

Russia at NATO's Chicago Summit

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Last year I discussed the results of NATO's 2010 Lisbon Summit as they applied to NATO-Russia relations.¹ What has happened in the meantime and how have these developments affected the Chicago 2012 NATO Summit? Well, for one thing, the fact that Russia's 'new' President Vladimir Putin did not want to attend the conference can be considered as a significant feature of the current relationship. A number of the themes discussed at the Chicago 20-21 May 2012 Summit were more or less connected to the Alliance's relationship with Russia. In italics below I will describe these issues as stated in the Summit Declaration, followed by a brief analysis of each of them.²

Partners

NATO welcomes to its meeting in Chicago thirteen partners (Australia, Austria, Finland, Georgia, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Morocco, New Zealand, Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates) who have made particular political, operational, and financial contributions to NATO-led operations.

Since the 1990s Russia has frequently condemned NATO enlargement or rather 'expansion of the military bloc' as it is usually described. Although Alliance member states differ on further enlargement, particularly with countries such as Georgia and those in the Pacific, Moscow, according to its security documents, considers this 'encirclement' as a threat to its national security. Thus, further strengthening of the ties with these partners by NATO, beyond cooperation in missions, can be expected to provoke a negative response from Russia.

Georgia

At the 2008 Bucharest Summit NATO agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO and in Chicago reaffirms all elements of that decision. NATO agrees to enhance Georgia's connectivity with the Alliance, including by further strengthening political dialogue, practical cooperation, and interoperability with Georgia. NATO appreciates Georgia's substantial military contribution, in particular as the second largest, non-NATO, troop-contributing nation to ISAF, Afghanistan. NATO reiterates its continued support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. NATO again calls on Russia to reverse its recognition of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia as independent states. The Alliance continues to be concerned by the build-up of Russia's military presence on Georgia's territory.

Since 2008, through increased Russian military contingents, ethnic Russians in the separatist governments and dependency on Russia for energy and other goods, South Ossetia and Abkhazia have become *de-facto* Russian provinces.³ Indeed, their independence was on a higher level before the Russian occupation of these Georgian territories in August 2008. In spite of NATO's frequent demands to Moscow to return the separatist regions to Georgia,

such an outcome is highly unlikely. Hence, this problem between Russia and the Alliance will continue, consequently, preventing Georgia from joining NATO, an outcome in accordance with Moscow's objectives.

Ukraine

NATO welcomes Ukraine's commitment to enhancing political dialogue and interoperability with NATO, as well as its contributions to NATO-led operations. NATO expresses its concern about the selective application of justice and what appear to be politically motivated prosecutions, including of leading members of the opposition.

Although certainly not in every aspect – with energy deliveries as one of the major disputes – under President Viktor Yanukovich Ukraine's policy emphasis has shifted from West (NATO) to East (Russia), although Kiev remains interested in closer cooperation with the EU.⁴ Towards NATO, Ukraine's position is now quite hesitant. With Western criticism of the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko and others, Kiev's stance towards Moscow might become even closer. These developments are all to the benefit of Russia's foreign policy and security strategies, given that in the Russian mind(-set) Ukraine shall always belong to Russia's heartland.

Russia

NATO and Russia differ on specific issues, and there is a need to improve trust, reciprocal transparency, and predictability. NATO's cooperation with Russia on issues related to Afghanistan – notably the two-way transit arrangements offered by Russia in support of ISAF, our joint training of counter-narcotics personnel from Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Pakistan, and the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund – is a sign of our common determination to build peace and stability in that region. NATO-Russia counter-terrorism cooperation has expanded. The Alliance also notes with satisfaction the growing counter-piracy cooperation off the Horn of Africa. NATO is committed to, and looks forward to, further improving trust and reciprocal transparency in: defence matters; strategy; doctrines; military postures, including of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe; military exercises; arms control and disarmament.

In the part of the Summit Declaration devoted to Russia, NATO, although not hiding the differences, stressed the fields of mutual interest and thus of cooperation: Afghanistan, counter-terrorism and anti-piracy. The Alliance recognizes problems in areas such as defence matters/military posture, strategy/doctrine, tactical nuclear weapons and arms control. With regard to defence matters/military posture, NATO is probably concerned about the on-going rearmament program of the Russian military, with plans to invest some €600 billion in new weapon systems to meet a target of modernizing 70 per cent of its arms by 2020. Even were Russia to succeed in implementing such a huge modernization, the result still would not pose a threat to NATO but might be threatening to Russia's neighbours, such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, that maintain close ties with the West. Moscow's security documents, such as the national security strategy and the military doctrine, continue to regard the West – the USA and NATO – as threats or dangers to its security. This Russian posture remains one of the obstacles preventing greater cooperation with NATO. As for nuclear arms, Russia has

superiority in tactical nuclear weapons. Apart from negotiations on strategic nuclear arms which resulted in the START 3 Treaty, Moscow is against negotiations aimed at reduction of its tactical nuclear armaments, probably out of a political interest in maintaining this rare superiority over the West.

