

# **NATO and Russia: A View from Moscow**

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In his first speech in September 2009 the new Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen said: "I believe that of all of NATO's relationships with Partner countries, none holds greater potential than the NATO-Russia relationship. Yet I also believe that none is so much burdened by misperceptions, mistrust and diverging political agendas... The historical baggage of the relationships between NATO and Russia and between the West and Russia cannot simply be ignored. And not all our disagreements are simply based on misunderstandings. Some of them are of a fundamental nature and, hence, will not disappear quickly".

## **The Sources of the Rivalry**

The North Atlantic alliance was established at the beginning of the Cold War - the global geopolitical Soviet-American confrontation, which continued for almost half a century. That was a clash between two competing world visions, promoted by two "camps", headed by the superpowers. So NATO was born as an alliance of the like-minded nations, which shared the Western democratic and market values, opposed to Communist ideas. Thus the alliance united politically North American and Western European countries to contain Communism and the Soviet Union. This ideological mission was a distinguishing feature of the North Atlantic alliance.

But at the same time the North Atlantic alliance was a unique joint military organization, bringing national military contingents under the Supreme Command. Never before there had been a permanent multinational military organization in peace time. The United States provided the backbone of the combined military forces, which were then facing the powerful Soviet Army in Central Europe. American nuclear umbrella for much weaker European allies was one of the reasons why from the very beginning NATO was dominated by Washington.

It's alleged that Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO, once said that the purpose of the North Atlantic alliance was "to keep Americans in, Russians out and Germans under". It seems that this mission has not been fundamentally changed for the last 60 years.

The North Atlantic alliance under American leadership was not focused on the economic integration of the West. But under NATO's protection the Western European launched the process, which later brought to life the European Union – the key economic partner and competitor of the United States. Nevertheless the North Atlantic alliance succeeded in preventing re-nationalization of foreign and defense policies of the Western allies.

While NATO became the mechanism to forge the political cohesion of the Western community, the military dimension has been dominant in the North Atlantic alliance. The armed forces of the allies trained together, tried to standardize their

weapons, and developed interoperability to fight 'the Soviet threat'. Federal Republic of Germany, despite the memories of the two World Wars, was permitted to create an impressive army, which was integrated into the joint military organization. The American predominance in NATO pushed France, which wanted greater political autonomy, to leave the joint military organization, while remaining a member of the North Atlantic alliance. But nobody else followed Paris, despite the fact that some other Western European countries were not always happy with heavy-handedness of the United States.

Europe was the main battlefield of the Cold War.

After the defeat of the Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union had the unrivaled military power on the European continent and Moscow had many ideological followers in European countries. Apparently Stalin did not think that the United States would stay in Europe after the end of the Cold War. He was willing to agree on spheres of influence, trying to make the deal (first with Churchill in Moscow in October 1944, then at Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945). I think his prime goal was to establish a huge security zone in Eastern Europe, including Poland, through which Russia was regularly invaded from the West. Apparently he thought it was a reasonable claim, reflecting the traditional way of pocketing the geopolitical spoils of the military victory.

In Russian historical memory there were five major invasions when "the West" sent its military to "destroy" Russia. It was the Polish occupation of the Kremlin in early XVIIth century, the Swedish attack in early XVIIIth century, the Napoleon invasion of 1812, and two wars with Germany in the first half of the XXth century. In each case the very existence of the Russian state was threatened. So suspicion and fear of the West developed in Russian mentality even before the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

I think Joseph's Stalin's insistence on giving a huge slice of eastern Germany to Poland and annexation of Kongsberg was based on security considerations, his desire to build "forward defenses" for Russia in Eastern Europe. He probably expected that Poland would be forever tied to the Soviet Union in order to keep her new "Western territories". Otherwise the Soviet zone of occupation (what later became the German Democratic Republic, the most faithful Soviet ally) would have been almost three times bigger.

Only by 1947 Stalin recognized the United States refused to accept his claims, and decided to impose the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, unilaterally establishing the "security belt" near the Western boundaries of the USSR. Later on he decided to show force, starting the Berlin blockade. These actions contributed to the creation of the North Atlantic alliance.

NATO was immediately perceived by the Soviet leaders as the enemy, "aggressive tool of American imperialism". Moscow took seriously the declarations about "roll back of Communism". The situation of nuclear monopoly of the United States allowed the Pentagon to prepare for a preventive nuclear attack on the USSR. So the Soviet planners relied on its huge conventional forces, which did not have a match in Central Europe. That was recognized by the Joint Chiefs of Staffs, who admitted that they can not stop a Soviet invasion of Western Europe.

