

words, the partnership with Russia must not be unconditional. For example, NATO must be free to decide on the extent of enlargement<sup>40</sup> and NATO members in the former Soviet bloc must be assured that planned ties with Moscow would not undermine their security. Thus, the key NATO objective is to strike the right balance between giving Russia a meaningful voice and preserving NATO's freedom of action on issues like military intervention and membership expansion.

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was launched on May 28, 2002, at the NATO summit in Rome. The NRC is to focus particularly on matters concerning non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the fight against terrorism. This Council of "twenty" is to be a full-fledged body with Russia's full-fledged participation in the drafting and approval of decisions. There is also a provision to establish working groups which will get "feedback" from other NATO structures.

The goal is to create a mechanism of joint responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. The NATO-Russia is thus intended to provide each participant with the opportunity to interact as equal nations in certain spheres where there are common interests: countering terrorism, peacekeeping, disaster relief, etc. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov considers the NRC a positive development because it "will allow us to draft and adopt decisions on crucial issues of security. We must make joint decisions and joint commitments and keep them." Moreover, he argues that the NRC makes NATO expansion palatable to Russia because it facilitates the transition of NATO itself in a direction which is in the interest of common European security.<sup>41</sup> President Putin, in reaction to the creation of the new

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<sup>40</sup> Those who are for stopping any enlargement of NATO argue that it provokes Russia, costs too much, dilutes Alliance unity, and distracts NATO from original mission. But to stop enlargement would damage NATO's credibility.

<sup>41</sup> Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov, "The landmarks of Russia's foreign policy" *Kommersant-Vlast*, no.22, June 11, 2002.