WILNIUS
WASHINGTON

NATO@75 – Keeping Calm and Being Ready for Challenges Ahead

Fritz Rademacher, Piotr Nieć,
Miha Škerbinc & Andrzej Lis (Eds.)

DOCTRINE AND TRAINING CENTRE OF THE POLISH ARMED FORCES
AND
GEORGE C. MARSHALL EUROPEAN CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES

NATO@75 – Keeping Calm and Being Ready for Challenges Ahead

Editors
Fritz Rademacher, Piotr Nieć, Miha Škerbinc & Andrzej Lis

Bydgoszcz / Garmisch-Partenkirchen 2024

Chapters for this collection were accepted in March 2024 and reflect the situation in the security environment at that time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

At their summit meeting in Washington D.C. in July 2024, NATO Heads of State and Government will commemorate the Alliance's 75th anniversary and chart its path forward at a critical time for Euro-Atlantic security and international peace and stability. The Alliance leaders will reaffirm NATO's essential and enduring purpose of safeguarding the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means and the enduring transatlantic bond. And they will declare their mutual commitment to defend their people, territory and liberty, founded on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The publication *NATO@75 – Keeping Calm and Being Ready for Challenges Ahead* is the result of a fruitful cooperation between the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (GCMC) and Doctrine and Training Centre of the Polish Armed Forces (DTC). The GCMC Alumni Scholar Group research project titled *NATO After Vilnius – The Way Ahead* started out as a discussion during the Seminar on Regional Security held at the GCMC in the spring of 2023, when a group of participants expressed their interest in conducting academic work on NATO issues.

With the generous support of the GCMC's Alumni Programs Office, and in close cooperation with DTC, the Alumni Scholar Group research project was established, with the aim of analyzing the outcomes of the NATO Summit held in Vilnius in July 2023, identifying the most promising pathways towards their full implementation at the speed of relevance, and addressing the mitigation of potential shortcomings, while the Alliance is faced with an extraordinarily volatile and demanding security environment as it is approaching its 75th anniversary.

The research project brought together four Alumni Scholars from Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania and Romania and three members of the GCMC's faculty from Poland, Slovenia and the United States. Their research addresses a broad range of questions of particular importance to Euro-Atlantic security and defense. It covers the further strengthening of NATO's deterrence and defense posture at the Northeastern flank; security in the Black Sea region in the context of Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine; Ukraine's path towards NATO membership; NATO and the Indo-Pacific; the state of the defense industrial base in NATO countries; the Alliance's ability and readiness for strategic adaptation and transformation; and NATO's nuclear policy and posture in an ever changing security environment.

A workshop of the Alumni Scholar Group research project was held on 27 November 2023 at the Central Military Library in Warsaw, Poland. Organized by the GCMC's Alumni Programs Office and hosted by DTC, the event took place back to back with DTC's GlobState Conference 2023. The workshop brought together the participants with the Director and Deputy Director of DTC; the Commander of the NATO Force Integration Unit Poland; and experts from NATO Headquarters, the NATO Defence College, Germany, and GCMC faculty to discuss the topics and outlines of the respective research projects.

The NATO Alumni Scholar Group presented the results of their research projects to an audience of NATO and national experts at the main conference held by the GCMC, in cooperation with and attended by DTC, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on 3 – 5 March 2024. As part of the GCMC's podcast series on NATO@75, the four Alumni Scholars were interviewed by the podcast hosts, Professor Fritz Rademacher and Rear Admiral Piotr Nieć, on 4 March 2024. The publication presenting the research finding of the project members is co-edited by Professor Fritz Rademacher, Major General Miha Škerbinc, and Rear Admiral Piotr Nieć on the part of the GCMC, and Colonel Dr. Andrzej Lis on part of DTC.

The GCMC Alumni Scholar Group research project and its publication would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of many. We would like to thank in particular Chris Burelli and Donna Janca from the Alumni Programs Office and the colleagues from the various branches of the GCMC for their continuous support, sage advice, and tireless efforts which made the project possible. Our thanks go also to DTC Deputy Director Colonel Dr. Robert Reczkowski, Chief Specialist Capt (N, Ret.) Jarosław Hewelt, Aneta Wilewska and the staff of Doctrine and Training Centre of the Polish Armed Forces who shouldered the burden of publishing the results of the project. The Alumni Scholars and contributing GCMC faculty members benefitted greatly from the expert advice and support of a group of dedicated practitioners and scholars, including Ruben-Erik Diaz-Plaja, Ambassador Martin Erdmann, Yevgeniya Gaber, Karl-Heinz Kamp, Julien Kita, Liviu Lazar, James Lee, and Dominik Jankowski.

We hope that this publication will contribute to the wider debate on the future of the Atlantic Alliance as it finds itself at yet another inflection point in its history.

Fritz Rademacher   Piotr Nieć   Miha Škerbinc   Andrzej Lis

Bydgoszcz / Garmisch-Partenkirchen, May 2024

History as a Prologue and a Strategic Pivot for NATO's Future Transformation: How Can NATO Remain Relevant and Fit for Purpose – From Vilnius to Washington and Beyond?

Miha Škerbinc[1]
Slovenian Armed Forces
George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany
e-mail: miha.skerbinc@marshallcenter.org

Abstract: Today's global security environment is perhaps the most unpredictable, complex, fragile and volatile since the end of the Cold War. As we approach the Alliance's Washington Summit, with the added symbolism of celebrating the Alliance's 75th anniversary, the question of NATO's future presents itself. This paper is an attempt to anticipate and speculate on how NATO will transform and adapt between the Vilnius and Washington Summits and beyond. Following the approach of institutional historicism, we will draw on historical experiences and examples. Based on the analysis of critical junctures, we will try to anticipate upcoming adaptations. We will also ask why NATO endures. What are the main features that have contributed to its 75 years of existence? Our conclusion will be that NATO will continue to adapt to the changing global security environment, that it will do so in its own unique way, and that as threats become more global, NATO will be an increasingly global organization.

Keywords: NATO adaptation, NATO transformation, critical junctures, the global alliance

1. Introduction

"History is the only thing that teaches us what will happen next"[2]. It is certainly a good idea to look to the past and try to learn from history as we look to the future of the Alliance and try to predict what the key issues will be at the Washington Summit and how NATO will transform, change or adapt in the post-Summit period.

It would be easy to get the very wrong impression that NATO has been in a constant state of crisis throughout its almost 75-year history if one were to follow the headlines

---

[1] Maj. Gen. Miha Škerbinc, Slovenian Senior Military Representative and Professor of the Faculty of Security Studies, George C. Marshall Center, Garmisch Partenkirchen.

[2] A quote often attributed to Winston Churchill although he may have never said it. The point remains.

of newspaper articles and the plethora of other literature on the Alliance. At least twice it has been called 'obsolete'[3]. It has been called 'brain dead' (The Economist, 2019). The declaration of its demise has been made numerous times through statements such as: 'NATO is dead', 'NATO as a military alliance is dead', 'NATO died in Afghanistan', 'NATO got sick with the fall of the Berlin Wall and then died in Afghanistan', 'NATO is as good as dead', 'NATO is dead but Europe is sick', etc. It also seems that throughout history there has been a competition between different authors as to who could come up with the better explanation for the fact that NATO is in a state of 'deep crisis', 'deepening crisis', 'fundamental crisis', 'greater crisis', 'unprecedented crisis', 'worst crisis ever', or 'disintegrating or ceasing to exist in such a crisis'. Finally, and most recently, NATO has been described by Sergei Lavrov, who, interestingly enough, was a close witness to the inglorious collapse of the Warsaw Pact, as 'a relic of the past' (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). But NATO is still here, and not only that, as it is growing into the oldest, largest, most powerful, most successful and most effective alliance of all time.

Beyond history, the next useful tool in speculating about the Alliance's future and transformation is to gain a reasonable understanding of the factors and reasons that have allowed NATO to endure for more than 70 years. Generally speaking, it is an extremely ungrateful task. Even more so in the current era, which is characterized by an environment that is more confusing, ambiguous, volatile, unprecedented, uncertain, complex and multidimensional than ever before. Nevertheless, we can try to deduce or speculate on the reasons and factors that helped the Alliance survive, endure and succeed, and then try to predict future developments.

2. NATO's history and transformation

It is well known that "the Alliance's creation was part of a broader effort to serve three purposes: deterring Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and encouraging European political integration" (NATO, 2022a). It is even easier to understand the motives for creating the Alliance if we use the words of NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, that NATO's main purpose "is to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down" (NATO, n.d.). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the origins of the Alliance, and thus of its identity, organizational culture and purpose, it is useful to also look at the three following perspectives: the characteristics of pre-NATO Europe, the situation in Europe after the Second World War, and the perspective of the Marshall Plan.

---

[3] President Charles de Gaulle, in his press conference September 15, 1966, and President Donald Trump several times during 2016 and 2017.

For several centuries after the emergence of modern states, Europe was characterized by great diplomatic chaos, a tangle of alliances and rivalries. The diplomatic culture and relations were based on justified and easy desertions and defections from alliances, a high frequency of changes of partners and allies, rivalries and intrigues, permanent suspicions and conspiracies, and on deception and fraud. The best description of relations in Europe at that time can be found in the following sentence: "Buying an ally was good: renting it was even better; and cheating it out of whatever it had been promised was considered the best outcome of all" (Thies, 2009, p. 59). It is good to remember this image of Europe to understand and grasp the meaning, role and characteristics of NATO. It can also serve as a cautionary tale when we reflect today on strategic autonomy and multilateralism of today's Europe. At the same time, and just as well, the memory of Truman's isolationism can serve as a reminder of the importance of the Transatlantic Alliance for Europe as well as for the US and Canada.

It is also important to bear in mind how fragmented and destroyed Europe was in the aftermath of the two great wars of the twentieth century. It is estimated that the death toll of the Second World War was between 15 and 20 million Europeans (Britannica, n.d.). There were more than 60 million refugees (Tomsic, 2017). Towns and cities had been in ruins. Infrastructure was left to decay. The war also led to an outbreak of disease and epidemics. The economy was in shambles. Europe also faced the imposition of Communist governments in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and Soviet pressure on Turkey and Iran, combined with efforts by Communist parties in France, Italy and Greece.

In 1945, Europe did indeed seem to be drowning. Something had to be done, and that is when Marshall made his famous speech at Harvard University on the 5th of June 1947, describing the situation as "the patient sinking while the doctors deliberate" (OECD, n.d.). This speech marked the beginning of the post-war European relief program. It was a defining moment in the modern history of Europe and an event that continues to shape events to the present day. The Marshall Plan was about much more than economic aid and the reconstruction of a war-torn Europe after the Second World War. It required the European countries involved to work together to get the help they needed. It helped to create a sense of common purpose among the countries of Western Europe, create a more integrated European economy, bring the countries of Western Europe closer together and establish balance power in Europe. The spirit of the Marshall Plan was, so to speak, in the cradle of NATO. It was a turning point in the history of Europe, from a ravaged to a prosperous, and from a bad practice of diplomacy, weak and short-lived alliances full of suspicion, to NATO, an open-ended, strong alliance of Western democracies.

Certainly, understanding NATO today can be aided by an understanding of the Alliance's origins. Comprehension of how NATO has evolved and changed over the

decades of its existence also improves the ability to predict future transformation. Seth A. Johnston has done very important academic work in this area. He has come to some very interesting conclusions using a 'critical juncture' framework. This concept: "[…] is a well-known essential building block of historical institutionalism…a dual model of institutional development characterized by relatively long periods of 'institutional stability' occasionally punctuated by brief periods of institutional flux – called critical junctures – during which more dramatic change is possible" (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). In NATO's history from 1950 to 2006, Johnston identified four 'institutional fluxes' or critical junctures (Johnston, 2017). These triggered significant institutional changes/adaptations. His work details the cause-effect relationship between the 'trigger' and the adaptation measures for each of the four NATO's adaptations from establishment to 2017, when the study was completed. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 triggered an adjustment that led to West Germany's accession to NATO. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 was a second critical juncture, after which NATO adapted through the MC14/3 Strategic Concept and the Harmel Report. The next 'trigger', the end of the Cold War in 1989-1991, led to NATO's implementation of the post-Cold War Strategic Concept and military reforms in Bosnia in 1994-1997. The last critical juncture before 2017 was triggered by the attacks of 11 September 2001, and institutional changes occurred with the expansion of ISAF in Afghanistan in 2006. Johnston argued that NATO has a considerable capacity to adapt, but that the process of adaptation following the events that triggered it is slow and remarkably persistent. Each time, NATO took 4-5 years to adapt. NATO needed this time to 'loosen structural constraints' and reach a consensus on adaptation measures. Johnston's analysis also came to the interesting conclusion that there are events that contribute to curtail contingencies and close adaptation after critical junctures. These typically occur 4 years after critical events. For example, the collapse of the EDC[4] proposal in 1954, the withdrawal of France from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966, and the apparent failure of the UN peacekeeping operation in Bosnia in 1994 were three such events that closed off adaptation in the first three cases.

Johnston's work also suggests that NATO is more adaptive than transformational. Although it is difficult to separate these two processes in theory, even if they are separated, they are both present and co-occurring. NATO has long recognized the importance of rapid, agile and innovative military 'change'. In 2003, Allied Command Transformation (ACT) was established to develop concepts, doctrine and capabilities to ensure that NATO can meet the challenges of the 21st century. ACT defines transformation as: "a continuous and proactive process, without a defined end state, by which forces adapt to the rapidly changing security environment to ensure that they

---

[4] EDC – European Defense Community was a French initiated alternative proposal to an idea and need to include West Germany in NATO to gain strategic depth as a part of lessons learned on the outbreak of the Korean War.

are fully capable of meeting upcoming challenges with the equipment and training that is needed, at a price that can be collectively afforded" (NATO ACT, 2015, p. 2). But in reality, and as history teaches us, NATO is less susceptible to some rapid and revolutionary changes. And when significant changes do occur, they are the result of events, critical junctures or external triggers, rather than evolutionary transformative activity within NATO itself. Moreover, when specific triggers do initiate NATO adaptation processes, they take time and have a very specific consensus-building dynamic. It is also necessary to consider the parallel processes taking place in the capitals of the Member States alongside what is happening in the institution, both in terms of time and content. Even if the solutions that emerge from NATO's consensus-building processes are often not the most effective or practical, they do make NATO stronger. All of this has had a significant impact and influence on NATO's specific organizational culture.

Using Johnston's approach and methodology, it is possible to identify a new, fifth 'critical juncture' that occurred after 2017, when his work was completed and published, and to predict a sixth, which may be particularly useful in discussing post-Washington NATO. The Russian aggression against Ukraine, which led to the occupation of Crimea and the rupture of the partnership, including the suspension of all practical civilian and military cooperation with the Russian Federation, has all the characteristics of a typical 'critical juncture'. This happened in 2014. Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine in February 2022 would then be an event that would curtail the contingency and close NATO's adaptation activities. NATO's new Strategic Concept from Madrid reflects such significant changes that we can call it adaptive or transformational. NATO's strategies generally reflect policy well. A new NATO Strategic Concept (NSC) clearly recognizes Russia as: "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area" (NATO, 2022b, p. 4). The 2022 NSC has done a good job of capturing the major transformation processes that have taken place in practice through the NATO Summits in Wales, Warsaw, Brussels and London. The Vilnius Summit was then more about consolidating and fleshing out the defined tasks and directions. A stronger focus on Deterrence and Defense in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine; a commitment to strengthening NATO's institutions and capabilities; strengthening NATO's conventional forces, including their ability to deploy rapidly to defend Alliance territory and strengthening conventional deterrence as such; enhancing NATO's resilience against cyber-attacks, hybrid threats and a plethora of different malicious activities; investing in new technologies and maintaining a technological edge... are just some of the typical transformational contingencies and actions agreed through the NSC. Even more than what was agreed and written in the 2022 NSC, the internal processes in the period between 2014 and 2022 reflect a strong adaptive nature.

Several facts support the thesis that one of the most important turning points was the process of drafting NATO's new Military Strategy. This is easier to understand with knowledge of the history and background of the time period. In the aftermath of the occupation of Crimea, the corridors of the Headquarters in Brussels were abuzz with both a strong need for change and adaptation to a new security environment, but also a much greater degree of restraint and caution than had previously been the norm in the Alliance. An important transformational process over this period has been the adaptation of NATO's Command Structure. Next, a clearer awareness of the threats from the two eastern directions necessitated the process of upgrading the so-called enablement of the SACEUR AOR, which also triggered intensive work on Military Mobility on the EU side. There were a number of other transformational workstreams and processes. The military side was preparing the first unfettered advice on a very complex issue of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD)[5]. The interesting thing about the latter is that even a mention of China was blasphemous at the time, and arguments about the regional nature of the Alliance prevailed. There were strong signals from the strategic commands, in particular from SHAPE, then headed by General Scaparrotti, about visibility of forces and all-in scenarios. There were also many informal discussions on the so-called One Europe Defense Plan, which was a working name for the idea that NATO needed more concrete and tangible military contingency plans for actual military threats. On the political side of NATO, there were strong concerns, even fears, that a consensus could not be reached on revising the NSC and that the end result might be even less effective than the existing one.

At that time, in the Defense Policy and Planning Division (DPP) of the International Military Staff (IMS), led by an Estonian Major General Neeme Väli and later German Major General Erich Siegman, there were some strategic and transformational thinkers (such as British Colonel Mark Sexton, for example). They pursued an idea of need for change and, while drafting a revised version of NATO Military Committee Directive (MC 400/2) on Implementation of the Alliance Military Strategy after the Washington Summit, proposed to nations for agreement the idea to initiate the drafting of a brand-new military strategic document that would follow the methodology of military strategy and replace the MC 400 series of documents on the implementation of the Alliance's Strategic Concept. Those who know NATO better will agree that this was a rather bold and unusual gesture, especially in post-Cold War NATO, where the civilian-political part of the Alliance largely dictates the pace and direction of the Alliance's activities. Writing a new strategy document that is not clearly linked in content or title to the implementation of political guidance (although it is quite clear that military strategy must reflect politically defined policies and directions in any

---

[5] A2AD is "that family of military capabilities used to prevent or constrain the deployment of opposing forces into a given theatre of operations and reduce their freedom of maneuver once in a theatre" (Simon, 2017).

case), and, moreover, doing so before the political part had agreed on the revision of the NSC, was certainly a very unusual move. And it was not the only case in this period where the bold approach of the military side somehow helped the civilian side to overcome the discomfort of political sensitivity. The IMS did not wait for an approved Political Guidance (PG) but provided the Military Committee (MC) with advice in advance to enable the Strategic Commands to start working within a regular NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) cycle. The new NATO Military Strategy was a major turning point, which along the way triggered a number of extremely important strands of NATO military work that in their own way informed the political process. While it is not the appropriate context for a detailed examination, looking at things briefly from this perspective, it was a new NATO Military Strategy that first triggered the production of two concepts[6]. Indeed, this was one of the aims and objectives of the document in the form and format of the military strategy. Both concepts then provided a solid basis for military planning, which was carried out through the so-called New Regional Plans[7]. These plans then logically had to be supported both in terms of command and control and capabilities, which were to be provided by the so-called New Force Model[8] and by informing the NDPP[9] process. This bold approach had a very similar effect on the organization to that of the so-called Wittmann paper many years earlier[10.] We can conclude: What the Wittmann paper was for the 1989-91 adaptation, the Military Strategy was for the 2014-2022 adaptation. And all this is further evidence of how the study of history can help us to understand NATO and to reflect and debate its transformation. Most of these transformational military activities influenced decisions taken at the following NATO Summits (Warsaw, Brussels, London, Madrid, Vilnius) and will almost certainly be addressed at the forthcoming Summit in Washington as part of the Alliance's further strengthening of its Deterrence and Defense posture.

In conclusion, a brief look at the history of the Alliance can help us think about its future. The Marshall Plan was an extremely important turning point that radically

---

[6] The NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) approved in 2021 and the Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) approved in 2020.

[7] New Regional Plans will outline in detail how NATO forces would defend different areas of the Alliance, from specific forces and capabilities to the levels of readiness required.

[8] The new NATO Force Model is going to deliver a larger pool of dedicated, combat-capable forces, including forces at high readiness, such as a new multinational and multi-domain Allied Reaction Force. Allies will keep up to 300,000 troops in a state of high readiness.

[9] The NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP) is a five steps process that provides required military forces and capabilities of Alliance through harmonized, balanced and effective engagement of Allies and taking into the consideration fair burden sharing.

[10] After the fall of the Berlin Wall, NAC tasked IMS to provide military advise on Warsaw Pact capabilities. A team led by Colonel Klaus Wittmann went way beyond this task and presented a study of an emerging security environment that triggered series of events leading to organizational change – Johnston's 'third juncture'.

changed the way alliances were perceived in Europe. NATO is a very different alliance from any in the centuries before the Second World War. The specific circumstances, the situation in Europe after the Second World War and the increasingly serious threats from the East also shaped the Alliance and formed NATO's character from the outset. As Wallace J. Thies said: "The Atlantic Alliance, in contrast, (to the alliances in Europe before WW2) was formed by members sharing a common heritage, common values, and common interests" (Thies, 2009, p. 288). And this, perhaps, at a time when the Alliance was faced with the need to defend the so-called 'rules-based world order', has become more important than at any time in history. Throughout its evolution, NATO has also developed a very specific way of responding to geopolitical changes and new security threats. The Alliance is an adaptive institution rather than a transformative one and each adaptation has taken its time and required specific procedures that are part of the institutional culture and the functioning of the internal system itself. System functioning and internal processes also play an important role in NATO. Sometimes, as in the case of the development of the Military Strategy, certain events trigger unprecedented consequences in adaptation. After all, as former SACEUR General (Ret.) Wesley Clark wrote: "NATO must underscore its fundamental principles, learn from the challenges of the past, and then adapt to the current environment" (Yonah & Prosen, 2015, p. 15). All this will inform the discussion below, on the evolution and role of NATO from Vilnius to Washington and beyond.

3. Why NATO endures

Especially when it comes to international alliances, which traditionally do not have a long shelf life, the question of an organization's longevity and success is a natural one. We have tried to look to history for answers. It is also good to consider NATO's core characteristics and the features and attributes of the organization that have contributed and continue to contribute to NATO's sustainability and success. In doing so, it is necessary to look at decision-making and internal processes and ask what makes NATO different and specific from other international organizations and alliances.

Just as the vast literature on NATO is replete with articles expressing concern about the organization or even predicting its demise, it is almost impossible to find an article that does not, among other things, mention or comment on reasons why NATO endures. Some of the most commonly cited reasons are listed and briefly commented on below.

The 'shared values' of its members are perhaps the first and most important characteristic, becoming even more pronounced and more important in the face of modern threats and their nature, and in times of so-called great power or strategic competition (NATO, 2022, 2023c). All NATO members are democracies and share

a commitment to liberal values, human rights and the rule of law. This shared commitment has helped to bind the Alliance together even in times of disagreement. Allies are committed to the so-called 'rules-based world order', "also known as the liberal international order, the post-World War II international order or the open international order" (Congressional Research Service, 2024, p. 1). A common purpose, a shared identity and a culture of cooperation are strong binding factors for the Alliance.

'Consensus decision-making' is directly linked to the democratic culture of the Member States. Although NATO has survived some dictatorial regimes in its history (e.g., Spain under General Francisco Franco, Portugal during the Estado Novo regime and Greece under the Greek Junta or the Colonels' Regime), this is more in the context of exceptions proving the rule. NATO has developed a very strong and specific culture of consensus. One that has an extremely high tolerance for dissent and even for a kind of disobedience on the part of Member States (how else to explain, for example, the unwillingness of a number of member states to follow common commitments on defense spending). Moreover, as Christelle Calmels (2022) describes in her in-depth analysis of French negotiating behavior within NATO, the so-called 'Gaullian perspective' and image of 'Alliance's *enfant terrible*' may even be part of the French influence strategy. This may mean that France deliberately takes a negative reactive role and opposes decisions in order to strengthen its own power within the institution and to counterbalance the influence of the US and the UK. Although such an approach by France is often very burdensome and time-consuming for the Alliance, it has practically become part of the organizational culture and has its own specific significance, which in its own way strengthens rather than weakens the Alliance.

The Alliance's commitment to fair burden sharing is another very important feature and advantage of NATO. No other Alliance has such a sophisticated and systematic system for building common military capabilities through fair burden-sharing. This is an advantage in many ways. It enables smaller members in particular to provide their own security and defense more rationally and effectively and to contribute their fair share. On one hand, Alliance members are still economically competitive, and an agreement on defense spending could help to balance the 'butter and guns' between them. On the other hand, the principle of fair burden-sharing also helps in some way to make it easier for each individual member state to justify its defense spending on the domestic front. This approach is an important reason why NATO remains by far the strongest alliance. Traditionally, and throughout history, the fact also stands that all Member States are somehow more confident in the area of nuclear deterrence because of the US nuclear umbrella. But the Member States do not share just the burden, they share information, development, lessons learned and, above all, efforts in common training. All this and more makes NATO's concept of Collective Defense a story of success.

There are many other equally important but seldom talked about characteristics of NATO. One has already been mentioned: the Alliance's adaptability. Another one is the 'shared threat perception' of the threat posed by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, which played an important role in the Alliance's endurance and transformation, particularly during the Cold War. This characteristic will be particularly pronounced at a time when it seems that the Alliance's common threat perception will only be reinforced by the rapidly growing awareness of pervasive instability, advancing authoritarianism, recurrent shocks and, in particular, the evolving dimensions of strategic competition (NATO, 2022b)[11]. The Alliance's openness to new members not only contributes to the continued growth of its strength, influence and power, but also brings new views, ideas and perspectives to it, consolidates its identity by strictly enforcing the standards and conditions that new members must meet before accession, and develops a sense of unity by deepening dialogue and consensus politics through discussions among members on the appropriateness and suitability of each new country joining the Alliance. Political will and strong public support[12] in virtually all Member States also plays an important role. It is not often that a Member State's government questions its membership in NATO, despite the fact that in democratic systems power changes hands relatively quickly and the democratic struggle for power calls for disagreement. Even the various political movements, NGOs and individuals who are averse to alliance politics remain in most cases very marginalized. The Integrated NCS and NATO force structure, standardized and regularly tested in numerous military exercises, are attributes that make NATO unlike any other alliance in the world, even the Warsaw Pact at the time. And on top of everything else, simply put, NATO is in fact the only existing transatlantic forum.

The aforementioned qualities and virtues have created a sophisticated and functional system and specific organizational culture over the decades. NATO's processes are already so tightly woven that it is sometimes known in advance what position a particular delegation will take on a given issue, or who will react in the dialogue and how depending on what someone else stated earlier. Everyone in NATO is accustomed to the notions that what is acceptable and 'digestible' at any given moment is diplomatically softly examined, and how things are coordinated and pre-agreed through the various fora and groups. But one thing overrides everything and is probably the most important thing of all. It is the awareness of the ultimate importance of compromise.

---

[11] Terms used in *NATO Strategic Concept 2022* (NATO, 2022b) to describe the contemporary security environment.

[12] The most recent NATO public opinion research took place in April-May 2023. The 2023 pre-Summit survey findings indicate that a large majority of respondents (73 per cent) consider NATO important to the future security of their country, and 70 per cent would vote for their country to remain a NATO member in a referendum (NATO, 2023a).

All of these specific characteristics, and the way in which NATO acts and influences the global security environment add to the Alliance's strength, contribute to its stability and are additional reasons why NATO endures.

4. NATO at Washington Summit and beyond

This chapter is being written just over six months before the Washington Summit, which will take place from 9 to 11 July 2024, at a time when deliberations have only just begun and only the first North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting has been held in Brussels to discuss the forthcoming Summit, and even that was very general and tentative. The real process of shaping the content of the Summit is just beginning and we can expect a very intense period, both in the corridors of the Brussels headquarters and in all the capitals of the Member States. In addition, there will certainly be a lot of debate and discussion in the various academic and public media. It would therefore be highly speculative to predict and forecast the topics of the forthcoming Summit, nor is that the purpose of this chapter.

As concluded above, NATO's history can be to some extent determinant and NATO's past can be an important factor in anticipating its future trajectory and NATO's core characteristics, its evolving institutional culture, virtues, values, norms, beliefs and, in particular, its culture of consensus-building will influence NATO's future adaptation to contemporary security challenges from Vilnius to the Washington Summit and beyond.

NATO is facing the most unpredictable, complex, fragile and volatile security environment it has faced since the end of the Cold War, if not in its 75-year history. According to the organization itself:

> The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace. Euro-Atlantic security is undermined by strategic competition and pervasive instability. The Russian Federation poses the most significant and direct threat to the Allies' security. Terrorism is an asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity. The People's Republic of China's stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. We also face global and interconnected threats and challenges like climate change, emerging and disruptive technologies, and the erosion of the arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture (NATO, 2022c).

When NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary in Washington in July, the question of how long, if at all, it will continue to play the role of a pillar of security will surely arise. This is especially true in view of the global security issues we have mentioned. As Jo Inge Bekkevold, senior China fellow at the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies,

argues, there are three general possible scenarios: a Europe-only NATO, a global NATO or a fragmented NATO (Bekkevold, 2023). The explanation for these three scenarios can be the following:

- a Europe-only NATO is a scenario in which the United States decides to withdraw from the alliance, either because they shift all of their resources to the Indo-Pacific in order to take on China or due to domestic political changes in the United States or the unpredictable moves of individuals caught in the web of the Putin regime;
- a global NATO is a scenario where both the United States and its European allies shift their energies and resources from Europe to Asia. It entails EU Member States rebalancing a significant amount of their naval assets to the Indo-Pacific region in order to support the United States in balancing China;
- finally, a fragmented NATO is a scenario where the United States remain committed to the defense of Europe but where allies are no longer pursuing a single, coherent strategy -because of different threat perceptions, the disparate interests of new members, or domestic political pressures (Bekkevold, 2023).

Reflections and discussions on NATO's global role have been taking place even before its 70th anniversary. In a sense, the end of the Cold War and contemporary security threats of the time (organized crime, piracy, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, cyber-attacks, political and humanitarian crises around the globe etc.) have automatically opened up a new perspective. In 2015, an interdisciplinary study by academic and government experts analyzing contemporary security challenges raised the question of whether NATO would be able to "transform itself from a former static defense alliance into a proactive global security provider" (Yonah & Prosen, 2015, p. 243).

Jessica Berlin, a German and American political analyst went even further arguing in favor of a 'globally open' NATO:

> To do that (defending members) effectively requires repositioning to deal with threats that NATO's founders never imagined. In addition to the Russian menace to European states like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, NATO faces wider global concerns. From digital and economic hybrid warfare tactics to climate crises and terrorism, the dangers to NATO member states are increasingly borderless and not limited to kinetic threats from nation-states. While far from fully established, the 'no limits' alliance of China and Russia declared by Xi Jinping is already underway and presents a serious risk (Berlin, 2023).

It is hard to believe that these and similar considerations will be met with a rapid response in the Alliance. It is also almost impossible, even in the current global security situation, for anyone to call for the opening of the Washington Treaty, for example, although perhaps an anniversary Summit in Washington could provide a symbolic

opportunity to do so. And talk of a global NATO or a 'globally open' NATO does not necessarily mean that countries outside the Euro-Atlantic area should formally join NATO. NATO is gradually becoming global as it confronts global threats, deepens its cooperation with partners and supporting countries around the world, extends its presence and attention to areas far beyond the borders of the SACEUR AOR, and so on. The conclusions and historical lessons outlined in the first two chapters also clearly indicate that NATO will certainly change, but it will do so gradually and in its own specific way.

In preparation for the publication, a team of authors conducted a series of interviews with senior officials at NATO Headquarters in late 2023. Based on these interviews, it is likely that at least part of the content of the Washington Summit will be shaped around four driving central topics or so-called 'baskets'. It is commonly perceived that these are the issues that will be hard to avoid:

- the first 'basket' will consist mainly of reports on the tasks carried out to strengthen the Deterrence and Defense posture. In Washington, the Alliance will be stronger than ever. Defense commitments from the Wales, Warsaw, Brussels, London, Madrid and Vilnius Summits will be met. NATO will have the highest defense spending ever in nominal terms and as a share of GDP. With the accession of Sweden and possibly Ukraine, NATO members will also be the most numerous ever. NATO's pool of forces will be the biggest since the Cold War and significantly stronger than at recent Summits. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that NATO will not have the solutions to complete the required capabilities for the Regional Plans, the 'New Force Model' will not be fully implemented, and, above all, NATO's Command and Force structure will not be fully manned. This could prove to be a sensitive point from a credibility point of view;
- the second unavoidable topic is going to be Ukraine. Regardless of how the Russo-Ukrainian war unfolds, the decision on Ukraine's accession to the Alliance will certainly be one of the most important issues at the Summit. Either the Alliance will manage to find a balanced formula that will satisfy the Ukrainian people and send a clear message of deterrence to Russia and China, or there will be lack of unity and this issue will make the Summit less successful;
- as the Summit will take place on American soil, it will probably be impossible to avoid the issue of the Pacific. The rise of China and the complete change in its behavior to aggressive in the Pacific and elsewhere (thus failing assumptions about China's non-interventionist character) is a fact. The threats, including nuclear, on the Korean peninsula are also a fact, similarly to the increasingly tense relations with Taiwan. Access to the common goods and freedom of navigation is becoming an essential issue. China and Russia are intensely

polarizing the world through the grouping of countries whose support they gain both legally and legitimately, and illegally, illegitimately and maliciously. These are all security challenges that also affect Europe;

- to address the issue of the Global South, NATO Secretary General has set up a working group (NATO, 2023b). It seems that the aim of it is not only to address the South (which we may assume covers South Asia, the whole of Africa and South America), as a fourth 'basket', in the context of the well-known 'Challenges from the South', but with a much broader perspective. This can be understood in no other way than that NATO is fully aware that we have entered an era of strategic competition between great powers and that there is an urgent need to increase NATO's attractiveness on a global scale in order to contain the influence of China and Russia.

Let us return to the thesis that the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 triggered the fifth critical juncture in NATO's history and that the new NSC 2022 has completed the adaptation. This particular adaptation has taken a little longer than all the previous ones. A somewhat slower response than the five years normally required to adapt after each critical juncture, as noted by Johnston and discussed in more detail above, is perhaps due precisely to the extreme complexity of the current situation and the resulting greater caution and care in making decisions and creating the conditions for compromise within the organization. Using the same approach, methodology and logic, it is also possible to predict the next, sixth juncture. The analysis of the so-called 'Fifth Critical Juncture' focused mainly on facts related to the changed security environment brought about by the drastic change in the policy and behavior of the Russian Federation. In fact, most of the adjustments that informed and led to the change in the NSC were largely related to it. However, a careful reading of the text of the 2022 NSC reveals that it mentions a number of things that are not only directly related to Russia, but also to China and other global security challenges. As mentioned in the NATO Defense College Research Paper: "Those (statements in the NSC) on China are pathbreaking and would have been even more assertive had the Allies moved closer to the American position" (Weber, 2022, p. 57). The 2022 NSC is pathbreaking also in the open recognition of a new era in geopolitical relations, defined as 'strategic competition'. The strategic competitors are not only - and not exclusively - Russia and China, but also: "Authoritarian actors [who] challenge our interests, values and democratic way of life. They are investing in sophisticated conventional, nuclear and missile capabilities, with little transparency or regard for international norms and commitments" (NATO, 2022b, p. 3). This is very likely to relate, alongside China and Russia, to at least the North Korean and Iranian regimes. In any case, all of this will not only enhance NATO's global awareness, but will have a major impact on the Alliance's further transformation. What will trigger the sixth critical juncture is difficult to say, but the direction of the Alliance's evolution and adaptation is already visible

today, through the clear identification of contemporary global security challenges, the decisions and policies defined in the NSC, and through the four driving topics identified above, at least two of which, if predictions are correct, are typically global in nature. Whether and to what extent the China will be recognized as a threat, even in soft diplomatic language, (action that would also signify that NATO is looking beyond the horizon of regionalism) is difficult to say. It is even harder to say whether NATO is slowly becoming a global organization. In any case, global security is being gently pushed onto NATO's agenda and the Washington Summit will not be able to avoid it. The extent to which the Summit's decisions will be transformative will be interesting to see in the future.

5. Discussion and conclusions

After 75 years, NATO is symbolically returning to Washington, where the North Atlantic Treaty, also known as the Washington Treaty, was signed by 12 founding members on 4 April 1949, and after celebrating the Alliance's 50th anniversary with the adoption of a revised and updated NSC in 1999. NATO returns to Washington bigger and stronger than it has ever been at any time in its history. But it is returning at a time of pervasive instability and the worst global security situation since at least the end of the Cold War, if not since the founding of the Alliance. This in itself raises at least three questions: Is NATO's size and power matched by unity, coherence and solidarity among its members? Will NATO be able to respond to all the challenges and problems it will face in the near future? And, in what direction will its transformation take place?

The latter has been briefly reviewed because it can serve as a prologue and strategic pivot in considering the direction of organizational change and in speculating about the Alliance's future. It is fair to say that NATO's success was virtually guaranteed when it was founded, because circumstances, and in particular the Marshall Plan, made NATO a very different alliance from those that had existed in Europe for centuries.

Using historical institutionalism and the concept of critical junctures, with which Johnston so well analyzed the rules of NATO adaptation, the 'fifth critical juncture' was defined, triggered by Russia's aggressive behavior and the consequent rupture of the partnership with that country. NATO's adaptation to these drastic changes in the geopolitical strategic security environment was completed with the adoption of the new NSC 2022. The same methodology and approach were used to look beyond the Washington Summit. The dynamics that have emerged in the global security environment require further adjustments. They were brought about by the era of Great Power Strategic Competition, and will inevitably trigger the next critical juncture. There are many reasons why NATO will have to transform itself from a regional to

an increasingly global alliance, to respond to increasingly global nature of security threats.

NATO's possible approach to adapting to contemporary security challenges has also been outlined above. Throughout its history, the Alliance has developed a very specific way of responding to geopolitical changes and new security threats. In its adaptive nature, NATO will not make any revolutionary changes, although having learned from the history of the institution and from the study of its essential characteristics, there is a high degree of certainty that NATO is here to stay, and that it will endure. Anything else would constitute a significant strategic shock, but is not something one can dismiss. There could be several reasons for such. For example, the phenomenon of today's complex and unpredictable times, which lacks a high-quality theoretical explanation, is the uncharacteristically strong influence of individual political leaders on the politics and governance of a particular country, on the one hand, and the growing evidence of the so-called instrumentalization of Western political leaders and influential public figures by Putin's regime, on the other. This is a very dangerous situation, including for NATO.

Let us end this chapter in the form of a military motivational speech, as the author has been a soldier throughout his career: NATO will endure, and not only that, NATO will prevail. As always, in its own way. The more adversaries attack the Western way of life, the post-World War II world order, our values and our freedoms, the more the Allies will stand together. NATO will be strengthened by new members, partners and supporters. Autocratic regimes, terrorists and transnational criminals, with all their malicious activities, cannot pose a threat to democratic regimes, liberal values and freedoms.

There are many obstacles ahead of us and we face difficult challenges in the near future. The wars in Ukraine and Israel are likely to be followed by conflicts on the brink of war or wars in several other places around the world, wherever our adversaries and those who seek to transform our global influence into their global dominance have an opportunity to initiate one.

