



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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Russian Proposals at Munich Security Conference

by Robert Śmigieński

At a conference in Munich, held between 5 and 7 February 2010, Russia upheld its proposal for a new treaty on European security, and got back to the idea of trilateral cooperation on key international issues among Russia, the EU and the US. Although the present proposals do not differ perceptibly from those already put forward, some European countries have shown growing interest in discussing them.

The Russian representatives at the 46th International Security Conference in Munich, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, focussed on arms control, disarmament, and promotion of a European security treaty proposal. Mr Lavrov reiterated the highlights of the draft treaty which, he said, was designed to guarantee indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic area. He called for international problems to be resolved through Russia–US–EU cooperation, leaving off NATO in an intention to marginalise the Alliance's influence of security, especially in Europe.

Minister Lavrov played up the importance of the Korfu process, initiated in the course of OSCE discussions on Russia's proposals in June 2008, and he proposed that it should also embrace issues outside the scope of the proposed treaty, such as arms control, confidence building measures, conflict regulation and reacting to present-day threats. In contrast, Russia previously saw the process as only an appendix to the mainstream treaty debate. The change seems to indicate that Russia wants to use the discussion over its proposals (whatever its outcome) as a springboard to reach some of its goals in the field of military confidence- and security-building measures. And this would mean that Russia, having criticised the OSCE in recent years for an excessive focus on human rights and democracy, is interested in a strengthening of the organisation's political and military competences.

Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov concentrated on arms control and disarmament, where he upheld Russia's opposition to the US plans to build a missile defence system—thus adding to Minister Lavrov's pre-conference criticism of a of an initiative to place the elements of the system in Romania. But at the same time Ivanov spoke about swift conclusion of the post-START treaty (to scale down offensive strategic arsenals), currently negotiated with the US. He also reiterated Russia's readiness to cooperate in preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially in the context of the Iranian nuclear programme threat. He did not present, though, any new proposal in this respect.

Lavrov and Ivanov's pronouncements at the conference did not provoke any firm reaction. However, the positions of the major addressees of the Russian proposal were seen diverging over the recent time. The US remains sceptical of the idea to set up new European security institutions, and it wants the existing ones strengthened (including the OSCE and the Russia–NATO Council). On the other hand, Germany and Spain look favourably at the Russian initiative, as could be seen from conference statements by their foreign ministers. And at the French-German Council of Ministers, held in Paris on 4 February, Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Nicolas Sarkozy spoke in favour of a serious discussion about the draft treaty, while stressing the importance of Europe's partnership with Russia.

The evolution of individual Western states' positions shows that the Russian proposals have increasingly become the subject of serious political debate, and that Russia's expectations on many important issues are being met with growing understanding. Although not necessarily translating into swift acceptance of the Russian position, this nevertheless increases Russia's chances for attainment of at least some of its security objectives.