

Helsinki 2.0 – illusion or imperative?

We need new multilateral formats, including a new permanent conference on European security with Russian participation

BY ALEXEY GROMYKO

In the long and complicated history of the Cold War, tensions and détente had their peaks and troughs. One profound achievement of peacemaking was the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki in 1975. It was the embodiment of a new *modus vivendi*, above all in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Helsinki Process led to the creation of Europe's most inclusive organization – the OSCE, which comprises both East and West.

The Helsinki treaty has not become outdated, and the OSCE continues to play a crucial role – especially since the Ukrainian crisis. But recent developments have brought into sharp relief the necessity of a renewed commitment to its principles. The idea is to reconfirm the principles of 1975 and those of the 1990 Paris Charter, while taking into account the historical changes of recent years. The goal should be a balance of interests, compromise

and mutually beneficial solutions based on international law and the supremacy of the UN Charter. In the absence of any positive signs in this sphere, the spillover of the new arms race into the nuclear domain is a stark reality. The readiness of the US to scrap the 1987 INF treaty could have dramatic consequences.

In 2008, then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev proposed to the EU, NATO, OSCE, CIS and Common Security Treaty Organization (SCTO) the conclusion of the European Security Treaty. The idea was to create a common Euro-Atlantic security space based on the legally binding idea of indivisibility of security. NATO, the EU and OSCE never replied. The draft of the new treaty was part of Russia's efforts to revive the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and to draw a final line under the Cold War. "Helsinki 2.0" was coined as a shorthand of this and other attempts to find a common security denominator between Russia and the West. It never got off the ground. The main stumbling block has been the underlying intention of the US and its allies to marginalize Russia geopolitically and economically in Eastern Europe and in other regions of the post-Soviet sphere.

Several attempts have been made in the past to move in the direction of Helsinki 2.0. As a repercussion of Medvedev's proposal, the OSCE launched the Corfu Process in 2009, which re-examined the post-Cold War security arrangements in the wake of the war in the South Caucasus. The following year, Russia and Germany put forward the Meseberg Initiative, with the aim of establishing an EU-Russian dialogue focused on resolving the Transnistria conflict of 2010. Helsinki 2.0 could take various shapes. It can be a permanent conference covering all four Helsinki baskets, or it could concentrate on politico-military issues, taking into consideration the urgency of de-escalation in this particular area.

Participants of such a permanent conference could include states as well as international organizations. The Final Act of 1975 was signed by 35 states. The number of participants of Helsinki 2.0 could potentially be much higher in view of the sharp

increase of European states following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Not all of them need to join right away. The initiative could be launched by a coalition of the willing. The role of host nation for the conference could be filled by an internationally recognized mediator state such as Austria, Finland or Switzerland.

What would be the fundamental tenets of a new Helsinki Treaty? The purposes and principles of the UN Charter; state sovereignty; equality and non-interference; the peaceful settlement of international conflicts; a comprehensive approach to security relations between member states; indivisibility of security; refrainment from the threat or use of force.

Some argue that there is no need for Helsinki 2.0, as the existing international treaties – the UN Charter, the 1975 Final Act, the Paris Charter, etc. – are fully sufficient. However, their interpretations vary while new historical circumstances take hold and pose new challenges. Lest mutual claims and counterclaims mount and tensions rise, all sides should meet and argue in a structured and serious dialogue.

Others argue that, prior to negotiations, the opposite sides should comply with certain preliminary conditions. This would only succeed in ruining the chance that the conflicting players would engage in talks with one another. In the past, major wars were followed by the conclusion of key international treaties that defined the victorious and defeated nations. Today, it is impossible to expect any major center of power, especially a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to admit defeat or yield to ultimatums. Insisting on preliminary conditions would in effect torpedo the settlement of international disputes through diplomacy.

NATO is vehemently opposed to anything that might limit the ability of the Alliance to enlarge. However, indivisibility of security does not automatically prohibit enlargement of any military organization. Nor does it eliminate the open door policy of NATO, SCTO or other alliances; instead, it undergirds expansion with pragmatism, not ideology. Moreover, it implies that all sides become reciprocal stakeholders in the common security sphere and that

the dividing lines between opponents begin to blur. The more this process is advanced, the more it becomes unnecessary for military organizations to grow territorially.

Common sense and the extremely precarious conditions of arms control and strategic stability dictate the necessity to launch dialogue among a coalition of the willing in the spirit of Helsinki. It is highly desirable that all states from Vancouver to Vladivostok participate in this endeavor. Unfortunately, the near future holds little hope that such an idealistic scenario will prevail. However, waiting for the perfect moment to arrive risks allowing the chances of a new big war to increase.