CFE

NATO remains committed to conventional arms control. NATO CFE Allies recall that the decisions taken in November 2011 to cease implementing certain CFE obligations with regard to the Russian Federation are reversible, should the Russian Federation return to full implementation. NATO CFE Allies continue to implement fully their CFE obligations with respect to all other CFE States Parties.

Another obstacle in NATO-Russia relations is the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. At the time Russia had agreed to withdraw its forces from Transnistria (Moldova) and from Georgia. Subsequently, NATO and Russia agreed on adapting the CFE Treaty – including data exchange of weapon systems and on-site inspections – to bring this treaty in line with the post-Cold War security architecture in Europe, i.e. including the demise of the Warsaw Pact. However, Moscow did not fully comply with the complete withdrawal of its military from the aforementioned states, which resulted in the refusal of NATO countries to ratify the adapted CFE Treaty. Next, in 2007 President Putin suspended Russia's execution of the treaty. Consequently, at the end of 2011, with the US and NATO suspending their treaty obligations towards Russia, this cornerstone of arms-control cooperation between Russia and NATO in fact ceased to exist. This development surely is regrettable since mutual on-site inspections were an outstanding instrument of confidence- and security-building measures at the grass-roots level of the military.

South Caucasus and Moldova

The persistence of protracted regional conflicts in South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova continues to be a matter of great concern. NATO welcomes the constructive approach in the renewed dialogue on Transnistria. The Alliance remains committed in its support of the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, and will also continue to support efforts towards a peaceful settlement of these regional conflicts.

Since March 2012 Medvedev and Putin, by appointing former Russian NATO ambassador Dmitry Rogozin as special representative for Transnistria – on the same level as those appointed for Abkhazia and South Ossetia – as well as by appointing Rogozin as envoy for the bilateral cooperation between Russia and Moldova, have been increasingly treating Transnistria as another *de-facto* province, similar to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Transnistria (Moldovan territory with a Russian military contingent), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgian territory occupied by Russia), and Nagorno Karabakh (Azerbaijan's territory, occupied by Armenia) are usually referred to as the 'frozen conflicts'. In each case the countries that 'own' the disputed territories wish to cooperate with or even join Western institutions. Russia, however, considering these regions and states as part of its sphere of (former Soviet) influence, intends to prevent them from joining the West by prolongation of

the 'frozen' character of these conflicts. To this end, Moscow uses diplomatic pressure (Moldova, Azerbaijan/Armenia) and military presence (Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Given the stalemate between East and West a solution of the frozen conflicts appears remote.

Energy security

A stable and reliable energy supply, diversification of routes, suppliers and energy resources, and the interconnectivity of energy networks, remain of critical importance. NATO members will continue to consult on energy security and further develop the capacity to contribute to energy security. NATO will work towards developing our competence in supporting the protection of critical energy infrastructure. Increasing energy needs will further shape the future security environment in areas of concern to NATO and have the potential to significantly affect NATO planning and operations.

Energy security is most certainly a booming agenda item for the Alliance, due to the fact that demand, especially from the expanding Chinese and Indian economies, is growing but, simultaneously, supply is becoming increasingly scarce. In addition, after Russia's repeated cut-offs of gas deliveries to/via Ukraine, which also deprive EU states of energy, NATO and the EU have been more focussed on reducing their energy dependency on Russia, by developing alternative pipeline routes from Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Conversely, Russia is also building alternative pipelines directly to the West, avoiding Ukraine. Moreover, Moscow has a highly ambitious energy strategy for the Arctic region – a newly developing energy-rich area – from which Russia wishes to exclude NATO.⁵ With enormous strategic and economic interests at stake, energy security is likely to become another obstacle in Russia-NATO cooperation.

Ballistic Missile Defence

At the NATO Summit in Lisbon we decided to develop a NATO Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) capability to pursue our core task of collective defence. The aim of this capability is to provide full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against the increasing threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles. NATO is pleased today to declare that the Alliance has achieved an Interim NATO BMD Capability. Given NATO's shared security interests with Russia, we remain committed to cooperation on missile defence, such as the recent NRC Theatre Missile Defence Exercise. The Alliance seeks to determine how independent NATO and Russian missile defence systems can work together to enhance European security. We propose to develop a transparency regime based upon a regular exchange of information about the current respective missile defence capabilities of NATO and Russia, in order to provide Russia with the assurances it seeks regarding NATO's missile defence plans and capabilities. NATO missile defence is not directed against Russia and will not undermine Russia's strategic deterrence capabilities.

