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NATO-Russia relations

NATO is pursuing a dual-track approach towards Russia: strong deterrence and defence combined with dialogue. Practical cooperation has been suspended since 2014 in response to Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, Ukraine. Political and military channels of communication remain open.

Milestones of relations

- NATO-Russia relations started after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991), and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (1997).

- Practical cooperation started after Russia joined the Partnership for Peace programme (1994) and deployed peacekeepers in support of NATO-led peace-support operations in the Western Balkans in the late 1990s.

Meeting of the NATO-Russia Council on 12 January 2022

- The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act provided the formal basis for bilateral relations, including by establishing the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) as a forum for consultation and cooperation.

- Russia froze its relations with NATO because of differences over the Kosovo crisis in 1999, but resumed activities and meetings within the PJC following the end of NATO's air campaign in Kosovo, including participation in the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

- Dialogue and cooperation were strengthened in 2002, when the PJC was replaced by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) to serve as a forum for consultation on current security issues and to direct practical cooperation in a wide range of areas.

- Russia established a diplomatic mission to NATO in 1998. NATO opened an Information Office in Moscow (NIO) in 2001 as the focal point for disseminating information within Russia on NATO, and a Military Liaison Mission (MLM) in 2002 to facilitate communication between NATO's Military Committee in Brussels and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

- Russia's military action in Georgia in August 2008 led to the suspension of formal meetings of the NRC and cooperation in some areas, until spring 2009. The Allies continue to call on Russia to reverse its recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

- All practical civilian and military cooperation under the NRC with Russia has been suspended since April 2014, in response to Russia's military intervention and aggressive actions in Ukraine, and its illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, which Allies condemn in the strongest terms.

- In the wake of the attack with a military-grade nerve agent in Salisbury in March 2018, the maximum number of personnel in the Russian Mission at NATO Headquarters was reduced from 30 to 20 people.

- In October 2021, NATO reduced this number further by withdrawing the accreditation of eight members of the Russian Mission to NATO, who were undeclared Russian intelligence officers, and decided to reduce the number of accredited Russian diplomats. This decision was based on intelligence.

- Also in October 2021, Russia decided to suspend the work of its diplomatic mission to NATO, and required NATO to close down the NATO Information Office in Moscow and suspend the work of the Military Liaison Mission in Moscow. NATO regrets Russia's decision; nevertheless, NATO's policy towards Russia remains consistent - strengthening deterrence and defence while remaining open to dialogue.

- In December 2021, Russian authorities proposed a legally binding treaty to NATO and the US, demanding NATO to redraw the European Security Architecture by not enlarging further to the East as well as by prohibiting NATO from deploying military forces or weaponry in member states that joined after 1997.

- The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) is an important forum for dialogue and met eleven times since 2016 (the first time it reconvened following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine). On 12 January 2022 the NRC met last. Allies and representatives of Russia discussed Russia's military build-up in and around Ukraine as well as Russia's proposal for a security agreement that goes against NATO's Open Door Policy. As Allies made clear that NATO will not compromise on a core principle of European and the Alliance security, the NATO Secretary General has invited Russia to a series of meetings in order to discuss mutual security concerns such as arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation and an increase in transparency of military exercises.

Response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict

After Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Allies suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation and demanded Russia to comply with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities. Furthermore, they called for Russia to end its illegitimate occupation of Crimea; refrain from aggressive actions against Ukraine; halt the flow of weapons, equipment, people and money across the border to the separatists in eastern Ukraine; and stop fomenting tension along and across the Ukrainian border. NATO does not and will not recognise Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea.

In response to Russia's military build-up in and around Ukraine which reached a level of more than 100,000 combat-ready troops beginning of 2022 with additional 30,000 troops stationed in Belarus, NATO Allies increased its presence in the central, eastern and south-eastern part of the Alliance and the readiness of the NATO Response Force.

NATO, however, keeps open channels of political and military communication, with Allies strongly supporting the settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine by diplomatic and peaceful means such as the Minsk Agreements. Russia has a significant responsibility in this regard. In April and December 2021, as a response to Russia's hostilities and increased military build-up in and around Ukraine, Allies called on Russia to cease its provocations and to immediately de-escalate tensions on Ukraine's borders and in illegally annexed Crimea.

Wider concern about Russia's behavior

NATO's concerns go well beyond Russia's activities in Ukraine. The Allies continue to express their support for the territorial integrity of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova within their internationally recognised borders and call on Russia to withdraw the forces it has stationed in all three countries without their consent. Russia's military activities, particularly along NATO's borders, have increased, and its behaviour continues to make the Euro-Atlantic security environment less stable and predictable – in particular, deploying near NATO borders, conducting large-scale training and snap exercises, and violating Allies' airspace. Russia is also challenging Euro-Atlantic security and stability through hybrid actions, including attempted interference in the election processes of nations, widespread disinformation campaigns and malicious cyber activities.

Of particular concern and condemnation were Russia's involvement in the tragic downing of flight MH17 on 17 July 2014; activities by Russian operatives that resulted in the explosions of ammunition storage depots at Vrbetice in 2014; Russia's military intervention and considerable military presence in Syria; Russia's unjustified use of military force against Ukrainian ships and naval personnel near the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait in November 2018; Russia's construction of the Kerch Strait bridge; Russia's involvement in the use of a military-grade nerve agent in Salisbury in March 2018; Russia's involvement in the nerve gas attack on Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny on 4 September 2020, and Russia's reckless and irresponsible anti-satellite missile test of 15 November 2021.

These concerns are compounded by Russia's continued violation, non-implementation and circumvention of numerous obligations and commitments in the realm of arms control and confidence- and security-building measures. Allies have long been concerned about Russia's selective implementation of the Vienna Document, and its long-standing non-implementation of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty as well as its breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, actions that undermine Euro-Atlantic security. Allies have repeatedly called on Russia to return to full compliance with the Open Skies Treaty, and in June 2021, expressed their deep regret regarding Russia's decision to withdraw from the treaty, instead of returning to full compliance. Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty became effective on 18 December 2021.

While NATO stands by its international commitments, Russia has breached the values, principles and commitments that underpin the NATO-Russia relationship. Russia has broken the trust at the core of our cooperation, and has challenged the fundamental principles of the global and Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Nevertheless, channels of political and military communication remain open to allow an exchange of information on issues of mutual interest and concern, reduce misunderstandings and increase predictability.

Allies continue to believe that a partnership between NATO and Russia, based on respect for international law, would be of strategic value. They continue to aspire to a cooperative, constructive relationship with Russia – including reciprocal confidence-building and transparency measures and increased mutual understanding of NATO's and Russia's non-strategic nuclear force postures in Europe – based on common security concerns and interests, in a Europe where each country freely chooses its future. They regret that the conditions for that relationship do not currently exist. At the Brussels Summit in June 2021, Allied leaders reiterated that there can be no return to 'business as usual' until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities.