



Written by on March 6, 2009

Clinton Wants Closer NATO-Russia Ties

"We can and must find ways to work constructively with Russia where we share areas of common interest, including helping the people of Afghanistan," said Clinton.

The assembled NATO delegates agreed to the proposal to resume formal ties with Russia. However, not all NATO members were as enthusiastic about the decision as was Secretary Clinton. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband told the BBC that it was not "business as usual" with Moscow, but that the resumption of ties would provide an opportunity to engage with Russia "in a hardheaded way." Miliband said that "the invasion of Georgia and continuing infringement of its sovereignty" could not be "swept under the carpet."



Hillary NATO

During the debate over the proposal, the Lithuanian delegation delayed its assent to the resumption of cooperation with Moscow through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), the body that coordinates dialogue between the two parties on security issues. The agreement of all 26 NATO members was required to finalize the decision and Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas initially said it was "a bit premature" for NATO to reward Russia with restored relations.

However, after some discussion, U.S. diplomats persuaded Lithuania to drop its objections. Since their nation was occupied for many years by the old Soviet Union, Lithuanians have an historic reluctance to trust the Russians.

Clinton sought to reassure the Lithuanians and other relatively new NATO members in Eastern Europe that the normalization of diplomatic ties with Russia was not a sign of weakness on the part of the alliance. Speaking at a news conference at NATO headquarters, the secretary of state said there would be no avoiding, or backing down from, disputes with Moscow.

"The United States will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence over any other nation," said Clinton. An AP correspondent said she was referring to Russia's claim to have an historic role as the dominant nation in the region. Many European nations as well as the Obama administration dispute this self-appointed Russian role.

Speaking at the meeting, Clinton made little effort to hide the fact that an important motivation for U.S. efforts to normalize relations with Russia is to secure Russian cooperation for NATO's expanding military operations in Afghanistan. "We can and must find ways to work constructively with Russia where we share areas of common interest, including helping the people of Afghanistan, arms control and nonproliferation, counter-piracy and counter-narcotics and addressing the threats posed by Iran and North Korea," said Clinton.

As if picking up a cue from Clinton, Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's envoy to NATO, stated: "We need to get



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down to business fast to ensure stability and security in Afghanistan." Rogozin noted that his nation had already demonstrated its willingness to help the NATO effort by cooperating in the shipment of supplies through its territory bound for the alliance's troops in Afghanistan.

Clinton also said at the NATO conference that "we should continue to open NATO's door to European countries such as Georgia and Ukraine and help them meet NATO standards." However, Russia opposes NATO membership for the two former Soviet states because it considers such membership to be an intrusion into its sphere of influence.

The day after the NATO meeting, Clinton met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva. "I will be meeting with ... Lavrov to discuss a wide range of critical matters where we can cooperate and those where we have differences," Clinton said from Brussels. The Itar-Tass Russian news agency reported on the morning of their meeting that the new chief diplomats would discuss arms control, missile defense, Iran, and North Korea. The agency quote Lavrov: "It will be a meeting that will allow us to look at the whole agenda in the international sphere of cooperation."

A report from Bloomberg news observed that the U.S. proposal for a missile shield in Eastern Europe may be "the most contentious issue" under discussion. President Barack Obama told reporters on March 3 that last month he sent a letter to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev explaining that the shield is designed to protect primarily against Iranian missiles, and "to the extent that we are lessening Iran's commitment to nuclear weapons, then that reduces the pressure or the need for a missile-defense system." Observers have interpreted this message to Medvedev as a call for Russia to use its influence with Iran to drop its missile program and suspected nuclear-weapons program so that the need for a defensive missile shield in Eastern Europe will not be necessary.

The ongoing discussions between NATO and Russia and the United States and Russia highlight several ironic developments in U.S. foreign policy. The first of these is that when NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was founded in 1949 as what the United Nations terms a "regional arrangement" formed under Articles 51-54 of the UN Charter, its stated purpose was to defend Western Europe against invasion from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern Europe. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the stated purpose for NATO no longer existed, so one might have expected NATO to be dismantled. Instead, several former Warsaw pact nations from Eastern Europe were admitted to the alliance.

Then NATO's mission was expanded beyond its original purpose, and NATO forces have been sent to Bosnia and Afghanistan, where a buildup of troops is underway.

Another irony is that when Russia's predecessor government, the Soviet Union, occupied Afghanistan, the United States covertly supplied armaments to the resistance movement, the mujahedin, including one Osama bin Laden! When bin Laden turned against the West and became our sworn enemy in our war on terror, we invaded Afghanistan (under NATO auspices) because the nation's ruling Taliban regime had provided a base of operations for bin Laden's al-Qaeda movement. With the logistics of supplying the troops in Afghanistan becoming difficult, we have now asked for Russia's cooperation in supplying a military operation against a terrorist network that includes a man we once helped to fight against Russia's previous government!

Some might argue that Russia is an entirely different nation than the old Soviet Union, but members of the Soviet Union's notorious KGB, including Vladimir Putin, continue to exert powerful influence over Russia's policies.



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Perhaps all of this would make more sense if NATO were renamed Oceania, Russia as Eurasia, and the radical Islamic terrorist network as Eastasia. Recall that George Orwell, in *1984*, depicted two of the three powers as being engaged in perpetual war against a third, but with the alliances periodically shifting.

In 1947, just two years before Orwell's *1984* was published, historian Charles Beard told Columbia University historian Harry Elmer Barnes that the foreign policy of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman could best be described by the phrase "perpetual war for perpetual peace."

The foreign policies of subsequent presidents, including Bush and Obama, has not departed from this pattern.

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