We have shown our weaknesses. Both internationally and internally. But all those who are today contributing to the backsliding of democracies and creating the impression of decadence and hypocrisy, all those who are in the sprawling networks of transnational organized crime and are being recruited and instrumentalized by our opponents, will soon realize how short-sighted and against their own interests their behavior has been. The losers will feel not only the mercy but also the power of the winners.

Russia will be defeated, and China contained. The world, globally speaking, will return to developing and progressing. And NATO will be the strongest global pillar of security and development.

References

Bekkevold, J. I. (2023, September 11). *NATO's remarkable revival*. Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/11/nato-alliance-us-europe-russia-geopolitics-china-military-deterrence/

Berlin, J. (2023, August 3). *NATO's future must be global*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/article/natos-future-must-be-global/

Britannica. (n.d.). *The blast of World War II*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Europe/The-blast-of-World-War-II

Calmels, C. (2022). *France in NATO – an evolving Gaullian agenda*. NATO Defense College. https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1749

Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, D. R. (2007). The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism. *World Politics, 59*(3), 341-369. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40060162

Congressional Research Service. (2024). *Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense – Issues for Congress*. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R43838.pdf

Johnston, S. A. (2017). *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance since 1950*. Johns Hopkins University Press. https://doi.org/10.1353/book.98248.

NATO ACT. (2015). *What is Transformation? An Introduction to Allied Command Transformation*. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2015/NATO_Introduction_AlliedCommand_Transformation_Jan2015.pdf

NATO. (2022a, June 3). *A short history of NATO*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm

NATO. (2022b, June 22). *NATO Strategic Concept*. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

NATO. (2022c). *The Strategic Concept's Key Aspects*. https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/

NATO. (2023a, March 14). *NATO public opinion research*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_207244.htm

NATO. (2023b, October 6). *Secretary General appoints independent group as part of NATO reflection on southern neighbourhood*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_219076.htm

NATO. (2023c, November 7) *Vilnus Summit Communiqué*. https://www.ncia.nato.int/about-us/newsroom/vilnius-summit-communique.html

NATO. (n.d.). *Origins. NATO leaders. Lord Ismay*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm

OECD. (n.d.). *The "Marshall Plan" speech at Harvard University, 5 June 1947*. https://www.oecd.org/general/themarshallplanspeechatharvarduniversity5june1947.htm

Simon, L. (2017, January 4). *Demystifying the A2/AD buzz*. War on the Rocks. https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/demystifying-the-a2ad-buzz/

The Economist. (2019, November 7). *Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead*. https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2023, November 6). *Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to participants' questions at the federal educational marathon "Knowledge. First", Moscow*, November 6, 2023. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1913533/

Thies, W. J. (2009). *Why NATO Endures*. Cambridge University Press.

Tomsic, M. (2017). *Learning from the past: Working with WW2 refugees*. The University of Melbourne. https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/learning-from-the-past-working-with-wwii-refugees

Weber, M. (2022). The strategic concept and the US-China-Russia strategic triangle. In T. Tardy (Ed.), *NATO's New Strategic Concept* (pp. 49-57). NATO Defence College. https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/autres/2022/NDC_RP_25.pdf

Yonah, A., & Prosen, R. (Eds.). (2015). *NATO: From Regional to Global Security Provider*. Lexington Books.

Keep Calm and Plan for the Worst: Strengthening Deterrence and Defence of NATO's North-Eastern Flank

Justina Slėnytė[1]
e-mail: just.slenyte@gmail.com

Abstract: The chapter aims to analyze the implications for strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense posture of the North-Eastern flank. In the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept it was stated that Russia is the most significant and direct threat. Therefore, the article aims at presenting security environment challenges, particularly when it comes to Russia's threats to the Alliance and Allies. In this regard Belarus' role as Russia's important accomplice should not be underestimated. Additionally, Russia's focus on the Northern and Eastern Allied countries is explained. The chapter focuses on what NATO as well as Allies have been doing so far to address these specific challenges. The methodology of this research is based on a literature review and analysis of articles as well as official statements. Findings conclude that strengthening deterrence and defense of NATO's North-Eastern flank will remain one of NATO's long-term priorities in addition to further developing Allied threat assessment and long-term policy towards Russia. Practical limitation of the research stems from relying on open sources. Additionally, the decisions and policies described are either very recently adopted or are in the process of being developed and implemented. Therefore, their verified evaluation might be limited. The originality of the research stems from the in-depth analysis of the upcoming deployment of the German-led permanently stationed brigade in Lithuania.

Keywords: NATO, Russia, collective defense, deterrence and defense posture, forward presence

1. Introduction

From the time that NATO leaders gathered in Vilnius on 11-12 July 2023 the security situation keeps deteriorating in a quick manner. The spillover of violent crises has brought human suffering to the affected regions. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Israeli-Hamas war, crises in the South Caucasus, the Red Sea region, and persistent hybrid operations against NATO Allies continue to bring security dilemmas to the transatlantic community. Today the Alliance needs to be prepared for threats from multiple directions.

---

[1] Justina Slėnytė, graduate of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University, Lithuania, holds a Master's degree in international relations and diplomacy.

Russia, continuing to wage its war of attrition against Ukraine and increasing its military capabilities despite losses incurred in war, is and will continue to be "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area" (NATO, 2022b). Supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia remains one of the crucial priorities for Allies in a foreseeable future. They must continue to do this not only because this is the right thing to do or that the outcome of the war will determine the future of the Euro-Atlantic security, but also, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasized, because this support is not charity, it is an investment in our own security (NATO, 2024a).

Even though for the time being Russia seems to be bogged down and occupied with its war against Ukraine, it is high time to invest even more resolutely into Allies own security. As President of the United States of America Joseph R. Biden stressed: "If anybody in this room thinks Putin will stop at Ukraine, I assure you, he will not" (The White House, 2024). Strengthening Alliance's North-Eastern flank – where Russian threat is felt most acutely – needs to remain one of NATO's long-term top priorities.

NATO Vilnius Summit brought a number of key decisions for NATO's deterrence and defense posture with a particular focus on the North-Eastern flank. Approval of the new regional defense plans that describe how NATO would defend against both Russia and terrorists' groups is one of the key deliverables.

NATO Allies have also reaffirmed decisions of the NATO Madrid Summit to put additional robust in-place combat-ready forces on the NATO's Eastern flank, scaled up from the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required, underpinned by credible rapidly available reinforcements, prepositioned equipment, and enhanced command and control. Allies agreed to further improve the readiness, preparedness, and interoperability of NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence, in particular through regular training and rotational presence of modern air defense systems and capabilities across SACEUR's Area of Responsibility, with an initial focus on the Eastern flank (NATO, 2023b).

With all this in mind, together with Finland's rapid progress towards full integration into NATO's deterrence and defense, Sweden's membership as of 8 March 2024, and the defense investment pledge agreed in Vilnius, NATO should be on a good track in securing its most vulnerable region against Russia's threat. However, different threat perceptions, a lack of sense of urgency as well as necessary military capabilities might cause the Alliance to lose important time.

This chapter aims to analyze the aspects of strengthening NATO's North-Eastern flank that are of crucial importance in the context of the current security situation in the region. While the focus is on military capabilities, Allied cohesion in this regard cannot be underestimated. In the current security environment, it is no less crucial to look at the concepts of deterrence and defense in a broader sense, by including the significance of reinforcement abilities, civil preparedness and resilience.

2. Why Russia is the most significant and direct threat

Russia's President Putin has repeatedly claimed that Russia is already in war, existential battle with the West. And while neither the Alliance, nor Allies individually assess that this is the case, more and more often leaders and officials publicly admit that in the future there could be a realistic scenario of war with Russia. German defense minister Boris Pistorius claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin could attack NATO in less than a decade (Camut, 2024). In a similar tone, Sweden's minister for civil defense Carl-Oscar Bohlin warned citizens that "war could come to Sweden" (Nordstrom, 2024). According to NATO Chair of the Military Committee Admiral Rob Bauer, NATO countries face the most dangerous world in decades and need to "expect unexpected" (NATO, 2024b). Unsurprisingly, NATO Eastern flank countries see the time frame of only three to four years (ERR News, 2023). These evaluations have a solid basis in multiple aspects, from military to historical and political points of view.

2.1. Russia's military plans

Despite prioritizing the war in Ukraine, Russia has begun its large-scale reform of the Armed Forces, announced at the end of 2022, with the aim to increase the number of military personnel, armaments, and combat equipment units in the Western Military District by 30 to 50 percent (Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence & The State Security Department, 2024). According to Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Moscow is planning to possibly double the number of troops along its western border with the Baltic states and Finland, as it anticipates a potential military conflict with NATO in the coming decade (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 2024).

At the end of 2023, the Russian President signed into law the country's budget for 2024, according to which, spending under the budget chapter 'national defense' is expected to account for 29% of total budget expenditure and military expenditure will increase to 7.1% of GDP in 2024 (Cooper, 2023). Russia has found ways to circumvent sanctions and ramp up its industrial output, outpacing the West. Some experts argue that Russia even advances technologically, as it has begun to produce its own stealth air-to-air missiles, which it did not have at the beginning of the war (Kiisler, 2023).

Additionally, Russia makes deals with heavily sanctioned countries in attempt to further ramp up its military capabilities. North Korea is believed to have made numerous transfers to Russia since August 2023, delivering a million rounds of artillery (Posaner et al., 2023). On 9 January 2024, the US along with a number of partner nations condemned North Korea's export of ballistic missiles to Russia, as well as Russia's use of these missiles against Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Iran and Russia's arms swapping is another serious concern for the West. According to the reports, Iran has supplied Russia with large quantities of attack drones as well as artillery shells. Russia is also using Iranian drone technologies to establish large-scale domestic production of attack drones for use in Ukraine. Moreover, Russia should receive Iranian ballistic missiles, with Iran also delivering upgraded drones (Yanchik, 2024).

And while for the time being there is no evidence of China's arms transfers to Russia, this cannot be denied as a possible scenario, if or when China would find it advantageous. However, even without direct arms transfers, the EU has indicated that some Chinese entities are supplying dual-use goods to Russia and in this way are helping Russian military industry, and therefore the EU blacklisted these entities (Lau, 2024).

It is evident that Russia is committed to continue its war against Ukraine in order to subjugate Ukraine, as well as to increase its military capabilities despite its losses incurred in the war.

2.2. Belarus' role

Belarus, more particularly Lukashenko's regime, plays an even more crucial role in Russian war planning than its other foreign partners. As confirmed in the NATO Vilnius Summit Communiqué, "Belarus' support has been instrumental as it continues to provide its territory and infrastructure to allow Russian forces to attack Ukraine and sustain Russia's aggression" (NATO, 2023b).

Previously there could have been different interpretations and expectations of the Belarus' role in a potential Russia's attack on the Alliance. Few years ago, some authors challenged the assumption that Belarus would submit to Moscow in any crisis scenario and argued that Belarus could be seen as potentially useful for NATO instead:

> Though identifying Belarus as an extension of Russia may be a useful planning assumption, doing so risks overlooking potential opportunities that could benefit NATO. First, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has expressed major policy disagreements with Putin in the past, especially in regard to how Russia handles its territorial disputes. Second, despite Belarus' participation in Russian military exercises, uneven integration characterizes their two armed forces. Though parts of the Belarusian Army are questionable in their loyalty toward Minsk, Belarus has been reluctant to provide basing to Russian military assets. (…) Third, one may reasonably conclude that Lukashenko's primary goal is to retain political power in Belarus, having retained tight rule over the country since becoming President in 1994. He may be averse to participating in any offensive military operation that could further destabilize the region or expose him to a NATO counterattack (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2019, p. 31).

Nearly none of the above holds ground in today's context. The 2020 post-election events in Belarus played an important role in making Lukashenko dependent on Putin ever more firmly. In the end of 2022, Lukashenko announced deployment of a regional group of forces comprising troops from both countries in Belarus.

Russia is also using Belarus' factor for its aggressive nuclear rhetoric. In 2022 Russia delivered nuclear-capable Iskander launchers to Belarus, and Belarussian pilots of Su-25 attack aircrafts have completed training in Russia on the use non-strategic nuclear weapons. Russia also helped to modernize Belarussian military aviation to carry nuclear weapons. Reportedly, in 2023 the delivery of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons to Belarus was completed. While Russian Iskanders, based in Kaliningrad Oblast, can cover Poland, Baltic States and the central part of the Baltic Sea, the stationing of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Belarus increases Russia's nuclear capability on the European continent and now extend the threat to the western part of Ukraine and Slovakia, and partly to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Moldova (Wilk & Żochowski, 2023).

Even though this move might not force a significant recalculation of the Alliance's military strategies, it is clear evidence of another strategic dilemma posed to NATO, aimed at testing red lines. The way in which NATO would react and take into consideration this provocative move by both countries, might be interpreted by Russia as lack of Alliance's resolve and self-deterring.

Additionally, in 2021, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania experienced hybrid attacks when Lukashenko's regime facilitated the trafficking of thousands of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa across their borders, combined with a well-prepared disinformation campaign (Debunk.org, 2021). These examples also demonstrate Lukashenko regime's readiness to support Russia not only with necessary logistical or military support, but also by initiating hybrid threats with the aims to distract and overwhelm human and logistical assets of the small countries in the region.

One of the lessons learnt from Russia's war against Ukraine should be that in the event of a military conflict with NATO, Russia would have unrestricted access to the Belarusian territory, airspace, and infrastructure and Moscow would receive necessary military support from Minsk.

2.3. The north-eastern flank

Right before invading Ukraine, Russia put in writing its often and actively communicated approach towards its Western neighbors, and more particularly, NATO's Eastern flank countries. Security demands that Russia articulated to the US and NATO openly indicated Russia's intention to take NATO back to 1997. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia put it, "NATO has been persistently moving eastwards all these years while neglecting Moscow's concerns. Furthermore, each new

member added to NATO's frenzied anti-Russia charge" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021). Most recently, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova again stated that "increasing the activity and military capacity of NATO and its member states close to the borders of Russia and the Union State of Russia and Belarus is provocative and may lead to the total deterioration of the European security architecture" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024).

Societal issues, especially Russian minorities living in the Baltic States[2], have been instrumental for Russia to escalate its 'russophobia' narrative for years. However, the usual discourse in some cases becomes as extreme as, for example, in the case of M. Zakharova claiming that Baltic States are preparing 'a final solution' for Russians living in these countries: "the Baltic states have been openly preparing a mass deportation effort targeting Russians as what could be a way for them to come up with a final solution to the Russian question and resolve the issue of so many people living as non-citizens on their territories, which has become an anomaly in the 21st century" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024). These comments could be called a well-known Russian playbook, but it is still important for them to be followed and addressed. Russia has been successful in instrumentalizing this narrative, for example, when attacking Georgia in 2008. For Kremlin it is also important for retaining the support of the domestic audience and further fueling the broader narrative of Russia's existential war against the West. Over the years these political intentions and accusations have been reflected in the military domain through either major exercises, such as Zapad, smaller exercises and simulations, as well as routine provocative violations of Allied borders across air and sea (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia, 2023).

Certainly, the geography of the region plays another important role. Latvia and Lithuania are next to each other by the Baltic Sea, attached to the rest of NATO on land only through the Suwalki Gap – a small land corridor between Lithuania and Poland, flanked by Belarus and Kaliningrad Oblast. It is often emphasized that due to their small size, the Baltic States lack the strategic depth which plays in favor of Russian military calculations. Poland has a better geographic position, but its location on the western side of the Sarmatic Plain exposes it to land invasion from the direction of the Russian city of Smolensk (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2019).

The Kaliningrad Oblast should also not be overlooked, even though some of its military capabilities were shifted to Russia's war against Ukraine. Lithuanian intelligence institutions estimate that "deployment to occupied Ukrainian territories mostly affected the ground component, while air and naval forces remained practically untouched" and that "the decrease in Russian military threat in the Baltic Sea Region

---

[2] In 2023, the percentage of Russians living in the Baltic States was: 5.1% in Lithuania (Lietuvos statistikos departamentas, 2023), 23.7% in Latvia (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2023), 22.5% in Estonia (Statistics Estonia, 2023).

will only be temporary" (State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania & Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023).

In 2022, when long-term NATO's partners Sweden and Finland decided to join the Alliance, Russian President Putin stated that "as to enlargement, Russia has no problem with these states – none", though added that "the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response" (Faulconbridge, 2022). Sweden and Finland have more advanced military capabilities than the Baltic states and troops and equipment could be transported much more easily by ship via Sweden to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. However, both Russia's strategic assets in the Baltic Sea and the High North and recent developments along the border with Finland, indicate that Russia will be extremely vigilant towards the newest NATO Allies.

The Kola Peninsula, lying just east of northern Norway and Finland, is particularly relevant to Russia's threat perception and Russia's national security in general. The Kola Peninsula serves as home to Russia's Northern Fleet headquarters, which hosts Russia's most advanced Arctic land, air, and naval assets, and notably its nuclear arsenal and second-strike capabilities (Bermudez et al., 2020). Therefore, experts assess that Russia will seek to increase conventional deterrence along its Northwestern flank, including strengthening anti-access/area denial defenses around the Kola Peninsula as well as reinforcing the border with Finland near Saint Petersburg (Lokker & Hautala, 2023).

The recent developments along the Finnish-Russian border are also noteworthy as an example of potential Russian hybrid tactics and willingness to test the limits. In the last months of 2023, Finland experienced what Poland, Lithuania and Latvia have experienced several years ago – an influx of asylum seekers, reportedly instrumentalized by Russia. Finland closed its border with Russia. Its reaction was rather swift and adequate, sending a firm message to Russia.

2.4. Window of opportunity

While it is not the scope of this study to analyze in-depth potential conditions or rationale of Russia's willingness to test the Alliance's unity and its commitment to the Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, it is worth noting a number of aspects that are perhaps most acutely visible in the countries of the Eastern flank.

The unprovoked attack against Ukraine provided a reminder that the confrontation with Russia stems from a clash of world views. From that it follows, according to the Russian expert Keir Giles, that "it is a fundamental mistake to assume that Russia is interested in cooperation or reducing tension, and that the West acting on its own can improve the situation" (Giles, 2021, p. 19). Kremlin's mindset is set on war-type co-existence and this 'war with the West' approach is rather a state of being, not a specific event, which could be resolved provided the West takes actions. Russia is going to be

a long-term threat. Therefore, any Western or the Allied policy towards Russia have to be approached and dealt with this in mind.

In addition, Russia remains aware that its conventional military capabilities are inferior to those of the US and NATO Allies and, therefore, would prefer a mode of conflict that would render the superior capability irrelevant (Giles, 2021). This notion should be once more discussed and clearly understood among all the Allies. It also follows that the speed of total Russian military rebuild is a secondary question (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia, 2023), because what Russia might need and use is a window of opportunity, a 'perfect timing' possibility, combined with its own assessment that the way NATO is going to respond will be at an acceptable cost. Russia will continue to test boundaries of appropriate actions to make its calculations.

The West cannot prevent Russia from having an expansionist and assertive mindset. What it can do, however, is to deter Russia from taking specific actions (e.g. attacking a NATO country), with "the possession of significant military force, present in evident mass where it is needed, coupled with demonstrated willingness to use it" (Giles, 2021, p. 15). Strengthening the deterrence and defense of NATO's North-Eastern flank is therefore essential in NATO's defense planning.

3. NATO and the new era of collective defense

In the past years, the 75-year-old Alliance has been transforming at an unprecedented speed and by demonstrating its cohesion. From decisions made in Madrid in 2022 to the ones made in Vilnius in 2023 and a way forward to the upcoming stock-taking in Washington in 2024 – the Allies have been ramping up its support to Ukraine, as well as significantly strengthening its deterrence and defense posture. The Washington Summit will also be an anniversary one, but the current security environment dictates that it must be much more than that.

3.1. New regional plans

In Vilnius, NATO Heads of State and Government approved new regional plans, which operationalize the implementation of the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area Concept. The plans aim to ensure that NATO will defend every inch of the Allied territory from the very first minutes of a potential conflict. The plans are geographically oriented (for the northern, central, and southern flanks) in order to defend specific parts of NATO territory. According to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Cavoli, the regional plans "blend National Defence plans of our front line's nations into NATO plans, and this optimizes NATO's ability to move forces to the right place at the right time" (NATO, 2023a).

In a broader sense, these new regional plans as well as the previously approved new NATO Force Model (NFM)[3] mark the Alliance's comeback to the roots of collective forward defense. While during the Cold War defending Alliance territory as far East as possible was a strategic goal (Palmer, 2019), for the past 30 years the Alliance focused more on the crisis response operations. The fundamental difference between crisis management and collective defense, pointed out by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee Admiral Bauer, is that in case of crisis management it is not we, but our adversary who determines the timeline and thus the conflict can present itself at any time (NATO, 2023a). Therefore, deciding what is needed to make the plans fully executable as soon as possible demands clear focus and hard work.

At the opening session of the 190th Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session, Admiral Bauer outlined the work in progress on executability of the plans, namely:

- putting more troops on higher readiness;
- capability building and development;
- adaptation of NATO's command and control structures;
- creating and sustaining more enablement: logistics, host nation support, maintenance, military mobility, and replenishment and prepositioning of stocks;
- more collective defense exercises and training against these new plans (NATO, 2024b).

In their study *The Future of NATO's European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects,* a group of experts concluded that:

> The European land forces under consideration have recognized weaknesses in their respective forces, which exist in all of them to varying degrees, including operational overstretch, lack of stocks and resupply limitations, limited unit and formation level collective training, low personnel numbers, ageing equipment, unsuitable equipment, maintenance problems, and tight budgets. Many of these combine to produce lower levels of combat readiness than NATO defense plans and the New Force Model (NFM) will demand (Barry et al., 2023, p. 33).

NATO forces are comprised of the Allied forces, so the decisions and commitments to restructure, modernize and stock up forces depend on national decisions by Allies and how quickly they will be able to adapt their national defense planning and acquire the necessary capabilities. It is important to underline that differences in threat perceptions can also hinder Allied commitment to NFM and regional plans: "differing threat assessments concerning Russia may lead nations to develop different

---

[3] NATO Force Model's aim is to deliver a larger pool of dedicated combat-capable forces, harnessing regional expertise and geographic proximity to improve military responsiveness. When fully implemented, it would increase NATO's response force of high readiness units from 40,000 to over 300,000 personnel (NATO, 2023d).

land modernization plans. Frontline states will base their planning on worst-case assessments, but the same might not be true for European allies further away" (Barry et al., 2023). This might additionally hinder the process of filling the gaps and ensuring the fluent implementation of the decisions made by the Allies. The transition to NFM was planned to be completed in 2023. It is yet to be seen if Washington Summit would confirm this.

Similarly, further strengthening of NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) with an initial focus on the Eastern flank remains to be still underway. This would contribute to filling the air defense gap in the Baltic region. However, issues such as the previous underinvestment in defense create problems, delaying the implementation of a robust IAMD posture.

With regards to practical efforts in exercising the new regional plans, this year marked an essential step forward. With approximately 90 000 troops taking part, the largest military exercise in Europe since the Cold War, Steadfast Defender 2024, aimed at practical testing of the new regional plans. Over several months, complex multi-domain operations were conducted across thousands of kilometers, including along the North-Eastern flank, with the focus on enhancing civil-military cooperation and national and collective resilience (NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2024).

3.2. Forward presence

Deterring a war is far better than fighting one, and the strongest deterrence comes from credible, forward-deployed forces (Cancian & Monaghan, 2023).

NATO enhanced forward presence (eFP) was first deployed in 2017, with the creation of four multinational battalion-size battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, led by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the United States respectively. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Allies reinforced the existing battlegroups and agreed to establish four more multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia (NATO, 2023d).

Battlegroups of the eFP on NATO's Eastern flank played an important role in strengthening Alliance's deterrence and defense. They have been assisting in reducing interoperability challenges at the tactical level, identifying lessons on a daily basis from regular exercises and training, and effectively contributing to creating a mindset of readiness (Brauss & Carstens, 2020). Additionally, from 2017 onwards the capacity of the battlegroups evolved with the addition of critical combat capabilities.

The presence of the US troops in the region provides an additional and very significant deterrence effect, since for Russia it represents an adversary of a different magnitude (Giles, 2021). Therefore, for the security of the Baltic States it is very important that the US has stepped up the force presence in 2023 and has been sending rotational deployment to the region uninterruptedly (Ministry of National Defence

of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023a). Evidently, the US-led eFP battle group and first permanently stationed US forces (Permanent Garrison) in Poland play a vital role in this regard (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland, 2023).

Today, however, due to the radically changed security situation, the small size of the eFP battlegroups (playing their roles of tripwires) is no longer sufficient:

> First, if Russia finds a way to attack the Baltic States without killing or wounding NATO and US troops, then these forces will neither deter nor reassure. Unfortunately, Russia might be able to bypass the tripwire. It is investing heavily in long-range, precision weapons and remotely piloted vehicles, which are as useful for accurately avoiding targets as they are for accurately hitting them. (…) Second, Russia need not invade an entire Baltic country, let alone all three of them, to discredit NATO. Seizing a relatively small piece of territory in any one of them might suffice, particularly if that terrain has strategic, political, or symbolic value. (…) Third, tripwires are designed to deter conventional and nuclear threats. They may not work against a hybrid threat, particularly if Russia prefers to use such nonviolent tools as agitation (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2019, p. 110).

In 2021, scholars Paul Poast and Dan Reiter concluded that "militarily inconsequential forces are surprisingly ineffective at deterring aggression" and that "potential attackers will still strike if they believe they can achieve their territorial goals swiftly, winning a fait accompli before larger reinforcements can arrive" (Poast & Reiter, 2021). Judging from the perspective of Russia's assertive behavior, this option looks certainly possible. It is, however, quite common to imply that for the moment, NATO deterrence against Russia is effective because Russia has not attacked a NATO country. Yet Russia's current war against Ukraine is a significant variable in this regard with the real success of deterrence depending on the outcome of the war (and the way that Russia is going to perceive it).

In 2022, at the NATO Madrid Summit Allies have committed "to deploy additional robust in-place combat-ready forces on our Eastern flank, to be scaled up from the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required, underpinned by credible rapidly available reinforcements, prepositioned equipment, and enhanced command and control" (NATO, 2022b). This decision is set to rebalance towards credible deterrence by denial while retaining deterrence by punishment as well. The presence of a larger defensive force would also require Russia to assemble a larger offensive force, allowing Allies greater warning time and more flexibility to respond (Brauss et al., 2020).

However, the implementation of this commitment to scale up the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units 'where and when required' largely depends on the bilateral agreements of the Framework Nations and Host Nations (NATO 2022c).

While it is not an imperative for all battlegroups to be permanently scaled up to the brigade level, the ability to be scaled up to the brigade level is a firm requirement for all of them. In this regard the current process of deploying a German-led brigade in Lithuania can provide useful lessons.

3.3. German-led brigade in Lithuania

On 18 December 2023, Germany and Lithuania have signed an implementation roadmap for hosting the German-led brigade in Lithuania, with full operational capability expected to be achieved by the end of 2027. German Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius has named the upcoming German-led brigade in Lithuania as "the most visible lighthouse project of the Zeitenwende and the largest project in the history of the Bundeswehr" (Jungholt, 2023).

The German decision to permanently station combat forces is a practical example of how Allies continue to strengthen its deterrent and defense posture. In the recent past for some Allies to unilaterally keep commitments under NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA), a political agreement signed in 1997[4], remained important even when Russia failed to implement its part of the bargain (Deni, 2017). As NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg noted right after Russia's invasion in 2022, "The NATO-Russia Founding Act doesn't work, because one side, Russia, has violated over many years. But now we see an extremely blatant and flagrant violation of the Founding Act with the invasion of Ukraine" (NATO, 2022a). It is clear that Russia's actions made this agreement null and void.

On 7 June 2022, German Chancellor O. Scholz and Lithuanian President G. Nauseda signed a joint communiqué, after which bilateral deliberation and internal and public discussions took place as first steps were being adjusted. During this time, a clear understanding of commitments by both the Host Nation and the Framework Nation is of crucial importance from the very beginning. After the announcement on 26 June 2023 by German Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius that Germany is ready to permanently station a robust brigade of around 4000 troops in Lithuania, the technical and practical aspects of the process then were negotiated and agreed by both countries.

The Roadmap Action Plan signed by the ministers of defense at the end of 2023 states that:

---

[4] Experts note that the term 'substantial combat forces' have never been formally agreed by the NRFA parties, and with the reference to historical record they would presume that larger forces up to a brigade could be stationed without violating the NRFA. Additionally, there are several significant strong arguments (which were already valid in 2014 so even so in 2022) that security environment has changed from the one in 1997 by Russian actions. Russia itself, as well as did not "exercise similar restraint in its conventional force deployments in Europe" (Brauss et al., 2020; Alberque, 2016).

The overall objective is to deploy and sustain a robust and warfighting capable German-led brigade ('Brigade Lithuania') in Lithuania. The stationing of the 'Brigade Lithuania' will mainly happen during 2025-2026, as soon as the agreed prerequisites, in particular the provision of military and civilian infrastructure by Lithuania, are met. Full operational capability will be achieved by the end of 2027. The 'Brigade Lithuania' is an integral part of NATO's defense plans. It will be subordinate to the German 'Division 2025' as a heavy combat brigade. We will organize the multinational elements of the 'Brigade Lithuania' by converting the enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group (eFP BG) into a multinational combat battalion and by integrating this battalion into the 'Brigade Lithuania', thus ensuring combat readiness and warfighting effectiveness (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023b).

The Roadmap Action Plan also defines 3 implementation phases:
- **the preparation phase** (currently underway, until the official activation ceremony of the German-led brigade in Lithuania in 2025) will be used to agree on the requirements for military and civilian infrastructure, including IT connection, infrastructure for catering and welfare and recreation facilities and prepositioning requirements. Additionally, in order to complete the legal framework for the stationing of forces, Germany and Lithuania will conclude a Supplementary Agreement to the NATO SOFA;
- **the transition phase** (from 2025 to the time that 'Brigade Lithuania' achieves full operational capability not later than the end of 2027): the further process of establishment of new units, gradual relocation to Lithuania, structures of the office of the defense administration abroad and the medical support will be expanded further, as well as the pre-deployment of material and the storage. In 2026, the eFP battalion group will be transformed into a multinational combat battalion and also be subordinated to the 'Brigade Lithuania';
- **the full implementation phase** (after achieving full operational capability of the German-led Brigade in Lithuania by the end of 2027): the 'Brigade Lithuania' has been established in terms of infrastructure, personnel and material, and is fully operational and interoperable at the national and multinational level.

Lithuania's preparedness in terms of Host Nation Support, including the necessary military infrastructure, have been an issue of concern. By signing the Roadmap, Lithuania committed itself to provide "very good conditions for training and exercises, taking into account German requirements", to build "barracks and accommodations for Bundeswehr personnel in accordance with German requirements in coordination with Lithuania", and to develop "logistic sites of the 'Brigade Lithuania' in the vicinity of Siauliai and other agreed locations" (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023c).

Another issue of discussion has been the necessary conditions for the families of Bundeswehr personnel coming to Lithuania. The Roadmap touched upon a number of aspects:

- accommodation for families will be available in the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas or in their close proximity. Two main options will be taken forward: using an existing housing rent market and developing living quarters in a dedicated area;
- good travel conditions (especially flight connections) between Germany and Lithuania as well as improvement of traffic links (in particular local public passenger transport) between the cities of Vilnius and Rūdninkai as well as Kaunas and Rukla are desirable;
- for medical care, it is essential to rely on the Lithuanian health care system;
- in the mid-term, Germany intends to establish one or two Bundeswehr schools abroad and German-language childcare facilities in Lithuania.

The discussed Roadmap provided a solid homework list for both countries with specific timetables to implement it. The Joint Working Group will be responsible for identifying solutions, coordinating and implementing the Roadmap.

For the upcoming steps, according to the Minister of National Defence of Lithuania Arvydas Anušauskas, in the second half of 2024 Lithuania and Germany are also set to sign a bilateral agreement. The purpose of the agreement would be to define more particularly the legal, tax, employment, and other conditions for the life of the German citizens in Lithuania (LRT & BNS, 2023).

According to the approved State Budget of Lithuania for 2024 for the development of training locations and infrastructure, ammunition storages and other infrastructure, 230.8 million EUR will be allocated to the infrastructure as the Host Nation, including 127.8 million EUR of Solidarity contribution funds. Most of the amount will be allocated to the infrastructure of the Host Country, to the service and storage infrastructure of new military equipment and ammunition, and to improving the service conditions of soldiers. In total 2 billion 91.7 million EUR will be allocated to Lithuania's defense budget in 2024, including 134.8 million EUR Solidarity contribution funds. The defense budget for 2024 will be 2.75 percent of the GDP (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023b).

At the Lithuanian side, preparations to host the brigade will be coordinated at the highest level by a Commission formed by the Government and headed by the Prime Minister. It will include Ministers of National Defence, Finance, Transport and Communion, Education, Science and Sport, Foreign Affairs and the First Deputy Chancellor of the Government of Lithuania. The Commission will be responsible for providing civilian infrastructure and services for the German Brigade (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023).

While the first preparatory phase is underway, it is difficult to draw any feasible evaluation of the process. Time is of essence and therefore it is important that from the summer of 2023 both countries have been already focusing on concrete aspects of the deployment of 'Brigade Lithuania'. In 2024, Lithuania will hold three elections (presidential in May, European in June, and parliamentary in October), which might possibly cause some delays in procedural matters.

The internal communication to the Lithuanian society should also be carefully prepared. It has been noted that bigger consolidated forces are more likely to irritate local citizens, creating an ideal target for propaganda (Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2019). It is very likely that Russia will use any opportunity to infuse its usual anti-Western narrative by using fake news, especially when there have been already been cases in the past related to the Allied forces stationed in Lithuania. Additionally, while for the moment the overwhelming majority of the Lithuanian society does not raise questions as to why the German-led brigade is needed, if not reasonably and timely addressed, questions might arise when some social habits or benefits would be affected due to a number of German families residing in Lithuania.

3.4. Reinforcement and enablement

As reaffirmed by the Strategic Concept, NATO's improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice is another essential aspect of its deterrence and defense posture (NATO, 2022c).

Notably during the Cold War, one of NATO's top priorities was the development and maintenance of robust and credible military infrastructure and enabling elements (Dowd et al., 2023). Presumably, the real threat of war with the Soviet Union at the time significantly reinforced this aspect of the planning. However, the situation changed after the Cold War when, according to Admiral Bauer, NATO has for decades "neglected the larger-scale logistics that is connected to collective defense" because it was planning for operations out of its operational area (Kenney, 2023). And while in Western Europe credible military infrastructure was developed at some extent, in the Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe the situation is even worse as such infrastructure never existed in the first place (Brauss et al., 2021).

Admiral Bauer's assessment is echoed by Lieutenant General Alexander Sollfrank, Commander of NATO Joint Support and Enabling Command: "In peacetime, a lot has been disbanded or torn down. Now, in order to have full support, we are currently working very hard on creating this robust, resilient reinforcement and sustainment network, at the right place, at the right time. And for this, the roads, the railways, the depots, the prepositioning of stocks, all of that requires resilient infrastructure" (Moody, 2024).

Lieutenant General Sollfrank has repeatedly stressed the need to create 'military Schengen', an area of free military passage akin to the political Schengen zone, which would ease the burden of NATO having to navigate among a number of national regulations (Euractiv, 2023). Military officials also emphasize that Allies should invest in extra capacity in order to have an abundance of options for storing munitions, moving units around and setting up command posts (Moody, 2024).

The decisions to appropriately fill the gaps of enablement lie with the Allies as well as in the cooperation with the European Union (EU) when it comes to military mobility. The need for the EU and NATO to better share information relevant to military movement and mitigate together the difficulties of rapid military movement has been underscored earlier and remains relevant (Hodges et al., 2020).

In the beginning of 2024, the Netherlands, Germany and Poland signed a declaration of intent aimed at developing a military corridor for the movement of forces between Europe's North Sea ports and the NATO's Eastern flank. It will address transport choke points, such as low or weak bridges and the bureaucracy that requires permits to move munitions across borders. It will also study how military rail transports can be prioritized over routine civilian traffic (Ruitenberg, 2024). These kinds of agreements are crucial in further rebuilding Europe's reinforcement capabilities, yet practical executability as soon as possible remains key.

For the NATO's Eastern flank (and Baltic States more particularly), on-time reinforcement and resupply is of crucial importance and all routes (air, land, sea) are relevant. However, for their part, Baltic States also need to do their homework. For example, it is essential to finalize on time the Rail Baltica, greenfield rail transport infrastructure project that would integrate the Baltic States into the European rail network, as well as ensuring the full capacity of the main international highway Via Baltica. Since part of the reinforcement might have to come from the newest Allies Finland and Sweden, strengthening the North-Eastern flank cooperation in this regard is also vital.

3.5. Resilience

NATO's new Strategic Concept identified resilience as critical to NATO's core tasks: deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. It also emphasized that strategic competitors test NATO and Allied resilience (NATO, 2022c). While rooted in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty[5], resilience regained critical momentum from the 2016 Wales Summit onward with the enhanced resilience

---

[5] Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty states that: "In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack" (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949).

commitment and agreed seven Baseline Requirements for national resilience[6] (NATO, 2023c).

Russia's war in Ukraine provides valuable lessons in this regard as well. As pointed out by one NATO official during an event held under the Chatham House Rule, the role of society in a war is fundamental. Firstly, society must be ready for an attack, absorb the initial shock and not run away. The Ukrainian society has been at war from 2014, their commitment to stay and fight in 2022 remained firm.

When it comes to civil preparedness, the Nordic countries, Finland in particular, could be an excellent example. Finland employs a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to security in society and it retained and developed its approach to national security, continuing to invest both in weapons systems and in the social and public institutions necessary for whole-of-society defense after the Cold War (Lucas et al., 2023). Personal will to defend the country remains high – 82% of Finns state that they would be prepared to participate in the various tasks of national defense according to one's abilities and skills. The number varied throughout the years but has not been lower than 65% in the last twenty years (The Advisory Board for Defence Information, 2024). Furthermore, from 2021 Sweden and Finland have been developing and working on the Hanaholmen Initiative, a cross-sector bilateral crisis preparedness program, which aims to strengthen civil defense in the two countries as well as regional cooperation.

In the Baltic States' case, the critique of them speaking more actively about Article 5 and not focusing enough on Article 3 is not baseless. Baltic 'comprehensive defense' models are in general less well developed, with the focus mainly on reserves (Lucas et al., 2023). While all three countries have (or have reintroduced) conscript service in order to better prepare the civilian part of society, Russia's war against Ukraine also demonstrated a number of gaps in civil preparedness, such as lack of necessary infrastructure for shelters, evacuation or mobilization planning, etc.

Successful civil preparedness largely rests on national capabilities and understanding of what needs to be done, especially since even neighboring societies have differences. While resilience is a national responsibility, it is also a collective commitment and NATO's role in coordinating Allied efforts and further seeking a more comprehensive approach, which could play an important role. It should include additional resources, improvement of civil-military coordination, harmonizing, and integrating national resilience plans and strategies and, without a doubt, robust investment (Dowd & Cook, 2022).

---

[6] 1) Assured continuity of government and critical government services; 2) resilient energy supplies; 3) ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people; 4) resilient food and water resources; 5) ability to deal with mass casualties and disruptive health crises; 6) resilient civil communications systems; 7) resilient transport systems (NATO, 2023c).