BMD can be regarded as the most intractable obstacle in Russian-NATO relations. In spite of all the assurances by NATO, Moscow continues to consider BMD as a threat to its security. Nuclear arms are of utmost importance to Russia's security mind-set. Taking into account the inferiority of Russia's conventional forces, it can only (politically) compete with the West

in nuclear weapons. Hence, the Kremlin's unwillingness to discuss (reduction of) tactical nuclear arms. Strategic nuclear weapons make Russia an international (super) power. Any possible spoiler of this desired position, such as BMD, is therefore condemned. Whilst NATO proceeds in implementing BMD, Vladimir Putin is likely to harden his threats to the West of developing and stationing missiles and others weapons in response.⁶ BMD is likely to cause a further deterioration in the relationship between NATO and Russia.

Assessment: mutual focus on Afghanistan as cooperation priority

Most of the aforementioned obstacles to cooperation with Russia, such as CFE, BMD, the 'frozen conflicts' and energy security, are not new, but a repetition of statements in the Lisbon Summit declaration of 2010. It would be foolish to think that these hurdles can be solved soon, easily, or even ever. Moscow shall continue its resistance against NATO's closer cooperation with or even membership offers to Georgia and partners in the Gulf and the Pacific. Also, Russia is not likely to withdraw politically and/or militarily from the 'frozen conflicts'. Around energy security a new 'battle' can be expected between Russia and the West. Unless NATO gives in to Russia's demands for a joint BMD and/or legal assurances of not using this missile shield against Moscow, which is unlikely, BMD will also continue to be a major problem.

However, on other topics, such as piracy and terrorism, fruitful cooperation has proven to be possible. The most promising but also most demanding 'window of opportunity' seems to be Afghanistan. With NATO withdrawing its forces from Afghanistan in 2014, Russia and especially its Central Asian friends are becoming increasingly nervous since they will be the ones that have to cope with Taliban terrorism and narcotics. Support for a joint Western-Eastern approach to fighting terrorism and drugs around Afghanistan is therefore gaining momentum. As mentioned above, through the NRC NATO is already working together with Russia in training Afghan anti-narcotics officers and on helicopter maintenance. Moreover, Russia and a number of Central Asian states have granted NATO transit rights to transport goods for the ISAF operation in Afghanistan through or above their territory. As to institutional cooperation, for a long time NATO wanted to discuss Afghanistan only with individual neighbouring countries, not with the regional, (partly) Russian-led organizations, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁷ However, since spring 2009 NATO (and the EU) and SCO and CSTO have attended the same conferences on the future of Afghanistan. Moreover, China and Russia have demonstrated increasing awareness of the threats erupting from Afghanistan after NATO's departure.

Teamwork between NATO/EU and CSTO/SCO, bearing in mind that East and West face the same threats – terrorism by the Taliban and Al Qaida and drugs production and trafficking – could be established in a number of fields. First of all, this could be achieved by a military contribution, with SCO/CSTO dispatching troop contingents to Afghanistan, whilst NATO forces keep training the Afghan military. Another option is political and socio-economic cooperation between CSTO/SCO and NATO/EU, for instance in reconstruction projects in Afghanistan and in the fight against drugs. By cooperating in and around Afghanistan, NATO and Russia – in the latter's prominent role in the CSTO and SCO – not only would strengthen

stability and security in the Central Asian region, but, as an extra benefit, could also reduce their mutual suspicion and distrust.

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1. 'NAVO en Rusland na de Lissabon Top: hoe nu verder?', *Atlantisch Perspectief*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2011, pp. 26-30; http://www.atlcom.nl/upload/AP%202011%20nr_%203.pdf.
2. The texts are not exact quotations from the Summit declaration but paraphrased by the author.
3. 'Is South Ossetia's "independence" under threat?', *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty (RFE/RL)*, 5 August 2011.
4. I. Lyubashenko, 'Prospects for Ukraine's association with the EU', *PISM Bulletin*, 5 December 2011.
5. 'Russia to create Arctic troops – defence minister', *RIANovosti*, 1 July 2011.
6. 'Russia does not rule out preemptive missile defence strike', *RIANovosti*, 3 May 2012.
7. CSTO is a Russian-led military alliance with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as its other members. SCO is a Russian/Chinese-led political, economic and security organization with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as additional members, and Iran, India, Pakistan and Mongolia as observers.