



Since his speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, President Vladimir Putin has been complaining about Russia not being treated on an equal footing internationally. He underrates, though, how much this has to do with his own policies. Russia is isolating itself.

That is what the Kremlin is doing very effectively with its present course: revisionism, destabilization and military infiltration of neighbors – distracting from internal problems through confrontation with the outer world. Such a policy is the opposite of Gorbachev's "Perestroika," "Glasnost," and "New Thinking."

That, however, is exactly what Russia needs: "new thinking" in foreign and security policy, as part of its much-touted modernization. Conversely, the West, and particularly NATO, should make that easier by self-critically recognizing its share of the responsibility for the continuous worsening of the relationship over the last 15 years.

New thinking on the Russian side would comprise the following: clichés and stereotypes from the Cold War period should be overcome as well as their instrumentalization for domestic purposes. Since its London Declaration in July 1990, the Alliance has sincerely extended the hand of cooperation to former adversaries, and in their "Founding Act" of 1997 NATO and Russia declared they would no longer regard each other as enemies.

Russia must realize that dangers to its security loom in the South and possibly in the East, but not from the West. At the same time the Kremlin must realize which worries arise in neighboring countries from its insistence on a privileged sphere of influence and its proclaimed "obligation" to "protect Russians wherever they live."

Sovereignty, integrity and independence of the post-Soviet states have to be recognized, and Russia should constructively contribute to problem-solving instead of mainly acting through "nuisance power" and "prevention policy."

This includes the requirement to actively promote solutions for so-called "frozen conflicts" (such as Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh and Georgia) instead of keeping them simmering for the sake of destabilization and influence.

NATO, however, should self-critically acknowledge a number of things: First of all, there was too little understanding of Russian "political psychology" and its "imperial phantom pain." After the end of the Cold War, too little attention was given to the question of Russia's place in the



The West made mistakes, too: US President Barack Obama (3rd from right), British Prime Minister David Cameron (4th r.), President of Romania Traian Basescu (2nd r.), NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (5th l.), German Chancellor Angela Merkel (4th l.), Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (2nd l.) and French President François Hollande (5th l.) gather to watch a flypast of military aircraft on the second day of the NATO 2014 Summit at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, South Wales, on Sept. 5, 2014.

The West is not Russia's enemy

Moscow needs new thinking. Europe and the US can help by accepting part of the blame for worsening ties | By Klaus Wittmann

European security order. In addition, Russian proposals for the adaptation or the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty on conventional forces in Europe were ostensibly disregarded.

The ambitions of Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO were not handled constructively. When at the 2008 Bucharest Summit meeting mainly the US pushed for offering them the Membership Action Plan, both countries were for different reasons not ready for that step. More importantly, no understanding was sought with Russia, whilst previous enlargement rounds had been "cushioned" through the creation or upgrading of the NATO-Russia Council.

Controversial plans for missile defense were offered as a cooperative project much too late. The West underestimated the significance for Moscow of its decision to recognize Kosovo (although the analogy with the annexation of Crimea construed by Putin is flawed).

The NATO-Russia Council was insufficiently used and developed. NATO put it on ice during the Georgia war in 2008 – just like Russia did, strongly criticized by the West, during the 1999 Kosovo air campaign.

Russia's present policy and course of action, however, do not appear to be predominantly

motivated by interaction with the West but conditioned by internally steered political change. Not least in reaction to the 2011 and 2012 demonstrations, democratization and liberalization were halted, and Putin seems to regard the prospect of a democratic and Western-oriented Ukraine as a threat to his very system. He programmatically places Russia in a stance of opposition to the West politically, culturally, increasingly even ideologically.

Geopolitically he increasingly openly strives for an exclusive zone of influence and does not refrain from using military force to that end. He seems to think that by working against the rules of the European peace order he can enforce the respect of the West and equal status with the US. And no longer is NATO regarded as the only adversary: The Russian geopolitical mindset puts the European Union into the same basket, as epitomized by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's portrayal of the EU's "sphere of power."

The West must be firm and demonstrate the limits of what is acceptable in international behavior. But at the same time it should hold out the longer-term prospect of better relations, of cooperation, of "modernization partnership". NATO should preserve the NATO-Russia Council for better times. The alliance was right in not

deactivating it in the present crisis. But one session with the Russian ambassador after three months was inadequate. Rather it should be sitting almost permanently.

Here are a few ideas for concrete offers for a "better future" in the relations between Russia and the West, focusing on what particularly NATO could contribute.

The NATO-Russia Council needs a new quality and determined broadening of the areas of common interests and joint action, based on a practical agenda and frank discussion of deficiencies in mutual trust. Also, NATO readiness for a structured dialogue with the CSTO (the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization) might be constructive. With regard to further NATO enlargement, the open door policy in accordance with Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty cannot be given up. But between "no veto for Russia" and totally giving in to Russian indignation there must be a middle road, where Russia's sensitivities would be taken into account.

Moreover, President Dmitry Medvedev's 2008/2009 proposal for a comprehensive European security treaty should have been actively responded to by NATO. Not that its substance appeared acceptable, but it could have been the starting point for an intensive dialogue with the exploration of common interests and the firm

presentation of Western principles. Western anxiety was not justified – did not the 1975 Helsinki Final Act with its beneficial consequences for European history also originate in Soviet proposals that initially many in the West regarded with great suspicion? One day the initiative should be resuscitated, leading to a structured format for substantial and very frank discussions of NATO's and Russia's contrasting concepts for the Euro-Atlantic area.

This might also lead to innovative approaches in conventional arms control. The adaptation of the CFE Treaty – from bloc-to-bloc-format to individual states as parties to the agreement – failed not least because of Western insistence on relatively insignificant conditions. Not unexpectedly Russia suspended the treaty following Putin's 2007 Munich speech. This is not so important because of the numerical limits for tanks, artillery, airplanes and the like, which are factually undershot anyway, but because of the deactivation of verification, transparency and inspection provisions which had an important confidence-building function.

A revitalization of the CFE Treaty appears unrealistic. Thus, a new departure is necessary. Confidence-building, transparency, mutual reassurance, doctrine talks and credible defensive orientation

of armed forces and infrastructure would be part of that approach as well as cooperative endeavors.

For the time being, the alliance policy of stabilization and inclusion of Central and Eastern Europe in step with a close NATO-Russia partnership appears to have failed. However, the philosophy of the 1968 Harmel Report – firmness and cooperation, defense preparedness and dialogue as two sides of one medal – continues to be valid.

Farsighted Western policy should encourage the "new thinking" in Russia. One day it will prevail there, albeit possibly not as long as President Putin is in office. But his rule may end more quickly than he and the enthusiastic audience of his Crimea speech in mid-March think. In any event, long-term offers for cooperation including the seriously renewed encouragement for cooperative as opposed to confrontational security should be developed – taking into account the legitimate interests of both the West and Russia.

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