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Charity Registration Number: 208223

## REP Roundtable Summary

# Russia, NATO, and the Future of European Security

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20 February 2009

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Russia's mission to NATO is made up of 47 people – 27 diplomats, and 20 military representatives, senior officers and generals. The permanent representative works with two deputies, one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the other from the Ministry of Defence.

Russia's interaction with NATO is focused on three areas – political dialogue; military to military dialogue and cooperation; and the so-called 'third dimension', which includes humanitarian and soft security issues.

The 2002 Rome agreements made way for the creation of the NATO-Russia Council. This was set up on the basis that there would be equality between all members of the Council, interaction would be conducted between states, not military blocs, and cooperation could only be achieved through a high level of mutual trust.

In reality, from its inception, a very different situation developed. The NATO-Russia Council is held behind closed doors not because the content of the meetings is confidential, but to hide from outside observers the fact that the discussion is devoid of any meaningful content. The meetings are held once a month, and have been essentially reduced to briefings by NATO of Russia's permanent representation. The Russian delegation asks important questions, and the other participants stay quiet and write in their notebooks. It is virtually a one-man show. The Russian representative raises vital issues such as Afghanistan, piracy, and the continuing unlicensed production of Soviet arms in Eastern Europe. Only after 8 August did a serious discussion begin in the Russia-NATO Council. Only then did the parties really say what they thought of each other.

The failure of the Alliance to consult Russia during and directly after the war in Georgia was a huge mistake. It led to the marginalization of NATO, and forced the European Union to become the major player. Now, after a bracing exchange of unpleasant remarks, we have re-engaged. But our partners are trying to pretend that nothing has happened. They are trying to avoid analysing the situation and considering what has changed since the crisis. They always tell us to look to the future, but it is not possible to look to the future without considering what has just occurred. NATO has declared there can be 'no business as usual'. Russia's response is that there should be 'no small business as usual' with Russia.

The problems and threats that have developed over the last twenty years have pushed Russia and NATO to have a serious conversation. The main global threats come from areas bordering Russia, or where Russia is there in spirit, such as Afghanistan. It is still a mystery to me why the United States

got involved in a war in Afghanistan. But facts are facts. The Security Council of the United Nations has provided a mandate for the military operation there, and Russia will provide support to the Alliance, not because it agrees with its actions, but because it won't let NATO abandon the country. The situation in Afghanistan has important implications for Pakistan, a nuclear power, and many other allies of Russia in the region. If NATO is defeated, this will damage Russia's interests; Russia will have to fight there, and we do not want this.

Russia has several complaints against NATO over the conduct of its military operations in Afghanistan.

- NATO's operations have been ineffective. They have avoided direct fighting, preferring bombing from the air, which often misses its targets and results in civilian deaths. This turns the civilian population against the Alliance and increases support for the Taliban.
- The US has 50,000 troops in the country, and President Obama has promised to double that number. Despite the large number of troops in the country, however, production levels of heroin have not been reduced. 94 per cent of the world's heroin is supplied by Afghanistan. We are talking about production on an industrial scale. Russia has offered to increase cooperation in this area. Within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) we have developed an initiative which would track production and transportation along the whole supply chain to tackle both producers and traders. The initiative would have been much more effective if NATO had also been involved – we don't have direct access to Afghanistan, they do.
- NATO does not pay sufficient attention to building up Afghanistan's civilian infrastructure. When the Soviet Union was at war in Afghanistan, it had 120,000 troops in the country for ten years. It didn't just fight, it built roads, mosques, tunnels, it provided the transport system which maintained the unity of the country. When the Soviet Union withdrew, the leader remained in power for three years. If the US were to leave tomorrow, how long would President Karzai stay in power? Probably not even a month.

Russia provides active assistance to NATO by permitting the transit of civilian and non-lethal cargo across its territory. It also provides training for anti-narcotics police in a centre outside Moscow, and provides support to the Afghan National Army, which uses Russian helicopters, which are best adapted to the conditions.

