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# HOW THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC VIEWS NATO

**An analytical report based on sociological research commissioned by  
the NATO Information Office in Russia**

Moscow 2006



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## Introduction

The main aims of this research were to study how the Russian public and elite view the North Atlantic Alliance and to analyse the changes that have taken place over the last ten years. The project aimed to do the following:

- understand the Russian view of NATO's role in the world today;
- assess how well-informed people are about the current state of NATO-Russia relations and identify to what extent the Alliance's image stems from stereotypes formed during the Cold War;
- identify how the opinions of the general public and of the elite (political and expert communities) differ, and analyse how much they influence one another;
- identify attitudes towards NATO-Russia cooperation and individual forms thereof.

Special attention was given to assessing the attitude of the younger generation, who are presumably less influenced by stereotypes of the past. Another specific target audience was the population of Moscow and St Petersburg. Respondents in major cities are generally better-informed about foreign policy issues. Moreover, it is in the environment of these cities that the elite form their opinions and decisions are taken which shape the country's policy.

Of course, the Russian people are more the subject of foreign policy than an active player. However, we should not underestimate the role of public opinion, which is often enlisted as an aid to diplomatic manoeuvres. Moreover, some attitudes in the mass consciousness chime with the ideas of decision-makers, and this means that their behaviour can to some extent be predicted.

The report is based on the results of public opinion surveys carried out by WCIOM during the period 1994-2006.



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Firstly, this involved quantitative research using a national selection of 1600 respondents representing the Russian population by sex, age and place of residence (town/ village). Up to 2005, the selection included 40 regions and 100 survey points; from 2005, there were 46 regions and 153 survey points, so that the situations in the seven RF federal districts could be compared. Personal interviews were held in the respondents' homes. Statistical error is not more than 3.4%.

Secondly, focus-groups were held in April 2006 in Moscow and Novosibirsk (one in each city). Target audience for the survey: 70% men and 30% women. The groups were balanced in terms of age and education. Respondents were selected using the "snowball" method. There were eight respondents in each group. Discussion lasted about an hour and a half.

Thirdly, a survey of experts was carried out in April-May 2006. 50 experts took part in it (representatives of executive and legislative agencies at federal and regional level, military personnel and security service staff, higher education teachers, researchers and journalists). 20 were from Moscow, 10 from Kaliningrad, 10 from Samara and 10 from Novosibirsk. The research was carried out by means of detailed interviews lasting about an hour.

The report was drawn up by D.V. Polikanov, Candidate of Political Science and Associate Professor, and S.V. Krugliakova, Head of Projects at WCIOM, with the support of the Russian Political Analysis Centre (CPKR) and the NATO Information Office in Moscow. The opinions expressed in this report are entirely the views of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with the official views of WCIOM, CPKR or NATO.



## **The role of NATO**

When the Cold War ended, NATO's role changed significantly. The Alliance gave up its traditional mission to "engage the Americans, squeeze the Russians and restrain the Germans" and had to find responses to new challenges, which meant setting itself new objectives. Since then NATO has been able to amend its strategy, expand its area of operations and change from a collective defence organisation to one based on the principle of collective security, where the political aspects of relations play a noticeably greater role than the military component. Another stimulus for change at NATO came from the growing divergences of opinion and the differing potential between its members on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Despite these very visible events in NATO's recent history, Russians' attitude to it remains much the same. This view of NATO's role in the modern world is mainly due to the fact that foreign policy issues are pretty much on the periphery of public attention. This was particularly characteristic of the 1990s, when most people were preoccupied with the question of survival and reacted only to the most startling events of international life. Today, Russia is gradually re-establishing itself as a great power and consolidating its position in the world arena, thanks to economic growth, high energy prices, etc. This means that Russians are increasingly interested in evaluating events with other key global players, including NATO as a kind of embodiment of the West. But internal political issues and social problems are still more important to Russians than any changes in international relations.

### ***Level of knowledge about the Alliance***

*It should be understood that the mass of the population is poorly-informed about the important changes involving NATO. Television was the main source of information for 75% of respondents, with only 25-28% of those surveyed using radio or newspapers to get their information. Only 2% of people were interested in foreign media.*

*"It's basically newspapers, television and so on..."*



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*“Newspapers: Komsomolka, Argumenty. Television: I trust two or three channels. The information they give is more or less truthful these days. NATO doesn’t scare me now.”*

*“I get information from the Internet and television. I’m indifferent to any bloc or political organisation. I’m not interested in these things.”*

Few of those surveyed knew that the NATO website had a Russian-language page and practically no-one said that they used this information resource.

*“Never. Believe it or not, I’ve never used it. I don’t think there’s any information there apart from their future plans, actions, organisation plans. We won’t find out anything specific, they’ll keep quiet about that.”*

Most experts also say that their main sources of information are the media – mainly television – and Internet. In this regard it is noteworthy that most experts know about the NATO website and some of them use it from time to time. At the same time, they are clearly quite critical of the website.

*“I have quite enough propaganda, so to speak, from our side on this issue. When it comes to something substantial, I prefer to use the publications of NATO’s analytical centres, there are specialists, experts, working for this organisation. I mean, of course they have their set positions too, but at least there’s no propaganda” (representative of academic community, Novosibirsk).*

As regards information allowing deeper study of Alliance issues, representatives of federal legislative and executive agencies definitely have the advantage. They can get information from the Russian authorities and in the course of personal meetings with Alliance representatives. In the Russian regions these personal contacts are noticeably less frequent, but here too the respondents recall seminars and other events involving NATO officials and military personnel.

In the 1990s there was much discussion of the first wave of NATO enlargement and the events in Kosovo in 1999, and so NATO was constantly in the news, although mostly in



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a negative light. Today, the Alliance has practically disappeared from the information radar and public discussion, and to some extent even from intellectual debate in the expert community. Part of the academic community still has a professional interest in this question, but it is no longer a burning issue –just routine discussion of technical matters. Most of the experts questioned said that even the few reports that appear in the Russian press or on TV are mostly about protocol events or, as before, present a negative picture (particularly items about the possibility of Georgia or Ukraine joining NATO). And there are often reports about operations by NATO or individual NATO member nations in Afghanistan or Iraq.

*“NATO is advancing. NATO is driving off its adversaries.. NATO will soon be here”, under the general slogan “NATO is on the threshold”. And this means that it’s a bad thing” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*“It’s usually NATO’s general activities, basic decisions taken by NATO at a given moment” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

The research carried out in 2005 shows that the level of knowledge about NATO is now quite low. Only 8% of those surveyed claimed to be well-informed about the Alliance's activities (15% in Moscow and St Petersburg). Another 36% think they have a general idea but would like to know more. 44% do not want any more information about the Alliance.

Russians aged 45-59 and 25-34 are the best informed. Incidentally, the older of these two groups contained the lowest percentage (39%) of people who did not wish to have any further information about NATO. People in the age group 35-44 or over 60, on the other hand, are less inclined to find out more about the Alliance. There is an equally evident correlation between level of education and income: people who earn more than 3,000 rubles per month and have gone through higher education are more enthusiastic about finding out more about NATO’s activities. This is also true of Moscow and St Petersburg residents; only 28% of respondents there did not want more information about NATO. In terms of geography, the Far East Federal District comes first (10% are well informed and 49% have a general idea and would like to know more), while the



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Southern Federal District lags behind (51% do not want any further information about the Alliance).

In the focus-groups, it emerged that those questioned were also largely indifferent to NATO's activities.

*"In principle, I have enough information. I'm indifferent to NATO."*

*"If I didn't have enough information, then I would have looked for it somewhere. I'm not looking for it. I'm not interested in a few facts about soldiers' lives." There are more urgent problems than NATO to think about."*

Participants attributed their lack of interest in this problem to the fact that they cannot get objective information, though they found it hard to specify which data could be considered unbiased.

*"No-one will ever tell us the whole truth. They'll never tell us about the goals that NATO and Russia are pursuing, I mean global objectives like world domination. They'll never tell us how many people have been killed. They do all they can to keep people from worrying, so that they stay calm."*

*"Of course, our opinion and Western opinion aren't always the same. So our information here is not objective. Basically, all information is politicised."*

*"I have the feeling that history has created a negative attitude towards NATO. In the last I at least understood that it was a military organisation with a negative attitude to the Soviet Union and to Russia as its main successor. The track already exists, and when you take in information and it fits into the track, you believe it because you have the basis for it."*

*"One channel praises NATO, another abuses it. One channel says: "Ukraine- that's awful, it mustn't be allowed." But another says: "So be it, I don't mind.""*

Most of the experts interviewed did not evince much interest in obtaining more information either. Those questioned in Moscow, who also get material distributed by the NATO Information Office, even seem to have a surfeit of information on the Alliance.



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*“Well, there is quite a lot of information on everything that interests me, I don't need any more for a peaceful life. The information I get is enough” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*“Do I have enough information on the Alliance? Unfortunately, yes” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

*“There are handbooks, monthly magazines and reviews published by NATO. It seems to me that we know a great deal about NATO – practically everything. Of course I don't know everything, but those who need to deal with these matters know everything. Just as NATO knows everything about us. NATO has a detailed network of intelligence experts, it's all done to a very high standard” (serviceman, Moscow).*

Thus, the overwhelming majority of Russians have a fund of general knowledge, but not good enough to allow a reasoned and objective assessment of NATO's work and role in the world. Moreover, almost half of those surveyed were completely satisfied with their basic knowledge of the Alliance and had no plans to expand it, or thought it was irrelevant. Among experts the opposite seems to be true. The overwhelming majority consider that they are well-informed and therefore are not interested in having more information. Still, it is interesting that both groups base their ideas of NATO mainly on what they learn from the media - first and foremost television – and information from the Internet.

It is clear that, given this approach and in the absence of any concentrated impact on public opinion, it would seem virtually impossible to shake Russians' view of the North Atlantic Alliance - either positively or negatively. But there is a hidden danger here: when there is no information or knowledge about the Alliance, a vacuum is created, and this will inevitably have the effect of reinforcing the stereotypes of the past as the only reliable basis for judgement.

This is most clearly demonstrated among the younger generation – they are largely indifferent to having information about the Alliance, but base their views on what they hear from their parents, who were influenced by Soviet propaganda in their younger



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days. Moreover, the lack of information on modern-day NATO is exacerbated by the fact that there is practically no discussion of Moscow-Brussels relations, which would a) be of interest to people, b) present information from different points of view and c) make people form their own opinion. Myths are therefore perpetuated, and nothing is being done to destroy them.

### ***NATO's mission: myths and reality***

Thus, in the light of the above it is fair to say that ideas of NATO have been formed mainly on the basis of Soviet propaganda and the 1990s campaigns in the Russian media – all of which impaired the people's image of the Alliance. It is highly significant, therefore, that opinions of NATO during the survey carried out in early 2003 were divided as follows: 30% thought of the Organisation as an aggressive military bloc hostile to Russia and its allies; another 25% saw the Alliance as a Cold War organisation with no role in today's world; and only 23% knew that NATO is a defence union of Europe and North America whose task is to maintain stability and protect these countries from the threat of international terrorism. This group of associations also featured prominently among focus-group participants, both older respondents and young people.

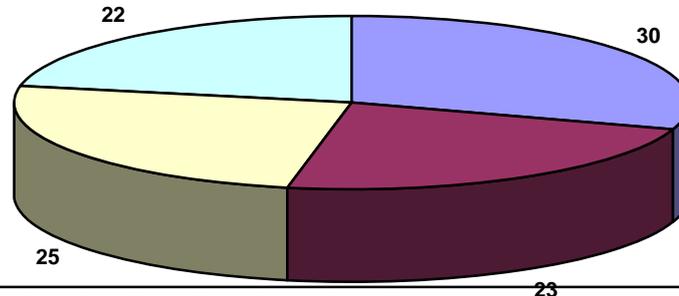
*"This bloc seems to be against Russia."*

*"Associations with NATO: weapons, rival, threat, enemy, arms race."*

*"They had Russia as their enemy, and so the enemy remains Russia. Now they say they are friends, etc, etc, but it's not actually true."*

**In your view, NATO today is first and foremost...**

*(January 2003)*



- An aggressive military bloc hostile to Russia and its allies
- A defence union of Europe and North America whose task is to maintain order and protect against world terrorism
- An organisation set up during the Cold War which no longer has any meaning
- Don't know

On this subject, NATO as such has negative associations on the whole. Over the last seven years the situation has hardly improved. In 1999 a fifth of respondents said that they had a positive view of the Alliance (significantly lower than is the case with other international organisations) and in 2005 this number had grown only to 27%. At the same time, the majority (53%) stand firm in their mainly negative view of NATO. This all happens at subconscious level, where there are already associated “markers” – only 5% had not heard anything about NATO and 15% said they didn’t know.

