

## **Russia and the Enlargement of NATO**

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International political confrontation over NATO's enlargement to the East constitutes, by all standards, the largest conflict in relations between the new Russia, which emerged on 8 December 1991 as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the West, the Atlantic alliance and major Western powers. Political leaders on both sides of this conflict stress that it should not be allowed to develop into a new edition of the Cold war, and they are undertaking pragmatic steps to prevent such a development. Still, the conflict exists. It poisons the situation in Europe, as well as. It clouding prospects for the development of partnership and cooperation.

It seems that both the reasons for and driving tendencies behind the disagreements over NATO's enlargement lie both in the past and in the present. Thus it is logical to start with their prehistory.

The system of international relations which took shape in Europe and the Trans-Atlantic area in general in the first decade after the Second World War (often called the Yalta or Yalta-Potsdam system) was based on countervailing of two opposing military-political coalitions - NATO created in 1949 and the Warsaw treaty organization or the Warsaw pact established in 1955. Direct military conflict between them would almost automatically lead to a Third World War with all its apocalyptic consequences. Both sides learned, in the course of a series of sharp crises in the late 1940s and early 1950s, how to avoid armed conflict. Moreover, the outlines of a system which could help manage this uneasy but stable truce were created, eventually leading to the Conference Organization on security and cooperation in Europe.

This organization rather superficially covered up the fundamental division of Europe which was constantly renewing the Cold war. One military-political bloc justified the existence of the other. This abnormal model, though it created stability for almost half a century, was critically viewed by those in Russia who thought of reforms and democracy.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was inevitably coupled and even preceded by the collapse of the Warsaw pact which was officially disbanded on 1 July 1991 on the insistence of its members who were eager to get rid of Soviet domination. In the new Russia, which had started along the difficult and tortuous road of economic reforming and political democratization, there was a widespread belief that the disappearance of the Warsaw pact made the further existence of NATO unnecessary. It was expected that a NATO without an opponent which justified its existence would fade away. This expectation proved naive.

For the sake of justice it should be recognized that the NATO leaders at first started moving towards a reformation of the Alliance. In the London declaration on the Transformed North Atlantic Alliance (6 July 1990) NATO proclaimed its desire to cooperate with CSCE in search of a larger security framework for Europe. In the Rome summit (7-8 November 1991) a new strategic concept of the Alliance was adopted and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council was created to enhance cooperation and stability in Europe. Later, since 10 January 1994 the Partnership for Peace program of cooperation with NATO's non-members was proclaimed with the same purpose. It seemed that the division of Europe, which was a scourge for two generations of Europeans, started to give way to a new Europe, undivided and free.

Such hopes were encouraged by a number of summits and other highly authoritative forums which unconditionally proclaimed the end of the division of Europe, the indivisibility of security and the search for common responses to the challenges of the future. This set of new ideas was solemnly announced by leaders of states and governments in the Charter

of Paris for a new Europe (21 November 1990), the Declaration of the Helsinki Summit (10 July 1992) and many other international documents.

These decisions were not merely confined to statements. When practical problems emerged they were solved in the spirit of these declarations. For instance, in the major document on the unification of Germany (a Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany, signed in Moscow on 12 September 1990), both Germanics, France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed (article 5), that after the Soviet forces were withdrawn from the territory of the former DDR, German forces belonging to NATO would be allowed to stay there but without nuclear weapons carriers. Simultaneously, the treaty declared that "foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed in that part of Germany or deployed there" <sup>\*/</sup>

It was clearly recognized that NATO's Eastern border was finalized and frozen, and the alliance would continue to concentrate on its internal transformation. Only taking into consideration this prehistory one should judge the shock which the Russian society felt when on 1 December 1994 the decision to start preparations to the enlargement of NATO to the East was taken by the North Atlantic Council. It was a psychological and political shock which quickly started to develop into a feeling that Russia was being betrayed by the same leaders and nations that it was just about to join (in a democratic civilization).

