

NATO- Russia Council

*and Its Relevance to Afghanistan's
Security Before and After 2014*

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Abstract

This article examines the post-9/11 developments in NATO-Russia relations and Afghanistan's role in setting the scope of their bilateral cooperation. More specifically, the article analyzes the efforts of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), a mechanism for cooperation between

NATO and Russia in fighting terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. Subsequently, the paper prospectively assesses Russia's position in relation to the post-NATO Afghanistan. NRC was established in 2002, in response to increasing concerns about terrorism after 9/11. Drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism, NRC provided a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, and facilitated building bridges in order to tackle new security challenges, with a special emphasis on terrorism, in the broader Euro-Atlantic region. Thus since the establishment of NRC, NATO and Russia have been cooperating more intensively. In terms of it being a safe haven for terrorists, Afghanistan immediately rose to the top of the agenda as a key issue for cooperation between NRC and Russia.

Accordingly, under the NRC, NATO and Russia have actively cooperated on the stabilization of Afghanistan, and even signed transit agreements for transferring and transmitting non-military equipment through Russian territory to Afghanistan, to be used by the NATO mission (ISAF). Nonetheless, the article argues that despite the level of cooperation achieved, one can scarcely argue that this cooperation will endure. This is because, as the forthcoming NATO withdrawal shows, Russia's post-2014 cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan will depend on the nature of the NATO mission. In this sense, Russia has expressed that for it to further cooperate with NATO in Afghanistan, NATO needs to have a valid legal basis, and UN Security Council authorization.

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Under the NRC, NATO and Russia are actively cooperating on the stabilization of Afghanistan, which is a common security issue. ISAF is considered to be one of the most successful instances of practical cooperation since 2008 when Russia signed a transit agreement with the Alliance, allowing Russian territory to be used to transport ISAF's non-military equipment through to Afghanistan. Significantly, this cooperation has not been hampered by the 'Russia's growing opposition to NATO's eastward expansion, the development of a missile shield, and the globalization of NATO's involvement'.¹ This article examines NATO-Russia relations vis-à-vis September 11th, providing analyses of NATO-Russia cooperation on the NRC level prior to 2014 along with Russia's perspective on the post-2014 Afghan mission.

9/11 and its Effect on NATO-Russia Relations

NATO has intensified its cooperation with Russia since the creation of the NRC in 2002, which replaced the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC). Positive cooperation on Afghanistan in the post-9/11 context was fundamental in shaping the NATO-Russia relations, leading to the creation of the NRC. The key stimulus for Russia-NATO rapprochement was the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Putin's offer of assistance

¹ Roger E. Kanet and Maxime Henri Andre Larive, "NATO and Russia: Perpetual New Beginning", *Perceptions*, Spring, Vol-ume XVII, No 1, 2002, pp. 75-96

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in the U.S.-led 'war on terror'. Putin conveyed Russia's solidarity with the United States and underscored the need for closer anti-terrorist cooperation between the West and Russia. Moscow allowed U.S. forces to use Russian airspace for operations in Afghanistan, and did not oppose the creation of U.S. bases in the former Soviet Central Asian republics.² Central Asian states offered flyover rights and other support for the coalition's anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan hosted coalition troops and provided access to airbases and in recent years, most of the regional states have also participated in the Northern Distribution Network for the transport of U.S. and NATO supplies to and from Afghanistan.³ Putin's consent to the deployment of Western forces in Central Asia and to the use of Central Asian airfields during the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan represented a dramatic turn in Russia's Central Asian policy.⁴

² Luca Ratti, 'Back to the Future? International Relations Theory and NATO-Russia Relations Since the End of the Cold War', *International Journal*, Spring 2009, p. 404

³ Jim Nichol, 'Central Asian: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests', *Congressional Research Service*, 9 January 2013, pp. 1-67

⁴ Lena Jonson, "Introduction", *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Lean Jonson, New York, London: I.B. Tauris Co Ltd, 2004, p. 1.

Russian involvement in Kyrgyzstan's recent moves to end U.S. use of the Manas air base seems to run counter to Russia's positive cooperation on Afghanistan.⁵ However, in explaining this rapprochement, it should be borne in mind that Putin's strategic reassessment had already begun before September 11th. When he came to power in 2002, one of his foreign policy decisions was to end the freeze in NATO-Russia relations.

Following the positive cooperation immediately after 9/11, Russia rekindled its interest in boosting relations with the Alliance, and the West was prepared to reciprocate. For instance, early in October 2001, Putin made his first trip to Brussels and met with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

It was the then-British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, among NATO leaders, who first suggested the establishment of a new mechanism of cooperation. British officials suggested the post-9/11 realignment as a way to overcome old enmities and build new bridges.⁶ Eventually, after several consecutive rounds of negotiations between the Alliance and Russia, the new mechanism was named as 'NATO-Russia Council (NRC)', and was formally established at a special

⁵ Oksana Antonenko and Bastian Giegerich, 'Rebooting NATO-Russia Relations', *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2, April-May 2009, p. 18.

⁶ NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community: the Transatlantic Bargain Challenged, ed. Stanley R. Loan, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2005, p. 171.

The objective behind the creation of the NRC was quite clear: to provide a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism.

NATO Rome Summit, at a transformed airbase *Practica Di Mare* on 28 May 2002, five years and one day after the signing of the Founding Act and launch of the PJC.⁷ According to the Rome declaration, NATO member states and Russia would work as equal partners in areas of common interest and the NRC would provide a mechanism for consultation, consensus building, cooperation, joint decision, and joint action for the member states of NATO and Russia on a wide spectrum of security issues in the Euro-Atlantic region.⁸

The objective behind the creation of the NRC was quite clear: to provide a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism. This move has also led to cooperation on Afghanistan's security at the institutional level, with the creation of the NRC. In this

⁷ Kara Bosworth, "The effect of 11 September on Russia-NATO relations", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 3:3, 2002, p. 380.

⁸ NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality. Declaration by Heads of State and Government of NATO Member States and the Russian Federation, May 28, 2002, at http://www.nato-russia-council.info/media/69549/2002.05.28_nrc_rome_declaration.pdf

sense, NRC's relevance to Afghanistan's security before and after 2014 must be analyzed in greater details given that Russia and NATO actively cooperate on the stabilization of Afghanistan.

NRC and Cooperation on Afghanistan

Working towards security and stability in Afghanistan is an important area of cooperation for the NRC, because Russia and NATO allies have a common interest in ensuring that Afghanistan is peaceful, stable and secure, and can never again become a haven for terrorists. To this end, Russia supports the NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan in accordance with UNSCR 1386, adopted unanimously on 20 December 2001, which authorized the establishment of an ISAF to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding area, so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations could operate in a secure environment.⁹

On 11 August 2003 NATO took over command of the ISAF in Afghanistan, marking the first time in NATO's history that it had taken charge of an 'out of area' operation, beyond the Euro-Atlantic confinements specified in the Strategic Concept of April 1999. The Alliance aims to help establish a

secure and stable Afghanistan with a fully representative government. Based on the December 2001 Bonn Conference 2001, as reflected in UN Security Council Resolutions, NATO will remain in Afghanistan as long as it takes to achieve these objectives, in order to help Afghanistan emerge from nearly four decades of authoritarian rule, foreign occupation and civil war.

Support for ISAF

In 2008, NATO asked Russia to allow the land transit of non-military equipment for ISAF contributors across Russian territory to Afghanistan in support of the NATO-led ISAF. The transit arrangements for non-lethal goods proved critical to the development of the northern supply route to Afghanistan, linking rail transportation between the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. At that time, the NATO-led ISAF was about 47,000 strong, tasked with consolidating the authority of Hamid Karzai's weak central government across the country.

The agreement was concluded at the NATO 2008 Summit in Bucharest, where the question of Ukraine and Georgia's membership in NATO was slated to hold a key place on the agenda. Russia harshly opposed NATO's eastward expansion, and warned of the political and military consequences of moving forward with such plans. NATO discounted Russia's threats until the Russian

⁹ Resolution 1386 (2001) on the Situation in Afghanistan Adopted by the Security Council at its 4443rd Meeting, on 20 December 2001

Ambassador to NATO, Rogozin, suggested that Russia might point warheads at Ukraine if it were to join the Alliance.¹⁰ Ultimately, NATO turned down Georgia and Ukraine's applications for Membership Action Plans (MAP) in Bucharest.

Despite this political drama, NATO and Russia did manage to produce one important initiative in Bucharest: Russia signed a transit agreement with the Alliance, allowing for the transport of non-military equipment for ISAF contributors through Russian territory to Afghanistan. It should also be noted that Russia is also obliged to assist ISAF with transit agreements under the Security Council Resolution, which called upon members of the UN to provide ISAF with 'such necessary assistance as may be required, including providing flyover clearances and transit.

In 2010, NATO and Russia entered into discussions on amendments to improve the 2008 arrangement and to better clarify the types of equipment that could be moved.¹¹ At the Lisbon Summit in 2010, NRC leaders agreed on amendments to the arrangements, allowing land transit of non-lethal

¹⁰ Julianne Smith, 'The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà vu?', Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2008, p. 6

¹¹ Only non-lethal cargo will be transported using multi-modal commercial transit. 'Non-lethal' means goods valid for international transport, with exceptions as defined in the Annex to Decision No 219 by the government of the Russian Federation on the 28 March 2008 (explosives, ammunition and all weapons), 'Questions and Answers on ISAF Transit and Russia', 18 July 2012, at <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/18-july-2012-transit-agreement-qa/>, accessed on 17 April 2013

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cargo through Russian territory both to and from Afghanistan. As a result, more than 60,000 ISAF containers have been transported by railway by Russian carriers to ISAF in Afghanistan. In 2012, the Russian government extended the transit scheme to multimodal transportation – rail, road and air transport by amending 2008 resolution. Thus, ISAF cargo can now be transported through Russia by rail, road and air depending on economic parameters and other specific conditions. The Russian government has also approved the use of Ulyanovsk International Airport as a hub for transit to and from Afghanistan, due to its proximity to air freight transport and international rail infrastructure.

The NRC Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund

In Lisbon, the NRC leaders agreed to establish an NRC Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund to enable the Afghan Armed Forces (AAF) to operate

their helicopter fleet. The goal of the project is to contribute to the ability of the AAF to operate its fleet of Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters more efficiently, providing training for the Afghan maintenance technicians, along with helicopter spare parts. During the first phase, ten donor nations, including Russia, contributed to the Trust Fund project, providing maintenance and repair capacities, including spare parts and technical training. Training started in 2012 and the Novosibirsk Aircraft Repair Plant in Russia is serving as the main center for Afghan maintenance personnel. The 19 trainees who completed the training were reintegrated back into the Afghan National Army Air Corps as of September 2012, and 30 Afghan maintenance personnel – representing about 20 percent of AAF helicopter technicians – were successfully trained in April 2013.¹² During the second phase, more specialized and intermediate maintenance training will be offered, promoting the self-sufficiency of the AAF, which will be essential after full responsibility for security in Afghanistan has been transferred to the ANSF and the NATO-led ISAF has withdrawn at the end of 2014.

NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan also includes the provision of counter-narcotics training for Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani personnel.

Counter-Narcotics Training of Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani Personnel

NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan also includes the provision of counter-narcotics training for Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani personnel. The NRC Project for Counter-Narcotic training was launched in December 2005 by NRC Foreign Ministers to address the threats posed by the trafficking of Afghan narcotics. In cooperation with the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the project was aimed at building local capabilities and promoting regional networking and cooperation by sharing the combined expertise of NRC nations with mid-level officers, initially from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan since 2010. Along with the project's seven beneficiary countries, 21 NRC nations are involved in the project as well as two non-NRC contributors, Finland and Ukraine. This project is unique since it brings together source and transit countries for trafficking with the nations that are ultimately targeted as markets for drugs. Since its inception, the project has trained over

¹² 'NATO-Russia Council Practical Cooperation Fact Sheet', November 2012, p. 5.

