

# Why Russia Needs NATO

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**T**his generation of Russians have begun something extraordinary. They have dismantled, with extraordinarily little bloodshed, a Communist police state and an ungainly empire. They have chosen the kind of country they hope to be: a democracy with free elections for parliament and president, sustained by the classic institutions of a free press, an independent judiciary, and an increasingly free market economy.

The task, however, is incomplete. For a series of entirely understandable and even inevitable reasons of history and of modern politics, Russia remains still trapped in that ancient dilemma that has shaped and constrained its course since the days of the Mongol invasions. The nation has never quite chosen, and has never quite been able, to consider itself an integral part of the West. That prospect, for perhaps the first time in Russian history, is now open. More than that, the opportunity is not simply to beg humble admission to a politico-economic grouping whose rules and pecking order are already established but to play a pivotal role in designing the new structure that now seems to be emerging.

The end of the cold war has been hailed at various moments since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But for President Clinton, the new historical era began when he flew to Paris in May to seal the formal acquiescence of Russia's Boris Yeltsin to the American design of a redrawn map of Europe. For the White House, the future starts here, with the birth of the post-cold war era. President Yeltsin's signature of the new Founding Act that brings Russia into NATO's councils not only confounds those foreign policy gurus who said the Kremlin's opposition to NATO enlargement could never be overcome; it is also for the White House the crucial landmark on Russia's bumpy post-cold war journey into the strategic family of the West.

NATO has indeed been transformed. No longer just the military alliance dedicated to the defense of Western Europe against a Soviet threat, it is becoming instead a trans-Atlantic security system that is deliberately designed to include Russia rather than isolate it. That is the real echo of the original inspiration of

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NATO, and of America's grand strategy for the cold war, devised fifty years ago. Its genius was to comprehend that stability in Europe and in Asia would hinge on the nurturing of the wartime enemies of Germany and Japan into democratized partners and allies for the future. And that, at last, is the promise of this new NATO to the old cold war foe in Russia.

The Clinton White House sees Russia's agreement to a larger NATO as the first step in a much longer process, and part of their self-imposed task is to prepare the American establishment, not just for this year's enlargement, but for the long haul, much as the Marshall-Acheson generation prepared the United States for the fifty-year Watch on the Rhine of the cold war.

The long-term perspective sees Hungary, Poland, and the Czechs as full alliance members by the time of NATO's fiftieth anniversary in 1999, with Austria and Slovenia and perhaps Romania then also starting the transition process into the club. By the time they are full members, probably by 2003, the next phase will include at least one of the Baltic states, probably Estonia. But this will probably depend on those traditional neutrals of Finland and Sweden joining a NATO that by then will no longer be a military alliance aimed at anyone, but will be the new trans-Atlantic security system. This is meant to enlarge hand-in-hand with the socioeconomic structure of the European Union itself. By 2010, some of the Balkan states and the remaining Baltic states could be in, paving the way for the final step that could—if they choose—include Ukraine and Russia as partners with a transformed NATO and a transformed Europe that are each umbilically linked to North America.

The implications of this development, a transformation of the geostrategic world we have known for the past half-century, stretch far beyond Europe and reach all around the globe to Beijing. China has already complained of "a new containment" in America's restored diplomatic links to Vietnam, its strengthened security pact with Japan, and last year's dispatch of two aircraft carrier task forces to the Taiwan Straits. Russia's strategic decision to work with and in NATO, rather than oppose it, is a serious setback for Beijing.

It blocks, or at the least seriously hinders, China's attempt to play the Russian card in its diplomatic jockeying with the United States. With a series of state visits, arms and trade deals, and most recently a proclamation in Moscow by China's President Jiang Zemin of "a strategic partnership" with Russia, Beijing has courted its vast Eurasian neighbor. In his address to the Russian Parliament on 23 April, Jiang Zemin went further, summoning Russia to join China in resisting America's post-cold war dominance. "No country should be allowed to seek hegemony or go in for power politics," he said. "Imposing one's own social system and ideology in international relations is absolutely unacceptable."

The signing ceremony in Paris was the clearest evidence that Russia is shrugging aside this Chinese appeal and is prepared to go along with the American policy of enlarging the traditional Atlantic alliance community to include eastern Europe. The trick now for U.S. and NATO policy will be to consolidate this into a permanent Russian policy commitment. But already, it paved the way for the NATO summit in Madrid that brings Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic

into the alliance, with other eastern European countries explicitly invited to join in the future.

President Clinton insists that this first round of NATO enlargement “will not be the last.” Slovenia, Romania, and traditionally neutral Austria seem likely candidates for inclusion next time. The Baltic states, still the most neuralgic question for Moscow because they are former Soviet republics, remain the critical problem. It is hard to see how any military guarantee to them could be made meaningful unless and until Sweden and Finland drop their traditional neutrality and join NATO in their turn. The more NATO becomes the trans-Atlantic security system, rather than the old military alliance, the easier that will be.