3.6. Regional cooperation

In 2023, NATO Vilnius Summit welcomed Finland as the 31st Ally and at the Washington Summit the 32nd Ally Sweden will be welcomed as well. The tremendous benefit that these members bring to the security of the Alliance has been widely discussed. Finland with its significant military capabilities will contribute significantly to deterring Russia in the region. Sweden will likely be acting as a staging ground and will be reinforcing member states which is particularly vital for the Baltics (Vanhanen, 2023).

Nevertheless, this potential is yet to be realized and strengthened and for this regional and bilateral cooperation in nearly all aspects should be enhanced. In 2023, this was demonstrated by the synchronization of the year's biggest military exercises in the Baltic Sea region – the Polish Anakonda with the Swedish Aurora and the US Defender 23. Additionally, there is a need for more information exchange, coordination, and cooperation across the Baltic Sea region (Gotkowska, 2024). From 2014 and onwards, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) has been contributing to enhancing Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the security domain. More recently, JEF ministers have also agreed to "strengthen efforts with regard to actively sharing tactical intelligence and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) information on possible maritime threats to ensure a common situational awareness" which would contribute further to common threat analysis (UK Government, 2023). The traditional Nordic-Baltic (NB8) format is actively being exercised but it would also benefit from even greater political cohesiveness inside the region, as well as speaking with one voice more forcefully, especially on the issue of common threat perceptions.

Even more coordinated actions are needed from the Baltic States' as well. The recently announced mutual defense line is a good example of such efforts. Ministers of Defence of three countries signed a Protocol of Intent on cooperation enhancement through national-level development of efficient counter-mobility measures along the border with hostile states. Another agreement consolidated the mutual intent to develop a HIMARS High Mobility Artillery Rocket System capability (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2024).

The cooperation with the US and the transatlantic bond is not only essential for the Baltics and Poland, but it is also of crucial importance for the Northern countries. At the end of 2023, both Sweden and Finland (and Denmark) signed their respective bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the US, aimed at further strengthening security cooperation. Moscow reacted by summoning Finland's ambassador and claiming to "take necessary measures to counter the aggressive decisions of Finland and its NATO allies" (Greenall, 2023). Once fully ratified, all the Nordic and Baltic states and Poland will be parties to bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreements concluded with the US. This would provide the opportunity to significantly increase

the US presence in the Nordic-Baltic region (Tarociński, 2023). US presence in the region continues to play an important deterrent role.

While the countries of the region are in the process of further building better cohesion and understanding among themselves, a similar approach in emphasizing the interdependency of the region should guide NATO's planning.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The Alliance is facing "the most dangerous world in decades" (NATO, 2024b) and swift and speedy return to collective defense is what the current security situation calls for. As Admiral Bauer put it, "we need a warfighting transformation of NATO" (NATO, 2024b). And in order to achieve this, Alliance's cohesion and unity is a decisive factor.

However, the sense of urgency to put the planning in practice cannot be stressed enough. With Russia continuing to wage its war in Ukraine as well as threatening and testing the West, Allies need to fill the remaining defense gaps with capabilities as soon as possible.

- **NATO needs a long-term strategy towards Russia as the most significant and direct threat** because Russia's threat is going to be a long-term one. A reactive approach is not sufficient and the Allies need to agree and implement a proactive policy. NATO has a number of tools at its disposal (from using partnerships, fighting against Russian disinformation etc. to posing strategic dilemmas to Russia). Previous narratives that could refer to Alliance self-deterring should be abandoned. For all of this, however, a common threat perception is vital. An allied long-term policy would also help to ensure the necessary continuity in implementing decisions. It will also contribute to ramping up the defense industrial base, since private defense entities would be ensured at least in some degree that the need for ammunitions, arms and related technologies is a long-term one. Belarus' role should also be assessed appropriately.
- **Deterrence and defense posture needs to be strengthened with this bigger picture in sight**. As it is stated in the Strategic Concept, "NATO's deterrence and defense posture is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities" (NATO, 2022c). Though necessary decisions are expensive timewise and financially, with tangible goals at sight it becomes easier to both explain and implement them. The plans and decisions that are being taken during last Summits, as well as at the ministerial level, are right and very much needed. Nonetheless, for the executability of them Allies need to dedicate their full capabilities and resources. The goals and actions should be properly explained

and communicated to the domestic public. Political will to act decisively is closely interconnected with informed and supportive societies.

- **Consolidated forward presence in the Eastern flank is a necessity** and the German-led brigade in Lithuania can provide useful lessons for other Host and Framework Nations. It is no longer about reassuring some vulnerable Allies. It is about forward defense, the ability to contest and deny any attempts made by an adversary. Additionally, NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence with the focus on the Eastern flank will continue to require further investment.
- **Interoperability and deterrence and defense of the whole North-Eastern flank should be reinforced** from both the perspective of regional/bilateral cooperation and from NATO's planning point of view. Further building on strong transatlantic bonds in the region is crucial in this regard. Regional regular live exercises should be on the agenda often.
- **Strengthened NATO-EU cooperation** is needed in pursuing of necessary substantial results in military mobility as well as a common approach towards Russia. The EU plays a significant role in forming and implementing the sanctions policy against Russia and Belarus. Coordination with NATO on how to better ensure that the Russian military industry will not receive necessary elements or transfers is required.

The 75-years-old NATO is as strong and as large as ever before. Yet the current security situation demands the need to use the remaining potential further, deeper, and faster. The Alliance and Allies can and must do more in both – supporting Ukraine in defeating Russia and at the same time strengthening its own security. Considering the current security challenges and in order to aspire for peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO needs to keep calm and plan for the worst.

Acknowledgments

References

Alberque, W. (2016). *"Substantial combat forces" in the context of NATO-Russia relations*. NATO Defence College. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep10262.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A7dc58e551e280aff271254bae383e5dc&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

Barry, B., Boyd, H., Giegerich, B., Gjerstad, M., Hackett, J., Michel, Y., Schreer, B., & Tong, M. (2023). *The Future of NATO´s European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects*. IISS. https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/2023/06/iiss_the-future-of-natos-european-land-forces_june-2023.pdf

Bermudez Jr., J. S., Conley, H. A., & Melino, M. (2020, March 23). *The Ice Curtain: Modernization on the Kola Peninsula*. CSIS. https://www.csis.org/analysis/ice-curtain-modernization-kola-peninsula

Brauss, H., Hodges, B., & Lindley-French, J. (2021, March 3). *The CEPA Military Mobility Project*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-cepa-military-mobility-project/

Brauss, H., & Carstens, N. (2020). Germany as framework nation. In Lanoszka, A., Leuprecht, C., & Moens, A. (Eds.). *Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence, 2017-2020* (pp. 61-70). NATO Defense College. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27710

Brauss, H., Stoicescu, K., & Lawrence, T. (2020). *Capability and Resolve. Deterrence, Security and Stability in the Baltic Region*. ICDS. https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ICDS_Policy_Paper_Capability_and_Resolve_Brauss_Stoicescu_Lawrence_February_2020.pdf

Camut, N. (2024, January 19). *Putin could attack NATO in "5 to 8 years," German defense minister warns*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-germany-boris-pistorius-nato/

Cancian, M., & Monaghan, S. (2023). *"Repel, Don't Expel" Strengthening NATO's Defense and Deterrence in the Baltic States. A Report of the CSIS International Security Program*. CSIS. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-07/230706_Cancian_Repel_Expel.pdf?VersionId=bWauCAFUtQqgbBLyuTS9n_0fyVgIQRiY

Centrālā statistikas pārvalde. (2023). *Demogrāfija*. https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-10/Nr_04_Demografija_2023_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf

Cooper, J. (2023, December). *Another Budget for a Country at War: Military Expenditure in Russia's Federal Budget for 2024 and Beyond*. SIPRI. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/sipriinsights_2312_11_russian_milex_for_2024_0.pdf

Debunk.org. (2021, December 17). *"Merciful" Belarus uses migrants to accuse Lithuania and Poland of using methods close to "fascism."* https://www.debunk.org/merciful-belarus-uses-migrants-to-accuse-lithuania-and-poland-of-using-methods-close-to-fascism

Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence & The State Security Department. (2024). *National Threat Assessment 2024*. https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GR-2024-02-15-EN-1.pdf

Deni, J. R. (2017, June 29). *The NATO-Russia Founding Act: A Dead Letter*. Carnegie Europe. https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/71385

Dowd, A. M., & Cook, C. R. (2022). *Bolstering collective resilience in Europe*. CSIS. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/221209_Dowd_CollectiveResilience_Europe.pdf?VersionId=mRhbDHbVq4jDbhPZaa6FGKgM1O4XOv95

Dowd, A., Jankowski, D. P., & Cook, C. (2023). *European warfighting resilience and NATO race of logistics: ensuring that Europe has the fuel it needs to fight the next war*. CSIS. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-06/230628_Dowd_EuropeanWarfighting_NATO_0.pdf?VersionId=7T5WG0kEgpAzJ_oDb78HXYGfu7qkdxNa

Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service. (2024, January 31). *International Security and Estonia 2024*. https://www.valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2024-en.pdf

ERR News. (2023, December 3). *Polish security chief: NATO Eastern Flank states have 3 years to prepare for Russia attack*. https://news.err.ee/1609183456/polish-security-chief-nato-eastern-flank-states-have-3-years-to-prepare-for-russia-attack

Euractiv. (2023, November 23). *NATO urges members to build military Schengen*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/nato-urges-members-to-build-military-schengen/

Faulconbridge, G. (2022, May 17). *Putin sees no threat from NATO expansion, warns against military build-up*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-calls-finland-sweden-joining-nato-mistake-with-far-reaching-consequences-2022-05-16/

Giles, K. (2021). *What deters Russia. Enduring principles for responding to Moscow*. The Royal Institute of National Affairs. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/21-09-23-what-deters-russia-giles.pdf

Gotkowska, J. (2024, January 22). Moving NATO's military power center towards Central and Northern Europe. Poland's political and military goals. In Eastern Europe Studies Centre, *Navigating Geostrategic Challenges: A Comprehensive Analysis of NATO's Evolving Landscape* (pp. 14-17). https://www.eesc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/v04_6-publikacijos_EN_A4-1.pdf

Greenall, R. (2023, December 19). *Russia summons Finland ambassador over US border accord*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67760621

Hodges, B., Lawrence, T., & Wojcik, R. (2020). *Until something moves reinforcing the Baltic region in crisis and war*. International Centre for Defence and Security. https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ICDS_Report_Until_Something_Moves_Hodges_Lawrence_Wojcik_April_2020_cor.pdf

Jungholt, T. (2023, October 12). *Bundeswehr: Was die Blockadekraft des alten Systems von der Zeitenwende übrig lässt – WELT*. Die Welt. https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article247941392/Bundeswehr-Was-die-Blockadekraft-des-alten-Systems-von-der-Zeitenwende-uebrig-laesst.html

Kenney, C. M. (2023, May 11). *NATO details defense plans – and reiterates call for more member spending*. Defense One. https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2023/05/nato-details-defense-plansand-reiterates-call-more-member-spending/386220/

Kiisler, I. (2023, November 27). *Experts: Russian losses are not yet high enough to end the war*. ERR. https://news.err.ee/1609177726/experts-russian-losses-are-not-yet-high-enough-to-end-the-war

Lanoszka, A., & Hunzeker, M. A. (2019). *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*. US Army War College Press. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1380&context=monographs

Lau, S. (2024, February 26). *China warns EU, UK of "negative impact" after firms blacklisted*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/china-warns-eu-uk-negative-impact-after-unprecedented-sanctions/

Lietuvos statistikos departamentas. (2023). *Nuolatiniai gyventojai pagal tautybę metų pradžioje, procentais*. Oficialiosios statistikos portalas. https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=e31753a4-2533-4a33-9381-84bc8b942096#/

Lokker, N., & Hautala, H. (2023, March 30). *Russia won't sit idly by after Finland and Sweden join NATO*. War on the Rocks. https://warontherocks.com/2023/03/russia-wont-sit-idly-by-after-finland-and-sweden-join-nato/

LRT, & BNS. (2023, November 15). *KAM: kitąmet Lietuva ir Vokietija pasirašys sutartį dėl brigados dislokavimo*. LRT. https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2125201/kam-kitamet-lietuva-ir-vokietija-pasirasys-sutarti-del-brigados-dislokavimo

Lucas, E., Sendak, C., Collén, C., Kallberg, J., & Viksnins, K. (2023, September 28). *Sea change: Nordic-Baltic security in a new era*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/sea-change-nordic-baltic-security-in-a-new-era/#footnote_127_23567

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia. (2023, January). *Russia's war in Ukraine: Myths and lessons*. https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/myths_and_lessons_0.pdf

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2021, December 10). *Foreign Ministry statement on dialogue with the United States and other Western countries regarding security guarantees – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1789855/

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2024, January 17). *Excerpts from the briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, January 17, 2024 – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1925990/#9

Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. (2023a, September 20). *Next U.S. rotation begins service in Lithuania*. https://kam.lt/en/next-u-s-rotation-begins-service-in-lithuania/

Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. (2023b, December 5). *Lietuvos gynybos biudžetas – kariuomenės kovinės galios stiprinimui ir modernizacijai*. https://kam.lt/lietuvos-gynybos-biudzetas-kariuomenes-kovines-galios-stiprinimui-ir-modernizacijai/

Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. (2023c, December 18). *Signature of the implementation Roadmap of the German Brigade deployment sends a signal to those who threaten the security of Europe*. https://kam.lt/en/signature-of-the-implementation-roadmap-of-the-german-brigade-deployment-sends-a-signal-to-those-who-threaten-the-security-of-europe-2/

Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. (2024, January 19). *The Baltic states develop a mutual defense line: agreements signed on countermobility and HIMARS capabilities*. https://kam.lt/en/the-baltic-states-develop-a-mutual-defence-line-agreements-signed-on-countermobility-and-himars-capabilities/

Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland. (2023, March 21). *Permanent Garrison of the US Forces in Poland*. https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/permanent-garrison-of-the-us-forces-in-poland

Moody, O. (2024, January 29). *NATO should "prepare for Russian missile strikes in Europe"*. The Times. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nato-russia-missile-strikes-europe-germany-vbwt2dktt

NATO. (2022a, February 25). *Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the extraordinary virtual summit of NATO Heads of State and Government*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_192455.htm

NATO. (2022b, 29 June). *Madrid Summit Declaration issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

NATO. (2022c). *Strategic Concept Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid*. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

NATO. (2023a, May 10). *Joint press conference by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer with Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Christopher Cavoli and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Philippe Lavigne*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_214382.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO. (2023b, July 19). *Vilnius Summit Communiqué issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Vilnius 11 July 2023* [Press release]. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

NATO. (2023c, August 3). *Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm#resilience

NATO. (2023d, October 23). *Deterrence and defense*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm#bolster

NATO. (2024a, January 16). *Securing an Insecure World panel discussion - Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland*. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_221713.htm

NATO. (2024b, January 17). *Opening remarks by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer and NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană at the meeting of the Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_221752.htm

NATO Allied Command Transformation. (2024, January 26). *NATO's Steadfast Defender 2024: Unprecedented Military Exercise Signals Alliance Unity and Preparedness*. https://www.act.nato.int/article/steadfast-defender-2024-signals-alliance-unity-and-preparedness/

Nordstrom, L. (2024, January 18). *Sweden's call for population to prepare for war sparks panic and criticism*. France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240118-sweden-s-call-for-population-to-prepare-for-war-sparks-panic-and-criticism

Palmer, D. A. R. (2019, June 1). *A Strategic Odyssey: Constancy of Purpose and Strategy-Making in NATO, 1949-2019*. NATO Defence College. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19967

Poast, P., & Reiter, D. (2021, June 17). *Death Without Deterrence, or Why Tripwire Forces Are Not Enough*. War on the Rocks. https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/death-without-deterrence-or-why-tripwire-forces-are-not-enough/

Posaner, J., Melkozerova, V., Kayali, L., Barigazzi, J., & Larson, C. (2023, November 2). *North Korea sends Putin tons of ammo. Europe can't do the same for Ukraine*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-kim-jong-un-russia-pyongyang-beats-brussels-to-a-million-ammunition-rounds/

Ruitenberg, R. (2024, January 31). *Europeans set up corridor for rushing NATO troops eastward*. Defense News. https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2024/01/31/europeans-set-up-corridor-for-rushing-nato-troops-eastward/

State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, & Defence Intelligence and Security Service under the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. (2023, February 15). *The National Threat Assessment*. Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. https://kam.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Assessment-of-Threats-to-National-Security-2022-published-2023.pdf

Statistics Estonia. (2023). RV0222U: *Population by sex, ethnic nationality and county*. Andmed.stat. ee. https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/rahvastik__rahvastikunaitajad-ja-koosseis__rahvaarv-ja-rahvastiku-koosseis/RV0222U/table/tableViewLayout2

Tarociński, J. (2023, December 27). *Finland, Sweden and Denmark: Defence Cooperation Agreements with the USA*. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-12-27/finland-sweden-and-denmark-defence-cooperation-agreements-usa

The Advisory Board for Defence Information. (2024). *Finns' opinions on foreign and security policy, national defense and security*. Ministry of Defence of Finland. https://www.defmin.fi/files/5893/ABDI_Finns_opinions_on_foreign_and_security_policy_national_defence_and_security_january_2024.pdf

The North Atlantic Treaty. (1949). https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf

The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. (2023, December 13). *952 Dėl Komisijos pasirengimui Vokietijos ginkluotųjų pajėgų brigados nuolatiniam buvimui Lietuvos Respublikoje koordinuoti sudarymo*. https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/1fec8ca099c411eea70ce7cabd08f150?positionInSearchResults=3&searchModelUUID=03fa290c-6506-4cb9-9b55-fb607bf7d74f

The White House. (2024, March 8). *Remarks of President Joe Biden -- State of the Union Address as prepared for delivery*. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/03/07/remarks-of-president-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address-as-prepared-for-delivery-2/

U.S. Department of State. (2024, January 9). *Joint Statement on DPRK-Russia ballistic missile transfers* [Press release]. https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-dprk-russia-ballistic-missile-transfers/

UK Government. (2023, June 13). *Joint statement by Joint Expeditionary Force ministers, June 2023*. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-joint-expeditionary-force-ministers-june-2023

Vanhanen, H. (2023, December 19). *NATO and northern Europe: No longer the forgotten flank*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/19/nato-and-northern-europe-no-longer-forgotten-flank-pub-91297

Wilk, A., & Żochowski, P. (2023, June 6). *Russian nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus: The consequences*. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-06-06/russian-nuclear-weapons-deployed-belarus-consequences

Yanchik, O. (2024, January 11). *Arsenal of autocracy: North Korea and Iran are arming Russia in Ukraine*. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/arsenal-of-autocracy-north-korea-and-iran-are-arming-russia-in-ukraine/

Black Sea Security in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian War: Navigating the Path to the Washington Summit. A Romanian Perspective

Mihaela Mîndrescu[1]
National Cyber Security Directorate, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: mihaela.mindrescu@gmail.com

Abstract: The Russo-Ukrainian war has heightened insecurity in Europe, particularly in the Black Sea region, prompting NATO to urgently reassess its strategic approach. The ongoing conflict underscores the critical need for NATO to bolster its presence and address security concerns in the region. While NATO's Strategic Concept acknowledges the strategic importance of the Black Sea, concrete measures are imperative, not mere rhetoric. As NATO prepares for the Washington Summit, it must prioritize drafting a comprehensive defence strategy for the Black Sea region to safeguard stability and Euro-Atlantic security. This strategy should entail bolstered military presence, seamless coordination between member states and regional partners, enhanced intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and proactive measures to counter Russian aggression. By strengthening its commitment to the Black Sea region, NATO can effectively respond to evolving security challenges and uphold its collective defence responsibilities.

Keywords: Black Sea region, NATO's Strategic Approach, collective defence, Euro-Atlantic security

1. Introduction

Looking at history, be it recent or long ago, an aspect that stands out is that the world has never been a peaceful place. After two destructive wars erupted in Europe, quickly engulfing the entire world, the establishment of the United Nations and additional peace-focused associations and organizations nurtured a hope that peace was not merely a dream, and Europe was now shielded from the possibility of a new major 'conventional war' on its soil. However, the rumble of Russian military vehicles shook the foundations of peace, ultimately destroying it in February 2022. Russia, one of the

---

[1] Mihaela Mîndrescu, Senior Cyber Security Policy Officer at National Cyber Security Directorate, Bucharest, Romania. Former Head of NATO Policy Office within the Romanian Ministry of National Defence and Defence Adviser within the Permanent Delegation of Romania to NATO.

Big Five responsible for international peace, once again shattered the Kantian dream and destabilized peace. Russia's resort to arms not only demonstrated that such actions were viable but also encouraged some nations to contemplate similar paths. As one's gaze extends beyond the borders of Europe to the broader world, the prevalence of international violence becomes apparent. Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, Somalia, Yemen, and other regions serve as hotspots where the reverberations of heavy guns echo. Moreover, several areas teeter on the brink of breaching the line of peace.

While the Black Sea has always held extraordinary interest for Russia, it also represents a region of paramount importance for NATO and the EU. Examining the map that demarcates Western democracies from Russian dictatorship underscores that the Black Sea and its adjacent regions are where Russia exhibits the most restlessness, engaging in both war and intimidation. While other areas have faced Russian aggressive discourse, the Black Sea has experienced not only political turbulence but also brutal military aggression.

The strategic shock delivered to Western countries, the rule-based international order, and peace-loving individuals in February 2022 marked a turning point. Political-military considerations started to regain prominence, often superseding other priorities. As this chapter will demonstrate, the Black Sea is not merely an arena where Russia asserts its interests but a region demanding the strategic counteraction of Russian aggressive behaviours. Countering the violent approach of a nation like Russia is a substantial undertaking, requiring a vast and complex strategy that spans multiple domains. This endeavour demands willpower, determination, resources, and a thoughtfully conceived strategy translating into actions that yield desired effects. This chapter focuses on the defence and security dimensions of that strategy. While other domains warrant attention, the defence and security aspects are arguably the most pressing and urgent, having been neglected for too long. The self-erasure of the Soviet Union from the world political map was erroneously considered a herald of a new 'history' characterized by peaceful coexistence. We were wrong then, and now we must rectify the political fallacies we embraced.

Amid these challenges, there is a glimmer of hope: NATO, a coalition of democratic, peace-loving nations united by shared values, stands resilient and determined to face turbulent times. This chapter briefly assesses whether NATO, founded in Washington 75 years ago, is adequately positioned to address the challenges in or emanating from the Black Sea region. It does not aim for comprehensiveness due to the subject's complexity and editorial constraints. The main finding is that the Alliance is on the right path but bridging the identified gaps will demand additional efforts and collective actions, with challenges requiring sustained and long-term engagement. Determination, solidarity, realism, and practicality must be guiding principles. The fundamental lesson we must grasp is encapsulated in what Edmund Burke allegedly said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing".

The primary research objective is to assess the disparity between what is needed to counter the Russian aggression in the Black Sea region and what has been achieved so far, offering insights into what may be achieved in Washington this year. Research questions framing the analysis are constructed around the following aspects:

- What are the primary challenges facing NATO in the Black Sea region?
- How do Black Sea nations perceive the current security situation, and what responses have they adopted?
- How has NATO's response evolved over time to address security concerns in the Black Sea region?
- How can NATO effectively address the strategic defence disparity between the northern and south-eastern parts of the Eastern Flank?
- How can NATO develop a more balanced and effective defence strategy specifically tailored for the Black Sea region?
- How can NATO adapt its strategies to ensure a more equitable and comprehensive approach to security across the entire Eastern flank?

The chapter relies on the analysis of relevant policy papers and official documents from various countries and organizations. Additionally, insights from informed writers with expertise on the Black Sea issue are incorporated. Acknowledging the words of Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations*, the chapter recognizes that everything heard is an opinion, not a fact, and everything seen is a perspective, not the truth.

2. Black Sea – a geopolitical perspective: The main features of the current security environment

Geopolitics has not just staged a comeback; it has demonstrated enduring influence, challenging the notion that history has reached a standstill. This resurgence underscores the enduring impact of geopolitical dynamics, dispelling any perception of a static historical landscape or prolonged stability. In navigating this complex terrain, the Black Sea region stands out with its profound geostrategic importance, shaped by both unchanging geographical features and intentional strategic decisions made by local communities and regional actors.

2.1. Historical significance

The Black Sea, functioning as Eastern Europe's gateway to the Mediterranean and pivotal global sea routes, serves as a critical link connecting Europe not only to the Middle East but also to the broader Caspian region. Throughout history, this region has consistently demonstrated its geopolitical and economic significance, intricately woven into the global economy. It is a central hub for transit infrastructure, playing

a crucial role in the energy market, acting as a vital pathway for ensuring food security, serving as a reservoir of natural resources, and functioning as a geopolitical arena where *realpolitik* has played a central role.

Historically, the Black Sea has been an integral part of major trade routes, including the Silk Road before the birth of Christ. It facilitated connections between the Roman Empire to Asia and acted as a bridge for empires such as the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The sea has served as a dynamic avenue for trade, migration, and conflict, forming a significant stage where diverse cultures, empires, and conflicts have shaped the region over the centuries.

The Ottomans, recognizing the Black Sea as a coveted prize, meticulously guarded its waters. Following their conquest of Constantinople, they systematically curtailed access for outside ships. This strategic move unified all the sea's coasts for the first time, creating a singular commercial and political network. Trade, notably in slaves, brought wealth to the empire, and the Black Sea essentially transformed into an Ottoman Mare Nostrum.

A pivotal moment occurred in the late 18th century when six years of conflict between Russia and the overextended Ottoman Empire culminated in the signing of the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. This treaty granted Russia a direct access to the Black Sea region through the Kerch and Azov ports. Simultaneously, the Crimean city of Sevastopol was founded. From 1783 onwards, Russia emerged as a burgeoning Black Sea power, while the Ottoman Empire embarked on a gradual, declining trajectory.

2.2. Contemporary challenges in the complex security landscape

The concerning security developments in the Black Sea region originated in 2008 with Russia's military incursion into Georgia, marking a manifestation of its restored imperial ambition. The subsequent *de facto* occupation of 20% of Georgia's territory signalled a shift in the geopolitical landscape, reigniting international attention on this region. Empowered by a weak response from the international community, Russia continued its assertive actions, leading to the unlawful annexation of Crimea in 2014, the 2018 Kerch Strait crisis, and eventually escalating into a full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022, an ongoing conflict to this day. Nowadays, the Black Sea remains a key front line for transatlantic and Euro-Atlantic security, standing as the site of the largest conflict in Europe since World War II, underscoring its ongoing and critical role in shaping the geopolitical landscape.

A thorough examination of the current security architecture in the Black Sea region unveils a complex array of challenges. Enduring frozen conflicts and nuanced hybrid warfare strategies, involving propaganda, disinformation, and subversion, contribute to the multifaceted challenges. Disruptions to foundational principles like free navigation, targeted assaults on civilian infrastructure, energy weaponization, and substantial disruptions in the food and supply chain characterize the region. Extensive militarization,

the looming threat of drifting mines, recurrent cyberattacks targeting energy infrastructure, and a disregard for the international rules-based order further complicate the situation. The interconnected nature of these issues, combined with historical rivalries, human rights abuses, and unilaterally imposed maritime blockades, poses a significant risk of escalating into a vortex with far-reaching global repercussions if not meticulously addressed. This amalgamation of challenges necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between geopolitical, military, and economic factors. Such understanding provides essential insights into the evolving security dynamics of the region, serving as the bedrock for informed discussions on potential solutions.

In navigating this tumultuous landscape, a scholarly examination becomes not just an intellectual pursuit, but a pathway to uncover mitigation measures. It amplifies the call for international cooperation, emphasizing that our collective efforts are indispensable in effectively addressing these multifaceted challenges.

3. The multifaceted implications of the war in Ukraine for the Black Sea security

The evolving conflict in Ukraine, initiated by Russia's actions dating back to the 2008 invasion of Georgia, has become a focal point reshaping the security landscape of the Black Sea region. This subchapter explores the multifaceted implications of the ongoing war on the security of Black Sea littoral countries, dissecting political, military, economic, environmental, and cyber dimensions, and underscores the imperative need for collaborative efforts in navigating the intricate web of geopolitical complexities.

3.1. Security landscape transformation

Russia's series of assertive and aggressive actions, from the unlawful annexation of Crimea in 2014 to the all-out war against Ukraine in 2022, has plunged the region into a period of profound and dramatic change, intensifying insecurity among Black Sea littoral countries. This historical backdrop necessitates a comprehensive examination of the myriad threats stemming from the conflict, encompassing political tensions, military manoeuvres, economic ramifications, environmental impacts, and cyber warfare. Failure to confront these threats may lead to further escalation, exacerbating an already volatile security climate and carrying profound implications for the entire region.

3.2. Political tensions and increased security measures

Moscow's targeted attacks on Ukrainian Danube ports Reni and Ismail in September 2023, just a few kilometres from the Romanian border, have raised security concerns

for Romania and Moldova. The subsequent discovery of drone fragments on Romanian soil, reminiscent of those used in the ongoing conflict, further elevates security risks for the alliance. The potential scenario of Russia extending its control to the Danube's mouth and the Romanian border is viewed as a critical threat, effectively positioning Russia as a de facto neighbour of NATO. In response, Romania has taken proactive measures, deploying additional US F-16 fighter jets, expanding the no-fly zone, and reinforcing its military presence near the river. These strategic responses underscore the growing unease within NATO regarding the potential spillover of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict into its territory.

3.3. Military dynamics and airspace challenges

Military dynamics are shifting, with notable changes in airspace activities. In 2023, NATO reported a substantial decrease in fighter plane scrambles, with interceptions of Russian military aircraft dropping from over 570 in 2022 to just over 300. Despite the decrease, the region remains a hotspot for provocative actions by Russian military aircrafts, as illustrated by incidents such as the May 7th, 2023 interception of a Polish aircraft by a Russian Su-35 fighter jet in the Black Sea. The March 14, 2023, incident involving two Russian Su-27 aircraft engaging in an unsafe intercept with a US Air Force MQ-9 aircraft underscores the potential for miscalculation and unintended escalation in the volatile airspace of the Black Sea region (Vandiver, 2023).

3.4. Navigating Montreux: Türkiye's naval tactics and NATO's challenges

The application of the 1936 Montreux Convention (Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, 2024) in the Black Sea conflict reveals contrasting perspectives between Türkiye, as the custodian of the convention, and other NATO countries, which must adhere to its conditions. Türkiye's invocation of the convention in the ongoing conflict acts as a deterrent, preventing the expansion of the Russian fleet. The convention's provisions, particularly Articles 19, 20, and 21, grant Türkiye substantial discretion during wartime, allowing it to control the passage through the Turkish Straits based on its subjective assessment of the perceived threat (Atlamazoglou, 2023). While this flexibility affords Türkiye the ability to regulate maritime operations, it creates obstacles for NATO nations, restricting their freedom of movement and response to Russian threats in the Black Sea region. Moreover, it hinders the continuous presence of Standing Naval Forces in the Black Sea and impacting NATO strategic manoeuvres in response to the conflict. The opaque nature of Türkiye's stance necessitates urgent clarification and communication with NATO allies to align strategies and navigate the complexities of the evolving conflict (Aliano & Spivak, 2022).

3.5. Freedom of navigation concerns

The issue of Russia restricting freedom of navigation and violating the Law of the Sea gained attention after an incident on August 13, 2023. Russia's Black Sea Fleet conducted a board-and-search operation on a Turkish freighter within Bulgaria's exclusive economic zone, involving warning shots, a helicopter deployment, and Russian sailors forcefully boarding the vessel. This incident drew condemnation from Ukraine and the US, raising concerns about a potential 'war at sea' escalation and highlighting worries over Russia's use of military threats, impacting trade with Ukraine. The event underscores the urgent need for closer integration with NATO to address regional security (Tramazzo & Santicola, 2023).

3.6. Snake Island's geostrategic importance

Situated just 30 miles from the Romanian border, Snake Island, despite its modest size, has become a focal point in the conflict. Occupied on the first day of Ukraine's invasion in February 2022, it experienced intense military conflict and a widely publicized incident where Ukrainian forces defiantly responded to a Russian cruiser's demand for surrender. Despite Russian forces withdrawing on June 30, Snake Island remains contested. Securing Snake Island provides Russia with a strategic advantage, enabling the establishment of a comprehensive defence system covering the Black Sea's north-western part and southern Ukraine. Potential future seizures of the island would become bargaining chips with significant consequences for Ukraine and NATO. Russian control could lead to a blockade of the Ukrainian port city of Odesa, disrupting regional shipping and threatening Romanian ports. Moreover, Russian control might reintroduce legal uncertainties around the delimitation of the continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) between Romania and Ukraine, settled in 2009. This renewed uncertainty could impact both countries' interests in minerals, oil, and gas exploration and extraction (Colibăşanu et al., 2022). Despite Ukrainian troops repelling Russian incursions on Snake Island and encountering military setbacks, it remains imperative to prevent Moscow from regrouping and pursuing further aggressive actions in the Black Sea region (Aronsson & Mankof, 2023).

3.7. Economic implications

The termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) by Russia in mid-July 2023 had significant implications for the global food landscape, impacting the export of Ukrainian grain through its Black Sea ports. However, since the initiative's expiration, the decline in grain exports has been less severe than initially anticipated.

On April 06, 2024, Oleksandr Kubrakov, Deputy Prime Minister for the Restoration of Ukraine and Minister for Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure Development, highlighted the positive impact of reopening the Black Sea corridors. Since August 2023, an impressive volume of cargo exceeding 36 million tonnes has been transported through the Ukrainian sea corridor, facilitated by over 1286 vessels. These vessels carried around 25 million tonnes of agricultural goods to various destinations across Asia, Africa, and Europe. At the time of writing, the ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Pivdennyi are anticipating the arrival of 135 vessels, collectively carrying an additional 4 million tonnes of cargo.

These record-breaking export figures, not only demonstrate the success of the Ukrainian corridor, but also indicate a gradual return to pre-war export levels through these ports. With over 90% of all agricultural exports now flowing through the ports of Greater Odesa and the Danube ports, Ukraine's critical role as a key guarantor of food security is underscored, particularly for grain exports to Africa and Asia (State sites of Ukraine, 2024).

3.8. Drifting mines

Drifting mines, deployed by both conflicting parties, pose a significant threat to navigation, complicating maritime security efforts and requiring specialized military capabilities for counteraction. This amplifies the risks associated with handling and neutralization. The sinking of an Estonian cargo ship highlights the direct risks to ships and critical infrastructure, impacting NATO countries and international community. Despite international restrictions in the Hague Convention of 1907, enforcing regulations remains challenging. This sensitive situation hinders fishing in the Black Sea, particularly in the Northern Black Sea, raising concerns about global food security (Savitz, 2022; Martin, 2024; Kucukgocmen & Hayatsever, 2024).

3.9. Global impact on prices and gas exploration

The conflict fuels a perilous upward spiral of prices, impacting both energy and food prices globally. Increased prices of essential agricultural products pose a threat to food security. Furthermore, Russia's actions in exclusive economic zones pose a serious threat to gas exploration, intensifying security challenges in the region.

3.10. Environmental consequences of the conflict

The conflict has led to widespread soil and water contamination from chemicals, petroleum, and heavy metals due to intense warfare, highlighting its significant

environmental toll. Extensive deforestation, destruction of fertile agricultural lands, and the deliberate targeting of the Kakhovka Dam amplify the environmental toll estimated at over $51 billion. These damages foreshadow significant, long-term health risks for local populations and ecosystems. The sea, entangled in intense fighting, faces irreversible harm, threatening the rich biodiversity of maritime life, including cetaceans like dolphins and porpoises (European Parliament, 2023).

3.11. Cyber warfare integration

Amidst the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the digital realm has transformed into a critical battleground, amplifying the impact of the confrontation. Both sides have adopted aggressive cyber operations alongside traditional military strategies, marking cyber warfare as a pivotal tactic in the conflict. This integration of cyber warfare, characterized by destructive attacks on critical infrastructure and heightened spear-phishing activities, carries significant implications not only locally but also on a global scale.

Russia's extensive cyber operations against Ukraine, predating the February 2022 invasion, underscore the evolution of modern warfare. Despite Russia's history of cyber warfare, many of these operations have fallen short of their objectives. However, the invasion ushered in a wave of destructive cyberattacks aimed at disrupting essential services and infrastructure within Ukraine. These attacks, targeting telecommunications, internet access, financial systems, and critical utilities, underscore the potential for cyber warfare to inflict substantial harm on civilian populations.

The ramifications of the conflict transcend Ukraine's borders, evident in the persistent expansion in malicious cyber activity detected in neighbouring countries. For instance, following the conflict's onset, Romania's civilian cybersecurity agency reported a significant increase in cyberattacks targeting government institutions, critical infrastructure, and private entities. While many of these attacks were successfully repelled, they underscore the interconnected nature of cyber threats in the region. Motivations behind these attacks often arise from geopolitical tensions and expressions of solidarity with Ukraine by neighbouring states. Notably, the condemnation of the war in Ukraine by Romanian officials coincided with a cyberattack on a major oil and gas company in Romania, resulting in temporary operational disruptions.

The evolving role of cyber warfare underscores the importance of robust cyber policies and necessitates considerations regarding the involvement of technology giants in modern conflicts. As both Russia and Ukraine confront escalating cyber threats, international cooperation is imperative to effectively address the challenges posed by cyber warfare (Colling, 2024).

4. Shifting sands: The dynamic political landscape of the Black Sea and collaborative security initiatives among the littoral states

Nestled on Europe's periphery, the Black Sea emerges as a pivotal theatre where security intricacies reverberate across the continent, forging a new frontier of strategic significance. The complex interplay of historical rivalries, enduring 'frozen conflicts', and evolving security threats shape the Black Sea's dynamic landscape, influenced by riparian states, external actors, and its role as a nexus of civilizations post-Soviet dissolution.

Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the reliability of security guarantees takes centre stage, with Russia casting a formidable shadow. Allies such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye, grounded in Article V security commitments, prove indispensable. Meanwhile, NATO membership aspirants like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, with geopolitical ties to the Black Sea region, contribute significantly. However, Russia's disruptive actions challenge the established order, transforming the Black Sea from a potential realm of cooperation into a potential battleground.

The Black Sea's paramount challenge lies in navigating the myriad actors with conflicting interests, both regional and non-regional. This intricate landscape sees diverse security approaches among Black Sea countries, each grappling with the threat posed by Russia's strategy and posture in its unique way. The region, once a prospect for cooperation, now demands a collective response to Russia's military threat and hybrid influence, emerging as an existential priority for European security.

4.1. Bulgaria: Dynamic struggle

4.1.1. Shaping modern alliances in the face of historical influences

The influence of Russia on Bulgaria's commitment to Western integration is profound, rooted in historical, cultural, and religious ties (Hedlung, 2023). This influence permeates various aspects of Bulgarian society, from economic dependencies to political instability. Despite being a member of NATO and the EU, Bulgaria struggles to align its policies with Western interests, especially concerning support for Ukraine and reducing reliance on Russian energy. Negotiating this delicate balance underscores the complexity of Bulgaria's position between Western aspirations and historical ties with Russia. Internal divisions, fuelled by disinformation campaigns and strategic challenges, further complicate Bulgaria's trajectory.

