

The New Russia versus NATO: A Reassessment and Understanding

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I. Introduction

The past of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) tactical concepts can be traced back to the very beginning of the Alliance in 1949 with “The Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area”, published December 1st, 1949 (Cook, 2017). In the decades that followed, the Concept was updated and presented during the Cold War between 1949 and 1968 and was classified and fairly operationally relevant, making them more “military-strategic” than “political-strategic” (Zenko, 2010). It later transformed from a strategic outlook to that which is “political-strategic” in nature. A key element in the move from “military-strategic” to “political-strategic” (Clausson; Clausson, NATO: Status, Relations and Decision Making, 2006)

Concepts was the Harmel report published in 1967. The “Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance” was crafted at the order of Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel at a challenging time in NATO’s history when some questioned the nature or reason of the Alliance (Demir & Alper, 2022). A key development brought forth by the report was the introduction of a twofold-track approach of preclusion and détente. The Tactical Concept presented in 1968 could be seen as belonging to the preclusion and security track of the two foldl-track approach. Later, both tracks were incorporated into the Strategic Concept. The post-Cold War Strategic Concepts of 1991, 1999 and 2010 were all influenced by the relative strategic stability of the times and positive prospects for cooperative and constructive developments in global affairs. The Concepts of 1991 and 1999 still included deterrence as a core war strategy for the Alliance; it was however presented in a much more sanguine manner then in the Concept of 1968. The Strategic Concept of 2010 presented three core tasks for NATO; Collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security. However, the Russian military offensive against Ukraine in 2014 contributed to a growing sentiment that the 2010 Concept needed to be updated. Despite, this back drop, the presidency of Donald Trump made it impossible to think seriously about writing a new Concept.

II. Russia’s Resurgence and NATO Counter Strategic Policy

Russia’s rebirth has been ongoing since 2004 when Vladimir Putin, through his homeland policy measures, put an end to several vagueness and misgivings about Russia’s ability to stage a comeback as a power of significance Putin’s military victories in Chechnya provided Russia the confidence to resuscitate the power of the old Soviet Union. Added also Russia has emerged as the world’s biggest energy producer, pumping more oil than Saudi Arabia and making Europe dependent on the export of its natural gas. The growing commodity items exports have swelled the Kremlin’s coffers, which now possesses the third largest reserve of foreign currency in the world. It has a large reserve worth over \$160 billion dollars. Russia’s resurgence and its foreign policy focus depend on its leadership and national interests which are linked to territorial expansion in the near abroad on grounds of security and regional hegemony, not only in Europe and the post-Soviet republics, but also the world at large.

For two scores, NATO tried to build a friendship with Russia, developing discourse and practical cooperation in areas of common interest (Sangiovanni, 2020). Despite this, Russia has violated the standards and principles that contributed to peace in the new world order. Coupled with the negation of cordiality; Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace and stability. In light of its hostile policies and actions, NATO can no longer consider Russia to be a partner. However, NATO remains willing to maintain channels of communication with Moscow to mitigate risks and prevent escalation. NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia (Lin, 2021). The Alliance will continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a united and responsible way.

Russia’s energy blackmail, its brunt on international food supplies, its smeared hybrid activities, cyber attacks, global disinformation campaigns and irresponsible nuclear oratory demonstrate Russia’s ignorance for international norms and security and welfare of billions of humanity around the world. Russia continues its deliberate attempts to stop Ukraine’s agricultural exports, on which hundreds of millions of people worldwide depend. Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the beginning of its aggression in eastern Ukraine in 2014, NATO has adopted a firm position in full support of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its

internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters. Crimea and Sevastopol are two closely related regions with a core geopolitical cum strategic importance. Crimea is a peninsula located in the Black Sea, contagious strategic platform close to mainland Ukraine (the Ukrainians claim ownership, Russia believes it owns it) (Duyile, Ethno-Religion Cum Geo Political Background to the Russo Ukraine War, 2023).

As a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea, NATO Allies decided in 2014 to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia, while keeping open channels of political and military communication. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, political dialogue with Russia was fully suspended. Allies remain willing to maintain channels of communication with Moscow to mitigate risk and prevent escalation (Trachtenberg, 2021).

