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RUSSIA AND NATO EXPANSION

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For the last four years the question of NATO enlargement has figured prominently in relations between Russia and the West. There has been hyperbole on both sides, with Western officials claiming that eastward enlargement is more historic than German unification and Yeltsin comparing tensions over NATO with the those of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

At the same time, it is true that the development of NATO has become the key issue for post-Cold War European security. As far as Moscow is concerned, the NATO question bears on all dimensions of its security: relations with the Western 'far abroad', the US and Western Europe; relations with the 'middle abroad' of Central and Eastern Europe; ties with the 'near abroad' of the Baltic and the Commonwealth of Independent States; and, indirectly, 'inner abroad' relations between Moscow and the outlying areas of the Russian Federation, especially in the North Caucasus. It is partly because the NATO issue touches on so many areas that it has been so controversial and central in domestic political debate.

The centrality of the NATO question for Russia is both curious and unfortunate. It is curious insofar as the end of the Cold War should have brought a diminution in the importance of the military content of international relations. Economic factors should and in many ways do shape those relations more now than at any time this century. The continuing salience of military relations is unfortunate because they tend to take on the nature of a zero-sum game. An increase in security for one side is often seen by others as a threat. While far from uncontentious, economic relations are more easily seen in positive-sum terms, as bringing advantages to all sides.

Responsibility for the continued importance of military and security issues in relations between Russia and the West lies with both sides. The story is one of excessive expectations and minimal response. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Moscow expected, rather unrealistically, to be given economic aid on a scale appropriate to a defeated enemy while being treated politically as a new ally. In the event, the West responded to the end of the Cold War with a policy of prudent minimalism.

Economic help has been modest and poorly presented. The G7 made promises of substantial aid (totals of \$40 billion were mentioned, ie equivalent to one year of Marshall aid) but relatively little has been delivered. Of the \$79 billion allocated to Russia in 1991-96 only a very small proportion was aid, the rest consisted of credits and loans. Russian appreciation for the aid that has been forthcoming has been more than tinged with suspicion that the West is out to capitalise on and exploit its former opponent's economic vulnerability.

Such suspicion has been reinforced by the prudent minimalism of the West on the political and security front. Here the West might have taken radical steps, it was not constrained, as in the area of economic aid, by scarce resources. Yet the overall approach has been one of incremental adjustment rather than the kind of radical re-thinking one might have expected to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the collapse of communism. Some of the rhetoric sounded radical, with talk of a new strategic partnership with Russia. The reality has been one of cautious adaptation of existing Western institutions and the rather grudging extension of invitations to Russia become associated with them. (The G7 is evolving into something like G7.5; membership of the WTO is still to come.)

As far as NATO is concerned, there has never really been any question of Russia being considered a potential member, the most she qualifies for is the semi-detached relationship embodied in the Fundamental Act/accord of May 1997. At the same time, three of the Central European states, Moscow's erstwhile dependencies, are on track for membership in 1999. For Russia the eastward enlargement of NATO drives home its exclusion from the European security space.

### **The Evolution of Russian Attitudes Towards NATO Enlargement**

The story of Moscow's policy towards NATO is one that reflects a changing understanding of Western intentions as well as the general evolution of Russian policy towards the 'far abroad' through four stages.

***Role of the NATO Factor in Shaping this Evolution***

1. For most of its first year (1992) the new Russia followed a foreign policy that may be described as one of passive Westernism, acquiescing to all major moves from Washington in the hope of earning both aid and alliance. In December 1991 Yeltsin even talked about Russian membership of NATO as a long-term possibility. When the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was established at the end of 1991, it was seen by Moscow as a possible path to Russian membership of NATO and as a channel for help with 'peace-keeping' in the 'near abroad'. Most importantly, Moscow saw NACC as a device to keep East European claims for NATO membership at bay.

2. The last months of 1992 and the first of 1993 saw Russian policy become tentatively assertive. Yeltsin and others started to criticise US policy and accuse Washington of trying to dictate in the Middle East and in south east Europe. This new critical tone applied particularly to NATO. It became clear that NACC was not a diversion from the enlargement of NATO but a staging post on the road to expansion. Moscow showed irritation at what it saw as American and NATO high-handedness in Bosnia, an area of traditional Russian interests. Repeated protests against more forceful NATO actions, especially airstrikes, were only in part motivated by real concern about the effectiveness of these moves. The main reason for Russian objections was resentment at not being consulted about moves in Bosnia. Moscow felt that this lack of consultation was symptomatic of American dominance in the whole region. Russian calls for the UN to play a far more active role were part of an effort to bring the US under collective control. Even the later cooperation of Russia in the seven-member Contact Group, failed fully to meet Moscow's objections about being a very junior partner in the whole Bosnian operation, a feeling made more acute by American management of the Dayton agreement.

3. Differences between Russian and NATO over action in Bosnia developed within the context of a growing general assertiveness in Russian foreign policy from mid-1993 to the end of 1995. In contrast to the universalist language it had used since the late 1980s, Moscow began stressing the primacy of Russian interests. As far as NATO was concerned this meant opposition to eastward enlargement.

Looking for ways to prevent this enlargement, Moscow initially welcomed the plan to establish Partnership for Peace (PfP),

launched at the beginning of 1994. This was even claimed as a Russian idea, something quickly denied by its American authors. Russian early enthusiasm for PfP was based on the assumption that the scheme was really a way of responding to pressure from the East European states without really bringing them any closer to becoming members. Moscow knew that many NATO allies opposed enlargement and that the US had doubts on this score. Only gradually did it emerge that Washington at least was using PfP less as a diversion than as a pathway to membership for the East Europeans. Russian attitudes became more critical, as tensions over Bosnia grew, and the Foreign Minister Kozyrev had to postpone signing the Partnership agreement until June 1994. By the end of the year the climate of relations with the West had deteriorated and at the Budapest CSCE conference Yeltsin warned of the dangers of Cold Peace. Russian objections to the very idea of NATO expansion become ever more vociferous as the December parliamentary elections approached. The victory of the communist party and the Left in these elections catalysed a change in Foreign Ministers. Andrei Kozyrev, long attacked by domestic critics for being too Western-oriented, was replaced in January 1996 by the experienced and realist-minded Yevgeny Primakov.

4. Primakov's period at the Foreign Ministry has seen Moscow developing a more confident policy of competitive collaboration with the West. Primakov has followed a *realpolitik* of diversifying relations in the Middle East and Asia while keeping basically on good terms with the US. This realist and pragmatic approach became marked in Russia's policy towards NATO from the June 1996 Berlin meeting of NACC. At Berlin, Primakov distinguished clearly between the unacceptable military face of NATO expansion and its less objectionable political enlargement. He set the scene for negotiations with NATO which tried, largely uncessfully, to take advantage of the differences among the allies to get a better deal for Russia in the shape of a Charter or treaty. A deal finally emerged in the form of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, signed in Paris in May 1997, shortly before the July Madrid summit at which the decision was announced to admit the Czech republic, Hungary and Poland by 1999. After six rounds of hard bargaining about the Founding Act, Primakov and other diplomats reportedly felt that terms could be improved by prolonging negotiations. In the event, Yeltsin seems to have taken the advice of reformers such as Anatoly Chubais who were more concerned with getting an agreement signed at Paris so as to increase the chances of

Clinton delivering on his promised support for Russian entry into the WTO and other international economic organisations.

### **The Domestic Dimension**

Before the Paris meeting, as at most critical points over the last four years, the course of Russian policy towards NATO has been affected by the domestic political context. Some Russian officials have tended to take shelter behind domestic difficulties; Kozirev used to try and attribute many political setbacks in Moscow to problems with the opposition. In fact, the noise of domestic protest against NATO enlargement been greater than the policy signal. The overall contours of Russian policy on the NATO issue reflect of the Kremlin's increasingly *realpolitik* responses to US actions and attitudes. However, many of the specific features of the Russian foreign policy landscape make sense only if also viewed through the prism of domestic politics.

Sensitivity to NATO was first expressed by the nationalist opposition, both communist and non-communist. Its leaders have sounded the loudest alarms, pointing to US plans to use NATO enlargement to put pressure on a weakened Russia. Among the responses for which the opposition have called are alliances with traditional allies, such as Iraq, and the re-targetting of nuclear weapons. Such responses have had little impact on the Kremlin. Far more influential have been the critical points voiced by centrist 'state realists'. It was the centrists who put an effective case against Partnership for Peace in the Duma in early 1994 and warned the government against rushing in to the scheme. Yeltsin delayed signature of the NATO-Russia agreement partly because of the critical points made in the Duma debates. But his main reason for postponement was the political advantage he hoped to gain from making this concession to nationalist and centrist opinion. At the time (early 1994) Yeltsin was anxious to persuade as many political groups as possible to sign up to a kind of political ceasefire, represented by the so-called Civic Accord. Tactical domestic considerations made it expedient to take a more cautious line on PfP than might otherwise have been the case.

