

## **NATO's Final Frontier**

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*Why Russia should join the Atlantic alliance.*

AT NATO's 2010 summit, planned for November, the alliance's members intend to adopt a new "strategic concept" to guide its evolution. NATO's relationship with Russia is at the top of the agenda. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and its NATO allies have constructed a post-Cold War order that effectively shuts Russia out. Although NATO and the European Union have embraced the countries of central and eastern Europe, they have treated Russia as an outsider, excluding it from the main institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community. Russia's isolation is in part a product of its own making. The country's stalled democratic transition and occasional bouts of foreign policy excess warrant NATO's continued role as a hedge against the reemergence of an expansionist Russia.

Nonetheless, the West is making a historic mistake in treating Russia as a strategic pariah. As made clear by the settlements after the Napoleonic Wars and World War II--in contrast to the one that followed World War I--including former adversaries in a postwar order is critical to the consolidation of great-power peace. Anchoring Russia in an enlarged Euro-Atlantic order, therefore, should be an urgent priority for NATO today.

Russia has been disgruntled with the expansion of NATO ever since the alliance began courting new members from the former Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. However, Russia's economic and military decline and the West's primacy encouraged NATO members to discount the potential consequences of Russian discontent. "As American capabilities surged and Russian capabilities waned," the political scientists Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry have observed, "Washington policymakers increasingly acted as though Russia no longer mattered and the United States could do whatever it wanted."

The strategic landscape has since changed dramatically, however, and the costs of excluding Russia from the Euro-Atlantic order have risen substantially. The Kremlin's recentralization of power and Russia's economic rebound thanks to higher energy prices have brought the country back to life. Russia now has the confidence and the capability to push back against NATO--just as the West urgently needs Moscow's cooperation on a host of issues, including the containment of Iran's nuclear ambitions, arms control and nonproliferation, the stabilization of Afghanistan, counterterrorism, and energy security.

Moreover, the ongoing expansion of NATO has made the question of Russia's place in the Euro-Atlantic order even more pressing. In its new military doctrine, released this February, Russia identified NATO enlargement as a primary external threat. The alliance has been contemplating membership for Georgia and Ukraine, a move that would dangerously escalate tensions between NATO and Russia. Indeed, the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 was to some extent a reflection of Moscow's disquiet about Georgia's westward geopolitical alignment. And rather than just opposing NATO enlargement, Russia is now offering its own ideas for revamping the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. In November 2009, the Russian government released a draft of a new European security treaty that laid out Moscow's proposals for a pan-European institution. NATO allies, it seems, no longer have the luxury of indefinitely postponing consideration of Russia's place in the post-Cold War settlement.

A vision for bringing Russia into the Euro-Atlantic space is readily within reach: Russia should become a member of NATO. The country's eventual admission to the alliance would be the logical completion of a Euro-Atlantic order in which NATO is the primary security institution. Having embarked on the process of enlarging NATO when the Soviet bloc collapsed, the

Western allies should now do their best to conclude that process by integrating Russia and other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) into the alliance.

There are, of course, many other options for pursuing a pan-European order, such as fashioning a treaty between NATO and the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization; elevating the authority of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), of which Russia is a member; or picking up on Russia's proposal for a new European security treaty. But now that NATO, the world's most powerful military alliance, has 28 members and more to come, these other options are merely strategic sideshows. Countries will be either NATO members or outsiders. The only logical path to a pan-European order thus entails Russia's integration into the alliance.

Russia may ultimately reject inclusion in NATO due to the requirements and constraints membership entails, instead choosing to go its own way. But if the primary institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community ultimately fail to extend their reach to Russia, let it be due to the Kremlin's missteps, not because the Atlantic democracies failed to demonstrate the vision or the will to embrace Russia in a pan-European order.

### ONE ALLIANCE, TWO STRATEGIES

FROM ITS inception in the late 1940s, the Euro-Atlantic security order has had a dual character. On the one hand, Western institutions have sought to provide collective defense against external threats by amassing military forces to defend the territory of member states (primarily against the Warsaw Pact) and project power (as in Kosovo and Afghanistan). On the other hand, they have sought to provide collective security against internal rivalries by tethering members to one another through military, political, and socioeconomic integration (via both NATO and the European Economic Community, the predecessor to the EU). But there has always been tension between the two missions. Collective defense is primarily about the concentration of power through maximizing national armaments and coordinating decision-making; the aim is to produce a countervailing balance against external threats. Collective security is primarily about the deconcentration of power through collectivizing both armaments and decision-making; the aim is to neutralize internal threats through the centripetal force exerted by integration. During the Cold War, the institutional division of labor was relatively clear-cut. NATO pursued collective defense by amassing power against the Soviet threat and collective security by binding its members to one another. Meanwhile, the European Economic Community (and, later, the EU) focused on turning western Europe into a zone of stable peace through economic and political integration.

