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5 Ways to Bring NATO and Russia Together

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On Friday in Lisbon, NATO will adopt a new strategic concept identifying its purpose and priorities for the decade ahead. The credibility of this exercise will be significantly boosted if a day later NATO and Russia can agree on a bilateral strategic concept of their own, paving the way for a genuine transformation of NATO-Russia relations, free of empty declarations and rhetorical overtures.

Such a NATO-Russia concept should foster a mutual commitment to eliminating false perceptions of threats that Russia and NATO pose to each other. At the same time, it should develop effective practical tools for cooperation in addressing common threats and challenges wherever these could emerge in the future. In essence, Lisbon should propel NATO-Russia relations on a steady, predictable and sustainable trajectory of integration between these three actors within a common Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

Such a community, first envisaged by the forefathers of post-Cold War Europe and recently

reaffirmed by President Dmitry Medvedev in his vision of a new Euro-Atlantic security architecture, has failed to take root two decades after the fall of the Berlin wall. Yet, a strategic landscape shaped by post-financial crisis austerity measures, declining defense capabilities and dwindling public support for future expeditionary operations all reinforce the need for a reworked security community.

At present, NATO and Russia seem more like reluctant neighbors than committed partners. Practical cooperation between them remains limited even by the standards of the 1990s, when they conducted joint operations in Balkans. Their level of inter-operability and trust remains low.

To address these challenges a NATO-Russia strategic concept should include five elements:

1. Adopt multilevel confidence-building measures that focus on reviving important transparency elements of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. This should include devising special multilateral confidence-building measures, normalizing Russia's relations with all of its neighbors based on the examples of the Russian-Polish and Russian-Norwegian normalization. Both NATO and Russia should stop conducting major military exercises along their borders. NATO should seek to provide credible security reassurances for Central and Eastern European NATO members, not through Cold War-era type contingency planning against a nonexistent Russian threat, but through confidence-building measures with Russia.

2. Initiate practical cooperation on one of the key strategic issues of the day — missile defense Russia should participate fully at all levels of cooperation between the United States and its European allies. Moreover, Russia and the United States should go further in devising elements of a global system outside Europe. Joint-threat assessments should be complemented by information sharing and technological cooperation.

3. Expand cooperation on developing a regional security system for Afghanistan and its neighbors. Russia and NATO share common concerns over developments in Afghanistan, particularly within the context of current efforts to bring about a strategy of political reconciliation among different Afghan groups and preparations for a viable exit strategy for the NATO-led coalition forces. Russia is already contributing to NATO operations by providing land routes in the north through which almost 50 percent of all nonlethal goods are currently supplied to coalition forces. NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization should establish cooperation by developing a viable counter-narcotics strategy for the region. Moreover, Russia should participate in discussions centered on a sustainable regional approach to Afghanistan once coalition forces leave the country. Moscow should also continue its role in training and supplying the Afghan army and police.

4. Upgrade the level of inter-operability between NATO and Russia. This can be done through expanding military-to-military programs, including regular consultations and joint exercises. Russia's comprehensive transformation of its armed forces offers an opportunity to enhance inter-operability with Western militaries. U.S. and European forces have provided a model for many aspects of Russia's military reforms — from establishing a professional noncommissioned officer core to help the transition to a more devolved command structure. Russia and NATO should also increase joint educational programs. With a two-year pause in Russian military educational enrollment, the moment is ripe for educational and language

exchange programs for Russian instructors at leading Western military institutions. This would allow for a new generation of Russian and NATO officers to better understand one another. Finally, NATO should rethink its reservations about military-technological cooperation with Russia, initiate much greater cooperation on joint systems and welcome Russia's procurement of Western technology and platforms for its domestic modernization needs. As it stands today, roughly 30 percent of the modern weapon components procured by Russia's armed forces are supplied by foreign manufacturers.

5. Reform the NATO-Russia Council to transform it into a truly integrated body in which all members are comfortable to participate in their national, not bloc-based, capacity and which is both mandated and able to make joint decisions on issues of mutual concern. First, the NATO-Russia Council should be renamed to bring it more into line with the intended format at 29, rather than 28+1. Moreover, if NATO members agree to transfer several areas of its policymaking functions, such as anti-piracy or humanitarian operation, this will help turn the NATO-Russia Council into a mechanism for addressing real issues instead of simply a tool for managing NATO's relations with Russia.

Lisbon presents a unique opportunity for achieving a qualitative improvement in NATO-Russia relations. The two today share more common threats and challenges than ever before, and both sides see their resources and capabilities reduced. At the same time, the "reset" in U.S.-

Russian relations and the improvement of

Russian-Polish relations present a new, positive atmosphere in which practical cooperation can be taken to a higher level.

The question of eventual Russian membership of NATO will continue to loom. Strong practical and political arguments have been marshaled in support and in opposition to the proposition. Viewed against present realities, the question may seem to retain a long-range, almost abstract character. But real penalties of a political and diplomatic kind would be incurred in closing off the debate. Pragmatic cooperation that has intrinsic value in its own right would at least ensure that the debate could more plausibly be carried forward in a cooperative context.

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