The need to appeal to patriotic sentiment in the build up to the elections of December 1995 helps to explain the sharp tone of official protests against NATO expansion in those months. However, NATO did not figure as an important issue either in

those elections or in those for the presidency in June-July 1996. Opinion polls suggested that the public were not particularly concerned with the whole question of NATO. A majority of respondents in one survey in seeing 1996 were indifferent to or uncertain about the whole issue of enlargement. (To be sure those actually disapproving of membership of NATO for Eastern Europeans outnumbered those positive about enlargement.) Of those who took a view on the issue, twice as many thought that Moscow should respond by developing a positive relationship with NATO as favoured a hostile response.

If the Russian public have been generally indifferent or conciliatory about NATO enlargement, the political elite have shown considerable sensitivity. In one early 1996 survey a third of respondents thought that eastward expansion would damage Russian security. A similar proportion favoured quite sharp responses, such as accelerated modernisation of nuclear weapons in the event of any expansion.

### **Russian Concerns about Enlargement**

Elite concerns about NATO enlargement are worth examining because they broadly coincide with official views and continue to inform Moscow's policy. These concerns can be grouped under two headings: military vulnerability and marginalisation.

1. *Military vulnerability.* Nobody in the Kremlin and very few even in the military seriously think that the West wants to coerce Russia in any direct way. Some military leaders are concerned about eastward expansion bringing more troops and nuclear weapons closer to Russian borders, making tactical weapons into strategic ones. Many more worry about the unfavourable asymmetries enlargement will create. According to Russian calculations eastward expansion coupled with planned Russian military cuts will result in a NATO preponderance in conventional forces of three to one. The flexibility shown by the West on the CFE provides some assurance in this area. The assurances in the Founding Act on the deployment of weapons on the territory of new member states fall short of the guarantees which the Russians wanted. While NATO pledges not to deploy 'substantial' combat forces on a permanent basis, it retains the right to do so temporarily. The provisions on military infrastructure are also too loose for Moscow's liking. The Act notes the right of all member states to upgrade their military



installations and NATO's need to ensure integration and interoperability. The recent announcement of plans to locate the headquarters for Danish and German northern forces in Szczecin does little to reassure Moscow about the operational implications of enlargement.

Sensitivity to any adverse shifts in the balance of forces must be seen against the background of the humiliating experience of the Chechen war and budgetary crisis. The army claims that its budgetary allocations remain wholly inadequate to maintain minimal military security let alone undertake the military reform the politicians want. Differences between the Kremlin and Minister of Defence Rodionov led to his dismissal earlier this year by the more compliant Igor Sergeev. But personnel reshuffles are unlikely to stop complaints or change military wariness of an enlarged NATO.

2. *Marginalisation.* The feeling that enlargement pushes Russia further to the periphery of the European security space is part and parcel of a widespread image of NATO as 'genetically' anti-Russian. For most of the elite NATO continues to be a defensive alliance, embodying Cold War divisions. They do not believe claims that NATO can transform itself into the basis of collective security for a new and wider Europe, one including Russia.

As far as Moscow is concerned, the inclusion of Central and East European states is likely to obstruct rather than further any transformation from defence alliance into collective security institution. Central and East European aspirants value NATO first and foremost as a provider of security against turmoil and threat from the east. This is perfectly understandable given their geostrategic position and their historical treatment by Russia. What now most concerns Moscow is not the inclusion of the first echelon of Central European members in 1999. It is the prospect of membership being extended to a second group of south-east European states, including Romania and Bulgaria. The latter has traditionally been regarded as a natural ally of Russia, as part of its sphere of influence. In what was later unconvincingly explained as a slip of the tongue, Yeltsin last year invited Bulgaria to consider joining Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan quadripartite agreement. More recently, light was shed on Russian security views of south-east Europe by the Secretary of the Defence Council's statement that Moscow envisaged the need for a military base in the Balkans. As the states of south-east Europe press for membership of NATO and



the EU, Moscow is aware that it has no means of slowing the process. The Founding Act makes clear that there is no Russian say on membership questions or indeed on any matters of 'internal' concern to NATO.

What especially worries Moscow about future NATO expansion are its reach into the Russian 'near abroad'. Two areas here are of particular concern: Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Coming within the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine is part of what Moscow has defined officially as 'a zone of Russian interests'. Since the establishment of the CIS, Ukraine has been the greatest single obstacle to the creation of any effective defence network. The signing of the Russian-Ukrainian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership in May marked the end of over five years of conflict over a range of security issues. However, President Kuchma declared in August that Kiev does not feel bound by the 1992 CIS security agreement and will maintain its position of non-alignment. This means developing the kind of loose association NATO laid down in the special accord with Brussels without seeking to pursue any goal of full membership. In present circumstances, neither Kiev nor Brussels would wish to consider the membership option. For the time being, Moscow remains somewhat anxious about any signs of Kiev's military involvement with NATO – reactions to the recent PfP exercises in the Black Sea and Crimea testified to Russian sensitivity.

