

## **NPR Interview and Listener Call-In with Russian President Vladimir Putin**

Q: Listener Remus Mixus (ph) of Seattle, Washington, asks: Do you oppose the admission of the three Baltic Republics, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, into NATO?

*President Putin:* You know, this is a question -- or this is an issue that cannot really be summed up in a yes or a no. I will try and express my position on this matter briefly.

NATO was built to counteract the Soviet Union in its day and time. At this point there is no threat coming from the Soviet Union, because there is no Soviet Union anymore. And where there was the Soviet Union once, there is now a number of countries, among them the new and democratic Russia, if -- and I have already said that, and I don't mind repeating that -- if we were to take to the streets of New York or to the streets of Washington, D.C., or Paris, or London, or Rome, or any and all other major capitals of the countries that are NATO members, and if we were to ask the man in the street, the ordinary person, whether he thinks that the enrollment of Estonia, with its 1,300,000 people and Latvia and Lithuania if they were to join NATO, whether or not it will increase their level of security, most likely most probably almost everybody will say no -- no, their enrollment in NATO will not increase their security, because unfortunately mechanical enlargements of NATO is not going to increase the level of security in the face of new threats -- the threats of the 21st century. However, if we were to ask the man on the street whether he thinks that Russia is in a position to help neutralize the newly-emerging threats, again most likely everybody will say, Yes, Russia can do that -- and that would be the right thing to say.

So what I am trying to say is that while Russia acknowledges the role of NATO in the world of today, Russia is prepared to expand its cooperation with this organization. And if we change the quality of the relationship, if we change the format of the relationship between Russia and NATO, then I think NATO enlargement will cease to be an issue -- will no longer be a relevant issue. I guess that would be my comment.

Q: That's a very long answer to our listener's yes-or-no question, but I take it that you are saying under present circumstances you do oppose, until the relationship changes?

*President Putin:* Not only I am not opposed to it, I actually don't think it makes any sense. If we were to deal with increasing its national security, NATO enlargement does not make sense. We of course are not in a position to tell people what to do. We cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their nations in a particular way. But I don't think that enlarging or enhancing NATO mechanically makes any sense.