If the NATO enlargement process continues unfolding to plan, it stabilizes Russia’s European frontier. It already has the Russian officer corps in the beguiling habit of working with NATO, building on the remarkably successful experiment of incorporating Russian military units into a NATO command structure and into an American army division in the Bosnian peacekeeping operation.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, with understandable hyperbole, has claimed that the creation of NATO in 1949 was the great achievement of Harry Truman’s presidency and that President Clinton’s success in securing NATO’s enlargement finally fulfills Truman’s vision. But this is more than simply a grand project of Democratic presidents. It completes George Bush’s historic promise at Mainz in May 1989, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, that America’s foreign policy would secure “a Germany whole and free in a Europe whole and free.” In 1990, when Germany’s Chancellor Helmut Kohl was negotiating hard to win the Kremlin’s acceptance that a united Germany would remain fully within NATO, Bush wrote to Mikhail Gorbachev: “German unification will take place only as part of a transition to a European security system in which NATO itself will be transformed.”

That, in effect, is what has now happened. But this process unfolded in the characteristic way of American foreign policy, with a large and vague goal being set, with various administrations half planning and half blundering their way toward it, in a manner that appears far more coherent in retrospect than it did at the time. President Clinton’s decision to enlarge NATO took place almost by accident. It began with the personal lobbying of the new president by Poland’s Lech Walesa and Czech President Václav Havel when they came to Washington for the 1993 opening of the Holocaust Museum. The Pentagon and State Department were then determined to keep NATO as the tight and reliable club of cold war allies. The eastern Europeans were fobbed off with the proposal of General John Shalikashvili of a “Partnership for Peace,” a halfway house to NATO membership that stopped decisively short of a full military guarantee. And as the partnership spread to include Russia and the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, it became less and less convincing to the eastern Europeans that they were indeed being brought into the Western club.

But then came the creeping disaster of the Bosnian war, which from 1993 to 1995 became a serious and simmering crisis in relations between the United States and Britain and France. The disputes, not resolved until President Clin-

ton reasserted American leadership with the deployment of U.S. troops to enforce an American-brokered peace agreement, convinced Clinton and his key advisors Strobe Talbott and Richard Holbrooke that NATO in its traditional and limited form was becoming unsustainable. The old NATO, however reliable and useful, was less and less easy to justify. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, NATO had lost its defining military mission. It had become a system that would simultaneously maintain an American role and limit Germany's growing dominance in Europe, in the guise of a club whose membership defined the West. As such, the eastern Europeans lobbied desperately to join, as much for the symbolism of inclusion as for the insurance guarantee against any future Russian threat.

That putative threat was sharply diminished by Boris Yeltsin's signature in Paris to a deal that locks Russia into the new security architecture of Europe, just as Russia's joining the G-7 summit locks it into the West's economic system. Economically, politically, and militarily, Russia's president has made the historic choice to embrace the West and its institutions rather than pursue an impoverished isolation. That, at least, is how President Clinton saw it when I interviewed him in the Oval Office on the eve of his trip to Paris and asked if it was his policy to lock Russia into the Western security family.

"I hope so," the president replied. "But locking may not be the word. I'm not forcing them to do anything. But if I were the president of Russia, and looked at the potentials for future problems in Europe, or in Central Asia and with China, I would very much want to be a part of the West's institutions.

"I believe Boris Yeltsin to be a true democrat, who believes in human rights, believes in elections. But he is also an old-fashioned Russian patriot and nationalist. This is not easy for the Russians, to reconcile their past with a partnership with nations they once dominated or once feared."

Clinton was at pains to stress that the new partnership with Russia was not directed at building an encircling structure of containment around China. "If containment was my policy, I would not let us buy 30 to 40 percent of their exports every year. Containment is not my option; partnership is. Only a country's unacceptable behavior would justify containment. I am struggling mightily now to maintain a policy of engagement with China, although I am very disappointed over human rights. The Chinese need not fear our partnership with Russia. It is not aimed at them. Down the road, I'd like to see both China and India in the G-7 process. They will have to be considered for membership in all kinds of partnerships and institutions."

It would be difficult to exaggerate the ambition of the current foreign policy thinking of the Clinton administration, heartened by the president's success in becoming the first Democrat re-elected to the White House since Franklin Roosevelt, over fifty years ago. Despite the fiasco in Mogadishu and the missteps over Haiti and Bosnia in his first two years in office, President Clinton has now grown self-confident and comfortable with the uses of American power. He is personally convinced that the world is changing in fundamental ways and that his administration can define its course for the next century, just as the Truman adminis-

tration devised the Marshall Plan and NATO, drafting the grand strategy that carried the United States and the West through the last half-century.