The joint military organization of the North Atlantic alliance was supposed to balance the Soviet conventional superiority. The US could not permanently

maintain in Europe an equal force, and the war in Korea demanded to send the American army there. NATO was intended to combine forces of the Western European allies, but without Western Germany there was not enough manpower. So after the plan of creation of European army, which could integrate West German force, failed, Federal Republic was admitted into NATO.

Until early 1950s Moscow still did not exclude a possible neutralization of entire Germany, as a buffer between the West and the Soviet "security belt". Reunification and neutralization of Germany was also supported by some people in West, who were opposed to German remilitarization. One of them was George Kennan, the author of the doctrine of containment. He argued against excessive emphasis on the military means of confrontation with Soviet Union and was unenthusiastic about NATO.

It is known that in summer of 1953, when anti-Communist riots started in East Berlin, some Soviet leaders, including dreadful Lavrenty Beria, were willing to exchange the German Democratic Republic, supported by Soviet tanks, for the reunification and demilitarization of Germany. This position was used later as a proof of his "treason" at Beria's trial. Nevertheless in 1955 the USSR indeed agreed to reunification and demilitarization of Austria, and fully implemented this agreement with the West.

And in 1954 Moscow created a diplomatic scandal, proposing that the USSR should be admitted into the North Atlantic alliance, thus demonstrating that NATO has no anti-Soviet aggressive intentions and establishing an all-European security system. The West quickly rejected this proposal, accusing the Soviet Union of propaganda games and efforts to disrupt the unity of the allies. Lord Ismay wrote that it was "like an unrepentant burglar requesting to join the police force".

The admission of West Germany into NATO alarmed the Soviet leaders. After two World Wars Russians learned the awesome might of the Germany army and claimed that Bundeswehr is a continuator of Wehrmacht. The USSR responded by creating the Warsaw Pact organization, consolidating its control over Eastern Europe and mobilizing its resources to oppose NATO. Thus the European continent was finally divided between the two competing military blocks.

The reliability of the Warsaw Pact allies, except the East Germany, was questionable. The Soviet Union had to beef up its military presence in Eastern Europe, several times using its forces to suppress anti-Communist rebellions. It crushed the revolt in Hungary in 1956 and sent "fraternal assistance" to Czechoslovakia in 1968. Twice, in 1956 and 1981, the threat of the Soviet military intervention was used to keep the Communist regime in Poland.

It turned out that the NATO was powerless to implement the "roll back doctrine" and intervene during these events, deterred by the Soviet military power. At least on paper, the Warsaw Pact contributed to the Soviet conventional superiority over NATO in ground forces. But the West had an impressive advantage at sea, and NATO had a qualitative advantage in the air. Nevertheless the North Atlantic alliance was preoccupied with the Fulda gap, through which the Soviet tank armies were expected to push all the way to the Atlantic shore.

## The Nuclear Factor

To correct the perceived imbalance the United States started deployment of thousands of tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of its Western European allies. Early use of nuclear weapons was supposed to stop the Soviet tanks. The arms race between NATO and Warsaw Pact acquired a much larger nuclear dimension, when the US deployed intermediate range nuclear missiles in Turkey and Italy, so they could attack targets in Soviet territory.

In mid-1950s the USSR succeeded in development of long range ballistic missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The launch of *Sputnik* demonstrated that Soviet ICBMs can reach American territory. The United States lost its invulnerability to Moscow's nuclear weapons. That was a shock to Washington, which had to abandon the doctrine of massive retaliation, threatening a nuclear attack if the USSR prevails in a conventional conflict. That raised concern in Western Europe about the reliability of American "nuclear umbrella".

The situation in the North Atlantic alliance was also complicated by the Suez war of 1956, when Great Britain and France attacked Egypt. The United States refused to support the military adventure of the two key NATO military allies, and the Soviet Union threatened to use the military aggression was not stopped. The Suez war led to the decision of Great Britain (which tested nuclear bomb earlier), France and Israel (not a member of NATO) to rely on their own nuclear deterrence.

