

Britain Floated NATO Membership for Russia, Archives Reveal

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First Russian President Boris Yeltsin

Britain considered granting Russia partial membership in NATO 25 years ago, according to declassified National Archives documents cited by British media Tuesday.

NATO, a U.S.-led Western military alliance created to provide collective security against the Soviet Union, [suspended](#) relations with Russia in response to Moscow's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. Russia [views](#) NATO's expansion eastward into its old Soviet sphere of influence as a key national security risk.

Britain's then-Defense Secretary Malcolm Rifkind sought to allay Kremlin suspicions over NATO's enlargement by proposing a limited membership position for Russia in early 1995, according to the documents. His idea was rejected as a non-starter.

"A possible solution would be to create a new category of Associate Member of NATO," The Guardian quoted Rifkind as [saying](#). "It would... give Russia a formal status within NATO."

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That status did not envision collective security guarantees, Russian vetoes or membership in NATO's military staff, it added.

Moscow's formal membership would, Rifkind said, "encourage a gradual convergence and harmonization of policy, doctrine and practice."

Then-Chancellor Ken Clarke resisted the idea in January 1995, the BBC [reported](#).

"At the extreme, some were even contemplating including Russia in NATO. That was farcical and should not be on our agenda," the BBC quoted a minute from that meeting as saying.

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The dismissed proposal "led to the NATO-Russia Council," a forum that allows the diplomats to air the grievances, The Guardian quoted Rifkind as saying 25 years later.

"This promoted understanding, discussion and consultation [between NATO and Russia]. Russia used to attend some NATO meetings," Rifkind was quoted as saying.

"Sadly, this came to an end after Putin annexed Crimea," he said.

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