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# NATO and Russia: A Perpetual New Beginning

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## Abstract

*After a brief period of positive relations between Russia and NATO in the early 1990s, a whole series of crises in relations have led to a general deterioration of the relationship. These crises have resulted from two very different conceptions of self-identity and of the future of security in Europe. Although the divisions became evident already in before the turn of the millennium, the policies of Presidents Putin and Medvedev aimed at rebuilding Russia's role as a great power contributed further to the divisions. Three areas of NATO policy have been central to Russia's growing opposition to NATO- expansion eastward, the development*

*of a missile shield, and the globalization of NATO's involvement. Prospects for a real reconciliation between Russia and NATO are not positive.*

## Key Words

Russian foreign policy; Russia-NATO relations; identity and foreign policy; NATO expansion; U.S.-sponsored missile shield; globalization of NATO activity.

“We spend too much energy on what divides us. We should instead focus on what unites us” by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2009.

## Introduction

The post-Cold War period has been far from a stable era, considering the many crises between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia that resulted from the waves of NATO enlargement, the war in Kosovo, support of the West for the color revolutions, the U.S.-sponsored missile shield, and so on. Throughout the two decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall

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and of the Soviet Union itself, relations between NATO and Russia have led to the emergence of a significant sense of mistrust on both sides.

The end of the Cold War redefined the relationship between NATO and Russia. On the one side, NATO has been able to transform its *raison d'être* by shifting from an organization solely providing collective defence to an organization proactive in the area of collective security. NATO, initially designed to protect the Euro-Atlantic area from a Soviet attack, evolved into an alliance promoting security in Europe, but also beyond. On the

other hand, Russia has been seeking a new identity since 1991. The direct aftermath of the Cold War was a clear

period of domestic turmoil ending with the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000. Since 2000, Mr. Putin's primary mission has been to bring Russia back to its great power status by reasserting its influence over neighboring states and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

The status of the relationship has remained one of the most pressing issues for both actors. Andres Fogh Rasmussen made his first speech as the new Secretary General (SG) in 2009 on this very topic: NATO and Russia. Secretary General Rasmussen believes that good relations between the two actors would not only contribute to better European security,

but to improved global security.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1990s David Yost wrote, "no issue is more central to the Alliance's goal of building a peaceful political order in Europe than relations with Russia."<sup>3</sup> More than a decade later such a statement could not be more accurate. The core members of the Alliance see Russia as the missing piece of the puzzle in order to stabilize and "westernize" the European continent completely. On the other hand, Russia views the European continent as still an area where Russian influence can be increased and maintained.

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Both actors share one characteristic: the pursuit of proactive foreign policies. NATO has been proactive by expanding the

number of its members, leading several military operations, and broadening its spectrum of activities. On the other hand, Moscow under Putin has also maintained an assertive foreign policy as a way to divide the West and strengthen Russian power and regional influence. For both actors, action is essential for validating existence. In addition, clearly these actions have not been coordinated, as the regular verbal confrontation between the two makes evident.

The broader question of this article about relations between NATO and Russia concerns relations between Russia

and the members of the Euro-Atlantic community. NATO and Russia have had a troubled relationship for historical, cultural, strategic, and political reasons. Is NATO the appropriate platform for strengthening cooperation and security on the European continent and beyond? Can NATO overcome the internal strategic divisions among its members on dealing with Russia? Is Russia willing to cooperate fully with the members of the Euro-Atlantic community through NATO?

This article is structured around three issues. The first looks at each actor separately in order to clarify their understandings of foreign policy as well as their political culture. The second section analyses the actual relations between NATO and Russia. The last part of the article examines three areas of contention- the U.S.-sponsored missile shield, NATO enlargement, and the globalization of NATO.

## Two Actors: Two Visions

### *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Search of Itself?*<sup>4</sup>

The 1949 North Atlantic Treaty signed in Washington, DC, in 1949 established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Two of the core components of NATO remain the famous Article 5, which promises security support for any

member state which comes under attack,<sup>5</sup> and less popular, but still extremely relevant, Article 2, which commits the member states to work toward strengthening security by strengthening free institutions.<sup>6</sup> These two articles are the heart and soul of NATO and the definition of the concept of “collective defence.”

