

5 Reasons Why Russia Could Join NATO

By [Alexander Kramarenko](#)

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Regarding the Nov. 19 Moscow Times comment “[5 Reasons Why Russia Will Never Join NATO](#)” by Michael Bohm, I would like to object to each of the author’s five reasons with the following arguments:

1. Russia does have civilian and democratic control over its armed forces, which one could easily confirm by following debates in the country’s media. Some even believe that this control cannot be more civilian than is already the case. Moreover, in Russia’s history, including during the Soviet period, the country always had a longstanding tradition in that regard. Control by nongovernmental organizations may not be ideal, but here, too, steady progress has been made.

Ultimately, all judgments are relative. Civilian control is not an end in itself. As we can see from the recently leaked documents on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, outrageous things do happen. Bob Woodward’s latest book, “Obama Wars,” shows how the U.S. military prevailed over the administration of President Barack Obama in shaping the country’s strategy for the war in Afghanistan.

To the best of my knowledge, there is ample openness in Russia's military affairs. Take, for example, the latest military doctrine, published in February. I can understand the author's dissatisfaction with the state of the Russian society. It is shared by Russia's political class and public at large. But one must bear in mind the scale and the depth of the upheavals Russia has been through over the past two decades, as well as the fact that today's Russia has been shaped, *inter alia*, by external factors, including adversarial policies toward Russia from the administration of former President George W. Bush. Thankfully, U.S.-Russian relations considerably improved after Obama was elected president, which explains why Russia's future membership in NATO has become part of the political discussion.

2. There is a widespread habit among certain Western elites — and among the public at large — to think that the West knows what is better for Russia than Russia itself. When the author stated that “Russia needs NATO as an ‘enemy,’” he referred to opinions voiced by some marginal politicians and journalists. As far as I know, Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's envoy to NATO, is a staunch champion of a strengthened Russian-NATO relationship. What he wrote on Twitter in March regarding NATO military planning against Russia is true. Perhaps NATO is more responsible than Russia for lack of transparency in military affairs.

As far as Russia's military doctrine is concerned, it doesn't say NATO *per se* is a danger, but rather the alliance's eastward expansion closer to Russia's borders, as well as its activity beyond the Euro-

Atlantic space and when it acts outside of the existing framework of international law. In this context, it should be noted that Russia's joint projects in Afghanistan have been flourishing over the past 2 1/2 years, ever since Russia signed the Afghanistan transit agreement in April 2008 in Bucharest at the Russia-NATO Council summit.

3. As for China, Russia's membership in NATO wouldn't be a threat to China, since there would be a tripolar security cooperation structure among United States, the European Union and Russia. Its nature will thus radically change. It would be difficult to imagine a NATO, which operates on the basis of consensus, engaging in some hostile military action against Russia. The events of August 2008 provide ample evidence of that.

Thus, there will be nothing inherently anti-Chinese if Russia joins NATO, just as there is nothing inherently anti-Russian in France's return to the alliance's military organization, nor is there anything anti-Western in the Chinese-Russian union within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SCO.

4. The Collective Security Treaty Organization, or CSTO, is not a mirror image of NATO. If Russia were to become a member of NATO, the alliance would be transformed into something new. This would be very much in line with current trends in international affairs, including former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski's concept of a global security web.

5. Russia's global ambitions are reasonable. Russia is content to be one of the leading nations of the world, which is precisely where it is today. It is a leading member of the Group of 20, the G8, BRIC and SCO. Russia believes that the end of the Cold War effectively abolished the status of superpower.

I disagree with the author's statement that Russia's membership in NATO is “wishful

thinking.” Of course, Russia will never knock at the alliance’s door, but if NATO invites Russia to join, it will be difficult to decline.

My impression is that this reality is well understood by Russia’s partners, but some are truly frightened by the prospect of Russia’s potential membership in NATO. That is why the debate is being distorted and presented in the wrong way. To cover up the psychological inability of NATO to make a membership offer to Russia, the alliance shifts the burden of proof on to Russia. The real problem seems to be unwillingness to cooperate with Russia on the basis of equality and mutual interest.

Over the past 300 years, Russia constructively partnered with the West for the good of Europe and the world. At times, when freedom of Europe and the very existence of European civilization were at stake, Russia made decisive contributions to a common cause. It played by the rules even during the Cold War. Now is the time to face collectively global threats and challenges common to us all. We must strive for a broader solidarity that goes beyond NATO or the CSTO. Russia’s idea of a European security treaty is aimed at clearing the way for practical cooperation on that basis.

Some people cast the debate about Russia in NATO in existential terms, which makes the issue intractable. Such an approach has already damaged Russia in terms of a dysfunctional Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Russia is and will continue to be different. I remember reading in a London newspaper an article in which the author expressed her indignation at Anton Chekhov’s story “Kashtanka.” In the story, a dog prefers a struggling existence with her former masters to a comfortable life of a circus artist. But those same qualities, including the strength of emotional attachment and self-sacrifice, accounted for Russia’s ability to contribute to European history at critical junctures.

Nineteenth-century poet Fyodor Tyutchev foresaw that the West would have to abandon its geopolitical solitude when he said “By the very fact of her existence, Russia denies the West’s future.” Now that the old international order is falling apart, it appears to be the time for NATO to integrate with Russia. That, along with visa-free travel, would allow NATO and Russia to continue shaping each other in positive ways.

Convergence, synthesis and fusion reflect the current trends in global affairs. Russia’s offer in Lisbon on European missile defense offers an excellent opportunity for synergy. It also provides a pragmatic conduit that can transform Russia’s strategic relationship with the West. The alternative — a return to the absurdity of arms control in Europe and probably another arms race — is bleak.

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