

Russia and NATO: A new Cold War gains momentum

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Abstract

The confrontation between Russia and the West is heating up more and more. Relations are now at a very critical point. Increasingly, there is a reason to believe that the world is witnessing a second Cold War. Full-pledged censorship of media began, as well as the closure of economic and political interaction with Russia, since, according to the West, Russia is an autocracy and not a democracy. This is disappointing; since with the collapse of the USSR, the US, the EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the newly independent Russian state were meant to find a common language. But instead, a severe escalation began. In particular, NATO and Russia cannot find an understanding on such critical issues as the presence of NATO in the vicinity of Russia and the expansion of the organization to the east, especially Ukraine's accession to NATO. This paper finds evidence of a new Cold War between NATO countries and Russia, analyzes NATO's attitude to Russia and argues that its strategy does not improve relationships. NATO needs to take the initiative to achieve relaxation. In the end, the paper offers several solutions to get out of this protracted crisis.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, NATO, conflict, war, alliance

I. Introduction

War and fire are no joke. This well-known Russian proverb perfectly describes the situation before 1991. When there were two ideological worlds that had opposite worldviews, values and attitudes and that regularly blamed each other. It looked like verbal altercation between diplomats which would transform into a much more serious conflict that could involve a full-scale military action. This was the nature of the Cold War, an ideological conflict that primarily involved the capitalist United States of America (US) and the communist Soviet Union

(USSR). The end of the Cold War was meant to stimulate positive change in relations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, since the latter became a capitalist state with a market economy. Unfortunately, in 2014 Russia-NATO relations were thrown back again to the brink of the Cold War after the armed conflict started in Donbas, a region in Eastern Ukraine, and when Crimea became a Russian region. Moreover, since the end of 2021, the Russia-NATO relations became even worse in the background of rumors about the impending Russian invasion of Ukraine and

reached a critically low point when a “special military operation,” as Russian president Vladimir Putin prefers to call it, started in February 2022. The conflicting parties blame each other for having imperialist ambitions, broken promises and willingness to create a sphere of influence like during the Cold War. The absence of diplomatic dialogue has a risk of having a potential military conflict that would bring unnecessarily high costs and casualties.

This paper argues that NATO clearly views Russia as an ideologically and militarily hostile regional rival. Russia is a shadow of the Soviet Union in NATO’s perspective.

Existing research is very focused on why Russia opposes enlargement of NATO to the East (e.g. Wolff 2015, Greene 2012, Gotz 2019). For instance, a common argument is that having problematic and ambiguous relations with Western institutions such as NATO is not something new and this problem persists since the end of the Cold War. However, there is very little analysis of the effectiveness of NATO’s strategy to maintain constructive relationships with Russia. Choosing the right strategy is crucial if conflicting parties want to advance in negotiations. Therefore, this paper is aimed to find out if NATO’s confrontational stance against Russia was a right or wrong strategy. Firstly, the paper will analyze to what extent the current situation mimics the Cold War. This would help to understand what the strategy of confrontation with Russia is based on. Secondly, NATO’s key elements of strategy towards Russia will be introduced. Then, their effectiveness will be analyzed, mainly taking into account existing disagreements between member states and the issue of enlargement to the east. Finally, some policy

recommendations will be given for NATO that may calm down the situation. The outbreak of military conflict in Ukraine also increases the risk of direct military conflict between Russia and NATO, and the possibility of the Third World War is indeed feared by people regardless of region and nationality.

2. The world is watching a new Cold War

Before going deep into the topic of this paper, it is important to have an overview of the current political situation. There is not enough information available to understand if Russian researchers, like a number of Western researchers, believe that the US, its allies and Russia entered a new Cold War. Western perspective is that this new Cold War was provoked by the actions of Russian president Vladimir Putin. His recognition of the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent from Georgia, his actions to achieve the reunion of Crimea with Russia, and the “special military operation” in Ukraine symbolize a grand ambition to restore Moscow’s influence on the former Soviet republics¹. The situation is aggravated by the fact that some of these republics, and also states of the former communist bloc are NATO members, for example, Poland, three Baltic states and Romania. Therefore, there is a conflict of interests between NATO and Russia, which then creates tension in the European region. Potential NATO expansion to Ukraine became a special flashpoint for Putin. This development of events is like a “red rag,” i.e. particularly annoying for the Russian