2500 counter-narcotics personnel from across the region.¹³ Crucially, many of the counter narcotics officers trained have since been involved in the most significant drugs hauls in the region. At the Lisbon Summit, the scope of the project was expanded to provide further assistance to institutional capacity building in the future. In 2013, it will further continue to introduce new areas, including training officers in the use of sniffer dogs. Two additional fixed training sites will also be added: a Canine Training School in Rostov on Don, and the Siberian Federal District Law Institute in Krasnoyarsk.¹⁴

NRC and the Fight against Terrorism

It is also important to mention how Russia and NATO are cooperating on the institutional level in the fight against international terrorism. Significantly, at the PJC meeting on 13 September 2001, Russia joined NATO's condemnation of terrorism, and its pledge not to let those responsible for such an appalling act to go unpunished. They agreed to intensify their cooperation under the Founding Act to defeat this scourge. Cooperation has taken the form of joint threat assessments, regular exchanges of information, in-depth consultation, civil emergency planning for terror-

ist attacks, high-level dialogue on the role of military, lessons learned from recent terrorist attacks and, scientific and technical cooperation. An Ad-hoc Working Group was created to discuss conceptual approaches to addressing the terrorist threat and to develop practical cooperation. This effort has shown that NATO and Russia share many common views on both the nature of the terrorist threat and how to address it; given the unique challenges posed by terrorism, NATO-Russia work in this field has had to be both diverse and multi-dimensional.¹⁵

Three high-level conferences were held in Rome and Moscow in 2002 and in Norfolk in 2004, in order to explore the role of military in combating terrorism, and generate recommendations for ways to develop practical military cooperation in this area. At an international conference on lessons learned from recent terrorist attacks in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2005, representatives of law enforcement, rescue and health departments and services of NRC member states who had been involved in terrorist-response operations came together to share their practical experience of preventing terrorist activity, consequence management and dealing with hostage-taking. Following the expert-level discussions, some studies and assessments have been tested through joint exercises. In addition,

¹³ 'NATO to Expand Counter-Drugs Training Project', *RIA Novosti*, 10 April 2013, at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20130410/180563702.html>

¹⁴ 'NATO-Russia Council Project Took Stock of Training in 2012', *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)* at <http://www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/news/nato-russia-council-project-took-stock-of-training-in-2012.html>

¹⁵ Andrei Kelin, "NATO-Russia Cooperation to Counter Terrorism", *NATO Review*, Autumn 2005

joint projects have been established, such as the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI) and the Stand-off Detection of Explosive Devices (STANDEX).

The political significance of the NRC became apparent for Moscow in the aftermath of the Beslan school hostage crisis of September 2004. According to official statistics, 344 civilians were killed, 186 of them children, and hundreds more wounded. For many Russians, this was their 9/11.¹⁶ On 7 September, the NRC met in extraordinary session and became the first international body to adopt a statement resolutely and unambiguously condemning what had taken place, defining it as ‘a crime and a direct threat to our common security, shared democratic values and basic human rights and freedoms.’¹⁷ One of the immediate results was the approval of an action plan on terrorism to coordinate practical cooperation under the NRC. The adopted plan was a new format for NATO-Russia cooperative efforts to combat terror-

¹⁶ Cindy C. Combs and Martin Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, eds., Cindy C. Combs and Martin Slann, New York: Info-Base Publishing, 2007, p. 40

¹⁷ The NRC categorically rejects terrorism in all its manifestations. It reconfirms that terrorist acts pose a direct challenge to common security, to shared democratic values and to basic human rights and freedoms. NRC nations agree that there is no cause that can justify such acts, and call for unity of action in the international community in addressing this insidious threat. They will do everything in their power to fight all forms of terrorism, acting in conformity with the UN Charter, international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as other existing commitments. They stand united in support of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, as well as the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. “NATO-Russia Council Action Plan on Terrorism”, e-Library, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_72737.htm, accessed on 29 March 2013

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ism: in the plan, they outlined measures to enhance the capabilities of Russia and NATO to act, individually and jointly, in three critical areas: preventing terrorism; combating terrorist; and managing the consequences of terrorist acts. Thus, NATO and Russia were proceeding from statements of intent and exercises to exploring the possibilities for joint practical actions, including actions involving the use of military means, to counter the terrorist threat.