The deployment of American and Soviet nuclear weapons in Europe added additional instability, when NATO and the Warsaw Pact challenged each other at West Berlin. East Germany could not stop defection of its citizens to the West, so Moscow tried to force the United States, Great Britain and France to abandon the West Berlin. There was a very sharp crisis in 1961, when the East German regime with the full support of Nikita Khrushchev decided to build the infamous wall.

The Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, which brought the US and the USSR very close to a nuclear war, resulted in withdrawal of Soviet missile from Cuba and American missiles from Italy and Turkey. But the USSR kept a large number of intermediate range missiles on its territory, so they could target Western European members of NATO and American forces in Europe.

The question of credibility of American nuclear guarantees became a source of major tension within the Western community. The United States had to propose the flexible response doctrine to reassure its allies, that Americans would use nuclear weapons to protect them. Some US tactical nuclear weapons were provided to several NATO countries, but they remained under dual control and could not be used without American permission. For some time Washington was exploring the proposal for of a multilateral nuclear force at sea, but that idea was rejected.

The doctrine of flexible response, which was also formally adopted by the North Atlantic alliance, soon resulted in preoccupation with the concept of the escalation control. According to this concept, it was necessary to achieve domination at each step of the so-called escalatory ladder. The idea was to demonstrate to the opponent that it would be defeated if he tried to escalate the military conflict to a higher level. NATO tried to achieve such escalation control by deploying a sophisticated range of different types of weapons, while the Soviet Union acted in a similar way.

The conventional and nuclear arms race produced an approximate strategic parity between two sides by the beginning of 1970s. The USSR and the US signed the SALT-1 agreement and the ABM Treaty in 1972. The assured nuclear destruction was recognized as the foundation of strategic stability. In 1973 the North Atlantic alliance and Warsaw Pact agreed to start talks on mutual balanced force reductions, which continued for many years without any results. In 1975 the Helsinki act was signed, codifying the rules of détente in Europe.

### **The Failed Detente**

The Soviet Union adopted the slogan of peaceful coexistence of the two competing social and economic systems in 1956, rejecting the Stalinist theses of the inevitability of the new world war. Arms control agreements and the Helsinki act were interpreted in Moscow as the victory of this policy. But at the same time the USSR was committed to a different principle, the so-called “proletarian internationalism”. Moscow was supporting “national liberation movements” all over the world. While the Cold War came to a standstill in Europe, it flared up in other places, outside of the area of responsibility of the North Atlantic alliance. In Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and finally Afghanistan Soviet weapons and soldiers were advancing the cause of “proletarian internationalism”.

The United States and its allies rejected the Soviet interpretation of détente. The tensions began to grow again, while the arms race moved to a new stage. What was not prohibited, was permitted. So the next crises in Europe was provoked by the “euromissiles”. At the SALT negotiations the USSR failed to limit American forward based tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, and British and French nuclear systems, which could reach the Soviet territory. The definition of strategic weapons included only nuclear missiles and bombers with the range above 5500 kilometers. So in the late 1970s the USSR started modernization of its medium range forces, replacing the old missiles with the new SS-20 mobile systems with multiple warheads.

The Soviet move immediately provoked new fears about “decoupling” of Europe from America. The North Atlantic alliance members were again engaged in heated debates about the reliability of American nuclear umbrella. Regan’s administration, which never believed in détente, decided to deploy intermediate range ballistic and cruise missiles in Western Europe, reversing the decision made after the crises. At the same time Washington started the Star Wars program, announcing its intention to abandon the ABM Treaty.

The USSR interpreted these actions as a deadly threat, which exposed American plans for disarming and decapitating preemptive strike. Pershing-2 missiles could reach Moscow in 10-12 minutes. And the orbital ballistic missiles defenses could destroy the mutual assured destruction, restoring American invulnerability to the weakened Soviet retaliating strike. The USSR responded by bringing its forces to higher alert.

In the early 1980s the military tension in Europe reached a new peak. The Cold War again could become hot. That made many NATO members unhappy, since they could have become the first victims of the nuclear confrontation. The seemed to be a pattern: the European allies were often troubled when the United States and the Soviet Union behind their back were concluding bilateral deals,

presenting the North Atlantic alliance with a *fait accompli*; but even more the same allies were worried, when the global Soviet-American competition threatened to get out of control and make them a battlefield of the two superpowers.