This sharp turn was one of the inexplicable paradoxes of post-Cold war history. For several years before it happened, it seemed that the new Russia's growing relations with European and North American nations and institutions was an impressive example of partnership between East and West so unlike the relationships which existed between the West and the Soviet Union. A series of summit meetings, Russia's role in the unification of Germany, Russia's admittance to the G-7 dialogue and many other events had augered a rosey future. At

least that was the impression of many in Russia.

The irony of history is that a conflict arose exactly in the area of international relations. It succeeded in pushing to the background Russia's potential problems in the East, the conflicts in the South in which it is directly involved, and even those difficulties and complications in its relations with the outside world which developed because of the massive use of military force in Chechnya.

The enlargement of NATO has a complex knot of mutual recriminations, and it appears that it will not be easy to untie this knot. In this conflict it seems that practically all, the advantages are with NATO. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are knocking at NATO's doors. No country, including Russia, has the power of veto over their desires and actions. Russia herself is in economic and political crisis, though election of a national president, in the first general election in her thousand years of history, may at least lead to the growth of political stability.

Both sides should carefully weigh all the possible consequences, but the larger responsibility lies with NATO as the stronger side, even though both sides have committed mistakes in the process of the development of the conflict.

The prevailing opinion in Russia is that NATO was and is the driving force in this conflict. The process of NATO's transformation and adjustment to the new post-Cold war realities has slowed down rather early in the 1990s. It seemed that the NATO leaders concluded that all the major internal problems of the Alliance were solved and that the emphasis could be transferred to relations with the nations of CEE. The Partnership for Peace program, which could be a constructive long-term compromise, was, rather hastily, partly supplemented and partly replaced by efforts aimed at formal enlargement of NATO. Russia, taken by surprise, resisted.

The above does not mean that Russia herself was blameless. Statements in early 1990s about special interests in the CEE area, though later discontinued, gave rise to fears and

suspicious about Russia's intentions. The war in Chechnya has also strengthened the position of supporters of NATO's enlargement in the CEE countries.

In the dispute surrounding the question of enlargement NATO plays the assertive role, with Russia trying to protect herself. Naturally, the right to join or not join political and military alliances is the inherent right of any sovereign state, which is not to be vetoed by any other state. But, at the same time equally inherent is the right of any state to protect its interests by political means especially if it perceives a threat to those interests and its security.

The overwhelming majority of Russians share such a perception, and it is appraised by Russian society as multifaceted. Some of them lead to external potential dangers, the others - to internal dangers.

The fear of the external threat emerged because, irrespective of the intentions and rationale of supporters of NATO's expansion, it may, and most probably will, eventually lead to a new division of Europe. It creates a traumatic apprehension in Russian society. Overcoming the division of Europe was one of the greatest achievements of the post-Cold war era. At least this was how it was interpreted in Russia.

Now the spectre of a new division of Europe due to NATO's enlargement is beginning to loom quickly arising. This new division will have a new border, shifted further to the East than the border of the old Cold war division of Europe; the Iron Curtain. Moreover, Russia will stay beyond this new border weakened economically and politically. Naturally it considers this new situation to be very uncomfortable, and a threat to its security and interests.

The most damaging aspect of such a threat is the approach of NATO's military structures towards Russia's borders. These structures may not only be conventional but nuclear as well. When in August-December 1994 the Working group on NATO enlargement created by the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA) approached a number of national delegations to the NAA with a

series of questions concerning the attitude of their states to various aspects of NATO's enlargement, some of them (the Czech Republic and Estonia most explicitly) confirmed in one way or another the readiness of their countries not only to station non-indigenous forces but to deploy foreign nuclear weapons on their territories.\*<sup>2</sup> Only Latvia pointed out that it is bound by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.\*<sup>3</sup>

Thus the enlargement of NATO will constitute a threat not only to Russia or any other particular country. If pursued vigorously it may threaten the existing international treaties (and not NPT alone) thus leading to violations of the foundations of European and global security.

