



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 6, 2011

## Russia Threatens to Kill NATO War in Afghanistan

Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin was widely quoted last week as saying that if the military alliance refuses to offer a serious response to the Kremlin's demands, "we have to address matters in relations in other areas." And the Russian government's cooperation in the NATO occupation of Afghanistan could be one of those areas, he warned.



Supply routes through Pakistan for the Afghan war effort — which delivered about half of the alliance's supplies — were completely sealed off late last month. The border closures came after [NATO forces killed more than two dozen Pakistani military officers and soldiers](#) in an attack inside Pakistan's borders.

Western officials apologized for the killings. But it was not enough. Outraged Pakistanis poured into the streets as the regime ordered border crossings and U.S. airbases closed. NATO chiefs were left scrambling to route all of the necessary supplies through the "Northern Distribution Network" via Russia and former Soviet states bordering Afghanistan to the north.

The new geopolitical situation — NATO's absolute reliance on Russian cooperation to keep the landlocked Afghan war going — has given the Kremlin a powerful bargaining tool. And while the Russian regime has supported the NATO occupation so far, that could change.

The U.S. government recently worked out agreements with its counterparts in [Romania](#) and Turkey to set up new missile defense systems — supposedly to protect Europe from a hypothetical attack by Iran. But the Russian regime is not happy about it, arguing that it would alter the nuclear balance of geopolitical power, and has become increasingly vocal in recent weeks.

Another contentious issue straining relations between Washington and Moscow is the Russian government's controversial alliance with the regime of Syrian "President" Bashar Al-Assad. NATO governments have become increasingly aggressive, applying new waves of sanctions on Syria and even [issuing veiled hints of a possible regime-change operation in the works](#).

Meanwhile, Russian authorities have steadfastly refused to cooperate with the Western belligerence toward Assad. The communist dictatorship ruling mainland China and the Russian government both recently vetoed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council condemning the Syrian regime. And Russia is expected to continue frustrating NATO efforts at the international level — especially after [what happened in Libya](#).

But with Russia's newfound leverage, the U.S. government and the military alliance are in a tough spot, analysts said. "Simply raising the possibility of cutting supply lines forces NATO and the United States to recalculate their position in Afghanistan," [noted](#) George Friedman, founder of the Austin, Texas-



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based intelligence firm Stratfor. "No matter how small the probability, it places more than 100,000 U.S. and allied troops in a vulnerable position."

Most observers agreed that Russia was probably unlikely to follow through with the threat, at least not as a first response. Blocking NATO's supplies would, of course, create enormous problems for the Western occupation of Afghanistan. But it would also create more than a few headaches for the Russian government.

Still, it is not outside the realm of possibility.

"If the U.S. is not responsive, then a cutoff could be a reality at some point," [said](#) Ivan Safranchuk, deputy head of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies in Moscow. "Russia would like the U.S. to be more serious about Russian concerns."

Other Russian analysts defended the nation's right to use such a threat as a bargaining tool to pressure the U.S. government. "There are processes which are critically important for Russia — which are about Russia's national security," [explained](#) Yury Krupnov of the Institute for Demography, Migration and Regulation Development.

Citing Washington's proposed missile program in Europe and the expansion of NATO along Russia's borders "without taking into consideration Russia's concerns," Krupnov told Russian TV network RT that the policies give Moscow the right "to use any leverage it has to be heard by its partner."

If the supply routes were eventually cut off, analysts universally acknowledge that the consequences would be devastating for NATO and U.S. forces. The Western-backed regime of Afghan leader Hamid Karzai would almost certainly collapse quickly, too.

Strategy Professor Michael Vlahos at the U.S. Naval War College explained that Russia has even more leverage than Pakistan right now. "The U.S. has a very tenuous kind of placement in Afghanistan and it is highly vulnerable to the Pakistanis," he [told](#) RT. "But it is more vulnerable to Russia. If Russia were to withdraw its permission for the U.S. to use its rail lines we would be in a very difficult position in Afghanistan."

Pakistani analysts, meanwhile, were even more blunt about the potential catastrophic scenario. Experts [cited](#) by Pakistan's *The News International* said the Russian threat, if acted upon, would deliver the "deathblow" to the NATO occupation, creating a "cold deathtrap" for Western forces that would cause massive casualties.

"Americans and NATO troops have been strangled in Afghanistan," [said](#) retired Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, the former chief of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. And if Russia follows through, which Gul believes is a very real possibility, the situation would become even more dire for Western powers.

"NATO troops will have to exit Vietnam-style," Gul noted, calling for cooperation between the governments of Pakistan and Russia on the matter. "And that, too, by using Pakistan's airspace, because Iran will never let U.S.A. use its airspace."

Even if Russia is bluffing, however, massive damage has already been done. Analysts pointed out that the vulnerability of the Western alliance and its occupation has been unveiled for the world — and the Afghan fighters battling the coalition — to see.

"The United States and NATO have been exposed as waging a war that depended on the willingness of first Pakistan and now increasingly Russia to permit the movement of supplies through their respective territories," [wrote](#) Stratfor's Friedman. "Were they both to suspend that privilege, the United States



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would face the choice of going to war to seize supply lines — something well beyond U.S. conventional capacity at this time — or to concede the war.... Washington, of course, hopes the Pakistanis will reconsider and that the Russians are simply blowing off steam. Hope, however, is not a strategy.”

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan tried to downplay concerns. "Whatever terms need to be negotiated they will be handled between diplomats and the states of the Northern Distribution Network," a spokesman was [quoted](#) as saying in *The Australian*. "ISAF does not negotiate with the Russians on border crossing rights." All supplies through the NDN, however, currently pass through Russian territory before reaching the Afghan border.

Following the Russian statements, U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder [proclaimed](#) that President Obama planned to proceed with the missile defense system "whether Russia likes it or not." Russian leaders, meanwhile, have reportedly already ordered the military to develop plans for attacking and disabling the as-yet non-existent U.S. missile sites in Europe.

Some analysts expected an eventual triumph of diplomacy on the supply-lines and missile-shield issues. Others, however, warned that the escalating tensions might even be the beginning of an impending third world war.

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