



The NATO-Russia Council: A Vital Partnership in the War on Terror

R. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO

Remarks at Spaso House

Moscow, Russia

November 4, 2004

It is a great pleasure to be here in Moscow and I am particularly pleased to be here at Spaso House, which has been the home of so many important dialogues between Russians and Americans over the years.

I am grateful and honored to have this opportunity to say a few words about the aims and goals of NATO's partnership with Russia.

Let me begin by stating outright that never have we needed each other's support and cooperation more than right now. You, most of all, who watched the horrible and tragic events unfold at Beslan this past September, do not need me to remind you that North America, Europe, and Russia are engaged in a common struggle against terrorism. And it is only by working together that we can prevail.

As Secretary Powell has said: "NATO needs friends and partners in this shared fight. The global war on terrorism cannot be fought--or won--by one or even a few nations alone."

This single issue, more than any other, will dominate the agenda of the NATO-Russia Council for the foreseeable future, just as it has defined NATO's agenda since the devastating attacks on America of September 11, 2001. The Alliance responded to those attacks by invoking--for the first time in its history--Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that an armed attack against one or more NATO member country will be considered an attack against all. Today, I am proud to say that NATO is present on the front lines of this global war on terror, with missions in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

United by this clarity of purpose--the fight against terrorism--we are also taking NATO's partnership with Russia to a new level of cooperation, engagement, and effectiveness. In the wake of the Beslan tragedy, NATO is working with Russia to develop new practical initiatives that will help coordinate and further strengthen our approaches to counterterrorism.

But before I discuss the NATO Russia Council's agenda for the coming months, I would like to quickly trace the council's roots and say a few words about why it is such an essential vehicle for cooperation.

Although NATO and Russia formally marked the beginning of their partnership by signing the Founding Act in Paris in 1997, the relationship between these two one-time adversaries has not always been smooth and productive. One abiding legacy of the Cold War has been a deeply entrenched suspicion of NATO's intentions, especially as the alliance has expanded eastward and struggled to redefine its mission in the post-Soviet world. This feeling of distrust might be best summed up by the idea that, if it is good for NATO, it must be bad for Russia.

This kind of zero-sum logic ignores the reality that NATO--and the U.S.--need a strong and stable Russia, and vice versa, if we are to meet our mutual security needs and counter the many transnational threats--first and foremost, terrorism, but also drugs, trafficking, and weapons of mass destruction--that feed off of unstable governments, lax border security, and weak economies. The U.S. certainly recognizes that a healthy, democratic Russia is in its long-term strategic interest. And while NATO and Russia may disagree from time to time on how best to strengthen democratic institutions both in Russia and in other former communist countries, I think we share the understanding that instability in neighboring regions such as Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Moldova affects both Russia's and Europe's security. This is why NATO has sought to engage the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus through programs like the Partnership for Peace. By helping these countries undertake needed political and defense reforms, NATO can play a role in establishing perhaps the greatest deterrent to would-be terrorists: stable, secure, and accountable governments.

The logic behind NATO's partnership with Russia is, therefore, not "zero-sum." It is "win-win." We realize we can accomplish much more together than we can apart.

It was for this reason that our heads of state and government decided to found the NATO-Russia Council in May 2002: in order to work together on practical projects in areas of common interest. We have made substantial progress in a number of areas, most significantly counterterrorism. I can give you a few examples:

- Just last week, Russia announced that two ships from its Black Sea Fleet would join NATO vessels already patrolling in the Mediterranean as part of Operation Active Endeavor. This critical operation protects our international shipping lanes from possible terrorism and prevents terrorists and others from using the sea as a way to transport WMD, and weapons technology.
- Our military-to-military cooperation is strong and growing. Russia has offered to support for example, NATO's mission in Afghanistan--the International Security Assistance Force--with overflights, transit, and airlift. We are exploring these offers now. In addition, the Council has produced several joint threat assessments: on Al Qaeda, the threat to our civilian aircraft, and the influence of Islamic extremist groups in Central Asia.
- We have also worked to strengthen the preparedness of our civil emergency personnel--the vital "first responders" to the scene of an accident or terrorist attack--via training exercises hosted by Russia in Noginsk in 2002, and Kaliningrad last June.
- We are cooperating on theater missile defense. NATO and Russia conducted a "command post" exercise in this area last year in Colorado Springs, Colorado that included 59 participants from ten countries.
- Russia and Hungary are working to create a standing rapid response capability to assist nations in dealing with the effects of a major nuclear-chemical-biological incident. The United States has committed a capability to this initiative.