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In recent years NATO's principles and identity have clearly evolved and changed in accordance with the international and regional balance of power, but also with the emergence of new security threats. NATO's identity has progressively shifted from that of a collective defence organization to one focused on collective security. As a collective defence organization NATO's roles are to deter coercion and military aggression against its members through military capabilities and the use of force, if necessary. This was NATO's role throughout the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era NATO needed to adjust to the new international threats, in order to survive and remain relevant. The development of a collective security

role has not only been its cognitive transformation, but also its strategic *raison d'être*. NATO's collective security role stands for "aspirations for universally shared responsibility for peace and international order."<sup>7</sup> This strategic and cultural transformation can be illustrated by the new types of missions undertaken by NATO, such as the Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011 or NATO's Operation Ocean Shield fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa since 2009. These new types of mission, along with the "nation-building" efforts in Afghanistan, are a considerable strategic shift for the Alliance. NATO has become the military instrument of members of the Euro-Atlantic community in dealing with pressing international crises usually based on a UN Security Council mandate.

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During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Alliance has faced considerable internal dilemmas affecting its functioning. The creation of the

European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, known as the CSDP after the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon) in 1998 led to a fear from the NATO members of a 3D syndrome- decoupling, duplicating, discriminating.<sup>8</sup> The CSDP was perceived as a threat and competitor to NATO until both structures came together in the Berlin Plus agreement in 2003. The new century started with the attack of 9/11 that unified the Euro-Atlantic community and even resulted in the sole historical use of Article 5 as a symbol of that solidarity. However, the honeymoon did not last long. The Iraq crisis of 2003 led to a considerable split between the pro-Atlantic members and the other members of the Alliance. The division between the two sides damaged not only NATO, but also the credibility of trans-Atlantic cooperation. Furthermore, the fact that former US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, made a distinction between the new and old Europe affected the unity of the Alliance and the European Union. This led to the questioning of the process of enlargement raising question of trust and reliance.<sup>9</sup>

Even after the considerable transatlantic split, the relations between the members of the Euro-Atlantic community have progressively become stable. The return of France to the NATO military command exemplifies the change of perceptions of the role and use of NATO in European capitals.

## *In Search of Power and Leverage: Russia in the Times of Vladimir Putin*

The collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the tumultuous developments of the 1990s left Russia “weak and frustrated,” especially after the frustrations of the Yeltsin period.<sup>10</sup> The election of Vladimir Putin to the presidency of Russia in 2000 had a major impact on the behavior of Russia regionally, but also internationally, as well as leading to considerable domestic transformation of the Russian political system. Since Putin’s rise to power, Russia foreign policy has been extremely revisionist taking into consideration its military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and the recurrent use of energy as a weapon. “One of the main factors that has permitted this has been its economic performance and the income from energy production and exports.”<sup>11</sup>

Former President Vladimir Putin has embodied a new trend in Russia seeking to re-impose Russia’s power and influence regionally and internationally. “In Putin’s conception, restoring Russia’s power and influence abroad required rebuilding the power of the Russian state at home, particularly halting the erosion of power from the “centre” to the periphery that had occurred under Yeltsin, and regaining state control over the “commanding heights” of the economy.”<sup>12</sup>

Russian leaders Putin and his successor Dimitri Medvedev have been implementing, what has been called a “managed democracy” or “sovereign democracy”. According to Nikolay Petrov and Michael McFaul, the characteristics of a managed democracy are: first, a strong presidency and weak institutions; second, state control of the media; third, control over elections, thus allowing elites to legitimize their decisions; fourth, visible short-term effectiveness and long-term inefficiency.<sup>13</sup> Such a system has been perceived more or less as a democracy à la *carte* and a challenge against Western values and norms promoted by both NATO and the European Union through their cooperation with former Soviet states. In addition corruption has been rampant at the highest levels of Russian government and society affecting economic redistribution and eroding the roots of democracy, such as the independence of the judiciary system.

