

NATO-Russia Relations: The Background

NATO began reaching out to Russia in 1990. Over the following two decades, the Alliance worked to establish a strategic partnership with Russia.

However, in March 2014, in response to Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia. At the same time, NATO has kept channels for communication with Russia open. This fact-sheet sets out the key dates and events in the relationship.

2014-2017: Responding to the Ukraine Crisis

In March 2014, Russia illegally and illegitimately annexed Crimea, part of Ukraine's sovereign territory. In response, NATO Foreign Ministers decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia on 1 April 2014. Since then, Russia has continued its aggressive actions against Ukraine, including through continued and deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. As a result, our cooperation remains suspended.

NATO has responded to this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defence posture, while remaining open to political dialogue with Russia.

At the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO Heads of State and Government made clear that the nature of the Alliance's relations with Russia will be contingent on a clear, constructive change in Russia's actions that demonstrates compliance with international law and its international commitments. Until then, we cannot return to "business as usual".

Nevertheless, channels for communication remain open. Talking to Russia allows us to clearly communicate our positions, with the crisis in and around Ukraine being the first topic on our agenda. NATO Allies remain open to periodic, focused and meaningful dialogue with Russia in the NATO-Russia Council. This is important to avoid misunderstandings, miscalculation, and unintended escalation, and to increase transparency and predictability.

The NATO-Russia Council has met five times since the suspension of practical cooperation, most recently on 19 December 2016. The Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General also engage regularly with their Russian counterparts.

2010-2014: Seeking a New Stage of Cooperation

During the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, 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 and the NATO-Russia Rome Declaration.

NATO met its commitment to cooperation. The Alliance invited Russia to explore the potential for cooperation on missile defence. 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, and discussed a joint 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."

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,” establishing the NATO-Russia Council as a consensus-based body of equal members. Russia was the only NATO partner offered such a privileged partnership. NATO and Russia agreed 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 NATO-Russia Council led to stronger cooperation in areas including counter-terrorism, crisis management, arms control and theatre missile defence. NATO and Russia cooperated on supporting Afghanistan. The joint work included Russian provision of transit routes for ISAF, counter narcotics training for officers from Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan, 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, 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.

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 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 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 Mikhail 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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