

STOPPING THE DECLINE IN US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Robert Blackwill, Arnold Horelick, Sam Nunn

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## STOPPING THE DECLINE IN US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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After a time-out for elections in both countries, US-Russian relations are poised to resume their downward drift toward mutual alienation. The time remaining to arrest that trend before NATO enlargement further accelerates it is short. Notwithstanding continued US efforts to disentangle START II from that issue, failure to achieve a "soft landing" for US-Russian relations in the wake of NATO enlargement will jeopardize both the nuclear and conventional forces arms control regimes that have been the legal anchors securing the post-Cold War peace and seriously erode US-Russian non-proliferation cooperation. Policy passivity in Moscow induced by Yeltsin's precarious hold on power means that it is extremely unlikely in the months immediately ahead that any new constructive departures will be made by the chaotic Russian side. If US-Russian relations are to be improved, the initiative will have to come from the American side. This must be done in ways that protect US national interests.

We define a favorable outcome as follows:

1. A "soft landing" for NATO enlargement. The official invitation to prospective new members takes place in an enriched, wider European security context as part of a larger package that provides credible safeguards for Russia's legitimate security interests and demonstrates the West's stated goal of giving Russia a responsible and dignified role in managing European security. NATO enlargement thus remains objectionable to Russia, but more tolerable.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Blackwill is a member of the faculty of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and a Rand consultant; Arnold Horelick is a resident consultant at Rand and professor of political science at UCLA; Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga) is retiring from the US Senate after a 24-year career during which he served as chairman of the Committee on Armed Services. The authors have recently returned from a series of meetings in Moscow with senior Russian officials and analysts conducted under the auspices of the Aspen Strategy Group and the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy. The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors.

2. The NATO enlargement package reduces opposition to START II ratification to the point where the Duma views it more or less on its merits. On that basis, with several non-Treaty- busting "fixes" that address real Russian financial and strategic concerns, the treaty is aggressively supported by the Russian executive and eventually ratified by the Duma.

3. The *modus vivendi* on NATO enlargement includes an agreement to adapt or modernize the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) as an integral part of the package, thus also giving a new lease on life to the most important pillar of the post-Cold War European security regime.

4. Navigating through the NATO enlargement/START II/CFE shoals stabilizes the otherwise downward drifting US-Russian relationship, opening the way to new agreements addressing US concerns about tactical nuclear weapons, taking further steps away from early-launch strategies, and improving cooperation on Russian "loose nukes."

On present trajectories, there is virtually no chance of achieving such a favorable outcome.

#### **NATO Enlargement**

We proceed from the premise that the commitment of the Administration to the first tranche of NATO enlargement is on an irreversible track and on a now unalterable timetable. What can be done in the time remaining to maximize chances for a "soft landing" and to minimize the inevitable damage that NATO enlargement will do to overall US-Russian and Western-Russian relations, and to the credibility and prospects of shrinking pro-Western political forces in Russia?

Our strategy should be to broaden the context of enlargement in ways that emphasize Russia's inclusion so as to balance the exclusion of Russia implicit in enlargement *per se* and to structure the enlargement process itself so as to demonstrate concretely that NATO enlargement is not directed against Russia or its legitimate security interests.

Apart from the genuine resentment felt by virtually all Russian elites against NATO enlargement in principle, there are two particular aspects of the projected enlargement that cause the greatest concern to Russians. The first has to do with the scope and pace of what is

intended by NATO (where will enlargement end and will NATO come closer still to Russian borders, i.e., are the Balts next on the list, and then the Ukrainians, and when?); the second concerns the implications of enlargement for the deployment of nuclear weapons, foreign forces, and NATO "military infrastructure" closer to Russian borders.

Russian anxieties about the ultimate scope of NATO enlargement is now the single most salient geopolitical factor in Russian thinking about the enlargement issue. Allaying Russian anxieties in this regard in anything approaching a credible manner is the most politically difficult part of any US. and NATO strategy designed to secure a "soft landing." Restricting the scope of NATO enlargement in advance flies in the face of the principles of open-ended enlargement to which the alliance is now committed. But the official NATO position that membership is in principle open to all states that qualify, when coupled with repeated statements by senior European leaders that Russia cannot be a member of NATO, invites Russian observers to conclude that the accession of several East Central European states into NATO is merely the first step in a series of rapid accessions that could ultimately include all of the European non-Russian former Soviet republics. This is the scenario gnawing even at those Russians most inclined to seek compromise, who, though deeply regretting the political message of NATO enlargement, see no military threat in the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO, but would find the expansion of NATO into the geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union utterly intolerable.

The only way now left open for us to address these Russian anxieties about the eventual scope of NATO enlargement is to provide firmer assurances about its *pace* without excluding any potential candidate for membership in NATO: namely, to assure the Russians that there will be a pause of some considerable length (say five to 10 years) after the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1999 before potential new alliance members will again be considered. We believe this pause is appropriate because a prolonged period of time will be required for NATO to absorb three or four new members and to assess the impact on alliance effectiveness of further enlargement.

This would be a politically difficult step for the United States and NATO to take, but to leave the issue where it now stands, namely that the Baltic Republics are not yet ready for NATO, leaves open the implication that NATO is ready even now for the Balts. If a policy decision is taken to have a pause in NATO enlargement and to announce it, other steps should be taken to accelerate and intensify the integration of the Baltic Republics and Ukraine into other European economic and political institutions as well as their participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

With respect to the nuclear weapon and foreign force deployment issue, we are at a loss to understand why NATO has been so reticent to give more visible and emphatic expression to what the allies all believe in any case: namely, that under presently foreseeable circumstances, there is no requirement to deploy nuclear weapons or permanently station foreign forces on the territory of new member states. It is true that sentences to that effect can be found in various NATO documents and forums, but they have been drowned out by repeated assertions that NATO will not bestow "second-class citizenship" on new members, etc. A much more visible and authoritative pronouncement that absent a real military threat which today does not exist, NATO does not intend to deploy nuclear weapons or station foreign forces on new members' territories is urgently required.

#### **The NATO-Russia Charter**

The more uncertainty we leave in Russian minds about the prospect of further enlargement any time soon and about foreign deployments on the territory of new members, the harder it will be to come to some mutually satisfactory agreement with the Russian government on a NATO-Russian Charter. If we do not find other vehicles for providing the minimum assurances the Russians are after, they will continue to seek such assurances in negotiated formal agreements on NATO-Russian relations, i.e., in a context that would essentially give to Russia the right of veto that is absolutely unacceptable to the United States and its allies. The Charter should aim principally at institutionalizing NATO-Russian arrangements for dealing with the alliance's peacekeeping

mission. It is hard now to anticipate with precision what the provisions of a NATO-Russian charter might be, other than they would have to formalize an intensive, multi-level set of consultative arrangements with Russia. However, if all of the enlargement issues that upset the Russians most deeply are left to the NATO-Russia Charter, the burden placed on the charter will be much greater than it can bear. In short, Russia's European security concerns must be reasonably addressed *before* Moscow is likely to negotiate and sign a formal new cooperative arrangement with NATO.

There is nothing we can plausibly do to persuade the Russians that NATO enlargement serves their interests, but we can help them to see it in a larger perspective that makes credible our repeated assurances that we do not intend to isolate Russia or to marginalize its role in Europe. So NATO strategy should be to take some of the sting out of the June-July enlargement invitations by providing reassurances well before then on an enlargement pause and on deployment intentions, while subsuming enlargement in a broader menu of arrangements and negotiations in which Russia is a direct and central participant.

## **START II**

Despite the hostile reception recently accorded Defense Secretary William Perry's pitch for START II ratification in the Russian State Duma, Russia will be worse off without a treaty than with one even if it does not provide Russian legislators and policy makers with all of the safeguards that they would like against various forms of break-out by the United States. Nevertheless, in the political climate obtaining in Moscow now, these reservations are so powerfully amplified by the NATO enlargement issue that the prospects for ratification any time soon are very poor to nil. If some of the heat can be taken out of the NATO enlargement issue, however, there is a reasonable chance that we could, with a few modifications and incentives to ease Russian implementation, secure more vigorous support of START II by the Russian leadership and eventual ratification by the Duma without treaty-busting amendments.

Despite Moscow's recent decision not to go ahead in Geneva with the signing of the first part of an interim agreement demarcating missile

defense activities consistent with the ABM Treaty, most knowledgeable Russians appear to believe that we are sufficiently on the same wavelength with respect to the ABM Treaty so that that issue will not be a show-stopper. There is still a widely shared Russian view that the START II Treaty is structurally biased against Russia, but in our view, that position is not decisive and can be overcome if the more substantial question of costs is somehow addressed. The cost question as seen by the Russians has two aspects: the costs of drawing down in some categories of weapons to meet treaty ceilings, and then, of building up in single-warhead land-based ICBMs (and new SLBM submarines) to fill out the restructured force. These considerations have led virtually all Russians to argue that an extension of three to five years for implementation beyond 2003 is required. While a relaxation of the timetable for START II reductions could be negotiated without busting the treaty, there are other ways of addressing these Russian cost concerns so as to avoid having to forego the mutual security advantages of meeting the 2003 target. On the first kind of cost, opening the prospect of providing increased Nunn-Lugar funding for START-II implementation could soften the impact of the build-down side of the Russian cost equation.

What bothers responsible Russians even more about START II is that after obliging them to destroy what they have regarded as their premier strategic weapon systems, the rough parity for which the treaty provides requires them to spend enormous sums of money to build new systems, even though these systems might eventually be subject to reduction under a START III Treaty. Secretary Perry's statement in the Duma about the readiness of the United States to move promptly after START II ratification to negotiate START III with lower levels was a useful step in the direction of alleviating these Russian concerns. However, we should be prepared to go further and seek agreement now on principles for START III to facilitate Duma ratification of START II. The objection that this will only prolong the ratification process has lost much of its force because there is so much else holding it up, including a considerable decline in Russian confidence in the good faith of the United States. A general statement of principles would assert the joint



commitment of the two sides to seek "substantial further reductions" in START III, perhaps even indicating an intention to seek reductions to about 2,000 strategic weapons on each side. This might be done in the context of a joint understanding along the lines of the June 1992 US-Russian Joint Understanding anticipating some elements of START II (but less specific and detailed). The Joint Understanding was issued a year after the signing of START I, but several months before either the US Senate or the Supreme Soviet ratified the treaty. START II was signed a half-year later.

As noted above, the US should also seriously consider proposing for START III principles the objective of making warheads the unit of account and verification in a future agreement. This would shift the focus of START III to warhead destruction, tie Nunn-Lugar and non-proliferation considerations more directly into strategic nuclear arms control, and address Russian concerns about greater US breakout potential. It could also provide a useful conceptual basis for addressing the verified reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons in a parallel treaty negotiation.

#### **CFE**

Failure of the Duma to ratify START II would still leave in place a START I treaty regime on which to fall back--at billions of dollars of cost to both sides, it is true--and with the possibility of returning to the issue after a pause. But a breakdown of the CFE regime would destroy the unique legal legacy that holds the post-Cold War European security regime in place. The consequent damage done to mutual confidence between Russia and the West in the wake of its abandonment would be extremely difficult to repair in the foreseeable future.

The Russian case that NATO enlargement would violate the CFE Treaty can be refuted on technical legal grounds, but politically it has undeniable reality. Moreover, Russian objections to some of the central provisions of the treaty are rooted in much larger changes in the European security environment that have occurred since the Treaty was negotiated. Again here, a "soft landing" on NATO enlargement will help us to deal more acceptably with CFE, but on any enlargement outcome, we

will still need to address the adaptation or modernization of the CFE Treaty.

There are a variety of ways to fix the treaty to make it clear that the sum total of NATO entitlements would not be increased by the adding of new members in 1999. The Russians seem unanimously to favor moving across-the-board from bloc-to-bloc (two "groups of States Parties") to national ceilings, but allocating them in such a way as to create a balance less than the present 3 to 1 (but far short of parity) between the entitlements of states that are members of NATO and Russia. Separate assurances outside of CFE about the non-deployment of nuclear weapons or the non-permanent stationing of foreign forces or pre-positioning of equipment on the territory of new NATO members could help reassure Moscow that the military balance in Europe will not tip even further against Russia.

Beyond the immediate issues raised by prospective NATO enlargement, there appears to be widespread agreement here and in Russia that a modernized treaty must adopt new, much lower ceilings on the five categories of treaty-limited equipment, both for the aggregate NATO ceilings and for national ones. NATO is now well below its CFE entitlements (e.g., 14,000 rather than 20,000 tanks) and the Alliance could propose at least a 25 percent cut in NATO's CFE equipment ceilings with a willingness to agree to somewhat smaller reductions for non-NATO members, including Russia. We should also be willing to loosen zonal constraints on Russia in the south, in recognition of Moscow's security concerns in that regime.

To sum up, the package that the United States and NATO should consider laying on the table in Moscow in the next few months would include:

- A statement early next year of NATO's intention after absorbing new members in 1999 to have an extended "pause" before considering any further enlargement.

- Credible assurances to Russia about non-deployment of nuclear weapons and permanently stationed foreign forces on the territory of new NATO members.
  
- A commitment to be made at the Lisbon OSCE Summit in December to modernize the CFE Treaty, including a goal of substantial reductions in equipment ceilings, and provisions to prevent the worsening, from Russia's perspective, of the military balance between Russia and NATO that NATO enlargement might entail.
  
- Pushing START II ratification by agreeing to begin at once discussions of principles for START III with a commitment to seek reduced levels; agreeing, if necessary, to a relaxation of the timetable for START II implementation; and offering to seek increased Nunn-Lugar funding to assist Russia in dismantling and destroying weapons slated for elimination under START II.
  
- With all this in place, completion before the June/July NATO Summit, of a document institutionalizing the NATO-Russian relationship.

The enlargement timetable requires that we move quickly. What has been suggested here would be elements of a very large and formidable agenda for the waning months of President Clinton's first term and the initial period of his second administration. The policy paralysis we now see in Moscow places the burden of developing new initiatives on the United States. Will the same leadership weakness in the Kremlin mean that Moscow will prove incapable even of responding positively to such helpful American moves? It is hard to know, but the effort to arrive at an outcome along these lines is essential and the effort to do so, even if it fails in some of its particulars, would leave the US-Russian relationship in better shape to make an overall recovery consistent with US national interests than will be the case if we continue on our present downward path.





