

Security Cooperation, Russia, and NATO

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November 2001
PONARS Policy Memo 207
CSIS

President Vladimir Putin's decision to support the U.S. war against terrorism was not quite the complete turnaround in Russian foreign policy that has been portrayed in the Western media. Putin has been developing ties to the West for some time, based largely on Russia's economic and business interests in Europe. Putin made a choice, but it was one rooted in broader interests and supported in political and economic circles.

It is certainly true, however, that Putin's choice contradicted the reservations and preferences of Russia's military leadership. Russia's unreformed military has been one of the major factors limiting the country's security cooperation with the United States. The Russian military's approach to NATO continues to prevent a major restructuring away from the Cold War preparations for war with NATO toward a modern, more capable military that can cope with instability and terrorism in Eurasia. Despite repeated statements that one of the government's priorities is military reform, the Russian military remains essentially a poor, shrunken, and angry version of the Soviet Army.

As long as the nature of Russia's relationship with NATO remains unresolved, Russian integration into Europe and the West is going to be limited. We cannot ignore the fact that NATO is a military alliance that improves the security and defense capabilities of its members. As an outsider looking in, Russia views NATO's military capabilities with distrust. The puzzle for policymakers has been how to overcome the obstacle to a cooperative relationship when Russia is not, and not likely to become in the near future, a NATO member.

The solution may now lie in focusing on NATO's military importance rather than minimizing it. NATO does not create military hardware capacity: it depends on the national forces of its members. However, if one thinks in terms of human capital, NATO substantially enhances the military capabilities of its members. The alliance creates multiplier effects in the capabilities and professionalism of member countries' militaries. NATO member officers learn how to train, command, and manage on a much larger scale than they could within their national military forces.

Even more important for effective security cooperation, the experience of working in NATO's multilateral cooperative military structures creates a common vision of professionalism and cooperation for security, enabling its members' militaries to view one another as partners in security instead of potential threats. The experience of serving in NATO's headquarters and participating in training and exercises makes its members'

military officers more capable, and more attuned to the advantages of multilateral security cooperation than many civilians in their home countries.

This benefit was extended in the 1990s to nonmembers through NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which has been enormously effective in engaging the militaries of countries throughout Europe and Eurasia. Russia's unreformed military, however, has resisted participating in Partnership for Peace, and has viewed NATO's multilateral military exercises with great suspicion. After Kosovo, Russian military doctrine was revised to define NATO as one of the potential threats to Russian security. The military has thus been a major obstacle to the development of a constructive Russian political relationship with NATO that might have helped Europe and Eurasia overcome the divisions of the Cold War.

This is where obstacle may become opportunity. Since September 11, Russian officials and analysts have suggested that the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) could be given a second chance as a mechanism for managing effective Russian support for counterterrorism. Although Russia cannot be given a veto over NATO matters, the common security threat in Eurasia creates a legitimate voice and role for Russia in a constructive mission, and may make the PJC a forum for constructive political engagement on security affairs.

In recent weeks, press reports have suggested that the Russian government has requested that NATO provide assistance for Russian military restructuring. If Russia's political leadership is serious about working with NATO to modernize its military, NATO could become a forum not only for security cooperation against terrorism, but for helping Russia to shed one of the remaining vestiges of the Soviet past. Unless Russia transforms its armed forces into a modern, capable, and professional military that can secure against twenty-first century threats, including terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, the potential for U.S.-Russia cooperation in the fight against international terrorism will be as limited as it was in the 1990s.

Were this to transpire, NATO could change from an obstacle to Russia's Western integration to a main forum for it. Putin's Russia could come to have a stake in NATO and in the broader range of military and intelligence cooperation with the United States to meet the common threat that both presidents have recognized. In the new environment of heightened threat that so many countries face together, we have the opportunity of a policy choice that could transform not only the NATO-Russia relationship, but also Russia itself.