Pro-Russian disinformation has exacerbated societal divisions in Bulgaria, impeding effective governmental responses to strategic challenges. Although disinformation is prevalent, Bulgarians are less inclined than the EU average to acknowledge being targeted by fake news. With only 11% of Bulgarians supporting military aid to Ukraine, scepticism is widespread (EURACTIV Bulgaria, 2024).

Disinformation originates from various sources, including Kremlin-backed narratives and ultra-conservative propaganda from the US. Efforts to counter disinformation are hindered by institutional indifference, allowing false narratives to exploit patriotic sentiments and nostalgia for the communist era, eroding trust in the EU and NATO and complicating national unity efforts (EURACTIV Bulgaria, 2024).

Bulgaria's heavy reliance on Russia for gas and crude oil, particularly affecting the Neftochim refinery, presents significant challenges in the energy sector. Despite attempts to diversify energy sources, hurdles remain, such as a gas export tax aimed at reducing dependence. Historical ties continue to shape energy dynamics, leading to complexities evident in recent controversies over gas taxes and EU antitrust investigations (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2023; Milcheva & Nikolov, 2023).

4.1.2. Military modernization and strategic alliances

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria, a NATO member since 2004, intensified efforts to modernize its armed forces, reflecting a commitment to regional security (Hedlung, 2023). Ongoing talks for major Western arms purchases include onshore anti-ship systems, submarines, and ship-building collaboration with Germany, with negotiations totalling about 5 billion levs ($2.7 billion). Seeking to purchase warships and coast guard weapons underscores concerns over Russian threats in the Black Sea. Approvals for Stryker armoured vehicles and radar systems highlight urgency in enhancing defence capabilities. Notably, joint US-Bulgarian military bases established under the 2006 Defence Cooperation Agreement contribute significantly to regional security, encompassing: Bezmer Air Base in Yambol Province, Novo Selo Range in Sliven Province, Aitos Logistics Centre in Burgas Province and Graf Ignatievo Air Base in Plovdiv Province. These bases underscore the shared commitment to defence and strategic cooperation between Bulgaria and the United States (Hedlung, 2023).

4.2 Romania: Enthusiastic response to regional challenges

4.2.1. Defence and energy security

Romania, a staunch supporter of NATO with deep-rooted historical tensions with Russia, strategically focuses on countering Russian hybrid threats. Possessing significant Black Sea gas reserves, Romania contributes to European energy security through projects like the Black Sea Oil and Gas Platform (Hedlung, 2023).

4.2.2. Military spending and strategic alliances

Hosting various multinational HQs (NFIU, Brigade, Division, and Corps level) and receiving a growing US military presence, Romania actively contributes to NATO's efforts in the Black Sea region. In the face of the war in Ukraine and the crisis in the Black

Sea region, Romania has taken proactive measures to enhance its defence and deterrence posture through collaborative efforts with key strategic partners. Notably, Romania has been hosting the main operating bases of the US Army Europe Rotational Task Force at Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base near the Black Sea since 1999. The recent increase in the US military presence, surpassing 3,000 troops, highlights Romania's pivotal role in regional security and its steadfast commitment to bolstering defence capabilities.

At the core of Romania's defence strategy lies the NATO Battle Group stationed at the Cincu Combat Training Centre. Established in May 2022, under France's leadership, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this NATO battle group, known as the NATO Battle Group Cincu, fosters defence cooperation among participating countries, including France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, on a rotational basis. The battlegroup also receives additional support from rotational deployments of US and Polish mechanized infantry elements, significantly enhancing the Alliance's defensive capabilities. These deployments play a crucial role in promoting cohesion among NATO members and bolstering collective readiness in response to evolving regional challenges.

Looking forward, the NATO Battle Group stationed in Cincu, Romania, is on track for a substantial upgrade by 2025, spearheaded by France's leadership. French General Loic Girard, the Senior National Representative in Romania, announced the planned elevation of the Battle Group to brigade level, which will see troop numbers swell to 4,000. This momentous expansion, to coincide with the multinational Dacian Spring exercise in May, will also witness a considerable augmentation in military equipment. The potential increase in Leclerc tanks from 13 to 50, alongside the introduction of Caesar howitzers, underscores France's pivotal role in bolstering NATO security on the eastern flank and reaffirms Romania's steadfast commitment to collective defence (Lepădatu, 2024).

Furthermore, NATO has increased its involvement in air policing and patrolling missions in collaboration with Romanian forces, actively contributing to the advancement of security in the Black Sea region. The substantial Allied presence, including the US, Poland, Portugal, North Macedonia, underscores Romania's pivotal role in regional security (Hedlung, 2023).

4.2.3. Modernizing defence

In response to Russia's aggressive stance in the region, Romania has initiated several defence programs to address capability gaps and enhance security. The Peace Carpathian programs involved procuring surplus F-16A/B aircraft from Portugal, resulting in the acquisition of a total of 17 fighter jets between 2016 and 2021 (Saw, 2023). Seeking more affordable combat aircraft, Romania turned to Norway, securing a contract worth EUR 454 million (Peace Carpathian III) for a package of 32 second-hand F-16 fighter jets, in M6.5.2 configuration and logistical support and services, with deliveries planned from

2022 to 2024. Additionally, a contract for F-16 modernization and logistics support for the existing fleet was signed with the US. Furthermore, major Foreign Military Sales (FMS) contracts with the US included the acquisition of 54 M142 HIMARS launchers and various missiles, as well as seven PATRIOT Configuration 3+ fire units. A recent USD 300 million contract for two Coastal Defence Systems using the Kongsberg Naval Strike Missile further enhances Romania's defence capabilities (Saw, 2023).

For the Land Forces, the GDELS Piranha 5 acquisition is a crucial modernization effort, with an initial contract for 227 vehicles and plans to procure an additional 150 (Saw, 2023). To address deficiencies in tank capabilities, Romania considers acquiring a tank battalion of M1 Abrams, potentially impacting cooperation with the Republic of Korea (ROK). ROK defence products, including the K9 self-propelled gun and ammunition, are under consideration. Collaboration with Türkiye includes a memorandum of understanding with Aselsan on smart munitions technology transfer and a potential order for Bayraktar TB2 UAVs. In the naval sector, plans for Gowind multi-mission corvettes and a submarine acquisition program with Naval Group are in progress. Despite regional uncertainties, Romania's strong economy allows for continued defence capability development, crucial given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the strategic importance of the Black Sea region. These initiatives underscore Romania's commitment to enhancing readiness and addressing regional security challenges (Saw, 2023).

In the latest developments as of early March 2024, Romania has successfully secured the acquisition of 3 systems comprising 18 Bayraktar TB2 drones, with a total value of $300 million (Tudor, 2024). This milestone represents a significant moment for the Romanian Army, as it establishes a dedicated battalion specifically for the operation of these cutting-edge drones. Furthermore, the acquisition also includes an additional 7 systems featuring Israeli Watchkeeper drones, set to be delivered by 2025. This strategic decision will result in the Romanian Army overseeing a comprehensive fleet of 10 systems, equating to a total of 60 drones. These systems will be stationed at the 184th Senzori and Anti-Aircraft Defense Battalion in Timișoara, as well as the Boboc Air Base in Buzău. The primary objective assigned to these drones is the uninterrupted surveillance of Russia's assertive forces in close proximity to the NATO's Eastern Flank. Notably, the Bayraktar drones, which gained prominence during Russia's incursion in Ukraine, have demonstrated their remarkable effectiveness by precisely targeting objectives across the entire 900 km length of the Ukrainian front (Tudor, 2024).

4.2.4. Romania's discrete multidimensional support to Ukraine's defence

Romania also has played a significant role in supporting Ukraine since the occupation of Crimea in 2014, offering multidimensional assistance throughout the conflict. Despite occasional tensions, particularly regarding the Romanian ethnic minority in Ukraine, Bucharest consistently provides robust support. Romania discreetly supplies

Soviet-made weapons, artillery, and ammunition to Ukraine, contributing significantly to its defence capabilities. Over a million Ukrainian refugees have transited through Romania, with hundreds of thousands choosing to stay. While the Romanian government has not publicly acknowledged military aid, NATO partners are reportedly aware of Romania's extensive support. In addition to humanitarian aid, Romania actively trains Ukrainian pilots for F-16 fighter jets, demonstrating a deeper commitment. As an EU-designated hub for civilian aid, Romania collaborates with Türkiye in demining the Black Sea and restricts Russian ships and air companies, showcasing an unwavering commitment to regional stability (Costea, 2023).

4.3. Türkiye: Navigating global dynamics with strategic precision

4.3.1. Strategic landscape and diplomacy

Türkiye, driven by historical pride and modern ambitions, stands as a regional power with substantial armed forces. As a NATO member since 1952, it actively participates in the alliance, hosting critical bases like Incirlik and Konya. The nation's foreign policy delicately balances its relations with Russia and the West, occasionally complicating Allied initiatives.

President Erdogan positions Türkiye as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict, supplying drones to Ukraine while refraining from endorsing sanctions against Russia. Despite condemning the invasion, Türkiye doubled its imports of oil and coal from Russia since February 2022, maintaining economic ties amid financial instability in both nations. Türkiye's involvement in the Black Sea Grain Initiative underscores its strategic importance in addressing global issues arising from the conflict (Siccardi, 2024).

4.3.2. Arms deals and regional politics

Türkiye's determination to enhance its military capabilities amid tensions with successive US administrations over the S-400 acquisition from Russia is evidenced by its recent $23 billion request for Lockheed Martin Corp F-16 fighters' modernization kits. This move comes amidst concerns regarding the strategic necessity of bolstering Türkiye's capabilities within NATO, particularly in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Following negotiations after Ankara's approval of Sweden's NATO membership bid, the US State Department readiness to proceed with the deal, suggests a potential improvement in bilateral relations. Initially approved by the Biden administration in January, the sale comprises 40 new F-16s from Lockheed Martin, along with modernization kits for 79 existing fighter jets in Türkiye's fleet, solidifying Türkiye's its position as a major F-16 operator with a fleet exceeding 200 older models. This development highlights Türkiye's pivotal role in safeguarding NATO's southern flank, including the Black Sea region, while concurrently modernizing its aging F-16 fleet to align with US and NATO standards. In

essence, Türkiye's role in the Black Sea region reflects a nuanced interplay of historical legacy, modern ambitions, strategic diplomacy, and complex defence dynamics, shaping its response to the evolving geopolitical landscape (Reuters, 2024).

4.4. Georgia: Navigating divides amidst Black Sea dynamics

4.4.1. Internal struggles

Georgia grapples with an internal struggle as a majority leans towards closer ties with Europe, while a Russia-friendly current Prime Minister remains indifferent to Western integration. This delicate dance sets the stage for a defining moment in the upcoming 2024 elections (Hedlung, 2023).

4.4.2. Occupation's shadows

Russia's assertive presence and ongoing occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, constituting 20% of Georgia's territory, threaten its autonomy. Georgia strategically navigates regional dynamics, delicately balancing cooperation and resistance. The Black Sea, with the occupation transcending national concerns, becomes a pivotal piece in regional politics. Georgia's engagements extend to the Associated Trio, a collaborative effort with Ukraine and Moldova, highlighting its nuanced approach to relations with Russia and pursuit of European integration (Melvin & Seskuri, 2022).

4.4.3. Security challenges

Russia's dominance, intensified by the conflict in Ukraine, poses hurdles for Georgia's security strategy. Stagnant NATO membership bids expose Georgia to Russia's naval dominance. The ongoing conflict prompts a recalibration of Georgia's security strategy, emphasizing collaboration beyond NATO's confines. Initiatives like the Anaklia deep-sea port emerge as crucial in counterbalancing Russia's formidable naval strength, calling for Western assistance (Demytrie et al., 2023).

The 2024 elections stand as a pivotal chapter in Georgia's story, where the nation's path will be defined, transcending internal conflicts and navigating the challenging waters of geopolitical intricacies.

4.5. Moldova: Navigating geopolitical challenges on the EU path

4.5.1. Shift in alliances

Moldova, positioned at the epicentre of geopolitical turmoil following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has witnessed a notable shift in public opinion, with approximately 60% favouring closer ties with the EU. The December 2023 announcement of membership

negotiations by the Council, alongside Ukraine, and granting candidacy status to Georgia, was met with enthusiasm in all three capitals (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2023).

4.5.2. Russian retaliation

Russia's multifaceted approach, aiming to punish Moldova's pro-Western government and increase influence, includes withholding gas supplies, supporting anti-government protests, and deploying disinformation tactics. Concerns loom over potential Russian military intervention in Transnistria. Moldova's resilience is evident in efforts to counter Russian claims, such as banning Russian TV channels and seeking air defence systems from NATO countries (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2023).

4.5.3 Romania's crucial role

Moldova's unwavering supporter, Romania, providing 80%-90% of Moldova's energy needs, plays a crucial role in supporting Moldova's independence, sovereignty, and European integration. Moldova's distinctive bond with Romania gains heightened significance amidst Russian imperial aspirations (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2023).

4.5.4. Russian legacy

Moldova, once part of the Russian empire, grapples with the continued presence of Russian troops in Transnistria. Despite challenges, Moldova's commitment to a pro-NATO, pro-EU trajectory is underscored by the European Council's initiation of EU membership accession negotiations in December 2023. Ongoing Russian efforts to destabilize Moldova remain a palpable threat, with President Maia Sandu leading determined initiatives (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2023). Moldova, lacking a Black Sea coastline, has shifted energy reliance from Russia to Romania, emphasizing dedication to pro-European integration (Ratchev & Tagarev, 2022).

4.6. Ukraine's heroic resilience: Navigating multifront challenges for sovereignty

4.6.1. Securing the Black Sea

In the face of relentless Russian aggression, Ukraine faces significant economic challenges stemming from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and ongoing hostilities. Since the conflict's onset, the country has undergone a severe economic downturn, witnessing a staggering 30-35% decrease in GDP, making it its largest recession in history. Despite these adversities, Ukraine has exhibited remarkable resilience, particularly in countering Russia's naval threat and effectively defending its shores

and shipping lanes. Moreover, the establishment of a strategic maritime corridor has proven vital in compensating for disruptions at land border crossings, symbolizing Ukraine's resilience in the maritime domain (Kilfoyle, 2023).

4.6.2. Adapting to cyber threats

Ukraine, on the frontline of global cybersecurity challenges, faces state-sponsored cyber-attacks from Russia, spearheaded by Military Unit 74455. These cyber threats, targeting critical infrastructure worldwide, highlight Ukraine's robust cyber defence efforts through effective public-private partnerships. Amidst multifront struggles, Ukraine's cyber resilience stands as a testament to its defiance against Russian aggression.

Supported by Western aid and its resilient populace, Ukraine's successful defence, underscores its unwavering determination. However, reclaiming occupied territories requires further capabilities, with Ukraine's strategic focus on seamless European integration. The nation's narrative of defiance resonates not only in land battles, but also in overcoming economic challenges and cyber vulnerabilities (Stein, 2024; Duguin & Pavlova, 2023).

4.7. Russia's ambitious chess moves: From imperial legacy to revisionist aspirations

Russia's historical ties to the Black Sea, which date back to imperial times, have undergone a resurgence in significance during the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, a pivotal moment marking a turning point in the region's contested dynamics. President Vladimir Putin's strategic vision for regional dominance has been steadily advancing since early 2000s, culminating in the bold annexation of Crimea in 2014. These moves solidified Russia's control and enabling power projection into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, signalling its revisionist aspirations on the global stage.

4.7.1. Strategic mastery unveiled: Crimea's annexation and modern military tactics

In the context of the current war, Russia's military actions in Ukraine reveal a comprehensive strategy that merges historical imperial tactics with modern military capabilities. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's aggressive militarization has fundamentally altered Black Sea security dynamics. With fortified defence systems and extensive military infrastructure, Crimea serves as a strategic launching pad for Russia's maritime dominance. Advanced Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) systems deployed in the region pose significant challenges to NATO, effectively limiting its capacity for reinforcement. The illegal occupation of Crimea provided Russia with approximately 27,000 square kilometres of territory, swiftly transformed into a formidable military fortress. This included enhancing naval, ground, and air defence capabilities, consolidating Russia's foothold in the region. Moreover, the annexation granted the Kremlin control over an exclusive economic zone rich in oil and natural gas reserves, further expanding its influence (Costea, n.d.).

4.7.2. Security dynamics reshaped

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine further unveiled Russia's strategy to reshape Black Sea security dynamics, isolating Georgia and prompting a NATO security recalibration. At the core of Russia's approach lies maritime supremacy through the Black Sea Fleet and control over Sevastopol. The invasion aimed at disrupting sea routes and halting Ukrainian grain exports. However, Ukraine's innovative responses exposed vulnerabilities in Russia's pursuit of absolute maritime dominance. These tactics, featuring a mix of 'classical' means such as air attacks, antiship missiles, and naval mines, alongside new methods like naval and air drones, effectively challenged Russia's regional dominance. Additionally, Ukraine's strategic targeting of Russia's critical aerial crafts like the A-50 and Il-22M surveillance planes further challenged Moscow's maritime hegemony. As a result, the security dynamics in the Black Sea region has undergone significant transformation, forcing Russia to reassess its naval strategy while bolstering Ukraine's position (Castillo, 2024).

4.7.3. Hybrid tactics and global impact: Russia's comprehensive influence

Russia's influence in the Black Sea region extends beyond military actions, encompassing hybrid tactics like disinformation, economic pressure, and cyber warfare. The invasion of Ukraine serves as a reminder of Russia's determination to assert dominance, highlighting the multifaceted nature of its approach. This complex strategy emphasizes the intricate and far-reaching impact of Russia's influence in the Black Sea region, necessitating a multifaceted response from the international community.

4.8. US navigating the Black Sea geopolitical chessboard: Perspectives and strategic actions

In response to the ongoing conflict, the United States strategically positions itself as a key player in shaping energy dynamics and reducing Europe's reliance on Russian supplies. Recent legislative developments, such as the National Defense Authorization Act and the Black Sea Security Act, align with the Biden administration's five-pillared Black Sea security approach. This strategic response aims to counter Russian destabilization through diplomatic engagement, reinforced NATO presence, economic cooperation, energy security, and democratic resilience. Recognizing the unique dynamics of non-NATO states, the strategy emphasizes nuanced considerations, including supporting Ukraine's economic recovery and enhancing Black Sea trade routes. Comprehensive recommendations involve strengthening the US presence, bolstering NATO's eastern front, recalibrating relations with Türkiye, prioritizing democratic resilience, and supporting connectivity projects independent of Russia. As the US strategically navigates the complex Black Sea geopolitical landscape, these

actions play a crucial role in fostering stability and security in the region, necessitating a careful and adaptive approach amid evolving dynamics (Depuy, 2023).

4.9. EU's Black Sea strategy: Comprehensive and action-oriented

The Black Sea holds strategic significance for the European Union (EU), situated at vital geopolitical crossroads with borders shared by six countries, including two EU Member States. The EU's Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan, a key component of its broader Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, dedicates specific attention to the Black Sea. This comprehensive plan integrates initiatives like the Black Sea Synergy of 2007 within the European Neighbourhood Policy. Specifically tailored to the region, the EU MSS Action Plan outlines four key objectives for the Black Sea: promoting regional cooperation, supporting synergies through the Facility for Blue Growth, combating crime, and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue. This multifaceted approach underscores the EU's commitment to addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities in the Black Sea, aligning with its overarching foreign and security policy goals.

4.10. China's Belt and Road impact on the Black Sea

In recent years, China has strategically positioned itself in the Black Sea region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), actively reshaping economic and transportation networks. Excluding Romania, China's targeted investments serve both economic interests and political influence, notably amidst Russia's weakened position due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Transformative infrastructural investments are perceived by some Black Sea states as a counterbalance to Russian influence, fostering closer collaboration with China. Despite diplomatic manoeuvres, challenges persist, including China's support for the Russian economy. The current conflict further complicates China's role in the Black Sea, influencing regional dynamics and prompting considerations for a resilient American and allied presence in response to China's expanding influence (Dunlevie, 2023).

5. Collaborative security initiatives among Black Sea littoral states

In recent years, collaboration among Black Sea littoral states has evolved, shaping strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing regional security and stability. Several key initiatives underscore the collective commitment to fortify the defence posture and address common challenges:

- Regional Component Command for Special Operations (R-SOCC): At the Vilnius Summit in 2023, Romania and Bulgaria jointly announced the establishment

of a Regional Component Command for Special Operations (R-SOCC). This initiative aims to bolster the command and control structure of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the Black Sea region. With Romania taking the lead, the R-SOCC will provide crucial coordination for allied SOF efforts against Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. The creation of the R-SOCC underscores the unwavering commitment of Black Sea countries to collaborative security efforts;

- European F-16 Pilot Training Centre in Romania: Another significant decision arising from the Vilnius NATO Summit is the establishment of The European F-16 Pilot Training Centre in Romania. This initiative, developed in collaboration with the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Lockheed Martin Company, aims to elevate the proficiency of Romanian pilots operating F-16 aircraft. Importantly, it extends its benefits to pilots from Allied partner states, including Ukraine. The commitment of the Royal Dutch Air Force to deploy F-16 aircrafts, coupled with Lockheed Martin's technical support, not only reinforces Romania's regional leadership in F-16 pilot training but also emphasizes its role as a dedicated security provider;

- MCM Black Sea: Safeguarding Navigation, Ensuring Food Security: Established on January 11, 2024, the Task Force to Combat Sea Mines in the Black Sea (MCM Black Sea) is a joint initiative by Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye. Formed in response to the persistent threat of sea mines in the Black Sea, MCM Black Sea operates with a rotating command every six months, bolstering defence on the Eastern flank and ensuring continuous readiness. This collaborative effort extends invitations to NATO partners, including both littoral and non-littoral Allies, and involves NATO Standing Maritime Groups. Beyond its defensive role, MCM Black Sea plays a crucial part in securing food routes in the region. The initiative addresses the significant threat posed by sea mines to Ukraine's Black Sea export routes, notably impacting Ukrainian grain exports. By guaranteeing a secure passage for civilian shipping, MCM Black Sea contributes to regional stability and security, highlighting the shared commitment among Black Sea littoral states to address common challenges (Savitz, 2022; Martin, 2024; Kucukgocmen & Hayatsever, 2024).

6. Towards Washington Summit – bridging strategic gaps: Crafting a comprehensive NATO strategy for the Black Sea

6.1. Strategic realignment

The changing security landscape in the Black Sea region underscores the imperative for NATO to reassess its strategic focus. Since the 2016 Warsaw Summit, there has

been a noticeable gap in attention directed towards the Black Sea, with the Alliance's military leadership predominantly focused on the potential threat of a Russian incursion in the Baltic Sea region. This oversight has become increasingly apparent as the security situation in the Black Sea continues to evolve.

To effectively safeguard European interests and uphold NATO's commitment to collective defence, a nuanced and adaptable strategy should be crafted. This strategy should account for the unique geopolitical dynamics, security concerns, and emerging threats in the Black Sea region. By rebalancing its attention and resources, NATO can enhance its readiness and resilience, ensuring a more comprehensive defence posture that aligns with the complex realities of the contemporary security environment.

The immediate aftermath of the Ukrainian war prompted a just response during the extraordinary NATO Summit in Brussels in March 2022, that marked a transformative moment and a reset of the collective posture. The establishment of four new battlegroups in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, underscored NATO's commitment to fortifying regional security. The subsequent decision at the Madrid Summit in the same year, to enhance their capacity from battalion size to brigade level when and where required, not only further solidified NATO's dedication to strengthening security in the region but also marked a shift in its military strategy from a 'forward presence' to a 'forward defence' posture. This strategic evolution reflects NATO's adaptability and responsiveness to emerging threats in the ever-changing geopolitical landscape.

6.2. Anticipating change at the Washington Summit

As the NATO agenda moves forward, the upcoming Washington Summit, when NATO celebrates 75 years as the most successful Alliance to date, presents an opportunity for significant changes. While constructive dialogue and enhanced regional cooperation are crucial, they should not be a substitute for a tailored, coherent, and comprehensive NATO defence strategy specifically designed for the Black Sea region. This strategy should aim to bridge the gap between the North and the South part of the Eastern Flank, fostering complementarity rather than competition. Similar to Russia's unified strategy for the Black Sea region, a clear vision is essential for defining forces, capabilities, plans, and exercises to effectively counter potential challenges in the Black Sea region in this area.

This section offers recommendations to craft a comprehensive NATO strategy concerning force posture, capabilities, and engagement in the Black Sea region. Additionally, it outlines measures aimed at strengthening the capabilities of allies and partners to proficiently counter malign Russian influence and deter potential aggression.

In crafting a strategy for the Black Sea region, NATO must navigate the considerable asymmetry in interests and military capabilities between Russia and the Alliance. This section identifies essential components for the strategy, focusing on countering Russian

influence and deterring potential aggression. It emphasizes the alignment of forces, capabilities, plans, and exercises to effectively address the multifaceted challenges in the Black Sea region. The overarching goal is to ensure a resilient and adaptable defence posture that aligns with the complexities of the contemporary security environment.

Essential components of a NATO strategy for the Black Sea region should include the following aspects[2]:

1. strategic level:
   a) enhancing strategic awareness with a robust Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capacity, utilizing both manned and unmanned aerial systems, cyber and satellite capabilities, signals intelligence platforms. This approach should be informed by insights gained from the Ukrainian conflict;
   b) establishing a regional centre of excellence for unmanned aerial and naval systems in the Black Sea region, inclusive of Ukraine from the outset (Hodges et al., 2022). Collaborating with Ukrainian authorities, leveraging their newly established drone branch, would enhance defence capabilities and promote regional security. This aligns with NATO's goal of fostering interoperability and strengthening defence capacities in the area.
2. military operational level:
   a) on air/for air operations:
      - strengthening NATO littoral countries' capacity to counter Russian Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) advanced systems in the Crimean Peninsula, by:
         – enhancing coastal and air defence systems with layered defences to effectively deter and counter potential Russian attacks;
         – providing support to littoral Allies through the deployment of long-range precision strike weapons and capabilities;
      - increasing NATO's commitment to ensuring a 24/7 air defence mission in the region, including fighter jets, surveillance flights, moving toward a robust air defence;
      - allocating the necessary resources for the European Sky Shield Initiative for robust, layered air and missile defences;
   b) on maritime/for maritime operations:
      - increasing NATO's naval presence within the Black Sea, conducting port visits (show of flag) frequent naval exercises to strengthen readiness;
      - developing a NATO Naval Flotilla operated by Black Sea littoral states, to maintain a constant presence, in coordination with other NATO nations, ensuring compliance with the Montreux Convention;

---

[2] This policy recommendations build on the contributions made by many other researchers examining regional security in and around the Black Sea. See especially Hodges et al. (2022), Sofia Security Forum (2023), Lancaster (2023).

- supporting the Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO to safeguard critical seabed infrastructure;
- preparing for military missions in defence of critical infrastructure and naval escort;
- conducting frequent joint Black Sea naval exercises, incorporating NATO partners like Georgia for extended geographic reach;

c) on land/ for land operations:

- transitioning to a model of permanent bases, ensuring rotational ready-to-fight combat forces;
- continuing operationalizing and enabling SACEUR's Area of Responsibility, focusing on logistics, host nation support, military mobility, replenishment, and prepositioning of stocks and ammunition;
- ensuring the extension of the NATO Pipeline System on the territory of the Eastern Allies, to provide the necessary fuel for the operations;
- conducting joint exercises to enhance interoperability and strengthen collective defence capabilities;

d) on command and control:

- ensuring the executability criteria of regional plans (RPs) for the Black Sea region, aligning them with national defence plans and regularly revising them based on evolving threats;
- establishing a joint, multi-national three-star headquarters at the Black Sea;

e) engagement and communication:

- prioritizing direct engagement, regular dialogue, and communication to build trust among involved parties and actors;
- collaborating with the EU for a comprehensive security strategy, including economic security, energy security, and food security, for a unified approach to regional stability.

7. Discussion and conclusions

In the annals of organized human communities, the Black Sea region has been a dynamic theatre where interests have oscillated between peaceful negotiations and military strategies. To draw wisdom from history is not just a suggestion but a necessity, as nations and organizations must ready themselves for tumultuous times in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Contrary to Western expectations in the late 1990s, which envisioned Russia as a participant in the global security architecture, Russia has consistently demonstrated a disregard for international norms and agreements. Its aggression transcends mere rhetoric, manifesting in brutal military actions that reflect a fundamental departure

from ethical considerations. This stark reality underscores the imperative for NATO to respond to Russia with carefully calibrated decisions and actions. It necessitates an acknowledgment of the need for a successful and nuanced strategy to effectively counter Russia's destabilizing behaviour on the international stage.

When examining NATO's fringes towards Russia, three significant directions become apparent – the Scandinavian, the Baltic-Polish-German, and notably, the Black Sea. Each holds equal importance, yet the Black Sea stands out as the region where Russia chose to express its aggressiveness not only in words but in military actions.

Geopolitical and political realities demand a realistic political approach. The Black Sea's unique political intricacies, shaped by diverse interests along its shores, add layers of complexity to decision-making processes. The strategic importance of the Black Sea necessitates a recalibration of defence capabilities. The region must be fortified with the right resources to serve as a deterrent against Russia's political recklessness. The ancient adage *si vis pacem para bellum* is not just relevant; it is a guiding principle. NATO, rooted in comprehensiveness, 360-degree defence, solidarity, and mutual support, should not devolve into internal competition. Striking a balance is imperative, ensuring that attention to one aspect does not compromise defence capabilities in others. Addressing the challenges in the Black Sea requires a substantial allocation of resources, and fortunately, NATO possesses the capability to provide these resources. Political strategies must transcend rhetoric, embodying realism, and practicality to guide subsequent actions effectively.

As the Washington Summit approaches, with the Alliance's commemorating its 75th anniversary, it takes on unprecedented significance. In navigating the complex international landscape, the Alliance must showcase determination and realism, upholding the political engagements enshrined in the NATO treaty of 1949. In this nuanced context, NATO's role extends beyond military preparedness; it becomes a beacon of diplomatic prowess, showcasing the Alliance's adaptability and resilience in the face of evolving challenges.

References:

Aliano, A., & Spivak, R. (2022, April 25). *Ukraine symposium – the Montreux Convention and Turkey's impact on Black Sea operations*. Lieber Institute West Point. https://lieber.westpoint.edu/montreux-convention-turkeys-impact-black-sea-operations/, Apr 25, 2022

Aronsson, L., & Mankoff, J. (2023, February 2). *The inhospitable sea: Toward a new U.S. strategy for the Black Sea region*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. https://www.csis.org/analysis/inhospitable-sea-toward-new-us-strategy-black-sea-region

Atlamazoglou, C. (2023, October 19). *An 87-year-old deal is keeping a lid on the naval war in Ukraine — for now*. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-ukraine-montreux-convention-keeping-warships-out-of-black-sea-2023-10?IR=T

Castillo, N. (2024, January 21). *Russia on the back foot in the Black Sea: Implications for Georgia and the Caspian region*. Caspian Policy Center. https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/regional-south-caucasus/russia-on-the-back-foot-in-the-black-sea-implications-for-georgia-and-the-caspian-region

Colibăşanu, A., Crowther, A., Hickman, J., & Scutaru, G. (2022, September 27). *The strategic importance of the Snake Island*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-strategic-importance-of-snake-island/

Colling, J. (2024, January 8). *Recapping "Cyber in War: Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict"*. Lieber Institute West Point. https://lieber.westpoint.edu/recapping-cyber-war-lessons-russia-ukraine-conflict

Costea, C. A. (n.d.). *The Russian Federation and the implementation of the A2/AD System in the Black Sea: Risks and threats to Romania*. The Market for Ideas. https://www.themarketforideas.com/the-russian-federation-and-the-implementation-of-the-a2-ad-system-in-the-black-sea-risks-and-threats-to-romania-a176

Demytrie, R., Brown, P., & Cheetham, J. (2023, December 13). *Russia's new Black Sea naval base alarms Georgia*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67625450

Depuy, A. C. (2023, December 5). *The Biden administration finally has a Black Sea strategy. It's what comes next that matters*. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-biden-administration-finally-has-a-black-sea-security-strategy-its-what-comes-next-that-matters/

Duguin, S., & Pavlova, P. (2023). *The role of cyber in the Russian war against Ukraine: Its impact and the consequences for the future of armed conflict*. European Parliament https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/702594/EXPO_BRI(2023)702594_EN.pdf

Dunlevie, T. (2023, December 5). *China and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Moving towards Pax Sinica?* Center for Maritime Strategy. https://centerformaritimestrategy.org/publications/china-and-russia-in-the-black-sea-region-moving-towards-pax-sinica/

EURACTIV Bulgaria. (2024, January 16). *Pro-Russian disinformation in Bulgaria achieves its goals, experts say*. EURACTIV. https://www.euractiv.com/section/disinformation/news/pro-russian-disinformation-in-bulgaria-achieves-its-goals-experts-say/

European Parliament. (2023, July 19). *Russia's war on Ukraine: High environmental toll*. European Parliament Think Tank. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2023)751427

Hedlung, S. (2023, June 29). *Georgia's divide between Russia and the West*. GIS Reports. https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/georgia-russia-west

Hodges, B., Horrell, S., & Kuz, I. (2022, September). *Russia's militarization of the Black Sea: Implications for the United States and NATO*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/russias-militarization-of-the-black-sea-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/

Kilfoyle, M. (2023, October 24). *Ukraine: What's the global economic impact of Russia's invasion?* Economics Observatory. https://www.economicsobservatory.com/ukraine-whats-the-global-economic-impact-of-russias-invasion#:~:text=Ukraine's%20economic%20output%20is%20now,%2C%20if%20only%20by%200.5%25

Kucukgocmen, A., Hayatsever, H. (2024, January 11). *Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria sign deal to clear floating Black Sea mines*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-romania-bulgaria-ink-deal-clear-floating-black-sea-mines-2024-01-11/

Lancaster. M. (2023, October 7). *Troubled Waters – How Russia's War in Ukraine Changes Black Sea Security*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2023-10/020%20DSCFC%2023%20E%20rev.1%20fin%20-%20BLACK%20SEA%20-%20LANCASTER%20REPORT.pdf

Lepădatu, F. (2024, February 29). *NATO Battle Group in Cincu to be upgraded to brigade level in 2025*. Radio România Actualitaţi. https://www.romania-actualitati.ro/news-in-english/nato-battle-group-in-cincu-to-be-upgraded-to-brigade-level-in-2025-id189514.html

Martin, T. (2024, January 11). *Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey join forces for Black Sea mine countermeasures coalition*. Breaking Defense. https://breakingdefense.com/2024/01/bulgaria-romania-turkey-join-forces-for-black-sea-mine-countermeasures-coalition/

Melvin, N., & Seskuri, N. (2022). *A New Security Order in the Black Sea. The Role of Georgia*. Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. https://static.rusi.org/355-EI-Georgia-Black-Sea-web-final.pdf

Milcheva, E., & Nikolov, K. (2023, September 1). *Russian oil fuels new political crisis in Bulgaria. EURACTIV*. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/russian-oil-fuels-new-political-crisis-in-bulgaria/

Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits. (2024, March 6). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreux_Convention_Regarding_the_Regime_of_the_Straits

Ratchev, V. R., & Tagarev, T. (2022, January 13). *Bulgaria's Black Sea dilemma: NATO ally or Russian gateway?* The Jamestown Foundation. https://jamestown.org/program/bulgarias-black-sea-dilemma-nato-ally-or-russian-gateway

Reuters. (2024, February 29). *Turkey receives U.S. draft letters approving F-16 jets deal – official*. https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/turkey-receives-us-draft-letters-approving-f-16-jets-deal-official-2024-02-29/

Savitz, S. (2022, November 16). *The drifting menace*. RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/11/the-drifting-menace.html

Saw, D. (2023, July 19). *Romania's ongoing military transition*. European Security & Defence. https://euro-sd.com/2023/06/articles/31843/romanias-ongoing-military-transition

Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. (2023). *A Security Strategy for the Black Sea*. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/AC-Black-Sea-Strategy-ack-revised.pdf

Siccardi, F. (2024, February 28). *Understanding the energy drivers of Turkey's foreign policy*. Carnegie Europe. https://carnegieeurope.eu/2024/02/28/understanding-energy-drivers-of-turkey-s-foreign-policy-pub-91733#:~:text=But%20since%20February%202022%2C%20Turkey,is%20a%20case%20in%20point

Sofia Security Forum. (2023). *NATO's Role in Addressing Security Threats and Challenges in the Black Sea: Time for a Comprehensive Strategic Approach for the Region*? New Strategy Center. https://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Security-threats-and-challenges-in-the-black-sea-web.pdf

State sites of Ukraine. (2024, April 6). *Oleksandr Kubrakov: Record 195,700 tonnes exported from Pivdennyi Port on one vessel*. https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/oleksandr-kubrakov-rekordni-1957-tysiachi-tonn-na-odnomu-sudni-eksportuvaly-z-portu-pivdennyi

Stein, J. (2024, January 9). *Ukraine is on the front lines of global cyber security*. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-is-on-the-front-lines-of-global-cyber-security/

Tramazzo, J. C., Santicola, I. (2023, September 11). *Russia's interdiction of neutral merchant vessels and the law of the sea*. Lieber Institute West Point. https://lieber.westpoint.edu/russias-interdiction-neutral-merchant-vessels-law-sea/

Tudor, R. (2024, March 6). *Premieră: România înființează un batalion de drone militare*. Radu Tudor. https://radu-tudor.ro/premiera-romania-infiinteaza-un-batalion-de-drone-militare/

Vandiver, J. (2023, December 29). *NATO sees marked drop in Russian aircraft intercepts in 2023*. Stars and Stripes. https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2023-12-29/nato-russia-intercepts-12496692.html

Ukraine's Path Towards NATO Membership
– From Vilnius to Washington, Staying on the Reform Track

Anna Tiido[1]
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Tallinn, Estonia
e-mail: anna.tiido@mfa.ee

Abstract: The present paper looks into the preparations of Ukraine's membership of NATO analyzing the decisions of the 2023 Vilnius Summit and describing the necessary reforms on the path towards membership. The research stems from the understanding that Ukraine has its own agency, and its decision to pursue Euro-Atlantic integration should be respected. Findings conclude that the necessary reforms Ukraine should undertake for NATO membership overlap to a great extent with those Ukraine is undertaking in the process of accession to the European Union. For Ukraine, these two processes are closely interlinked, and the recommendations of the paper suggest a more thorough coordination mechanism between NATO and the EU in monitoring reforms. Practical limitation of the research stems from the fact that the author used only publicly open sources, and there is limited data on NATO internal procedures. The originality of the research is the analysis of both NATO and the EU procedures in combination and bringing out the concrete way forward for coordination of the activities of both organizations.

Keywords: NATO enlargement, Ukraine, reforms, fight against corruption, national minority

1. Introduction

Though it is tempting to see the world in the terms of great power strategic competition, it has to be stressed that the question of NATO enlargement is strongly connected to the political will of the sovereign nations who want to join the Alliance. This was the case with every NATO enlargement. The terminology is also important in this respect – Russia speaks of 'NATO expansion' instead of 'enlargement', as if the Alliance imposed its will upon passive subjects. In reality, the agency of all the states is crucial; these are democracies who decide themselves on their security arrangements. NATO has also proved to be the most efficient defense alliance in the recent history, and it is understandable that nations want to join it. The Alliance has been an effective

---

[1] Dr. Anna Tiido, Counsellor at the Transatlantic Relations Unit, Department of NATO and Transatlantic Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

deterrent, the Article 5 was only evoked once in case of the 9/11 attack on the United States.

