

N.A.T.O.-Russia Cooperation: Political Problems Versus Military Opportunities

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The relationship between N.A.T.O. and Russia is one of ups and downs. Structural cooperation started in 1997 with the Founding Act providing frequent consultations on a number of security issues. As a result of N.A.T.O.'s air attack on Kosovo in 1999, however, Russia postponed all cooperation with N.A.T.O. In the beginning of the current decade, Russia returned to negotiations with N.A.T.O., which led to the foundation of the N.A.T.O.-Russia Council in 2002. Since 2002, mutual consultations have been intensive and a considerable number of political and military forms of cooperation have been enacted. Now and then, however, differences of opinion still occur.

N.A.T.O.'s Actions Rejected

In the 1990s, N.A.T.O. developed from a collective defense organization into a collective security alliance and has broadened its "area of responsibility" from N.A.T.O. territory proper via Europe into the Euro-Atlantic region, as stated in its Strategic Concept of 1999. Along with conceptual and organizational changes in the 1990s, N.A.T.O. has conducted operations outside of its territory and enlarged its membership. A number of these developments have specifically annoyed Russia:

- N.A.T.O.'s involvement in the former Yugoslavia, with the air attacks on Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 and the air campaign on Kosovo in 1999, in particular. Russia was neither consulted nor informed about these operations prior to their start.
- N.A.T.O.'s 1999 Strategic Concept. With this concept, the alliance ensures stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. The document, however, does not state what the boundaries are of this region. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the Kosovo conflict, N.A.T.O. can act even without consent of the United Nations Security Council (U.N.S.C.). These entries in the Strategic Concept -- from Russia's point of view -- provide the alliance with a carte blanche to use military force wherever considered necessary.
- N.A.T.O.'s 1999 and 2004 enlargement rounds. Russia usually refers to these enlargements as "expansion." Apparently, Russia did not accept the Founding Act of 1997 as a trade-off for the introduction of former Warsaw Pact members into the alliance. Russia was especially disturbed by granting the former Baltic Soviet Republics N.A.T.O. membership, which formally was considered a threat to Russia's national security.
- N.A.T.O.'s air protection above the Baltic States. Since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became members of the alliance in 2004, N.A.T.O. has provided aircraft to protect their airspace from violations, corresponding to military assistance provisions of the N.A.T.O. treaty.
- The deployment of U.S. forces in Bulgaria and Romania as part of the Pentagon plan to shift U.S. military bases eastwards, as was announced at the end of 2005.
- The possibility of N.A.T.O. membership for Ukraine and Georgia. This would again add former Soviet republics to N.A.T.O. Ukraine has a large Russian (oriented) population. More importantly, both states provide vital geostrategic and geoeconomic interests, for instance with regard to the Crimea and oil pipelines in the Southern Caucasus.

Russia was not informed prior to most of these decisions and feels ignored as a major power in Europe and even more as a former superpower. Furthermore, considering its traditional security perceptions -- pointing at encirclement by its enemies and an insatiable desire for security, demanding buffer zones such as the former Warsaw Pact satellites -- Russia has difficulty in understanding and accepting N.A.T.O.'s move eastwards and conducting operations close to Russia's borders. The result of this is two-fold: disappointment and aversion. Facing N.A.T.O., Russia feels a number of disappointments. For instance, Russia has no influence in N.A.T.O.'s decision-making process on the use of military force. Russia does not have access to the North Atlantic Council -- N.A.T.O.'s primary organ -- and therefore has no "veto right" to prevent certain decisions. Participation in decision-making is only offered in so-called "soft security" issues. In addition to this, Russia and N.A.T.O. have different views on the fight against terrorism, for instance pertaining to Russia's actions in Chechnya and the contrasting way both sides consider the Palestinian organization Hamas. Moreover, Russia is still skeptical regarding the intentions of the alliance.