Thus, we have a strange tension: on the one hand, there is the abstract, ineffective talks which take place at the NATO-Russia Council; on the other, in a practical situation we are able to cooperate on serious issues. A striking contradiction.

A few words on the future. There is a future for NATO-Russia cooperation; however this is not thanks to the structures and policies we are faced with, but against the logic of them. Russia would like the Alliance to stop pursuing policies which contradicts its own interests, such as the unceasing drive for enlargement. Who is enlargement conducted against? Against which states? The new members, and the would-be member-states are of no military significance. However they are unstable territories in volatile regions. Enlargement increases the area of responsibility for the alliance, but its capabilities, its military potential is not increased. Enlargement does not increase security. The policy is a kind of new Trotskyism.

The Russian Federation does not know what the security situation will be in 10-15 years. At present, the Russian Federation is not interested in joining the alliance. It seeks flexible agreements and structures. Russia faces significant challenges related to demography, energy, and terrorism. These are not problems NATO is capable of dealing with. NATO, with all its missiles and tanks cannot fight terrorism. Russia will fight the threats it faces in its own way.

Of course we are interested in cooperating with each other. But Russia would like to strip away all the idiotic ideology, prejudices, double standards and stereotypes, and build a more pragmatic relationship. We hope that we won't be criticised in the future for alleged disproportionate use of force, when NATO has killed civilians in Kosovo and Afghanistan in much greater numbers. NATO is not in a position to lecture on this. One cannot marry on one's own; one can't be a partner on one's own. NATO needs a partner. It needs Russia.

## Questions and Discussion

**Many would agree with you that the NATO-Russia Council should not discuss small business. Do you have any evidence that from the time of the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008 to 7 August 2008 the NATO Allies themselves conducted a serious analysis of the situation in Georgia?**

In Bucharest a promise was made that Georgia and Ukraine would be members of NATO. The modality of the statement left no doubt on the issue. What was the situation in Georgia at that time? President Saakashvili had held a referendum on the question of NATO accession, but he declined to conduct it in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In other words, he *a priori* rejected the views of the people living in those two territories. The Alliance didn't condemn this, because if Saakashvili had conducted the referendum in these territories as well, the level of support for NATO would have been far below 60 per cent, it would have been less than 50 per cent. Instead, they accepted Saakashvili's assertion that the people of Georgia had chosen to join NATO. NATO told Saakashvili that he should resolve the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and that it was not possible to admit a country that had frozen conflicts on its territory. Saakashvili decided not to wait for a political solution; instead, he launched a blitzkrieg on Tsinkhvali, hoping that political leaders would be away on holiday and distracted by the Olympics, and he could recapture the territory within two days. Saakashvili saw the Bucharest statement as a promissory note for a military solution. He took it as *carte blanche* to use whatever methods he wished to recapture the territory.

Russia had to act for two reasons. First, no country can be indifferent when civilian are attacked, when refugees are fleeing into its territory. Second, no army can forgive another country for attacking its peacekeepers, for shooting its soldiers at point-blank range.

Saakashvili was convinced Russia would not become involved because it would fear US involvement. In addition, the political scientists in Georgia got the relationship between Putin and Medvedev wrong. They thought that they would not be able to work together, and would not be able to take decisive action in response.

**Could you explain Russia's ideas for a new European security architecture? It is clear that NATO is a difficult partner for Russia. The fact Medvedev does not intend to use the OSCE as the basis of a new European security architecture suggests that Russia may be trying to move away from its OSCE commitments. Is this the case?**

If you attach a piano to a plane, it will crash. Hard security and soft security issues have to be looked at separately. President Medvedev is interested in hard security in its primary sense. When the US is looking to build strategic alliances it does not consider their record on democracy and human rights. The US did not analyse whether Kuwait was more democratic than Iraq before becoming involved in the war between them. Hard security is about the most important human right – the right to life, the right of individuals and nations to safety. Russia does not want to discuss security with Cold War institutions, but with Great Powers, with national powers.

