NATO and Russia Viewed from Moscow

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NATO and Russia: A View from Moscow

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NATO's eastward enlargement stirs Russia's deep, historical fears about 'Western' attempts to destroy or marginalize it. However, the dialogue opened up by the new US administration, along with the declarations and propositions by President Medvedev, suggest that a new era of cooperation, relating to Afghanistan, anti-missile defense systems, disarmament and even NATO's next strategic concept, may now emerge.

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In his first speech, in September 2009, the new Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said: "I believe that, of all of NATO's relationships with partner countries, none holds greater potential than the NATO-Russia relationship. Yet I also believe that none is so much burdened by misperceptions, mistrust and diverging political agendas … The historical baggage of the relationships between NATO and Russia and between the West and Russia cannot simply be ignored. And not all our disagreements are simply based on misunderstandings. Some of them are of a fundamental nature and, hence, will not disappear quickly."

The sources of the rivalry

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union held unrivaled military power on the European continent and Moscow had many ideological followers in European countries. Stalin, it seems, did not think that the United States would stay in Europe after the end of the war. He was willing to agree on spheres of influence, and sought to make a deal on this, first with Churchill in Moscow in October 1944, then at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945. His prime goal, I think, was to establish a huge security zone in Eastern Europe, including Poland, through which Russia had been regularly invaded from the West. He appears to have considered this a reasonable claim, which would reflect the traditional way of pocketing the geo-political spoils of military victory.

Russia's suspicion and fear of the West go back well before 1917

In Russian historical memory, there were five major invasions when 'the West' sent its military to 'destroy' Russia: the Polish occupation of the Kremlin in the early 17th century, the Swedish attack in the early 18th century, the Napoleon invasion of 1812, and two wars with Germany in the first half of the 20th century. In each case, the very existence of the Russian state was threatened. In this way, suspicion and fear of the West developed in the Russian mentality, even before the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

Joseph Stalin's insistence on giving a huge slice of eastern Germany to Poland and on the annexation of Königsberg was based, I believe, on security considerations – his desire to build 'forward defenses' for Russia in Eastern Europe. He probably expected that Poland, in order to retain its new 'Western territories,' would be forever tied to the Soviet Union. Otherwise the Soviet zone of occupation (what later became the German Democratic Republic) would have been almost three times bigger.

By 1947, Stalin recognized that the United States refused to accept his claims. He decided to impose the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and then to show force, starting the Berlin blockade. These actions contributed to the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance.

NATO was immediately perceived by the Soviet leaders as the enemy – an 'aggressive tool of American imperialism.' Moscow took seriously the declarations about the 'roll-back of communism.' The US nuclear monopoly allowed the Pentagon to prepare for a preventive nuclear attack on the USSR. The Soviet planners, therefore, relied on the Soviet Union's huge conventional forces, which did not have a match in Central Europe.

The joint military organization of the North Atlantic Alliance was supposed to balance the Soviet Union's conventional superiority. The US could not permanently maintain an equal force in Europe, and the war in Korea required that the American army be deployed there. Thus, after the plan to create a European army, which could integrate West German forces, failed, the Federal Republic was admitted into NATO.

Until the early 1950s, Moscow did not exclude the possible neutralization of the whole of Germany, as a buffer between the West and the Soviet 'security belt.' The reunification and neutralization of Germany was also supported by some people in the West. One of them was George Kennan, the author of the doctrine of containment.

It is known that in the summer of 1953, when anti-communist riots started in East Berlin, some Soviet leaders, including the dreadful Lavrenty Beria, were willing to exchange the German Democratic Republic, supported by Soviet tanks, for the reunification and demilitarization of Germany. Later, at Beria's trial, this position was used as a 'proof' of his 'treason.' Nevertheless, in 1955 the USSR indeed agreed to the reunification and demilitarization of Austria.