Some experts, like Robert Kagan, talk about the Mars and Venus distinction between American and European cultures. This opinion is partially collaborated by the fact that the United States usually spends on defense twice as much as their allies, while the Europeans give much greater priority to social protection, health and education expenditures. The huge losses in two World wars and previous conflicts make many Europeans less militaristic. After the loss of their colonial empires the Western European countries are not enthusiastic about military engagements in far away places, sticking to the formal boundaries of the area of responsibility as defined by the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949.

### **The *Perestroika* Revolution**

The spiral of confrontation was broken by the *perestroika* in the Soviet Union. Under Michael Gorbachev the USSR started a zig zag process of major political and economic reform. Moscow also drastically changed its foreign policy, trying to overcome the Cold War. That permitted to achieve new, unprecedented arms control arrangements, which drastically diminished the threat of war.

The INF Treaty, signed in 1987, was a breakthrough, prohibiting the entire class of Soviet and American intermediate range (from 500 to 5500 kilometers) missiles.

It was followed by the CFE Treaty, concluded in 1990. Unlike nuclear arms control, it covered not only the United States and the USSR, but all member-states of the two military blocks. The CFE Treaty was also based on the principle of parity, establishing equal numerical ceilings for NATO and Warsaw Pact organizations in major categories of weapons (tanks, armored fighting vehicles, artillery guns, combat aircraft and attack helicopters) and special limitations for different geographical zone in Europe (central zone, extended central zone, flank zones) with on-site inspections and notification of major movements of troops and weapons. Later it was also agreed to establish ceilings for military manpower.

The START-1, signed in 1991, provided for serious reductions for American and Soviet strategic forces with a very elaborate procedure for verification and monitoring. The text of the START-1 linked it to the ABM Treaty, which meant that limitations on ballistic missile defense will continue.

These 3 agreements were supposed end the East-West military confrontation, but they enormously contributed to the end of the Cold War. It's often claimed that the West "won" the Cold War, which implies that the Soviet Union was "defeated". I don't think this claim is justified. The 3 treaties registered the recognition by the United States and NATO of the perfect parity with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The arms race ended in a "draw", where neither side lost.

What followed was the collapse of Communism, as an ideology, which denied market economy. The West won the economic competition, demonstrating it can provide much higher standard of living, higher standards of social security. That undermined the ideological appeal of Communism not only in the West but

also in the East. When the *perestroika* reached the Eastern European countries, the legitimacy of the Communist regimes was undermined. They never had deep roots there, so when Gorbachev made the historical decision not to intervene, as it had been done, there was a chain reaction of “regime changes”. Soviet tanks didn’t move to save the Berlin wall or the Iron Curtain. That resulted in historical changes not only in Eastern European countries, but in the Soviet Union itself.

The post-Communist governments declared their desire to abandon their participation in military blocks. In summer of 1991 the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, and in December of 1991 the USSR ended its existence. Instead of reforming the socialist system the *perestroika* resulted in the non-violent collapse of the Soviet superpower and the “socialist camp”.

Moscow’s policy of non-intervention ended its total ideological domination and almost immediately – the military control over Eastern Europe, which had been the Soviet priority since the end of the Second World war. While many in the West were fearful of unified Germany, they claimed their support, hoping that the Soviet Union would never permit the reunification. Gorbachev refused to do it, trying unsuccessfully to secure a neutral status for the reunified Germany. But the North Atlantic alliance rejected his appeals, exploiting Gorbachev’s weaknesses. The Soviet leader came under attack from both Communist hard-liners and the loose coalition of democrats and nationalists, headed by Boris Yeltsin, and soon lost power.

The attempt to use the Soviet military to save the Communist regime in the USSR in August of 1991 failed, since the Russian society didn’t want anymore to keep the status quo. The USSR was replaced by 15 new independent states. Unlike the Soviet Union Russia was not a superpower, driven by a messianic ideology. Moscow gave up control not only over Warsaw Pact countries, but also over former Soviet republics, which had been incorporated into the Russian empire many centuries before the Bolshevik revolution. Moscow lost more than 1/3 of the Soviet territory and economic potential (McNamara’s definition of “unacceptable damage”) without any nuclear war. And chaotic market reforms (“shock without therapy”) pushed Russia’s economy into unprecedented decline for a decade.

### **The Winner Takes All?**

These developments produced a fundamental change in the global system of international relations and in the geopolitical and military situation in Europe. Suddenly the United States became the only superpower, and the North Atlantic alliance turned out to be the only political and military alliance on the European continent.

