense Attache, Moscow.

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