N.A.T.O. Policy as a Threat to Russia's Security

Russian feelings of aversion toward N.A.T.O. are expressed in stances in Russia's primary security documents. The following entries, which clarify what Russia considers to be threats to its national security, are derived from the National Security Concept, Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine -- all approved by President Vladimir Putin in 2000 but still in force -- the so-called Defense White Paper of October 2003 as well as Chief of the General Staff Yuri Baluyevsky's policy article of January 2006:

- N.A.T.O.'s Strategic Concept enabling the use of force out-of-area;
- Political and military guidelines of the alliance which are in contrast with Russian security interests;
- N.A.T.O.'s offensive military doctrine;
- The eastward expansion of the alliance;
- The deployment of foreign troops in new N.A.T.O. member states;
- N.A.T.O.'s planning and political declarations comprising anti-Russian entries;
- The strengthening of military blocs;
- The use of force against befriended states without sanction of the U.N.S.C.;
- The concept of "humanitarian intervention" as grounds for using military force, which violates the U.N. Charter. [See: ["Russia's Military Strategy: Preparing for the Wrong War?"](#)]

Military-Operational Opportunities

The political-strategic obstacles, however, do not prevent a growing amount of activities in military-operational cooperation. Examples of these are the N.A.T.O.-Russia Council's third Theater Missile Defense Command Post Exercise, which will be hosted by Russia in autumn 2006. In addition to this exercise, Russia is sending navy ships to participate in N.A.T.O.'s maritime operation Active Endeavor. This is particularly interesting since the operation is a so-called Article 5 (of the N.A.T.O. treaty) action, making Russia part of a collective defense operation of the alliance, which 15 years ago would have been unimaginable.

Furthermore, leaders from both sides have called for military cooperation in other areas as well. In December 2005, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov proposed cooperation between N.A.T.O. and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (C.S.T.O., a Russian-led military alliance within the C.I.S.), for instance in Afghanistan to fight narcotics together with N.A.T.O.'s I.S.A.F. peacekeeping force. Also, in summer 2005, N.A.T.O. Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and then-U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow suggested operational cooperation between N.A.T.O. forces and Russia's dedicated peacekeeping unit, the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade.

In addition to the current actions and plans for joint operations and exercises, there are more mutually beneficial possibilities of military cooperation that could be advanced. These possibilities include the exchange of operational experiences in irregular warfare (Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan) and operational doctrines (Russia's concept of mobile forces and N.A.T.O.'s concept of the expeditionary use of forces, as well as mutual views on the increasingly intertwined internal and external security). Also, to encourage mutual understanding and subsequently remove feelings of distrust, the exchange of (cadet) officers in training modules and of military academic staff in lecture postings could be established.

Conclusion and Outlook

In the past, Russia and N.A.T.O. have more than once failed to consider the sensitivities of the other side. If Russia and N.A.T.O. would like to improve their relationship, the following steps could be taken. From the Russian side, removing the anti-N.A.T.O. entries from its security documents and refraining from anti-N.A.T.O. statements would certainly encourage improvement of the relationship. However, there are no signs that the current security documents will be reversed and recent statements -- such as Baluyevsky's article -- point out that "Cold War vestiges" have not vanished.

From N.A.T.O.'s side, by ignoring Russia in its Balkan operations, N.A.T.O. should have expected a negative response from Russia. This also applies to the continuing N.A.T.O. operation of providing air protection to the Baltic States. It would have been better to train and equip these states to perform this task themselves, which would have been less offensive towards neighboring Russia. Also, the U.S. deployment of forces near Russia and the possibility of N.A.T.O. bases in new member states are likely to affect mutual relations.

Nevertheless, political-strategic changes are difficult to achieve. Taking into account the longstanding positive experience in arms control between N.A.T.O. and Russia -- resulting from the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty -- it is without doubt that military-operational cooperation can be implemented easier than changing political attitudes. If primacy is given to increased military cooperation, in due course such confidence-building measures may also result in improving political-strategic relations. The contrasting views on the war in Iraq have demonstrated that N.A.T.O.-Russia cooperation is not likely to fade away. The further strengthening of relations does not come automatically, however. The recent N.A.T.O.-Russia Rally, a N.A.T.O. public relations campaign in nine Russian cities from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad --

causing vivid discussions by students inside the meetings and demonstrating communists and retired officers outside -- revealed that both sides still have much work to do in fostering mutual understanding.

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