Since the Cold War's end, the Atlantic democracies have found it more difficult to balance collective defense and collective security. The United States sees NATO primarily as a tool for power projection, using it to gather European partners that can contribute to missions well beyond the European theater. The countries of western Europe tend to conceive of NATO as an instrument for consolidating peace and prosperity within Europe, and they therefore resist U.S. efforts to turn it into a vehicle for pursuing military campaigns around the globe. Meanwhile, the new members from central and eastern Europe view NATO in more traditional terms--as a bulwark against Russia. Their preoccupation with collective defense means that they favor a NATO-centered, rather than an EU-centered, Euro-Atlantic order. However, their reluctance to augment the military strength and profile of the EU could undermine the transatlantic link; a more capable EU is essential to keeping Europe geopolitically relevant to the United States.

Making Russia's inclusion in NATO a priority for the alliance would ostensibly exacerbate the tension between these divergent strategic perspectives. In the United States, pragmatists

would be intrigued while Wilsonian liberals and neoconservatives would recoil. In western Europe, which is still struggling to digest a steady stream of new entrants to the EU and NATO, the idea would likely intensify "enlargement Fatigue." And in central and eastern Europe, where fear of Russia continues to be strong, the proposal would trigger consternation, if not outright alarm. Moreover, the notion of letting Russia join NATO admittedly strikes a dissonant chord due to the alliance's Cold War mission, Russia's backsliding on democratic reform, and its heavy-handed approach to its "near abroad." Nonetheless, the prospect of Russian membership in NATO holds considerable promise for resolving not just how best to construct a pan-European order but also how to address the logical contradictions facing NATO's future.

## WELCOME TO THE CLUB

THE CASE for including Russia in NATO rests on five main arguments. First, opening NATO to Russia would restore one of the Euro-Atlantic order's primary functions--to provide for collective security through the centripetal force of integration. From the perspective of most NATO members, Russia is stuck in a strategic no man's land; it warrants neither the definitive cold shoulder of collective defense nor the warm embrace of collective security. Laying out a vision for Russia's inclusion in NATO would resolve this limbo; unless given reason to do otherwise, the alliance would begin reaching out to Russia, thereby exposing it to the democratizing and pacifying effects of integration--just as it did to Germany in the 1950s and central and eastern European states in the last two decades. NATO would be back in business as Europe's primary provider of collective security and would have a new *raison d'être*: the completion of a pacific pan-European community.

Second, Russia's gradual integration into NATO would revitalize the transatlantic link by making Europe the stronger geopolitical partner that the United States urgently seeks, which is of particular importance given how slowly the EU moves on matters of defense. A bipartisan consensus now exists in Washington in favor of a more unitary and militarily capable Europe--raising risks to the transatlantic link if Europe fails to rise to the occasion. The Lisbon Treaty entered into force last year, bringing about institutional reforms that may gradually enable the EU to adopt more collective and muscular foreign and defense policies. Nonetheless, even under the most optimistic scenarios, the EU is likely to make only halting progress in aggregating its defense capabilities. Accordingly, Russia, which has over one million active-duty forces, has the potential to strengthen Europe's military heft if it becomes part of NATO. Admittedly, NATO would have to proceed carefully on the sensitive matters of sharing intelligence and military technology. But surely such issues can be managed if doing so would significantly augment the military strength of NATO and the security of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Third, Russia's integration into NATO would enable Georgia and Ukraine to join the alliance without provoking a crisis with Moscow. According to the Russian political scientists Sergei Karaganov and Timofei Bordachev, the admission of these countries into NATO would increase "the risk of a conflict with unforeseeable consequences." Stopping the enlargement of NATO could avert this problem but would leave another one unsolved: How can Russia and its neighbors be integrated into a unitary Euro-Atlantic order? As Andrew Monaghan of the NATO Defense College notes, "Even if enlargement stops, Russia remains excluded from Euro-Atlantic mechanisms."

