

"NATO and Russia: A New Beginning"

Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Carnegie Endowment, Brussels

Mrs. Mathews,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your warm words of welcome.

This is my first major public speech as the new Secretary General of NATO. I have chosen to make this a speech about the NATO-Russia relationship – and I am very happy that we could get the Carnegie Endowment, a think tank with considerable expertise on Russia, to host today's event.

Why did I choose to focus my first speech on Russia? The answer is quite simple. 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.

We spend too much energy on what divides us. We should instead focus on what unites us.

Let me make it clear right from the outset: I am not a dreamer. There are some fundamental issues on which NATO and Russia disagree, and they will not disappear overnight. However, I do believe that it is possible for NATO and Russia to make a new beginning – and to enjoy a far more productive relationship in the future.

I therefore want to use this opportunity today to make three specific proposals to help us move in that direction.

First, I believe that NATO and Russia should immediately look to reinforce our practical cooperation in all the areas where we agree we face the same risks and threats to our security -- and there are many of those areas.

Second, in order to build confidence and trust, I would like to rejuvenate the NATO-Russia Council, so that we can use it as a forum for open and unbiased dialogue on all issues related to peace and stability in Europe.

And third, I would like to see NATO and Russia agree to carry out a joint review of the new 21st century security challenges, to serve as a firm basis for our future cooperation.

As you can see, these proposals are linked. But before I flesh out my ideas, let me stress that there is one precondition for all this to work, and that is for us all to display greater realism. Because let's be honest; when the Cold War ended twenty years ago, NATO and Russia developed rather unrealistic expectations about each other – and those flawed expectations are still very much alive today and continue to burden our relationship.

Put simply, Russia expected NATO to be dissolved when the Warsaw Pact collapsed. Because it didn't, many in Russia can only find one explanation – that the Alliance still sees Russia as a threat. And every thing we do is seen through that prism: enlargement, missile defence, even our partnerships.

For many in the West, the end of the Cold War seemed to herald a new age, when Russia would see things our way, cooperate with us across the board, and support the membership in NATO of former Warsaw Pact countries.

That was – in retrospect – a little unrealistic. Russia is a great European power, with her own point of view and her own interests. Often, those don't coincide with ours. And when that happens, there is a sense of disappointment and incomprehension among many in the West.

It is no wonder that the NATO-Russia relationship has remained a difficult one. Yes, we found great language for our partnership aims in the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration – but we have not been able to translate them into reality. Yes, we cooperated on a number of issues – but this cooperation was always kept hostage to the overall political climate. One major disagreement and it would falter. And last year, following the war with Georgia, when Russia unilaterally recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we reached that very point. Our relationship went into a freeze – because the foundations of this relationship were not strong enough.

A time-out may have been useful to rethink our relationship. But the international security environment does not wait for NATO and Russia to sort out their act. Quite simply, NATO-Russia cooperation is not a matter of choice – it is a matter of necessity.

But if the relationship is to be successful, then we must not continue to harbour false hopes. I firmly believe that now is the time for us all to be much more realistic. Russia must realise that NATO is here to stay, - not because we think Russia is an enemy. We do not. But because Allies share common values, and a culture of cooperation we want to preserve. And there should be no doubt, anywhere, that this Alliance will continue to make the security of all its members our number one priority.

And why not? I do not believe that the enlargement of NATO and the European Union has created any security problems for Russia. On the contrary: A more stable and prosperous Europe is indeed contributing to the security of Russia.

We also need to be realistic in recognising that NATO will continue its open door policy -- not because of any intention to “encircle” or marginalise Russia, but because respect

for territorial integrity and the right of each sovereign state to freely decide its security policy and alignments are fundamental if Europe is to be truly “whole and free”.

Finally, we also have to be more realistic in recognising that Russia has security interests which we need to understand and take into account. Many things that NATO Allies may regard as entirely benign can sometimes look very different when seen from Moscow – and vice versa.

I make these points, not in order to engage in some kind of blame game, but to highlight the difficulties of the concrete task before us: Making a new beginning in NATO-Russia relations.

Our ultimate goal must be a relationship that allows us to pursue common interests even when we disagree in other areas. So let me now flesh out my three proposals and explain how they will help us to reach that goal.

My first proposal concerns the short term. I would like NATO and Russia to strengthen their practical cooperation in the many areas where we have a clear common interest.

Key among these areas is the fight against terrorism. The days when terrorism was a purely local phenomenon have long passed. Terrorism has mutated into a global, trans-border franchise. Terrorists move from theatre to theatre – from Iraq to Afghanistan, from the Middle East to the Caucasus. And several NATO nations as well as Russia have repeatedly suffered the horrors of terrorist attacks.

Much has already been done in this area. We agreed a Joint Action Plan on Terrorism. We have been looking at threats posed by Al Qaeda. We have examined the threat to civilian aircraft and to critical infrastructure. We also analysed the terrorist threats to our troops when we were jointly engaged in bringing stability to the Western Balkans. But in order for all this work to bring lasting benefits to all our nations, we need to give it another political push. Let us agree, for example, to update our Joint Action Plan on Terrorism.

Another shared interest is preventing the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery. Many international experts believe that we are at a nuclear tipping point. If North Korea stays nuclear, and if Iran becomes nuclear, some of their neighbours might feel compelled to follow their example.

Such a multi-nuclear world is not in NATO’s interest – and it’s definitely not in Russia’s interest either. And so I believe we need to take a much more thorough look at the available options: at arms control as well as at non-proliferation efforts, and at means to protect ourselves against Weapons of Mass Destruction. And here as well, we can build on work that we have already initiated in the recent past, such as our joint assessment of proliferation trends, risks and challenges.

This brings me to another area where Russia and NATO can and should work together, which is missile defence. Yesterday, the US announced its plans with regard to a missile defence which can include and can protect all European allies. These plans will involve an even greater role for NATO with regard to missile defence in Europe – and I welcome that as a positive step.

In my view, the proliferation of ballistic missile technology is of concern not just to NATO nations, but to Russia too. Our nations, and our forces deployed in theatre, will all become increasingly vulnerable to missile attacks by third parties.

Studying ways to counter this threat is in NATO's and Russia's fundamental strategic interest. We should explore the potential for linking the US, NATO and Russia missile defence systems at an appropriate time. And I believe that the work that we have already done on Theatre Missile Defence under the aegis of the NATO-Russia Council, including joint exercises, clearly demonstrates the potential for cooperation in this area.

Both NATO and Russia have a wealth of experience in missile defence. We should now work to combine this experience to our mutual benefit.

Afghanistan is another area where we can and should do much more together, and where we already have a pretty solid foundation of cooperation to build upon. We have long agreed that countering terrorism and assisting the Afghan government in building a stable and secure country is in NATO and Russia's common interest. Indeed, Russia has offered land transit – to ISAF contributors and to NATO Allies bilaterally -- to facilitate our operation in Afghanistan, and this is most welcome.

NATO and Russia have also achieved a great deal together in our joint work on counter-narcotics training. We have advanced the professional skills of almost 1000 counter-narcotics officers from Afghanistan and Central Asia. This is a good start, and it should give us the confidence to go much further -- by examining, for example, how drugs money and organized crime in general are fuelling international terrorism.

So, we have firm base of cooperation in relation to Afghanistan on which to build. We should now look more closely into what else we can do together, and how we could possibly further Russian engagement. It is my firm belief that there is a lot more that we can and should do together to help Afghanistan to get on its own feet.

Finally, maritime security. This is another area where I am sure that progress is possible in the short term, as both NATO nations and Russia face the common challenges of piracy and terrorism at sea.

Again, we have an excellent basis on which to build. On a national basis, Russia has deployed ships to the Gulf of Aden to protect its shipping, and it cooperates at the tactical level with all other actors in that area, including several NATO member countries. NATO and Russia have already cooperated successfully in Operation Active Endeavour, the Alliance-led maritime anti-terrorist patrols in the Mediterranean. NATO has invited

Russia to renew her participation in this particular operation, and I hope Russia will accept.

So, as you can see, there is considerable scope for NATO and Russia to do more together – and this will, I am sure, help us to re-build confidence and trust.

But we need more than just enhanced practical cooperation to address some of the more serious disagreements between NATO and Russia. Hence my second proposal, which is to re-vitalise the NATO-Russia Council as a forum for serious dialogue.

I firmly believe that we should use the NATO-Russia Council again in the way it was originally intended -- not as a fair-weather forum, but as a forum where we can all air our differences openly and transparently, and where all our security concerns are discussed – including Russia's.

Take for example President Medvedev's ideas on a new European security arrangement. I am aware that the OSCE is the primary forum for such a discussion, and I am also aware that President Medvedev's ideas have not yet turned into concrete proposals. But to the degree that these ideas demonstrate Russian concerns about being marginalised in European security, I believe that a NATO-Russia dialogue could provide real added value. We must all aim for a Euro-Atlantic security architecture in which Russia sees herself reflected.

As many of you are aware, NATO has just started the process of drafting a new Strategic Concept. I plan to make this the most open, the most inclusive process in the history of NATO – or any other organisation. A process in which we will thoroughly engage the strategic community, and use new media in ways we have never done before. It goes without saying that this open process offers an excellent opportunity for the Russian strategic community to make its voice heard.

Now to my third proposal. When I look at the recent "Russian Security Strategy Until 2020" I realise that Russia, very much like NATO, is grappling with the new and rapidly evolving security environment. This environment confronts us with challenges that have little in common with those of the past. But I also firmly believe that it offers an ideal opportunity for enhanced cooperation between NATO and Russia. We should use the NATO-Russia Council to identify those areas where our interests converge and where further cooperation would be beneficial.

This is why I propose that we undertake a joint review of NATO's and Russia's common threats and challenges. We need an agreed analytical basis which we can then use to further enhance our practical cooperation.

We don't have to start from scratch. NATO and Russia have already conducted several joint assessments on specific threats. And we have agreed on an Action Plan on Terrorism. What we need to do now, in essence, is to broaden this work.

The agreement to conduct such a review would provide the NATO-Russia Council with an unprecedented high-level political profile. And it would also be an unambiguous signal of our intention to work more closely together and to put our past differences behind us – it would represent a genuine new beginning for the NATO-Russia relationship.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am perfectly aware that the proposals I have just laid out are ambitious. 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.

I am also keenly aware that NATO-Russia relations can quickly become hostage to domestic politics – in Russia as well as in Allied nations. After all, the state of NATO-Russia relations is very much a reflection of the state of bilateral relations between individual Allies and Russia.

So my proposals will require realism, but also considerable political will – not just to launch them, but particularly to prevent them from getting derailed by possible disagreements in other areas.

Carnegie's Dimitri Trenin once described Russia as being merely the planet Pluto in the "Western solar system". In other words, while it is formally part of the system, it is located out on the fringes where it is lonely, cold and frustrated. This situation is neither in Russia's own interest nor in NATO's interest.

NATO wants Russia to be a real stakeholder in European and international security. We need Russia as a partner in resolving the great issues of our time. And although many in Russia may still hesitate to agree, I predict that Russia – sooner rather than later – will also come to realise that a more cooperative relationship with NATO is very much in its own self-interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this new relationship will require a lot of hard work. But if we manage to get away from the reflex of assuming the worst about each other, and focus instead on our common interests, we can make a genuine new beginning in our relationship – in our own interest and that of the entire international community. Thank you.