In 1954, Moscow created a diplomatic scandal, proposing that the USSR be admitted into the North Atlantic Alliance, thus demonstrating that NATO had no anti-Soviet aggressive intentions and establishing an all-European security system. The West quickly rejected this proposal, accusing the Soviet Union of propaganda games and efforts to disrupt the unity of the allies. Lord Ismay wrote that it was "like an unrepentant burglar requesting to join the police force."

The admission of West Germany into NATO alarmed the Soviet leaders. In two world wars, Russians had come to recognize the awesome might of the German army and they viewed the Bundeswehr as a continuation of the Wehrmacht. The USSR responded to West Germany's admission by creating the Warsaw Pact organization, thus consolidating its control over Eastern Europe and mobilizing its resources to oppose NATO.

The reliability of the Warsaw Pact allies, except for East Germany, was questionable. The Soviet Union had to beef up its military presence in Eastern Europe several times. It used its forces to suppress anti-communist rebellions in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Twice, in 1956 and 1981, the threat of Soviet military intervention was used to secure the communist regime in Poland.

It turned out that NATO, deterred by Soviet military power, was powerless to implement the 'roll-back' doctrine and intervene during these events. At least on paper, the Warsaw Pact contributed to the Soviet conventional superiority over NATO in ground forces. But the West had an impressive advantage at sea, and NATO had a qualitative advantage in the air. Nevertheless, the North Atlantic Alliance was preoccupied with the Fulda gap (between the East German border and Frankfurt in West Germany), through which the Soviet tank armies were expected to push all the way to the Atlantic shore.

The nuclear factor

To correct the perceived imbalance, the United States began to deploy thousands of tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of its Western

European allies. The plan was that early use of nuclear weapons would halt the Soviet tanks. The arms race between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries acquired a much larger nuclear dimension when the US deployed intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Turkey and Italy, so they could attack targets in Soviet territory.

In the late 1950s, the launch of *Sputnik* demonstrated that Soviet long-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) could reach American territory. That was a shock to Washington, which had to abandon the doctrine of massive retaliation, threatening a nuclear attack if the USSR prevailed in a conventional conflict. This in turn raised concern in Western Europe about the reliability of the American 'nuclear umbrella.'

The deployment of American and Soviet nuclear weapons in Europe contributed additional instability when NATO and the Warsaw Pact challenged each other over West Berlin. East Germany could not stop the defection of its citizens to the West, so Moscow tried to force the United States, Britain and France to abandon West Berlin. An acute crisis arose in 1961, when the East German regime, with the full support of Nikita Khrushchev, decided to build the infamous wall.

The Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, which brought the US and the USSR very close to a nuclear war, resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba and American missiles from Italy and Turkey. But the USSR kept a large number of intermediate-range missiles on its territory, so they could target Western European members of NATO and American forces in Europe.

The question of the credibility of American nuclear guarantees became a source of major tension within the Western community. The United States had to propose the doctrine of *flexible response* to reassure its allies. Some US tactical nuclear weapons were provided to several NATO countries, but they remained under dual control and could not be used without American permission. For some time, Washington explored a proposal for a multilateral nuclear force at sea, but that idea was rejected.

The doctrine of flexible response, which was also formally adopted by the North Atlantic Alliance, soon resulted in a preoccupation with the concept of *escalation control*, whereby it was necessary to achieve domination at each step of the so-called escalatory ladder. The idea was to demonstrate to the opponent that it would be defeated if it tried to escalate the military conflict to a higher level. NATO tried to achieve such escalation control by deploying a sophisticated range of different types of weapons, while the Soviet Union acted in a similar way.

The conventional and nuclear arms race produced an approximate strategic parity between the two sides by the beginning of the 1970s. The USSR and the US signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty-1 (SALT-1) agreement and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 1972. Mutual assured destruction (MAD) was recognized as the foundation of strategic stability.

The failure of détente

In 1956, the Soviet Union adopted the principle of "peaceful coexistence" of the two competing social and economic systems, rejecting the Stalinist thesis that a new world war was inevitable. Arms control agreements and the Helsinki Act were interpreted in Moscow as the victory of this policy of peaceful coexistence.