The states that suffered most from the wars of the 20th century should assume the responsibility of initiating a new permanent conference on European security. Is there a nobler task than saving the world?

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The architects of Helsinki 1.0 in July 1975: Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford for the US ...



... and Leonid Brezhnev, Andrey Gromyko (grandfather of the author) and Konstantin Chernenko, for the USSR.

State of play: Russia and the fraying West

Despite their troubles, Europe and the US are not withering away. It would behoove Moscow to avoid escalations

BY DMITRI TRENIN

Looking at the West today, a Russian who witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago sees a striking picture. Political America is gripped in a cold civil war, and is led by a president who acts as if he were still the star of a reality TV show. British politicians have managed to maneuver their island into a Brexit limbo. Their French colleagues had to file for collective bankruptcy before installing a kingly figure whose political clothes have since become threadbare. Even Germany's political system, a paragon of post-World War II stability, is beginning to visibly wobble. A range of smaller Western countries add their own bright colors to the group portrait of the elites across the Euro-Atlantic world who have lost touch with their publics and confidence in themselves.

A few Russians are quite giddy at this view. They should sober up. Western economies, even if they may be facing yet another recession, are fundamentally strong. The United States still basically controls global finance and leads the world by a huge margin in both technology and innovation. For all the talk of fake news and Russian propaganda, mainstream Western media continue to dominate the information landscape across the globe. Migration waves to Western Europe and North America testify to how attractive Western living standards remain for the masses of less fortunate people all over the world. And, of course, the Pentagon wields phenomenal military power. So, unlike what happened to the Soviet Union and the communist system in the late 1980s, the West will live to see another day, even if it will have to transform itself in the process.

So, how should Russia deal with America and Europe in their

present condition? Above all, one needs to accept that while the West is altering its structure at the national, international and supranational levels, it is not withering away. The United States will continue to be in the lead, even if its leadership looks less benevolent and less altruistic. Europeans and other allies will have to accept the new regime, even if begrudgingly, and protect some of their own interests. The EU, for all the initiatives of French President Emmanuel Macron, is unlikely to emerge as a strategic player anytime soon. Many Europeans are sufficiently terrified of China's geo-economic expansion, Russia's geopolitical resurgence or both. There will be hand-wringing, but also arm-twisting. In any case, the bonds that tie Europe to America will not disappear.

In this situation, Russia would be wise to focus its US policy on preventing a direct military collision. It must accept that the current confrontation will probably go on

for years, meaning that sanctions will not be lifted. The Kremlin also must stay away from Trump: Vladimir Putin's meetings with him only make things worse. Seeking to influence the US domestic scene, even in a most innocuous way, is counter-productive. Reviving US-Russian arms control will not help. The INF Treaty is dead, and New START is likely to follow when its time is up in 2021. Thus, Moscow can only work with Washington to prevent incidents from spinning out of control; to avoid escalation of running conflicts such as Ukraine; and to minimize mutual misperceptions. Crucial here is a 24/7 US-Russian military-to-military communication link, and high-level personal contacts between their military and security chiefs. These contacts, of course, are no substitute for a comprehensive dialogue that will have to wait at least five to six years, and possibly more.

In this larger strategic framework, Russia's relations with

Europe will need to focus largely on protecting EU-Russia trade links in the thickening sanctions environment and allowing human contacts to proceed despite growing alienation and estrangement. With EU-Russia relations largely frozen, Russian-European relations will be a sum of bilateral ones. While trade is only a bit more than half of what it was before 2014, it is still important, particularly in the energy sector. Security matters will have to take a back seat: Europeans cannot decide alone on the issues that fall within NATO's competence. The OSCE is essentially irrelevant, and the Russia-NATO communications line is but an add-on to the US-Russian one. Yet, a few EU member states, including France, Germany and Italy, prefer to keep open their channels of political dialogue with Moscow. Despite the likely termination of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe, contacts among ordinary people

are still vibrant. This mutual interest that has so far withstood the hybrid war is a firm enough basis on which to begin discussing a new lasting foundation for the Europe-Russia relationship, one centered on trade, human contacts and neighborly ties.

It goes without saying that no such discussion can avoid the formal reason for the breakdown of Russia-Europe relations: Ukraine. While chances for solving the issue in the foreseeable future are slim, every effort must be made to ensure that incidents on land in Donbass, in the water off Crimea or in the Sea of Azov do not lead to escalation. The hybrid war may take a long time to play out, but it is crucial that, like its predecessor, it stays mostly cold.

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