What Russia is proposing is very hard to oppose. We want to build a security architecture on the principles of equal security and no security at the expense of others. We are trying to initiate a conversation. We don't have all the answers, but we want to draw people to the negotiating table. In response, we're told by the West that they like NATO and the EU as it is, they suit us fine. Well, they do not suit us. We don't like it. One sometimes has the impression that NATO is not an alliance of states, but a union of bureaucrats and civil servants in Brussels, Mainz, Rome and other cities. They try to fend off any reform because they're worried they might lose their jobs.

Hard security has to be examined separately; the events of last August prove that the adventurism of one state, of one individual can create an international crisis on our continent. At the same time there is no issue that Russia will not discuss. But let's talk about hard security first. This is the primary issue – the right of people to life is the most important human right.

**What was the reason for the Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute? Will it ever be resolved?**

The dispute was a problem of ideology, not gas. Twenty years ago you told us that communism was bad and had failed. We finally agreed, and replaced it with a market economy. So now we have a very simple arrangement – if there's money, there's gas. No money, no gas. You yourselves explained this system to us. Now you say, there's no money, but you still have to supply the gas. When we say we're not comfortable supplying under such circumstances, you label us an unreliable supplier.

There are two issues here. The first is related to the security of supply to our European partners. The second concerns Ukrainian-Russian bilateral relations, which we will solve on our own. As regards the first question, energy resources cannot be used as a diplomatic weapon. All vendors want their customers to be happy; we are all interested in a secure and continuous supply of gas. That is why we were so upset by Ukraine's action – we don't want to be labelled as an unreliable supplier. There have been many traumatic events in Russia's recent history, but two institutions have remained untouched. The first is the nuclear arsenal and the second is Gazprom.

The European Union says that both sides are to blame. We don't accept this, but if we are indeed to blame, then let's build an alternative pipeline system around Ukraine. It is in order to provide energy security to Europe that Russia has proposed constructing North Stream and South Stream. This is a big financial commitment for Russia, and it's for your own security. If Ukraine were more reliable, we wouldn't build these extra pipelines. But the European Union's response is that these are bad pipelines; they insist that a third pipeline is built, to offer more guarantees, even though no one knows how to fill Nabucco with gas.

Energy security is the reason why Russia is now condensing gas and supplying it by container directly to the European Union. This is how we prove that we are engaged, that we are a reliable partner, and we have learnt the lessons you taught us about market principles.

**Land access to the theatre of war in Afghanistan is very important for the Alliance. After the war in Georgia, you questioned whether Russia would be able to guarantee access in the future. If an agreement on transit access is reached between Russia and NATO, can you provide assurances that the deal won't be made hostage to other policy issues?**

This is an area of practical cooperation. We want to help because we know it's your sons fighting and dying in Afghanistan. Even in hard times, when cooperation between Russia and NATO was pared down, we agreed to preserve the transit corridor, because even when relations are tough, we want to help save lives.

**It is clear that the Russian strategic nuclear arsenal would not be compromised by any missile defence system that the United States might build. Why, then is Russia against a system which could protect against small states possessing a limited number of crude nuclear missiles, but have no effect on Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent? Would it make a difference if the monitoring and interceptor stations were at sea rather than in Poland and the Czech Republic?**

The opposition of the Russian Federation is not purely technical in nature. We are unhappy about the lies which have accompanied the missile defence programme. First, there was no consultation. The initiative was a surprise for everyone except Warsaw and Prague. I'm certain it was even a surprise for the United Kingdom. Second, the decision was taken to build a system aimed at providing defence against Iran without a common joint analysis of nature of the threat. Look at the map – why would you target a country through Poland? Are they such fools that they will see a trap and fall straight into it? The plans are naïve. Let's suppose Iran develops the missile technology to hit the US, they won't even be able to build a plant before Israel destroys everything. That's why the US supports Israel, that's why Israel is there – to do the United States' dirty work. Do you not think that we monitor the situation in Iran carefully? Do you think that we would let Iran build missiles which could hit Moscow? We're not crazy.

