
NATO and Russia

- ✓ *Is NATO's current military presence in Eastern Europe adequate to deter Russian expansionism, or are additional troops necessary?*
- ✓ *Can NATO function as a deterrent to Russia without using armed force?*
- ✓ *What are the costs and benefits of NATO expansion?*

Facts about NATO

Members: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

Leaders: Curtis Scaparrotti, 60, supreme allied commander for Europe; Jens Stoltenberg, 57, secretary general; Petr Pavel, 54, chairman of the NATO Military Committee.

Background.

Founded in 1949 after the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (also known as the Washington Treaty), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created to “safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their [the Parties’] peoples.” NATO’s biggest adversary at the time was the growing Soviet Union, which sought to expand territorial gains made in Eastern Europe during World War II. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many thought that NATO was no longer necessary—a relic of the Cold War. However, recent actions taken by the Russian Federation to expand control over former Soviet satellite countries have restored a sense of purpose for NATO in Europe.

Facts about Russia

Population: 142.5 million (2015 est.).

Military Power: 771,000 active, 2,000,000 reserves (2015 est.).

Leaders: Dmitry Medvedev, 50, prime minister of Russia; Vladimir Putin, 63, president of Russia.

Important Dates.

1991: The modern Russian Federation is founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1999: Vladimir Putin is appointed prime minister of Russia. He subsequently becomes acting president.

2014: NATO-Russia Council cooperation is suspended after Russia annexes Crimea.

Background.

Russian policy under Vladimir Putin has constantly put the country at odds with NATO. Events like the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the recent Russian annexation of the Crimea have increased hostile rhetoric between NATO leaders and Putin. NATO has since augmented the number of troops in Eastern Europe in an effort to combat what it sees as Russian expansionist policy. NATO also deploys naval warships to patrol the Black Sea, adding to tensions over a potential outbreak of conflict. Russia has faced heavy sanctions from many NATO members, plunging the country into recession and further straining relations.

Current U.S. Policies

North Atlantic Treaty.

The North Atlantic Treaty established NATO and is the basis of U.S. foreign policy with regard to the organization. The defining element of the treaty is Article 5, a shared promise among all parties that an attack against one will be regarded as an attack against all. President Obama calls NATO “the cornerstone of our collective defense and U.S. security policy.” The administration has been very supportive of sanctions against Russia, which it maintains should be ongoing until such time as Crimea is returned to Ukraine. At the recent NATO Summit in Warsaw, President Obama announced the addition of 1,000 U.S. troops to Poland, constituting one of four multinational combat battalions to be deployed to Eastern Europe under NATO auspices.

Candidate Positions



Hillary Clinton favors a stronger NATO to counter aggressive Russian foreign policies. She supports sanctions in response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine and Crimea, as well as to its use of airspace over Turkey—a NATO ally—in its campaign to defend Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Mrs. Clinton has denounced a suspected Russian cyberhack of Democratic National Committee computers, and accuses President Putin of attempting to influence the U.S. presidential election.

As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton was instrumental in the so-called “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations, which earned some early successes—including joint sanctions on Iran’s nuclear program—but did not achieve sustained cooperation. Her relationship with the Russian president has been particularly fraught since Mr. Putin’s 2012 presidential campaign, during which Clinton voiced support for anti-Putin protestors and called for transparent elections. At the time, Putin accused her of actively working to undermine him.



Donald Trump revoked his previous assessment of NATO as obsolete, citing the creation of a counterterrorism division as the reason for this change of opinion. Still, Mr. Trump says that NATO as it stands is a “bad deal” for the U.S. He drew international criticism when he indicated that U.S. obligations under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty should be conditional on countries’ financial contributions to the alliance.

Mr. Trump expresses admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s leadership style, calling him “a better leader than Obama.” In the wake of a suspected-Russian cyberhack into the DNC, Mr. Trump made a public statement encouraging Russia to hack into Hillary Clinton’s email. He has since described those comments as sarcastic. In a departure from his party, Mr. Trump seemed to indicate that his administration would not supply defensive lethal weapons to the Ukrainian government, and that he would consider recognizing Crimea as Russian.

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