The West lost its enemy. The ideological conflict between Russia and the West was gone. Moscow’s military might vanished. Russia was entitled to only 1/3 of the CFE weapons (the other two thirds were allocated to Eastern European countries and former Soviet republics). About one million troops were removed from Eastern Europe and Baltic states, another million was “nationalized” by Ukraine and other Soviet successor-states, which tried to take control over nuclear weapons on their territory.

Moscow lost its allies and clients. Within several years Russian military shrunk to about 25% of the Soviet armed forces, with many weapons either

decommissioned or put into hastily prepared storage facilities. Within several years the entire Army (Ground Forces) of the Russian Federation were smaller than the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, and inferior in training and equipment. As the war with separatists in Chechnya demonstrated, Russia “couldn’t invade even herself”.

Many in Russia believed that the West would follow the example and dissolve the North Atlantic alliance. Some hoped that Russia would become a NATO member. But the dominant view was that there would be a new all-European collective security system, including Russia, “from Vancouver to Vladivostok”, as proposed by Secretary of State Jim Baker in early 1990s. The Conference on Security and Cooperation was supposed to become the mechanism to construct this system.

But these expectations did not come true. While the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was established, it played only a marginal role. Instead the North Atlantic alliance started to play the dominant role. Since NATO lost its mission of collective defense, because nobody could threaten the most powerful military alliance in the world, it was necessary to invent a new purpose. The slogan was: “Out of area, or out of business”. Step by step NATO began to expand its responsibilities and membership to promote democracy and stability. Gorbachev’s vision was “common European home”, with former rivals under the same roof. But the new European home was built without Russia, on the bases of NATO and EU.

At the very end of the Cold War some of the Western leaders vaguely promised to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand. But this commitment was never legally formalized. So a few years later the North Atlantic alliance started its move East. In 1993 the Clinton administration invited former Warsaw Pact countries to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) under NATO auspices. But when Russia in 1995 totally withdrew its troops from Germany the situation changed.

The West faced the temptation to consolidate the results of the Cold War according to the principle “the winner takes all”. The Cold War started in Eastern Europe, so absorption of this region into the Western community seemed logical. The top priority was given to the institutionalized integration of Eastern European countries into the North Atlantic alliance and the European Union. The “vegetarian” PfP was no substitute for the “real beef” – full membership in the North Atlantic alliance, which was the goal of the new anti-Communist and anti-Russian elites in former Warsaw Pact countries. But the final decision belonged to NATO, where there were serious debates about the geopolitical consequences of the expansion. Some experts in the West, including George Kennan, warned against playing “zero sum game” with Russia. Meanwhile Moscow was cooperating with the North Atlantic alliance in peace keeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia produced a number of ugly ethnic wars. In these wars Russia was sympathizing with Serbs, while the West supported their opponents. To stop bloodshed and ethnic cleansing, NATO in 1995 decided to intervene. The precedent for NATO operation outside its traditional boundaries was established. Moscow agreed to participate in the Stabilization Force (SFOR). But it was an *ad hoc* arrangement, since SFOR was under political control of the North Atlantic Council, to which Russia did not belong. Originally Russian and NATO soldiers cooperated well, but eventually this arrangement misfired during the

Kosovo war.

By 1997 the advice of opponents of NATO enlargement was rejected by the Clinton administration. It was decided that Russia had no choice but to accept the will of the West. The decision to admit new members produced a very negative reaction in Russia. Moscow still looked at Eastern Europe, which was now relabeled as Central Europe, as a security buffer between Russia and the West. Moscow did not want and had no means to dominate this strategically important region. But it also did not want the region to be controlled by a more powerful military alliance, which had been Moscow's enemy in Europe for so many years. The North Atlantic alliance never seriously considered Russia as a possible member, and its joint military organization had now huge superiority over Russian military forces.

Russia's efforts to keep *status quo* failed in 1997. The North Atlantic alliance invited Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join. At the same time NATO signed another declaration with Russia – the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, which established the procedure for consultations, but no Russian veto rights over NATO's decision-making. Moscow recognized the irreversible geopolitical consequences of NATO's enlargement, but it wanted to limit the military consequences. The North Atlantic alliance promised no "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" and "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members"

The Founding Act unfortunately did not help much. In 1999 the North Atlantic alliance, led by the United States, started "a war of choice" against Serbia, which tried to suppress by brutal force the secessionists' insurgency in Kosovo. That war was a deep shock for many Russians, who interpreted it as a war of aggression. The Kosovo bombing was widely perceived in Russia as a proof of naivety of the post-Cold War expectations that the West was willing to treat Russia as an equal partner. The Kosovo war together with NATO's enlargement undermined the consensus of the *perestroika* times that the use of military force for even the best purposes could not be legitimate anymore. It's not accidental that the second war in Chechnya, which started soon, unlike the first one, was not opposed by the Russian public.