As the communique of Vilnius Summit refers to the 'conditions to be met' before Ukraine can join the alliance, these conditions are left ambiguous. It is crucial that the present Ukraine's bid for membership takes place during the active phase of a kinetic war started by Russia against a sovereign state. It is a unique situation, which makes any other comparisons rather inadequate. The understanding that the war should be over before the actual membership can be offered to Ukraine is quite well spread and, to some extent, taken for granted. Nevertheless, there are also other opinions, most notable, the one voiced by the former Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Wintour, 2023). Rasmussen proposed another solution – to accept Ukraine into NATO without presently occupied territories, citing as an example the membership of Western Germany in the Alliance.

The chapter will look into Ukraine's bid to NATO membership, keeping in mind Ukraine's agency. The mechanisms of the previous enlargements and the history of Ukraine's relationship with the Alliance will be shortly described. The chapter is written with the understanding that the membership will happen after the victory of Ukraine. In this respect, providing military aid to Ukraine remains the most important action for the time being. It is urgent to help Ukraine to win this war.

It is also outside the scope of this paper to predict what the exact political deliverable of the Washington Summit will be, though the invitation to join the Alliance would be a boost to Ukraine's morale also considering the continuation of the reforms. The invitation to the Summit would not mean an imminent membership, rather the start of further talks with the objective to reach full membership later, including when the condition of security on the ground is met.

In the communique of the Vilnius Summit, there is a reference to the increased interoperability, political and rule of law reforms (NATO, 2023). The communique states that the mechanism of Membership Action Plan is no longer needed, but it also refers to the regular assessment by the NATO Foreign Ministers of the progress through the adapted Annual National Program (ANP).

It is clear that there are two directions of action – first, Ukraine should win the war, second, it should undertake reforms. Winning the war will remain the main priority for both Ukraine and NATO, and in this regard, the assistance of the Allies is of crucial importance, though NATO as an organization does not provide for lethal aid. The chapter will concentrate on the other important activity – what kind of reforms should be continued in Ukraine in order to be ready for NATO membership.

2. Is there a clear mechanism for joining NATO? Membership Action Plan and Annual National Program

It can be argued that the process of joining NATO is political. At the same time, there are certain criteria stemming from the North Atlantic Treaty itself. The Article 10 states: "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty" (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). As one can see, one concrete criterion is that the acceding state should be European. Other criteria include the position to further the principles of the Treaty and contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area.

There are no other provisions that indicate the concrete mechanism of joining NATO. However, there is history of different accession processes. For example, the process that led to the 2004 enlargement of NATO shows us the practical preparations for the membership. One should argue, however, that this process took place in a totally different geopolitical situation if compared to the one of today. Before 2004, Russia, to some extent, had no major objections to NATO enlargement, at some stage even agreeing to it (2001 – significant shift towards the West in the wake of 9/11 attacks – Russia was prepared to reconsider its opposition to NATO enlargement to the states of the former Soviet Union). An argument could be made that this situation was a historic window of opportunity. The animosity and juxtaposition between the West and Russia were considerably smaller. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was an 'end of history' moment. Now, the war is raging in Europe, while Russia is a revisionist power without any scruples, ready to start military conflicts.

At the same time, there are also similarities between 2004 and 2023, with an important one being the parallel accession processes of the Baltic states and Ukraine to both the European Union and NATO. While the idea of the Baltic states joining NATO and reintegrating into transatlantic structures was logical right after these states regained their independence in 1991, the important milestone on the path towards the membership was the Washington Summit of 1999. At this gathering, aspirant countries were identified as the Baltic states, Slovenia and Slovakia, and a roadmap for getting to NATO was established. This bureaucratic framework began to be represented by the Membership Action Plan.

The Membership Action Plan (MAP) is a NATO program of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the Alliance. Participation in the MAP does not prejudge any decision by the Alliance on future membership. Key elements of the Membership Action Plan usually include:

- Annual National Programs covering political, economic, defense, resource, security and legal aspects of preparing for membership;

- a feedback mechanism on progress that includes both political and technical advice, as well as annual assessments by the North Atlantic Council;
- a clearinghouse for coordinating security assistance by NATO and by member states;
- enhanced defense planning that includes establishment and review of agreed planning targets specifically tailored to prepare aspirant militaries for possible future membership.

The ANP 2001 was built on membership requirements set out in the Washington Treaty, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, and the documents of Washington Summit 1999. *Study on NATO Enlargement* (NATO, 1995) is an important document in this respect, which interprets the Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty and stipulates the principles of enlargement. Some argue that a new study should be done now, as the situation has changed considerably (Coffey, 2024).

What does an ANP actually include? For example, *Latvia's Annual National Program 2001* consists of six chapters – Politics and Economy, Defense and Military, Resource, Information Security, and Legal Issues. The chapter on Politics and Economy reflects that Latvia is a stable, democratic country with a sound judicial system and a viable market economy. It describes the progress already achieved and the tasks envisaged for the year 2001 in the following areas:

- enforcement of democracy and the rule of law;
- implementation of human rights;
- development of the economy;
- democratic control over National Armed Forces;
- regional co-operation and development of good neighborly relations;
- Latvia's preparation for EU membership;
- Latvia's participation and contribution to increased security of the Euro-Atlantic Region;
- development of crisis management system in Latvia;
- environmental issues;
- informing the society about issues related to security and defense policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2014).

Participation in the MAP helped prepare the seven countries that joined NATO in the second post-Cold War round of enlargement in 2004 (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) as well as Albania and Croatia, which joined in April 2009. Montenegro, which joined the MAP in December 2009, became a member of the Alliance in June 2017. The Republic of North Macedonia, which had been participating in the MAP since 1999, joined NATO in March 2020.

At the Washington Summit in 1999, the Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to the open-door policy: "NATO is an open community, not a closed shop" (Klaiber, 1999). This commitment, in the way it was understood by NATO, evolved into the

MAP initiative proposed and launched in Washington aimed at assisting the aspiring partners to prepare for future membership in the Alliance. NATO expressed its readiness to provide advice, assistance, and practical support (Petrauskaite, 1999).

For over twenty years, MAP has been NATO's standard bureaucratic procedure for converting aspiring countries into members. After Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, this plan was created to streamline the process. The idea was based on the consideration that the initial set of candidates had been promised membership before the military and political reforms outlined in the alliance's own *Study on NATO Enlargement* (NATO, 1995) had been finished.

Nearly all countries that have joined NATO in the twenty-first century had first finished a MAP, with the exception of Finland (and also the same procedure applies to Sweden). Some analysts claim that it was not necessary for Helsinki to obtain a MAP because it was already a member of the EU, which has more stringent political, economic, and legislative admission requirements than NATO (Landgraf, 2023). Another reason Finland did not need a MAP was that it already had a capable military that is interoperable with NATO in most respects. This partly explains why all countries that have joined both organizations since the end of the Cold War have joined NATO first.

As for the Baltic states and their defense, all three countries decided on comprehensive plans with relation to the organization of their forces. Using western institutions and NATO military structuring as a starting point, the Baltics organized defense configurations by developing capable land self-defense forces (through the use of training facilities, peace- and wartime logistic systems, and updated equipment for land forces). The Baltic states saw the necessity to modernize their militaries and make them capable of training and operating with NATO forces. NATO assisted the Baltic states with policy planning, disaster planning and response, and most notably, military-to-military cooperation (Clemmesen, 1999; Lawrence & Jermalavičius, 2013). At the same time, MAP is not a legal requirement for joining NATO and may not be applied when the country already meets the requirements of the Alliance (Defense Express, 2023).

3. Ukraine's bid for NATO membership

For Ukraine, the road to NATO is thornier and more inconsistent. Like other newly independent states, Ukraine joined North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the Partnership for Peace Program in 1994. In 1997, Charter on a Distinctive Partnership was signed. The 1997 Charter established the NATO-Ukraine Commission as the main body responsible for developing the NATO-Ukraine relationship and for directing cooperative activities. Relations were further enhanced in 2009 with the

Declaration to Complement the Charter, which reaffirmed the decision by NATO Leaders at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of NATO.

In the in-between years, the political situation in Ukraine itself changed and the clause of neutrality was added to the Constitution in 2010 during Viktor Yanukovych's presidency. The legislative amendment to abandon this non-bloc status was voted in 2014, the year of Russian occupation of Crimea and invasion of the parts of Eastern Ukraine. In February 2019, the constitution was amended to require governments to seek European Union and NATO membership.

After the aggression by Russia against Ukraine entered its intensified phase in 2022, the bid for NATO membership became even more important. On September 30, 2022, Ukraine's president formally submitted an application to become a NATO member. Large hopes were put on the NATO Summit in Vilnius in the summer of 2023. There are many assessments of the results of the Summit concerning Ukraine. The main deliverables in this regard were:

- reassurance that Ukraine would be a NATO member once all the members agree to it;
- the requirement for MAP was taken out, now Adapted ANP;
- upgrading NATO-Ukraine Commission to NATO-Ukraine Council.

Thus, one of the important decisions in Vilnius was to go beyond a MAP towards an adapted ANP. Does conducting the accession process without MAP mean an accelerated procedure? It is more complicated than that. The Ukraine-NATO Annual National Program (ANP) used to be a key tool introduced in 2009 to support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic course. The document is a road map of national reforms in the security sphere, taking into account NATO standards. The document allows for tracking progress using fairly clear indicators. Its main content is divided into five sections: Political and economic issues, Defense and military issues, Questions related to resources, Security issues, Legal component (Khimiak, 2023). The adapted ANP is concentrating on the reforms of security and defense sectors. Ukraine's priorities are legislation on the civilian control of the armed forces and the public procurement.

In the context of NATO, interoperability has been very important. In addition to military interoperability, one can refer to 'political interoperability', where reforms play a key role. One example of NATO-related reforms is the defense procurement reform. In 2020, appropriate law was established, which substituted the old system of state orders with a free market model. Though with the outbreak of a full-scale war in February 2022 the government classified the information connected to defense procurement, there are still positive developments. A new law has been established obliging the Ministry of Defense to publish information on procurement contracts on the Prozorro website (Ukraine's tender platform). As of May 2023, 10 000 reports had been made public. These steps show that the government is open to NATO best practices even in the conditions of aggression (Fakhurdinova, 2023).

Ukrainian authorities embraced the notion of the adopted ANP. The head of Ukraine's mission to NATO, Natalia Halibarenko, commented:

> Then the war began, and this issue fell off the top of our agenda for some time. Therefore, when my allies and I started to discuss the issue of how Ukraine would continue reforms, we came to the conclusion that the best option was to follow a pattern that was in ANP, if only because the accession negotiations are based on the same structure that ANP has: it's the same five chapters in which you report on the implementation of reforms. Only this time we want it to be a short document with a list of reforms that are needed to join NATO, and which should not duplicate our obligations within the EU (Interfax, 2023).

One of the deliverables of the Vilnius Summit was the decision to launch a new institutional platform, NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC), to replace the NATO-Ukraine Commission founded in 1997. The new NUC has a different set-up in that all the members of this format are equal, including Ukraine. Some joint committees are expected to continue operating under the new NATO-Ukraine Council, following the same tracks as they did under the NATO-Ukraine Commission. It has to be mentioned that under the Commission, some joint working groups were dealing with defense and security reform, armaments and economic security, as well as scientific and environmental cooperation. Such working groups were involved, along with NATO Committees, in planning and arranging senior-level meetings of the Commission. The NUC is beneficial to both Ukraine and NATO, as Ukraine now has a lot of experience in warfare.

The inaugural NUC meeting took place on the 12th of June, 2023, with the attendance of Heads of State and Government, including Ukraine's President Zelensky. On the 16th of November, 2023, the NUC met on the level of military representatives. In October, 2023, NUC met on the level of defense ministers, in November – foreign ministers. At the time of writing, it is also notable that the NUC was summoned twice at the request of Ukraine in the crisis format – in August, 2023, following the attacks on the Black Sea infrastructure, and in January, 2024 after Russia's massive attacks on Ukraine's cities.

According to some analysts (Kuz, 2023), NUC is an element that can guarantee quicker and more efficient preparations for Ukraine's joining NATO. The important difference in comparison with previously existing NATO-Ukraine Commission, is that the NATO-Ukraine Council is the forum of (at the moment of writing) 32 equal states, not 31+1. During the Commission days, all allies had to reach a consensus to hold a meeting with Ukraine, which could be blocked by just one ally. Now Kyiv can also convene a meeting any time. The new formation has new committees and the subjects for discussion will be more than just necessary reforms and will include mutual security interests and issues Kyiv wants to highlight, such as hybrid and cyber warfare, or the defense industry. In addition, the allies and Ukraine act on the basis of a work program with clearly defined benchmarks.

4. Ukraine on the path towards membership – domestic reforms

In transatlantic integration of Ukraine, it is important to underline that the transformation of the state and society is quite thorough and results in the benefit for the Ukrainian society first and foremost. The following sections offer an analysis of the reforms that Ukraine is undertaking and still needs to undertake in the fields of the fight against corruption and the ethnic minorities question as the most contentious issues.

4.1. Case study: The fight against corruption in Ukraine

One of the most problematic areas in terms of reforms and functioning of the society is the endemic corruption in Ukraine. First of all, corruption is undermining other reforms. Secondly, it is undermining trust of the West and western investors, while the investments are of crucial importance for the future reconstruction of Ukraine. And it is an issue for both NATO and the EU accession.

Why and how has corruption become such an ever-present predicament in Ukrainian society? The roots of the corruption go deep into the times of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the so-called oligarchs began to play an important role in the economy and gained access to political power by their corrupted ways. The modern period can be tracked back even further into the past, as in the 1980s the Soviet nomenklatura was integrated with the Soviet organized crime. After regaining the independence, the privatization process was deeply flawed, as the previous nomenklatura and organized crime had access to it (for example, the acquisition of Dniproenergo by Renat Akhmetov). Back in 2007, then-US Ambassador William B. Taylor wrote that "like the subsequent sale of the Kryvorizhstal steel plant, it was apparent that the two Nikopol Ferroalloy Plant tenders [in 2003 and 2004] were rigged in favor of Viktor Pinchuk, the son-in-law of then-President Leonid Kuchma, for a cut-rate price" (Onyshkiv, 2011).

At the perceived level of corruption, Ukraine has been slowly improving its rating in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index from a rating of 1.5 out of possible 10 points in 2000 to a rating of 33 out of possible 100 points in 2020. Clearly, the people of Ukraine believe the situation is improving but also that it is improving very slowly, as the 2020 index rating of 33 is lower than that of Albania (36), Bosnia and Herzegovina (35), Armenia (49), Georgia (56), and Kazakhstan (38) (Kos, 2022). In 2022, the index remains the same in terms of ranking, 33 out of possible 100 points, but Kazakhstan and Armenia are now respectively at the level of 36 and 46 points. Ukraine is at the same level with Angola, Philippines, Algeria, Mongolia, and El Salvador (Transparency International, 2022).

The issue of corruption remains extremely acute and painful for the Ukrainian society, as evidenced by public opinion polls. For example, 94% of respondents say corruption is one of the main problems in Ukraine. This problem is particularly acute in the context of the war, when Ukrainians are sacrificing everything for the army and the defense of their homeland from the Russian aggression. In this context, 61.7% of Ukrainians believe that corruption in procurement for the army is the most harmful to Ukraine's ability to resist and defeat Russia (Petrenko, 2023).

The Ukrainian government defines its objectives in the fight against corruption in the national strategy for 2021-2025 (National Agency on Corruption Prevention, n.d.). The strategy is based on 5 key principles:

- optimization of functions of the state and local government. In particular, it is envisaged to eliminate excessive powers of the state bodies as well as the duplication of their functions;
- reduction of the 'human factor' and increase in transparency and efficiency of the state's relations with people and organizations. This will be achieved through the introduction of rules of general administrative procedure and digitalization of most processes and services;
- creation of convenient and legal alternatives to corrupt practices;
- ensuring effective state control over the observance by public servants of the rules of ethical conduct and requirements of anti-corruption legislation;
- ensuring the inevitability of liability for corruption and corruption-related offenses (National Agency on Corruption Prevention, n.d.).

President Zelensky understands well the importance of the fight against corruption, as he launched anti-corruption campaign in 2022 pursuing many law enforcement activities. The criminal cases filed show that the authorities of Ukraine go in depth in different sectors. For example, the cases against oligarchs included alleged tax avoidances (searches in the properties of Ukrainian businessman Ihor Kolomoysky, a former minister of internal affairs Arsen Avakov, in the offices of the Kyiv tax service). The SBI[2] has also served a notice of suspicion to a former minister of the Ministry of Energy and Coal Industry of Ukraine, whose negligence allegedly led to public budget losses of almost 40 million USD in favor of oligarch-owned companies (Kyiv Post, 2023). In addition, anti-corruption cases are connected to the corruption in the defense force, which is especially sensitive during the war. The Minister of Defense Oleksii Reznikov had to resign due to misuse of funds in military procurement, a whole set of officers in local military commissariats were sacked because of alleged bribes for help in avoiding military draft. It is also important that there were high level criminal cases against judges. It shows that the fight against corruption is working, as more senior level cases are started as well, for example, the case against Supreme Court Chairman Vsevolod Knyazev (Moskalenko, 2023). Counterintelligence units and investigators

---

[2] State Bureau of Investigation (Ukraine).

from the SSU[3] also revealed new information concerning the alleged criminal activities of Vyacheslav Bohuslaiev, ex-president of the Ukrainian aircraft engine company Motor Sich, who was already suspected of providing funding and support to Russian proxies and terrorists in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. In addition to these high-profile cases, numerous other operations were carried out around Ukraine by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), the Special Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), the police, and other law enforcement and anticorruption agencies (Minakov, 2023).

The European Commission assessed the progress in the fight against corruption in its report (European Commission, 2023). In general, the report issued in October 2023 concluded that on the fight against corruption, Ukraine has some level of preparation. The Commission brings out the establishment and consolidation of the anti-corruption institutional framework, as it is an important pre-requisite of addressing the challenges. Ukraine stepped up reforms in the area of investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating high-level corruption cases. The Commission stresses the importance of national anti-corruption strategy mentioned above and program for its implementation. The report states that, inter alia:

> The new Heads of the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) were appointed in July 2022 and March 2023 respectively, following transparent and meritocratic selection procedures with the involvement of independent experts. Since their appointment, NABU and SAPO have increased their cooperation and stepped up investigations into high-level corruption cases. The e-asset declaration system, suspended after the introduction of martial law, was restored and opened to the public, albeit with some potential weaknesses related to the verification powers of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) and the data to be verified. The Parliament has also adopted a law that would weaken administrative liability related to e-asset declarations, but the President has not signed this law into effect. To ensure the impact and sustainability of anti-corruption efforts, Ukraine should continue building a credible track record of investigations, prosecutions, and final court decisions in high-level corruption cases, including the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets. Timely and steady implementation of the 2023-2025 state anti-corruption programme should also be pursued. Efforts are also needed to further streamline and improve substantive and procedural criminal law. To cope with increasing workloads, the number of NABU staff, SAPO prosecutors and High Anti-Corruption Court judges should be increased. Furthermore, SAPO should be further protected from possible undue interference by improving the selection procedures for the Head of SAPO and its key officials, increasing its organisational and procedural autonomy, and improving its accountability framework (European Commission, 2023).

---

[3] Security Service of Ukraine.

In its report, the European Commission also assessed the so-called seven steps towards European integration. The checklist included: Constitutional Court reform, continuation of judiciary reform, anti-corruption, combatting money laundering, anti-oligarch reform, media legislation, alternation of legislation on national minorities (European Commission, 2023). As one can see, the majority of the steps (five out of seven) are associated with the fight against corruption. While the report assessed the fulfilment of the seven steps, the fulfilment of the five steps connected to corruption is summed up below. There are steps that the Commission deemed completed:

- step 1 – "enact and implement legislation on a selection procedure for judges of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, including a pre-selection process based on evaluation of their integrity and professional skills, in line with Venice Commission recommendations" (European Commission, 2023, p. 9);
- step 2 – "finalize the integrity vetting of the candidates for the High Council of Justice members by the Ethics Council and the selection of candidate to establish the High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine" (European Commission, 2023, p. 9);
- step 4 – "ensure that anti-money laundering legislation is in compliance with the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF); adopt an overarching strategic plan for the reform of the entire law enforcement sector as part of Ukraine's security environment" (European Commission, 2023, p. 10).

At the same time, the steps 3 and 5 needed some more work according to the Commission's assessment. Step 3 stipulates:

> further strengthen[ing] the fight against corruption, in particular at high level, through proactive and efficient investigations, and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions; complet[ing] the appointment of a new head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office through certifying the identified winner of the competition and launch[ing] and complet[ing] the selection process and appointment for a new Director of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (European Commission, 2023, p. 9).

The Commission report concludes that

> Ukraine should still enact a law raising the legislative staffing cap for the NABU and remove from the law on corruption prevention the provisions restricting the NACP's powers to continued verification of assets that have already undergone the verification process and limiting NACP's powers to verify property acquired by declarants before joining the public service, without prejudice to the rules applying to national security during wartime (European Commission, 2023, p. 10).

Step 5 requires implementation of the anti-oligarch law to limit the excessive influence of oligarchs in economic, political, and public life; this should be done in a legally sound manner, taking into account the forthcoming opinion of the Venice Commission on the relevant legislation. The Commission concludes that Ukraine still has some work to do: "Ukraine should still enact a law regulating lobbying in line with European standards, as part of the anti-oligarch action plan" (European Commission, 2023, p. 11).

4.2. Case study 2: Hungary and the issue of national minorities in Ukraine

The other most contentious issue in terms of domestic reforms is the minority issue. The territory of Ukraine is inhabited by many different ethnic groups, forming numerous ethnic minorities. Ukraine is home for representatives of 130 nationalities.

While analyzing the issue of minority, one cannot underestimate the role of history and the current state of affairs in terms of the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The identity of Ukrainian people is also closely connected to this question. The Ukrainian nation started to emerge in the 19th century, when the territory of what later became Ukraine was split between the Russian Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire. "When Ukraine became independent in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, anyone living on the territory had a right to citizenship. At that time, a little less than a quarter of the population identified as ethnically Russian and three-quarters as ethnically Ukrainian – alongside minorities, including Crimean Tatars" (Merino & Ware, 2022).

The identity of Russian-speakers was largely connected to the Russian empire and later the Soviet Union. This issue is quite complex also because of the fact that some ethnic Ukrainians became russophone after moving to large cities. This background is necessary to keep in mind while assessing the current Ukrainian legislation on minorities, language, and education. The preservation and development of the Ukrainian language is a crucial element of solidifying the national identity of Ukraine.

The main legal instrument regulating the issue is the Law on National Minorities. It was amended in September 2023 to satisfy the requirements of Venice Commission and thus facilitate Ukraine's bid for the European Union. The opinion of Venice Commission made specific recommendations as to how to improve the law, including also the recommendations concerning other laws. In particular, it recommends "to further postpone the gradual transformation of the minority language school-system and to reconsider it in the light of the 2017 Opinion the Venice Commission" (The European Commission for Democracy through Law, 2023).

The European Commission gave its opinion on the minority question under step 7 assessment in November 2023. Step 7 assumes "finaliz[ing] the reform of the legal framework for national minorities currently under preparation as recommended by the Venice Commission, and adopt[ing] immediate and effective implementation mechanisms" (European Commission, 2023, p. 11). The Commission concluded that

certain implementation mechanisms were adopted, among them the State Program Unity in Diversity, which are to be complemented by additional implementation measures, in particular a resolution on the methodology for language use in traditional settlements of persons belonging to national minorities or where they make up a significant part of the population (European Commission, 2023, p. 11).

In response to these opinions, Ukraine's parliament Verkhovna Rada adopted as a basis and as a whole the draft law No. 10288-1 "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Consideration of the Expert Assessment of the Council of Europe and its Bodies on the Rights of National Minorities (Communities) in Certain Areas" on December 8, 2023. On the same day, President Zelensky signed this law. The Ukrainian newspaper Ukrainska Pravda sums up the changes in the following way:

- private universities can freely choose the language of education among official EU languages, if they also teach Ukrainian as a separate discipline;
- classes being taught in languages of national minorities that are official languages of the EU, the right to use the national minority language in the educational process alongside the state language is guaranteed;
- representatives of national minorities of Ukraine whose languages are official languages of the EU and who started school before 1 September 2018 in the language of their minority may study in primary and secondary schools in accordance with the rules that were in force before the Law of Ukraine On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language came into force (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023).

It should be noted that the amendments do not apply to the Russian language as that of the aggressor state.

The issue of national minorities has become highly politicized due to the Hungarian position. Around 150 000 ethnic Hungarians live in Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia) region, although during the war a large part of the population, especially the Hungarian passport holders, left for European countries. Hungary has been vocal in demanding the protection of the rights of minorities in Ukraine.

The Western Ukrainian region is special – its territory has complex political and cultural history, characterized by constant migration and frequent changes of government entities. Hungarians came to the territory of modern Transcarpathian region eight centuries ago as the result of the Tatar-Mongol invasions and Ottoman colonization of the territory of modern Hungary. However, Hungarians appeared in the Ukrainian state only 65 years ago – after the Transcarpathian region was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic in 1945 (Chvorostov et al., 2011).

The Hungarian position towards its minorities according to some researchers constitute an 'ethnic trap' for Ukraine. The dispute between Kyiv and Budapest over guaranteeing the rights of the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine has been

ongoing for over five years, starting immediately after the adoption of the 2017 educational law. The relationship between Hungary and Ukraine has worsened and led to a bilateral crisis in many issues. The problems include the dual citizenship and distributing of Hungarian passports to ethnic Hungarians; the education and language laws of Ukraine and the call by Hungarians to give the Hungarian language official regional status in Transcarpathia; demands for autonomy for the Hungarian minority, such as cultural, political, and territorial, including the creation of a 'Hungarian district'; use of Hungarian symbols in the public sphere (e.g. flags on administrative buildings). In addition, the relations deteriorated due to Hungarian officials' interference in the Parliamentary elections in 2019 and local elections in 2020 in Ukraine and the malign influence of Russia in Hungary in general, including 'gas power' (Tuzhanskyi, 2023).

Recently, some positive developments in bilateral relations took place. Notably, on January 29, 2023, the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries took place in Uzhgorod, Ukraine. It was the first visit of the Hungarian foreign minister Peter Szijjarto to Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion by Russia in 2022. The meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba has, according to Szijjarto, "doubtlessly stopped a negative spiral" (El País, 2024). It remains to be seen how the diplomatic ties between Hungary and Ukraine develop.

5. NATO and the European Union – possible areas of convergence in monitoring reforms

In a way, the process of Ukraine's integration into the transatlantic structures mirrors the one the Baltic states went through earlier. The reforms, which have to take place are necessary first of all for the nation itself to become a fully functional democracy. At the same time, the nation receives a very thorough guidance and scrutiny from the transatlantic institutions, and here the role of the European Union is indispensable. The innovations of the NATO Vilnius Summit were briefly analyzed above, and the examples of two case studies concerning the necessary reforms were described. In this subchapter the process which Ukraine is going through in the European Union integration will be considered.

Ukraine applied for the membership of the European Union in the midst of a war. In the summer of 2022, the EU granted Ukraine a candidate status. A list of seven requirements related to reforms came together in the package. The European Commission presented Ukraine with the so-called seven steps plan, as mentioned earlier (Sydorenko, 2023). On 8 November, the European Commission issued the communication on enlargement policy, or Ukraine 2023 Report (European Commission, 2023). It concluded that in spite of Russian aggression, Ukraine steadily introduced needed reforms, and the candidate status granted in June 2022 accelerated this track. It assessed the fulfilment

of seven steps, four of them considered completed by the report. The Commission thus recommended opening accession talks with the EU. Ms. von der Leyen said Ukraine had completed "well over 90% of the necessary reforms" that the EU set out last year, adding that "the goal is truly within reach" (Bettiza, 2023).

In light of the results achieved by Ukraine and Moldova, and of the ongoing reform efforts, the Commission has recommended that the Council opens accession negotiations with both countries. Furthermore, the Commission recommended that Council adopts the negotiating frameworks once Ukraine and Moldova have adopted certain key measures. At the European Council meeting in December 2023, the historic decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine (and Moldova) were made. The political consequences of this decision include Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban walking out of the room. Hungary continued holding at that point its controversial position by blocking the aid to Ukraine at the same meeting. The process of Ukraine's joining the European Union is long and thorough, there are more than 70 decision points where a member state can block the process. Nevertheless, the historic step was taken, and the monitoring of reforms will continue.

For Ukraine, the strategic partnership with NATO is an integral part of the European integration course. It is connected with and is partly overlapping with the process of domestic transformation in the context of the accession to the European Union. What about the cooperation between NATO and the EU on the matter of Ukraine joining both of these organizations? While the practical day-to-day consultations between NATO and the EU are ongoing in many matters, the official NATO-EU cooperation is quite limited, including due to the difference in the membership of these organizations, as they do not overlap. The membership of Turkey in NATO, and the membership of Cyprus in the European Union mean that the contentious issues between these two countries make formal cooperation between the two organizations difficult. The agreements do exist in the sphere of security, mostly concentrated on crisis management and focusing on development of European defense capabilities. The so-called 'Berlin plus' arrangement is guiding the work in this regard. The question of enlargement of both organizations is definitely outside the scope of these formal arrangements. Thus, the present formal cooperation does not concern the issue of Ukraine.

The issue of future enlargements though, notably one of Ukraine, could be dealt with in the framework of mutually beneficial consultations on the working level. Though the processes of the enlargements of both organizations are separate, they are, in practice, parallel. Since both organizations are demanding many reforms, it is clear that in Ukraine the authorities and the entire society are working on them simultaneously. Therefore, the evaluation could be better coordinated. The European Union has a more thorough process of assessment and the scope of the reforms it monitors is wider than that of NATO. The EU officials could present their findings to NATO on a working level, e.g. the Chair of EU Council Working Group on Enlargement could give regular

briefings to NATO committees or North Atlantic Council. Staff-to-staff contacts could be also deepened and strengthened to embrace the issue of reforms.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter, the process of NATO enlargement and the necessary steps Ukraine has to take on its path towards membership were analyzed. Ukraine's agency and the sovereign will of its people fighting the cruel aggression of Russia should be taken into account at every stage of this process. As the findings of this chapter show, there is a mechanism for taking in new members into NATO, though it is not set in stone, and the enlargements have a very strong political element to them. The previous enlargements and the mechanisms of Membership Action Plan (MAP) and Annual National Programs (ANP) were described in this chapter. The decisions of the Vilnius Summit allowed Ukraine to skip the step of MAP and concentrate on the adapted ANP. In addition, NATO-Ukraine Council has been created, which is another useful tool to concentrate on the concrete steps towards membership. The findings of the chapter also show that the processes of enlargement of NATO and the European Union, though separate, are parallel, and many reforms are done in unison. The chapter has also analyzed two case studies that show the complexity of reforms. The European Union has a more sophisticated apparatus to assess the reforms, and thus, it would be efficient for NATO to use the EU's findings. Thus, it is recommended:

- to continue the reform track for Ukraine, bearing in mind that the moment NATO deems the necessary preparations for membership ready, the decision to accept Ukraine into NATO should be taken. At the Washington Summit, the invitation to join NATO should be issued, as it will be a boost to the morale of Ukraine. It will not mean the immediate full membership. Rather, the accession talks will start, as well as the necessary reforms assessed in this framework;
- to continue work in the framework of NATO-Ukraine Council, as it is beneficial to both Ukraine and NATO. The NUC should be the primary forum for the discussion of both necessary reforms, and also the political issues. The work program of the NUC will be the instrument to increase interoperability. At the Washington Summit, NUC has to issue a common statement;
- to establish a more efficient consultation mechanism on reforms between NATO and the European Union. Stressing that the processes of enlargement of both organizations are separate and may move at different speed, on a technical level, there is benefit of coordination of the preparations. Informal consultations on the level of working groups could be beneficial, for example, the chair of the EU working group on enlargement could regularly brief relevant NATO committees on the progress of reforms.

References

Bettiza, S. (2023, November 8). *Ukraine gets European Commission backing for talks on Ukraine membership*. BBC https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67354323

Chvorostov, V. B., Bakirov, V., Kizilov, A., & Kizilova, K. (2011). *The Hungarian Minority in Ukraine*. Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.11194.59844

Clemmesen, M. H. (1999). Before implementation of the Membership Action Plan: Baltic States' defence development until the present. *Baltic Defence Review*, 2(2), 35–42.

Coffey, L. (2024). *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization at 75: Reflecting on Past Successes and Planning for the Future*. Hudson Institute.

Defense Express. (2023, July 11). *Following the example of Sweden and Finland, NATO Membership Action Plan was canceled for Ukraine... or not*. https://en.defence-ua.com/events/following_the_example_of_sweden_and_finland_nato_membership_action_plan_was_canceled_for_ukraine_or_not-7279.html

El País. (2024, January 29). *Ukrainian and Hungarian foreign ministers meet but fail to break a diplomatic deadlock*. El País. https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-01-29/ukrainian-and-hungarian-foreign-ministers-meet-but-fail-to-break-a-diplomatic-deadlock.html

European Commission. (2023). *Commission Staff Working Document. Ukraine 2023 Report. Accompanying the Document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Reigons. 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a0f3eaa6-7eee-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Fakhurdinova, M. (2023, July 9). *No longer a mésalliance: How well prepared are NATO and Ukraine for each other?* Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies. https://sceeus.se/en/publications/no-longer-a-mesalliance-how-well-prepared-are-nato-and-ukraine-for-each-other/#_

Interfax. (2023, September 27). *Halibarenko: Annual National Programme for Ukraine to achieve NATO criteria to be adapted, adopted by end of 2023*. https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/937475.html

Khimiak, A. (2023, November 2). *Will the next Annual National Programme bring Ukraine closer to NATO membership?* Ukraine Crisis Media Center. https://uacrisis.org/en/annual-national-program-ukraine-nato-membership

Klaiber, K.-P. (1999). The membership. Action plan: Keeping NATO's door open. *NATO Review, 2*, 23.

Kos, D. (2022, June 14). *War and corruption in Ukraine*. Eucrim. https://eucrim.eu/articles/war-and-corruption-in-ukraine/#docx-to-html-fn2

Kuz, I. (2023, August 2). *A cloudy dawn for Ukraine's new NATO era*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/article/a-cloudy-dawn-for-ukraines-new-nato-era/

Kyiv Post. (2023, February 1). *EXPLAINED: What do we know about latest searches and dismissals of Ukrainian officials*. https://www.kyivpost.com/post/11740

Landgraf, W. (2023, July 20). *Off the MAP: Ukraine and the problems of expanding NATO*. Foreign Policy Research Institute. https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/07/off-the-map-ukraine-and-the-problems-of-expanding-nato/

Lawrence, T., & Jermalavičius, T. (2013). *Apprenticeship, Partnership, Membership: Twenty Years of Defence Development in the Baltic States*. ICDS.

Merino, D., & Ware, G. (2022, March 18). *The history and evolution of Ukrainian national identity - podcast*. https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/the-history-and-evolution-of-ukrainian-national-identity--podcast/

Minakov, M. (2023, February 13). *Fighting corruption in wartime Ukraine*. Wilson Center. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/fighting-corruption-wartime-ukraine

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2014, December 2). *Latvia's Annual National Programme 2001. Executive Summary*. https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/security-policy/latvia-s-contribution/latvia-s-annual-national-program-2001

Moskalenko, O. (2023, June 26). *Judging the judges: Ukraine's battle with courtroom corruption*. CEPA. https://cepa.org/article/judging-the-judges-ukraines-battle-with-courtroom-corruption/

National Agency on Corruption Prevention. (n.d.). *Anti-Corruption Strategy*. https://nazk.gov.ua/en/anti-corruption-strategy/

NATO. (1995, September 3). *Study on NATO Enlargement*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

NATO. (2023, July 11). *Vilnius Summit Communiqué*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

Onyshkiv, Y. (2011, September 2). *Clearer picture. U.S. officials describe Ukraine as kleptocracy in Wikileaks cables*. Kyiv Post. https://www.kyivpost.com/post/7704

Petrauskaite, J. (1999). Membership Action Plan: Practical results from the Washington Summit. *Baltic Defence Review, 2*, 15-25.

Petrenko, I. (2023, September 11). *The fight against corruption in Ukraine: Myths and realities*. Agenda Publica. https://agendapublica.elpais.com/noticia/18807/fight-against-corruption-ukraine-myths-and-realities

Sydorenko, S. (2023, February 1). *Seven steps for Ukraine's EU future. How does Kyiv implement Brussels' checklist?* European Pravda. https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/articles/2023/02/1/7155269/

The North Atlantic Treaty. (1949). https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf

The European Commission for Democracy through Law. (2023, June 12). *Ukraine. Opinion on the Law on National Minorities (Communities)*. https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2023)021-e

Transparency International. (2022). *Corruption Perceptions Index*. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/

Tuzhanskyi, D. (2023, February 23). *How Ukraine must develop its minority policy and avoid ethnic trap during EU accession negotiations, and how internationalpartners could help*. GLOBSEC. https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/how-ukraine-must-develop-its-minority-policy-avoid-ethnic-trap-during-eu

Ukrainska Pravda. (2023, December 8). *Zelenskyy signs amendments to law on national minorities*. https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/12/8/7432299/

Wintour, P. (2023, November 11). *Ex-NATO chief proposes Ukraine joins without Russian-occupied territories*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/11/ex-nato-chief-proposes-ukraine-joins-without-russian-occupied-territories

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization in… the Pacific?

Daniel C. Love[1]
e-mail: dannylove8242@gmail.com

Abstract: This chapter examines the history of relations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Asia-Pacific countries, specifically Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea, or the so-called Asia-Pacific 4 (AP4), as well as recent developments and evolutions in those respective relationships in order to analyse what has driven deepening cooperation between NATO and the AP4, in what areas cooperation will occur, what cooperation might look like in practice and what it may evolve in to, whether this cooperation will succeed and endure, and who will it benefit versus who will it counter.

Keywords: NATO Strategic Concept, Asia-Pacific, People's Republic of China

1. Introduction

This chapter is an effort to capture in brief overview the relations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its Asia-Pacific partners of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea (ROK), or the so-call Asia-Pacific 4 (AP4). While not intended to be exhaustive in scope, this chapter strives to inform on both the history of the NATO-AP4 relationships with each respective AP4 partner country, the recent developments in those relationships as a result of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the subsequent 2022 NATO Strategic Concept (NSC), as well as what areas NATO and its respective AP4 partners will cooperate on and what this cooperation may evolve into. Analysis on NATO and AP4 relations and suppositions on the trajectory and overall success of deepening NATO and AP4 partner relationships vis-a-vis the upcoming NATO Summit in Washington in July 2024 and beyond conclude this chapter.

---

[1] LtCol Daniel C. Love, active-duty US Marine Corps Eurasia Foreign Area Officer and Northeast Asia Regional Affairs Officer. ORCID: 0009-0000-7744-9226.

2. A brief history of NATO and institutional adaptation

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949 at the height of the Cold War between the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), with its primary purpose, according to NATO's first Secretary General Lord Ismay being to "keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down" in Europe (Johnston, 2017, p. 1). In other words, a transatlantic alliance between the US and Europe was created in order to ensure peace and stability on the European continent after World War II (WWII), with the primary purpose in 1949 being to serve as a bulwark Alliance against the USSR in free Europe.