NRC and Afghanistan’s Security after 2014

Since NATO took over ISAF in 2003, it has been conducting security operations, while also training and developing the ANSF. Since 2011, responsibility for security has gradually been handed over to the Afghans. This process is scheduled to be completed at the end of the 2014, when ISAF’s mission will end. After 2014, the Alliance will lead a follow-on mission to train, advise and assist the ANSF during the transformation process (2015-2023) with the aim of continuing to support the development and maintenance of the Afghan security forces and institutions. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stressed that “the new mission

will not be ISAF by another name. It will be different, and be significantly smaller. Its aim will be to train, advise and assist the Afghan forces, not substitute for them.”¹⁸ It will have a regional approach and will be based in Kabul and in the North, West, South and East. The focus will be on the national institutions such as the security ministries, and the corps levels of army and police command.

The question is, ‘Will Russia continue to cooperate with NATO on the NRC level as ISAF is withdrawn by the end of 2014?’ It seems that Russia-NATO cooperation on Afghanistan is coming to an end. This is partly for objective reasons; when the Alliance withdraws the majority of its troops, it will not need Russia’s help to the same extent. It is likely that they will continue to cooperate in line with the previous projects or other new projects on the NRC level. After his visit to Moscow in April 2013, NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, said that he and his Russian counterparts agreed that their counter-narcotics training efforts have been successful and could be expanded. It was also recognized that there is a common interest in NATO’s success in Afghanistan, and in continuing to support stability in the region. Speaking on post-2014 NATO-Russia cooperation, he stated that

18 ‘NATO Defense Ministers Endorse Concept for New post-2014 mission in Afghanistan’, 5 June 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_101248.htm, accessed on 12 August 2013

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‘As we look to the post-2014 period Afghanistan is going to have many different needs that the international community will have to address. Some of them will be in the security field, but there may be additional areas relating to securing the borders, fighting corruption, or dealing with other transnational crime, where NATO-Russia cooperation can be among the catalysts for greater regional cooperation. The focus may shift away from the security field, but NRC countries could provide a real impetus that could bring the Central Asian countries, Pakistan, India and China into new initiatives to support Afghan sovereignty and economic development. The counter-narcotics training project has provided a model for future cooperative projects. It has already gone beyond just training Afghans, to providing capacity building in Central Asia and Pakistan. There is an opportunity to be even more inclusive, given that the Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan as well as Pakistan have an even

more direct stake in avoiding any backsliding after 2014.¹⁹

Given that ISAF is expected to leave Afghanistan by the end of the 2014, Russia is worried about the subsequent consequences for the stability of the region. Indeed, many observers believe that the situation in Afghanistan is far from secure, and its future after the troops withdrawal remains quite uncertain. Russia is concerned about two important threats that are expected to rise following the end of the ISAF mission: terrorism and Afghan narcotics, and their potential spread to the neighboring states. Russia's main worry is that NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan might lead to a Taliban victory, and a return to the turbulent conditions of the 1990s, when Islamist militants infiltrated the neighboring post-Soviet republics of Central Asia and threatened the stability of Russia's southern flank.²⁰ Similarly, the inflow of the Afghan heroin became the main challenge from Afghanistan, posing a vital threat to its human security, via its direct impact on Russian society. While present trafficking through Central Asia accounts for 25 percent of Afghan heroin exports and 15 percent of opium exports, 90 percent of the heroin that goes through Central

19 'NATO Deputy Secretary General Talks about Moscow Visit', 3 April 2013, <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20130403-nrc-ambassador-vershbow-interview/>, accessed on 12 August 2013

20 Fred Weir, 'Russia Urges NATO to Stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014', 19 April 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0419/Russia-urges-NATO-to-stay-in-Afghanistan-beyond-2014>, accessed on 22 September 2013

Although Russia has expressed that further cooperation is possible, it claims that NATO needs a UN mandate for the post-2014 Afghan mission.

