



Russia should be a partner in the Western Alliance

Should Russia join NATO? Sixty years ago, the trans-Atlantic military alliance was created to protect Western Europe and the United States from Soviet aggression. Now a leading expert on European security says the West should strengthen ties with the Soviet Union's successor, including membership in the 26-member alliance.

"Why not take Russia, in the long run, into NATO?" asks **Horst Teltschik**, former national security advisor to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl from 1982 to 1990 and international consultant.

Speaking in the opening dialogue of the INSEAD Leadership Summit Europe on April 3, Teltschik said that building closer ties with Russia economically, politically and militarily would go a long way to resolving one of today's most pressing security concerns.

"Russia still believes it is a world power and in one respect it is still true - after the US, it is the second most powerful nuclear power in the world," he says. A key figure in the German reunification process, Teltschik, who sits on the boards of Bertelsmann, Boeing and Roche, is a co-founder of the annual Munich Security Conference which brings together heads of state, foreign affairs and defense ministers and senior politicians from around the world.

Other world figures have considered the idea of Russian membership in NATO, says Teltschik, who revealed that former US President Bill Clinton had told him he had discussed the subject with former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who rejected it as being too soon.

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Relations between the US, Europe and Russia have thawed since US President Barack Obama took office in January. For example, during the G-20 summit President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed to reduce their nuclear powers. But Russia still poses a security threat unless the West takes additional measures to treat it as an equal partner, according to Teltschik.

"The problem is how to cope with Russia and I do believe there's only one answer left," he says. "We have to work hard to integrate Russia into Europe whether we like it or not. The Russian leadership believes it is a European country but the problem is they measure themselves against the United States, therefore they still believe they are a world power.

They believe the rest of the world has to cope with them on an equal level with the Americans and this doesn't work anymore."

Russia has a centuries-old fear of being encircled by enemies, says Teltschik, and with China to the east, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south, and NATO to the west, this fear is understandable. "They believe they are surrounded, and therefore we have to take care of their security interests, we have to take it seriously," he says.

Moreover, Russia's economy is weaker than its leaders admit. It depends largely on revenue from the sale of oil and gas to Europe. On the other hand, Europe is highly dependent on those resources. This mutual dependency means it is in the interest of both parties to establish good relations. "The best way to find an agreement is if both sides know they are dependent on one another and have common interests," says Teltschik.

Despite the strains, Russia under Medvedev, who took office in March 2008, has taken steps to reform its domestic business climate. As a result, more and more European businesses have set up operations in Russia, including some 4,600 German companies.

"They tell me that they can go to court and they are successful, and therefore even the rule of law is improving slowly," Teltschik says, while acknowledging that will take time. "The problem is you can pass laws in the Duma (the Russian Assembly) but you need judges, lawyers and so on, you have to educate them. This takes time, it takes generations. Look at our Western European countries how much time it takes to change things."

Russia's natural partner is Europe, while Europe's closest ally is the US, Teltschik says, ruling out other possible partners such as China, a powerful rival and potential enemy, and India, with which the Soviet Union already attempted to form a partnership.

In a discussion on the sidelines of the conference, Teltschik explains the likely consequences of not bringing Russia into the Western alliance.

"Russia was always an aggressive country," he told INSEAD Knowledge. "If you push them into a corner, isolate them, what will be the repercussion? Isolating Russia means they will start to rebuild their army, their nuclear systems and so on. And I think that is not in our interest."

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