It must be said that respondents’ first reactions to this acronym are linked mainly with associations which damage NATO’s image in Russian eyes. Among all the diverse opinions, let us highlight the views most frequently expressed by focus-group participants. These mainly concern conceptions of how NATO is linked one way or another with “military threat” or “aggression”.

*“War, breakdown, poor suffering people”.*

*“Like Hitler’s policy, they want everything, everywhere. There’s something rotten about them”.*

*“War, complete lawlessness, seizure”.*

*“They want to conquer and subjugate”.*



*“They rush into any military operations, national conflicts, and try to settle them. So I think that they’re the cause of a lot of trouble”.*

It is worth noting that NATO fares a little better among young people - 36-38% say that their view of the Alliance is on the whole positive. But then this fits in completely with their general view of the world – all other opinion polls have shown that young people are much more open and optimistic than the older generation. At the same time, there is no absolute direct link – among those aged 18-24, 47% do not like NATO, while their older friends (25-34) are less negative and more pragmatic (43%).

However, the results of the survey in Moscow and St Petersburg are startling. The best-informed members of the public, the “nutrient broth” of the Russian elite, has the most negative attitude towards the Alliance. Here the numbers with positive associations of NATO are almost halved (11%), while those who dislike the Alliance make up 61%.

Among experts, opinions on the first associations springing to mind in respect of NATO are divided. Half of them draw on those deep-rooted stereotypes which became entrenched during the Cold War.

*“When I hear the word “NATO” I think of an aggressive military-political bloc” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

Another group of experts surveyed said that their conception of NATO had changed in recent years – respondents noted the Alliance’s anti-terrorist work and humanitarian operations.

*“Because of that, I now associate NATO with cooperation on combating at least those things which now pose a common challenge or threat to us. Nowadays it’s cooperation and common security” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

In the assessment of NATO’s role, another important factor is the general context of how relations between Russia and the West are perceived by the population and by experts. The opinions of Russians today are divided more or less down the middle.



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About 40% think that Russia should become more integrated in western civilisation, while 40-45% take the opposite point of view. Many of those who do not want *rapprochement* with the West base their view largely on their negative attitude towards the USA and US policy, which is not always consistent and is sometimes quite aggressive. Although the population is generally satisfied with the state of relations with America today, this position is subject to great fluctuation as the situation changes. Surges of love and hatred towards the USA may sometimes depend on insignificant events (a good example is the conflict concerning gold medals at the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City and the subsequent media campaign).

In this context NATO is seen as the stronghold of the West, acting on Washington's orders and completely unable to take independent decisions. In 2002 70% of Russians said that NATO was not an independent organisation but was almost completely under US control (a year earlier 59% had held this view).

*"America plays the main role in NATO. Without America there would be no NATO."*

*"I think that NATO plays the role of world policeman. As the headquarters are in America, everything leans that way, even though some western countries such as Germany and France now don't agree with NATO's policies."*

This is, of course, a clear example of a typical stereotype – when people lack information, the easiest thing is to extrapolate a familiar psychology onto the Alliance. The Soviet Union and Russia dominated the Warsaw Pact and then the CIS, telling (or trying to tell) their allies to do this, do that - so why should NATO be any different? And so Washington comes to be seen as a "Big Brother" for NATO.

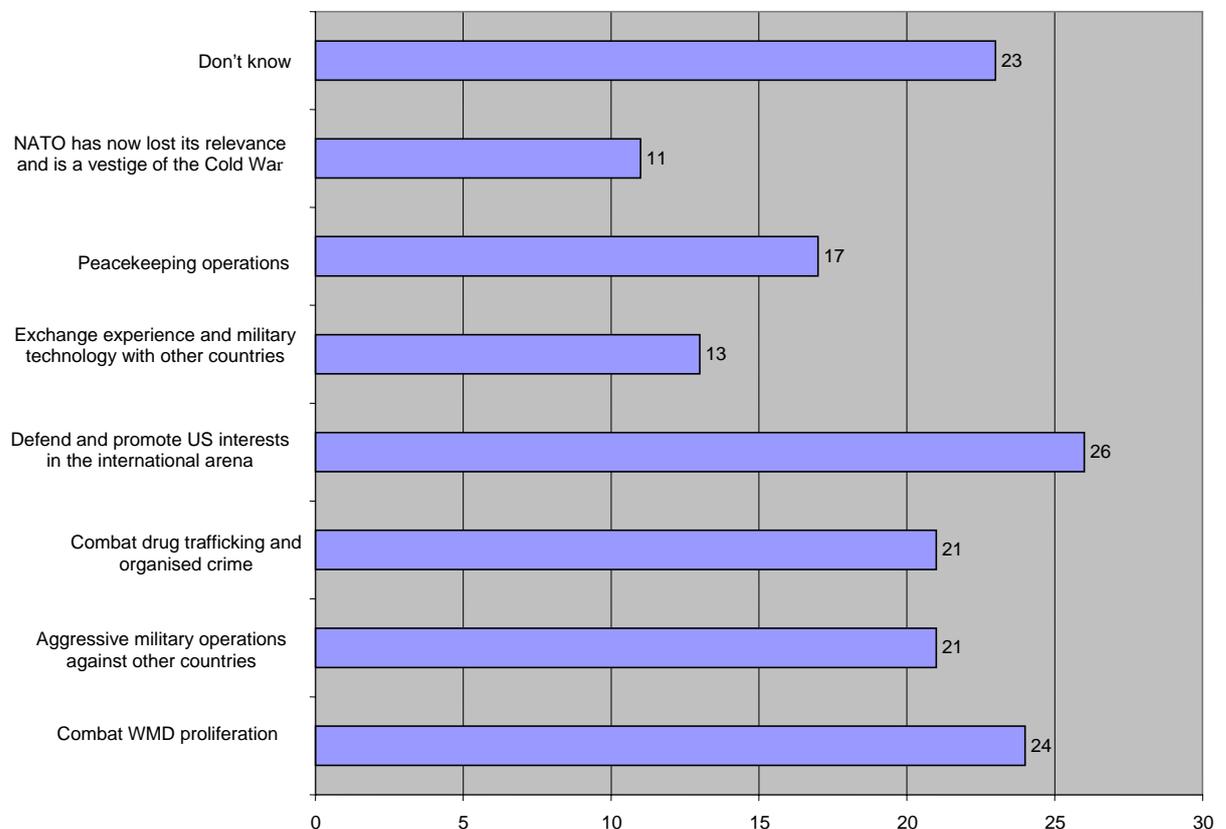
It is no surprise that 26% of those surveyed saw NATO's first task as defending the USA and promoting its interests in the international arena. At the same time it is no coincidence that combating the proliferation of WMD was seen as the second most important task (24%). In joint third place (21%) were aggressive military operations against other countries and combating drug trafficking and organised crime. It is noteworthy that one in ten Russians sees NATO as a vestige of the Cold War, while



about a quarter find it difficult to define the Alliance's mission. All this goes to show that opinions on NATO's main activities are again divided – representatives of each camp have identified primary and secondary tasks (be they the defence of the USA and its aggressive intentions or combating non-traditional threats and challenges – WMD proliferation and drug trafficking).

### What do you see as NATO's mission today?

(April 2006)



It is worth noting that young respondents place peacekeeping operations and combating drug trafficking and organised crime at the same level as defending US interests, while combating WMD proliferation is mentioned most. People who have undergone higher education and those who live in big cities are more inclined towards the idea of US domination (33% and 38% respectively), while 26% of Moscow and St Petersburg residents claim that NATO is planning aggressive military operations.



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Most experts perceive NATO as a politico-military bloc in which the political component is playing an ever greater role.

*"Firstly, you have to remember – this is very important – that NATO is first and foremost a political organisation which uses force in its own interests" (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

The bloc's main tasks at this stage, apart from the classic task of maintaining the security and defence of the North Atlantic region (*"protecting Europe and North America against military threats" (journalist, Samara)*), as identified above by the population, are to serve as a kind of global policeman and enforce US interests.

*"NATO's objectives are to carry out the Americans' political will and impose a unipolar world on our entire planet. I can quote specific examples from recent years: let's remember what happened in Yugoslavia. This was real aggression, even though Russia took the directly opposing view and we were categorically against it. After that – same story with Afghanistan, then Iraq, now Iran. The Americans also decide who should be considered a rogue state. Who is a threat like Korea and other states. Now it's Belarus" (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*

The cause of the greatest concern, however, is *"the obvious attempt to use NATO as a tool to increase western influence over the CIS region, and not in the cause of joint security efforts but to force Russia out. This is a clear trend, the USA is actively at work here. NATO is an old tool of theirs for European policy – and not just European now, because NATO has officially declared that its area of responsibility goes far beyond the limits of Europe and also includes the post-Soviet area" (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

At the same time, a significant number of experts stressed that the Alliance was *"a remnant of the Cold War"* – an organisation looking for a purpose for its existence.

*"Because the Cold War has ended, but the organisation remains" (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*"In fact this organisation can't explain the logic of its existence. I've met several senior NATO officials and they can't tell me who they're united against – it's the*



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*most simple question. The NATO bloc has now fulfilled its mission – it ended in 1991 when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the Soviet Union broke up. NATO's existence today provokes more questions than it can answer. If NATO was really countering international terrorism as it declares, it would have to move forward and develop cooperation in a completely different direction from the one it is taking now. So I see NATO as an organisation whose mission is to oppose Russia and to some extent China" (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

In a sense, these references back to the Cold War cause offence and anxiety. There used to be two blocs, and when the Warsaw Treaty broke up many people thought that NATO would cease to exist too – certainly not that it would enlarge.

*"The Warsaw Pact used to be a counterbalance, now there isn't any. And, speaking purely as a military professional and human being, I think the USA doesn't need NATO to get any bigger" (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*

*"Maybe it's a bit worrying when you remember that there's no Warsaw Pact any more but NATO is still carrying on. I mean, the balance has been upset, and that's worrying." (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

### **Attitudes to NATO enlargement**

NATO expansion is an irritant for many Russians, although their interest in the development of Central and Eastern Europe diminished after the Warsaw Pact broke up. Nevertheless, during all the years of the first and second waves of enlargement, the ratio of Russians for and against the process was on average 14:38, and a quarter to a third of those surveyed were not at all concerned about Alliance expansion. Overall, about 45% of respondents thought that Russia was wrong to accept NATO enlargement.

**What do you think about former Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, etc) joining NATO?**

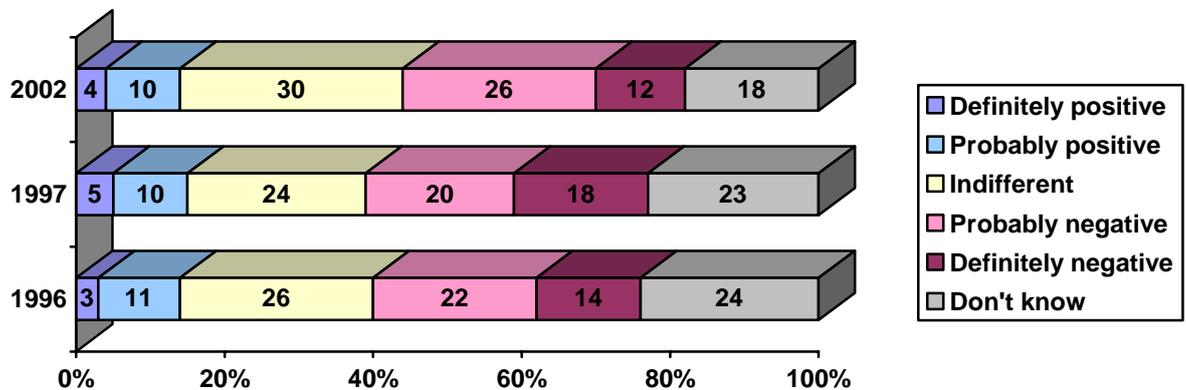


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Most of those questioned thought that the people of these countries had not made a free choice, but that it had been decided by the USA and other Alliance members trying to build up their influence in Europe and in the world (46%). Only 29% of respondents thought that this was what the people of Central and Eastern Europe wanted and that it was closely linked with their desire for greater security.

