

NATO Threatens Russia: Moscow urges NATO to limit military presence near Russian borders

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Russia is pressing for a NATO ban on the deployment of substantial numbers of allied forces in the newly-admitted eastern member-nations.

Last December, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov handed the alliance's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen a draft agreement on a new framework for Russia-NATO relationship. Although the fact was kept secret by mutual consent, talks have been going on uninterrupted ever since.

The Russian version of the draft sets a ceiling for the number of troops and weapons allowed for deployment, a move it says will make NATO's military activities more predictable. The alliance has hinted that a compromise is not unlikely and could be put for discussion at the upcoming Russia-NATO summit Lisbon, or even earlier, during Fogh Rasmussen's visit to Moscow, initially scheduled for November 5.

Vladimir Yevseyev, head of the Center for Socio-Political Studies, takes a look at the issue:

Speaking about what the term "substantial forces" actually implies, it looks like it's a question of new military bases. Apparently, Russia hates the prospect of having any new NATO bases in Central or Eastern Europe, and it will, of course, strongly object to any U.S. military bases, for example in Georgia or in Azerbaijan. Speaking about troop numbers, they could compare with relatively small U.S. bases in Bulgaria and Romania, roughly the size of a brigade, or between 2,500 and 3,000 servicemen.

Why does Russia oppose this? Because any additional amount of weapons deployed in relative proximity to the Russian border will force it to retaliate with deterrence. From that point of view, the idea is quite comprehensible and, in my opinion, it will not encounter strong opposition from NATO because new bases do not seem to be an issue now as the economic crisis continues.

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