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## Russia and NATO after the Lisbon Summit

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The NATO Summit that took place on November 19th and 20th has been characterized by a very full agenda for its participants. Numerous major matters were broached, such as Afghanistan, the new strategic concept as well as missile defence. In this e-NOTE, we will look into the role played by Russia in negotiations, while foreseeing the geopolitical implications that this new order will carry. The fact that Russia and NATO enter into a negotiation process is noteworthy insofar as few observers would have imagined such a development after the Bucharest Summit in 2008. It should however be noticed that Lisbon has not been the scene of a spectacular revival inasmuch as the progresses made in the negotiation process have to be put back in the broader context of the

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“reset” previously proposed by the Obama administration. Having said this, the Lisbon Summit has opened many ways for cooperation between Russia and NATO. We will restrict our analysis to two topics: Afghanistan and missile defence.

### **The Afghan setting**

The mission in Afghanistan being the core foreign operation of the Alliance’s institutions, no wonder that this issue stood high on the list of priorities under discussion. Russia has committed itself in numerous fields during the Summit:

- help with the transport of NATO’s military and other cargoes to Afghanistan through Russian territory by air, rail as well as road ;
- implementation of a NATO-Russia Council Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund in 2011 ;
- training of pilots, special forces, military, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism units in Russian training centres by Russian instructors.

There is no doubt that Russia’s commitment will fully benefit the international coalition. Military transit through Russia is necessary insofar as the route through Pakistan is regularly the target of attacks that disrupt the traffic flow. Hence an alternate geographical option is a necessity. Moreover, the Russian military material is adapted to the operational conditions of the Afghan national army (ANA). In this view, the acquisition of Mi-17 Russian helicopters is being considered for the ANA. In the light of the temporal objective of Western withdrawal, the training of the Afghan army is one of the priorities of the western military authorities inasmuch as the ANA is supposed to eventually ensure the security of the country by itself. The assistance offered by Russia is however not disinterested. As Andreï Fediachine puts it, NATO and Russia are condemned to the “Afghan partnership”.

The first element of this partnership is linked to the Russian domestic security, which is threatened by drug trafficking. Against the background of its porous borders, that makes the transport of tons of heroine coming from Afghanistan possible, Russia has no other solution than supporting NATO. Even a partial withdrawal of NATO troops without the appropriate training of Afghan forces would be a disaster for Moscow, with the appearance of an uncontrollable and well-armed heroine-growing area under its nose<sup>2</sup>. According to Russian statistics, a substantial quantity of narcotics produced in Afghanistan passes through the Russian territory. Data relating to drug trafficking must be analyzed with a critical

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<sup>2</sup>Andreï FEDIACHINE, “La Russie, sauveur de l’OTAN en Afghanistan, mais à quel prix?”, *RIA Novosti*, 3 November 2010.

eye, but we have to admit that fiddling the figures is not really in the interest of Russian authorities. Those data are besides very bad: 25% of the total Afghan production enters Russia, one part of which is meant for Western Europe, but the majority of which is intended to supply the Russian market. Official statistics show that 2.5 million Russians are addicted to a drug, turning this country into the first consumer of Afghan heroin. According to the Russian media, 30,000 people die of drug overdose every year. Those few data show us to what extent Russia is vulnerable to the security development of the Afghan political scene.

The second element which backs up the thesis of the “Afghan partnership” relates to Islamic extremism in this part of the world. Islamic forces in Afghanistan, who fight the central government of Kabul as well as NATO, have branches in all Central Asia. This presence is thus liable to destabilize a much larger region than Afghanistan, including the Russian northern Caucasus. The terrorist attacks in the Moscow underground reminded the Russian society of its fragility when faced with religious extremism<sup>3</sup>. In the light of its obvious past experience, Russia won't send combat troops on Afghan soil. But it is nevertheless in the country's interest that Central Asia be pacified.

### **The missile shield**

On November 12th 2010, the Russian Foreign minister declared that cooperation between NATO and Russia on the creation of a common missile defence policy was possible on certain conditions: “(...) If we proceed on the basis of equal cooperation, starting with a joint analysis, joint assessment of risks, which exist in the sphere of missile proliferation, then such cooperation is completely feasible<sup>4</sup>”. This development, which started well before this speech, marks a tactical change from the Russian authorities. For a few years now, the American plan to develop a defence shield on the European continent had indeed been a cause for deep concern in Moscow. Russian critics were focusing on the unilateral aspects of this project capable of destabilizing the European balance in the fields of security and defence. Although Russia paves the way for cooperation in the domain of missile defence, the country's stance remains steadfast in its approach.