The United States and its allies rejected the Soviet interpretation of détente. Tensions began to rise again. The next crisis in Europe was provoked by the 'euro-missiles.' At the SALT negotiations, the USSR failed to limit American forward-based tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and British and French nuclear systems, which could reach Soviet territory. The definition of strategic weapons included only nuclear missiles and bombers with a range above 5,500 kilometers (3,400 miles). So, in the late 1970s, the USSR started modernizing its medium-range forces, replacing the old missiles with the new SS-20 mobile systems with multiple warheads.

The Soviet move immediately provoked new fears about 'decoupling' Europe from America. NATO members again engaged in heated debates about the reliability of the American nuclear umbrella. Reagan's administration, which never believed in détente, decided to deploy intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles in Western Europe, reversing the decision made after the crisis. At the same time, Washington started the Star Wars program, announcing its intention to abandon the ABM Treaty.

The USSR interpreted these actions as a deadly threat, which exposed American plans for a preemptive disarming and decapitating strike. Pershing-2 missiles could reach Moscow in 10-12 minutes. And the orbital ballistic-missile defenses threatened to destroy the principle of mutual assured destruction, restoring American invulnerability to the weakened Soviet retaliating strike. The USSR responded by putting its forces in a state of higher alert.

Moscow viewed the euro-missiles of the 1980s as a mortal threat

In the early 1980s, military tensions in Europe reached a new peak. This made many NATO members unhappy, since they could become the first

victims of a nuclear confrontation. The European allies were often troubled when the United States and the Soviet Union were concluding bilateral deals behind their back, but they were even more concerned when the global Soviet-American competition threatened to get out of control and make them a battlefield for the two superpowers.

Some experts, like Robert Kagan, speak of a Mars and Venus distinction between American and European cultures. This opinion is partly borne out by the fact that the United States usually spends twice as much on defense as its allies, while the Europeans give much greater priority to spending on social protection, health and education. Their huge losses in two world wars and in previous conflicts make many Europeans less militaristic. As well, after the loss of their colonial empires, the leading Western European countries are not enthusiastic about military engagements in faraway places, preferring to stick to the formal boundaries of the area of responsibility as defined by the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949.

The *perestroika* revolution

The spiral of confrontation was broken by the development of *perestroika* (literally, restructuring) in the Soviet Union. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR started a zigzag process of major political and economic reform. Moscow also drastically changed its foreign policy, trying to bring the Cold War to an end.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, signed in 1987, was a breakthrough, prohibiting the entire class of Soviet and American intermediate-range (from 500 to 5,500 kilometers/300 to 3,400 miles) missiles. It was followed by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (the CFE Treaty), concluded in 1990. Unlike nuclear-arms control, it covered not only the US and the USSR, but all member states of the two military blocs. The CFE Treaty was also based on the principle of parity, establishing equal numerical ceilings for NATO and Warsaw Pact organizations in major categories of weapons (tanks, armored fighting vehicles, artillery guns, combat aircraft and attack helicopters) and special limitations for different geographical zones in Europe (central zone, extended central zone, flank zones), including on-site inspections and notification of major movements of troops and weapons. Later it was also agreed to establish ceilings for military manpower. The first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1), signed in 1991, provided for serious reductions in American and Soviet strategic forces, along with an elaborate procedure for verification and monitoring. The text of START-1 linked it to the ABM Treaty, which meant that limitations in ballistic-missile defense would continue.

These three agreements were supposed to end East-West military confrontation, but they enormously contributed to the end of the Cold War. It's often claimed that the West 'won' the Cold War, which implies that the Soviet Union was 'defeated.' I don't think this claim is justified. The three treaties registered the recognition by the US and NATO of perfect parity with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The arms race ended in a *draw* – neither side lost.

What followed was the collapse of communism as an ideology that rejected the market economy. The West won the economic competition, demonstrating that it could provide a much higher standard of living and higher standards of social security. When *perestroika* reached the Eastern European countries, the legitimacy of the communist regimes was undermined. They never had deep roots there; thus, when Gorbachev made the historical decision not to intervene, there was a chain reaction of regime change.