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Putin worked on centralizing power around the presidency, as defined by the constitution, but also around a few “men

of influence.” These men of influence are from the circles of the FSB, formally the KGB, and energy sector. After two terms as president, Putin stepped down to become Medvedev’s Prime Minister in 2008, which has not limited his control over Russia’s power.<sup>14</sup> At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin underlined the fact that Russia was back in the forefront of international politics and sought to maximize its national interests, when he broadly attacked virtually all aspects of U.S. policy.<sup>15</sup> The Georgia invasion of 2008 was also a major wake-up call for the Euro-Atlantic community, since it was an obvious reaction to Western recognition of Kosovo and the commitment of the United States and others in NATO to grant membership to Ukraine and Georgia. The invasion was a clear statement by Moscow that Russia remains a powerful actor and “wants the West to accept that the post-Soviet space is part of a Russian sphere of influence.”<sup>16</sup> This latter point was made most explicit in a speech by President Medvedev soon after the war in Georgia, when he referred to post-Soviet space as an area of Russia’s “privilege interests.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the usual tensions between Russia and the West, the two waves of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, added to the NATO enlargements have also contributed to increasing frictions between Russia and the members of the Euro-Atlantic

community. The post-Soviet states and others that were part of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence that joined NATO have been seen as lost territories by Russia. Furthermore, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the EU and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) of NATO have been a powerful instrument of soft power, in order to establish strong relations with important energy partners and/or energy transit states, while promoting strong economic, social, cultural ties aimed at increasing mutual prosperity and stability at the regional level. This has contributed to fostering a fear by Moscow that the involvement of the Western institutions in Russia’s neighbourhood undermines Russia’s influence in an area perceived as a sphere of “legitimate interest.”<sup>18</sup>

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Since the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, Moscow has implemented and pursued a foreign policy embedded in realpolitik. Moscow’s narratives are in

fact hiding a “timeless power politics.”<sup>19</sup> The splits between the members of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and Moscow are numerous and considerable: the missile shield; the CFE Treaty; NATO rapprochement with Kiev *and* Tbilisi; the globalization of NATO; and the question of energy security.

## The History of NATO-Russian Relations

Relations between NATO and Russia have been at the heart of European and international politics for over sixty years. The history of the relations between the two actors is one of mistrust, competition and problems. The end of the Cold War did not alter this trend, as demonstrated by the multiple crises since the 1990s. The 1990s were a period of difficulties in relations between the two actors starting with a “honeymoon” period following the 1991 declaration of Russian President Yeltsin speaking of an eventual NATO membership for Russia. As underlined by Pouliot, soon after the end of the Cold War, “Moscow seemed on the way to integrate the Euro-Atlantic security community, sparking high hopes for a new peaceful order in the northern hemisphere.”<sup>20</sup> However, this did not last and the question of NATO enlargement of states of Central Europe became a prominent issue. The creation of the Partnership for Peace

(PfP) in 1994 continued to contribute to the deterioration of relations between NATO and Russia, for Moscow perceived the PfP as an instrument to increase US power in Europe and to downgrade Russian influence. The turning point in the cooperative relations between NATO and Moscow was 1994 for two reasons: first, NATO involvement in Bosnia; and, second, NATO’s decision to widen its membership.<sup>21</sup>

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The institutionalization of NATO-Moscow relations started in 1997 with the NATO-Russia Founding Act, followed five years later by the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) an official platform for cooperation and discussion. The 1997 Founding Act was a considerable stepping-stone in institutionalizing cooperation between NATO and Russia. The Act laid out the mechanism of cooperation, coordination, joint decision-making and joint action in order to foster relations between NATO and Russia. The Act underlined that;

*Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and*

*Russia will work together to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behaviour in the interests of all states. [...] NATO and Russia start from the premise that the shared objective of strengthening security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area for the benefit of all countries requires a response to new risks and challenges, such as aggressive nationalism, proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, terrorism, persistent abuse of human rights and of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and unresolved territorial disputes, which pose a threat to common peace, prosperity and stability.*<sup>22</sup>

NATO's military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 demonstrated Russia's inability to influence NATO policy, despite the presumed relevance of the Founding Act. In 2002, after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and the "reset" in Russian relations with the United States, the NATO-Russia Council was established at the Rome Summit to improve communication between NATO and the Russian Federation. Recently the council was revitalized, in order once again to rebuild and solidify connections and ultimately cooperation with Russia. In the long term, NATO envisions the use of the NRC for dialogue and joint action with Russia.<sup>23</sup> The NRC replaced the

existing NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC), which was supposed to be a 16+1 platform of cooperation and coordination. "The *Founding Act* did give Russia a special relationship with NATO in the sense that its level of representation and rights of consultation were greater than those accorded to any other non-member state."<sup>24</sup> The NRC is a clear symbol of the institutionalization of the special relations between NATO and Russia<sup>25</sup> and was designed to address issues of international security as well as joint projects. However, as argued by Russian analyst Dmitri Trenin, "the NRC, instead of becoming the instrument of Western-Russian security interaction, has turned into a mostly technical workshop- useful, but extremely narrow in scope."<sup>26</sup>