The damaging internal influence on Russia of NATO's enlargement is also quite worrying. It is and will be eagerly exploited by ultra-nationalistic forces in their struggle against domestic reforms and policies of international cooperation. This struggle may finally lead to domestic destabilization and even a rather radical transformation of the economic, foreign and defense policies of modern Russia. The repercussions of such developments are quite obvious.

The advocates of an expanded NATO provide a number of rationales and explanations justifying such an approach to contemporary European security and political problems. A noticeable place among them is occupied by the interpretation of such an enlargement as a precautionary measure. NATO in this scenario should act as a military alliance against Russia in case of chaos, turmoil or other events there which may lead to a crisis in its relations with the West. The trouble with such a rationale is that due to the negative influence of NATO's enlargement on Russia's domestic development it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What is the way out of the uneasy situation created by NATO's desire to enlarge? It should be sought on the basis of negotiations and political dialogue, though such an approach would demand a lot of effort, with emotions and disagreements are running high.

The starting point for such a search may be found in the often expressed desire by both sides not to allow the situation to slide down to the resumption of the Cold war.

So far as Russia is concerned, its political leaders and experts are continuously putting forward practical proposals aimed at solving the problem, (although, frankly speaking not all of them are well thought of). Among them is the idea of Russia joining the political organization of NATO, creating a neutral non-nuclear zone of security in Central, Southern and Northern Europe etc.

More realistically, however, was the idea of new members joining only the political structures of NATO and avoiding participation in its military structures. Along the same lines the proposal of a series of mutual guarantees by NATO and Russia of the security of CEE states was repeatedly put forward by Russia. It later conceded that if these states need only NATO's guarantees it would be their right and Russia would not resist. There was particular insistence that any compromise should exclude the possibility of NATO's military structures approaching Russia.

NATO was rather lazy in exploring the practical proposals of the compromises concerned. Though the alliance was careful not to force the issue of enlargement in the period preceding the presidential elections in Russia, some new steps were marked in the process of the internal transformation of the organization. After several years of discussion and disagreements the Berlin session of the North Atlantic Council (3 June 1996) finally took the decision to start implementing the concept of a Common joint task forces (CJTF) which - if and when implemented - may signify a serious step towards the "Europeanization" of NATO.

At the same time a considerable number of Western political and security analysts are undertaking major efforts to try to develop compromise models of special relations to be established between NATO and Russia, with the likely inclusion of a particular treaty codifying the interrelationship,

the overarching bilateral structures, etc. Among the proposals were: a NATO-Russian forum; a full-blown multidimensional institution, with a Council of ministers; a Military committee; a Nuclear planning group; an Arms control working group; and a Parliamentary contact group.\*<sup>4</sup> The Secretary General of NATO and his Russian counterpart would act as chief coordinating officers. Naturally, all these ideas should be carefully weighted and positively analyzed.

Inevitably, it will need time to take into consideration the enormity of the problems and the acuteness of the disagreements. But all sides agree that if and when the NATO starts to be enlarged, it will be a complex and long process. It will demand careful negotiations, a very thorough appraisal of financial, organizational and other problems and consequences, ratification in the parliaments, etc.

NATO politicians and officers continually stress that Russia's interests should be taken into consideration. If this desire is genuine it needs careful, hasty interaction.

Many political figures and experts expressed the opinion that the successfully developing interaction between Russia and its Western partners in IFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina presents a vivid practical example for future and larger scale forms of cooperation. Unfortunately, this successful example has been too short. It is necessary to have more such possibilities for a thoughtful examination of the essence and details of the developing experience and the format and ways for its future implementation. In other words, patience and time, time and patience: these are the obvious and necessary conditions for developing a successful outcome.

### Notes

- 1 SIPRI Yearbook 1991, p.613.
- 2 NAA. Defense and Security Committee. The Enlargement of the Alliance. Brussels, 1995, pp. 27, 34, 35,47
- 3 Ibid., p. 49



- 4 Christoph Bertram. *Europe in the Balance. Securing the Peace Won in the Cold war.* Washington, 1995, pp. 36-37