Since the signing of the Washington Treaty in 1949, NATO has undergone myriad institutional adaptations in order to remain fit for purpose. In his comprehensive work *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950* Dr Seth A. Johnston argues that "NATO undergoes significant change with some regularity" (Johnston, 2017, p. 1) and that "these changes and their boldness and frequency over a period of nearly seventy years distinguish NATO from other international institutions" (Johnston, 2017, p. 1). However, Dr Johnston rightly asks: "Would Lord Ismay recognize NATO today? In its seventh decade, NATO's missions, functional scope, size, and membership are profoundly different from those of its origins" (Johnston, 2017, p. 1). He rightly notes that today's NATO, now with 32 member nations, and the missions and initiatives it has undertaken as well as the adaptations it has undergone since 1949 would likely astound the original twelve Washington Treaty signatories. However, these missions, initiatives, and adaptations have been critical to ensuring that NATO has remained fit for purpose throughout its history. NATO has, and likely will continue, to successfully adapt as an institution in order to remain the greatest Alliance in the history of the world.

Dr Johnston posits that NATO has undergone five major strategic adaptations in its history, caused by so-called 'critical junctures' that were catalysts to NATO institutional adaptation. These were the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950 leading to the subsequent accession of West Germany to NATO in 1955, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 resulting in the Military Committee (MC) 14/3 Strategic Concept and the Harmel Report in 1967, the end of the Cold War in 1989-1991 and the subsequent implementation of NATO's post-Cold War Strategic Concept in 1991, and the September 11, 2001 attacks and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expansion in 2006 in Afghanistan (Johnston, 2017, p. 179). According to Johnston:

> [T]he outbreak of war in a divided Korea raised fears of war in a divided Europe too. This period saw a reevaluation of Germany's role in the post-World War II order (…). [T]he Cuban Missile Crisis and détente raised questions about the credibility of American nuclear deterrence (…). But NATO adapted by

> developing the Nuclear Planning Group, the strategy of 'flexible response', and an increased political dimension embodied in the Harmel Report. (…) [T]he collapse of the Cold War order in Europe and of the Soviet Union (…) [was] perhaps NATO's best-known critical juncture. (…) NATO's purpose was unclear. (…) NATO adaptation and strategy-making turned to membership enlargement, political engagement, and crisis management in the former Yugoslavia. (…) [The last adaptation of NATO took place after] the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, especially with respect to NATO's involvement in Afghanistan (Johnston, 2017, p. 6-7).

These historical examples support that NATO as an institution has successfully adapted to the external challenges it faced throughout its history. Dr Johnston further details that, from its inception, the Washington Treaty of 1949, or NATO, is:

> more than simply an agreement among states. (…) [T]he Atlantic Alliance has exhibited a much higher degree of formal institutionalization than most other alliances. Although its formal institutions have changed and developed over time, NATO has included from a very early state a permanent administrative bureaucracy with independent agencies; an integrated multinational command structure; and common standards, doctrine, and procedures. (…) NATO is also an international organization (Johnston, 2017, p. 12).

NATO as an international organization and as a transatlantic alliance is as relevant today as it was in 1949, given Russia's full-scale war of aggression in Ukraine that commenced on 24 February 2022, as well as Russia's seizure of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and invasion and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine's Donbas region beginning 20 February 2014. However, was NATO fit for purpose in 2014 and 2022 respectively to serve as a guarantor of peace and security of its Alliance members? If looked at through the three core tasks of NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, Collective Defence, Crisis Management, and Collective Security, there is a lack of evidence to conclude whether NATO would have been able to respond adequately in support of Allies. However, it is evident that NATO lacked the capacity to respond in support of its partner Ukraine in order to stop Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region thereafter.

However, since 2014, and especially since 2022, NATO has awakened to the threat posed to Europe, the transatlantic alliance, and beyond by Russia's invasion and subsequent full-scale war of aggression in Ukraine. In particular, support from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Russia has caused NATO to re-examine its views on both the PRC and the importance of the Asia-Pacific region as it relates to Euro-Atlantic security. That is not to say that NATO lacked awareness of the problems posed by the PRC prior to 2022. The PRC was already on NATO and the European Union's

(EU's) radar prior to 2022, primarily due to heavy PRC investment in European infrastructure such as 5G from the PRC company Huawei. Therefore, while NATO was aware of the presence and potential problems posed by the PRC prior to 2022, PRC support to Russia in 2022 forced the Alliance to sharpen its outlook on the PRC as it relates to European security and subsequently security of the Asia-Pacific. As a result, NATO's relationships with its Asia-Pacific partners, particularly Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the ROK, the so-called AP4, have taken on a new level of importance in the 2022 NSC and subsequent actions by NATO. Likewise, NATO's rhetoric regarding the PRC has evolved since 2019 to recognize the challenges the PRC poses to Euro-Atlantic security. Again, the problem posed by PRC companies vis-à-vis their investment in critical European infrastructure was becoming evident in European security circles circa 2015; however, the awareness of NATO to the problem was evident by 2019 and became unequivocally stated in NATO's 2022 NSC. It is arguable that NATO is once again at a so-called 'critical juncture' of institutional adaptation that is setting the future strategic direction of not only the NATO Alliance, but also the conditions for peace, prosperity, stability, and freedom of the Euro-Atlantic region as well as the Asia-Pacific region. In order to better understand how NATO's relationships with its AP4 partners will influence this, and what consequences such relationships may have, it is crucial to understand the history of the relations between NATO and its AP4 partners, the current situation and 2022 NSC, and the likely outcomes of such a situation as it develops in 2024 and beyond.

3. Overview of the history of relations between NATO and Asia-Pacific partners

Cooperation between NATO and its AP4 partners goes back almost two decades in all instances of NATO relations with its respective AP4 partners, and even as far back as over three decades in the instance of NATO-Japan relations. This section will provide a brief historical overview of NATO and its respective AP4 partners in alphabetical order: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the ROK.

Australia and NATO have cooperated in areas of mutual interest since 2005 (NATO, 2024b). Regarding NATO-led operations and missions, Australia was "one of the largest non-NATO troop contributors to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)" from 2003 through 2014 as well as its follow-on Resolute Support Mission (RSM) from 2015 until 2021 where it contributed Australian personnel to "train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions" (NATO, 2024b). Australia also is an operational partner in NATO Mission Iraq which is "a non-combat advisory and capacity-building mission launched in July 2018 that aims to strengthen Iraqi institutions and forces" (NATO, 2024b). Regarding maritime security, Australia is an operational partner for both NATO's Operation Sea Guardian, "NATO's maritime

security operation in the Mediterranean (…) conducting three maritime security tasks: maritime security capacity building, support to maritime situational awareness and maritime counter-terrorism" (NATO, 2023a) and a past participant of Operation Ocean Shield, which from 2008-2016 "helped to deter and disrupt pirate attacks, while protecting vessels and helping to increase the general level of security" (NATO, 2022a) in the Gulf of Aden and in the Indian Ocean (NATO, 2024b). Regarding key areas of cooperation, Australia has, since 2014, participated in the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII), which "brings Allies together with selected partners that are active contributors to NATO's operations. Australia is also one of five countries that have enhanced opportunities for dialogue and cooperation with the Allies (known as 'Enhanced Opportunities Partners') in recognition of their particularly significant contributions to NATO operations and other Alliance objectives" (NATO, 2024b). Australia also cooperates in NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program framework in the areas of "emerging and disruptive technologies and energy security" (NATO, 2024b).

The Japan and NATO relationship dates back to the early 1990s when initial contacts were made for political dialogue and cooperation, with Japan's most notable contributions to NATO-led operations in the intervening years being Japan's "generous contributions to NATO Trust fund projects in various partner countries (…) [and] support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and for wider reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. It helped mobilise international support for Afghanistan by organizing the Tokyo Conference in July 2012 (…) [as well as] played a role in stabilizing the Balkans" (NATO, 2023e). Regarding maritime security, Japan has trained its Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) with NATO ships in both the Baltic Sea in 2018 and the Mediterranean in 2022 as well as having a liaison officer at NATO's Maritime Command in the United Kingdom (NATO, 2023e). Regarding key areas of cooperation, since 2014 Japan has also participated in NATO's PII, enhanced cooperation with NATO "in the area of emerging and disruptive technologies through (…) participation in the activities of NATO's Science and Technology Organization (STO)", and is engaged in NATO's SPS Program framework in the areas of "counter-terrorism and the detection of mines and unexploded ordnance" (NATO, 2023e).

New Zealand and NATO have cooperated in areas of mutual interest since 2001 (NATO, 2023f). Regarding NATO-led operations and missions, New Zealand "made a significant contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)" from the early 2000s through 2014, as well as to its follow-on Resolute Support Mission (RSM) from 2015 until 2021 where it contributed personnel to "train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions" (NATO, 2023f). Likewise, New Zealand armed forces officers served in the NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NATO, 2023f). Regarding maritime security, New Zealand

contributed twice to the aforementioned Operation Ocean Shield NATO conducted in the Gulf Aden and also to Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean in 2015 (NATO, 2022c). Regarding key areas of cooperation, since 2014 New Zealand has also participated in NATO's PII "to develop capability between NATO and New Zealand and to build capacities in other countries (…) [through] operations, exercises and training; exchanges of information, personnel and lessons learned; as well as involvement in the development of standards and science and technology cooperation" (NATO, 2023f). New Zealand also cooperates with NATO through its SPS Program, focusing on "counter-terrorism and small states' responses to salient security challenges" (NATO, 2023f).

The ROK, or South Korea, as it is more commonly referred to, has engaged in "dialogue and cooperation since 2005" (NATO, 2023d). Regarding NATO-led operations and missions, South Korea "[f]rom 2010 to 2013, as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (…) led an integrated civilian-military Provincial Reconstruction Team of some 470 personnel in Parwan Province (…) [and contributed] to the NATO-run Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust fund", serving as the latter's co-chair in 2020 (NATO, 2023d). Regarding maritime security, South Korean naval forces provided merchant vessel escorts through the Gulf of Aden in cooperation with NATO's Operation Ocean Shield (NATO, 2023d). South Korea is also a participant in NATO's SPS Program, "focusing on activities in the fields of advanced technologies, counter-terrorism, and defence against chemical, biological radiological and nuclear (CBRN) agents", as well as cooperating through the PII since 2014 and on cyber defense since 2021 (NATO, 2023d).

As is evidenced in the above overviews of all NATO AP4 partner nations, there has been significant cooperation between these AP4 partners in key areas such as support to NATO military operations (notably land, maritime, cyber, and information domains, etc.), military interoperability, security related research initiatives, the development of science and technology, cooperation on emerging contested domains, et al. all in order to further mutual interests and capabilities of NATO and AP4 partners as they relate to peace and security. All AP4 NATO partners previously had bilateral Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP) agreements between themselves and NATO, which were signed between 2012 and 2014 respectively (Galic, 2023). In the section 5 of this chapter entitled Areas of cooperation between NATO and the AP4, the Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP) bilateral agreements between NATO and its AP4 partners, that came into effect in 2023 and cover until 2026 and which have superseded the aforementioned IPCPs, will be addressed. Related to the evolution of NATO relations with its AP4 partners, all four AP4 nations participated for the first time at the Heads of State and Government level in NATO's 2022 Madrid Summit, and subsequently for the second time at the 2023 Vilnius Summit (NATO, 2023b, 2023e, 2023f, 2023d, 2024b). This was preceded by the participation of their

Foreign Ministers in myriad NATO Foreign Ministerial meetings since 2020 (NATO, 2023g), as well as the fact that the AP4 partners regularly participate in meetings at NATO Headquarters between NATO Allies and the four partners in the Indo-Pacific region at the level of Ambassadors (NATO, 2023e, 2023f, 2023d, 2024b). It is likely that all four AP4 NATO partners will be present at the 2024 Washington Summit at the Heads of State and Government level, and that the cooperative bilateral relationships between NATO and its AP4 partners will continue to deepen in concrete and measurable ways, now withstanding any unforeseen and monumental paradigm shifting developments in the regional security of the Asia-Pacific between now and July 2024. NATO's rhetorical shift from 2019 to present regarding the PRC has been notable and is worth exploring in detail, with the most notable shift being the 2022 NSC.

4. 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and evolving policy on the Asia-Pacific

The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022b) is a clear shift of NATO views toward the PRC and the importance of the Asia-Pacific region. According to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly report entitled *NATO and the Indo Pacific Region* by Marcos Perestrello:

> [i]n recent years, NATO has been increasingly turning its attention to the Indo-Pacific region. China was first publicly mentioned in the declaration of the London Summit in December 2019 and again at the Brussels summits in June 2021 and March 2022. The new Strategic Concept contains extensive references to China and implies that it is a strategic competitor. At the same time, NATO has considerably expanded co-operation with the Asia-Pacific partners (the so-called AP4: Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand) in the areas such as cyber, technology, resilience, arms control, maritime security and climate change (Perestrello, 2022, p. 2).

The main catalyst of this attention paid by NATO to the Asia-Pacific and the subsequent deepening of its cooperation with its existing partners in the region, according to Perestrello (2022), is that developments in that region can and do directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. It is overtly stated in the 2022 NSC that "[t]he Indo-Pacific is important for NATO, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. We will strengthen dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests" (NATO, 2022b, p. 11).

Furthermore, the 2022 NSC is very direct in addressing the systemic challenges that the PRC poses to NATO and Euro-Atlantic security writ-large, stating:

> The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC employs a broad range of political, economic and military tools to increase its global footprint and project power, while remaining opaque about its strategy, intentions and military build-up. The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security. The PRC seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and enhance its influence. It strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains. The deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests (NATO, 2022b, p. 5).

The bottom line, and best summary, of the preceding key paragraph from the 2022 NSC is that the "deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests" (NATO, 2022b, p. 5). This is at the core of NATO's rhetorical shift and its more assertive stance toward the PRC in the 2022 NSC, as well as its deepening relationships with its AP4 partners. NATO views the PRC as a challenge to Euro-Atlantic security interests as well as to the rules based international order in key areas such as military arms build-up, military strategy, cyber operations, information operations, key technologies and industries, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply-chains. One paragraph later in the 2022 NSC it is stated that NATO "will stand up for our shared values and the rules-based international order, including freedom of navigation" (NATO, 2022b, p. 5).

One of the most interesting facets of NATO's increased interest in the Asia-Pacific region is that it seemingly occurred as a result of the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, as previously mentioned, the events of 2022 served to sharpen NATO's focus on the PRC as a strategic challenge. That is to say, NATO did not suddenly become aware of the challenges to Euro-Atlantic security coming from the PRC merely as a result of China's support to Russia after 24 February 2022; however, it did sharpen its focus on the problem the PRC poses. The reliance of Europe in February 2022 on Russian energy exports was a critical vulnerability for a preponderance of Alliance members, and a shock to those same Alliance members that Russia, and possibly other malign actors, would use such critical vulnerabilities as leverage. Published in July of that same year, the 2022 NSC asserts that NATO:

will work towards identifying and mitigating strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies, including with respect to our critical infrastructure, supply chains and health systems. We will enhance our energy security and invest in a stable and reliable energy supply, suppliers and sources. We will ensure civil preparedness to provide for continuity of government, the delivery of essential services to our populations and civil support to our armed forces. We will boost our capacity to prepare for, resist, respond to, and quickly recover from strategic shocks and disruptions, and ensure the continuity of the Alliance's activities… We will invest in our ability to prepare for, deter, and defend against the coercive use of political, economic, energy, information and other hybrid tactics by states and nonstate actors. Hybrid operations against Allies could reach the level of armed attack and could lead the North Atlantic Council to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO, 2022b, p. 7).

If nothing else, NATO has awakened to the fact that the world from 2022 onwards is and will be very different from the post-Cold War peace dividend that characterized geopolitics and the international relations of the preceding 30 some years. NATO realizes now, if it did not before 2022, that it has glaring strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies vis-à-vis China and Russia related to European critical infrastructure, supply chains, energy supplies, and military preparedness in both materiel and personnel. In describing the strategic environment that many NATO members awakened to as a reality in February 2022, the 2022 NSC stated:

The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace. The Russian Federation has violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks define our broader security environment. The threats we face are global and interconnected…Authoritarian actors challenge our interests, values and democratic way of life. They are investing in sophisticated conventional, nuclear and missile capabilities, with little transparency or regard for international norms and commitments. Strategic competitors test our resilience and seek to exploit the openness, interconnectedness and digitalisation of our nations (NATO, 2022b, p. 3).

This rhetorical shift by NATO is not just directed at Russia but also, as evidenced in the above excerpt from the 2022 NSC, at the PRC which can likewise be characterized as an authoritarian actor that challenges NATO's interests, values and democratic way of life, not least through its declaration of a 'no limits' partnership between the PRC and Russia. A plurality, if not majority, of NATO Allies finally awakened from their so-call 'end-of-history' post-Cold War dream to the reality of geopolitics in the 21st century as a result of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the PRC's support to Russia

in its invasion against Ukraine. According to Thierry Tardy (2022), in NATO's New Strategic Concept the 2022 NSC states:

> importantly, for the first time ever, the new Concept mentions China, stating that its politics challenge Allied 'security and values' (…). There is an understanding that China poses a number of problems to the Alliance (…), yet how and where NATO can or will respond is still to be defined. Nevertheless, the very fact that the Concept mentions China indicates a shift in Alliance policy (Tardy, 2022, p. 2-3).

Therefore, NATO's rhetorical and strategic shift in its 2022 NSC recognizes Russia and China, both authoritarian regimes that have deepened their partnership and cooperation since Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, as threats to NATO members and partners shared interests, security, and values grounded in the post-Cold War rules-based international order.

Public statements made by NATO officials since the 2022 Madrid Summit and the release of the 2022 NSC, have continued to underline the importance of NATO and its AP4 partners' cooperation. At a joint press conference following a two-day meeting of the NATO Military Committee (MC) on 18 January 2024, Admiral Rob Bauer stated that the MC held "a dedicated session with NATO's Indo-Pacific Partners being Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea. We talked about how we can create more and better military cooperation. When it comes to security there is no such thing as local. All security is connected" (NATO, 2024a). Likewise, in December 2023 a delegation consisting of eight NATO member countries visited Seoul, South Korea to "engage in discussions on the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region and other pertinent issues" and as such was a collective visit by NATO allies of the US, United Kingdom, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Czechia, Romania, and Poland that "is seen as the first of its kind, and aligns with NATO's increased collaboration with its four Asia-Pacific partners" (Da-gyum, 2023). Politically, at a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting on 28 November, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO "must be clear-eyed about the impact of China's coercive policies on our security (…) [as] the challenges we face are global (…) [and] work more closely with partners, including in the Indo-Pacific to stand up for our values and interests" (NATO, 2023i). When asked about where he wants to land on NATO's strategy on China during a media question and answer session at that conference, Secretary General Stoltenberg emphasized that China's significance in terms of security cannot be overlooked. He pointed out that although NATO will continue to be an Alliance primarily focused on North America and Europe, the region itself confronts global threats and challenges. Among these challenges lies the security implications of China's actions, particularly their increasing collaboration with Russia. He further highlighted that many of the

measures adopted by NATO are applicable to addressing the challenges posed by China, even if they are not explicitly labeled as such (NATO, 2023h).

These examples underscore the overarching rhetorical shift of NATO, starting in 2019 with the London Summit Declaration and culminating in a seismic shift with the 2022 NSC clearly identifying both Russia and China as strategic competitors that are actively working to undermine the shared interests, security, and values of NATO and its partners.

The bottom line is that Russia and the PRC, in actions and words, present a systemic challenge to the rules-based international order that NATO seeks to preserve as well as to NATO's inherent interests, values and democratic way of life; NATO took a firm stand in its 2022 NSC to preserve and protect those facets now and in the future. Likewise, the systemic challengers identified in the 2022 NSC seek to exploit the openness of not only the societies of the Alliance but also those of all free and open nations, including the AP4 NATO partners. Therefore, NATO responded by developing its 2022 New Strategic Concept in order to reduce, or eliminate, its exploitable vulnerabilities given the new strategic environment. NATO is seeking to increase member nation resilience as well as partner nation resilience in some cases as well, notably with its AP4 partners. The most recent 2010 NATO Strategic Concept was no longer sufficient to guide NATO's strategic actions toward the end-state of preserving the rules-based international order, therefore the 2022 NSC was developed. Likewise, the IPCPs between NATO and its existing AP4 partners were insufficient ways and means to meet the demands of the changed security environment in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific vis-à-vis both Russia and China. Therefore, the ITPPs between NATO and its long-standing AP4 partners are some of the ways and means NATO intends to increase resilience in Alliance and AP4 nations, and also to take concrete action in standing up for their shared interests, security, and values in order to achieve the end-state of preserving the rules-based international order.

5. Areas of cooperation between NATO and the AP4

Most notably since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, NATO members have unequivocally supported Ukraine in defending itself as well as those Allies strengthening their own intra-Alliance cohesion in the face of Russia's war of aggression. Likewise, Japan and South Korea have been visible supporters of Ukraine. Most recently, Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko visited Kyiv on 7 January 2024, the first official foreign state visit to Ukraine of 2024 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024), and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol visited Ukraine in July 2023, where he toured Bucha and Irpin, nearby Kyiv, and the sites of atrocities early on during Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine (Associated Press, 2023). Both Japan

and South Korea have had previous high-level visits with Ukraine, with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visiting Ukraine in March 2023 and South Korean President Yoon meeting Ukrainian President Volodymry Zelensky in May 2023 at the G-7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan as well as receiving the first lady of Ukraine that same month in Seoul, South Korea (Associated Press, 2023). Mostly notably, Japan and South Korea have pledged non-lethal aid to Ukraine directly and the latter has sold billions in war materiel to Poland and the US in order to allow them to replenish their stocks that were sent to Ukraine (Associated Press, 2023). In addition to visible political and diplomatic support, as well as substantial fiscal pledges and contributions, NATO partners in the Asia-Pacific have sought to increase their cooperation with the Alliance in concrete and measurable ways that will contribute to the endurance of the rules-based international order and NATO and its AP4 partners mutual interests, security, and values.

While all AP4 nations signed an ITPP with NATO in 2023, there is little public information known about the particular details of each AP4 partners' bilateral agreement with NATO. Of the four NATO-AP4 ITPPs signed in 2023, only the NATO-Japan ITPP is publicly available and even that ITPP is noted to be "an 'open edition', indicating the existence of another (probably longer) version" (Jun, 2023). Likewise, there is publicly available information on the NATO-South Korea ITPP from a Korean language press release by the Korean Presidential Office, which is "the most comprehensive and official description of the document" available to date (Jun, 2023). Using what is known about these two ITPPs, predictions on the development and trajectory of the NATO-AP4 bilateral relationships, what this cooperation might look like in practice, and what it may evolve into follow.

In a December 2023 Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) article, an entitled Diplomatic Academy researcher Dr Hae-Won Jun (2023) asserts that NATO's ITPPs with its AP4 partners are documents that describe:

> cooperation between NATO and its partner countries. Like its predecessor, the Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP), it is renewable and not legally binding. While IPCPs mainly presented principles for and areas of cooperation, leaving a lot of room for NATO and its partners to decide how to actually cooperate at a later stage, ITPPs cover comprehensive and concrete plans for cooperation over a four-year period. ITPPs therefore represent a stronger and more accountable commitment by both NATO and partner countries to an implementation process (Jun, 2023).

Dr Hae-Won Jun stresses the fact that the ITPPs between NATO and its AP4 partners are, based on what is publicly available regarding the NATO-Japan and NATO-ROK ITPPs, likely to be:

less rhetorical and more action-oriented, as it focuses on practical and technical cooperation. It is less geopolitical and more functional in its nature, as it does not specify any geographical settings for joint actions. And it is less targeted and more far-sighted, since it does not mention China but promotes joint action on current and future security challenges such as emerging and disruptive technologies through research and development exchanges. Although not precluding high-level dialogues, the mechanism for implementing the ITPP will take the form of numerous exchanges (…) in which practitioners and military personnel engage in exercises, training and information-sharing (Jun, 2023).

Overall the ITPPs between NATO and its AP4 partners are expected to deepen collaboration between NATO and each nation respectively, through bilateral cooperation. These ITPPs are essentially a leveling up of the partnership between NATO and its AP4 partners from their previously signed IPCPs that came in to effect between 2012 and 2014 respectively, as covered in the previous section on the history of relations between NATO and their AP4 partners. These ITPPs will most likely serve as a road map for cooperation and exchanges on priority issues in the spheres of cyber defense; strategic communication; emerging and disruptive technology; space security; climate change and security; maritime security; arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation; dialogue and consultation; emergency management; science and technology; practical cooperation for interoperability; capability development and interoperability; resilience and civil preparedness; public diplomacy; women, peace, and security; and human security (NATO, 2023c). While each respective AP4 partners' ITPP may not include all of the aforementioned issues as areas of cooperation, the aforementioned 16 issue areas are explicitly listed in the NATO-Japan 2023-2026 ITPP and the other three ITPPs are likely to include some, if not all, of these areas as well. The NATO-Japan 2023-2026 ITPP also sets three strategic objectives which are:

- "Japan and NATO strengthen dialogue and consultations;
- (…) Japan and NATO promote practical cooperation and enhance interoperability;
- (…) Japan and NATO enhance their individual resilience across the peace-crisis spectrum" (NATO, 2023c).

Like the 16 issues areas, these three strategic objectives are likely a formula that have been followed in the others three NATO-AP4 ITPPs. Perhaps the most tangible outcome of the deepening relations between NATO and its AP4 partners will be the possible opening of a NATO liaison office in Tokyo in 2024, as proposed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. Regarding the proposed Tokyo liaison office, Nikkei Asia reports that:

the idea has faced opposition from France, which fears it sends the wrong message to China, and that it may also raise concerns among members of the Association

of Southeast Asian Nations. One idea floated among NATO members is to characterize the proposed office as a facility for smooth implementation of the four ITPPs. The opening of a liaison office requires the consent of all members, and it is hoped this approach would win over France. (…) The Japanese side is keen to have the NATO office. (…) NATO maintains liaison offices at the United Nations in New York, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kuwait, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine (Moriyasu & Tsuji, 2023).

Whether the desired NATO liaison office in Tokyo becomes reality will be determined by multiple political factors, most notably whether intra-Alliance opposition can be overcome and consensus reached among NATO members. As evidenced in aforementioned remarks by the NATO Secretary General, as well as in the ITPPs discussed herein, it is evident that regardless of whether the Tokyo liaison office is established, relations between NATO and its AP4 partners appear to be firmly set on a course for continued, and likely enhanced cooperation, for many years to come.

Using the NATO-Japan 2023-2026 ITPP as a predictor of what is detailed in the other three NATO-AP4 2023-2026 ITPPs seems logical when comparing the former's content to what is publicly known of the NATO-ROK 2023-2026 ITPP. However, it is important to note that the key difference in IPCP agreements and ITPP agreements is the word 'tailored'; that is to say that each of these bilateral ITPPs will be bespoke plans that serve to further areas whereby NATO and its respective AP4 partner country's interests overlap. These will not be monolithic ITPPs, they will be varied and designed to be mutually beneficial to each bilateral partner. While the NATO-Japan ITPP's publicly available details are the most in-depth available of any of the four NATO-AP4 ITPPs, Dr Hae-Won Jun (2023) provides specifics of the NATO-ROK ITPP in her article and states that:

> NATO has quietly but decisively entered into a new phase of cooperation with South Korea. (…) [T]he 2023–2026 South Korea–NATO ITPP is a substantial departure from the previous dialogue-centred South Korea–NATO cooperation agreement, which cast South Korea in a relatively passive role in NATO activities. Aiming to jointly contribute to upholding the rules-based international order in areas of common security interest, the South Korea–NATO ITPP heavily leans towards achieving greater interoperability between South Korea and NATO by fostering technological cooperation and facilitating the development of defence and security capabilities. The 11 areas of cooperation listed in the ITPP confirm this orientation. They are: (i) dialogue and consultation; (ii) counterterrorism cooperation; (iii) women, peace and security; (iv) arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation; (v) capability development and interoperability; (vi) science and technology; (vii) practical cooperation for interoperability; (viii)

public diplomacy; (ix) emerging and disruptive technologies; (x) cyber defence; and (xi) climate change and security (Jun, 2023).

Comparatively, the NATO-Japan 2023-2026 ITPP lists 16 goals across four priority issue areas, while the NATO-ROK 2023-2026 ITPP lists 11 areas of cooperation according to Dr Hae-Won Jun, 10 of which are identical to those listed in the NATO-Japan ITPP. In sum, all of the NATO-AP4 ITPPs will likely expand and deepen the range of NATO cooperation with its AP4 partners and subsequently increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their bilateral capabilities and interoperability, as well as their mutual interests, security, and values.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The events of 2022, namely Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, were a 'critical juncture' for NATO. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been a catalyst for institutional adaption that is currently underway and may take several years, if not a decade or more, to come to fruition. The immediate effect of this systemic shock has been Finland and Sweden joining NATO in the wake of Russia's February 2022 war of aggression in Ukraine. Both Finland and Sweden, historically non-aligned European countries in regards to their militaries, immediately petitioned NATO for membership, with Finland becoming a member of NATO in April 2023 and Sweden becoming a member in March 2024. It is hard to overstate how much of a seismic geopolitical shift their accession to NATO membership is, both for the Euro-Atlantic region and beyond. The longer-term effect of this systemic shock is a stark shift in NATO rhetoric and strategy. This shift in NATO rhetoric and strategy, stated in the 2022 NSC, not only concerns the Euro-Atlantic region's security and how NATO must adapt itself to meet its obligations as it relates to Russia, but also concerns the security of the Asia-Pacific region and how NATO and its AP4 partners can and will cooperate to further their shared interests, security, and values in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific. In sum, both NATO members and like-minded partners realized that their shared interests, security, and values that have been the foundation of the post-Cold War rules-based international order were under acute and direct threat from authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China. This led to an evolution in NATO-AP4 relations, whereby AP4 partners contributions to supporting Ukraine today are seen as an effort to prevent a similar future scenario in the Asia-Pacific, whereby an authoritarian China seeks to impose its will on its Asia-Pacific neighbors through economic or political coercion or outright military force. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has often warned that "the main lesson to be drawn from the war… [is] 'Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow'" (Tsuruoka, 2023), stating to the U.S.

Congress in April 2024 that "Russia's unprovoked, unjust, and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has entered its third year. As I often say, Ukraine of today may be East Asia of tomorrow" and that "Japan will continue to stand with Ukraine" (Nikkei Asia, 2024). Given the geopolitical situation of the 21st century in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific in light of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, and the fact that the PRC and other malign authoritarian actors have signaled and provided moral and material support to Russia, NATO and AP4 relations and likely to continue to deepen in coming years in order to further their mutual interests, security, and values towards the ends of preserving the rules based international order.

Based on the already existing cooperation between NATO and its AP4 partners, that is set to become even more extensive given the details known publicly about the ITPP agreements, it is predicted that NATO and AP4 cooperation will enhance the security architecture of both the Euro-Atlantic region as well as the Asia-Pacific region. The ways and means that this will occur are through military exercises and personnel exchanges, in political support up to and including heads of state and government of the AP4 nations at NATO Summits, and in joint scientific research et al. between NATO and its AP4 partners in areas of common interests, security, and values. As mentioned, the catalyst of this deepening cooperation between NATO and its AP4 partners was the seismic shift in the European security situation as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This event unequivocally changed international relations in the 21st century, evident in the statements of Xi Jinping that China and Russia share a "no limits" friendship, in the former's subsequent failure to condone the latter's war of aggression in Ukraine, and in Xi Jinping's statement during a visit to the Kremlin in March 2023 that "Right now there are changes – the likes of which we haven't seen for 100 years – and we are the ones driving these changes together". Russia's war of aggression not only awoke NATO to the threat authoritarian regimes posed to a free and peaceful Europe, it also brought NATO's AP4 partners, among others, to realize the threat posed by China to a free and open Asia-Pacific region. This was the catalyst that led the AP4 nations, among others, to more closely hitch their fortunes to the US led rules-based international order in the hopes that, through their cooperation with NATO and other like-minded partners that share their interests and values, such a system will be preserved and endure for the benefit of generations to come. Europe, and the Asia-Pacific, is hoping to never again endure the tragedy and scale of suffering and loss seen during WWII.

And never again to NATO and these AP4 partners should, and seemingly does, mean taking decisive action in the here and now. The US and its NATO members and partners must do everything they can for Ukraine now or not only Ukraine will suffer the consequences today and tomorrow, but also future generations in Europe, the US, and likely beyond. The best time to have supported Ukraine fully and with everything they needed to defeat Russia's invasion of sovereign Ukrainian territory

was 24 February 2022, the second-best time is now. Ukraine should be offered NATO membership at the July 2024 NATO Summit in Washington, with consensus from all Alliance members, along with full support from NATO's AP4 partners. Historic times require historic decisions that are bold, courageous, and just. The realization of such a historic decision would still take years of effort by NATO to bring about permanent institutional adaptation and Ukraine's accession to the Alliance, but beginning the process should start now as a further signal to Russia and China, and similarly malign authoritarian actors and otherwise that NATO and its AP4 partners are firm in their resolve and will not waiver in preserving their mutual interests, security, and values grounded in the rules-based international order. These are interests, security, and values that include the non-negotiable existence of a continued free and independent Ukraine, with sovereignty over its 1991 borders and the right for Ukrainian self-determination to join any international organization it desires and qualifies for, including NATO and the EU, and others. NATO and its AP4 partners' deepening cooperation on both Europe's and the Asia-Pacific's overlapping regional interests, security, and values will be mutually beneficial and the time, effort, and resources well spent by all parties involved. NATO and its AP4 partners' continued support to Ukraine and their deepening cooperation in light of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine will be beneficial in the short and long terms for NATO, its AP4 partners, the rules based international order and 21st century geopolitics, and most of all a free and independent Ukraine.

References

Associated Press. (2023, July 15). *South Korean president makes surprise visit to Ukraine.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-ukraine-war-south-korea-president president-yoon-suk-yeol-visit-rcna94421

Da-gyum, J. (2023, December 12). *8 NATO envoys to visit Seoul to discuss Indo-Pacific security*. The Korea Herald. https://m.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20231211000582

Galic, M. (2023, July 6). *What's behind NATO's tightening ties with its Indo-Pacific partners?* United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/07/whats-behind-natos-tightening-ties-its-indo-pacific-partners

Johnston, S. A. (2017). *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jun, H.-W. (2023, December 5). *NATO and its Indo-Pacific partners choose practice over rhetoric in 2023*. Royal United Studies Institute. https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/nato-and-its-indo-pacific-partners-choose-practice-over-rhetoric-2023

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2024, January 7). *Foreign Minister Kamikawa's visit to Ukraine*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00086.html

Moriyasu, K., & Tsuji, T. (2023, June 13). *NATO to upgrade ties with Australia, New Zealand, South Korea together with Japan, four nations will have tailored partnership programs*. Nikkei Asia. https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/NATO-to-upgrade-ties-with-Australia-New-Zealand-South-Korea

NATO. (2022a, May 19). *Counter-piracy operations (2008-2016)*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48815.htm

NATO. (2022b, June 29). *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.* https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

NATO. (2022c, September 1). *Operation Active Endeavour (2001-2016)*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_7932.htm

NATO. (2023a, May 26). *Operation Sea Guardian*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136233.htm

NATO. (2023b, July 11). *Vilnius Summit Communiqué, issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Vilnius 11 July 2023.* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO. (2023c, July 12). *Individually tailored partnership programme between NATO and Japan for 2023-2026.* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217797.htm

NATO. (2023d, July 20). *Relations with the Republic of Korea*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50098.htm

NATO. (2023e, July 28). *Relations with Japan*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50336.htm

NATO. (2023f, July 28). *Relations with New Zealand*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52347.htm

NATO. (2023g, August 17). *Relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific region*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm

NATO. (2023h, November 28). *Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the first session of the NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_220657.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO. (2023i, November 28). *NATO Foreign Ministers address deterrence and defence, support for Ukraine, and partnerships*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_220645.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO. (2024a, 18 January). *Joint Press Conference by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer with Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Christopher Cavoli and Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Chris Badia*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_221779.htm?selectedLocale=en

NATO. (2024b, March 7). *Relations with Australia*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48899.htm

Nikkei Asia. (2024, April 12). *Full text of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida's speech to U.S. Congress*. https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Full-text-of-Japanese-Prime-Minister-Kishida-s-speech-to-U.S.-Congress

Perestrello, M. (2022). *NATO and the Indo-Pacific Region*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2023-11/021%20PCNP%2022%20E%20rev.%202%20fin%20-%20INDO-PACIFIC%20-%20PERESTRELLO%20REPORT.pdf

Tardy, T. (2022). *NATO's New Strategic Concept*. NATO Defense College. https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737

Tsuruoka, M. (2023, June 28). *The 'Russia factor' in NATO-Japan relations*. United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/06/russia-factor-nato-japan-relations

How Does the War in Ukraine Affect NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Strategy?

Piotr Nieć[1]

George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

e-mail: piotr.niec@marshallcenter.org

Abstract: The war in Ukraine has brought the issue of nuclear deterrence to the forefront due to the nuclear threats made by Russia. Many experts argue that Russia was able to deter NATO and isolate Ukraine to some extent. This raises the question of how Russia's willingness to explore non-strategic nuclear weapons is affecting NATO's deterrence. Although the issue of nuclear weapons is not often discussed in public, there are enough open source publications to provide an overview of NATO's nuclear posture, including nuclear sharing. The research indicates that the differing approaches of NATO and Russia to nuclear escalation create a gap that adversaries may exploit. While NATO is adapting, discussions about necessary changes to nuclear posture are still needed.

Keywords: non-strategic nuclear weapons, nuclear sharing, deterrence, NATO

1. Introduction

This chapter describes the implications of the war in Ukraine, including its extensive nuclear developments, only for NATO's nuclear deterrence posture. Both NATO and Russia have recently released guiding documents to signal their positions on nuclear deterrence. The United States and Russia have separate nuclear sharing agreements regarding non-strategic nuclear weapons, with NATO allies and Belarus respectively. NATO's agreement dates back to the Cold War, although it has been modified since then. Russia's arrangement is much more recent and can be seen as a result of the war in Ukraine. With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia returned to the practice of nuclear blackmail, but it has intensified extensive nuclear saber-rattling over the past two years. During the early stages of the war, Russia employed nuclear escalation as a means of deterring the West. Later, as Ukraine gained the upper hand on the ground, Russia used this tactic to coerce Ukraine into negotiations. Russia portrays the

---

[1] Rear-Admiral Piotr Nieć, Visiting Military Professor, Strategic Security Studies, George C. Marshall European Center For Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

conflict in Ukraine as a part of its larger war against the West. The use of non-strategic nuclear weapons in a limited war against NATO to achieve required objectives might be considered by Russia due to a sense of its conventional inferiority. NATO faces challenges in its approach to nuclear deterrence due to its strong non-proliferation agenda and the unique nature of nuclear weapons. The aggressive pursuit of non-strategic nuclear weapons agenda by Russia creates a gap in deterrence and assurance within the NATO system. The Alliance is attempting to address this issue through technical adjustments to its current nuclear posture. However, a political discussion regarding the development of a new approach to nuclear deterrence and assurance seems necessary to maintain the cohesion of the Alliance.