The missile defence system is aimed at Russia, not Iran. We suggested to the US that we could develop a common missile defence system and the radar system in Gabala, Azerbaijan. This system could detect missiles from the moment of launch, and would include our modern monitoring station in Rostov Oblast. This met with a flat refusal. Next, we suggested that the monitoring station in the Czech Republic be built in such a way that the angle of the radar sweep is limited and doesn't look eastward over Russia. Again we were rebuffed. They refused to allow us to inspect the facility. We asked that the facility be turned off in times of peace, this was also ignored. How was Russia supposed to act in such a situation? Russia has offered to provide confidence building measures. The competitive development of defence technology eventually spills out into an offensive arms race.

We have also established after studying the technology that the interceptor missiles have a double-use. They can be used to hit targets on land as well as strike objects in mid-air. We are talking about highly powerful missiles which can reach Moscow in four minutes and can be targeted at an area no larger than 40cm. They could be used as a first-strike weapon to hit a specific target in the capital.



**Has Russia had any success in soft security cooperation? How, in your view, should NATO-Russia relations be reformed?**

Russia and the European Union should agree on three issues. First, when we talk about security, we mean hard security. Second, economic cooperation is vital to both sides and must be maintained. Third, we need to develop an Energy Union which would allow us to agree, once and for all, the procedures for buying and selling energy resources. The Russian Federation is willing to discuss all of this. The European Union is a natural and essential partner of Russia. We should have a Russia-EU Council. 56 per cent of our trade is with the EU. There is no alternative for Russia.

**If energy security formally becomes part of the NATO agenda, what would Russia's response be?**

What tools does NATO have to solve this issue? After the Ukrainian gas crisis, I was told, please don't be offended, but we will have to raise this at the Russia-NATO Council. I replied, how are you going to solve the problem? Will you drop paratroopers in Orenburg to make sure the gas is delivered? Will you use your military forces to make us lower the price? If you're not willing to do that, don't raise the issue at the Council, because you'll only look silly. This is a problem for the EU; it's a question of suppliers and consumers. NATO has no role to play. In the end, the Secretary General looked for people to raise the issue at the Council when it came to discuss any other business, and there was complete silence.

Now NATO has found another energy issue it wishes to pursue: arctic hydrocarbon reserves. Russia insists that the arctic is a question for the arctic states: Russia, Canada, the US, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. As they say in Russian: 'more people, less oxygen.' The countries of south east Europe, for example, should not be involved in this discussion, they don't know anything about it. The Secretary General said that by 2012 the arctic ice will have melted and NATO will have a role to guarantee North Sea shipping routes. I replied to Jaap de Hoop Scheffer that when the Arctic ice melts there will be bigger issues to deal with – The Netherlands won't exist any more.

**Did anyone in Moscow ask you how NATO would react to the invasion of a sovereign country?**

It was not possible for the Russian leadership to consult with me on whether it would be expedient to talk to the West. When a man is drowning, you don't hold a press conference. First you save the man, then you hold the press conference. The attack on Tsinkhvali began at 11.35pm on 7 August. Russia did not respond for two hours; when we confirmed that a large scale war had been launched and our peacekeepers were being murdered with knives we took the decision to respond. We have a young president at the start of his tenure. I expect it was one of the worst days of his life. He had all kinds of plans and initiatives to launch his presidency. Instead, he was forced into military action. War is a terrible thing; it provokes strong emotions. But Russia is not afraid to discuss any issue with its partners because we are certain that we are in the right. The truth is on our side. The details of Georgian civilian deaths have been kept very quiet, because they were minimal. The fact is that we avoided civilian loses and only attacked military targets and military infrastructure. Can you imagine if Russia had acted in Georgia the way Israel has acted in Gaza? Our intelligence has confirmed that Saakashvili had planned an assault on South Ossetia for some time. The question often asked is, why did he not destroy the Roki tunnel to prevent Russian forces entering the territory? The answer is that he needed the Roki tunnel to stay open because he wanted people to flee through it. His plan was to shock Tsinkhvali and force the Ossets to flee the territory. Then they could have closed off the territory to the refugees and the problem would be solved. As Stalin said, 'if there's a person, there's a problem. If there's no person, there's no problem'. By the way, Saakashvili shares a birthday with Stalin – 21 December.