“This is the moment to create a new structure that will carry us through the next fifty years, just as General Marshall and the Marshall Plan generation created the structure that carried us through the cold war,” the president told me. The key to the process he sees as changing the traditional rivalries and military threats of great power relations, beginning with the transformed relationship between the United States, Europe, and Russia.

“What we are trying to do is to ensure that the dogs of the twenty-first century do not bark—and that is worth a hell of a lot. It will reduce the chances that Americans have to die in

Europe in the twenty-first century, as they did in the twentieth. We are much closer now to transforming NATO from a military alliance aimed at Russia into a trans-Atlantic system that includes it. This is a huge step toward redefining the strategic realities of the twenty-first century. The great power politics of Europe in the twentieth

century have bedeviled the lives of ordinary people and destroyed states.”

“It is a fundamental departure from the way geopolitics have been practiced by nation states. We are trying to write a future for Europe that will be different from its past. What we have done is to create a balance of power that restrains and empowers all those that come within the framework of the agreement,” he went on. “We have the capacity to create a new reality, to define our greatness in ways that do not entail the necessity of dominating our neighbors.”

There will be many bumps and difficulties ahead, not least from the old Communists and new nationalists in the Russian Duma who are suspicious of this Westernizing course. Some interim form of reassurance will have to be devised for the Baltic states and those other eastern Europeans excluded from this first round of NATO enlargement. Politically, the most important aspect of the next round of NATO politics will be to persuade the U.S. Senate to ratify the amended NATO treaty. The Republican leadership supports it. Indeed, the enlargement of NATO was the one foreign policy commitment contained in the “Contract With America,” the Republican manifesto for the 1994 congressional elections, which swept them back into control of both houses of Congress.

But the Republicans back NATO enlargement as a security insurance for eastern Europe against a renewed Russian threat. They have yet to pronounce on Clinton’s very different concept, which sees NATO transformed from a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union into a pan-European security system that includes Russia. Senator Jesse Helms, the powerful chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, which will hold hearings on the amended treaty before allow-

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ing it to the floor of the Senate for a vote, has already warned against “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” by losing the tradition of NATO as a reliable and uniquely powerful military alliance. “The senator is sympathetic, but wants to see the details,” said his foreign policy spokesman, Marc Thiessen. “His big concern is that NATO expansion not dilute NATO and not be an exercise in the appeasement of Russia.”

The other difficulty about the Clinton vision for the new trans-Atlantic order is that it relies on the European Union matching NATO enlargement by expanding their own economic and political space to include the eastern Europeans and by bolstering their new military security with economic prosperity.

The North American and European nations of the Atlantic alliance have in the last fifty years built a West that was founded on principles of geopolitics and geostrategy. With the end of the cold war, that West is undergoing a metamorphosis, as the old geostrategic environment becomes increasingly dominated by the new dynamics of geoeconomics and geofinance. The implications of this remain unclear, but some realities are already apparent. Russia can play a central role in the new process, because it alone of the emerging new economies is equipped to play an important role in demand and in supply.

The Russian market of 150 million potential customers, roughly the size of the French, Italian, and Spanish markets combined, is hugely attractive to Western exporters. Although only a fraction of the potential markets of India and China, Russia offers the massive attraction of a market already literate, already fully electrified, and with a relatively advanced communication system, all resting on what remains the richest store of raw materials on earth.

To take full advantage of this double attraction, Russia will rely on a number of essential requirements. The first is access to Western investment capital, which is now flowing, albeit hesitantly, as Western investors worry about the uncertainty of taxes, contracts, crime, and the safety of their executives. Only the Russian authorities can resolve their doubts. The second is access to the main economic institutions and decisionmaking bodies of the West, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and the G-7 summit process. Membership of these has been achieved, or is under way. The third is access to Western markets, inasmuch as North America and the European Union command between them some 60 percent of global GDP. And again, with the Commercial Agreement with the European Union and Most Favored Nation trading status with the United States, this too is proceeding handsomely.

Politically, Russia has already made her democratic choice. Economically, it is now up to Russian governments, managers, and consumers to be as integrated with the West's economic structures as they choose. Strategically as well, the choice is now for Russia to make, to decide the degree to which it wants to link its security as well as its prosperity to the West. Perhaps most important, it is now up to this generation of Russians to make the essentially psychological choice about their own destiny. In my view, the choice to become part of the West is already more than half-made by Russians themselves. After all, the reason that the West's embrace is now open for Russians to join is that for the first time since

tsarist troops watered their horses in the River Seine at Paris in 1814, Europe and the West no longer fear the looming presence of the giant Russian neighbor. That is already one huge achievement of post-Communist Russia, which makes everything else possible.