The post-communist governments declared their desire to abandon their participation in military blocs. In summer 1991, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, and in December 1991 the USSR ended its existence. Instead of reforming the socialist system, *perestroika* resulted in the non-violent collapse of the Soviet superpower and the 'socialist camp.'

Moscow's policy of non-intervention put an end to its total ideological domination and, almost immediately, to its military control over Eastern Europe, which had been a Soviet priority since the end of the Second World War.

Unlike the Soviet Union, the new Russia was not a superpower that was driven by a messianic ideology. Moscow gave up control not only of Warsaw Pact countries, but also of former Soviet republics, which had been incorporated into the Russian empire many centuries before the Bolshevik revolution. Moscow lost more than one-third of the Soviet territory and economic potential (McNamara's definition of 'unacceptable damage') without any nuclear war. And chaotic market reforms ('shock without therapy') pushed Russia's economy into unprecedented decline for a decade.

Winner takes all?

The West lost its enemy. The ideological conflict between Russia and the West was gone. Moscow's military might vanished. Russia was entitled to only one-third of the CFE weapons (the other two-thirds were allocated to Eastern European countries and former Soviet republics). About one million troops were removed from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states; another million were 'nationalized' by Ukraine and other Soviet

successor-states, which tried to take control over nuclear weapons on their territory.

Moscow lost its allies and clients. Within several years, the Russian military had shrunk to about 25 per cent of the Soviet armed forces, with many weapons either decommissioned or put into hastily prepared storage facilities. Within several years the entire army (Ground Forces) of the Russian Federation were smaller than the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, and inferior in training and equipment. As the war with separatists in Chechnya demonstrated, Russia 'couldn't invade even herself.'

Many in Russia believed that the West would follow suit and dissolve the North Atlantic Alliance. Some hoped that Russia would become a NATO member. But the dominant view was that there would be a new all-European collective security system, including Russia, "from Vancouver to Vladivostok," as proposed by Secretary of State Jim Baker in 1991. The Conference on Security and Cooperation was supposed to become the mechanism to construct this system.

These expectations, however, did not come true. While the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was established, it played only a marginal role. Instead, NATO started to play the dominant role. Since NATO had lost its mission of collective defense, because nobody could threaten the most powerful military alliance in the world, it was necessary to invent a new purpose. The slogan was: "Out of area, or out of business." Step by step, NATO began to expand its responsibilities and membership to promote democracy and stability. Gorbachev's vision was of "a common European home," with former rivals under the same roof. But the new European home was built without Russia, on the basis of NATO and the EU.

The new "European common home" has been built without Russia

At the end of the Cold War, some Western leaders vaguely promised to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand. But this commitment was never legally formalized. A few years later, NATO started its move East. In 1993 the Clinton administration invited former Warsaw Pact countries to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) under NATO auspices. But when Russia in 1995 totally withdrew its troops from Germany the situation changed.

The West faced the temptation of consolidating the outcome of the Cold War according to the principle of 'winner takes all.' Top priority was given

to the institutionalized integration of Eastern European countries into NATO and the EU. The 'vegetarian' PfP was no substitute for the 'real beef' – full membership of NATO, which was the goal of the new anti-communist and anti-Russian elites in former Warsaw Pact countries. But the final decision belonged to NATO, in which there were serious debates about the geopolitical consequences of the expansion. Some experts in the West, including George Kennan, warned against playing a 'zero sum game' with Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow was cooperating with NATO in the peacekeeping operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia produced a number of ugly ethnic wars in which Russia sympathized with the Serbs while the West supported their opponents. To stop the bloodshed and ethnic cleansing, NATO decided to intervene in 1995. A precedent for NATO operating outside its traditional boundaries was established. Moscow agreed to participate in the Stabilization Force (SFOR), but it was an *ad hoc* arrangement, since SFOR was under the political control of the North Atlantic Council, to which Russia did not belong.