For NATO's summit in Istanbul and beyond, the United States envisions five ambitious goals: a call for troops and resources for a more vigorous NATO presence in Afghanistan; a defined role for NATO in Iraq; expanded practical engagement with the Greater Middle East; improved relations between NATO and the European Union; to elevate and strengthen NATO's relations with Russia (Gabriella & Eskil, 2022). The United States remains committed to NATO, the essential Alliance, and to effective multilateralism in order to achieve the common European and American vision for a secure, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future. Originally created to shield Western Europe from Soviet communist aggression, the modern-day NATO has adapted to 21st century threats, transformed itself politically, acquired new military capabilities, and embarked on important new missions confronting the global terrorism threat on its front lines. For NATO's June summit in Istanbul and beyond, the U.S. envisions five ambitious goals for the 55-year old Alliance. This venerable multilateral institution remains a vital transcontinental bridge linking the United States and Canada to democracies in Europe and extending security across virtually two continents. Since September 11, 2001, the United States and its allies have been engaged in a top-to-bottom rebuilding of NATO. At the Prague Summit in November 2002, the allies agreed on a blueprint to create a new NATO — different in mission, membership, and capabilities than the old Cold War institution. The results of our transformation efforts will be evident at NATO's Istanbul Summit in June 2004. This epochal transformation has been occurring simultaneously with the Alliance's greatest enlargement since its founding in 1949. The Istanbul Summit will mark the first meeting of NATO's heads of state with 26 member nations. The addition to NATO of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia completed the greatest round of enlargement in NATO's 55-year history. These nations joining NATO made Russia agitated and suspicious of NATO intentions. The bad blood between NATO and Russia became the major trigger that started off the Ukraine and Russia war. Putin's Russia still has reminisced to the old Soviet Union borders and wants NATO not to be in its doorstep (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 'Japa' Phenomenon And Nigeria Students In The Mix Of A Proxy War in Ukraine, 2023). Strategy and doctrine must anchor on a balanced force that can effectively apply maritime power across the gamut of using sea platforms to achieve strategic air and sea roles and land objectives (Duyile, www.iiste.org, 2014). This, of course, is an advantage to NATO.

However, this same concept has been denied to Russia. Russia counteractions in Georgia and later Ukraine must be viewed in the context of a geopolitical understanding of Russia's retort to the NATO maneuvers in some countries close to its borders. The Russian counter action can also be deemed strategic and military. Russia's control of Ukraine's naval facilities has always been important for Russia's power to counter NATO's incursion into its sphere of influence (Duyile, Ojo, Oludemi, & Jegede, 2022). Putin insists that after the Soviet Union broke up into fifteen states, there was agreement between President Mikhail Gorbachev and the West that NATO will not expand East. NATO has denied the existence of such an agreement, but has barely hidden its subversive encouragement in bringing three countries under the former Soviet Union into its fold, virtually encircling Russia. For Putin, the invasion of Ukraine is his last stand, his push, after Crimea, for Russia's Modern-day Danzig (Duyile, Ojo, Oludemi, & Jegede, 2022). Russia has an advantage over NATO, the critical issue is that the United States and the other NATO countries are not readily available to fight side by side with the Ukrainians whereas Russian troops are directly engaged in the battle and the war (Lin, 2021). The Russian Military is far weaker, when it is a conventional war.

Russia major grouse, however, have come during the post-Cold War period, as NATO has reached out to its former adversaries from the Warsaw Pact, to the point of accepting many into the Alliance. As the Alliance has enlarged, it has also undertaken a transformation, reflecting the new realities. The process of transformation has been successful enough in 10 of these states to lead to their membership in NATO; several others have expressed interest in eventual membership. NATO has also played a leading role in the Balkans, including the first use of force in NATO's history, during the 1999 Kosovo campaign.

NATO's enlargement has expanded its territorial reach but also introduced new challenges. Integrating new members with diverse capabilities and political cultures complicates decision-making and can dilute the alliance's effectiveness. The process of enlargement also raises questions about the credibility of NATO's collective defense commitments, especially as the alliance's Article 5 guarantee now covers a much larger and

more heterogeneous group of countries. The dispute over European strategic autonomy-Europe's desire to develop independent defense capabilities-has become increasingly divisive. Some European countries see greater autonomy as necessary for their security; while others worry it could weaken NATO and transatlantic ties (Cook, 2017). This discussion set hurdles for NATO-EU relations and poses questions about how the two organizations can best balance each other without duplicating efforts or undermining collective defense. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union has introduced additional uncertainty into NATO's political landscape. Brexit challenges the integrationist identity that has underpinned European security and complicates coordination between NATO and the EU. It also affects burden-sharing and the political balance within the alliance, as the UK has traditionally played a leading role in both organizations.

NATO's decision-making process, which requires consensus among all members, can lead to delays and inefficiencies, especially as the alliance grows larger. Differences in national capabilities, defense industries, and procurement practices further complicate military integration and reduce the effectiveness of joint operations. The lack of a truly integrated defense industry among NATO members also increases costs and reduces interoperability.

A growing divide between nationalist and globalist political forces within member states fuels skepticism about multilateral commitments. Political churn and the rise of populist governments can undermine trust and make it harder to maintain a unified stance on key security issues, increasing the risk of internal fragmentation. NATO must continually reassess its role in a rapidly changing security environment marked by the resurgence of great power competition, particularly with Russia and China. Internal disagreements about how to respond to these challenges, coupled with the need to adapt to new forms of warfare and technological threats, place additional strain on the alliance's ability to act decisively and maintain its relevance.