To a certain extent, respondents contradict themselves here. Replying to questions about the correlation between level of security and joining NATO, they mostly thought that the new Alliance members were hardly likely to be a valuable addition to the Organisation. On the one hand, therefore, they condemn the West for applying pressure and say that it is because the West wants to strengthen its positions, including the element of power.

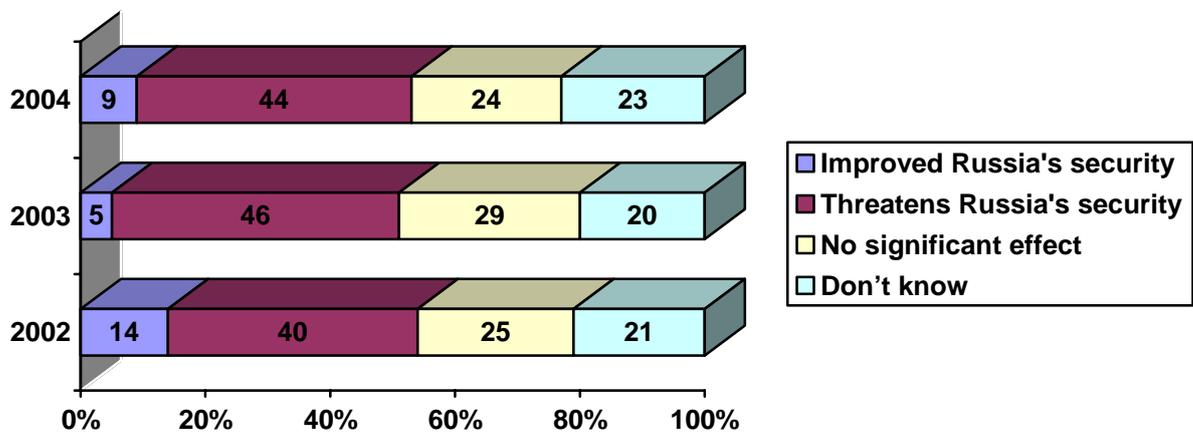
On the other hand, these same respondents are in fact admitting that the West has no reason to take on a new burden in the form of “beneficiaries” of security rather than “donors” or full “partners”. This contradiction reflects the general idea among the population that enlargement is a senseless act – there is hardly any benefit to NATO in terms of its basic mission, and also hardly any advantage for the new members, although they are probably happy with their new improved security guarantees.

This is especially evident where the Baltic countries are concerned. In 2003 44% of Russians thought that these states would be better protected by joining the Alliance



(34% took the opposite view). However, the reverse applied in respect of European security - 34% thought that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia would bring something to the Alliance, while 44% rejected such a possibility.

### Do you think that NATO's enlargement to the east to include East European and Baltic countries has improved Russia's security?



It should also be noted that NATO's enlargement is still viewed in a negative light, although less than with the first wave. More than 40% of Russians fear that Russia's security is threatened by new Central and East European and Baltic countries joining the Alliance. Fewer than 10% welcome the process and think that Russian security will only be strengthened. As before, about a quarter of those surveyed said they didn't know.

The idea of NATO expanding into former USSR territory is even more upsetting. Here the trend is quite clear and stable - it has less to do with the Alliance's actions than with losing influence over traditional allies. The number of respondents who would not object to Georgia, Ukraine, etc joining NATO fell to 9% in 2002 and remains at this low level today. Nearly half the Russian people (48% in 2002) are still against this process. The only positive element is the rising number of those who are "indifferent" – from 17% in 1997 to 25% in 2002.

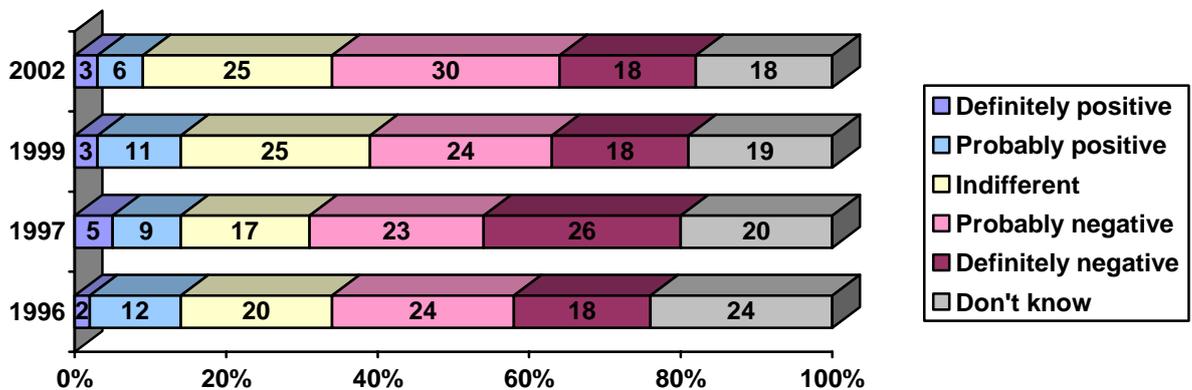


*"It annoys me to see NATO going where it's not wanted."*

*"Nearer and nearer to us and our borders."*

*"They keep on shouting – you want to be the same as us, everyone is like us. They say we're not developed enough, or that we're just not right."*

### What do you think about former USSR republics joining NATO?



Russians are even less convinced that such a step would help strengthen the security of former Soviet republics. In 2003 only 35% thought that the NATO “umbrella” would help former Soviet states, while 41% disagreed. On the subject of Ukraine, George and other potential candidates making a possible contribution to European security, respondents have even more radical views. Only 28% think that this will strengthen the European security architecture, while 47% of Russians believe that membership of NATO is unlikely to be useful in strengthening the security system in Europe.

All the same, Russians view this process not only with annoyance or scepticism, but also with some trepidation. They have not yet realised that, for the most part, NATO enlargement is driven by the internal logic of Alliance development, in which expansion and an extending reach are the reasons for NATO's existence as a bureaucratic institution. More than 40% of the population say that Russia's security will be undermined by former USSR countries joining the Alliance. It is true that another 30% do not see any effects from enlargement, while 7% think that it will even have a positive impact on the RF.



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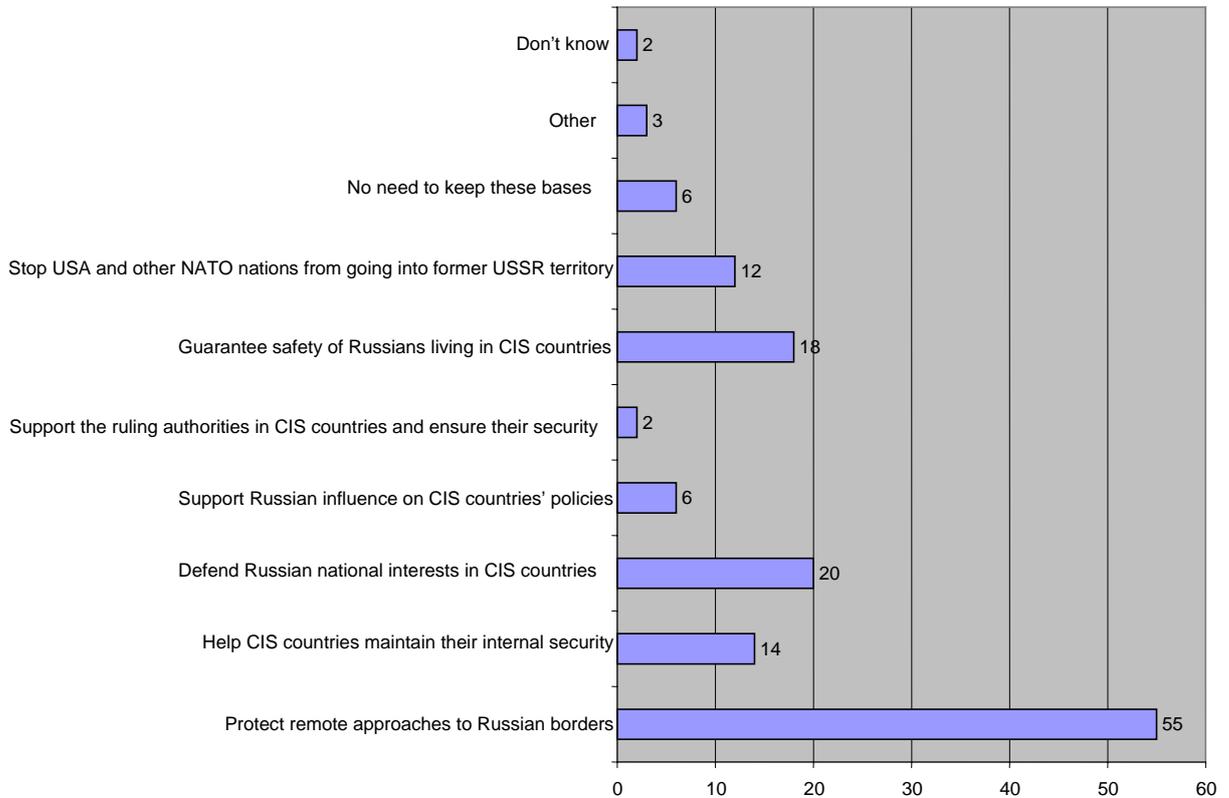
There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, proximity plays a role here – a foreign organisation has rushed up to Russia's borders and won the hearts and minds of the elite in those countries which were once under Russia's influence.

By way of illustration, there is the telling example of Russian bases abroad. Experts understand that, from the military point of view, these are mostly expensive installations without any useful strategic or tactical weight (be they bases in Georgia, Transdnistria or Ukraine, or even the airbase in the Kyrgyz Republic). The personnel at these bases are not trained to respond to new threats; assets are obsolete or inadequate; corruption is rife, and the troops have no practical use. It is useless even in terms of stabilising RF-friendly regimes in CIS countries (we need only consider the lack of action by Russian military during events in Ajaria, the Rose Revolution in the Kyrgyz Republic or even the economic blockade of Transdnistria).

However, for the population, who are usually in favour of neutrality and non-interference in any conflict and against sending military contingents to any kind of hot spot, the military bases are still a kind of symbolic stronghold of Russian influence. And a stronghold against whom? Partly against NATO (12%, though in Moscow and St Petersburg 30% think so) and in defence of certain abstract "Russian national interests" (20%) which respondents were sometimes hard pressed to formulate – and when they could, they most often cited internal problems rather than foreign policy.

**There are still Russian military bases in a number of CIS countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Tajikistan). What tasks do you think they should be carrying out?**

*(March 2005)*



On the other hand, these ways of thinking (apprehension and anticipation of aggression as a result of expansion) are partly provoked by the Russian elite and expert community. For them, further *rapprochement* between the former Soviet countries and NATO means that this scenario might be repeated in Russia too. This in turn would require real modernisation of the country and thorough – not just cosmetic – reforms. At the same time, the contradictory signals sent out to the people by the Russian authorities (NATO as a partner, NATO as the concealed enemy) only confuse Russians more and cause a rift in public opinion.

### ***Assessment of the Alliance's capabilities and its future***

Finally, we must take into account the fact that Russians are sceptical about NATO's military capabilities and effectiveness. This leads to a certain gradual shifting of assessments – from the blatantly negative to greater indifference. It is interesting that even at the most difficult times, i.e. at the height of the 1999 Kosovo crisis, most of those surveyed (50%) were convinced that relations between Moscow and Brussels



would be restored and that there was unlikely to be a new spiral of tension (only 25% saw a pessimistic scenario). The NATO military machine itself seems solid and threatening, especially considering how it is approaching Russia's borders. However, many Russians share the opinion of the expert community that the Alliance is actually a giant with feet of clay - NATO and the USA were unable to make real progress in Kosovo or in Afghanistan. And the success stories – Bosnia or Macedonia – are less known to the public at large or have long since disappeared from public debate.

As far as the future of NATO is concerned, therefore, a significant number of experts think that it will inevitably wind itself up; it is an organisation which *“will make itself obsolete, and is already well on the way”* (representative of academic circles, Samara). This is because of contradictions within the Organisation and the unjustified enlargement of its membership, which makes the decision-making process inefficient.

*“In the final analysis, NATO as an organisation is completely losing its fighting capability”* (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).