This chapter discusses non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) that can be used in local theaters of operation. Woolf (2022) describes several methods for classifying nuclear armaments as NSNW in contrast to the strategic weapons. These methodologies include the distinguishing based on the mission performed, range of the delivery vehicle, or yield of the warhead. Each classification of nuclear armaments has limitations, as certain types can perform both strategic and non-strategic missions. It seems that the best approach, despite its imperfections, is to apply the definition by exclusion. The New START Treaty, signed in 2010 by the United States and the Russian Federation, limits "strategic offensive arms" and defines them as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments (US Department of State, 2010). Any nuclear weapon not explicitly mentioned by the New START Treaty could be classified as NSNW. This is the closest common denominator between the United States, that tends to define NSNW based on the performed nuclear mission, and the Russian Federation, which takes the delivery range approach (Alberque, 2024).

In 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), which entered into force in 1988. The treaty required both parties to eliminate all ground launched ballistic and cruise missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons within a range of 500 to 5,500 km. This goal was achieved in 1991 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2019). Following the end of the Cold War, both states continued to reduce its NSNW arsenals. The United States removed from Europe and destroyed all land-based and sea-based NSNWs. The number of weapons assigned for delivery by aircraft was also significantly reduced. Russia has been following a similar path in reducing its NSNW arsenal, albeit at a slower pace. These reductions have resulted in the elimination of several thousand of nuclear weapons in both countries (Woolf, 2022). Over time, Russia chose to abandon the disarmament route and violated the INF Treaty by producing a new missile that did not comply with the agreement's limits. Diplomatic efforts to persuade Russia to return to the disarmament regime failed, leading the United States to withdraw from the INF Treaty in 2019 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2019).

2. NATO doctrinal approach to nuclear deterrence and defense

The current NATO nuclear policy is outlined in Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2012). Additional guidance, to a much lesser extent, is provided by the heads of state in the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a) and Vilnius Summit communiqué (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023). While the last two documents cover all subjects important to NATO, they only dedicate a small portion to nuclear policy.

The DDPR was adopted in 2012 when the Euro-Atlantic area appeared peaceful, and the risk of a conventional war to the Alliance was minimal. NATO and Russia were working towards a strategic partnership to create a common space of peaceful cooperation. The relationship between NATO and Russia was based on the NATO-Russia Founding Act while the emphasis was placed on respecting democratic principles, as well as the "sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states and their inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security, the inviolability of borders and peoples' right of self-determination" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1997). Nuclear weapons were identified as critical to the deterrence and defense in the context of negative security assurances of NATO nuclear states. However, heads of Alliance member states recognized that the significance of nuclear weapons has diminished since the end of the Cold War and they were anticipating further cutbacks of non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe. The same was expected from Russia, with an emphasis on transparency and repositioning of its nuclear weapons further away from the Alliance territory (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2010).

The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept emphasizes that the "fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion and deter aggression" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a). In other words, it is defensive in nature. To increase ambiguity and risk for potential aggressors, NATO does not commit to a 'no first use' policy and by doing so, leaves open the type and scope of the response to a nuclear attack against the Alliance. However, NATO stresses the differentiation between conventional warfare and nuclear employment and acknowledges that the utilization of nuclear weapons against the Alliance "would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a). When discussing nuclear weapons, a distinction is made between the strategic nuclear forces of NATO nuclear states and the nuclear weapons owned by the United States, but forward deployed to the European continent. Although NATO refers to them as nuclear weapons to maintain their nuclear nature, they could be classified as NSNWs. The document recognizes the importance of maintaining the credibility of nuclear deterrence (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a).

The Vilnius Summit communiqué acknowledges the adverse effects on Euro-Atlantic security resulting from Russian actions in the nuclear domain, which are

part of the conflict in Ukraine. The Heads of State reaffirm their stance on nuclear weapons, consistent with the principles outlined in the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept. They indicate their ability to "manage escalation risks in a crisis that involves nuclear weapons" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023). There are no significant changes to NATO's nuclear posture or employment.

3. Russian doctrinal approach to nuclear deterrence and defense

In June 2020, the Russian President signed an executive order on the Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence. The document outlines the concept of retaliation in response to aggression from potential adversaries against the Russian Federation and/or its allies. The aim of retaliation is to prevent escalation and end the conflict on terms favorable to the Russian Federation. The conditions required for the use of nuclear weapons are not necessarily linked to aggression itself, but rather connect conventional aggression with the imminent danger to the existence of the Russian state. Alberque (2024) argues that this distinction is not mutually exclusive. Due to Russia's perceived military inferiority to the potential of the United States and NATO, any conventional conflict with them would pose a threat, from its onset, to the existence of the Russian Federation. This is why major Russian military exercises always include the element of nuclear employment. The executive order specifies that nuclear deterrence is not only aimed at nuclear states, but also at countries or alliances with "significant combat potential of general purpose forces" (The President of the Russian Federation, 2020) which supports the aforementioned argument. Non-nuclear states on NATO's Eastern Flank are just as vulnerable to nuclear threats and attacks as the nuclear states in the alliance. Other triggers for retaliation include the use of nuclear weapons on Russian territory, either directly, or through the detection ballistic missile launches aimed at Russia. Additionally, an attempt to disable the nuclear deterrence system will also result in retaliation. The components of deterrence are defined as military capabilities, readiness of the nuclear forces, and the resolve to use them (The President of the Russian Federation, 2020).

The conclusion is that in Russian doctrine the use of NSNW is seen as another step in the escalation ladder in order to deter outside actors and achieve favorable conditions for the war termination (Nikitin, 2022). If Russia decides to use NSNW in a conflict, the actual employment would also be scalable to allow for further escalation, that is punishment (Bowen, 2020). These arguments align with the concept described by Western analysts as 'escalate to de-escalate', which is not mentioned however in Russia's official policy (Woolf, 2022).

This is the first time that the presidential executive order regarding nuclear deterrence policy, a rather secretive segment of state matters, has been made public

(Bowen, 2020). The intention was to signal Russia's approach to deterrence and the use of nuclear weapons. Therefore, this document includes a section describing "military risks that might evolve into military threats (threats of aggression)" (The President of the Russian Federation, 2020) which may lead to nuclear escalation. The executive order outlines military risks which were later elaborated on in the Agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a). This agreement was presented to the members of the Alliance almost two years later. Clearly, Russia assumes that it has the right to its own sphere of influence and the mentioned documents played a role in negotiations of the outer limits of that area. Russia reserves the right for itself to interfere with internal matters related to the defense of independent states.

NATO, contrary to Russian doctrine, clearly proclaims that it will not use nuclear weapons against Non-Nuclear Weapon States. Even possibility of directing threats is being rejected (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2012). Also, the approach to escalation is different; there is no continuum between conventional and nuclear actions. There is also a distinction between strategic nuclear forces of the three nuclear allied states and nuclear weapons deployed to Europe from the United States (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a).

4. Nuclear sharing arrangements

Nuclear sharing generally refers to the situation where a non-nuclear state can participate in the use of nuclear weapons of a nuclear state under certain conditions. It is important to note that this does not entail the transfer of control or employment authority, even if the weapon is physically located in a non-nuclear state. Sharing responsibility can take different forms, such as mutual planning and consultations regarding nuclear issues, supporting nuclear missions with conventional capabilities of non-nuclear states, providing delivery capabilities of non-nuclear states for nuclear missions, permanent transfer of nuclear weapons to the territory of non-nuclear states, and finally, extended deterrence and assurance as a protection mechanism for non-nuclear states (Kristensen et al., 2023).

NATO maintains that its "nuclear sharing is the sharing of Alliance's nuclear deterrence mission and the related political responsibilities and decision-making" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022b). The management of nuclear matters is conducted by all allies, except for France, through their participation in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). The NPG is responsible for developing nuclear policy and posture, that corresponds to the current security environment (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022c). Support of nuclear missions with the conventional capabilities

of the non-nuclear states is provided in NATO by more than ten countries. For some of them this is the maximum level of contribution. They participate in the Support of Nuclear Operations With Conventional Air Tactics (SNOWCAT) mission by providing air assets. Six countries participate in SNOWCAT and provide delivery capabilities through their dual-capable aircrafts (DCA). These are: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Greece. The newest DCA aircraft is F-35A, which is best suited for B61-12 gravity bomb due to its increased accuracy of strike. The B61-12 is the newest version of the B61 family of nuclear weapons and is classified as non-strategic nuclear weapon (NSNW). Five out of the six DCA contributing countries, have active nuclear storage sites on their territory, with Greece being the exception. It is estimated that there are approximately 100 United States' NSNWs (gravity bombs) in Europe as part of nuclear sharing (Kristensen et al., 2023).

Additionally, the United States is investing in the infrastructure of RAF Lakenheath in the United Kingdom to prepare for a 'surety mission'. Two F-35A squadrons may potentially be stationed there (Department of the Air Force, 2023, 2024). Surety mission involves ensuring the safety of nuclear weapons. As per standard policy, the United States does not disclose, any information regarding the stationing of nuclear weapons at this location (Wellman, 2024).

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had its own nuclear sharing arrangements with the countries under its influence, including states that are now in NATO. However, after the collapse of the Soviet system, all nuclear weapons were returned to Russia. This withdrawal was completed in 1996 (Kristensen et al., 2023). In light of the war with Ukraine, Russia has decided to reinstate nuclear sharing arrangements. The Belarusian President made the intention public by shortly before the military aggression in February 2022 (Roth, 2022). Subsequently, Belarus amended its constitution, including the deletion of the declaration of remaining a nuclear-free state in Article 18 (Venice Commission, 2022). In March 2023, President Putin announced his decision to move nuclear weapons to Belarus stating, that it would mirror NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement. He also specified that nuclear weapons could be delivered from Belarusian territory by military aircraft and Iskander ballistic missiles (The Associated Press, 2023). The process of constructing storage sites and certifying Belarusian forces has been ongoing since then. However, there is no solid, open source, visual confirmation of the actual presence of nuclear weapons in Belarus (Kristensen & Korda, 2023b). At the same time, the Defense Intelligence Agency is not dismissing the possibility of nuclear weapons being already stored in Belarus (Bertrand, 2023). Likewise, there are discussions about launch authority due to conflicting statements from the Russian and Belarusian leadership. However, it is unlikely, that Russia would transfer custody or any of its launch powers to Belarus.

Russia also possesses a much larger stockpile of NSNWs that are stored on its own territory, including the European part of the Russian mainland, which does not

form part of the nuclear sharing arrangements. There is an ongoing debate about whether NSNWs are also located in Kaliningrad Oblast (Masters & Merrow, 2023). The estimations range from 1,000 to 2,000 warheads. The delivery systems include a variety of armaments, such as close- and short-range ballistic missiles, ground and air launched cruise missiles, gravity bombs, and navy related weapons. These delivery systems are designed to be dual capable and serve as both tactical and theater weapons (Ashley, 2019; U.S. Department of Defense, 2018).

5. Nuclear related developments during the war in Ukraine

In February 2022, the deterrence failed to protect the NATO partner. The United States, European Union and G7 attempted to dissuade Russia from attacking Ukraine by announcing explicit actions that would follow if Russia decided to become an aggressor (The White House, 2021; GOV.UK, 2021). The Russian leadership decided to commence aggression, regardless of the potential consequences, as it believed it would result in a higher net gain than pursuing diplomatic means.

Prior to the aggression, negotiations were ongoing for the Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The United States and NATO responded to the proposal after extensive diplomatic consultations. Specific offers such as interference with NATO's conventional and nuclear force structure on the territory of NATO members who joined the alliance after 1997, or the open-door policy, were deemed non-negotiable. The responses also included potential areas of negotiation regarding security arrangements, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. (Crowley & Sanger, 2022). On February 12, the Presidents of the United States and Russia exchanged views during a phone call. Additionally, on February 24, Secretary of State Blinken was scheduled to meet with Foreign Minister Lavrov for the next round of negotiations (Lee & Isachenkov, 2022).

Russia has been using nuclear warnings throughout the war, with an increase in intensity during periods of heightened risk and uncertainty about the war's outcome. Horovitz and Stolze conducted a comprehensive study of nuclear rhetoric from the beginning of the war until August 2023 and identified few instances of Russian intent to escalate beyond the level of consistent warnings (Horovitz & Stolze, 2023). The given items can be divided into two distinct collections, each with its own specific purpose.

The initial nuclear escalation statements could be classified as deterrence aimed at non-combatant states. They were issued before and shortly after the start of the invasion when Russia was unsure of the extent of Western involvement. However, assuming that the West was committed to keeping the war limited, Russia employed a strategy of threats. The primary statement was made on the day of the invasion. In

his address justifying the commencement of a 'special military operation', President Putin stated:

> I would now like to say something very important for those who may be tempted to interfere in these developments from the outside. No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history. No matter how the events unfold, we are ready. All the necessary decisions in this regard have been taken. I hope that my words will be heard (The President of the Russian Federation, 2022).

Although he did not refer specifically to nuclear deterrence, many argued that his tacit intent was to intimidate the United States and NATO by implying that he was willing to escalate as far as nuclear employment (Woolf, 2022). The aim was to deter Western direct engagement and support to Ukraine in order to isolate this country. The Russian approach to deterrence proved to be successful (Tavberidze, 2022). During the initial period of the operation, Russia was able to limit the necessary foreign support to Ukraine. The failure of the initial plan, which aimed for a quick and decisive victory over Ukraine, can be attributed to the underperformance of Russian conventional forces. The use of nuclear deterrence to isolate the battlefield proved to be an effective tool.

The conclusion is that if Russia initiates any future conflict, it will likely exploit the nuclear dimension from the beginning to isolate the victim of the aggression. If Russia's perception of developments is so negative that it decides to escalate to the level of actual nuclear use, regardless of the consequences, the action would most likely be symbolic, and the potential explosion would take place in a remote area with the goal of causing as little damage as possible. The message would imply that Russia does not view the use of nuclear weapons as a problem, while also signaling its prepared to escalate to demonstrate its resolve.

The second set of nuclear escalation statements can be categorized as coercion directed at the invaded country, the victim of the aggression. In September/October 2022, Russia repeated nuclear escalation in response to the successful developments of the Ukrainian offensive. Russian rhetoric combined the illegal annexation of four Ukrainian provinces with the strategy of nuclear escalation. Officials, like Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev or Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov were signaling the will to protect territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (within new borders) at all cost. On that occasion they were referring to the provisions of "Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence" saying that any conventional attack that was threatening the existence of the Russian state was going to be the trigger for the nuclear retaliation against Ukraine. President Putin referred to the precedent set by the United States at

the end of the World War II when it used nuclear weapons to attack Japan (Horovitz & Stolze, 2023). The objective was to hinder the Ukrainian offensive and coerce Kiev into negotiations (Clark et al., 2022). However, this time, nuclear escalation did not bring any positive results for Russia. The Ukrainian leadership made it clear that the use of nuclear weapons would not lead to Ukraine's surrender. They argued that it is was impossible to escalate the conflict in a country already engaged in a full scale war.

The conclusion regarding coercion differs from the previously described deterrence scenario. This is due to the fact that in the deterrence scenario, the aggressor is in the initial phase of the conflict and still assumes a positive outcome of the war. The nuclear use is not intended to destroy victim's armed forces or critical infrastructure, but to isolate the attacked country. The coercion scenario is more likely to occur in the case of a progressing conventional defeat of the aggressor and their increasing weakness. Only multiple non-strategic nuclear explosions targeting formations of the Ukrainian army would create the possibility of halting the counteroffensive (Clark et al., 2022). Coercing a victim during an ongoing war is more challenging and generates more risk for the aggressor. If Russia were to choose this path in future conflicts, the escalation would be more aggressive.

6. The implications for NATO deterrence

It is important to consider that from the Russian point of view, Russia is already in a 'direct confrontation' with the West, which currently takes the form of a hybrid war. It is considered as an existential conflict that, if lost by Russia, will inevitably lead to the fall of the Russian state and Russian civilization, as such (Karaganov, 2022).

Thomas C. Schelling argues that every conflict should be analyzed as a bargaining situation (Schelling, 1979). Russia uses nuclear weapons to communicate its negotiating position during the current conflict stage. It provided both maximalist expected gain and minimalist red lines. The draft Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization proposed maximalist gain regarding NATO members (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a). The corresponding document with maximalist offers was directed towards the United States in the form of a draft Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021b). The red line represents the territory of Ukraine, which was visibly communicated in February 2022 with the start of full military aggression against the sovereign country. Belarus was also marked as a red line due to the revival of nuclear sharing from the Cold War and the decision to move nuclear weapons to that state. The purpose of the move was to send a clear political message that Russia is committed to protecting Belarus. The fact that the

story was made public indicates the seriousness of Russia's commitment, especially that Russia has long argued that NATO nuclear sharing violates the Non-Proliferation Treaty (Wilk & Żochowski, 2023).

Since 2014, NATO has been modifying nuclear deterrence. The process focused on the "military side of deterrence, i.e. weapons, procedures or exercises" within an old framework. However, the alliance has yet to engage in discussions regarding the "political dimension, i.e. the strategic consensus within the alliance on who should be deterred, how and with what" (Kamp, 2024). As a result, the lack of an adequate response from NATO, particularly in terms of updating its nuclear deterrence posture, to the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus may be causing Russia to perceive a disparity in access to security guarantees between the states that joined NATO after 1997 and those that were part of the Alliance during the Cold War (Wilk & Żochowski, 2023). In conclusion, Russia believes, that the sovereign status of all NATO members which joined the Alliance after 1997 can still be negotiated in order to expand a Russian sphere of influence (Alberque, 2022).

How can NATO demonstrate to Russia that the Eastern Flank countries are as important to the Alliance as the rest of its members? One approach is to take symbolic, full control of the area to show that the value of the Eastern Flank countries to NATO is higher than the value they present to Russia. This approach, in line with Snyder's argument, will position actual credibility of deterrence above required one, hence increasing deterrence effectiveness. It is important to note that the conventional part of deterrence is as important as the nuclear one (Snyder, 1961).

NATO is making progress in addressing the conventional part of the equation. However, the past, particularly the NATO-Russia Founding Act, continues to cast a shadow over Eastern Flank countries. The NATO Secretary General stated within a few days of the beginning of the war that the NATO-Russia Founding Act no longer functions because Russia decided to violate it (Stoltenberg, 2022). Yet, logistical infrastructure support, such as the Central European Pipeline System, prepositioned stocks, and permanent military bases, are still primarily located "behind the wall".

However, Russia likely believes that NATO has a conventional advantage. As previously stated, this is the reason why Russia is willing to consider nuclear escalation. Meanwhile, NATO appears to lack political consensus on nuclear deterrence, with individual allies pursuing their own paths. It seems that this topic is still not up for political discussion within NATO. It is worth noting that the last NATO's deterrence and defense posture review was conducted in 2012. Clearly, the security situation that NATO faces today is vastly different from that of a decade ago (Kamp, 2024).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, Karaganov argues that Russia should have the ability to escalate the conflict up to the level of a limited nuclear war as this is the only possibility to compel the West to come to the negotiating table (Karaganov, 2022). The attractiveness of nuclear escalation for Russia lies in its potential to disrupt the cohesion

of NATO. The argument that NATO remained united for the first two years of the war in Ukraine is not relevant to the analysis of potential future aggression against allied territory. While the security perceptions and risk calculations of each ally may differ, they all share the assumption that their respective territories and societies are more or less secure. Even the incidents involving missiles and drones, that took place over those two past years brought NATO closer to invoking Article 4 of the Washington Treaty only once, when two Polish citizens were killed by a missile that fell down on the Alliance's territory (Rauhala et al., 2022). This demonstrates, that the Alliance, including its Eastern Flank members, is capable of effectively managing serious crises without exacerbating them. However, in the case of aggression, the dynamics between Member States, or rather between the invaded country and the rest of allies will be dramatically different.

NATO faces the important dilemma of deterring Russia while maintaining a different approach to the use of nuclear weapons than potential aggressors. The war in Ukraine has shown that Russia blurs the line between conventional warfare and nuclear use, potentially paving the way for the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons. It appears that Russia is attempting to create a new threshold for nuclear employment. The assumption is that the use of NSNW in a limited war will not lead to a strategic nuclear exchange. Therefore, instead of a clear historical norm differentiating between conventional war and any nuclear use, Russia would prefer to divide nuclear use into two separate stages of escalation: NSNW on a tactical and theater level combined with the use of conventional forces and ultimately strategic weapons. This approach would guarantee Russia's ability to overcome NATO's deterrence goals.

The war in Ukraine appears to validate this approach. General Hodges argues that, based on the Western reactions to the nuclear blackmail, Russia learned that any victim of future aggression could be significantly isolated. NATO is unprepared to handle nuclear escalation of any sort (Zubriūtė, 2024). The isolation need not be absolute, but rather occur during specific periods of time that are crucial to achieving certain objectives during various phases of the war.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine will determine the Russian approach not only toward limited nuclear escalation, as such. Any final Russian success in Ukraine, even minimalistic in its nature, meaning gaining new territories, will determine its appetite for further territorial expansion. The only prerequisite will be to maintain 'escalation dominance' in the nuclear domain in order to overcome Western deterrence (Payne, 2022).

The United States has already identified the inability to deter an enemy's nuclear escalation during a regional conflict. Admiral Richard testified before the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services that Russia is capable of exploiting the "deterrence and assurance gap against the threat of limited nuclear employment" (United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, 2022).

NATO is not openly addressing the issue. Both the Vilnius Communique and the 2022 Strategic Concept emphasize the importance of "ensuring greater integration and

coherence of capabilities and activities across all domains and the spectrum of conflict, while reaffirming the unique and distinct role of nuclear deterrence" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022a, 2023). It appears that this approach is a continuation of the challenging process of nuclear adaptation that began in 2014. The focus is on public communication and increasing the credibility of the capabilities at hand, that is dual capable aircrafts (Durkalec, 2020). In the Vilnius Summit communiqué, NATO mentioned updating nuclear planning, unlike in previous communiqués (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023).

Political leaders should be presented with a diversity of capabilities and flexibility of planning to respond and control nuclear escalation. They might prevent self-deterrence, in the technical sense. Possessing a variety of delivery systems is necessary to achieve sufficiency due to their different characteristics of operation on the battlefield. For instance, the features of aircrafts differ from those of land-based missiles. Missile attacks may be difficult to counteract, but missiles cannot be turned back like aircraft (Tertrais, 2021).

There is debate over the effectiveness of nuclear gravity bombs delivered by dual-capable aircraft. Non-official conversations with some representatives from the Air Force suggest that such a mission may be less feasible due to the efficiency of the newest long-range missile air defense systems (Kristensen & Korda, 2023a). The experience gained during the war in Ukraine may provide some insights. To carry out a nuclear gravity mission, NATO would need to achieve air superiority in the specified area and time. The resources required to support one mission are enormous in terms of numbers and organization. Therefore, it can be concluded that nuclear gravity bombs are only deterrent weapons. In the event of initial nuclear use by the attacker, a limited number of nuclear weapons may be deployed as a defensive measure. This deployment would signal NATO's commitment to maintaining cohesion in the face of aggression against any of its members. However, if NATO were to begin losing the conventional battle, the effectiveness of nuclear gravity bombs may be reduced due to limited resources for conducting multiple nuclear strikes to achieve operational objectives.

Weaver argues that the NATO force posture lacks flexibility due to the deficiency of 'continuously forward deployed' nuclear capabilities that would diversify options presented by dual-capable aircraft. In this context he mentions the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) deployed on US attack submarines (Weaver, 2023). Missiles deployed from submarines would likely have a higher survivability level than DCA and could reach targets faster. Defending against these missiles would be challenging due to the possibility of covered launches from numerous locations. The SLCM-N missile is currently under development and has become a topic of political debate within the United States (Woolf, 2022). Kristensen and Korda present several arguments against the development of SLCM-N, with the biggest disadvantage being the uncertainty surrounding its delivery, which may not occur until the 2030s (Kristensen & Korda, 2023c).

Given the limited options for different NSNWs systems, it is necessary to adapt existing solutions to increase their effectiveness. For instance, it may be worthwhile to consider the options presented by the growing fleet of F-35A dual-capable aircraft. In the near future, these aircraft will be operated by allies who have not yet contributed to nuclear sharing through DCA. This approach would enhance the survivability and ambiguity of the nuclear response. As a result, the credibility of deterrence would increase. This solution would require the consent of all allies with a seat in the NPG (Kacprzyk, 2023). This brings us to the issue of political control over nuclear capabilities. It is important to acknowledge that the 'gap against the threat of limited nuclear employment' cannot be solved solely through technical adaptation of nuclear capabilities to a deteriorating security situation.

Cohen argues that the absence of clear guidance or policy is due to differing views among allies regarding nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons have been on the periphery of discussions. The outbreak of the war in 2022 has shaken NATO; however, the non-proliferation agenda prevents open discussion on the way how to credibly counter nuclear threats. There is a visible divide between the United States' approach and that of some NATO allies, indicating differences in their ability to bear escalation risks. There is a need for discussion, which could develop in two directions. The first path of 'strong nuclear rhetoric' would require addressing allies' concerns regarding nuclear escalation in a demanding debate. This would result, in cohesive NATO-wide credible deterrence, with all allies bearing equal responsibility and all allies being equally assured. Taking the 'continued nuclear path' would be convenient for allies with a strong non-proliferation agenda and aversion to nuclear risk. The burden of managing nuclear escalation would fall on the United States (Cohen, 2023). Delaying needed discussions or pushing it along 'continuation path' can harm NATO's cohesion. Some countries exposed to Russian threats may feel that their security concerns are not being adequately addressed, especially in light of Russian nuclear escalation in Europe.

References

Alberque, W. (2022, January 25). *Russia's new draft treaties: Like 2009, but worse*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/01/russias-new-draft-treaties-like-2009-but-worse

Alberque, W. (2024, January 22). *Russian Military Thought and Doctrine Related to Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons: Change and Continuity*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/2024/01/iiss_russian-military-thought-and-doctrine-related-to-non-strategic-nuclear-weapons_012024.pdf

Ashley, R., Jr. (2019, May 29). *Russian and Chinese nuclear modernization trends - remarks at the Hudson Institute*. https://www.dia.mil/Articles/Speeches-and-Testimonies/Article/1859890/russian-and-chinese-nuclear-modernization-trends/

Bertrand, N. (2023, July 21). *US intel officials: 'No reason to doubt' Putin claims Russia has moved nuclear weapons to Belarus*. CNN Politics. https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/21/politics/putin-russia-nuclear-weapons-belarus/index.html

Bowen, A. (2020, August 20). *Russian Armed Forces: Military Doctrine and Strategy*. Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11625

Clark, M., Lawlor, K., & Stepanenko, K. (2022, September 30). *Special Report: Assessing Putin's Implicit Nuclear Threats After Annexation*. Institute for the Study of War. https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/special-report-assessing-putin%E2%80%99s-implicit-nuclear-threats-after-annexation

Cohen, M. (2023, January). *The US and NATO at a nuclear crossroads*. NATO Defense College. https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1793

Crowley, M., & Sanger, D. (2022, January 26). *U.S. and NATO respond to Putin's demands as Ukraine tensions mount*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/26/us/politics/russia-demands-us-ukraine.html

Department of the Air Force. (2023, March). *Military Construction Program. Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Budget Estimates*. https://www.saffm.hq.af.mil/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=8x62jjw60Hg%3D&portalid=84

Department of the Air Force. (2024, January 23). *48th LRS Dock Levelers*. SAM.GOV. https://sam.gov/opp/7dece237cb394b6d9180dfcc3eecab3f/view

Durkalec, J. (2020). *NATO strategy to counter nuclear intimidation*. NATO Defense College. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25147.6.pdf

GOV.UK. (2021, December 12). *Russia and Ukraine: G7 Foreign Ministers' statement*. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-russia-and-ukraine

Horovitz, L., & Stolze, M. (2023, August). *Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine: A chronology*. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Horovitz_and_Stolze_-_Nuclear_Chrono_Final_2August2023.pdf

Kacprzyk, A. (2023). *NATO Nuclear Adaptation*. Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych.

Kamp, K.-H. (2024, February 14). *NATO at 75: Time to deliver on its promiseS*. German Council on Foreign Relations. https://dgap.org/system/files/article_pdfs/DGAP_Analysis_No-2_February%202024_15pp.pdf

Karaganov, S. A. (2022, September 1). *От не-Запада к Мировому большинству* [From non-West to the Global Majority]. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6439-2022-20-5-6-18

Kristensen, H., & Korda, M. (2023a, October 27). *Biden administration decides to build a new nuclear bomb to get rid of an old bomb*. Federation of American Scientists. https://fas.org/publication/biden-administration-to-build-a-new-nuclear-bomb/

Kristensen, H., & Korda, M. (2023b, June 6). *Russian nuclear weapons deployment plans in Belarus: Is there visual confirmation?* Federation of American Scientists. https://fas.org/publication/russian-nuclear-weapons-deployment-plans-in-belarus-is-there-visual-confirmation/

Kristensen, H., & Korda, M. (2023c). United States nuclear weapons. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 79*(1), 28-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2022.2156686

Kristensen, H., Korda, M., Johns, E., & Knight, M. (2023). Nuclear weapons sharing, 2023. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 79*(6), 393-406. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2023.2266944

Lee, M., & Isachenkov, V. (2022, March 3). *Breakdown of US-Russia diplomacy runs deep, beyond Ukraine*. AP News. https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-us-diplomacy-breakdown-f9267ad236ecf4b4568a6d73337c6823

Masters, J., & Merrow, W. (2023, March 30). *Nuclear weapons in Europe: mapping U.S. and Russian deployments*. Council on Foreign Relations: https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/nuclear-weapons-europe-mapping-us-and-russian-deployments

Nikitin, M. (2022, April 21). *Russia's nuclear weapons: doctrine, forces, and modernization*. Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45861

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (1997, May 27). *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris*, France. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2010). *Active Engagement, Modern Defence - NATO 2010 Strategic Concept*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2012, May 20). *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2019, August 2). *NATO and the INF* Treaty. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_166100.htm

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2022a). *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2022b, February). *NATO's Nuclear Sharing Arrangements*. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220204-factsheet-nuclear-sharing-arrange.pdf

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2022c, May 9). *Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50069.htm

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2023, July 11). *Vilnius Summit Communiqué*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

Payne, K. (2022, June 1). *Deterrence in contemporary U.S. - Russian relations*. National Institute for Public Policy. https://nipp.org/information_series/keith-b-payne-deterrence-in-contemporary-u-s-russian-relations-no-523-june-1-2022/

Rauhala, E., Stern, D., & Ebel, F. (2022, November 16). *Missile in Poland was accident, NATO says. But spillover fear remains*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/16/nato-poland-missile-russia/

Roth, A. (2022, February 18). *Belarus leader expected to join Putin for strategic nuclear drills*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/putin-lukashenko-actively-take-part-strategic-nuclear-drill-belarus-president-russian-ballistic-cruise-missile-launched

Schelling, T. C. (1979). *The Strategy of Conflict* (sixth printing). Harvard University.

Snyder, G. H. (1961). *Deterrence and Defense*. Princeton University Press.

Stoltenberg, J. (2022, February 25). *Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the extraordinary virtual summit of NATO Heads of State and Government*. North Atlantic Treaty Organization. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_192455.htm

Tavberidze. V. (2022, April 7). *Former NATO Commander Says Western Fears Of Nuclear War Are Preventing A Proper Response To Putin*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. https://www.rferl.org/a/breedlove-nuclear-fears-west-deterred/31791020.html

Tertrais, B. (2021, May). *Principles of Nuclear Deterrence and Strategy*. NATO Defense College.

The Associated Press. (2023, March 25). *Putin says Russia will station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2023/03/25/1166089485/putin-russia-tactical-nuclear-weapons-belarus

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2021a, December 17). *Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.* https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en&clear_cache=Y

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2021b, December 17). *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees.* https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en

The President of the Russian Federation. (2020, June 8). *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence.* The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/1434131/?lang=en

The President of the Russian Federation. (2022, February 24). *Address by the President of the Russian Federation.* http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843

The White House. (2021, December 7). *Press briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.* https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/12/07/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-december-7-2021/

U.S. Department of Defense. (2018, February). *Nuclear Posture Review.* https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF

United States Senate Committee on Armed Services. (2022, May 4). *Testimony on the Nuclear Weapons Council.* https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/to-receive-testimony-on-the-nuclear-weapons-council

US Department of State. (2010, April 8). *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.* https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf

Venice Commission. (2022, October 5). *CDL-REF(2022)034-e Belarus - Constitution (with amendments adopted by referendum of 27 February 2022).* Council of Europe. https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-REF(2022)034-e

Weaver, G. (2023, September 29). *The urgent imperative to maintain NATO's nuclear deterrence.* NATO Review. https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/09/29/the-urgent-imperative-to-maintain-natos-nuclear-deterrence/index.html

Wellman, P. (2024, January 29). *Federal notices suggest US may bring its nuclear weapons back to England.* Stars and Stripes. https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2024-01-29/nuclear-weapons-lakenheath-12831280.html

Wilk, A., & Żochowski, P. (2023, June 6). *Russian nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus: The consequences.* Centre for Eastern Studies. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analizy/2023-06-06/russian-nuclear-weapons-deployed-belarus-consequences

Woolf, A. (2022, March 7). *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons.* Congressional Research Service. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32572/46

Zubriūtė, E. (2024, January 10). *'West must be ready for Russia to ask if Lithuania is worth nuclear war' – US general.* LRT. https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2167174/west-must-be-ready-for-russia-to-ask-if-lithuania-is-worth-nuclear-war-us-general

Quantitative Analysis of the Defense Industrial Base of NATO Countries in the Post-Cold War Period (1990-2022)

LEON RUNJE[1]
Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia
e-mail: leonrunje91@gmail.com

Abstract: Analysis of burden-sharing stands as a fundamental approach for understanding how actors participate in sharing financial responsibilities within distinct groups. Mancur Olson's collective action theory serves as a key method for scrutinizing burden-sharing dynamics within a group, notably finding application in the examination of burden-sharing within international entities like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN), particularly during the Cold War era. Within this tradition this chapter examines burden-sharing among NATO member states, encompassing both financial burden-sharing (BURDEN) and investments in individual national Defense Industrial Bases (DIBs). Moreover, this chapter addresses a research gap by scrutinizing both financial burden-sharing and individual national DIB investment in NATO during the post-Cold War period. Prior research, with few exceptions, predominantly focused on financial burden-sharing in the Cold War era and neglected the aspect of DIB investment. To achieve this goal, the chapter proposes modifications to existing methodological techniques within the field, which represent a crucial step for analyzing the distribution of DIB investment during the specified period. The significance of this chapter lies in its conceptual contribution, as it examines both financial burden-sharing and DIB investment during a transformative moment for NATO. Additionally, it provides a temporal contribution by studying a period that has received limited attention in the literature. Lastly, the chapter offers a methodological contribution, highlighting the necessity for adjustments in research methods to accommodate the dual focus on financial burden-sharing and DIB investment.

Keywords: burden-sharing, NATO, DIB, post-Cold war, joint product model

1. Introduction

The chapter deals with the impact of NATO amending its classical goal of deterrence and defense in the Euro-Atlantic area with a focus on crisis management and out-of-area operations in the post-Cold-War period (1990–2022) on financial burden-sharing

and on the development of the investment in the individual national Defense Industrial Bases (DIB) of NATO Member States. The goal of the chapter is to analyze the development of the DIB of NATO members with the aim of determining how the transformation of the Alliance impacted the development of the DIB of its Member States during the aforementioned time period.

The chapter finds its theoretical grounding in the theory of collective action developed by Mancur Olson (1965) and furthermore the joint product model of alliance, a theoretical – conceptual framework which has successfully been developed and applied to the study of NATO burden-sharing by several authors including by Olson and Zeckhauser (1966), Sandler (1977), Sandler and Forbes (1980) and further elaborated by Plümper and Neumayer (2014), and George and Sandler (2018). The chapter views investment in the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) of a NATO country as a form of burden-sharing within the Alliance and will therefore seek to analyze the DIB of the Alliance members along the same lines that financial burden-sharing (BURDEN) was analyzed previously in the literature.

For the purposes of this approach, the subjects of collective action under study are NATO countries who were members of the Alliance during any point in time from 1990 to 2022. The chapter utilizes a quantitative approach and deploys statistical analysis to observe the development of the DIB of these countries. Data are drawn from several Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data sets including the SIPRI Database on Military Expenditures (SIPRI, 2022a), the SIPRI Arms Industry Database (SIPRI, 2022b)[2], SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (SIPRI, 2022c), as well as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2017) and finally the Composite Index of National Capacity – CINC (Correlates of War, 2021). The composite index – CINC combines military spending, troop levels, population, urban population, iron and steel production and energy consumption (Beckley, 2018; Palmer et al., 2022). Data however is only available for the 1990–2016 period[3] and for the later years a median value of the 1990–2016 was used to estimate the values for the years 2017–2022.

---

[2] Data for the time-period of 1990–2001 was unavailable and therefore estimated using the data from the period 2002–2022 (arithmetic mean).

[3] The full spectrum of variables included in the research will be described in the text and put in the proper context, but an overview is provided here:

- BURDEN$_{it}$ – defense burden of member state i during period t within NATO.
- SIZE$_{it}$ – ratio of a country's national GDP to the combined GDP of all NATO countries for country i during period t.
- CINC – the composite index which combines military spending, troop levels, population, urban population, iron and steel production and energy consumption.
- PRIVDISP$_{it}$ – variable representing the number of private disputes for the country i during period t within NATO.
- RUSBURD$_{it}$ – the Russian defense burden dependent variable. This variable captures the arms-racing aspect of the (potential) Russia-NATO rivalry. The defense burden equals Russia's (i) military expenditures divided by Russia's GDP for any given year (t).
- TENSION$_{it}$ – the measure of post-Cold War tension takes account of all conflicts involving NATO states and Russia in any context.
- DIB$_{it}$ denotes the Defense-Industrial Base for state (i) in year (t).

2. Research framework and literature review

Utilizing the collective action theory proposed by Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser in their influential 1966 paper *An Economic Theory of Alliances*, this chapter examines burden-sharing within NATO from 1990 to 2022. This time-period has been selected primarily because, since the 1990s, NATO has added an additional focus along with its traditional task of defense and deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic in the form of crisis management and out-of-area operations. This process, which started with the missions to Kosovo and Afghanistan in the 2000s culminated with the codification of such an approach in the NATO Strategic Concept adopted in 2010 at the Lisbon Summit (Zapolskis, 2012). It is assumed that this process was influenced by the wide-ranging disarmament trends taking place in the 1990s and 2000s in the wake of the disappearance of the Soviet threat as well as the advent of the so-called 'peace dividend'. It is further assumed that this process was detrimental to the financial burden-sharing and the investment in the DIB of NATO states. The chapter expects this to be visible in the data. The trend was ultimately halted and partially reversed at the Wales summit in 2014 making this time period under analysis (1990–2022) extremely relevant for studying two Alliance transformations, the first one moving the Alliance away from deterrence and defense in the Euro-Atlantic area and a second one moving the Alliance back to its traditional role.

2.1. Impact of economic size on burden-sharing and DIB investment

In order to fully illustrate the research tools used in this chapter it is necessary to take into account the insights derived from Oneal's work in 1990 and the collaborative efforts of Oneal & Diehl in 1994. Drawing on Olson and Zeckhauser's perspectives from 1966, they characterize NATO as a uniquely privileged group, providing only the pure public good of deterrence.

