

# NATO-Russia Relations: The Background

NATO began reaching out to Russia in 1990. Over the following two decades, the Alliance proposed to Russia an unprecedented series of partnership initiatives and practical cooperation activities. In March 2014, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, channels for political dialogue and military to military communication have remained open. This fact sheet sets out the key dates and events in the relationship.

## 2014-2015: Responding to the Ukraine Crisis

In an emergency meeting prompted by Russian aggression against Ukraine, the North Atlantic Council agreed on 2 March 2014 that Russia's military action is "a breach of international law and contravenes the principles of the NATO-Russia Council and the Partnership for Peace" (statement [here](#)). The NATO-Russia Council discussed the crisis on 5 March 2014 but Russia continued to escalate its aggression against Ukraine. In response, NATO Foreign Ministers in April 2014 decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia (statement [here](#)). At the same time, channels of political dialogue and channels for military to military communication remain open.

The suspension stays in place as Russia continues to destabilise Ukraine by providing separatist forces in the east with supplies, weapons, and command and control.

NATO Defence Ministers discussed Russia's involvement in Syria at their meeting on 8 October 2015. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called on Russia to play a constructive role in the fight against ISIL.

## 2010-2014: Seeking a New Stage of Cooperation

At a NATO-Russia Council held during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 (statement [here](#)), NATO leaders and President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to embark on "a new stage of cooperation towards a true strategic partnership", based on the goals and principles of the Founding Act (text [here](#)) and the NATO-Russia Rome Declaration (text [here](#)).

NATO met its commitment to cooperation. The Alliance invited Russia to explore jointly the potential for linking missile defence systems. NATO and Russia agreed to reinforce cooperation against terrorism and piracy.

In the following years, NATO and Russia worked together in support of the Afghan army's helicopter fleet, conducted joint counter-piracy and submarine-rescue exercises, disposed of obsolete munitions in Russia, and discussed a joint military mission to help dispose of Syria's chemical weapons in 2013 and early 2014.

## 2008: The Georgia Crisis

NATO found Russia's military action in Georgia to be "disproportionate and inconsistent with its peacekeeping role, as well as incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution set out in the Helsinki Final Act, the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration." (read [here](#) the Foreign Ministers statement from 19 August 2008).

At the Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl on 4 April 2009, NATO leaders recognised disagreements with Russia over Georgia but decided to resume practical and political cooperation. They also expressed readiness to make the NATO-Russia Council a more efficient vehicle for cooperation.

## 2002-2008: Cooperation through the NATO-Russia Council

On 28 May 2002 in Rome, NATO leaders and President Vladimir Putin signed a declaration, "NATO-Russia Relations: A new quality" ([here](#)), establishing the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) as a consensus-based body of equal members. Russia was the only NATO partner offered such privileged partnership. NATO and Russia declared to open a new page in relations aimed at "enhancing our ability to work together in areas of common interest and to stand together against common threats and risks to our security."

The NRC led to stronger cooperation in areas including counter-terrorism, crisis management, arms control and theatre missile defence. NATO and Russia cooperated to support the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The joint work included Russian provision of transit routes for ISAF, counter narcotics training for police and customs officers from the region and support for the Afghan army's helicopter fleet.

### 1997: The NATO-Russia Founding Act

On 27 May 1997, NATO leaders and President Boris Yeltsin signed the Founding Act (text [here](#)), expressing their determination to “build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security.”

The Act established the goal of cooperation in areas such as peacekeeping, arms control, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and theatre missile defence.

In the Founding Act, NATO and Russia agreed to base their cooperation on the principles of human rights and civil liberties; refraining from the threat or use of force against each other or any other state; respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states and their inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security; prevention of conflicts and dispute settlement by peaceful means.

### 1994: The Partnership for Peace

In June 1994, Russia became the first country to join NATO’s Partnership for Peace (Pfp), a programme of practical bilateral cooperation between NATO and partner countries.

The Brussels Summit Declaration ([here](#)) defined the goals of Pfp as expanding and intensifying political and military cooperation in Europe, increasing stability, diminishing threats to peace and building strengthened relationships by “promoting the spirit of practical cooperation and commitment to democratic principles that underpin our Alliance.”



### 1990 London Summit: “No longer adversaries”

On 5-6 July 1990, the NATO Summit in London proposed to the countries of the then Warsaw Pact a joint declaration ([here](#)) stating that:

*“We are no longer adversaries and reaffirm our intention to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”*

In this spirit, the Alliance invited President Mikheil Gorbachev and representatives of Central and Eastern European countries to address the North Atlantic Council.

The London Declaration emphasised the need to conclude arms control agreements and reduce reliance on nuclear weapons following the full withdrawal of Soviet forces from Central and Eastern European states. The Declaration stated NATO’s determination to begin a major transformation and work with all the countries of Europe to create enduring peace on the continent.

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