*“They’re taking in new members – maybe that will work out all right for us, because decision-making gets more difficult, although the Americans don’t let anyone open their mouths there. I’ve seen it, I’ve been at NATO meetings, and when we severely criticised NATO’s military preparations the other countries from the former eastern camp [...] We thought this meant they disapproved of what we said. And imagine my surprise when these same people came up to me in the corridor and said – and I quote word-for-word – go on, lads, give them what-for, because we can’t say a word here. So I think they could start to have internal conflicts, though the Americans are managing to control everyone at the moment”* (representative of state agency, Moscow).

Some respondents, however, take a more optimistic view on account of the Alliance's transformation and adaptation to new global challenges, i.e. the potential for protecting Europe and America against terrorism, local conflicts, etc.

*“There will be changes because anti-terrorist work is so urgent, they’ll combine their efforts to put an end to local conflicts – including inter-ethnic conflicts – and I think they might well combine their efforts using army discipline and organisation*



*skills in preventing and managing disasters in Europe. I mean it will be a kind of European EMERCOM” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*“As regards combating world terrorism, in any case, they say this all the time, there are exercises, joint exercises, joint consultations, so anti-terrorism is on the increase. Yes, I think that as far as anti-terrorist work is concerned, and under the cover of this work, their presence will build up everywhere” (journalist, Kaliningrad).*

Another version is NATO’s transformation into a political body with a gradual scaling down of the military element.

*“And then if it’s going to be a political body, let’s say a kind of general foreign policy, then there’s bound to be more correlation between NATO and the EU and some merging of these two bodies, and Russia will be able to cooperate much more comfortably with this kind of model” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

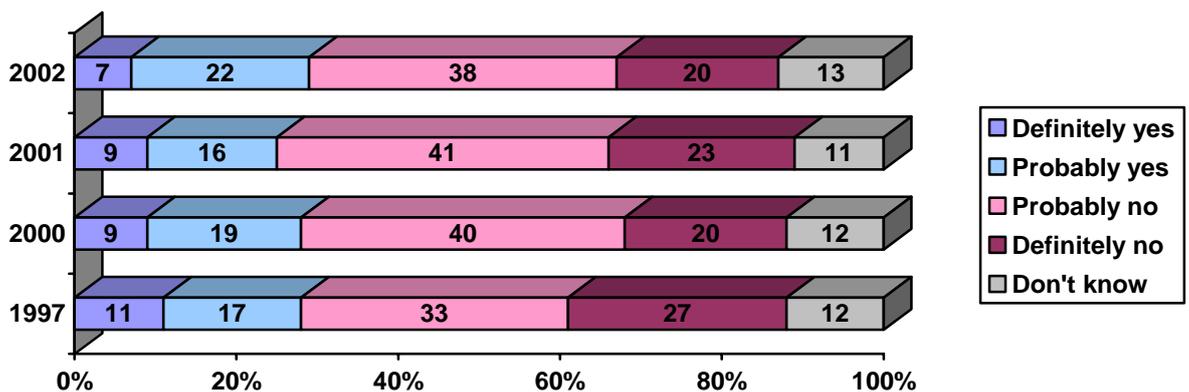
*“It’s the most powerful military-political organisation, I would say, and it’s got to have something to do. The transformation process is underway – a transformation, I would say, from a military-political organisation to a politico-military organisation. It will focus more on politico-economic tasks” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*



## NATO-Russia relations: models and prospects

In the light of Russian views of NATO as set out above, it is natural that opinions on cooperation models for Moscow and the Alliance should also be of a distinctive nature. Most people consider the RF to be a peaceful country posing no threat to the security of NATO member nations (about 60%). Only 28% think that Russia could be a cause for anxiety among Western countries.

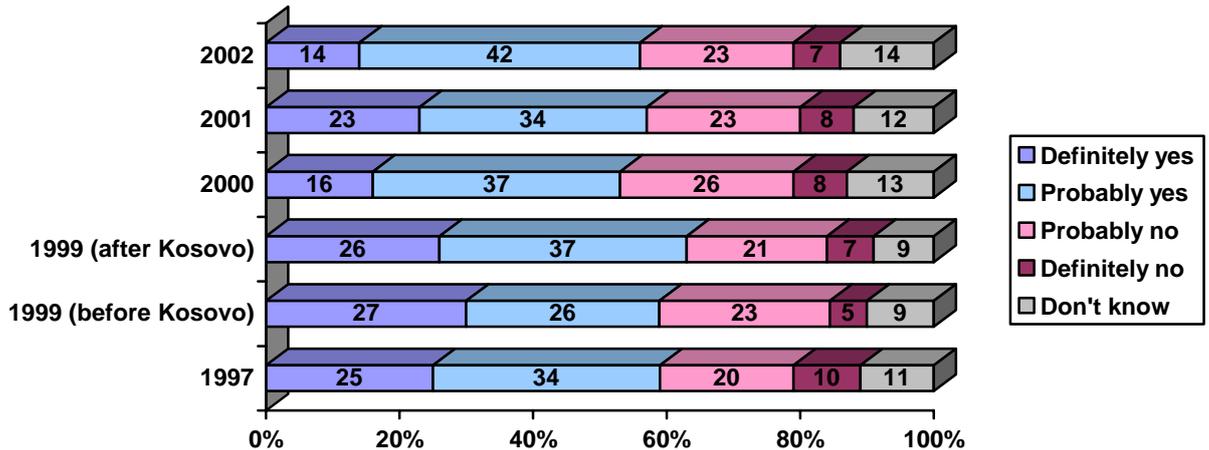
### Do you think that western countries which are members of NATO have any reason to fear Russia?



At the same time, respondents had exactly the opposite reaction when asked about dangerous Western influence. 53-56% were concerned about NATO's activities and only 30% thought that Russia should not expect any threat from the West.



## Do you think that Russia has any reason to fear Western countries which are members of NATO?



However, there are two positive factors. One is the diminishing number of hardliners, who are gradually going over to the “probably yes” group. The other is that Russians are realising that this kind of confrontation or rivalry will not lead to a third world war or open conflict with the West. Even in 1999 the number of people expecting clashes between Russia and NATO was not more than a third (37%, of whom only 8% thought that there was a high probability of armed conflict). Most people (49%) thought that such a war was practically impossible.

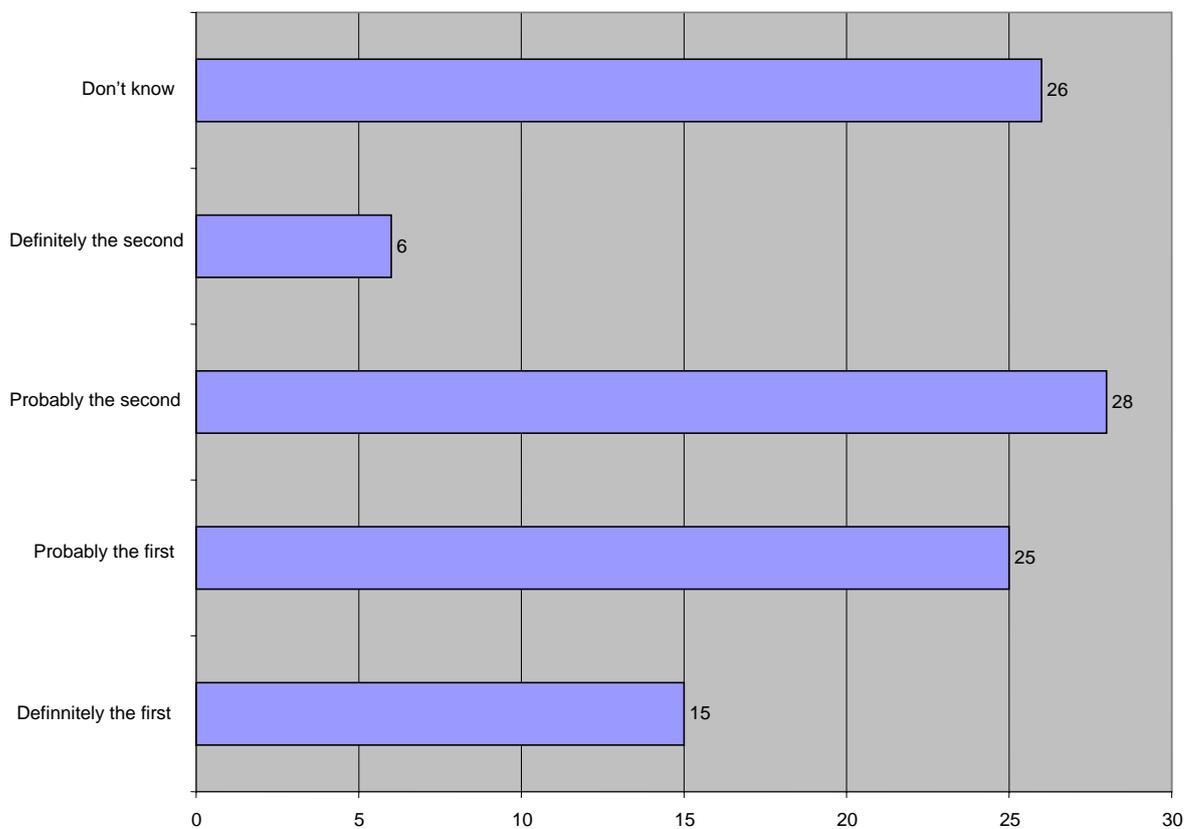
### ***NATO: is there a threat to Russia?***

In 2006, looking at NATO-Russia relations from a historical perspective, Russians present divided opinions and more restrained evaluations. 40% of those questioned thought that NATO still presented some kind of threat to our country today, while 34% thought that this standpoint was a throwback to the Cold War. The latter view prevailed amongst the youngest people (36:41), and was also typical for Moscow and St Petersburg (33:48).



**Some Russians think that NATO is a threat to our country today. Others believe that this threat no longer exists - it is a thing of the past, from the days of confrontation between the USSR and the USA. Which of these two views do you lean towards?**

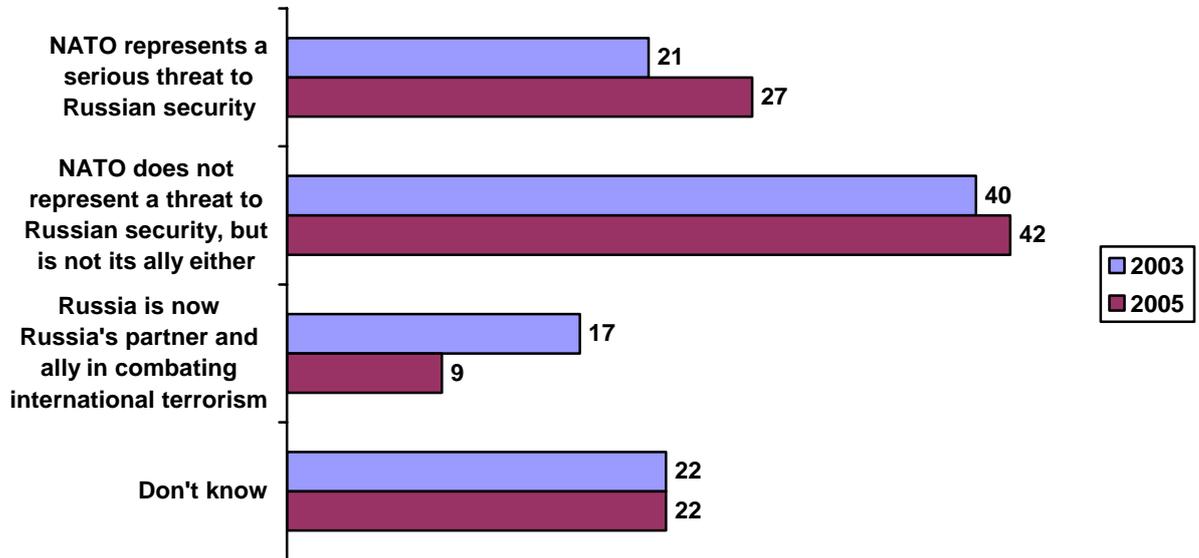
*(April 2006)*



The negative mood is largely irrational, like the fears. When it comes to more pragmatic assessments, however, it becomes clear that only a quarter of Russians see the Alliance as a real and serious threat. The majority (about 40%) are undecided as to whether NATO should be considered an enemy or an ally. Fewer than 10% really believe in the partnership between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, especially in combating international terrorism, which is a very sensitive area for the Russian people.