From 2002 until 2009, NATO- Russia relations were unstable and difficult. One of the most important issues was the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia. The decision made by the US in 2009 to press the "reset button" in relations with Russia led to a rejuvenation and ultimately solidification of the relations between the US and Russia, and ultimately with NATO.<sup>27</sup> "Reset means that Russian relations with the USA, and by extension with NATO, must

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reflect the principle of parity, similar to international status of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.”<sup>28</sup> This “reset button,” mostly symbolic, has been nevertheless a stepping-stone in fostering cooperation.

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A year later, at the Lisbon Summit, NATO laid out its new “Strategic Concept,” which includes a segment on revitalizing NATO-Russian relations.<sup>29</sup> The Strategic Concept is an important document as it underlines the new directions undertaken by NATO in order to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Following the discussion on NATO-Russia relations, the table below (figure 1) incorporates all the component of the relations, perceptions, and dynamics between the two actors. The table highlights the overlapping zone of interests between the two actors. These overlaps, minimal as they seem, should be prioritized, in order to move the relations in a more cooperative direction in order to overcome the considerable zones of tension. Seeking these areas of common interests could lead to the shaping of a “new thinking” of the NATO-Russia relationship.

## Areas of Tension

This section of our analysis examines a number of issues that have contributed to the deterioration of relations between NATO and Russia. Considering the numbers of crisis situations, three areas have been selected: NATO enlargement, the construction of the missile shield, and the globalization of NATO. Cases such as the war in Kosovo, the Conventional Forces Europe (CFE) agreement, and others will not be covered in this article.

### *NATO Enlargement*

The question of NATO enlargement is simply a case of regional balance of power. The discussion around NATO enlargement germinated in the early aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Henry Kissinger started advocating such move as early as 1991-92.<sup>30</sup> It was under US President Bill Clinton that NATO enlargement became a concrete plan and ultimately a policy. From 1994 until today, with the dilemma surrounding the case of Georgia and Ukraine, NATO enlargement has been a major topic of disagreement with Russia.<sup>31</sup> NATO enlargement has been and continues to be perceived by Moscow as a zero-sum game, in which the members of the Euro-Atlantic community are trying to increase their influence and power at the expense of Russia.

**Figure 1: Are the interests of Russia and NATO so far apart?**

	<b>NATO</b>	<b>Russia</b>
<b>Perceived Outside Threats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iran</li> <li>• Nuclear proliferation</li> <li>• Terrorism</li> <li>• Cyber-terrorism</li> <li>• Environmental issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorism</li> <li>• Nuclear proliferation</li> </ul>
<b>Perception of the other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-zero sum actor</li> <li>• declining power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• military bloc</li> <li>• defence structure</li> <li>• Cold war mentality</li> <li>• zero sum game (over continental influence)</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy for action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deterrence – conventional and nuclear capabilities</li> <li>• Partnership with countries and international organizations</li> <li>• NATO-Russia cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• military force</li> <li>• Realpolitik</li> <li>• bilateral cooperation – Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)</li> </ul>
<b>Zone/issues of tensions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of force to maintain sphere of influence</li> <li>• realpolitik/aggressive narratives</li> <li>• cybersecurity</li> <li>• energy security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NATO enlargement/NATO’s open door policy</li> <li>• globalisation of NATO</li> <li>• R2P</li> <li>• missile shield</li> </ul>
<b>Areas of action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afghanistan</li> <li>• Iraq</li> <li>• Libya</li> <li>• Horn of Africa</li> <li>• Balkans</li> <li>• Mediterranean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chechnya</li> <li>• Georgia</li> </ul>
<b>Possible Areas of cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stabilization of Afghanistan</li> <li>• prevention of proliferation</li> <li>• fighting terrorism</li> <li>• Middle East</li> <li>• Iran?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drug trafficking through cooperation between CSO and NATO</li> <li>• combating terrorism</li> <li>• fighting piracy</li> <li>• Afghanistan?</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy to increase cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rejuvenation of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC)</li> <li>• seeking transparency on the overall Strategy</li> <li>• soft power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bilateral negotiation with key NATO members outside of NRC</li> </ul>