The Kosovo war ended with Russian and NATO soldiers facing each other at the Pristina airport. It was a miracle that they did not start shooting. While Russia again joined the peace keeping force (IFOR), it had neither political nor military means to influence the policies of the North Atlantic alliance, which prepared conditions for the declaration of the Kosovo independence. After a few years Russia withdrew from the IFOR, ending the NATO-Russia military cooperation on the ground.

### **The Growing Rift**

The new century Russia and the North Atlantic alliance met in the situation of revived mutual suspicion and mistrust. Nevertheless President Vladimir Putin suggested to NATO's Secretary General George Robinson that Russia may one day join the North Atlantic alliance, but there was no reaction. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks Moscow and Washington again proclaimed the strategic partnership. And in May 2002 the New Russia-NATO Council was established to

promote cooperation in a wide range of areas. But the new rapprochement did not last.

In 2002 the George W. Bush administration decided to unilaterally withdraw from the ABM Treaty and started the deployment of ballistic missile defense systems, despite Russian protests. Also in 2002 Moscow was presented with a fait accompli when the North Atlantic alliance implemented the new round of expansion. This time it was “a big bang” – NATO admitted 7 new members, including 3 former Soviet republics – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. What used to be the “security belt” of the USSR was fully absorbed by NATO.

In 2003 the US invaded Iraq. This war was opposed not only by Russia, but many members of NATO, including Germany and France. The North Atlantic alliance was for the first time in its history openly at odds. The Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the “new” Europe and the “old” Europe, with new NATO members fully supporting the Iraq war while the old members criticized it. Besides, some former Warsaw pact countries, which also became members of the European Union, slowed down the integration of the EU and development of the European security identity. Poland and the Czech Republic are the last countries to ratify the Lisbon Treaty.

The Bush administration preferred to build the “coalition of the willing” outside the formal NATO structures. Thus the United States contributed to the crises of the North Atlantic alliance. But when Washington got stuck in the quagmire in Iraq, it pushed NATO to take the responsibility for the war in Afghanistan.

In 2006 the North Atlantic alliance formally accepted control over the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. It seemed that some American allies decided: “Better Afghanistan than Iraq”. Afghanistan became the first NATO war outside of Europe.

The experience of SFOR, KFOR and ISAF produced proposals for a global NATO, which would bring under one umbrella the North Atlantic alliance and American allies in Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, South Korea and Australia. But there seem to be too many obstacles to achieve this goal.

Meanwhile Russian economy started recovery due to high energy prices, and the political situation in the country stabilized. Moscow accumulated huge foreign currency reserves. Russian armed forces began a slow modernization after many years of decline. That permitted Russia to be more assertive in foreign affairs, in particular in the post-Soviet space, which Moscow perceived as the sphere of Russian “privileged” interests. In the West many asserted that Russia returned to traditional authoritarianism and imperialism.

Moscow interpreted the “orange revolutions” in Ukraine and Georgia in 2004 as a new proof of the Western strategy to marginalize Russia and make her militarily impotent before the United States and the North Atlantic alliance. Since the pro-Western governments in these former Soviet republics declared their willingness to join NATO, Russian leaders have determined to prevent this scenario.

Even more Russia was alarmed about the third site of American BMD, which the Bush administration decided to deploy in Poland and the Czech Republic. The third site had an open-ended architecture, and was perceived as American

intention to eventually deny Russia's nuclear deterrence. Moscow announced that in response it would deploy short range missiles "Iskander" in Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave in former Eastern Prussia, surrounded by the new NATO members. Russian leaders also hinted that they may withdraw from the INF Treaty, which banned medium range missiles, capable of covering the entire territory of Europe. It seemed that Russia and NATO were rushing to another "euromissile crises".