Moscow still looked at Eastern Europe, which was now relabeled as Central Europe, as a security buffer between Russia and the West. Moscow did not want and had no means to dominate this strategically important region. But it also did not want the region to be controlled by a more powerful military alliance, which had been Moscow's enemy in Europe for so many years. NATO never seriously considered Russia as a possible member, and its joint military organization now had huge superiority over Russian military forces.

Russia's efforts to maintain the *status quo* failed in 1997. NATO invited Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join. At the same time, it signed another declaration with Russia – the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, which established the procedure for consultations, but no Russian veto rights over NATO's decision-making. NATO promised no "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" and "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members."

The Founding Act, unfortunately, did not help much. In 1999 NATO started 'a war of choice' against Serbia, which was trying to suppress by brutal force the secessionists' insurgency in Kosovo. The NATO bombing during the Kosovo war was widely perceived in Russia as proving the naivety of post-Cold War expectations that the West was willing to treat Russia as an equal partner. The Kosovo war together with NATO's

enlargement undermined the consensus during the *perestroika* period that the use of military force for even the best purposes was no longer legitimate. It's not accidental that, unlike the first one, the second war in Chechnya, which started soon, was not opposed by the Russian public.

The Kosovo war ended with Russian and NATO soldiers facing each other at the Pristina airport. It was a miracle that they did not start shooting. While Russia again joined the peace-keeping force (IFOR), it had neither the political nor the military means to influence the policies of NATO, which prepared the conditions for the declaration of Kosovo's independence. After a few years, Russia withdrew from IFOR, thus ending NATO-Russian military cooperation on the ground.

The growing rift

At the beginning of the new century, Russia and NATO met in circumstances of revived mutual suspicion and mistrust. Nevertheless, President Vladimir Putin suggested to NATO Secretary General George Robertson that Russia might one day join NATO. No response was forthcoming. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Moscow and Washington again proclaimed the strategic partnership and, in May 2002, the new Russia-NATO Council was established to promote cooperation in a wide range of areas.

The new rapprochement did not last. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration decided to unilaterally withdraw from the ABM Treaty and started to deploy ballistic-missile defense systems, despite Russian protests. In 2002, Moscow was presented with a *fait accompli* when NATO implemented a new round of expansion. This time it was a 'big bang' – NATO admitted seven new members, including three former Soviet republics: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. NATO fully absorbed what used to be the 'security belt' of the USSR.

In 2003 the US invaded Iraq. This war was opposed by Russia, and NATO was for the first time in its history openly at odds. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the "new" Europe and the "old" Europe, as new NATO members fully supported the Iraq war while most of the old members criticized it. Besides, some former Warsaw Pact countries, which also became members of the European Union, slowed down the integration of the EU and development of the European security identity. Poland and the Czech Republic were the last countries to ratify the Lisbon Treaty.

The Bush administration preferred to build the "coalition of the willing" outside the formal NATO structures. But when Washington got stuck in

the quagmire in Iraq, it pressed NATO to take responsibility for the war in Afghanistan. In 2006, NATO formally accepted control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Afghanistan became the first NATO war outside Europe.

The experience of SFOR, KFOR and ISAF led to proposals for a global NATO, which would bring under one umbrella the North Atlantic Alliance and American allies in the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, South Korea and Australia. But there seem to be too many obstacles to achieve this goal.

Meanwhile, the Russian economy began to recover thanks to high energy prices, and the political situation in the country stabilized. Moscow accumulated huge foreign currency reserves. Russian armed forces began to slowly modernize after many years of decline. This allowed Russia to be more assertive in foreign affairs, in particular in the post-Soviet space, which Moscow perceived as the sphere of Russian 'privileged' interests. In the West, many asserted that Russia had returned to traditional authoritarianism and imperialism.

Moscow interpreted the 'color revolutions' as attempts to marginalize it

Moscow interpreted the 'orange' and 'rose' revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, respectively, in 2004 as new evidence of the Western strategy to marginalize Russia and make it militarily impotent before the US and NATO. Since the pro-Western governments in these former Soviet republics declared their willingness to join NATO, Russian leaders determined to prevent this scenario.