However, the questions around the how, why, who, and when would come at two different periods. How and why were addressed in a 1995 document, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, laying out the different rationales<sup>32</sup> behind NATO enlargement, while the who and when were addressed in the Madrid Summit of 1997. In 1997, Madeleine Albright, then US Secretary of State declared,

*The truth is, the quest for freedom and security in Europe is not a zero-sum game, in which Russia must lose if central Europe gains, and central Europe must lose if Russia gains. Such thinking has brought untold tragedy to Europe and America, and we have a responsibility as well as an opportunity to transcend it.*<sup>33</sup>

During the Bush administration from 2000 to 2008, NATO had an “open-door policy.” The color revolutions of 2003-2005 in Central Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia led NATO to talk about including Ukraine and Georgia within the Alliance, despite Moscow’s strongly voiced opposition. In Putin’s words, the enlargement of NATO is a real threat to the security of Russia, since the expansion is going eastward. Candidates for NATO membership are geographically within the sphere of influence of Moscow, as is the case for Ukraine and Georgia and other possible candidates. In early 2011 the Russian Prime Minister declared, “the expansion of NATO infrastructure towards our borders is causing us concern.”<sup>34</sup> The main reason is that Russia views NATO

as a military rather than as a political structure. In the case of Georgia, there is no doubt that the Georgians are seeking membership for one simple reason, protection from the threat of Russia.

Russia pursued a dual strategy to contain the enlargement process: economic pressures on Ukraine and Georgia, largely through the shutting down of natural gas flows and the 2008 war in Georgia.<sup>35</sup> Georgia and Ukraine were and are still considered as the Russians’ jewels of its lost imperial past they were the cornerstones of Russia’s regional hegemony and great power status.<sup>36</sup> The Georgian issue started with the diplomatic crisis of 2006 and the 2008 invasion.<sup>37</sup> The 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russia seriously affected relations between NATO and Moscow. It also sent a strong message to Western capitals: Is the West ready to sacrifice its standard of living and security for a state like Georgia? Moscow’s invasion of Georgia was a direct challenge to the true value and power of article 5 of the NATO treaty. Furthermore, the talk of including Georgia within the structure of the Alliance has been perceived by Moscow as a direct threat to its sphere of influence over the entire post-Soviet space. The second case, Ukraine, is equally sensitive, but for different reasons. The case of Ukraine is unique, because it is central to Russian power. As underlined by Zbigniew Brzezinski, without Ukraine Russia cannot remain

a Eurasian empire.<sup>38</sup> The discussions about NATO enlargement and Western support for the democratic movement in Ukraine have directly threatened Russia, which viewed the Orange Revolution and Ukraine's focus on relations with the West as a major blow to Russia's sphere of influence. In Moscow, Western involvement in Ukraine in support of democratic changes and even integration within the Euro-Atlantic community and architecture was seen as a threat to Russian objectives.

Ultimately, from Moscow the enlargement of NATO looks like "the creation of a buffer zone in reverse, a means to isolate the new Russia from continental Europe."<sup>39</sup> NATO enlargement, as well as its open door policy, is seen as a direct challenge to the Russian expansionism embedded in the imperialist and nationalist sentiments re-launched by Vladimir Putin since 2000. This imperial nostalgia is putting considerable strains on the relationship.

### *Missile Shield*

As part of the game of regional balance of power, the missile shield has been a considerable area of division and tension between Russia and NATO. In response to the probable rise of a nuclear Iran,

the US under President Bush decided to revive the former "Star Wars" project, or the missile defence shield, previously initiated by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. The project consisted of financing the building of two pieces of the missile shield puzzle: a missile interceptor site in Poland and a X-band radar in the Czech Republic. These two sites were to be part of a larger strategy that included sites in the UK, Greenland, California, and Alaska.