As the Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozine notices, the implementation of a joint NATO-Russia anti-missile network will have first to meet three criteria. First of all, missile defence cannot be based on the explicit designation of a state as the “target” of the project. As such, Iran cannot be integrated in the anti-missile scheme as the country for which the future system

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<sup>3</sup> Mihaiu MARGARIT, “The issue of Afghanistan seen from Moscow”, *World Security Network*, 25 October 2010.

<sup>4</sup> “Russie/OTAN: la Russie prête à coopérer à la défense antimissile”, *Europe Diplomatie et Défense*, No. 365, 16 November 2010, p.2.

is meant. Russia's aim is to be careful not to upset Tehran, while avoiding to give the impression of docilely siding with the Americans. Secondly, the system must content itself with countering short- and medium-range missile threats. Thirdly, and even if this contradicts the first point, the system must be geographically deployed where risks do exist. Moreover, the interceptor missiles should not technically and tactically be able to neutralize intercontinental ballistic missiles<sup>5</sup>. Those three points are so many bones of contention between Western and Russian negotiators. The Russian authorities do not want to open a Pandora's box which could lead to a change to their disadvantage in the complex equation of nuclear deterrence. Besides, the President Medvedev has clearly stated during the Lisbon Summit that the Russian participation would only be possible if the various actors taking part in the project were considered as equals.

The NATO-Russian cooperation in the field of missile defence has to be analyzed in the light of all those elements. Far from being the starting point of a security project common to the northern hemisphere, the missile shield still has to overcome many obstacles, cognitive as well as material, to be effective in the strategic equations of the NATO member states and of Russia. The NATO-Russia Council has been tasked with developing a comprehensive joint analysis of the future framework for broader missile defence cooperation. The progress of this analysis will be assessed at the June 2011 meeting of NATO-Russia Council Defence ministers<sup>6</sup>.

### **Which advantages for Russia in the Great Game?**

Besides the "local" reasons and objectives that we have just set out in the two previous points, Russia has engaged into a dialogue process with Western countries thanks to many global considerations. The enlargement of the Alliance to Georgia and Ukraine is clearly one of Russia's objectives. As a matter of fact, NATO does no longer consider their entry as a priority. As compensation Russia will besides demand that the West abandon its diplomatic involvement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and that poppy plantations in Afghanistan, a major domestic security problem for the Russian authorities, be destroyed<sup>7</sup>. Finally, seeing NATO fixed in Central Asia does certainly not go against Russian aspirations. For the time being, the Afghan security issue prevents any

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<sup>5</sup> ВЛАДИМИР СОЛОВЬЕВ, "Концепция глобального полицейского нас устроить не может", *коммерсант.ru*, 10 November 2010, consulted on <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=9d67137a-9345-4c18-9427-6cdfc35a7c1e&docsid=1536116>

<sup>6</sup> "NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement", 20 November 2010, consulted on [http://www.nato.int/cps/fr/SID-F9ED4D5B-9D6EF3B9/natolive/news\\_68871.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/fr/SID-F9ED4D5B-9D6EF3B9/natolive/news_68871.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Andreï FEDIACHINE, "Le cocktail afghan de l'OTAN insipide sans l'ingrédient russe", *RIA Novosti*, 18 November 2010.



substantial re-deployment of the Alliance, either military or diplomatic, in other regions of the world.

The difference in tone between the Lisbon Summit and that of Bucharest in 2008 is obvious. However, many psychological and material obstacles are still standing in the way to turn the Euro-Atlantic region into an undivided area. The cooperation in the field of missile defence constitutes a breakthrough, but we are still far from a general pacification on the European continent, as shown by the Moldavian and Georgian examples. As Dmitri Trenin puts it, we can conclude that “Lisbon was a step in the right direction, with many more steps yet to be made<sup>8</sup>”.

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<sup>8</sup> Dmitri TRENIN, “Turning a Happy Hour into a Happy Alliance”, *The Moscow Times*, 22 November 2010.