### In your view, what does NATO represent for Russia today?



*"Surely we don't expect any threat? I don't have the feeling that the Americans are going to come and attack Russia."*

*"Of course not. Maybe they sometimes try to get the upper hand over us, but it doesn't amount to much."*

Some people explained their lack of apprehension by saying that NATO was restrained by Russia's military might.

*"As long as we have nuclear weapons everything should be OK."*

*"I don't think relations are friendly - I would say they are neutral. All these bases they're building around our country – it's just because they're scared. I don't think there will be any armed conflict. If there were, it would be something terrible."*

Nevertheless, some respondents are inclined to think that NATO might hold an indirect threat to Russia (economic, political, ideological, ecological, etc).

*"I think that NATO operates on the basis of ideology. Breaking up the country from within, not by attacking Russia directly."*

*"I think there is a threat. Of course, they are interested in the economic side of things."*



*“They won’t attack. You think there were no after-effects from the attack on Yugoslavia? They fired some unknown kind of weapon, and do you think that hasn’t affected us? It’s ecology, isn’t it?”*

Overall, young people are more neutral, although their assessments are far from being completely positive. Most of the respondents who are indifferent to NATO are in the 25-44 age group. They do not have a clear idea of NATO's role in respect of Russia – they have already overcome the stereotypes of the past but still do not see any potential for partnership with the Alliance. As far as geographical differences are concerned, they are most worried about NATO in Moscow, and also in Siberia and the Far East – there is a slightly higher percentage of responses of this kind there. People in the North-West Federal District are more positively-inclined or neutral; after all, they are involved in a large number of transborder and regional cooperation programmes and are more likely to have direct interaction with politicians, military and experts from NATO countries. Thus, human contacts can overcome a wave of incomprehension.

What’s more, most experts think that NATO does not pose any real military threat to Russia today.

*“NATO has been diluted by the new members joining, it’s already lost its former military, purely military nature as opposition to Russia, and it’s becoming more and more a political union” (representative of academic community, Samara).*

*“When I ask a general – how do you see, let’s say, military operations, and what’s more the western world demands that you take responsibility for the people whose country you’ve occupied. Can a reasonable Western politician think of starting a war against Russia, but then establish order, structures? Everything is so run down here that the western economy will collapse if they try this” (journalist, Moscow)*

However, an aggravating factor in this context is that NATO is moving closer to Russia’s borders and maintaining its powerful military potential, which could hypothetically be directed against the RF or countries which are friendly towards the RF. Moreover, NATO could become a destabilising factor around Russia’s borders or in Russia itself.



*“In the sense that any military structure critically close to administrative centres and major industrial regions... On the other hand it’s not so much a threat – a potential danger. And this... or the possibility of using elements of the threat of military pressure, if there is some unforeseen turn of events, it exists” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*“NATO is capable of carrying out local operations which could destabilise the situation around Russia. It’s not hard to see that attempts to change the way peacekeeping operations are conducted in Transdnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia will lead to a large-scale bloody conflict. The Americans don’t care – they’re far away. America has already shown clearly that it doesn’t care what happens on the streets of Belgrade. And so they won’t care what happens somewhere in Sukhumi, Tbilisi, Tskhinvali, or Grozny or Vladikavkaz – they absolutely couldn’t care less how many people will die there or who will die there. It’ll be traditional American tactics, to make major important powers get involved in minor conflicts. I mean China has Taiwan, India has its conflict with Pakistan. Every power has its counterweight or small regional conflict which becomes the Achilles heel of a large, powerful country. Well, then there was Chechnya. Now they could set off the whole Caucasus region to destabilise Russia” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

There’s still a possibility of political confrontation, or these famous ideological differences. And this is not surprising, considering the gap between Russian and Western values. There is the effect of Russians’ incomplete or peculiar understanding of the integration processes going on in Europe - NATO is, after all, only one element in the geopolitical project. However, this geopolitical project is seen as “drawing new dividing lines” from the viewpoint of a conspiratorial way of thinking which is reinforced by the “besieged fortress” syndrome.

*“But [there is] a political threat, in the sense that Russia is always having to take decisions on foreign policy, keeping an eye on NATO. I mean we’re not free to take decisions without agreeing –not even agreeing, but – how shall I put it - without taking account of NATO’s influence” (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*



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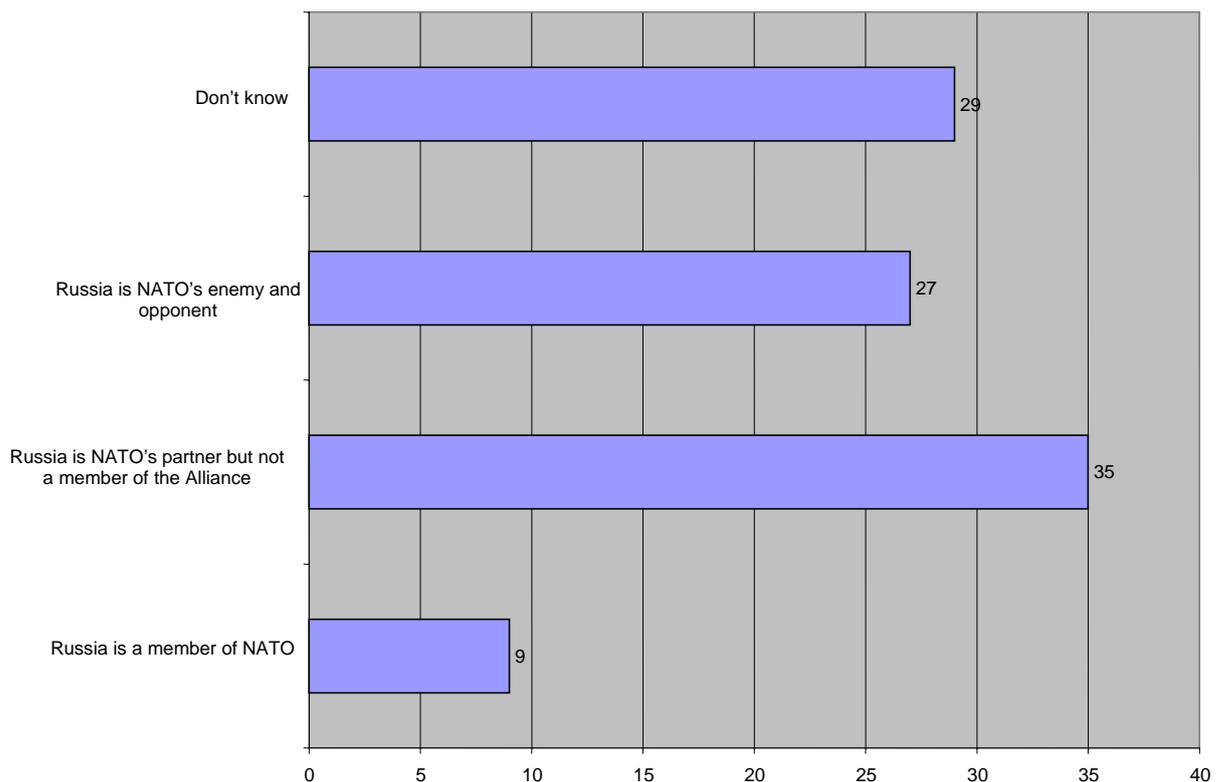
*"At political level, Russia's geopolitical capabilities have been severely reduced. What's more, NATO has plans for a "Big Arc" – going into a new geopolitical area, expanding into Southern and South-East Asia; it's not a direct threat to Russia, but again it severely curtails the possibilities for geopolitical manoeuvring. It would worry China – China would start to put together its own geopolitical organisation and there would be a new world split, with Russia the buffer state between the two blocs" (representative of academic community, Moscow).*



### ***NATO-Russia: format of relations***

This is more or less the way opinions are split on the current state of NATO-Russia relations. It is interesting that today 9% of those surveyed think that the RF is already a member of the Alliance; among young people (up to 24) this figure reaches 14%, with 40% seeing NATO as a partner. Among the over 60s, far more people said they didn't know and fewer saw NATO-Russia relations as a partnership. In Moscow and St Petersburg those who saw the Alliance as an opponent (39%) clearly outnumbered those who saw a partnership (27%).

### **Which of the statements below best describes NATO-Russia relations at the moment? (April 2006)**



It thus emerges that most of the population still have largely negative feelings towards NATO and see it mostly as a threat or at least as an unreliable partner. At the same



time, Russians think that Moscow, for its part, is more keen to have contacts with the Alliance and makes advances in this direction more often than NATO, taking the position of partner or ally. However, this does not mean that Russians are inclined to see NATO as a guarantee of Russia's security, while recognising that the world today is inevitably interdependent.

Focus-group members also had differing opinions. Some were inclined to describe Moscow-Brussels relations as openly hostile and not very good.

*"NATO wants to suppress Russia – that's their goal."*

*"As far as I know, relations are not very good, though NATO took part in Yugoslavia together with our troops."*

Other respondents described relations as "wary", not in open conflict, but far from constructive cooperation.

*"They act friendly, but behind their backs they're giving us the V-sign."*

*"NATO and Russia are like two businessmen on the same territory. They don't beat each other up, but they look suspiciously at each other and clench their fists behind their backs. We have completely different interests."*

A third group did not exclude the possibility of cooperation between Russia and NATO on certain points.

*"Today NATO exists and Russia exists. Both sides must respect the other's principles. So there is interaction. Not cooperation – but interaction. Yes, there is a Russian representation at NATO, there are joint exercises, because there is an international threat of terrorism. But they are cautiously wary of each other. We watch carefully to see who has what kind of weapons, how they are organising."*

Some respondents emphasised that they saw clear signs of progress in NATO-Russia relations over recent years, though it was partly based on restraint.

*"There is political balance. I don't think there will be any acute aggravation for the simple reason that arms development is much the same on both sides."*



*“Compared with 20 years ago, there is some movement. But these relations will never be friendly – our objectives are different. It’s hard to say how these relations will develop. Though I do think that we’ve already passed the high point of NATO-Russia confrontation.”*

Most of the experts questioned also described NATO-Russia relations today as interaction in the form of restrained partner relations, which nevertheless carry the burden of the past and a certain wariness.

*“On the outside, there’s a kind of partnership zone. Inside, each partner doubts the other’s sincerity and sees him as a potential threat. They never say this out loud, but it’s obvious from their military-strategic plans” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*“I mean, as far as I know there ‘s no armed interaction or conflicts. But as for the attitude – well it’s wary on the one hand, I mean there’s often talk of common interests there, in combating terrorism, and of common interests in some Middle Eastern conflicts. On the other hand, Russia still seems to see NATO as an enemy created just as a counterweight to Russia or the former Soviet Union. I mean there’s a wary attitude, my personal opinion... I don’t even have a very clear personal opinion” (journalist, Novosibirsk).*

This wariness is especially evident in respect of CIS states being drawn into NATO’s orbit.

*“It’s not open doors – it’s simply like a vacuum cleaner. The idea is to suck in our nearest neighbours. That’s alarming” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

*“There’s a certain cooling off again now, and this has to do with our nearest neighbours” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

Also, *“there are always meetings going on, our military meet their military, politicians get together and even settle certain questions, I mean there’s cooperation at working level” (journalist, Samara).* We therefore observe that *“there is a business part of relations, where the parties get – or try to get – what they need from each other, and there is an*



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external aspect, where the parties represent each other in a light which does not correspond to reality” (journalist, Moscow). However, this is more military cooperation, in the experts’ opinion.

*“If not warm friendship, then a certain cooperation, integration, whatever, that kind of thing. But mostly in the military area” (representative of state agency, Novosibirsk).*

### ***Alliance with the Alliance: motivation***

One illustration of Russians’ pragmatic approach is the diversity of opinion on possible *rapprochement* with NATO. In 2002, for example, the population was divided into three roughly equal groups: 33% thought that it was in Russia's interests to cooperate more closely with the Alliance, 37% disagreed, and 30% had no clear view.

The logic here is clear – although Russians have no fondness for NATO, they regard it less and less as a direct military threat, but see it rather as a kind of political rival. Therefore, when practical mechanisms come into operation people become more open to cooperation with the Alliance (without joining NATO or integrating in any profound way) and hope to neutralise it by engaging it. In the end, respondents think that emotional dissatisfaction with NATO and its expanding area of responsibility should not prevent the two sides from working together on certain common problems.