The construction of the missile shield in Europe not only divided the members of the Euro-Atlantic community, but

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also Moscow and the West. Vladimir Putin has expressed on several occasions, and especially during the 2007 Munich Security Conference, that the US was seeking world domination and warned about the militarization of space.<sup>40</sup> The Russian reaction was that the two sites in Central Europe were, in fact, directed against Russia's nuclear arsenal. Since then, Russian officials "want to have clear-cut guarantees that the deployable antimissile facilities will not work against Russia's strategic potential and will not have the appropriate capabilities."<sup>41</sup>

The question of the missile defence system goes beyond the shield itself. Moscow sees the shield as one issue among many about strategic offensive

and defensive nuclear weapons, and the militarization of space. The missile shield touches a sensitive point for Russia. Thus, Moscow does not fully agree with the fact that the threat of ICBMs is as real as it once was. Moscow would tend to believe that it is part of an overall strategy by the US to limit Russian nuclear arsenal.

Given the strong level of Russian opposition to the two-site missile shield and as part of the U.S. “reset” of relations with Russia, in addition to other factors, the Obama Administration in 2009 decided to scrap the two sites in 2009.<sup>42</sup> Alternative approaches to the development of a defensive shield to protect Europe against nuclear missiles from “rogue states”- read “Iran”- were then discussed. The 2010 Lisbon Summit discussed the possible cooperation between NATO and Russia on the development of a defence shield.<sup>43</sup> With the missile shield possibly becoming part of the NATO structure, the tensions between the US and Russia have been looming. The rationale for Washington to move the shield under a NATO-wide command and control system is to improve not only the coverage but also increase its capability.<sup>44</sup> From NATO’s perspective, including Moscow as a partner in the missile shield program would contribute to the construction of a true Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Since the revival of the shield project in 2007, NATO has underlined its commitment to work closely with

Russia in the NRC in order to increase cooperation and joint threat assessments. Even though the point was emphasized in the Council of Rome, Roberto Zadra argues that the cooperation within the NRC would not be effective unless a prior bilateral agreement between the US and Russia takes place.<sup>45</sup> Vincent Pouliot notes, as well, that “NATO’s advance toward Russia’s territory and its readiness to take unilateral action anywhere in the world have significantly contributed to revaluing nuclear deterrence in Moscow.”<sup>46</sup> In 2007 Russian President Medvedev declared that Russia would deploy new nuclear capabilities able to destroy the European components of the US shield.<sup>47</sup>

Both the Alliance and the US have made sure to include Russia as a possible partner in the project. In a bold move of policy entrepreneurship, Secretary General Rasmussen invited Russia to cooperate in 2010 and the 2010 Strategic Concept also called for Russia to participate in developing a missile shield for all NATO members in what could provide “one security roof.”<sup>48</sup>

### *Globalization of NATO Activity*

At the end of the Cold War NATO was destined to disappear for one simple reason: the collapse of the Soviet Union had eliminated its purpose for existing. NATO’s *raison d’être* disappeared in 1991 in the rubble of the Soviet Union.

Since then, NATO has been pro-active in order to survive by contributing to international security. “NATO’s expanded ambit is a result of the new global politics that emerged after the Cold War.”<sup>49</sup> The first NATO mission took place in 1995 in the Balkans. The air campaign over Bosnia and Herzegovina led the way to the 1995 Dayton agreement that brought an end to fighting in the country. Following the air campaign, NATO’s Implementation Force (IFOR) under UN Mandate was deployed, in order to monitor the peace agreement. In 1999 NATO forces were used in Kosovo in a massive air campaign. Since then NATO has been used in all kinds of operations: in training forces in Iraq, fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa, assisting African Union forces in Sudan, aid relief in Pakistan, monitoring Mediterranean sea. However, the missions in Afghanistan and Libya are two most prominent locations in which NATO has been involved and have placed a considerable burden on the NATO-Russian relationship. In the case of the Afghan mission, NATO has been involved since 2003 as part of the International Stability Action Force (ISAF). Afghanistan was NATO’s first “out of area” operation and its biggest in terms of military capabilities, and forces deployed. The second considerable military mission started during spring 2011 in Libya. Following the approval of the UN Security Council resolution