The solution, then, is for Georgia and Ukraine to join a NATO in which Russia is already, or is soon to be, a member, ensuring that their entry would cause little, if any, geopolitical tension. More generally, if membership in the CIS remains separate from membership in NATO, Europe's East and West will be subject to indefinite geopolitical division and jockeying over zones of influence. In contrast, if NATO opens its doors to members of the CIS, such dividing

lines and the competition that accompanies them will likely fade away. There is a precedent for this evolution: all of the CIS' members already cooperate with NATO through the Partnership for Peace program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Fourth, building a pan-European security order around NATO would ensure that the alliance remains in control of the evolution of the Euro-Atlantic space. Alternative options, such as turning to the OSCE or fashioning a new structure, would devolve power to other institutions--one of the main reasons why NATO members have reacted with little enthusiasm to Moscow's recent proposal for a European security treaty. Their reaction may be justified, but so, too, is Moscow's own pique at NATO for ignoring its proposal, especially considering that the alliance has not come up with any credible counteroffers. Opening NATO to Russia and other CIS members represents just such a counteroffer--and one that would enable NATO to stay at the center of the game.

Finally, Russia's inclusion in NATO would help the Euro-Atlantic community focus its attention beyond its own neighborhood. To be sure, there is plenty of unfinished business in Europe itself, including in the Balkans and the Caucasus. But the collective interests of the states that occupy the geographic zone that runs from Vancouver to Vladivostok are increasingly affected by developments that are global in character, such as the rise of emerging powers, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, cyberattacks, and international crime.

Unlike most of the United States' traditional partners in Europe, which tend to be Eurocentric in their strategic orientation, Russia has broader geopolitical horizons. Moscow is an important player in negotiations with Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs and wields considerable influence in Beijing. Russia is one of the world's major energy suppliers. It is also an influential member of the United Nations, the G-8, and other multilateral institutions. One of the primary challenges facing the West is determining how best to open up such institutions to emerging powers. Russia, as one of the "BRIC" countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), can assist the Euro-Atlantic community as it seeks to make the necessary adjustments, including expanding the UN Security Council and transforming the G-8 into the G-20. Indeed, in June 2009 Russia hosted the first BRIC summit, in Yekaterinburg, suggesting that Moscow can help shape the character of the West's intensifying interactions with emerging powers.

Including Russia in NATO thus promises to have positive spillover effects well beyond Europe. NATO membership for Russia could both complete the project of building a Euro-Atlantic community at peace and help prepare that community for the multipolar and politically diverse world of the future.

## INCLUSION AND ITS CRITICS

THE PROSPECT of Russia's inclusion in NATO elicits three obvious objections: that it would bring the fox into the hen house, that it would dilute the alliance and weaken its solidarity, and that it would compromise the alliance's core values by admitting a member that is not a democracy.

To be sure, NATO would run a strategic risk by bringing Russia into an alliance that, for the moment, is still intended to hedge against a potential Russian threat. But NATO is actually running a potentially greater strategic risk by excluding Russia from the Euro-Atlantic order. And as long as it proceeds prudently, NATO can minimize the dangers involved in embracing Russia.

For starters, the process would move slowly and deliberately. NATO would begin by making clear that it welcomes Russian membership--a move intended to signal benign intent. Just as

the allure of NATO membership helped induce the countries of central and eastern Europe to pursue political and military reforms, the prospect of joining NATO would expose Russia to the incentives and socializing norms that might change its politics and its policies. At a minimum, the West's leverage in Moscow would be enhanced, and more contact between NATO officials and their Russian counterparts would help reduce mistrust. Cooperation could be tested on many different fronts, including arms control and nonproliferation, missile defense, military exercises, peacekeeping, joint naval operations to combat piracy or drug trafficking, and cybersecurity. Such initiatives would not only enhance mutual confidence between NATO members and Russia but also provide NATO plenty of time to gauge whether Moscow is willing to deepen cooperation and channel its power toward common ends.

There is, of course, no guarantee that Russia would reciprocate NATO's overture and adopt domestic and foreign policies consistent with eventual membership. But NATO's opening to Russia would hardly be irreversible. Were Russia to take advantage of NATO's open door to thwart the alliance--blocking decision-making, stoking internal divisions within NATO, continuing to pursue coercive behavior in its neighborhood--the outreach to Moscow would quickly come to an end. NATO would readily veer away from providing collective security across Europe and return to providing collective defense against Russia.