¹ Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War, Survival: Global Politics and Strategy, 57:1, 2015)

president. Putin perceives NATO's presence in Eastern Europe, which only gets larger, as dangerous for Russia's security. He is also not afraid to openly denounce the United States, like he did on 18 March 2014, just two days after Crimea joined Russia. While addressing thousands of parliamentarians on that day, Putin said that the US and its allies, including NATO, "prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun" and that "they act as they please...believing that only they can be right."² Western politicians and experts also accused Russia of breaking international law. These mutual accusations show that the West and Russia have such views on what is right and what is wrong that do not always match together. An aggravating circumstance is that parties still did not find an approach to each other. Their regular claims against each other hearken back to the original Cold War, where US and Soviet leaders also believed that only their own ideology was right and criticized the opposing one.

Moreover, a new Cold War is not about the struggle of communism and capitalism anymore. A new ideological battle is now between democracy and autocracy³. The US, the EU and NATO are representatives of democratic values and Putin's Russia is similar to an autocracy, as he has concentrated a lot of power in his hands.

Furthermore, another very significant element of the original Cold War has appeared again: the *iron curtain*.

Originally, the iron curtain was a political boundary in

Europe between the West and the Soviet Union with its satellite states. The contact between two ideologically opposing parts was blocked. In 2022, a pretty modern version of the iron curtain emerged and became consolidated very soon after Russian troops entered Ukraine. A *digital* iron curtain descended across Russia's internet. Similar to the Soviet Union, Russian authorities carefully monitor media, deciding what is "undesirable" information, with special attention to online newspapers and social media. The adoption of *Russian Sovereign Internet Act* attempts to impose fines and restrict Twitter, Facebook and Telegram all set a path to the isolation of the Russian internet from the West⁴. Russian citizens will have restricted access to different perspectives. The digital iron curtain became clear in March 2022, when Facebook was blocked in Russia for not deleting allegedly false information, Twitter slowed down and a law on fake news about the Russian army was approved. Particularly, this law prohibits the use of the word "war" when talking about Ukraine. This word, which represents Western views on Ukrainian events, would be considered as "fake." An authorized interpretation of Ukrainian events is "military operation to protect the people of Donbass." The West also did not abstain from media restrictions and threats of fines. As a result, the broadcasting of Russia Today and Sputnik channels fell under the ban. The West considers

² Robert Legvold., (Return to Cold War, 2016)

³ A new Cold War emerging as Russia launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (The Conversation, 2022)

⁴ US-Russian Contention in Cyberspace: are "rules of the world" necessary or possible (Russia Matters, 2021)

these channels a “propaganda machine of the Kremlin.”⁵ Youtube also decided to block the channels of Russian state media. Like Russia, the West has also imposed an iron curtain so that a different interpretation of events becomes suppressed. In the West it is not acceptable to call events in Ukraine as a “military operation.” Furthermore, Russian cultural figures and athletes become suspended from their activities in the West if they do not denounce Putin.⁶ This situation has hints of McCarthyism, a practice in 1950-1954 of finding traitors in the US that supposedly belonged to the Communist Party. Cultural boycott of Russia would lead exactly to the consequences of McCarthyism, which are prejudices, false accusations and fear of having Putin’s supporters nearby.

The West also aims to contain Russia, like it did originally with Soviet communism. In 1947 the Truman Doctrine was adopted, authorizing political, economic and military aid to democratic states supposedly threatened by communism. Now, the West is doing the same with Russia by imposing severe economic sanctions on banks, imports and exports, attempting to create political isolation of the Russian government and its “non-democratic” ideology. Moreover, the West closed its airspace for Russian airline

companies, meaning that Russian tourists cannot come to Europe from Russia. This particular discriminatory measure clearly indicates that the West actively contributes to faster establishment of the “real” iron curtain, together with a digital one, and isolation of Russia from the “civilized world.”

3. NATO’s strategy towards Russia: the basics

There is very little research on what NATO’s strategy towards Russia looks like. Scholars are more concerned with NATO’s weaknesses and with Russian policy towards NATO, but not the other way round. This paper attempts to narrow this gap in research.