1973, NATO was mandated to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. This mission was unique in the sense that NATO’s rationale was embedded in the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). In a December 8, 2011 meeting between NATO and Russia, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov expressed Russia’s position on Libya by claiming that Russia reaffirmed its “rejection of the methods of implementing the mandate contained in the UNSC resolutions [no-fly zone and arms embargo].”<sup>50</sup> NATO action in Libya was not only political, but also had an ethical component. This has been perceived by Russia, but also by other countries such as China, as a red line in term of rationale for action. Russian officials have expressed that the “Libyan model” could become a prototype for future actions- implying that it might be used against Russia itself. Thus, the Libyan mission has created further tensions between NATO and Russia, as Russia increasingly perceives NATO as a promoter of Western norms and values targeted, in part at least, against Russia and other post-Soviet states.

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**NATO strategy to become a global actor can simply be summarized by the expression of “out of area or out of business.”**

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The 1999 Strategic Concept was a turning point in the role of the Alliance as for the first time “out-of-area”

missions were included to the strategic role of NATO. Only two years later, the new strategy was implemented. The 9/11 events marked a new step in the construction of NATO. The fact that the Alliance used Article 5 for the first time in its history as a form of solidarity also underlined the emergence of a new security actor. Following the attacks of September 2001 NATO was used in Afghanistan for its first “out of area operation.” The event marks the shift from collective defence to collective security.

Following the 2004 Summit in Istanbul, NATO declared that “transatlantic cooperation is essential in defending our values and meeting common threats and challenges, from wherever they may come.”<sup>51</sup> The same year NATO was involved in a number of missions: expansion of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to all Afghanistan; the maintenance of a presence in Kosovo; enhancement of its presence in the Mediterranean as part of the fight against terrorism; the training of forces in Iraq; the contribution to the global fight against terrorism; the increase in links with Central Asia; and so on. As claimed by Brzezinski, “NATO is clearly not just a European defence system but a trans-Atlantic security system with increasing global reach. [...] So it is expanding its role and is becoming not just a European-focused defence alliance, but a broader international security system.”<sup>52</sup>

NATO strategy to become a global actor can simply be summarized by the expression of “out of area or out of business.”<sup>53</sup> However, this globalization of NATO is perceived as a considerable threat by Moscow for the reason that a global NATO would strengthen the influence of the Euro-Atlantic community in promoting their interests, values, and power.

## Conclusion

The 1990s were crucial in shaping the new identity of NATO and Russia. The latter emerged with Vladimir Putin as its leader trying to erase the memories of this lost decade and to reinstitute Russia as a great power. NATO had to change strategically and become relevant in the post-cold war environment in order to survive. It has done both.

In this post-Cold War environment, NATO-Russia relations remain relevant, as each has historically been the mirror image of the other. Not only does Moscow see in NATO the failure of the Soviet story, but also an Alliance that has known how to adapt to the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The intervention in Kosovo in 1999 led to a trend shaping NATO’s strategy into more interventionist tendencies, which attained their highest levels with the Libyan mission of 2011. NATO transformation from being primarily a collective defence mechanism

to becoming a collective security instrument is taking form. As Daadler and Goldgeier argue, NATO's new role of collective security should lead to an "open membership to any democratic state in the world that is willing and able to contribute to the fulfilment of NATO's new responsibilities."<sup>54</sup> This trend has become particularly worrisome for Russia as it would fully incorporate NATO within the international system.

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One of the core problems in relations between NATO and Russia can be summarized through the perceptions by each of the other. The way in which NATO perceives Russia and vice-versa is fundamentally different. Russia sees a military bloc; NATO sees a needed ally. Because of their shared history, NATO and Moscow need to establish their relations not on factors from the past, but instead on focusing on pressing security threats such as nuclear proliferation, Iranian nuclear program, international drug trafficking, piracy, and terrorism. Setting up relations on a shared view of security menaces could be a starting point in the progressive construction of NATO-Russia relations.<sup>55</sup>

The issues of NATO enlargement, the over-activity of NATO, the missile shield, the aortic, the CFE Treaty, and others will continue to arise. However, three elements could actually affect the relationship either way: the NATO secretary general,<sup>56</sup> the NRC, and the nature of NATO. First, since his appointment as the head of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen has made a clear point that NATO-Russia relations are central. Secretary General Rasmussen claimed that NATO and Russia must strengthen their relationship and cooperation despite disagreements and despite international crises, as "it is a matter of necessity."<sup>57</sup> The office of the secretary general could be an asset in fostering the relationship with Russia. The office of the SG under Rasmussen, himself a career politician, has been cultivating consensus among heads of state and government, as well as professional diplomats.<sup>58</sup> The new culture emerging from the SG's office of policy entrepreneurship and new ideas to deal with global security can be an asset as well as a problem.<sup>59</sup> The relationship with Russia is much more a political issue than a military one. Having a politician at the head of the Alliance could have a considerable impact on shaping the future Russia-NATO relations.