But instead of withdrawal from the INF Treaty in 2007 President Putin announced the unprecedented "moratorium" on the implementation of the CFE Treaty until countries of the North Atlantic alliance ratify its adopted version of 1999. NATO refused to do it, linking the ratification to the implementation of Russia's political commitment to completely remove its forces from the territory of Georgia and Moldova (the TransDniester republic). This was the first time Moscow de facto canceled a legally binding arms control agreement. But the West continued to ignore warnings from Moscow.

In the beginning of 2008 Kosovo declared its independence, unilaterally succeeding from Serbia. The protests of Serbia, supported by Russia, were ignored. Most (but not all) of the NATO countries immediately recognized Kosovo's independence.

In August of 2008 the Russia-NATO relations reached the lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The deep crisis was provoked by the attack of Western-sponsored Georgian President Saakashvili on the separatist South Osetia, which proclaimed its independence from Georgia after the collapse of the USSR. Georgian troops also attacked Russian peace keeping battalion, which was deployed there to supervise the cease-fire agreement, signed in 1992. Apparently Saakashvili hoped to regain control over South Osetia quickly, but Moscow responded with an overwhelming force, sending regular army to defeat Georgia. Russia also recognized independence of South Osetia and Abkhazia, another breakaway region.

Saakashvili appealed to the United States and NATO to save him. But the West didn't intervene militarily. Instead the North Atlantic alliance accused Moscow of "unprovoked aggression", and decided to stop all interaction with Russia. NATO and Russia were on the verge of a new Cold War.

### **The Reset**

Fortunately the Obama administration did not follow appeals to resume the policy of "containment" of Moscow. The new US President proclaimed his desire to "reset" American-Russian relations. Barak Obama apparently recognizes the failure of the effort to impose the unipolar international system with the United States as a single superpower. He seems to be willing to develop more balanced relationship not only with Western allies, but also with China, Russia and other players.

Barak Obama rejected the claim of George W. Bush that arms control is "obsolete" and agreed with President Dmitri Medvedev to negotiate a follow on treaty to START-1, which expires in December 2009, further reducing the number strategic warheads and delivery vehicles. It's not easy to negotiate a new strategic agreement in a very short time.

The new US administration admitted the linkage between offensive and defensive system and apparently decided to freeze the development of strategic BMD, concentrating on defenses against shorter and medium range ballistic missiles (which Russia and America eliminated in accordance with the INF Treaty). Last April Washington stopped a number of strategic BMD programs, and in September cancelled the deployment of the plans for the third site in Poland and Check Republic. The strategic systems, like interceptors GBI and X-band radar were useless against Iranian medium range missiles, which require theater ballistic missile defenses. Obama was accused of “appeasement” and “capitulation” to Russia by the Republican opposition in Congress and some politicians in Eastern Europe, who in summer 2009 sent an open letter, warning him against the Russian threat.

But the White House was supported by the key NATO members and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic alliance, who called for a “new beginning in NATO-Russia relations”. Following American lead Brussels agreed to resume the activities of the Russia-NATO Council. Rasmussen proposed “to reinforce our practical cooperation in all the areas where we agree we face the same risks and threats to our security” and to carry out “a joint review of the new 21st century security challenges, to serve as a firm basis for our future cooperation”. He also expressed interest in President Medvedev’s ideas on a new European security arrangement, recognizing “Russian concerns about being marginalized in European security”.

It should be noted that President Medvedev soon after his election suggested to convene pan-European summit to discuss a new comprehensive security system, which should involve all European countries and multilateral institutions, including NATO, EU, OSCE and ODKB (the Treaty for Collective Security organization, which links Russia and 7 former Soviet republics). While this proposal lacks specific details, it reflects Moscow’s desire to overcome the new division of Europe and become an equal participant in the Euro-Atlantic system “from Vancouver to Vladivostok”.

Remarkably this idea was reflected in recent articles by Zbignev Brzezinski, who never was considered “pro-Russian”. He supported an agreement between NATO and ODKB, provided that Moscow would not object against continued enlargement of the North Atlantic alliance (Ukraine and Georgia don’t belong to ODKB). Apparently Brzezinski is willing to concenter a Russian “sphere of influence” in former Soviet republics in Central Asia, but not in Eastern Europe. Probably, his position reflects also the growing unease that the North Atlantic alliance may suffer a painful defeat in Afghanistan. So Russia and ODKB may play the role of a barrier to stop Taliban and EI-Qaida, if they regain control of Afghanistan.

