

# Russia should enter NATO Alliance, Claims Report

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Questions over Afghanistan could be tackled by the partnership

By Marco Giannangeli

Russia should be allowed to enter a strategic alliance with Nato, according to a new report.

The report, by the International Institute of Security Studies (IISS) and the Russian Institute of Contemporary Studies, envisages the creation of a “common security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok”.

It claims Cold War mistrust should be replaced with a focus on common ground, suggesting the new alliance could tackle questions such as Nato force withdrawal from Afghanistan, distrust over Iran, global arms supply and the reduction of weapon of mass destruction.

The proposals, which will be published tomorrow, come just a few weeks before a Nato summit in Lisbon, to be attended by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

Earlier this week, it emerged Russian helicopters would see service Afghanistan for the first time since the Soviet Union was forced to pull out of the country 20 years ago during the Soviet-Afghanistan war.

The arrangement to give Afghan forces four Mi-8 helicopters will be made public at the upcoming Nato summit.

It will also include a deal for the US to purchase 17 other aircraft.

In June, U.S. President Barack Obama announced that he had “reset” relations with Russia. The countries agreed to expand joint anti-terror operations and strengthen economic ties.

According to the report: “Nato and Russia have a unique opportunity to overcome the Cold War legacy of mistrust and to begin building relations free from exaggerated mutual threat perceptions and better equipped to deal with current and future crises.”

But the suggestion that Russia should become a full-blown member of Nato, an ambition long-harboured in some quarters of the Kremlin, was avoided.

In principle, cooperation would give certain assurances to the West. Russia would have to show that it is fully democratic and that its military is controlled by a civilian government.

A deal with Nato would also put paid to any expansionist plans in Georgia, Ukraine or territorial disputes with Japan – a necessary assurance after Russia’s invasion of Georgia two

years ago.

"This is realpolitik," said Tory MP Patrick Mercer of the deal.

"We are still experiencing regular probes from Russian aircraft into our air space, and spy ships in our waters.

"A deal like this would, potentially, take away Russia's need to act in this way if it succeeds. But it's a big if."

Other critics point to a beleaguered Obama administration desperately seeking to secure a foreign policy coup to distract from economic woes.

In the meantime, they warn, Russia will take advantage of defence cuts by the US and UK and use its newly found status to assert its dominance.

Jonathan Eyal, Director of International Security Studies for the Royal United Services Institute, said: "Yes, such cooperation sounds wonderful in theory, but I do not believe it can or will ever happen this way.

"This is about Russia trying to find its place in a world that has moved on from a Euro-Atlantic access. It feels left out in the cold.

"As the report acknowledges, there is still a strong strata of Russian military which distrusts the West. These officers take part in no US or European training programmes. They remain completely isolated and stuck in their beliefs."

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