One possible reason that this research gap exists is that NATO actually needs a comprehensive strategy for Russia. At the moment it seems it cannot take decisions on its own not just because it is a member-driven organization, but also because members inside NATO find themselves competing in terms of political and economic interests. No NATO strategy can be implemented without close coordination and agreement with the EU and the US.⁷

At the same time, since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, a communist analogy of NATO during the Cold War, it looks like the Western alliance gained more confidence and strength on the world’s stage. For example, NATO reacted quite quickly to the events in Ukraine by adopting the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) during the Wales Summit in 2014. RAP is a strategy to improve member states’ ability to defend and bolster the organization’s ability to respond

⁵ The Russian Information War and Propaganda Narratives in the European Union and the EU’s Eastern Partnership Countries, (*International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 7:5, 2017)

⁶ Valery Gergiev dismissed as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic, (*Classical Music* 2022)
Ex-F1 Russian driver in limbo as WEC team pulled over refusal to sign FIA ‘peace’ document, (*Express.com*, 2022)
Russian Soprano Anna Netrebko Removed by Met Opera, Berlin State Opera Over Refusal to Denounce Putin, (*Digital Music News*, 2022)

⁷ NATO needs a comprehensive strategy for Russia, (*RAND Corporation*, 2015)

to fast-moving crises. RAP was specifically designed to increase the defensive capacity of states that are close to Russia. For example, measures under RAP include a continuous air, land, and maritime presence in the eastern part of the alliance on a rotational basis. This initiative is designed to reassure allies on NATO's eastern flank. Also, there was an agreement to increase military spending. As a result, some RAP measures were implemented: In March 2015, 600 personnel and 120 vehicles from the United States' 2nd Cavalry Regiment completed a road march of 1,800 kilometers across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany⁸. Moreover, states significantly increased their defense spending by surpassing the 2% of GDP spending threshold agreed at the Wales Summit. According to 2021 data, U.S., the UK, Greece, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania and France reached that level⁹. In December 2015, due to the expansion of Russia's military potential in the Black Sea region as well as the militarization of Crimea, NATO set up the Multinational Division Southeast (MND SE) headquarters in Romania. This addition is designed to facilitate the command of Allied forces deployed in the southeastern part of Europe¹⁰. So, it would be wrong to conclude that NATO is too weak to take decisions and that its policy specifically towards Russia is unclear. NATO's strategy is clearly aimed at improving the mobile

movement of troops, especially in the eastern part of Europe. The situation has not changed much. Until February 2022, the Russian army conducted military exercises with Serbia and Belarus and also strengthened positions in the Black Sea and the Kaliningrad region that has a border with two NATO countries: Poland and Lithuania. NATO continues increasing its military contingent in the framework of its deterrence policy. Both sides see bad intentions in each other's actions and want to secure their sphere of influence.

It is also noticeable that NATO's overall positions changed significantly after Putin's geopolitical actions. When the Alliance's Strategic Concept was adopted in 2010, it recommending cultivating a strategic partnership with Russia, made limited mention of terrorism, and no mention of China. However, when relations with Russia significantly worsened, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described NATO's strategy as "the biggest reinforcement of collective defense" in a generation¹¹. As a result, in 2019 a new Military Strategy was adopted and signed by Allied Chiefs of Defense. The Military Strategy identified both Russia and terrorism as threats facing NATO, with its primary focus on the issue of deterrence against potential conflicts with Russia. This strategy also aims at contesting and countering these challenges by developing a common capacity for competition and deterrent power at all times, and not just in crisis and defense. This moved NATO—at least in principle—from a

⁸ NATO's Readiness Action Plan: Strategic Benefits and Outstanding Challenges, (Strategic Studies Quarterly, 10:1, pp. 74-105, 2016)

⁹ NATO Summit, NATO Defense Expenditure

¹⁰ From Wales to Warsaw and Beyond: NATO's Strategic Adaptation to the Russian Resurgence on Europe's Eastern Flank, (Connections QJ 15, no. 4 (2016): 45-65, 2016)

¹¹ NATO and the future character of warfare, (London School of Economics, 2021)

reactive to a deliberate strategy for force deployment¹². Now NATO policy is focused on the transfer of troops and equipment to problematic areas, especially in the Baltics.

