

Russia's top five myths about NATO



Myth 1: NATO is trying to encircle Russia

Fact: This claim ignores the facts of geography. Russia's [land border](#) is just over 20,000 kilometres long. Of that, 1,215 kilometres, or less than one-sixteenth, face current NATO members.

Russia shares land borders with 14 countries (Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, North Korea). Only five of them are NATO members, while two more aspire to join.

Claims that NATO is building bases around Russia are similarly groundless. Outside the territory of NATO nations, NATO only maintains a significant military presence in three places: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and at sea off the Horn of Africa. All three operations are carried out under United Nations mandate, and thus carry the approval of Russia, along with all other Security Council members. Before Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine began, Russia provided logistical support to the Afghan mission, and cooperated directly with the counter-piracy operation, showing clearly that Russia viewed them as a benefit, not a threat.

NATO has partnership relationships with many countries in Europe and Asia, as can be seen from this [interactive map](#). Such partnerships, which are requested by the partners in question, focus exclusively on issues agreed with them, such as disaster preparedness and relief, transparency, armed forces reform, and counter-terrorism. These partnerships cannot legitimately be considered a threat to Russia, or to any other country in the region, let alone an attempt at encirclement.

Myth 2: NATO has tried to isolate or marginalise Russia

Fact: Since the early 1990s, the Alliance has consistently worked to build a cooperative relationship with Russia on areas of mutual interest.

NATO began reaching out, offering dialogue in place of confrontation, at the London NATO Summit of July 1990 (declaration [here](#)). In the following years, the Alliance promoted dialogue and cooperation by creating new fora, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), open to the whole of Europe, including Russia (PfP founding documents [here](#) and [here](#)).

In 1997 NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, creating the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council. In 2002 they upgraded that relationship, creating the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). They reaffirmed their commitment to the Founding Act at NATO-Russia summits in Rome in 2002 and in Lisbon in 2010 (The Founding Act can be read [here](#), the Rome Declaration which established the NRC [here](#), the Lisbon NRC Summit Declaration [here](#).)

Since the foundation of the NRC, NATO and Russia have worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning. We set out to build a unique relationship with Russia, one built not just on mutual interests but also on cooperation and the shared objective for a Europe whole free and at peace. No other partner has been offered a comparable relationship, nor a similar comprehensive institutional framework.

Myth 3: NATO missile defence targets Russia and the Iran agreement proves it

Fact: NATO's missile defence system is not designed or directed against Russia. It does not pose a threat to Russia's strategic deterrent.

As already [explained](#) by NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow, geography and physics make it impossible for the NATO system to shoot down Russian intercontinental missiles from NATO sites in Romania or Poland. Their capabilities are too limited, their planned numbers



too few, and their locations too far south or too close to Russia to do so.

Russian officials have confirmed that the planned NATO shield will not, in fact, undermine Russia's deterrent. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's missile defence envoy, [said](#) on January 26, 2015, that "neither the current, nor even the projected" missile defence system "could stop or cast doubt on Russia's strategic missile potential."

Finally, the Russian claim that the framework agreement on Iran's nuclear programme obviates the need for NATO missile defence is wrong on two counts.

The Iranian agreement does not cover the proliferation of ballistic-missile technology which is an issue completely different from nuclear questions.

Furthermore, NATO has repeatedly made clear that missile defence is not about any one country, but about the threat posed by proliferation more generally. In fact, over 30 countries have obtained, or are trying to obtain, ballistic missile technology. The Iran framework agreement does not change those facts.

Myth 4: NATO exercises are a provocation which threatens Russia

Fact: Every nation has the right to conduct exercises, as long as they do so within their international obligations, including notifying the actual numbers and providing observation opportunities when required.

In order to promote mutual trust and transparency, OSCE members are bound by the Vienna Document to inform one another in advance of exercises which include more than 9,000 troops, unless the exercises are snap tests of readiness.

NATO and Allies have consistently stood by the terms and the spirit of the Vienna Document. Those exercises which crossed the notification threshold were announced well in advance. This is why Russia could send observers to the UK-led Exercise Joint Warrior in April 2015.

Russia, on the other hand, has repeatedly called snap exercises including tens of thousands of troops, with some of them taking place close to NATO territory. This practice of calling massive exercises without warning is a breach of the spirit of the Vienna Document, raising tension and undermining trust. This is especially the case because Russia's military takeover of Crimea was masked by exactly such a snap exercise.

It is therefore Russia's exercises, not NATO's, which are a threat to stability.

Myth 5: NATO leaders promised at the time of German reunification that the Alliance would not expand to the East

Fact: No such promise was ever made, and Russia has never produced any evidence to back up its claim.

Every formal decision which NATO takes is adopted by consensus and recorded in writing. There is no written record of any such decision having been taken by the Alliance: therefore, no such promise can have been made.

Moreover, at the time of the alleged promise, the Warsaw Pact still existed. Its members did not agree on its dissolution until 1991. Therefore, it is not plausible to suggest that the idea of their accession to NATO was on the agenda in 1989.

This was confirmed by former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev himself. This is what Mr Gorbachev [said](#) on 15 October 2014 in an interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta and Russia Beyond The Headlines:

"The topic of 'NATO expansion' was not discussed at all, and it wasn't brought up in those years. I say this with full responsibility. Not a single Eastern European country raised the issue, not even after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991. Western leaders didn't bring it up, either."

For more information, please visit our "Setting the Record Straight" portal on the NATO website: <http://goo.gl/GvTesc>

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