Asia ends up in Russia.²¹ In this respect, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov urged NATO to keep its forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014. This demonstrates that the preservation of stability in Afghanistan is in Moscow's fundamental interests, as in the Alliance's.

More importantly, Russia is distinguishing between the Afghanistan issue and the disagreements on other major issues like NATO expansion and the development of missile defense system. This indicates it is clearly in Russia's interest to cooperate on Afghanistan. As noted earlier, Russia is aware that instability in Afghanistan would have negative repercussions in Russia. This is why it has embarked on cooperation with NATO and is willing to cooperate on the mission beyond 2014.

Although Russia has expressed that further cooperation is possible, it claims that NATO needs a UN mandate for the post-2014 Afghan mission. The Russian Ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, said that 'further cooperation is possible but will depend on the nature of the

21 Ekaterina Stepanova, 'Afghanistan after 2014: The Way Forward for Russia', *Ifri Russia/NIS Center*, 2013, p. 12, cited in *World Drug Report 2011*, New York, UNODC, 2011, p. 71.

NATO mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and must have a reliable legal basis and be approved by the UN Security Council. There should also be a clear understanding of the strategic tasks the international community intends to work on in Afghanistan.²² Earlier, Russia's Acting Ambassador to NATO Nikolai Korchunov had gone further, saying that Russia will stop cooperating with NATO over Afghanistan after 2014 unless the Alliance obtains UN Security Council authorization for its new training mission in Afghanistan. 'It is a precondition both for carrying on the operation and for our cooperation with NATO on that issue post-2014,' he told Reuters in an email.²³

Russia wants to know more about the scale and scope of post-2014 mission in Afghanistan before deciding whether to continue to cooperate with the Alliance. Putin's special envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov said that

'At the end of the day NATO is a military bloc. If a military-political group appears in the neighborhood of Russia territory, without our consent and with tasks unknown to us, this is problematic. Our current cooperation with NATO is based on the current NATO mandate from the UN Security Council.

²² Nigel Chamberlain, 'Prospects for a Productive NRC Meeting in April', *NATO Watch*, 8 March 2013

²³ Adrian Croft, 'NATO Must Have UN Mandate for post-2014 Afghan Mission', *Reuters*, 10 October 2012

And we only cooperate with such mission as have a mandate for which we have also voted.'²⁴

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen met with Afghan journalists to provide answers regarding NATO's operations in Afghanistan and a new mandate from the UN Security Council. He said that

'At Chicago we agreed on very clear status for the post-2014 mission. We agreed that we would seek a sound legal basis, such as a UN Security Council Resolution. This is our preferred option. But let me also stress that an international legal point of view it would be sufficient to have an invitation from the Afghan government. So an invitation would be sufficient. But, if this is complemented with a UN Security Council Resolution that would be even better.'²⁵

Notably, agreement on the chemical weapons situation in Syria was reached between Russia and the U.S. The UN Security Council voted unanimously to secure and destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. Russia previously vetoed three West-

²⁴ Gabriela Baczynska, 'Russia Wants Answers on NATO post-2014 Afghan Mission', *Reuters*, 25 October 2012

²⁵ 'Rasmussen Brief Afghan Journalists on NATO Mission in Afghanistan', *Khaama Press*, 4 January 2013, at <http://www.khaama.com/rasmussen-brief-afghan-journalists-on-nato-mission-in-afghanistan-26404>

ern-backed resolutions pressing President Bashar Assad's regime to end the violence in Syria. I would argue that the recent successful negotiations between Russia and the West on the Syrian issue means a green light for major security issues such as the post-2014 Afghan negotiations.

To conclude, it is true that there is some disagreement between NATO and Russia in regard to the post-2014 mission in Afghanistan. However, the objective situation in Afghanistan and in the region is pushing NATO and Russia towards cooperation. In this sense, they should find common ground to cooperate on the NRC level. However, this can only be realized if cooperation prevails over rivalry.