Although it is not quite fair to compare 2005 data and other trends (since the list of endings to the question was changed), it should nevertheless be noted that the general attitude towards the prospects of cooperation with the Alliance remains practically unchanged. 6-10% of those surveyed still want Russia to join NATO, while 15-20% are against the Alliance. In 2003-2004 the numbers of those against fell slightly, but now, following the trail of “orange revolutions” and with people taking a more aggressive stance on foreign policy, their numbers have risen again to 21%. A significant proportion of Russians (about a third) are entirely in favour of peace. They would like the country to remain neutral, refrain from taking on any additional commitments and avoid membership of unions of any kind.



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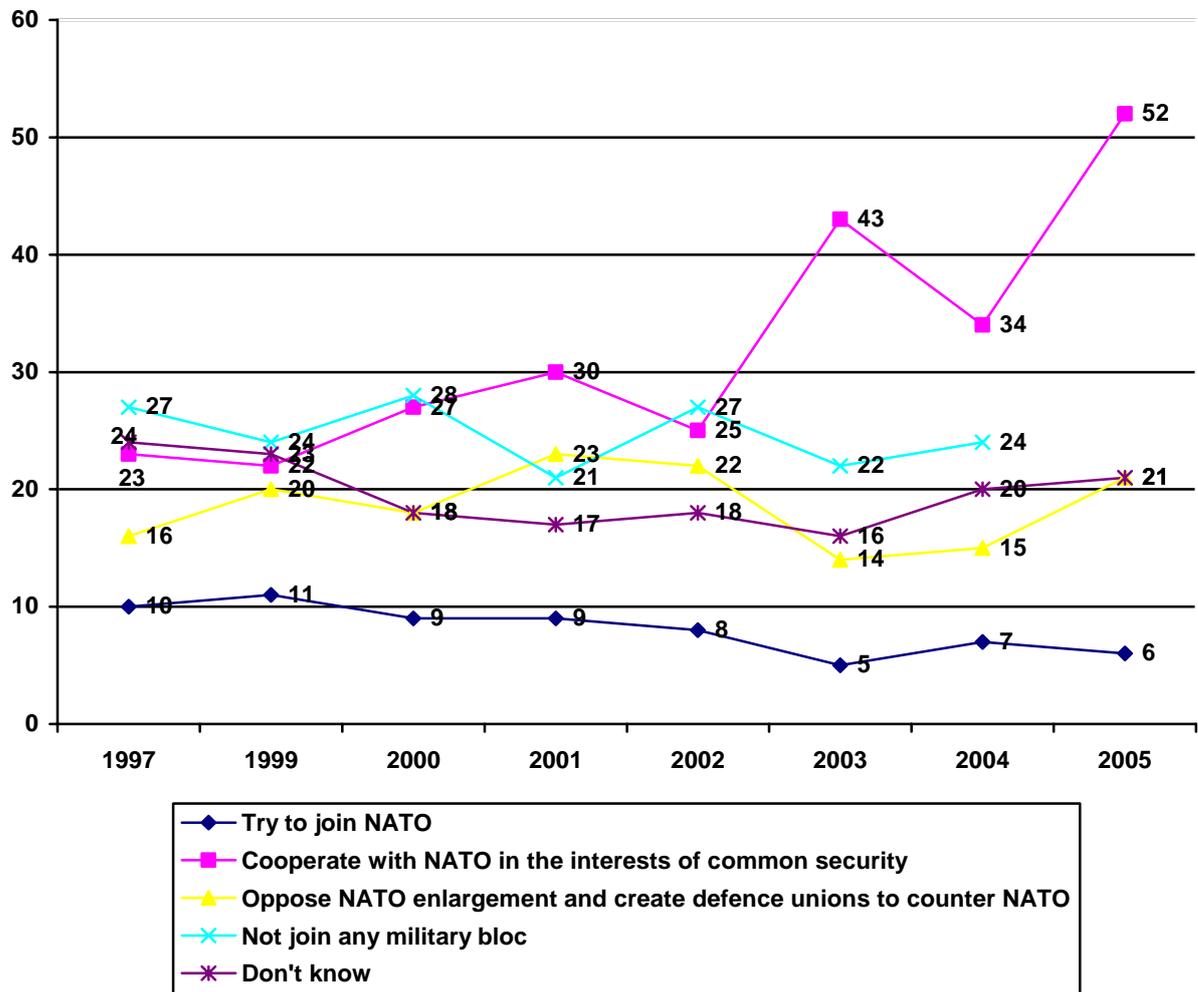
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At the same time, there is clearly a growing pragmatism. If we add up the responses to the first two options, in favour of a certain amount of cooperation with NATO, it is clear that this figure is growing. In the late 1990s it was less than 40% (specifically, 33% in the most significant years – during the first wave of enlargement, the events of Kosovo, the second wave of enlargement) and now it has passed the 50% mark. In 2005 the overall number of people in favour of cooperation with the Alliance grew to 58% (although it is clear that many of them had simply moved from the group against any kind of alliance to the group supporting mutually beneficial cooperation).

Looking at the different age groups, the number of people in favour of cooperation with NATO in any form (including membership) is comparatively high among those aged 25-34 (61%). The older generation is more radical – only 46% would think about any kind of cooperation. Paradoxically, in Moscow and St Petersburg the number of people in favour of *rapprochement* with the Alliance was 10% higher than in Russia in general (68%), which only serves to confirm the above-mentioned theory of irrational phobias and pragmatic leaning towards cooperation where possible.

**Which of the following, in your opinion, best serves Russia's interests?**



The overwhelming majority of experts thought that cooperation with the Alliance was essential - mainly in order to avoid confrontation. In this sense, cooperation was an indispensable process. After all, it was in Russia's interests, since Russia "is in crisis, and what's more there are very serious potential dangers right under our noses which could... we can't rule out the threat of war right next to Russia" (journalist, Novosibirsk).

*"We must develop cooperation, that's an objective necessity and not a matter of choice. Because Russia can't resolve today's international problems on its own. It would be cooperation based not on love but on mutual advantage"* (representative of academic community, Novosibirsk).

Nevertheless, this would definitely have to be "a bilateral approach" (serviceman, Kaliningrad).



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*“On a normal, equal [basis], no pressure on either side, based on respect for the other side and its opinion, normal dialogue” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

Why should Russia strengthen its relations with the Alliance? Focus-group members thought that this was necessary in order for Russia to keep up with world events and not find itself on the sidelines of global processes, including combating international terrorism.

*“We need to cooperate in order to have at least some control over the situation and to have some kind of influence.”*

*“I think there is some mutual benefit, intermingling, as it’s a world task, combating terrorism.”*

*“After all, there is a third force, a territorial force. The USA and the European market are very scared of South-East Asia, which is growing economically and taking on a completely new role.”*

Experts believe that all contacts, consultations, etc. will help the two sides to overcome stereotypes, to get to know and understand each other better.

*“High-level meetings, meetings between military structures, if only to enrich each other and have a clearer notion of the opponent’s way of thinking. Because time and time again [ ...] the idea, telling our people that it’s not a rival, as it were, a partner, we begin to react to this without trying to understand what’s behind it. And the same for them - they must have a better conception of the subjective motives driving our military-political elite. In this sense, consultations are useful for both sides” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*“When people have the opportunity to get together and discuss burning or vital issues, critical issues, they find a solution, there’s no need for any drastic action against countries we’re sitting with at the negotiating table” (representative of state agency, Samara).*



Moreover, *“Russia will stop being scared of NATO, keeping major military forces on the borders, and so on. The stronger and closer this cooperation gets, the more this military threat from this alliance will disappear”* (journalist, Samara).

*“It’s a guarantee of security, I mean partners... it’s sort of not done for partners to harm each other”* (journalist, Kaliningrad).

In addition, one focus-group identified the importance of exchanging experience and technology, mainly in the military domain. Respondents mentioned, although to a lesser degree, positive developments by NATO which could be used in reorganising the Russian armed forces and making army service more attractive.

*“There is a point to joint exercises with Russia. They’re getting together to deal with specific tasks and train personnel in new skills on both sides.”*

*“Exchange of technology, certain aspects of information exchange.”*

*“Maybe we can learn from their positive experience of developing the fighting spirit, the spirit of patriotism with which everyone’s trying to get into NATO?”*

*“Reorganising our armed forces. Perhaps they have can show us something useful. Because most people have no enthusiasm about our army, let alone any desire to serve in it. But their armies are all professional.”*

Experts agree. Incidentally, they mention this aspect of cooperation far more than the ordinary public.

*“Modernising the Russian army, making it a professional army. And of course getting money, which NATO has, for resettling military personnel, for retraining them”* (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).

*“I think that for solving problems in the army... there’s a ready-made model of successful armies, where service is prestigious and honourable, they have better benefits, which unfortunately the Russian army doesn’t have, because they have to get and use experience of this too”* (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).



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Another factor often mentioned in this context, especially by military experts, was military-technical cooperation, although most respondents had doubts about its success given the strong competition on the European arms market.

*"Perhaps the development of military-technical cooperation could be mutually useful. It's hard for European countries to hold out alone on the arms market, but if they teamed up with Russia they could create new complex and expensive arms systems. But here the USA steps in - they don't want that sort of competition" (representative of academic community, Moscow)*

Experts consider that Russia could also use its rich experience, including carrying out operations against irregular formations, in Afghanistan, the Middle East, etc. There are opportunities for military-technical cooperation, mainly in the area of military air transport and freight transit across Russian territory.

*"NATO has something to learn from Russia on training military personnel" (journalist, Kaliningrad).*

*"The transit of military consignments, as far as I know... in Operation Active Endeavour we took part in evacuating the crews of shot-down aeroplanes and helicopters, like in Afghanistan. Russia has military air transport, which NATO doesn't, and not so long ago the Russian-Ukrainian company Volga-Dnepr won a tender to provide transport for NATO" (journalist, Moscow). "Firstly, I have already said that Russia is really strong in a whole range of military issues – submarines, missile construction, aircraft construction. Russia continues to make products which in some ways are better than NATO's. So joint use of the best Russian-type weapons would be interesting for those states which might become Russia's partners in the framework of the North Atlantic bloc" (representative of state agency, Samara).*

However, the experts surveyed did not have a definite opinion as to which side found cooperation essential. Some of those questioned thought that NATO was more important for Russia, mainly because the organisation reflected the interests of the world's leading economically-developed states and was a key global player. On the



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other hand, they thought that NATO saw Russia as being of secondary importance, since the Alliance's priorities are quite different – the Middle East, China, the Balkans.

Most experts believe that Russia has an exceptionally important role for NATO, mainly as the key to resolving the problem of China. Moreover, Russia could serve as a good buffer to the promotion of radical Islam, terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal migration.

*“China would simply be squeezed on all sides, it would mean the domination of democracy, the democracy club to which Russia would also belong. I mean, in this sense, China would be very vulnerable” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*“Russia would be useful if it could offer influence or control, in any case, over China. Let's not beat about the bush, this is NATO's main interest, in my opinion” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

The Alliance could also use the traditionally good relations between Russia and a number of regions to promote its interests, stabilise the situation there, and obtain reliable intelligence.

*“Above all, Russia could help NATO with its long-standing contacts with potential rivals. Russia still has good relations with eastern and southern countries, this is where NATO could cooperate with Russia, and Russia could help NATO with these countries, just act as an intermediary. Secondly, we have a lot of military-industrial contacts with these countries, I think we could find common ground here too” (journalist, Samara).*

*“Firstly, even the crisis in the Balkans showed that it couldn't be resolved without Russia. Even more so on Russia's borders. We're seeing this now with Iran, and in other regions the West is trying to use Russia's diplomatic potential. This broadens the range of possibilities for the entire Western community, of which, I think, we can say Russia is a part” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

Moreover, some experts think that Russia is the key country for the Alliance in terms of justifying its existence.



*“Without Russia, what would be the point of NATO?” (journalist, Kaliningrad). “If it weren’t for us, there would be no reason to transform the organisation, perhaps it wouldn’t survive. But here’s an incentive in the shape of Russia, which has always been against NATO enlargement, and generally” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

*“If Russia disappeared now, theoretically, then NATO would only have China to oppose” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

### **Areas and forms of NATO-Russia cooperation**

Experts point out that the areas of practical cooperation between Russia and NATO [...]

