

Nato –Russia from idealism to realism

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Has NATO Russia relation evolved from idealism to realism? Definitely yes.

Today both partners hold a more sober perception of one another. However, this does not mean that the relation is free of any problems. I would point to 3 factors:

1. First, NATO-Russia relation still suffers under a sort of an original sin which is that while NATO had always presented a functional approach to cooperation with Russia, as to a partner in crisis management or in non-proliferation of WMD, Russia had always emphasized the institutional side of the relation; her position within NATO framework and her influence upon decision-shaping process of the alliance.
2. This led to a situation – and this is may second point – in which NATO-Russia relation often very much resembled political wrestling; both partners spent a lot of time and energy on institutional and procedural designs, but their common security challenges remained untackled. The post 9/11 proved that it was very much the case.
3. The side effect of this situation was that the public opinion in Russia, and in many NATO countries tends to see the relation through the prism of balance-of-power politics or muscle flexing of two “powers” rather than genuine effort in providing security in and for Europe.

This false image is still perpetuating and hampering cooperation of NATO and Russia. Despite the post 9/11 progress the gap between the political rhetoric, common institutions and real cooperation in tackling security challenges on the ground is still huge.

Now how can we handle it so it does lead us to new disappointments?

I would make one point: it seems to me that Russia has to make a strategic decision on what does she really need relation with NATO for? Is NRC about controlling and containing alliance activities or is it about solving a number of genuine common security problems? If NRC is about the former then Russia will lose a unique opportunity to strengthen its own security, as in the global world no single state, not even the powerful one, is able to provide security on its own without help of other countries.

However, if Russia decides to cooperate with the alliance without prejudice and without temptation to blame NATO for her own failures she will not only improve security of its homeland but also increase her political profile in the world.

For a real progress we need first of all to focus entirely upon a real co-operation and put aside all issues of common institutions. It is true that institutions are about prestige, and prestige is a driving force of most state policies. But if we look at the format and modus operandi of NRC and the number of joint working groups, it is fair to say that Russia as a partner of the alliance has everything she needs to feel satisfied.

What she needs instead to enhance its position is to abandon her equivocal approach to the alliance as neither still-an-enemy nor yet-a-partner. Otherwise the voice and impact of Russia upon NATO will remain tenuous which in long term perspective would be detrimental to Russia itself.