Russia was even more alarmed about the third US ballistic missile defense (BMD) site, which the Bush administration decided to deploy in Poland and the Czech Republic. The third site had an open-ended architecture, and was perceived as demonstrating that the US intended to eventually deny Russia's nuclear deterrence. Moscow announced that, in response, it would deploy short-range Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave in former Eastern Prussia, surrounded by the new NATO members.

Instead of withdrawing from the INF Treaty in 2007, President Putin announced an unprecedented moratorium on the implementation of the CFE Treaty until NATO countries ratified its adopted version of 1999. NATO refused to do this, linking ratification to the implementation of Russia's political commitment to completely remove its forces from Georgia

and Moldova. This was the first time that Moscow *de facto* canceled a legally binding arms-control agreement. But the West continued to ignore warnings from Moscow.

In the beginning of 2008, Kosovo declared its independence, unilaterally seceding from Serbia. The protests by Serbia, supported by Russia, were ignored. Most (but not all) NATO countries immediately recognized Kosovo's independence.

In August 2008, Russian-NATO relations reached their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The attack by the Western-sponsored Georgian President Saakashvili on separatist South Ossetia, which had proclaimed its independence from Georgia after the collapse of the USSR, provoked an acute crisis. Georgian troops also attacked the Russian peacekeeping battalion that had been deployed to supervise the ceasefire agreement signed in 1992. It seems that Saakashvili hoped to regain control over South Ossetia quickly, but Moscow responded with overwhelming force, sending regular army forces to defeat Georgia. Russia also recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, another breakaway region.

Saakashvili appealed to the United States and NATO to save him. But the West did not intervene militarily. Instead, NATO accused Moscow of "unprovoked aggression" and decided to end all interaction with Russia. NATO and Russia were on the verge of a new Cold War.

Resetting US-Russian relations

Fortunately, the new US President proclaimed his desire to "reset" American-Russian relations. Barak Obama rejected the claim of George W. Bush that arms control was "obsolete" and agreed with President Dmitri Medvedev to negotiate a follow-on treaty to START-1, which expires in December 2009, and further reduce the number of strategic warheads and delivery vehicles. It's not easy to negotiate a new strategic agreement in a very short time.

The new US administration admitted the linkage between offensive and defensive systems and apparently decided to freeze the development of strategic BMD, concentrating on defenses against shorter and medium-range ballistic missiles. Last April, Washington halted a number of strategic BMD programs, and in September canceled the third-site plans to deploy systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. The strategic systems, like the ground-based interceptors (GBI) and X-band radar, would be useless against Iranian medium-range missiles, which require theater

ballistic missile defenses. Obama was accused of "appeasement" and "capitulation" to Russia by the Republican opposition in Congress and some politicians in Eastern Europe, who in summer 2009 sent an open letter warning him of the Russian threat.

The White House, however, was supported by the key NATO members. Following the American lead, Brussels agreed to resume the activities of the Russia-NATO Council. Rasmussen proposed "to reinforce our practical cooperation in all the areas where we agree we face the same risks and threats to our security" and to carry out "a joint review of the new 21st century security challenges, to serve as a firm basis for our future cooperation." He also expressed interest in President Medvedev's ideas on a new European security arrangement, recognizing "Russian concerns about being marginalized in European security."

Dmitri Medvedev has proposed a pan-European summit, with multilateral institutions

It should be noted that President Medvedev, soon after his election, suggested that a pan-European summit be convened to discuss a comprehensive new security system, involving all European countries and multilateral institutions, including NATO, the EU, the OSCE and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, or ODKB in Russian), which links Russia and seven former Soviet republics.

Remarkably, this idea was reflected in recent articles by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was never considered 'pro-Russian.' He supported an agreement between NATO and the CSTO, provided that Moscow would not object to continued NATO enlargement (Ukraine and Georgia do not belong to the CSTO). It seems that Brzezinski is willing to concede a Russian 'sphere of influence' in former Soviet republics in Central Asia, but not in Eastern Europe. His position probably also reflects growing unease that NATO may suffer a painful defeat in Afghanistan. Thus Russia and the CSTO may play the role of a barrier to halt the Taliban and Al Qaeda, if they regain control of Afghanistan.