Second, the use of the NRC needs to be changed. Believing that Russia will play the institutional game would be a mistake. The NRC has not been the

platform of discussion or cooperation that was initially envisioned. The most pressing regional security issues, such as the frozen conflicts of Kosovo, South Caucasus, the missile shield, and so on, have not been tackled within this platform. Instead, these matters have been dealt with at bilateral levels. The NRC needs to incorporate the “real” security questions into its agenda, such as the question of the missile shield, the convention on arms control in Europe, and out-of-area mission such as Afghanistan. In order to bring these issues within the framework of the NRC, Europeans and American will have to move the discussions progressively from bilateral channels to the multilateral ones. Such a strategy

to strengthen the NRC will need to be approved by each NATO member, which could be a challenge, as NATO members – especially the powerful ones such as the US, France, and Britain- have traditionally used the bilateral channels to interact with Russia for two reasons: either as a bargaining tool or for reasons of domestic politics. Such bilateral practice of bypassing NATO and the NRC has been damaging to the credibility of the Alliance as well as increasing Moscow’s advantage on sensitive issues. NATO members need to commit to using

increasingly the multilateral platform of the NRC, which will create not only an institutional routine, but also strengthen multilateral dialogue between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community.

Finally, NATO is becoming a schizophrenic institution. On the one hand, Western European members and the US have come to realize that NATO has developed into an Alliance enforcing collective security and promoting security regionally and internationally. On the other hand, the new members from Central and Eastern Europe still look at

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**The new members from Central and Eastern Europe still look at NATO as a security blanket protecting them from Russia, as a mechanism of collective defence.**

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NATO as a security blanket protecting them from Russia, as a mechanism of collective defence. They see NATO as a security guarantee from an overactive and unreliable

neighbour. NATO’s power of attraction for states like Ukraine and Georgia has also been as protection against Russia. The emergence of a two-tiered NATO has also affected the dialogue with Moscow.<sup>60</sup> The central question is whether NATO is the appropriate platform to foster cooperation between Russia and the members of the Euro-Atlantic community. What is certain is that the increasingly interventionist strategy of NATO in and outside Europe has become a considerable red line for Moscow. NATO has become a powerful

military instrument and cooperative platform for the members of the Euro-Atlantic community, in order to advance, promote and defend Western values and norms, as well as Western security interests. Russia perceives this strategic shift as a threat to its regional influence, as well as competition. From the Atlantic perspective, NATO is the appropriate instrument for cooperation and has become a crucial piece of the puzzle. The most recent military operation in Libya illustrates clearly its success and value-added in the field of collective security.

However, NATO is and will remain seen as a remnant of a “lost past.” The symbols and meaning of the survival of NATO are too vivid and present in the minds of decision-makers to be the appropriate platform of communication and cooperation. NATO was designed to protect the Euro-Atlantic area from a Soviet attack. The historical meaning behind the image of NATO is too heavy

to be able to boost and develop solid ties between the West and Russia.

What is certain is that Russia and NATO are different international actors with a similar agenda: existence through actions. Undeniably, as expressed in official documents, NATO sees Russia as a core component to ensure a secure and stable regional and international space. NATO believes that cooperation

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**The relationship with Russia is much more a political issue than a military one.**

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between the two actors is not only desirable, but vital, as they both share common interests such as missile

defence, counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy and a stable international system. Ultimately, trying to find common ground for a better cooperation and coordination will remain a serious challenge. Until both actors are seeking the same thing, the perpetual new beginning of re-establish relations will be inevitable.

## Endnotes

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- 6 Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty declares that "the Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded [...]."
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- 54 Ibid.
- 55 See figure 1.
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