NATO clearly decided to antagonize Russia and put aside the possibility of any partnership with Russia. The situation now looks a lot like a new Cold War, and the difference is simply that instead of the USSR, Russia is a new opponent. NATO did not manage to put aside communist associations that come to mind when the Russian capital is mentioned, as Moscow was the heart of communist political system. The incitement of this stereotype is actively developed by the Baltic states and Poland that were once under ideological control from the Soviet Union. These countries still see Russia as an ideological and military threat to their sovereignty, and their active anti-Russian rhetoric clearly contributes to the destruction of all partnership possibilities.

3.1 No alliance is immune to controversy

NATO seems like it is united in its deterrence strategy against Putin. Yet, there are some disagreements inside this alliance. For instance, Turkey's decision to buy S-400, Russian anti-aircraft missile system, and deploy military troops hand-in-hand with Russian troops in Syria really stands out in an environment where there is growing anti-Russian sentiment. Turkey appears to be a bridge between NATO and Russia: on the one hand, Turkey's military security depends on the US, and on the other

hand, Turkey fears confrontation with Russia because Russia is its main gas supplier¹³. Moreover, Turkey is really the first member state that started to openly question NATO's ability to protect it. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stressed that NATO was protecting only one-third of the Turkish airspace and that Turkey needed the Russian S-400 missiles to protect its national security¹⁴. This greatly raises the prestige of the Russian army and the work of Russian diplomats. NATO, however, started to look weaker, and relations with the formal leader of NATO, the US, cooled down.

The words of French President Emmanuel Macron about NATO in 2019 were particularly striking. He told *The Economist* that NATO is "brain dead" and "European countries can no longer rely on America to protect its allies"¹⁵. Therefore, the evaluation of NATO's effectiveness cannot be too optimistic, as Macron's words signaled the absence of common purpose and lack of coordinated strategy. Moreover, the French President criticized America's hostile approach towards Russia: "the United States is really tough with Russia...we have the right to autonomy, not just to follow American sanctions"¹⁶. This created another split in NATO, as it turns out that not all member states want to openly stand against Russia. Macron raised a doubt about America's capacities and therefore hinted that European defense should be more

¹³ The resilience of the US-Turkey alliance: divergent threat perceptions and worldviews, (Contemporary Politics, 26:4, 475-492, 2020)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Is NATO Brain Dead?, (RAND Corporation, 2019)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

autonomous. Autonomy of European defense means that NATO might completely lose its meaning, as it is a transatlantic organization. At the moment, the EU does not have its own army and has to rely on NATO. As a result, the US uses this disadvantage to shape European policies, even if they would go against European interests. In March 2022, Macron during his election program presentation said that he does not go back on his words about “brain dead” NATO. Even though the contemporary situation will help the alliance to have more strategic clarity, *European* security still needs to be restored, he said¹⁷. Macron therefore continues to remind his colleagues that Europe still needs to be more independent as a defense actor and that the military alliance is not that reliable. That means Europe should also be independent in its strategy towards Russia, as any plans regarding defense depend on what path Europe wants to choose. The US is located on the other side of the world from Russia and Europe is in close proximity. Therefore, following a confrontational stance that NATO chooses, being influenced by the US, is reckless.

Moreover, Hungary also stands out. Since 2018, Hungary has regularly blocked ministerial-level political meetings between NATO and Ukraine as a sign of protest against violation of Ukrainian ethnic minorities rights. In 2017 the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a law of education that limited the rights of minorities to be educated in their native languages, such as Russian, Hungarian, Romanian,

¹⁷ War in Ukraine is ‘electroshock’ for NATO, says Emmanuel Macron, (Politico.eu, 2022)

Greek and Polish¹⁸. The Hungarian foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, said that the country will continue to block NATO-Ukraine meetings until minority rights are restored. This seemingly domestic problem of Ukraine actually has implications for Europe. Russia and Hungary are not only moving closer over a similar minority language issue, but another split is being created within NATO. Because of this, it is difficult for NATO to quickly accept Ukraine into its alliance. Furthermore, until very recently, Hungary did not allow NATO troops to step on its soil, and did allow so only after military conflict started between Russia and Ukraine. However, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán prohibited the transfer of lethal weapons through Hungary to Ukraine¹⁹. Hungary clearly wants to stay out of any military activities, despite being a NATO member. Orbán tries to “sit on two chairs” by participating in NATO activities, although to a limited extent, and by keeping relatively close ties with Putin. He does this not only because he wants a stable gas supply, but also because his thinking is close to Putin’s, especially when it comes to euroscepticism. Because of this stance, he is even called a “Trojan horse of Putin” that is aimed to weaken Western unity. Orbán is also considered as a traitor of “fundamental values” that NATO cherishes and even as an admirer of Putin’s rule²⁰.

