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Russian Foreign Ministry Appeals for NATO Reset

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NATO defense ministers at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, Belgium. **Geert Vanden Wijngaert / AP**

The Russian Foreign Ministry has unexpectedly spoken out in favor of a reset with NATO.

A representative of the Ministry said it denied seeing the NATO alliance as an anachronism, and expressed a desire to restore relations with the military bloc.

"We need to build normal relations with NATO and renew what we had before," Andrei Kelin, the Foreign Ministry's head of the Department of European Cooperation, told Interfax.

Many countries are NATO members because it is economically and politically profitable, allowing them to save money that would otherwise be spent on maintaining a full army, Kelin said. Such logic is particularly important for smaller countries, he added.

As a result, "it is impossible to convince member states that they should leave NATO," Kelin concluded, because their membership is based upon "purely rational reasons."

Kelin's comments come as surprising backtracking of an otherwise confrontational official position on the Western military alliance. Moscow has regularly called out NATO for taking supposedly aggressive actions toward Russia.

In November, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu even accused NATO of undermining regional strategic stability by deploying troops to Eastern Europe.

"On the western border of [Russia and Belarus], the U.S. and other NATO members are actively building up their offensive potential, opening new bases and developing their infrastructure," Shoigu said at the time.

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NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia in 2014 after Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine.

Russia and the alliance reopened the lines of communication in April 2016, holding an official meeting of the NATO-Russia council. However, Russian officials spoke negatively of the results of the meeting, with Kremlin Spokesman Dmitri Peskov complaining of a "total lack of trust" between the two sides.

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