These are just a few examples, but they illustrate effectively the scope and depth of our cooperation.

The attack at Beslan, however, shows just how vulnerable we still are to an elusive, stateless foe who cannot be deterred by traditional means and who does not hesitate to target our children, our schools, and our communities. Which is why we have to intensify and expand our joint efforts to combat terrorism and sharpen our response--both civil and military--to terrorist attacks. This will be a critical test for the Council in the coming months, as we seek to expand and strengthen our cooperation in all of the areas I just mentioned--Operation Active Endeavor, civil emergency preparedness, the Hungarian-Russian Nuclear Biological Chemical (NBC) defense initiative. For our part, we have put forward a couple of proposals to bring together our respective experts and share the lessons we have learned from the attacks many of us have suffered. Our aim is to share our experiences, the successes and failures in our responses, in order to better understand the terrorists, and how we may prevent future attacks.

It is clear to me that the NATO Russia Council has proven to be an effective and worthwhile forum for cooperation, and that, by working together, we have enhanced our ability to counter the common threats--from terrorism, proliferation, criminal activity--we face. The most remarkable aspect of the Council may well be the fact that our areas of cooperation are so wide-ranging and numerous. It reinforces the notion that Russia is emerging as perhaps NATO's most important and powerful partner in the global fight against terrorism. The Council is only just beginning to hit its stride as an effective security partnership--it will grow in stature and influence as NATO and Russia eventually overcome remaining Cold War stereotypes and strengthen their developing military and political ties.

While critically important, NATO's relations with Russia are of course only one part of the Alliance's activities. I want to also mention several other key issues that are on NATO's agenda for the coming year.

This past June, in Istanbul, the heads of state of NATO's 26 members united to produce a bold vision for a re-invigorated Alliance--intensifying efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, initiating a collective Alliance role in Iraq's reconstruction, engaging the Muslim countries of the Middle East in a constructive security dialogue, and expanding NATO's work with our new partners in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Although these constitute just some of the accomplishments of Istanbul, they convey the sense of NATO's resolve to be active at the forefront of this new century's great struggle to promote democracy and preserve peace in a world threatened by global terrorism.

Iraq

NATO's agreement to establish a collective, permanent training mission in Iraq for the country's new security forces was perhaps the Alliance's most significant achievement at Istanbul. The United States strongly believes such training is critical to the long-term success of reconstruction efforts in Iraq, and it was President Bush who led the push to establish a NATO mission.

Last month, after a healthy measure of debate, NATO decided to expand the size and scope of its Iraq mission, agreeing to create a permanent Training Center at Al-Rustamiyah that will train mid-level and senior officers in Iraq's security forces and to put the program under the command of Lt. General David H. Petraeus, who currently leads the multinational force's training program. The U.S. has offered to provide to the NATO effort considerable financial and other resources--including trainers and soldiers to protect the force--as well as air and logistical support to this collective, critical NATO mission to help ensure its success. NATO's decision confirms its determination to move beyond the rancorous debates over Iraq and provide the stability needed for Iraqis to provide security, rebuild infrastructure and establish the democratic institutions that will ensure long-term peace.

Afghanistan

At Istanbul, NATO also intensified its efforts in Afghanistan, where its leadership of the International Security Assistance Force is helping to stabilize the country and make sure it never again serves as a safe haven for Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.

Our most urgent priority in Afghanistan was to provide security for the October Presidential elections. Two battalions, including one from the NATO Response Force (NRF) deployed to assist local authorities in providing security for the election. The United States also contributed an infantry company of approximately 110 troops to Kabul to enhance the Kabul Multinational Brigade. NATO's actions bolstered significantly the international community's efforts to help the Afghan people exercise their democratic rights and make the successful transition to a constitutional, representative government.

