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NATO and Russia Hold 'Frank' Discussions

Meeting yielded no agreements but was 'constructive and substantive,' officials said

НАТО і Росія провели "відверті" дискусії

Зустріч не дала ніяких домовленостей, але був "конструктивний і предметний діалог", заявили посадові особи

"Представники країн НАТО і Росії зустрілися вперше з червня 2014 року, коли НАТО призупинив співпрацю після втручання Росії в Україні, на тлі зростаючої військової напруженості між Росією і США", - пишуть автори публікації. На зустрічі представник Росії Грушко заявив, що НАТО проводить мілітаризацію Балтійського регіону. Чинovníки альянсу зі свого боку підкреслили, що це агресія Росії в Україні змушує їх зміцнювати оборону на сході. "Ми відповідаємо на істотне нарощування військової потужності з боку Росії," заявив керівник НАТО пан Столтенберг після зустрічі. На зустрічі також відбулася довга дискусія по Україні, причому представники Заходу вимагали від Росії вивести звітти військовоу техніку, а Грушко наполягав на тому, що Україна повинна провести конституційні реформи, йдеться в статті.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-and-russia-hold-frank-discussions-1461163490>



Secretary-General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg speaks at a news conference Wednesday after the meeting with the Russian ambassador. Photo: John Thys/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

BRUSSELS—Ambassadors from Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization met on Wednesday for the first time in nearly two years, amid rising military tensions between Russia and the U.S.

While there were no agreements, officials described the meeting as constructive and substantive. The meeting included back-and-forth dialogue between the two sides, and ran for some 3½ hours, far longer than scheduled, a sign, officials said, of frank dialogue.

Nevertheless, officials from both sides said they outlined a sharply differing understanding about the source of the current conflict between Russia and the Western allies.

“We had a frank and serious discussion,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said after the meeting. “NATO allies and Russia hold very different views. But we have listened to what each other had to say.”

NATO officials emerged from the meeting with a measure of hope that military-to-military communications between Moscow and the alliance could be revived in the name of minimizing the possibilities of armed confrontation.

Wednesday’s meeting followed a series of incidents in the Baltic Sea, as Russian aircraft intercepted and buzzed a U.S. Navy destroyer and a U.S. Air Force reconnaissance plane, which American and NATO officials have called dangerous and unprofessional.

During the meeting, officials said, U.S. Ambassador Doug Lute pressed the Russians about the incident and the potential for a dangerous accident to occur.

After the meeting, Alexander Grushko, the Russian ambassador to the alliance, questioned why U.S. forces were operating so closely to Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave that is home to a number of military bases. He also said the U.S. has rebuffed overtures from Moscow to modernize agreements on safe interactions between the two militaries.

“Our aircraft were acting fully in line with our agreements,” Mr. Grushko said. The basic issue was why a destroyer equipped with cruise missiles with a range of 1,550 miles that could be nuclear, came so close to Kaliningrad, he added.

The meeting was the first since June 2014, when NATO suspended cooperation after Russia’s intervention in Ukraine.

In the meeting—and speaking with reporters after—Mr. Grushko said NATO was militarizing the Baltic region.

NATO officials said it was Russia’s aggression in Ukraine that compelled the alliance to begin reinforcing the east.

“Everything NATO does in the Baltic region is proportional, it is defensive and it is fully in line with our international agreements,” NATO’s Mr. Stoltenberg said after the meeting. “We are responding to the substantial military buildup by Russia.”

Ambassadors also had a lengthy discussion of Ukraine, with allied ambassadors pushing for a withdrawal of Russian weapons and Mr. Grushko pressing for Ukraine to make constitutional changes giving more autonomy to the east.

The cease-fire brokered in early 2015 reduced the level of violence in east Ukraine, but the conflict has persisted on a low simmer, leaving hundreds dead since the pact’s signing. Most of the peace agreement has gone unfulfilled.

The pact called for both sides to withdraw heavy military equipment, and some was indeed removed from the front lines.

A U.S. defense official, however, said the Pentagon has seen about 1,000 pieces of heavy military equipment flow across the Russian border into the Donbas region in the past 12 months.

The U.S. official said Russian grad rocket systems and TOS-1 flame throwers remain inside the rebel-held territory.

The U.S. is moving ahead with a \$335 million package of security and military aid for Ukraine that U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko agreed on March 31 in Washington.

As part of the aid package, the U.S. will provide Ukraine with more short-range TPQ-49 counter-mortar radar systems and longer-range TPQ-36 counter-battery radar systems, according to a U.S. defense official. The equipment—which will begin to flow into Ukraine in the coming months—also includes tactical unmanned aerial vehicles, Humvee ambulances, body armor, night-vision goggles and other items, the U.S. official said.

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