As for the potential of Russian membership to compromise NATO's efficacy and solidarity, it is true that the alliance's dilution will unquestionably increase in step with the size and diversity of its membership. If by 2025 NATO includes Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, and a handful of other CIS members, it will be headed toward having some 40 members of remarkably diverse sizes, levels of wealth, and military capabilities. But is an alliance of 40 countries that different from one of 30? The reality is that the current NATO of 28 members has already been substantially diluted by its size and diversity. Recent summits have witnessed major differences over the question of enlargement to include Georgia and Ukraine. Alliance members are divided over the merits of recognizing Kosovo. In Afghanistan, to its credit, NATO is carrying a heavy burden. But member states are taking on quite different levels of responsibility and risk, and the Dutch are poised to withdraw from Afghanistan this summer; NATO is already a multi-tiered alliance, in which some countries shoulder much heavier burdens than others.

As a consequence, bringing Russia into the alliance would only advance institutional changes that are already beginning to take place. The automaticity and solidarity of collective defense are giving way to the contingent and looser character of commitments to collective security. Although the checkered performance of the League of Nations and other collective-security institutions provides cause for concern about this transition, NATO's transformation is a matter of necessity, not choice. It can remain a traditional alliance focused on territorial defense--and gradually slip into geopolitical irrelevance. Or it can become a broader political-military union focused on advancing the collective security of the Euro-Atlantic space--and secure its centrality for the foreseeable future.

In this respect, NATO needs to address its outmoded reliance on decision-making by consensus, which could become a recipe for paralysis. Precisely because its member states have such a wide array of interests, fears, and capabilities, the alliance is more likely to take effective and timely action through coalitions of the willing, not by unanimous consent. For the same reason, provisions may be necessary to isolate or suspend the privileges of recalcitrant members. Accordingly, NATO should move toward a more flexible system of decision-making. Russian membership would help drive home the importance of updating NATO's institutions and decision-making procedures.

Should Russia join NATO, MOSCOW would likely oppose any such move away from unanimous decision-making. Moscow jealously guards its veto in the UN Security Council and insists on

decision by consensus in the OSCE. Its draft of a European security treaty envisages a decision-making forum in which decisions "shall be taken by consensus." Nonetheless, Russia, just like current NATO members, will have to get used to a more complicated strategic landscape, in which coalitions of the willing and more flexible systems of decisionmaking are likely to be essential for timely action.

Finally, admitting Russia and other CIS members to NATO would likely entail membership for countries that are not yet consolidated democracies. Russia may well move in a democratic direction in the years ahead--especially if helped along by deepening ties to the Euro-Atlantic community. But should democratization proceed in Russia, it would surely move slowly, confronting NATO with a timing problem. NATO needs to reach out to Russia sooner rather than later; locating Russia's place in the Euro-Atlantic space is an urgent issue. If NATO proceeds with Russian accession in a timely fashion, however, it will probably face the prospect of admitting Russia before it is fully democratic.

Is it feasible to admit a nondemocratic state to NATO? Doing so would certainly contravene the principles of "democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law" enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty. Moreover, during the three waves of enlargement that have taken place since the end of the Cold War (in 1999, 2004, and 2009), the alliance stipulated that new entrants not only had to be democratic but also had to have a market economy, treat minorities fairly, and be committed to peacefully resolving disputes--none of which is exactly Moscow's strong suit.

Were NATO to admit Russia, however, it would not be the first time a nondemocracy joined the alliance. Portugal was an original signatory to the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 but was not a democracy until 1974. Greece and Turkey were both admitted in the first round of enlargement, in 1952, but in the following years experienced political instability, coups, and military rule. In all three of these cases, admission was justified on strategic grounds. Even official NATO literature has acknowledged that early rounds of enlargement "took place during the Cold War, when strategic considerations were at the forefront of decision-making."

Keeping the Soviet Union out of the West during the Cold War was certainly of greater urgency than is bringing Russia in today. But the potential payoff of finally anchoring Russia in the Euro-Atlantic space would be considerable. On a wide range of first-order issues, partnership with Russia is of paramount importance. Indeed, bringing Russia into NATO would contribute at least as much to Euro-Atlantic security today as did membership for Greece and Turkey when they were admitted. If strategic considerations warranted their membership, even as nondemocracies, then surely the same applies to Russia today.

Moreover, Portugal, Greece, and Turkey proved to be steady NATO allies. Indeed, democracies and nondemocracies have often teamed up to good effect. The United States and the Soviet Union were reliable partners during World War II. Currently, the sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf are some of the United States' closest allies--even though they are among the world's most illiberal regimes. Although all of NATO's current members are democracies, some, such as Romania and Bulgaria, are falling prey to rampant corruption. The United States, in 2008, backed putting Georgia on the road to NATO membership just after its president, Mikheil Saakashvili, had violently suppressed antigovernment demonstrators and shut down opposition media outlets. If Washington is prepared to cut corners to get Georgia into NATO, then it should certainly do the same for Russia, a country of considerably more strategic importance. Since regime type is not a good predictor of foreign policy behavior, NATO would be wise to choose its partners on the basis of their conduct of foreign policy, not just the character of their domestic institutions.