*“The form, first and foremost, is clearly political cooperation, especially on those problems which Russia and the NATO countries might have in common, let’s say terrorism. In some cases it could be military cooperation, and there is some already – military exercises, rescue. Let’s say EMERCOM, terrorism again, information exchange” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*“In those forms which might, for example, help improve the combat readiness and effectiveness of the Russian armed forces, those forms which help reduce the threat around Russian borders – I’m talking about drug trafficking, the proliferation of nuclear materials and technology, those forms which are directed at combating terrorism” (journalist, Moscow).*

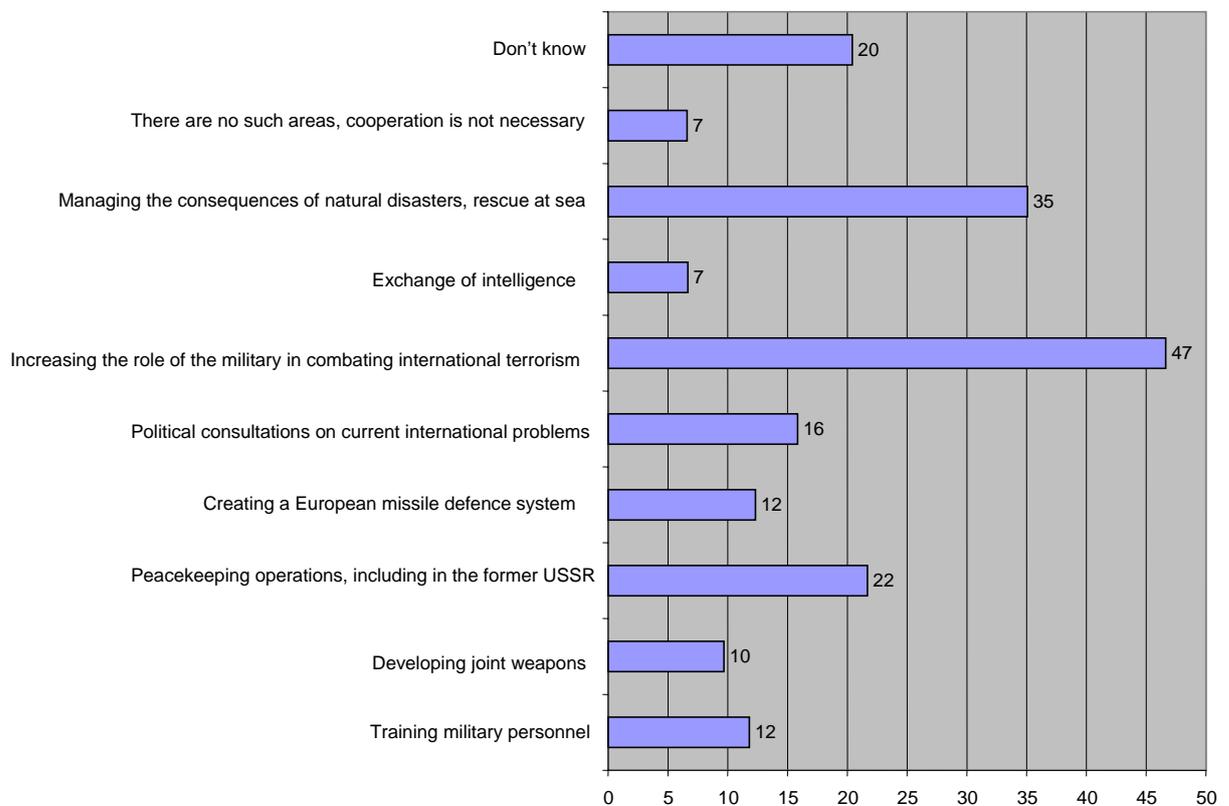
If we look at this in more detail, however, in which areas could NATO and Russia work together? Only 7% claim that there are no such areas and cooperation is not necessary (13% in major cities, 11% of military personnel). The majority of Russians, however, identify three tasks: increasing the role of the military in combating international terrorism (47%); managing the consequences of natural and man-made disasters (35%); and joint peacekeeping operations (22%). Next come political consultations on international problems (16%), cooperation on training personnel and creating European theatre missile defence (12% each) and joint development of new weapons (10%). Only 7% think that the two sides should exchange intelligence. As regards socio-demographic parameters, the only apparent correlation is in the view taken by the population of the Far East Federal District. Here they see the main area of cooperation



as managing the effects of disasters and emergencies, while combating international terrorism takes second place.

**In your opinion, which areas of NATO-Russia cooperation could be given priority?**

*(November 2005)*



It is worth noting that for the most part Russians identify areas in which NATO-Russia cooperation is already actively underway (apart from peacekeeping in the CIS). Also, respondents place more emphasis on new challenges (combating terrorism and natural disasters, political consultations) rather than on classical military cooperation (training, missile defence, exchange of intelligence or peace support operations).



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In general, experts agree with the general population. Combating terrorism should be the key aspect of cooperation – this is the view expressed by the overwhelming majority of experts.

*“Maybe combating terrorism. Well, everyone sees them as terrorists, they have no nationality, nothing. A terrorist is a terrorist. They're a threat to the USA, to the population and to the world in general. And to Russia. And life has shown us that we have to fight terrorism together, and so this area – NATO and the Russian armed forces holding joint exercises in combating terrorism, that's useful (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*

Cooperation in peacekeeping operations is of no small importance. The fight against drug trafficking is another promising area, although respondents are wary of NATO's double standards in respect of Afghanistan. Finally, it would be useful to cooperate on managing the consequences of emergencies.

*“We have experience of cooperating in Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, less successfully in Kosovo. There are fears of military conflicts in the Caucasus, and that NATO will try to push Russia out of the region” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

*“For example, under NATO's control Afghanistan might produce fewer drugs than it does now under US control. The USA has a direct interest in this trafficking going directly across the RF into Western Europe, which weakens both Europe and Russia” (journalist, Moscow).*

*“In order to be able, for example, to help people in extreme circumstances, when they have these rescue operations, when people are being trained, they share each country's experience, because there is a lot of experience on all sides. So that's a positive thing” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

Political cooperation was also mentioned, including in the post-Soviet area: *“Many countries today, especially in the former USSR, with which our relations are not exactly problem-free, they seem to use NATO to counter Russia. But if Russia and NATO have good, business-like relations, that could be good for us in our relations with other states” (journalist, Samara).*



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*“Well, I think the main benefit is political. If we cooperate actively with NATO, sooner or later they’ll stop seeing us as the bogeyman, the enemy” (journalist, Novosibirsk).*

This cooperation could take very different forms. 5% of those surveyed were well-informed about NATO-Russia cooperation these days, but 40% admitted that they had only a general idea of how it was developing. Another 40% were not interested in finding out more on this subject. The correlation between age and attitude here was the same as with the question on general knowledge about NATO. Russians aged 45-59 and 25-34 showed the greatest interest in obtaining more information, as did the residents of Moscow, St Petersburg, the North-West Federal District and the Far East Federal District.

One of the first NATO-Russia cooperation programmes was the Partnership for Peace. For the RF. the process of joining this programme was not straightforward, although it ended in success. It is noteworthy that in 1994 this pleased most people– 49% approved of Moscow’s action in this respect, and only 15% were against, saying that it contradicted Russia’s national and military interests. We can assume that Russians were impressed by the programme’s key message – the fact that it was orientated towards "peace", which got a positive reaction in the absence of any idea of what the programme really involved. This euphoria is now a thing of the past, but the two sides have created a new institution which goes some way to compensating Russia for its great-power ambitions – the NATO-Russia Council.

When it was set up in May 2002, the overwhelming majority of respondents saw this as an important step (64%). Only 20% were unaware of the importance of this “breakthrough” in relations with NATO and official propaganda announcements. Three years later, respondents admit that they still do not have enough information on this body. Only 5% claim to be well-informed, while 39% say they have a general idea of what the Council does. 42% of Russians do not want to find out anything more. Again, people in the North-West and Far East Federal Districts demonstrate a higher level of interest in these issues (like the residents of Moscow and St Petersburg).



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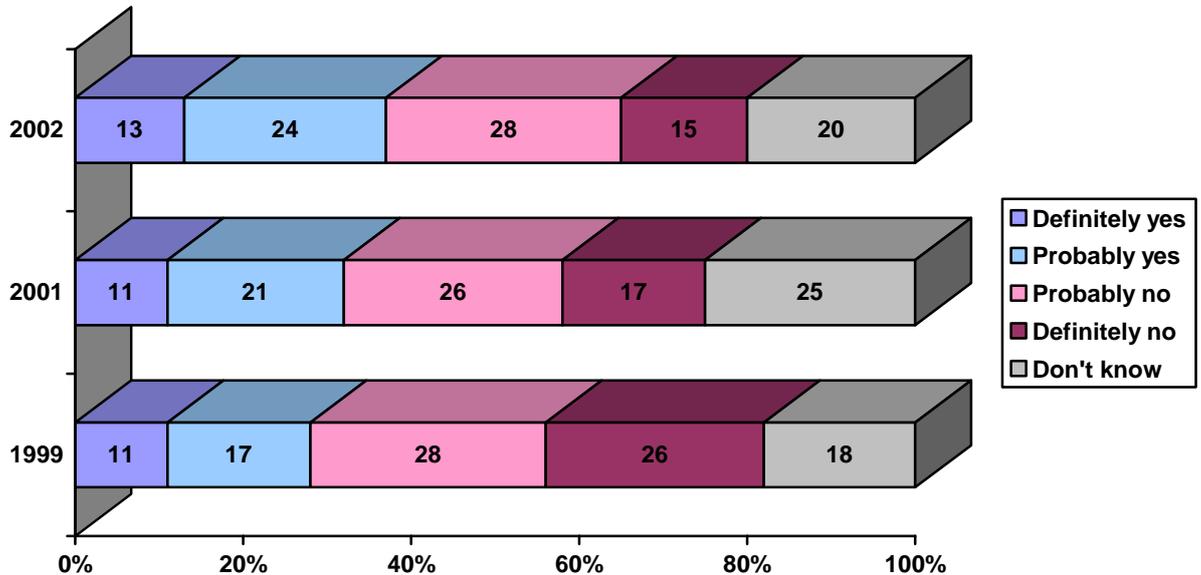
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### ***Joining NATO: desires and possibilities***

The public knows hardly anything about the details of NATO-Russia cooperation, but still does not rush to support the idea of joining NATO. Rather, the majority (43% in 2002) is against it, although this figure is appreciably lower than in 1999.



### Do you think Russia should try to join NATO?



Cooperation in the form of possible Russian membership of NATO is seen by Russians in an extremely negative light.

*“Why would we join NATO? Again we’dl have to accept American ideology.”*

*“Russia should not try to join NATO. Every country joining NATO has to re-arm. And if we join NATO, we’ll have to pay out colossal amounts of money, and we’ll have to throw out our more-or-less modern weapons.”*

In principle, respondents do not believe that this could happen.

*“We’ll never join it unless someone turns up who thinks it could help him. We’ll either find some kind of unity or we’ll fall apart, but we’ll never be with NATO.”*

*“I don’t think we’ll join NATO. After all, it would need huge financing. Although these countries don’t get anything from this, they have to finance it.”*

Experts are even more sceptical about the possibility of joining the Alliance. The overwhelming majority of experts believe that there is no sense in Russia trying to join NATO today, although hypothetically they don’t rule out this possibility, especially if the



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Alliance turns into a “political club”. It will be important to consolidate Russia’s special role in this “club” and its right to veto certain decisions.

*“If NATO turns into a kind of political club, let’s say along the lines of the OSCE, the Council of Europe, then we could join. A political club would mean the chance to discuss things together, but then we could say – you know, we’re certainly not going to do that, thank you very much, do it without us” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

There are many arguments against. Firstly, on joining the Alliance Russia would lose its potential for geopolitical manoeuvring and perhaps even damage its relations with other global players – China, the Muslim world.

*“It would mean losing our independence and even giving up part of our sovereignty. We are a self-sufficient power and also, as I have already said, we have partners in the East, why should we go with NATO? It would be better to maintain good relations with NATO and with the East - with Japan, China – these are the future powers, the powers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as they say” (representative of academic community, Samara).*

Moscow would have to submit entirely to the dominating role of the USA.

*“Submitting to the USA is not and cannot be the priority of our foreign policy” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*“No, this would take away Russia’s freedom to make its own decisions. There, some country like Lithuania only has to say it doesn’t agree and the principle of unanimity comes into play. Conditions will arise here – if Russia swears always to be the loyal vassal of the USA, they’ll accept it in 15 minutes” (representative of academic community, Moscow).*

Secondly, NATO will find it too difficult to absorb Russia – the presence in NATO of such a big country will significantly change the Alliance itself and perhaps have an adverse effect on its work.