The core attribute of such an entity lies in the readiness of a predominant actor, exemplified by the United States in this scenario, to shoulder the majority of the defense burden for the group (in this case NATO). This commitment is primarily driven by non-monetary advantages obtained from assuming this responsibility (Oneal, 1990). This concept stems from the presupposition embedded in the theory of collective action, asserting that a nation's economic size can effectively forecast its level of ambition in national defense. Given the massive differential of the economic size between the US and its NATO allies such an outcome was to be expected. This idea is more extensively elaborated in the seminal work of Olson and Zeckhauser (1966). In their original study, they explain that a nation's decisions regarding resource allocation to a military alliance or any other international organization are influenced by the

perception of the national interest by the nation's government (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966). Based on their findings, they deduce that within an alliance or any international organization where nations act in accordance with their national interests, there tends to be a widespread inclination for larger nations to bear disproportionately significant portions of the costs, while smaller nations contribute minimally or not at all to the shared objective (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966). This conclusion arises from the assertion that larger nations are willing to shoulder more significant portions of defense and other responsibilities, as identified by Olson and Zeckhauser in the context of various international organizations, such as the UN (Olson and Zeckhauser, 1966). This willingness is primarily driven by additional benefits, including political and geostrategic advantages. Oneal highlights that for the United States within the NATO framework, this translates to consistently bearing a disproportionate share of allied defense expenditures, as long as it perceives its security dependence on NATO, allows allies to act independently, and maintains economic preponderance (Oneal, 1990). Conversely, smaller states receive smaller portions of the overall benefits from the collective good and often lack the incentive to contribute additional amounts once larger members have fulfilled their desired commitments (Oneal, 1990).

The examination of existing literature reveals that the assertion of NATO being a uniquely privileged group and the viability of the pure alliance model, as well as the importance of country economic size for the level of national defense ambition, have faced criticism, as highlighted by both Oneal (1990) and George and Sandler (2018). Olson and Zeckhauser's assertion that NATO was a uniquely privileged group, provider of deterrence, an indivisible public good, was proven correct during the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) era from 1949 to 1967, a period when nuclear deterrence constituted the primary form of NATO collective defense. Authors supporting these conclusions include Tuttle (1970), Murdoch & Sandler (1982, 1984, 1991), Sandler & Murdoch (1986), as cited in Oneal and Diehl (1994), Beer (1972), Sandler and Cauley (1975), Sandler and Forbes (1980), Sandler (1988), Oneal (1990), Palmer (1990b) as referenced in Sandler (1993), as well as George and Sandler (2018). However as extensively outlined in the literature, a noteworthy shift occurred in 1967 when significant changes in NATO burden-sharing transpired following the adoption of the Flexible Response doctrine, where economic size (utilized as an indicator of national defense ambition), progressively ceased to be as closely linked to burden-sharing levels within NATO.

The hypothesis proposed by Olson and Zeckhauser, suggesting a positive correlation between gross national product (GNP) and military expenditure, appeared to lose its prominence when evaluating the burden-sharing capabilities of NATO allies, particularly since the late 1960s and early 1970s, with smaller allies increasingly contributing to defense spending (Sandler, 1993). This change not only raised skepticism about the legitimacy of the pure alliance model and the concept of NATO as a uniquely privileged group but also spurred the evolution of Mancur Olson's

theory of collective action and the transformation of the pure alliance model into the joint product model. This emerging model presented an alternative explanation, emphasizing factors such as private benefits, the impure public good of defense, and the increasing interdependence within Europe. This alternative perspective sought to elucidate the divergence between burden-sharing and GDP observed after 1967.

Notwithstanding these changes, Oneal and Diehl (1994) have illustrated that, even after incorporating these changes, NATO continued to exhibit the traits of a uniquely privileged group. This meant that the Alliance still provided, among other things, the pure public good of deterrence, that the United States still remained the predominant provider of security by shouldering most of the defense burdens and that country economic SIZE was still playing a key role in determining the level of national defense ambition. It is crucial to highlight that NATO's history of burden-sharing has been extensively documented by various authors, including Oneal (1990), Oneal & Diehl (1994), Hillison (2009), Plümper and Neumayer (2014), Song (2015), George & Sandler (2018), and Zyla (2018). Of particular relevance to this chapter is the consistent evidence presented in these works regarding the substantial influence of the United States on the defense spending patterns of European member states. This underscores the significant impact of US contributions to NATO on shaping the burden-sharing behavior of European nations and cannot be overlooked. Therefore, this chapter will also seek to test the impact of economic size ($SIZE_{it}$) on the financial burden-sharing of NATO states ($BURDEN_{it}$) as well as the Defense Industrial Base of NATO states (DIB_{it}) in the post-Cold War period.

2.2. Development of the joint product model – the analytical framework of the research

The conceptual-analytical framework used in order to conduct the analysis is, as previously stated, the joint product model of alliance. The theory was originally formulated by Olson and Zeckhauser in 1966 and centered on the pure alliance model, which was primarily founded on the provision of pure public goods. Subsequent scholars have extended and elaborated upon these concepts. As detailed in the chapter, the enhancements to Olson's and Zeckhauser's original framework (particularly after 1967) have led to the development of the joint product model. This model encompasses the provision of pure public goods, impure (mixed) public goods, and/or purely private goods. Taking into account the full development arc which stated with Olson and Zeckhauser (1966) who first developed the pure model of alliance, to Sandler (1977), and Sandler and Forbes (1980) who (according to George & Sandler, 2018) shifted the model's emphasis from the pure public good of deterrence towards the excludable (impure) public good of defense and other ally-specific benefits (private goods), this arc accounts for the creation of the 'joint product model of alliance'.

In contrast to its forerunner, the joint-product model posits that military expenditures can offer more than just deterrence; they can encompass various private

goods (such as national military goals) and public excludable goods (like defense, which, unlike deterrence, is exclusive to non-allies). It is essential to emphasize that a military alliance fashioned under the principles of the joint product model differs fundamentally from one adhering to the pure alliance model in several ways. Firstly, the sharing of burdens among countries is influenced partially by the acquired good, often of a private and excludable nature, rather than solely by the economic size of a country (although economic size still holds significant influence over a country's level of military ambition level). Secondly, the levels of defense may approach Pareto-optimal ideals, given that the alliance can achieve a balanced distribution of obligations due to ally-specific private benefits motivating burden-sharing as well as the fact of defense being a public good from which states can be excluded if they fail to meet certain defense expenditure levels or other criteria. Consequently, alliances fitting the joint product model are less likely to be characterized as uniquely privileged groups. However, they might still exhibit this characteristic. Therefore, along with the already identified impact of economic size on burden-sharing this chapter will also test the impact several other dependent variables ($RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$) on the financial burden-sharing of NATO states ($BURDEN_{it}$) as well as the Defense Industrial Base (DIB_{it}). This is done in order to attempt to take into account the impact of public, excludable and private goods on burden-sharing levels within NATO.

3. Research design

In order to determine how the transformation of the Alliance in the post-Cold War period (1990–2022), which amended the classical goal of deterrence and defense in the Euro-Atlantic area towards out of area operations and crisis management, impacted the DIB_{it} of NATO countries, this chapter turns to measures of allied burden-sharing provided by Oneal and Diehl in their 1994 paper titled *The Theory of Collective Action and NATO Defense Burdens*.

The first step in testing the development of the DIB_{it} of NATO member states is to see if it has followed the same trajectory of development as defense burden-sharing of NATO states during the 1990-2022 period. This is necessary because NATO burden-sharing has been widely researched in the literature providing a stronger frame of reference for comparison with past data. Defense burden-sharing is measured using the $BURDEN_{it}$ variable. Furthermore, the DIB_{it} variable (which denotes the DIB) is conceptually linked to the $BURDEN_{it}$ which further justifies this approach[4]. $BURDEN_{it}$ is a variable deployed often in the burden-sharing literature, particularly in the study of NATO burden-sharing, see Olson and Zeckhauser (1966), Sandler (1977), Sandler

---

[4] Both variables are constructed using measurements of defense expenditure of allied NATO states and both are significantly determined by country economic size of the NATO states.

and Forbes (1980), Plümper and Neumayer (2014), and George and Sandler (2018). The variable $BURDEN_{it}$ denotes the ratio of a nation's (i) defense budget divided by its GDP for a given year (t). Data is available from the SIPRI Database on military expenditures (SIPRI, 2022a).

The chapter uses three variables in order to analyze the burden-sharing of NATO states.

1. As has been already stated above, this chapter will also seek to test the impact of economic size ($SIZE_{it}$) on the defense burden-sharing of NATO states ($BURDEN_{it}$) as well as the Defense Industrial Base of NATO states (DIB_{it}) to ascertain the relationship between the economic size of country (i) in year (t) for the 1990–2022 period with the level of financial burden-sharing ($BURDEN_{it}$) as well as DIB investment (DIB_{it}). This will also lend insight into whether NATO still maintains the characteristic of a uniquely privileged group for the aforementioned time period.

2. As Oneal and Diehl (1994), referencing Olson (1971) and Jones and Thompson (1990), state, the provision of a public good (defense/deterrence) is influenced by the conditions that create a demand for it. During the Cold War, allied defense expenditures have been sensitive to the intensity of the Cold War. It was the perception of a Soviet threat that justified the Alliance's existence. Following in the footsteps of Oneal and Diehl (1994) this chapter conducts an analysis to see if this relationship has been maintained between NATO and Russia in the post-Cold War period. The chapter then proceeds to test the importance of this relationship for the development of the $BURDEN_{it}$ and DIB_{it} of NATO member states for the period 1990–2022. Using the Russian defense burden $RUSBURD_{it}$ dependent variable (Oneal, 1990). This variable captures the arms-racing aspect of the (potential) Russia-NATO rivalry. The defense burden $RUSBURD_{it}$ equals Russia's (i) military expenditures divided by Russia's GDP for any given year (t). Russian defense expenditures for the years 1992–2022 are taken from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2022a). The annual GDP of Russia was also derived from the SIPRI Database on defense expenditures.

3. The previous literature which focused primarily on Cold War period (Palmer 1990a, 1990b, as referenced in Oneal & Diehl, 1994) defined the index of the tensions in NATO-Russia relations as $TENSION_{it}$. For them, the measure of post-Cold War tension $TENSION_{it}$ was the algebraic sum of cooperative and conflictual acts directed by NATO states to Russia and by Russia to NATO states. Due to the change of the international situation after the end of the Cold War direct confrontations between NATO and the USSR/Russia have become rare and take on a less direct form while the number of cooperative acts has radically increased. To account for this fact the chapter will consider all conflicts

involving NATO states and Russia in any context while ignoring the countless 'collaborative acts'. This is driven by the idea articulated by Tsygankov (2018) and Guliyev and Gawrich (2020) that conflictual actions by any of the two sides in any context after 1990 can be seen by the other side as a provocation. Primarily because Russia publicly claims to see NATO interventions, such as those in FR Yugoslavia (1999) and Libya (2011), as evidence of power projection and regime change ambitions as described by Tsygankov (2018), while NATO sees Russia's wars in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014, 2022) as a clear indicator of an expansionist threat to Euro-Atlantic security (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020). Data is available from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2017).

In order to estimate the impact of these variables on allied burden-sharing the chapter will conduct a robust regression analysis adapted for panel data, between the independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$, and the dependent $BURDEN_{it}$ and the DIB_{it} variable. The DIB_{it} denotes the Defense Industrial Base for state (i) in year (t). The DIB_{it} variable is operationalized below.

Following the insights provided by Cakirozer (2023) on the effects of the peace dividend, the onset of globalization and the transformation of the Defense Industrial Base of NATO states after the Cold War, this chapter will attempt to gauge the size of the DIB of individual NATO states for the time period 1990–2022. Ideally, these indicators would encompass financial indicators, research and development (innovation) indicators, production indicators, supply chain/logistics indicators and employee profile indicators. The Defense Industrial Base variable DIB_{it} could therefore be calculated using a combination of quantitative indicators from different relevant aspects. However, due to the constraints in terms of data availability (there is a stringent classification system in this area of national security for most NATO states as well as Alliance data) and due to time constraints, an alternative indicator was chosen. As a proxy for the investment level in individual DIB the chapter used certain elements of the Composite Index of National Capacity (CINC) indicator. The indicator represents a compromise between delivering the research in a timely manner and making it available to the broader public on the one hand and the need to provide relevant and accurate results on the other. The composite index combines military spending[5], troop levels, population, urban population, iron and steel production and energy consumption (Beckley, 2018; Palmer et al., 2022). The chapter used the components focusing on iron and steel production and energy consumption. Unfortunately, data is only available for the period 1990–2016. Further data for the period 2017–2022 was estimated based on the median value of the data for the 1990–2016 period for each country. This approach was chosen because data during the 1990–2016 period did not follow a normal distribution and also had extreme outlying values, making this approach preferable to calculating the arithmetic

---

[5] The military spending factor was not chosen because the chapter relies on a different military spending factor available from the SIPRI Database on Military Expenditures (SIPRI, 2022a).

mean of the values[6]. The factors of troop levels, population and urban population were removed from the index seeing as they are not relevant for the needs of the chapter. The DIB_{it} variable was further constructed using the additional data from the SIPRI Arms Industry Database (SIPRI, 2022b), a database which details the largest defense industry firms by country in a given year[7], as well as the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (SIPRI, 2022c) containing information on all transfers of major conventional weapons for NATO states from 1990 to 2022 which allows for the monitoring and measuring the international flow of major conventional arms.

The final formula for the DIB_{it} is as follows:

$$DIB_{it} = (w_1 \cdot \text{Military Spending}) + (w_2 \cdot \text{Arms Transfers Database})$$
$$+ (w_3 \cdot \text{Top100} \cdot \text{Defense Industry Firms by Country})$$
$$+ (w_4 \cdot \text{Iron and Steel Production}) + (w_5 \cdot \text{Energy Consumption})$$

where w1, w2, …, w5 are the weights. Furthermore, the data was normalized to make the differing values of Military Spending (expressed in thousands of 2021 US dollars), Arms Transfers (expressed in number of weapons contracts), Top 100 Defense Companies (expressed in number of companies), Iron and Steel Production (expressed in thousands of tons) and Energy Consumption (expressed in thousands of coal-ton equivalents) to be mutually comparable.

The goal of the chapter was to examine the relationship between the independent variables $BURDEN_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$ with the dependent variable $BURDEN_{it}$ and then with the dependent variable DIB_{it} for the time-period of 1990–2022 thereby demonstrating the development of allied burden-sharing and DIB investment in the post-Cold War period.

In order to achieve this goal a graphical depiction of the relationship between the variables was provided. Furthermore, a robust regression analysis adapted for panel data of the relationship between the independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$ with the dependent $BURDEN_{it}$ as well as a regression analysis adapted for panel data of the relationship between the independent $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$ and the dependent DIB_{it} was conducted.

The equations, derived from the joint product model, are as follows:

$$BURDEN_{it} = \beta 0 + \beta 1 \cdot SIZE_{it} + \beta 2 \cdot RUSBURD_{it} + \beta 3 \cdot TENSION_{it}$$
$$DIB_{it} = \beta 0 + \beta 1 \cdot SIZE_{it} + \beta 2 \cdot RUSBURD_{it} + \beta 3 \cdot TENSION_{it}$$

---

[6] The findings were compared with the results generated with a data set where the 2017–2022 data was labeled as missing and no statistically significant difference between the results of the regression analysis of the two data sets was found.

[7] Data was available for the years 2002–2022, while the data for the period 1990–2001 was estimated using the arithmetic mean of the data for the 2002–2022 period. Such an approach was chosen because there were no extreme outlying variables.

4. Results and interpretation

The chapter firstly provides a graphical representation of the relationship between the BURDEN$_{it}$, RUSBURD$_{it}$, TENSION$_{it}$, and DIB$_{it}$ variables with the aim of completing the stated goal of examining the relationship between them.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the relationship between the variables used in the analysis. It should be noted that the variables listed on the graph are not mutually comparable in terms of scale. This is due to the fact that the DIB$_{it}$ variable was normalized rendering it incomparable to other variables in terms of scale. Furthermore, the scale differentials between the different variables were so extensive so as to necessitate intervention (in terms of a multiplication for certain variables x 100 for the DIB and x 1000 for the BURDEN and RUSBURD variables) so as to be able to be presented on the same graph. For those reasons Figure 1 should be exclusively used to analyze the trend of individual variables. Additionally, most of these variables don't have measurement units attached to their values, Some, like BURDEN and RUSBURD are constructed as ratios of other variables. Others like the DIB variable are normalized while the Tension variable is expressed in the number of interstate disputes. The same applies for Figures 2. and 3.
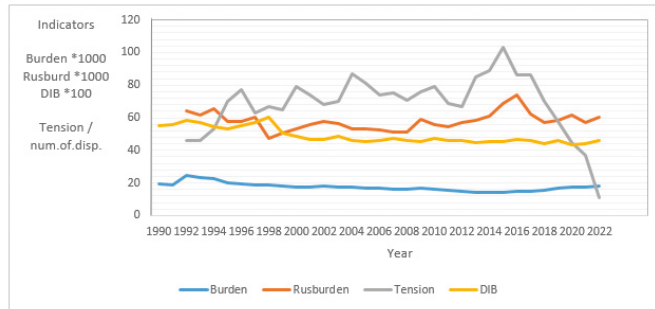

Figure 1. Comparison of variables (arithmetic means) of BURDEN$_{it}$, DIB$_{it}$, RUSBURD$_{it}$, TENSION$_{it}$ through time.
Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a, 2022b, 2022c), UCDP (2017) and Correlates of War (2021)

Upon examination several trends within the data become clear. Firstly, as Figure 2 demonstrates, the defense burdens of NATO states (BURDEN) have been on a steady decline since 1992 which is in accordance with the idea that the Allies focused on crisis management and out-of-area operations in the time-period under analysis. This time-period (1990-2022) is described in the literature as being characterized by the peace dividend. Furthermore, defense burdens have picked up again after 2014 implying a responsiveness of the Allies to the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent burden-sharing commitments made in the Wales summit of 2014 and the Warsaw summit of 2016.
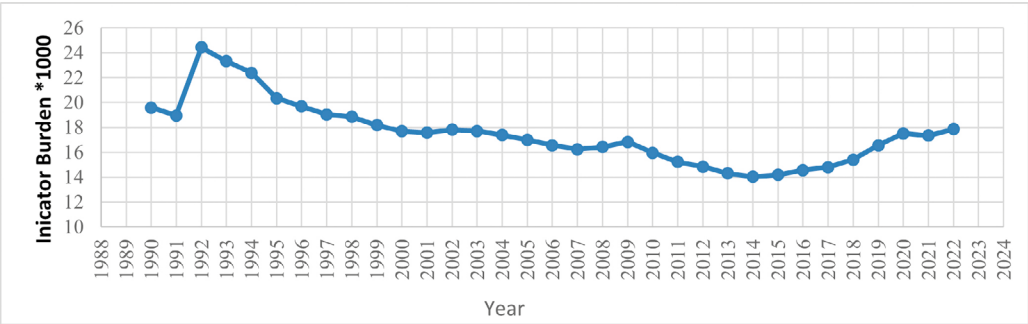
Figure 2. The trajectory of the defense burden of NATO states during the post-Cold War period
Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a)

When examining the Defense Industrial Base variable (DIB_{it}), while considering the above-mentioned limitations of the variable in terms of methodology and data, it should be noted that the value, with the exception of two sharp declines in the 1990s, does not show a clear trend of decline during the 2000-2022 time-period. Some of the noticeable fluctuations correlate with NATO expansion rounds and could be consequence of this fact. This is interesting because it runs contrary to conventional wisdom stating that the investment in the DIB of the Allies in the post-Cold War period has been constantly reduced and needs to be extensively reconstructed. A possible second explanation could be the fact that at least some of the capacity traditionally associated with the DIB is still physically in existence but could be unavailable to respective national governments for defense purposes. These capacities could be in use for other civilian or private market-based purposes. Figure 3 provides a depiction of the trajectory of the Defense Industrial Base of NATO states during the post-Cold war period.
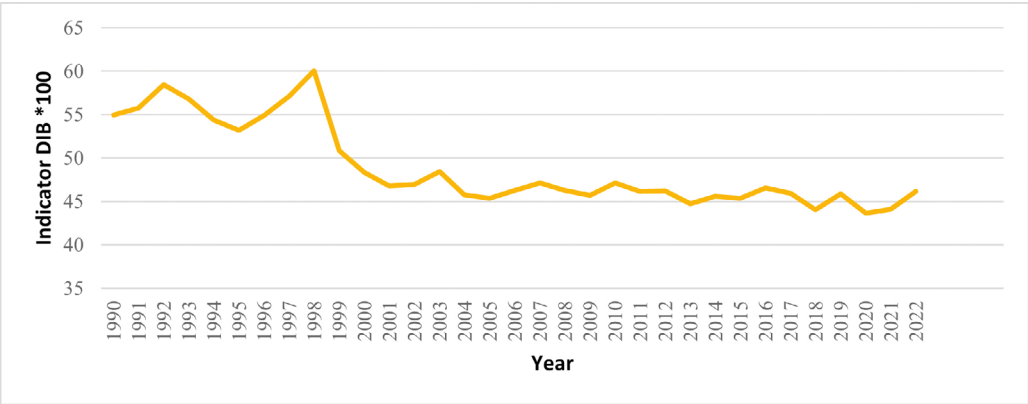

Figure 3. Depiction of variable (arithmetic mean): The Defense Industrial Base (DIB_{it})
Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a, 2022b, 2022c), and Correlates of War (2021)

The TENSION$_{it}$ variable, is described as the algebraic sum of conflictual acts conducted by NATO states and by Russia in the Euro-Atlantic area. Upon examination it is possible to ascertain that the variable has fluctuated over the years with a marked increase after 2012 and a sharp decrease after 2018 which is a consequence of one of the limitations of the variable, namely that it focuses on the number rather than the intensity of the conflictual acts. The variable was designed with the idea of creating a general sense of security perception for both NATO states and Russia within the Euro-Atlantic area. The aim is to compare the development of this variable with the investment of Allies into their DIB (DIB$_{it}$) and their financial defense contributions (BURDEN$_{it}$).

Furthermore, when examining the RUSBURD$_{it}$ variable (which, as has already been mentioned denotes Russia's defense contributions as a portion of Russia's GDP) it is possible to ascertain that the variable has undergone more radical changes than NATO burden-sharing. From the sharp decline experienced after 1997 (which corresponds with a period of profound economic crisis in Russia in 1998) (Feridun, 2004) to the increases of the late 2000s and early 2010s, which corresponds to the global financial crisis (Gaddy & Ickes, 2010) as well as with Russia's more assertive disposition after president Putin's return to power after 2012 (Kuzio, 2016). The first event represents a limiting influence on Russian defense expenditures while the latter two events signaled an increase in Russian defense expenditures possibly because they meant a shift away from economic development towards national prestige as a source of legitimacy of the Russian government in the public perception of the Russian population. Furthermore, it also cannot be ignored that the RUSBURD$_{it}$ variable dovetails well with the trajectory of the TENSION$_{it}$ variable, indicating that Russia was more responsive to the increase in the tensions in the Euro-Atlantic area than the NATO allies. This is in accordance with expectations considering the heightened threat perception publicly proclaimed by Russia (Tsygankov, 2018).

Figure 4 further illustrates the relationship between the defense burdens of NATO Allies (BURDEN) and Russia (RUSBURD) and substantiates the disparity between the two. During the entire post-Cold War period Russia's defense burdens have (in percentage terms) far exceeded those of NATO. This has remained true for all years with a significant continual increase of the RUSBRUD variable recorded in the period from 2012 to 2016 leading up to, during and just after the first escalation of fighting in Ukraine.
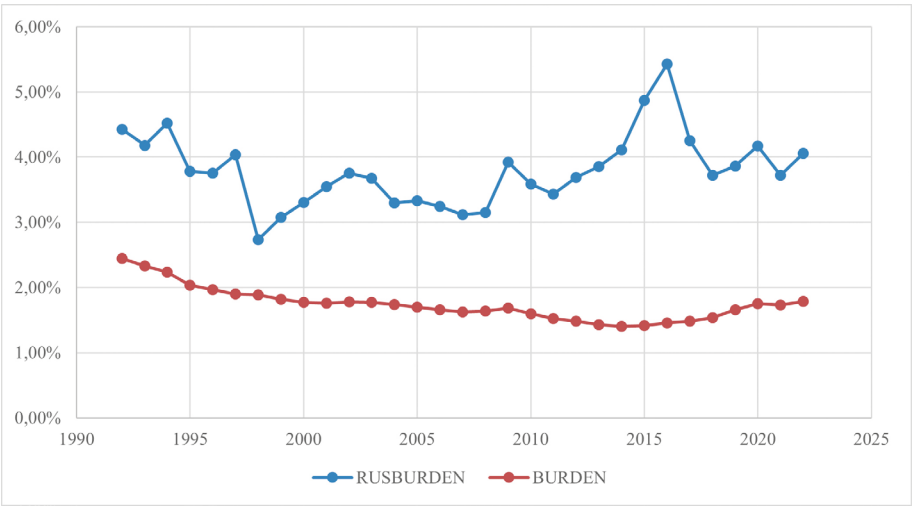
Figure 4. Comparison of variables (arithmetic means): $RUSBURD_{it}$ and $BURDEN_{it}$.
Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a)

The focus should now shift to the second part of the chapter, namely to the robust regression analysis for panel data which aims to ascertain the relationship between the independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$ and $TENSION_{it}$ with the dependent $BURDEN_{it}$ and DIB_{it} variables. This is in accordance with the joint product model of Alliance developed in the burden-sharing literature as well as with the idea that the $BURDEN_{it}$ and DIB_{it} variables are sufficiently similar for the same categorical apparatus to be used to analyze them both. Table 1 provides the results of a regression analysis adapted for panel data between the dependent variable $BURDEN_{it}$ and independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$.

Table 1. Robust regression analysis adapted for panel data between the dependent variable $BURDEN_{it}$ and independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$

reg Burden − Size, RusBurden, Tension (robust)		
Random-effects GLS regression Group variable: id	Number of obs = 707 Number of groups = 29	
R-sq: overall = 0.3490		

Burden	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Size	.0314767	.0105059	3.00	0.003	.0108854	.052068
RusBurden	.0355822	.0321258	1.11	0.268	−.0273833	.0985476
Tension	−.0002587	.0000932	−2.77	0.006	−.0004415	−.000076
_cons	.0165088	.001478	11.17	0.000	.0136119	.0194056

Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a), and UCDP (2017)

As visible from reading the table, the P value of the variable RUSBURD is greater than 0.05 which means that the variable is not statistically significant. This indicates that Allied burden-sharing was unresponsive to the burden-sharing of the Russian Federation. This is in accordance with expectations expressed in the literature which emphasized the Allied shift towards crisis management and out-of-area operations as well as a focus on reducing defense burdens in the context of the peace dividend. The variables $SIZE_{it}$ and $TENSION_{it}$ are statistically significant (P values are less than 0.05). The β coefficient of the $SIZE_{it}$ variable is significantly larger than the β coefficient of the $TENSION_{it}$. This is to be expected from examining the literature where country economic size has always been found to be a strong predictor of the level of national defense ambition (Oneal & Diehl, 1994). Furthermore, the strength of this variable could indicate that, during this time-period of analysis, the pure public good of deterrence was still a significant good enjoyed by NATO members. This could further point to NATO still maintaining the characteristic of a uniquely privileged group where the burden-sharing contributions of the United States remained dominant. Finally, the value of the β coefficient for the variable $TENSION_{it}$ is very small in relation to β coefficient for the variable the $SIZE_{it}$ and it therefore contributes very little to the explanation of the variance of the dependent $BURDEN_{it}$ variable. Therefore, it can be said that, as was expected in the literature, the Allies were unresponsive in terms of their burden-sharing (BURDEN) to both the level of tension in the Euro-Atlantic area (TENSION) as well as the Russian defense burdens (RUSBURD). The results of a regression analysis adapted for panel data between the dependent variable DIB_{it} and independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$ are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Robust regression analysis adapted for panel between the dependent variable DIB_{it} and independent variables $SIZE_{it}$, $RUSBURD_{it}$, $TENSION_{it}$

reg Burden − Size, RusBurden, Tension (robust)		
Random-effects GLS regression Group variable: id	Number of obs = 707 NNumber of groups = 29	
R-sq: overall = 0.8975		

DIB	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Size	6.348593	1.918418	3.31	0.001	2.588563	10.10862
RusBurden	−.0468527	.493996	−0.09	0.924	−1.015067	.9213617
Tension	.001561	.0022715	0.69	0.492	−.0028911	.0060131
_cons	.2086028	.0496491	4.20	0.000	.1112924	.3059132

Source: Own study based on SIPRI (2022a, 2022b, 2022c), UCDP (2017) and Correlates of War (2021)

Table 2 provides similar insights as Table 1, but focuses on the dependent DIB_{it} variable. The P values of the independent variables $RUSBURD_{it}$ and $TENSION_{it}$ are greater than 0.05, which means that the variables were not statistically significant. This indicates that Allied DIB investment (DIB_{it}) was unresponsive to the burden-sharing of the Russian Federation ($RUSBURD_{it}$) as well as the level of tension in the Euro-Atlantic area ($TENSION_{it}$). This is in accordance with expectations expressed in the literature and similar to the conclusions drawn from the regression analysis of the $BURDEN_{it}$ dependent variable. The variable $SIZE_{it}$ is statistically significant (P value is less than 0.05). The R2 value indicates that the predictor, the $SIZE_{it}$ variable explains 89.75% of the variance of the DIB_{it} variable. Considering these findings, it is possible to also infer a secondary conclusion. Such results indicate the validity of deploying the burden-sharing conceptual apparatus for analyzing the DIB seeing as their conceptual similarities, theorized above, are now confirmed in the similar behavior of both variables in terms of empirical analysis.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings indicate that during the era of the peace dividend and the onset of globalization (1990-2022) the Allies disregarded defense spending, burden-sharing and expanding their DIB. It should be noted that the independent variables $RUSBURD_{it}$ and $TENSION_{it}$ are not statistically significant within the regression model for both dependent variables ($BURDEN_{it}$ and DIB_{it}). It should also be noted that the DIB did not experience significant oscillations after the sharp fluctuations of the 1990s. This could indicate several things. Keeping in mind the fact that at least some of the behavior of the DIB_{it} variable can be explained by waves of NATO expansion leading to the reduction of the average value of the DIB of NATO, other explanations are still necessary. Firstly, the DIB could have been reduced in the context of the post-Cold War peace dividend but the lack of oscillations of the values of the variable after the year 2000 could be explained by the fact that DIB being retooled for commercial or other civilian purposes, seeing as some of it is dual use in nature. This could also help explain the lack of statistical significance of the $RUSBURD_{it}$ and $TENSION_{it}$ variables.

On a conceptual-theoretic note, the findings also indicate the validity of the idea expressed earlier in the chapter, to deploy the burden-sharing conceptual apparatus for analyzing the DIB. This is because both variables have behaved remarkably similarly in the empirical analysis. The fact that the R2 value indicates that the predictor, the $SIZE_{it}$ variable, explains 34.9% of the variance of the $BURDEN_{it}$ variable as well as 89.75% of the variance of the DIB_{it} variable points to several things. Firstly, the pure public good of deterrence could still be a significant good provided to Alliance members, because when this is the case country economic SIZE usually has great significance for the level

of defense ambition of states. Secondly, NATO could still maintain the characteristic of a uniquely privileged group. This is a group or international organization where the burden-sharing of one actor, in this case the US, is dominant. This tends to occur when country economic SIZE and, consequently, the pure public good of deterrence, are significant factors in determining the level of defense ambition of states.

Even though the war in Ukraine has served as a wake-up call and Allies are now working on reviving the DIB it must be noted that this response once again presents a situational reaction. This means, as Cakirozer (2023) points out, that, should circumstances change, the Allies could fall back into old patterns of behavior. It is therefore necessary to seize the moment and institutionalize the Allied commitment to redevelop their DIB in a way analogous to what was done with financial burden-sharing in the Wales Summit Declaration, the Warsaw Summit Communiqué and the Vilnius Summit Communiqué (NATO, 2014, 2016, 2023).

Therefore, the recent Defense Production Action Plan announced in the Vilnius Summit Communiqué of 2023 represents a step in the right direction. As Cakirozer (2023) mentions, the Defense Production Action Plan is a way to leverage NATO's role as "a convener, standard-setter, requirement setter and aggregator, and delivery enabler to promote sustainable defense industrial capacity". The plan will initially focus on land munitions and serve to help understand the inner workings of the alliance's vast defense industry, including small and medium size enterprises. Additionally, cooperation with the European Union (EU) in this regard is vital because most of the DIB will need to be located on the European continent in order for the Alliance to be able to promptly respond a deteriorated security situation on the European continent. Therefore, exploring synergies with EU initiatives such as the recently presented European Defense Industrial Strategy and the proposed European Defense Industry Program (EDIP) is of vital importance.

Some further recommendations in this regard include, but are not limited to, lowering inter-alliance barriers to cooperation on defense production, increasing the supply of ammunition stockpiles throughout the Alliance, auditing NATO allies' military hardware and increasing collaboration with the private sector including by developing a security-based culture (especially the highly innovative tech sector).

References

Beckley, M. (2018). *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower*. Cornell University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvrf8cq4

Beer, F. A. (1972). *The Political Economy of Alliances: Benefits, Costs, and Institutions in NATO*. Sage Publications. https://books.google.hr/books/about/The_Political_Economy_of_Alliances_Benef.html?id=dI4JAAAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y

Cakirozer, U. (2023, October 7). NATO Parliamentary Assembly. *Ensuring an Allied Defence Industrial Base for NATO's New Deterrence and Defence Baseline*. https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2023-defence-industrial-base-cakirozer-report-018-dsc

Correlates of War. (2021, July 22). *National material capabilities (v6.0)*. https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/

Gaddy, C. G., & Ickes, B. W. (2010). Russia after the global financial crisis. *Eurasian Geography and Economics, 51*(3), 281–311. https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.51.3.281

George, J., & Sandler, T. (2018). Demand for military spending in NATO, 1968–2015: A spatial panel approach. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 53, 222–236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2017.09.002

Guliyev, F., & Gawrich, A. (2020). NATO vs. the CSTO: Security threat perceptions and responses to secessionist conflicts in Eurasia. *Post-Communist Economies*, 33(2–3), 283–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2020.1800316

Jones, L. R., & Thompson, F. (1990). Burden sharing among America and its allies: Tests of collective choice and their significance. *The Western Political Quarterly, 43*(3), 459–477. https://doi.org/10.2307/448699

Kuzio, T. (2016). Nationalism and authoritarianism in Russia: Introduction to the special issue. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 49*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2015.12.002

Feridun, M. (2004). Russian Financial Crisis of 1998: An econometric investigation. *International Journal of Applied Econometrics and Quantitative Studies, 1*(4), 113–122.

Hillison, J. R. (2009). *New Members, New Burdens: Burden-Sharing Within NATO* [Dissertation, Temple University]. https://scholarshare.temple.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.12613/1441/Hillison_temple_0225E_10084.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Murdoch, J. C., & Sandler, T. (1982). A theoretical and empirical analysis of NATO. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 26*(2), 237–263. http://www.jstor.org/stable/173901

Murdoch, J. C., & Sandler, T. (1984). Complementarity, free riding, and the military expenditures of NATO allies. *Journal of Public Economics, 25*(1-2), 83–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727(84)90045-8

Murdoch, J. C., & Sandler, T. (1991). NATO burden sharing and the forces of change: Further observations. *International Studies Quarterly, 35*(1), 109. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600391

NATO. (2014, September 5). *Wales Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

NATO. (2016, July 9). *Warsaw Summit Communiqué issued by NATO Heads of State and Government*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm#cyber

NATO. (2023, July 19). *Vilnius Summit Communiqué issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Vilnius 11 July 2023*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press.

Olson, M. (1971). *The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press.

Olson, M., & Zeckhauser, R. (1966). An economic theory of alliances. *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 48*(3), 266–279. https://doi.org/10.2307/1927082

Oneal, J. R. (1990). The theory of collective action and burden sharing in NATO. *International Organization, 44*(3), 379–402. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706781

Oneal, J. R., & Diehl, P. F. (1994). The theory of collective action and NATO defense burdens: new empirical tests. *Political Research Quarterly, 47*(2), 373–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299404700208

Palmer, G. (1990a). Alliance politics and issue areas: Determinants of defense spending. *American Journal of Political Science, 34*(1), 190–211. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111515

Palmer, G. (1990b). Corralling the free rider: Deterrence and the western alliance. *International Studies Quarterly, 34*(2), 147–164. https://doi.org/10.2307/2600706

Palmer, G., McManus, R. W., D'Orazio, V., Kenwick, M. R., Karstens, M., Bloch, C., Dietrich, N., Kahn, K., Ritter, K., & Soules, M. J. (2022). The MID5 Dataset, 2011–2014: Procedures, coding rules, and description. *Conflict Management and Peace Science, 39*(4), 470-482. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894221995743

Plümper, T., & Neumayer, E. (2014). Free-riding in alliances: Testing an old theory with a new method. *Conflict Management and Peace Science, 32*(3), 247–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894214522916

Sandler, T. (1977). Impurity of defense: An application to the economics of alliances. *Kyklos, 30*(3), 443–460. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.1977.tb02203.x

Sandler, T. (1988). Sharing burdens in NATO. *Challenge, 31*(2), 29–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/05775132.1988.11471236

Sandler, T. (1993). The economic theory of alliances: A survey. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 37*(3), 446–483. https://www.jstor.org/stable/174264?seq=1

Sandler, T., & Cauley, J. (1975). On the economic theory of alliances. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 19*(2), 330–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200277501900207

Sandler, T., & Forbes, J. F. (1980). Burden sharing, strategy, and the design of NATO. *Economic Inquiry, 18*(3), 425–444. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7295.1980.tb00588.x

Sandler, T., & Murdoch, J. C. (1986). Defense burdens and prospects for the Northern European allies. In D. B. H. Denoon (Ed.), *Constraints on Strategy: The Economics of Western Security* (pp. 59–113). Potomac Books Inc.

SIPRI. (2022a). *SIPRI Military expenditure database*. https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex

SIPRI. (2022b). *SIPRI Arms industry database*. https://www.sipri.org/databases/armsindustry

SIPRI. (2022c). *SIPRI Arms transfers database*. https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers

Song, Y. (2015). *The US Commitment to NATO in the Post-Cold War Period*. Durham University. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/10978/

Tsygankov, A. P. (2018). The sources of Russia's fear of NATO. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 51*(2), 101–111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2018.04.002

UCDP. (2017). *UCDP Dataset download center*. https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/

Tuttle, A. C. (1970). Book reviews: What Price Vigilance? The Burdens of National Defense. By Bruce M. Russett. *Western Political Quarterly, 24*(4), 821–822. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591297102400423

Zapolskis, M. (2012). 1999 and 2010 NATO strategic concepts: A comparative analysis. *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review, 10*(1). https://doi.org/10.2478/v10243-012-0012-5

Zyla, B. (2018). Transatlantic burden sharing: Suggesting a new research agenda. *European Security, 27*(4), 515–535. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1552142