

# Strategic Considerations Behind Russian Proposal for New European Security Treaty

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MOSCOW: Russia on Sunday sent a draft treaty on European security to leaders of others countries and international organizations in the Euro-Atlantic space.

President Dmitry Medvedev said the draft, which should stretch “from Vancouver to Vladivostock,” will “finally do away with the legacy of the Cold War.”

Signing of the new pact would be beneficial to the security of Russia and Europe at large, but there is a long way to go before the United States and its European allies agree to the treaty since the parties’ security interests differ dramatically, analysts here say.

## TIMING OF PROPOSAL

Medvedev came up with an initiative in June 2008 to develop a legally binding treaty on European security. He proposed convening a common European summit to build such a treaty, which would be the legal basis for safeguarding future European security.

Thereafter, Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov repeatedly talked about launching the process of formulating a new security pact and made its signing a Russian foreign policy priority.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) began to discuss European security during an unofficial ministerial meeting in Greece in June. The foreign ministers from OSCE member states are presently gathering at Athens from Tuesday to Wednesday and Europe’s security remains high on their agenda.

Greece, which holds the OSCE rotating presidency, will pass on its position to the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan on Jan. 1. Apparently, Russia published the proposal two days before the OSCE meeting in the hope that the treaty would win broad support after Kazakhstan assumes the presidency.

Meanwhile, Russia and the United States have seen a thaw in bilateral ties, which sank to historic lows under the Bush administration before new U.S. President Barack Obama announced a reset in U.S.-Russia relations.

Russia and NATO, which have shaken off the shadow cast by Russia’s brief war with Georgia in August 2008, will soon declare the resumption of military cooperation, suspended following last year’s five-day war. Russia is also to render more support to Western countries regarding their operations in Afghanistan. Better ties with the West serves as a golden chance for creating new European security mechanisms.

## REASONS FOR PROPOSAL

Analysts say there are three reasons behind Russia's proposal of the draft treaty. First, it was a response to NATO's eastward expansion. NATO, a military bloc forged during the post-World War II era, continued to expand eastward following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, which disintegrated in 1991.

NATO military facilities have been deployed near Russian borders and the United States announced plans to place elements of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic. The West supported Ukraine and Georgia in "Color Revolutions" and brokered their entry into NATO, an attempt seen by Russia as a squeeze of its traditional sphere of influence and a threat to its national security.

Second, the proposed pact aims to involve Russia in European defense. NATO filled the blank left by the disintegration of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and took military actions during the Kosovo crisis, while OSCE and the United Nations lost their significance.

NATO members failed to approve the revised Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, indicating their unwillingness to change the current NATO-led European security architecture. Russia, a strong power in the Eurasian region, has been closed out of the European security framework.

Third, the treaty reflects Russia's ambition to strengthen its position. The Russian economy, bolstered by high energy prices, had been growing vigorously before it was hit hard by the global financial crisis. In contrast, the United States has seen an end to the unipolar world.

Russia hopes to be part of a multipolar world and play an increasingly critical role in the international arena. Medvedev has made it clear the pact would be open to "all states of the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space from Vancouver to Vladivostock," as well as members of NATO, the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and OSCE.

Existing security institutions like NATO, EU and OSCE were neither efficient nor comprehensive, said Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs, noting that none of them managed to prevent the Kosovo crisis and the Caucasus war.

Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's envoy to NATO, said "international organizations can not help but include Russia in their plans and admit that nothing could be achieved without joint efforts" under the current international context.

## LONG WAY TO GO

The draft treaty calls for mutual cooperation between signatory countries "on the basis of principles of indivisible, equal and undiminished security," which means that it's impossible for the United States to station an anti-missile shield in Central Europe once it signs the document.

Rogozin has handed over the draft treaty to NATO leaders, saying the signing of the treaty is one of the goals that Russia wants to realize through its cooperation with NATO. The steps to discuss the treaty will depend on "the circumstances of Russia-NATO ties," he said.

According to sources close to the issue, NATO objects to discussing the treaty within the NATO-Russia Council, insisting it be discussed by OSCE.

The West was likely to take different attitudes toward the draft, Russian political commentator Tatyana Stanovaya said.

The United States, Britain and some Eastern European countries would oppose the treaty.

Russia's traditional partners such as Germany, France, Italy and Finland would take a more cautious stance.

Switzerland was so far the only state that had voiced support for the treaty. Observers believe that CIS members also belong to the last category.

However, one legally binding document could not resolve the problems of Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, said Dmitry Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center and chair of its Expert Council and its Foreign and Security Policy program. The problem was Russia's lack of trust in the United States and Eastern Europe's lack of trust in Russia, he said.

Russia has long been at odds with the United States and its NATO allies over European security, observers said. It's difficult for them to reach any further understanding and would take even more time before the treaty could finally be accepted.

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