*“If we’re a member of NATO, then who should NATO be guarding against? And in fact why would it exist?” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*



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*“The moment Russia joins NATO, NATO will become meaningless” (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*

NATO itself is not ready to welcome Russia into its ranks.

*“I can’t see any point in it. Russia prefers to see most foreign policy issues in the context of its own interests and its own way of seeing things, while NATO’s position on many questions, if not diametrically opposed, is at the very least significantly different from Russia’s position. No-one’s going to do this” (journalist, Moscow).*

*“I don’t think it would be any good for us, and anyway they don’t want us there” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

Thirdly, there are objective difficulties associated with the need for drastic transformation of the Russian military machine and thus increased expenditure on military requirements.

*“Join NATO? Well, it’s hard to imagine the Russian army in its current form as a member of the North Atlantic organisation. The officers can’t speak English, which is essential, our weapons are Russian and aren’t compatible with NATO armaments, and procedures in our army are radically different from procedures in European armies. It’s too difficult to put these things together. I think that Russia and the Russian army have a long way to go before there can even be talk about any kind of associate membership of NATO” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

### ***The future of NATO-Russia relations***

As for the development of NATO-Russia relations in the immediate future, most experts do not expect any qualitative breakthroughs or greater *rapprochement* between the two sides, although they stress the general mood of partnership and cooperation, since *“a bad peace is better than a good quarrel”* (representative of state agency, Moscow).



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However, there are a number of factors determining the prospects for relations. Firstly, a great deal will depend on the internal situation in Russia, including the chances of continuity of policy after 2008 and the RF's commitment to democratic reforms.

*"Until the current generation of politicians and civil servants go to their well-earned rest, they will always be wary - for the last 15-20 years they've been used to regarding this organisation as a general threat to Russia's existence" (journalist, Samara).*

*"It suits us, some of our elite, very well because now we can see elements of the reanimation of evolutionary economics and, I won't say Stalinist, but the Brezhnev style. And this model always needs an external enemy – either a quite real one, or even a virtual one, to explain why we're making guns instead of butter. For many people, for the current generation, this is the policy in NATO countries, the model is also customary" (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

*"The Russian state is no longer seen by the outside world as a free, democratic state, with no threat to the West, and the press is full of various analytical reviews and materials saying, one way or another, that Russia is falling back into totalitarianism, Russia is becoming a closed state, building up its military potential and it's quite understandable that something like this is going on in the Russia media, and this could lead to internal confrontation, to less trust among our states, between NATO and Russia" (representative of state agency, Samara).*

Another important factor is the possibility of the Russian military undergoing a major transformation and preparing for real cooperation with the Alliance.

*"And one very small thing makes it hard to accept their values, their unity – our military is not ready for this, even if it's just because their interests are purely militaristic" (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*"I don't see NATO as a threat to Russia, although they try hard to foist this idea onto me; what is a threat to Russia, mainly for military Russia, is the NATO military model, the Russian army will have to change, it will have to accept a more democratic, more modern, more protected, more legal model, and I am afraid the*



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*Russian army will not be ready for this for a long time yet” (representative of state agency, Kaliningrad).*

*“The reform of our army is following the pattern of European countries. It’s basically following NATO standards, so as regards all these military technologies, I mean cooperation will go on, continue” (representative of state agency, Novosibirsk).*

Of no small importance here is the policy of the Alliance itself, the intensity of its efforts to expand its influence in the post-Soviet space.

*“Russia will actively oppose NATO enlargement, primarily in respect of Georgia and Ukraine, the Ukraine question is of crucial importance. Absolutely crucial, this has been acknowledged by high-ranking Russian military, because it will be a disaster, it will severely weaken Russia’s power with NATO forces stationed on Ukrainian territory. Let’s say near Kharkiv – that would be a serious threat for Russia” (representative of academic community, Kaliningrad).*

On the other hand, Alliance enlargement is seen as inevitable, and a Trojan horse tactic could be used.

*“More than likely, it will enlarge, because there’s no other option. If we can’t oppose NATO with some union of our own, then we’ll have to join it and take over” (serviceman, Kaliningrad).*

The state of Russian-American relations will play a decisive role.

*“But we have to be quite clear about this – NATO is first and foremost the USA. The attitude of the Americans plays a role here. So if relations with the USA deteriorate – NATO will become more active, and on the other hand, if there is a thaw – NATO’s actions will become neutral or even friendly. Everything depends on relations with the USA. At the moment they are getting worse” (representative of state agency, Moscow).*

*“It’s hard to say, because NATO... although the members of NATO are equal, some are more equal than others and they dictate the bloc’s general policy. And*



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*so, the way relations between Russia and the USA develop, that's how relations with Russia will develop in the NATO-Russia Council" (journalist, Moscow).*

*"The main thing now for NATO is the Arab world and Russia. Because the USA sees Russia as the most powerful country, mainly as a competitor. An economic, political and military competitor" (serviceman, Novosibirsk).*



## Conclusions

Russians' attitude to NATO and the various aspects of bilateral relations with the Alliance remains fairly stable. The changes are so slow that it is clear that people base their opinion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on deep-rooted stereotypes and the enormous amount of negative information that sprang from Russian political discourse of the 1990s (during the first wave of NATO enlargement, the Kosovo campaign, etc.). For the media today, after all, the Alliance has not been a hot potato for a long time.

Respondents' general knowledge about the Alliance seems to be relatively good: only 12-13% could not answer, while the majority claimed to have adequate knowledge of the organisation and its cooperation with Russia. Nevertheless, these claims are clearly superficial, as not more than 5-8% of people have thorough knowledge of NATO. Those living in the capitals show the greatest interest in this subject, as well as people who have gone through higher education and those with above-average earnings. It is interesting that people in the Far East and North-West of Russia are, or would like to be, better informed about NATO. At the same time the expert community, especially in Moscow, says it receives rather too much information on the Alliance.

It is because of this lack of information and low interest in the Alliance that people continue to base their attitude to it on propaganda myths from the days of bipolar confrontation. Only if the Russian elite becomes more energetic about breaking these stereotypes and the appropriate RF authorities work more intensively on public relations can we expect to see a gradual change in attitude. We should not underestimate the role of the media in this process –after all, they influence the way both the population and the expert community form their views on NATO.

Russians' attitude to NATO and the prospects for cooperation with the Alliance can be divided into three categories. People spill over from one group to another according to the contradictory signals sent out by the elite and the expert community, but the basic structure of the three groups does not change.



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Firstly, about 10-15% of people are open-minded about cooperation and think that the RF should think about full membership of the organisation. In certain conditions this group can grow to 20-25% with a positive attitude towards this international body. They do not see any particular reason for this kind of bloc to exist in today's conditions, nor do they believe that NATO has a friendly policy towards Russia, but nevertheless they do not wish to make an enemy of the Alliance. They see NATO rather as the West's guard-dog, whose bark is worse than his bite. These respondents are usually in the 18-34 age group, sometimes slightly older. They have adapted to modern life, have an average income and live in a big city (but not Moscow).

Secondly, there is the largest group, accounting for about 40-45% of those questioned. This group demonstrates a negative attitude towards the Alliance, although it is perhaps difficult to talk about complete unanimity as this category of people is a motley crew. It includes elderly people who vote for the Communist Party and remember NATO from Soviet times. Incidentally, many people in this age group prefer the standard "don't know" answer – this shows that they are not all "hawks", but that many of them are simply lost in the modern world and resort to certain "beacons" in their memory. Opponents of the Alliance also include successful people with average incomes, often living in Moscow or St Petersburg, who have been through higher education and are well-informed about NATO's activities. For them, their position is one of principle – they are afraid of Western influence spreading and weakening Russia's position in the world. They regard the Alliance as an obstacle to restoring Russia's former greatness; in their view, it is exclusively a conduit for US interests and a tool for implementing Washington's hostile plans.

Thirdly, the proportion of respondents who are indifferent to the Alliance and the nature of our bilateral relations with it is constantly increasing. If we include in this group those who answered "don't know", it reaches 50% on some issues. These people are more concerned with Russia's internal problems and would like it to be a neutral country. Many of them know a bit about NATO and do not feel afraid of it – they do not see the organisation as an effective international player, particularly after the relative failures of situation settlement in Kosovo and removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Others are not



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sufficiently informed about NATO and do not wish to know more - the media hardly mention the Alliance. To a certain extent these people are the victims of the kind of political discourse of 2002, when the Russian authorities, fearing hysteria about the second wave of NATO enlargement, simply excluded the subject from public discussion. In terms of improving NATO's image, this group is more promising – they are already free of negative feelings about the Alliance, but not yet ready to see it as a friendly structure.

It is interesting that most Russians have a basically negative or neutral attitude to NATO, and its activities give rise to fears and anxieties. Among young people, where there is no great warming of attitudes to NATO, this is mainly due to their general lack of practical interest in the Alliance's activities. Unlike other international bodies - in particular the European Union - NATO is not seen in terms of cost-effectiveness, as the perception of foreign military threat has diminished considerably. So young people might just as well accept the views passed down to them by the older generation, who have been left with a stereotype attitude to NATO from the long years of Soviet propaganda. The organisation is in no way seen as their own, but rather as a body hatching secret plans against Russia.

In general, experts' views were similar to those of the public, although they seemed rather more sceptical about the Alliance. At the same time it is encouraging that the overwhelming majority of experts questioned did not see NATO as a real military threat and thought that there was no alternative to cooperation with the Alliance. Like most Russians, they would not like to see Russia join NATO.

Many think that Alliance enlargement poses political and ideological risks for Russia. At the same time, however, this fear is no longer deep-rooted, and is rather ambivalent – it is more a reflection of internal dissatisfaction with Russia's position in the world and has a somewhat irrational basis. For most Russians, even in 1999 (49%) it was clear that there would be no direct military conflict between Moscow and Brussels. Therefore, in the political context NATO is coming to be seen more and more as a rival organisation grabbing the initiative in Russia's traditional area of influence. And so the negative view



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changes to indifference, which, in the final analysis, represents a certain warming in attitude to the Alliance.

It must be said that there is an inevitable temptation here to use NATO as a new mobilisation project for Russian development. It is clear that the country is seeing an increase in healthy nationalism and national awareness, and the people have achieved a sense of identity. In these circumstances, if there is to be a clearly delimited “us-and-them”, there has to be an outside enemy. Some Russian politicians today find it very convenient to use the West (as an abstract formation in the customary East-West dichotomy, which has long since ceased to have any basis in reality ) and its “club” – NATO – as the least offensive bogeyman. However, in its *Realpolitik* Moscow maintains close bilateral contacts with most Western countries and NATO member nations, and the public is more than well-disposed towards them. As far as declarations are concerned, though, the old ghosts are still serviceable – tilting at windmills has not died out, and hampers cooperation.

There can be no doubt that Russians’ perceptions are affected by the conception of NATO as a conduit for US interests. A certain allergy brought on sometimes by Washington’s aggressive policies can also spread to the North Atlantic Alliance. However, this is nothing new – anti-NATO and anti-American sentiments are just as strong in a number of European countries, only there, unlike in Russia, the elite want to overcome this negative feeling.

As regards areas of cooperation – which both experts and the public see as inevitable – most respondents named three main subjects: increasing the role of the military in combating international terrorism; managing the consequences of emergencies and rescue at sea; and joint peacekeeping operations, including on former USSR territory.

It is worth noting that respondents have selected precisely those areas where there is already considerable cooperation between the two sides (with the possible exception of peacekeeping, particularly in the CIS). Thus, expectations coincide with reality. It must also be pointed out that those surveyed mainly identified political tasks as a priority, as



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opposed to classical military tasks (training military personnel, developing joint weapons or creating a European system of theatre missile defence). This is probably due not only to respondents' largely sceptical view of the effectiveness of NATO's military machine, but also to the fact that NATO is gradually becoming a political organisation in Russian eyes rather than a military bloc in the bipolar confrontation style.

To sum up, we can say that the Russian people view NATO with less and less interest. However, the lack of information, and periodical encouraging of the negative view by items in the media and by experts who have made a considered choice in favour of fighting the bogeyman in the form of an "aggressive bloc", creates a situation where this indifference is unstable and could easily revert to a perception of NATO as the enemy. At the same time, the Russian elite has the capability to launch a counter-process – in favour of greater cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance - particularly as the objective trend in recent years has been a slow shift in the public consciousness from the negative to indifference.