A new window of opportunity

In his article of 10th September 2009, 'Go, Russia!,' President Medvedev called for the modernization of Russia and admitted that "the issue of harmonizing our relations with Western democracies is not a question of taste, personal preferences or the prerogatives of given political groups," since "we have many common goals, including absolute priorities which affect every inhabitant on Earth such as the non-proliferation of nuclear

weapons and reducing the risk of adverse effects from man-made climate change."

The common interests of Russia and the West include the fight against terrorism, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, maritime security, counter-narcotics, etc. What is required is a joint threat assessment, which Moscow has suggested many times. In particular, realistic assessments of Iran's nuclear and missile programs will enable the development of more effective ways to meet this challenge – whether diplomatic or, if unavoidable, by other means such as economic sanctions and ballistic missile defenses.

Since President Obama canceled the third site, there are new opportunities for building the European regional BMD, linking Russian, American and NATO theater defenses. Such a system should be aimed at protection against shorter and medium-range missiles (below the range of 5,500 kilometers/3,400 miles, which belong to the strategic arsenals of Russia and the United States). The components of this system might include the American integrated mobile interceptors, Patriot PAC-3, SM-3 and THAAD, Russian S-400 interceptors and, in the future, S-500, NATO-developed MEADS, and also Russian and American sea- and ground-based radar.

Building a European, regional anti-missile system

These cooperative defenses could be deployed in a couple of years and, if the threat intensifies, upgraded in the middle of the next decade. Only this approach will prevent a return to Cold War-type counter-balancing, retargeting and other confrontational military postures. Otherwise, unilateral measures – for instance, the deployment of Aegis systems with improved capabilities against strategic ICBMs (SM-3 Block II interceptors) in the Black and Baltic Seas – will provoke a very dangerous confrontation.

Another major area for potential cooperation is Afghanistan. Russia, too, perceives the Taliban and Al Qaeda as its enemies. But it is not willing to send its soldiers, still suffering from 'Afghanistan syndrome,' to that country. Nevertheless, Moscow has played an important role. It allowed France, Germany and Spain to transport military supplies to Afghanistan and, at the Obama-Medvedev summit in July 2009, agreed to permit the transit of American military personnel and cargo. This is of growing importance, since the deteriorating situation in Pakistan makes the transit to Afghanistan even more difficult and the possibility of chaos in Pakistan raises the prospect that its nuclear weapons might come under the control of Islamic extremists.

Moscow might, probably, agree to accept greater responsibility for the economic reconstruction of the northern provinces of Afghanistan. Russia is also willing to contribute to strong measures against narcotics, and might help to arm and train Afghan military and police.

I think that Russia and NATO should make vigorous efforts to save the conventional arms-control regime. It might be done under the auspices of the pan-European security conference. The modernized CFE Treaty should include not only NATO and Russia, but all the European countries that did not participate in the original CFE Treaty of 1991. The new regime could provide for much lower ceilings for weapons and manpower, reflecting the present holdings (which in many cases are 40-50 per cent below the outdated ceilings). The new arms-control arrangements should correspond to the realities of the 21st century instead of the legacies of the Cold War.

The Secretary General of NATO made an interesting proposal to engage Russia in the discussion of NATO's new Strategic Concept, which will be adopted soon, and compared it with the Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, which was adopted in May 2009. This could help to develop a common positive agenda for years to come. This agenda might serve as a founding base for a new indivisible pan-European security system. But this approach could succeed only if NATO allies follow Rasmussen's call to recognize that "Russia has security interests which we need to understand and take into account."

There is, it seems, a window of opportunity for NATO and Russia to rethink their relationship, and work out how to institutionalize it with legally binding agreements and a permanent decision-making mechanism – so that priority would be given not to their diverging, but to their common interests.

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KEYWORDS

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