THE HURDLES AT HOME

MANAGING THE politics of bringing Russia into NATO would be at least as difficult as managing the policy. The hurdles are high: every current NATO country must ratify the admission of new members. And NATO enlargement has already proved to be capable of stirring up passionate domestic debate. Indeed, the post-Cold War confrontation between NATO and Russia is in no small part the product of domestic pressures. In the United States, suspicion of Russia has lingered among foreign policy elites and politicians, particularly on Capitol Hill, predisposing them to interpret Russian foreign policy in an aggressive light. (This bias became apparent at the outbreak of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, when, despite considerable evidence that Georgia had initiated the hostilities, the dominant view in the United States was that Russia had acted as an unprovoked aggressor.) Moreover, the salience of NATO enlargement among U.S. voters of central and eastern European descent helped build political momentum behind expansion during the 1990s, as well as during the more recent rounds of enlargement. In central and eastern Europe itself, elites and electorates would be staunchly opposed to the notion of Russia's integration into NATO. Opposition would be much less potent in western Europe, where the publics, in part due to matters of energy dependence, tend to appreciate the need for outreach to Russia. In Russia itself, where Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and, to a lesser extent, President Dmitry Medvedev have helped ratchet up anti-Western populism, considering NATO membership would require a stark reversal of course.

In the United States, the Obama administration is working hard to "reset" relations with Moscow, a policy that, if successful in producing cooperation, promises to help dampen residual suspicion of Russia among the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Congress is likely to be the most difficult stumbling block, inasmuch as it could stand in the way of the ratification of arms control treaties and oppose other initiatives needed to promote mutual confidence between Washington and Moscow. Even though concrete strategic cooperation between NATO and Russia would help change attitudes on Capitol Hill, convincing Congress of the merits of Russian membership in NATO would be an uphill battle.

Altering attitudes toward Russia in central and eastern Europe would be even more challenging. For starters, NATO should balance a strategic outreach to Russia with reassurance to its members in central and eastern Europe that it remains committed to their territorial defense. In this respect, the alliance should undertake the military planning and exercises needed to reaffirm the integrity of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which provides for collective defense. NATO should also make clear to central and eastern Europeans that its outreach to Russia would take place with eyes wide open and would come to a halt should Russia consistently engage in behavior indicative of predatory or exploitative intent.

Central and eastern European leaders have their own hard work to do in toning down the Russophobia that continues to animate politics in the region. They need to impress on voters that Russia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic order is a far better investment in central and eastern Europe's security than tank traps, fighter jets, and Patriot missiles. Whether or not it is protected by NATO, central and eastern Europe will be a dangerous neighborhood if Russia remains estranged from the West. If Russia enters NATO and Europe's dividing lines dim, then the security problems in this neighborhood will be dramatically diminished. From this perspective, the countries of central and eastern Europe have a stronger interest than any other NATO members in the consolidation of a Euro-Atlantic order that includes Russia. Yes, it is difficult to imagine today that Poland will ratify Russian membership in NATO anytime soon. But so, too, was it hard to imagine in the late 1940s that Germany's neighbors would before long agree to its inclusion in the European Economic Community and NATO.

Russian leaders will also have to start laying the groundwork for a new domestic discourse about NATO. Rather than portraying the alliance as an offensive instrument intent on encircling Russia, Moscow should openly discuss the possibility that NATO could serve as the umbrella for

a pan-European security structure. Sustained cooperation between NATO members and Russia would help improve perceptions of NATO among Russian elites and the Russian public. Russia has long sought to join international institutions, such as the G-8 and the World Trade Organization, in order to increase its sway and symbolize its integration into the international community. Indeed, Putin, during his early days as president, asserted that he "would not rule out" Russian membership in NATO "on condition that Russia's interests are going to be taken into account, [and] if Russia becomes a full-fledged partner." It is now time to hold Putin to his word.

**Fonte: Foreign Affairs, v. 89, n. 3, p. 100-112 May/Jun2010. [Base de Dados].  
Disponível em: <[http://: web.ebscohost.com](http://web.ebscohost.com)>. Acesso em: 18 maio 2010.**

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