NATO will now extend its operations beyond Kabul to the major provinces and build on the highly successful Provincial Reconstruction Team program. These teams, known as PRTs, are playing an increasingly important role in helping Afghans build and repair damaged infrastructure, like roads, water wells and schools, and broaden the zone of security. Germany, in addition to its well-established operation in Kunduz, has added a second PRT in Fayzerabad, which achieved initial operating capability just last week. We now have five NATO-led PRTs in northern Afghanistan.

This is significant progress, but NATO needs to do more and move faster. Over the past year, NATO has not acted quickly or resolutely enough in Afghanistan. Our European allies need to put forward the necessary troops for NATO to succeed. Looking beyond the election in October, it is urgent that ISAF continue with its planned expansion into western Afghanistan. As ISAF expansion proceeds, we will also need to look closely, as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld suggested earlier this year, at bringing Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF together under a unified NATO command. At some point, it will no longer be possible -- or desirable -- to maintain two separate military operations in Afghanistan, especially as the OEF and ISAF begin working in the same areas of the country.

ICI

One of NATO's greatest successes since the end of the Cold War has been its ability to extend the borders of peace and stability throughout Europe. We have placed special emphasis on engaging with our partners in the strategically important regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia. NATO has made a commitment to support these countries' efforts to develop a closer relationship with the Alliance. Now, we believe NATO should expand its engagement with interested nations in the Arab world on security issues of mutual concern--such as the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, and opportunities to cooperate on border security and stemming all forms of illegal trafficking. The U.S. believes that NATO can add value as one of the key instruments for our long-term engagement in this important region. This is the logic behind the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the Alliance's effort to reach beyond our partners in the Mediterranean Dialogue to other states of the broader Middle East and North Africa and engage them in a strategic dialogue that could lead to tailored advice on military issues, cooperation on military exercises and training, and joint operations where our interests coincide.

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) have been consulted about their interest in participating in ICI, and we hope to broaden these consultations in the future. Iraq, for instance, should be approached about participating once the political transition has progressed further and stability is strengthened.

The Balkans

In the Balkans, NATO's role is evolving in response to both progress and pitfalls. At Istanbul, the Allies made the collective decision to conclude one of NATO's most substantial accomplishments--its role in stabilizing Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Stabilization Force (SFOR) helped bring peace and stability to a land ravaged by war and ethnic hatred. As SFOR completes its mission, an exciting new chapter begins, one that points to more fruitful cooperation between NATO and the EU. The EU is preparing to pick up where SFOR left off, helping Bosnia and Herzegovina chart a course oriented toward the promise of future integration with Europe. NATO will still maintain a military headquarters in Sarajevo to help authorities bring Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, and other indicted war criminals, to justice, and to advise Bosnia on defense reforms.

Just as the SFOR decision acknowledges that Bosnia has begun to turn the corner, NATO recognizes the need to stay the course in Kosovo. Having successfully stopped the fighting and repression in Kosovo, NATO's Kosovo Forces (KFOR) remain in the province as guarantors of the peace. The October 23 Assembly elections were an important step forward, and NATO's KFOR troops and UN civilian police did an excellent job safeguarding the vote. The only disappointment was that so many Kosovo Serbs decided not to take part in such an important opportunity to shape their future.

As I look at the next 12 months, I am optimistic that this 55-year-old Alliance can overcome the great global challenge of our era. If we are successful, and I know that we will be, NATO will have played an instrumental role in defeating the specter of global terrorism, and extending the zone of peace and security to new regions, while strengthening it within Europe. To do so will require us to work together, both within NATO and with partners like Russia, to overcome our differences, and to recognize the strength of our collective bond. Our enemies consider democracies to be weak, but as NATO and the NATO-Russia Council so effectively illustrate, we are just the opposite: resolute and determined to ensure a more peaceful world for our children.

Thank You.



[BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.