The war in Afghanistan has become the dominant issues for NATO, which might determine the fate of the alliance. The forces of ICF and the United States reached the level of Soviet “limited contingent” in Afghanistan three decades ago, but there is “no light in the end of the tunnel”. Many NATO members refused to allow their troops to participate in combat operations. The fraudulent elections demonstrated that the present regime after 8 years of war has not much support among the people. The military commanders warn that the war maybe lost next year, unless the United States and NATO send major reinforcements. There is a growing concern, that Afghanistan can become “Obama’s Vietnam”.

## **A New Window of Opportunity**

In his conceptual article, published on September 10, President Medvedev called for the modernization of Russia and admitted that “the issue of harmonizing our relations with western democracies is not a question of taste, personal preferences or the prerogatives of given political groups”, since “we have many common goals, including absolute priorities which affect every inhabitant on Earth such as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and reducing the risk of adverse effects from man-made climate change.

The common interests of Russia and the West include the fight against terrorism, prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, maritime security, counter-narcotics, etc. What is required a joint threat assessment, which Moscow has suggested many times. This approach might help to turn the areas of disagreement, like BMD, into spheres of cooperation. In particular, realistic assessments of Iran’s nuclear and missile programs will allow to develop more efficiently with this challenge – diplomatically and, if unavoidable, by other means – economic sanctions and ballistic missile defenses.

Since President Obama cancelled the third sight, there are new opportunities for building the European regional BMD, linking Russian, American and NATO theater defenses. Such a system should be aimed at protection against shorter and medium range missiles (below the range of 5500 kilometers, which belong to the strategic arsenals of Russia and the United States). The components of this system may include integrated American mobile interceptors Patriot PAC-3, SM-3 and THAAD, Russian interceptors S-400 and in the future – S-500, NATO developed MEADS, and also Russian and American sea- and ground bases radars.

These cooperative defenses can be deployed in a couple years, with the possibility of upgrading in the middle of the next decade, if the threat goes up. Only this approach will prevent the return to the Cold War type counter-balancing, retargeting and other confrontational military postures. Otherwise, unilateral measures, for instance deployment of Aegis systems with improved capabilities against strategic ICBMS (SM-3 Block II interceptors) in Black and Baltic seas will provoke a very dangerous confrontation.

Another major area of cooperation is Afghanistan. Russia also perceives Taliban and El-Qaida as its enemies. After 9/11 it provided the United States with important assistance. But Russia is not willing to send its soldiers, still suffering from “Afghanistan syndrome”. Nevertheless Moscow has played an important role, permitting France, Germany and Spain for transit to Afghanistan. At the Obama-Medvedev summit in July 2009 Russia agreed to permit the transit of American military personnel and cargo. This is of growing importance, since the deteriorating situation in Pakistan makes the transit to Afghanistan even more difficult. And the possibility of chaos in Pakistan raises the prospects that the nuclear weapons of this country can come under control of Islamic extremists.

Probably Moscow might agree to accept greater responsibility for economic reconstruction of northern provinces of Afghanistan. Russia is also willing to contribute to strong measures against narcotics. And it might also help to arm and train Afghan military and police.

I think that Russia and the North Atlantic alliance should make vigorous efforts to save the conventional arms control regime. It might be done under the auspices of

the All-European security conference. The modernized CFE treaty should include not only NATO and Russia, but all European countries, which did not participate in the original CFE Treaty of 1991. The new regime can provide for much lower ceilings for weapons and manpower, reflecting the present holdings (which in many cases are 40-50% below the outdated ceilings).

The new arms control arrangements should correspond to realities of the XXI century instead of the legacies of the Cold War.

The Secretary General of NATO made an interesting proposal to engage Russia in the discussion of the new Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic alliance, which will be adopted soon, and compare it with Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, which was adopted in May 2009. This could help to develop a common positive agenda for years to come. This agenda might serve as a founding base for a new indivisible All-European security system. But this approach can succeed only if NATO allies follow Rasmussen's call to recognize that "Russia has security interests which we need to understand and take into account".

As President Medvedev said, there will always be controversial topics, reasons for disagreement. But "resentment, arrogance, various complexes, mistrust and especially hostility should be excluded from the relations between Russia and the leading democratic countries".

It seems that there is a real window of opportunity for the North Atlantic alliance and Russia to rethink their relationship, how to institutionalize it with legally-binding agreements and a permanent decision-making mechanism. So their common benefits will take priority over diverging interests.