

# Russia's top five myths about NATO

## Myth 1: NATO is trying to encircle Russia.

**Fact:** This claim ignores the facts of geography. Russia's [land border](#) is just over 20,000 kilometres long. Of that, 1,215 kilometres, or less than one-sixteenth, face current NATO members.

Claims that NATO is building bases around Russia are similarly groundless. Outside the territory of NATO nations, NATO only maintains a significant military presence in three places: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and at sea off the Horn of Africa. All three operations are carried out under United Nations mandate, and thus carry the approval of Russia, along with all other Security Council members. Before Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine began, Russia provided logistical support to the Afghan mission, and cooperated directly with the counter-piracy operation, showing clearly that Russia viewed them as a benefit, not a threat.

NATO has partnership relationships with many countries in Europe and Asia, as can be seen from this [interactive map](#). Such partnerships, which are requested by the partners in question, focus exclusively on issues agreed with them, such as disaster preparedness and relief, transparency, armed forces reform, and counter-terrorism. These partnerships cannot legitimately be considered a threat to Russia, or to any other country in the region, let alone an attempt at encirclement.

## Myth 2: NATO has tried to isolate or marginalise Russia.

**Fact:** Since the early 1990s, the Alliance has consistently worked to build a cooperative relationship with Russia on areas of mutual interest.

NATO began reaching out, offering dialogue in place of confrontation, at the London NATO Summit of July 1990 (declaration [here](#)). In the following years, the Alliance promoted dialogue and cooperation by creating new fora, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), open to the whole of Europe, including Russia (PfP founding documents [here](#) and [here](#)).

In 1997 NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, creating the NATO Russia Permanent Joint Council. In 2002 they upgraded that relationship, creating the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). They reaffirmed their commitment to the Founding Act at NATO-Russia summits in Rome in 2002 and in Lisbon in 2010 (The Founding Act can be read [here](#), the Rome Declaration which established the NRC [here](#), the Lisbon NRC Summit Declaration [here](#).)

Since the foundation of the NRC, NATO and Russia worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning. We set out to build a unique relationship with Russia, one based not just on mutual interests but also on cooperation and the shared objective for a Europe whole, free and at peace. No other partner has been offered a comparable relationship, nor a similar comprehensive institutional framework.

In March 2014, in response to Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia. We cannot return to business as usual while Russia continues to violate international law, and breach the principles of the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

At the same time, NATO has kept channels for communication with Russia open. The NATO-Russia Council has met three times since the suspension of practical cooperation, most recently on 20 April 2016. The Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General also meet regularly with their Russian counterparts.

## Myth 3: NATO missile defence targets Russia and the Iran agreement proves it.

**Fact:** NATO's missile defence system is not designed or directed against Russia. It does not pose a threat to Russia's strategic deterrent. As already [explained](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, geography and physics make it impossible for the NATO system to shoot down Russian intercontinental missiles from NATO sites in Romania or Poland. The interceptors are too few, and located too far south or too close to Russia, to be able to do so. They are designed to tackle threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

The Russian claim that the framework agreement on Iran's nuclear programme obviates the need for NATO missile defence is wrong on two counts.

The Iranian agreement does not cover the proliferation of ballistic-missile technology which is an issue completely different from nuclear questions.

Furthermore, NATO has repeatedly made clear that missile defence is not about any one country, but about the threat posed by proliferation more generally. In fact, over 30 countries have obtained, or are trying to obtain, ballistic missile technology.

The Iran framework agreement does not change those facts.

### Myth 4: NATO exercises are a provocation which threatens Russia.

**Fact:** Every nation has the right to conduct exercises, as long as they do so within their international obligations, including notifying the actual numbers and providing observation opportunities when required.

In order to promote mutual trust and transparency, OSCE members are bound by the Vienna Document to inform one another in advance of exercises which include more than 9,000 troops, unless the exercises are snap tests of readiness.

NATO and Allies have consistently stood by the terms and the spirit of the Vienna Document. Those exercises which crossed the notification threshold were announced well in advance. This is why Russia was invited to send observers to the NATO exercise Trident Juncture in October-November 2015.

Russia, on the other hand, has repeatedly called snap exercises including tens of thousands of troops, with some of them taking place close to NATO territory. This practice of calling massive exercises without warning is a breach of the spirit of the Vienna Document, raising tension and undermining trust. This is especially the case because Russia's military takeover of Crimea was masked by exactly such a snap exercise.

It is therefore Russia's exercises, not NATO's, which are a threat to stability.



Russian observers visit NATO Trident Juncture 2015 exercise.

### Myth 5: NATO's Open Door policy creates new dividing lines in Europe and deepens existing ones.

**Fact:** NATO's Open Door policy has helped close Cold War-era divisions in Europe. NATO enlargement has contributed to spreading democracy, security and stability further across Europe.

By choosing to adopt the standards and principles of NATO, aspirant countries gave their democracies the strongest possible anchor. And by taking the pledge to defend NATO, they received the pledge that NATO would protect them.

NATO membership is not imposed on countries. Each sovereign country has the right to choose for itself whether it joins any treaty or alliance.

This fundamental principle is enshrined in international agreements including the Helsinki Final Act which says that every state has the right "to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance." And by signing the NATO-Russia Founding Act, Russia agreed to respect states' "inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security."

Over the past 65 years, 28 countries have chosen freely, and in accordance with their domestic democratic processes, to join NATO. Not one has asked to leave. This is their sovereign choice. Article 13 of the Washington Treaty specifically gives Allies the right to leave should they wish to.

For more information, please visit our "Setting the Record Straight" portal on the NATO website: <http://goo.gl/GvTesc>

**Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) – Press & Media Section**

**Tel.: +32(0)2 707 5041**

**E-mail: [moc@hq.nato.int](mailto:moc@hq.nato.int)**

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