In 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May publicly affirmed that the UK will remain "unconditionally committed to maintaining Europe's security," a reassuring statement that has yet to be tested. Brexit will probably result in the UK taking on a bigger role in NATO by using the Alliance as a key platform for international cooperation and power projection. May and the pro-Brexit camp frequently paint an image of post-Brexit Britain as a strong international trade powerhouse (Trachtenberg, 2021). NATO is an important forum for attempting to realize this vision, as it creates opportunities for like-minded countries to improve relations and shape the future of the liberal international order. The organization will become especially important after Brexit, which will reduce the UK's ability to substantially influence EU security policy. NATO will enable Britain to retain some of that influence, since 21 EU Member States and two candidate countries belong to the Alliance (Clausson, NATO: Status, Relations and Decision Making, 2006). Throughout recent history, the UK has blocked major EU actions towards defence and security integration and instead promoted cooperation through NATO.

The expectation of Britain's departure, combined with the emergence of a unified Franco-German agenda on the future of Europe, has resulted in the EU embarking on major security initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation framework, the European Defense Fund, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and the European Intervention Initiative. Together, these programs will enhance the EU's security research and development capacity, allow for better tracking and pooling of national defence resources, and improve military coordination within and outside the EU.

Unsurprisingly, these changes – considered alongside the sizeable upcoming increase in EU security and defence spending – have raised questions about whether the EU is attempting to replace NATO. That possibility remains unlikely (Demir & Alper, 2022). The most recent iteration of the EU Global Strategy emphasizes that NATO will remain at the center of Euro-Atlantic security. The Union's new structures will still mostly be controlled by Member States, as EU leaders and policymakers have been quite clear in opposing a fully integrated EU force. Cooperation between NATO and the EU is more sensible, as it leverages the unique tools of both organizations. The EU's decision to prioritize security and defence should be seen as a valuable complement to NATO, due to the increasingly transnational and rapidly evolving nature of global challenges like hybrid warfare. The Alliance and the EU should use their capabilities to address such issues and to each develop a presence where the other cannot. Furthermore, the planned increase in defence spending in many EU Member States can help them meet NATO's 2% defence investment pledge, which will strengthen NATO and hamper American criticisms about unfair burden sharing.

III. Concluding Remarks

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949 to ensure collective defense against Soviet expansion and promote transatlantic cooperation. Initially composed of 12 countries, NATO has expanded to include 31 members, with Sweden expected to join soon. During the Cold War, NATO served as a deterrent against Soviet aggression, maintaining a flexible military strategy and a robust command structure. The end of the Cold War marked a turning point, as NATO adapted to new security challenges, including

terrorism, cyber threats, and hybrid warfare. Its role evolved from collective defense to crisis management and cooperative security, reflected in interventions in the Balkans and Afghanistan (Sangiovanni, 2020).

In recent years, NATO has faced significant challenges due to Russia's aggressive actions, including the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine. These events have prompted NATO to strengthen its eastern flank through forward deterrence, advanced missile systems, and regional defense plans. However, internal disagreements among members about burden-sharing and strategic priorities have tested the alliance's cohesion. Hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion further complicate NATO's security environment.

NATO has also sought to modernize its approach by enhancing partnerships with non-member states like Japan and South Korea and addressing global concerns such as climate change and emerging technologies. The 2022 Madrid Summit and subsequent meetings emphasized adapting NATO's defense posture across land, air, maritime, cyber, and space domains. Despite these efforts, questions remain about NATO's ability to address diverse threats effectively while maintaining unity among its members.

Looking ahead, NATO must balance traditional defense roles with emerging challenges in a multipolar world. Expanding its partnerships globally and integrating advanced technologies will be crucial for its continued relevance. By addressing internal divisions and external threats proactively, NATO can remain a cornerstone of international security in the 21st century.

NATO's evolution from a Cold War military alliance to a multifaceted security organization highlights its adaptability in addressing global challenges. Over the decades, NATO has expanded its membership, redefined its strategic objectives, and responded to emerging threats such as terrorism, cyber warfare, and hybrid conflicts. However, the alliance faces significant challenges, including internal divisions over burden-sharing, differing strategic priorities among member states, and external pressures from adversaries like Russia and China. Despite these obstacles, NATO remains a cornerstone of international security, fostering collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Its ability to maintain cohesion while modernizing its strategies through partnerships, advanced technologies, and a focus on emerging domains like cyber and space will determine its future relevance. By addressing these challenges proactively, NATO can continue to adapt to the shifting global security landscape and uphold its role as a stabilizing force in an increasingly complex world.

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