

# Medvedev 'To Expand' NATO Transit Deal

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BRUSSELS — President Dmitry Medvedev is expected to allow NATO to take armored vehicles to Afghanistan through Russian territory under an expanded transit deal that would reduce reliance on more risky routes in Pakistan, NATO diplomats said Wednesday.

Alliance leaders and Medvedev are also expected at a NATO summit in Lisbon next week to complete a deal on the supply of Russian helicopters for the Afghan armed forces and to step up training in fighting drug trafficking.

With the mood improving between the former Cold War foes, NATO carried out a joint counternarcotics operation with Russian forces inside Afghanistan last month.

The transit agreement would stop short of opening the Russian route to weapons for the NATO mission in Afghanistan, one envoy said, but it would be the first time NATO armored vehicles were allowed through Russian territory.

"It's still not ammunition or guns but armored vehicles," the diplomat said. "Right now it's

things like food, clothes, fuel. It takes it more to military but not yet to lethal" equipment.

The vehicles would include armored personnel carriers but not tanks, and the deal would potentially allow vehicles needing replacement or repair to be brought back through Russia, the diplomat said.

NATO has been keen to expand its existing deal for transit of supplies via Russia — which itself fought a 10-year war in Afghanistan before withdrawing in 1989 — to reduce its reliance on routes through Pakistan, which have come under frequent militant attack.

NATO spokesman James Appathurai said details were still being discussed but significant progress was expected at the Lisbon summit on Nov. 19 and 20.

This would reflect better relations with Moscow, which have gradually recovered since the war in Georgia in 2008.

Appathurai said the helicopter deal would involve about 20 Russian aircraft and the training of Afghan pilots, but financial details still had to be finalized. "Some will be brought commercially, some will be donated. There will be a financing arrangement of one type or another and probably a trust fund for training pilots and for spare parts," he said.

The two sides are also expected to finalize a review of security threats and lay out areas for cooperation. NATO will also repeat an offer for Russia to join a system of territorial missile defense that it expects its members to agree to in Lisbon.

Appathurai said the review would reflect the improved mood by not referring to NATO and Russia as threats to each other. "We would codify that as well as laying out a list of where we can cooperate," he said.

While no definitive agreement is expected in Lisbon on Russia joining the missile defense system, Moscow promised this month during a visit by NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to consider this, as well as to boost cooperation in Afghanistan.

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