There is greater sensitivity on the question of NATO involvement with the Baltic states. While formally outside the CIS, the Baltics are generally regarded as falling within the Russian security area. Moscow considers itself entitled to a *droit de regard* over these states' security alignments and has made it clear on many occasions that it regards their membership in NATO as unacceptable. This position is explained in terms of the Baltics' geostrategic location (adjacent to sensitive areas such as Kaliningrad) and the complexities flowing from the presence in Estonia and Latvia of large Russian minorities. Even quite reasonable groups in Moscow think that NATO could turn the whole Baltic area into 'a hotbed of conflict'. Opposition to the Baltic states becoming members of NATO is shared by a very broad spectrum of political opinion in Moscow.

Beyond the specific concerns about the implications of NATO embracing regions which the Russians regard as vital to their security and to some extent as falling under their *droit de regard*,

there is a more general worry about marginalisation. Russia has historically felt itself to be only partly European. The age-old debate continues about the European and Eurasian identity of the Russians. The way in which NATO has dealt with Russia has heightened feelings of being excluded from Europe. The psychological dimension of the process is as important as the military one.

### **Ways Forward**

NATO enlargement has been a confidence-destroying measure as far as relations with Russia are concerned. We now need to give content to the framework of relations set out in the Founding Act and use it to build confidence on both sides about the benefits of security cooperation in Europe.

Three kinds of confidence-building measures are particularly important.

1. **Military assurance.** The flexibility shown by the West on Russian conformity with CFE provisions should be continued as revisions to the treaty are negotiated. It is clearly sensible to adjust flank quotas to take into account the fundamental changes in the security landscape since the original treaty was signed. Russian concerns about the imprecision of assurance in the Founding Act relating to the deployment of nuclear weapons, conventional forces and infrastructure could be reduced by Western self-restraint in these areas.

A good deal of consultation with Russia should precede all military exercises close to its borders. Such consultation might have avoided the kind of adverse comment from Moscow which has greeted recent exercises in the Black Sea and in the Baltic. In the longer-term, the exchanges of liaison officers envisaged in the Founding Act should be promoted to dispel the mistrust that is currently widespread on the Russian side. So far the Russian military have been very reluctant to take an active part in the PfP. There is considerable scope for reducing such wariness by increasing transparency about capabilities, doctrine and planning. There may also be some room for indirect economic support for the improvement of housing and social welfare.

2. **Assurance about expansion and partnership.** Even though the Founding Act rules out any Russian co-decision making on issues of membership, measures can be taken to minimise

conflict on these issues. There should be extensive consultation about the admission of states in south-eastern Europe. At present, this looks like a very distant prospect, and many doubt whether there will ever be a second group of new members. But the admission of the first three may well generate growing pressure not to rule out a further set of entrants.

Particular sensitivity is required in handling the delicate question of the Baltic states. So far, these states have been placed in a very difficult position by NATO expansion taking centre stage in the development of a wider European security system. Most in need of security against Russia, they look least likely to acquire it through membership of NATO. The US displays continuous public ambivalence on this issue which makes Baltic governments anxious without really reassuring Russia. The best way forward lies in Lithuania and Latvia joining Estonia on track for EU membership. Accelerated EU entry would bring the Baltic states the kind of core European club membership that would relieve their security anxiety. At the same time, EU membership would be unobjectionable from the Russian standpoint. Moscow has long made clear that it would welcome the Baltics joining economic and political Europe.

3. Partnership in European security. Russian grievances about being a junior partner in a Europe dominated by the West may be eroded gradually by establishing habits of consultation through the NATO–Russia Joint Council established by the Founding Act. Whether it holds arid formal meetings or contributes to building a real sense of partnership depends of course on the general course of relations, mainly between the Washington and Moscow. Use should be made of the Council to discuss the whole range of 'common interests' rather than restrict consultation to the technical aspects of peace-keeping operations.

It is arguable that the Council and NATO itself are not sufficient as a basis on which to involve Russia as a full and effective partner in European security. There is a good case for bolstering the institutional strength of OSCE which, in contrast to NATO, is designed to deal with the kind of security problems, involving internal conflicts, often linked to minority rights, which are likely to require an international response.

No institutional measures will work unless the basic relationship between Russia and the West provides increasing incentives for both sides to cooperate. As far as Russia is concerned, being treated as an equal partner, whether by NATO or directly by

Washington or Bonn remains vital. Material incentives can usefully complement and support political ones. It is important that the West (including Japan) makes good on its pledges to help Russia integrate into international economic organisations, including the WTO. Such integration and the promotion by governments, wherever possible, of trade and investment, will help encourage the reform groups to continue to give priority to the economic dimension of security.