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# Military Ready to Restore Ties With NATO

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Di Paola

Russia's top general has assured a visiting senior NATO commander that Russia is ready to restore military cooperation with the Western alliance almost two years after relations were frozen during the Georgian war.

The United States hopes that a thaw in ties between Moscow and NATO could lead to greater cooperation in the war against Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.

"We are ready again to seek together responses to modern challenges and threats to international security," General Nikolai Makarov said after talks in Moscow with Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, NATO's military committee chairman.

In comments contrasting with the harsh anti-NATO rhetoric from Moscow over recent years, Makarov said Russia was ready to work on ways to resolve "the problems that have piled up."

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has asked Russia for help in Afghanistan.

Makarov, who is chief of the armed forces General Staff, said Russia was pursuing a possible deal to supply helicopters but gave no further details.

"We are working on the question related to the helicopters as they are needed in Afghanistan. So this set of questions is at the stage of being decided," Makarov said. "The long-term interests of Russia and the alliance coincide in this region."

He said Russia would continue to provide transit routes to NATO members for cargo and personnel to support the U.S.-led contingent in Afghanistan.

NATO sees more scope for cooperation in logistics, such as air-to-air refueling and heavy-lift air transport, and wants progress next year in a program for swapping air traffic data.

Di Paola said that in the next few months, NATO would focus on preparing a program of joint actions with Russia for 2011.

He said major areas of cooperation would include search and rescue operations at sea, fighting terrorism, and Afghanistan.

The bulk of NATO-Russian military cooperation was frozen after Russia sent troops to crush an August 2008 assault by Georgia on its breakaway region of South Ossetia.

Russia remains deeply suspicious of NATO and views the expansion of the alliance to include former Soviet republics as a direct threat to Russian interests.

But given U.S. President Barack Obama's "reset" with Russia, the frost in relations with NATO has partially melted, with both sides making tentative attempts to resume cooperation.

"We need to get back to a similar pace that we were at before, and then go further," a NATO official in Brussels said on condition of anonymity. "Bearing in mind the potential, the level of ambition is pretty high. The train, we are hoping, is gathering speed."

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