¹⁸ Why is Hungary ‘blocking’ Ukraine’s NATO accession?, (Embassy of Hungary in Washington, 2021)

¹⁹ Hungary to block arms supplies to Ukraine amid Russian invasion, (Eurasia Times, 2022)

²⁰ Hungary is the frontline in a new ideological battle, (The Telegraph, 2022)

Once again, individual interests of member states start prevailing once there is a critical situation. Also, member states want a degree of autonomy to decide what is best for them, and this is something that tears the alliance apart.

3.2 To enlarge or not to enlarge

It is noticeable that in the post-Cold War years NATO's expansion to the East happened relatively fast. Firstly, Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland became members of this alliance, then Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Bulgaria joined as well. All this happened before 2005. This was part of the process of democratization for post-communist states and an erosion of the division of the European continent. NATO therefore conducted its first attempt to dominate over Russia in ideological and military spheres: NATO was seen as strong and Russia as weak.

Regarding enlargement, NATO has an open door policy based on Article 10 of the Alliance's founding document, which is the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949. The Treaty states that NATO is open to any "European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area"²¹. NATO is guided by this principle and is not going to leave it. Turning away from the open door policy would undermine NATO's credibility.

However, if we look at the reality, we see that there is a challenge facing NATO. The fact is that Russia strongly opposes any further enlargement of NATO to the East, and especially the admission of Ukraine to the

²¹ NATO Enlargement & Open Door, 2016

organization, as Ukraine is a relatively large country that has a long border with Russia. This story goes on since 2006, when the Russian State Duma passed a resolution warning that "Ukraine's accession to the military bloc will lead to very negative consequences for relations between our fraternal peoples"²². Now this position is strengthened as never before. NATO is viewed as a serious military threat to Russian security and also a traitor of an agreement made in late 1990s when NATO pledged not to expand in the East. Ukraine is a security buffer for Russia. Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott described the Russian attitude to NATO saying that for the Russians NATO is a vestige of the Cold War, inherently directed against their country²³. We can even assume that NATO just prolonged the Cold War, but in a modified format. A senior fellow at the CATO Institute, Ted Galen Carpenter, even suggested that the Ukrainian crisis that we watch now could be avoided if NATO and the US arrogant policies would not provoke Moscow to adopt radical measures to ensure its security²⁴. Russia wants one simple thing: a security guarantee. The main security guarantee is that NATO will not enlarge. NATO claims that its enlargement to the East is not directed at Russia and the organization just follows its open door policy. NATO therefore balances between two choices. The first one is accession of Ukraine

²² NATO's Enlargement Policy to Ukraine and Beyond: Prospects and Options." In *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond*, edited by Rebecca R. Moore and Damon Coletta, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 71-95, 2017)

²³ Ignored Warnings: How NATO Expansion Led to the Current Ukraine Tragedy, (CATO Institute, 2022)

²⁴ Ibid.

and therefore fulfilling the promise of 2008 that Ukraine will be in the organization, and the second one is to keep the status quo and not escalate already critical relations with Russia. According to Bruno Tertrais, a senior fellow for Strategic Affairs, it is actually Moscow who uses its anti-NATO arguments to overturn post-Cold War architecture, because it wants to keep its “sphere of influence,” but NATO is about to destroy it²⁵. From this perspective, we can assume that Moscow views US-led NATO as an ideological rival and not vice versa. However, the main issue is not who started this confrontation. The problem is that opposing sides do not hear each other and are not determined to give up at any moment. Such stubbornness certainly does not contribute to a more relaxed discussion of topics such as security guarantees.

It also seems that NATO does not comply with the promises it made. For instance, in 1990 the US and France reassured Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader back then, that NATO forces would not be stationed in the Eastern Länder after unification. According to then-Secretary of State James Baker, NATO military forces would move “not an inch,” eastwards. However, NATO broke this promise, because in 1993 the Clinton administration invited former Warsaw Pact countries to join the Partnership for Peace, guided by NATO principles²⁶. Moreover, in 1997 NATO promised Russia not to station troops farther than the alliance’s east border at the time and take into account

Russian interests²⁷. However, this promise was broken after former Warsaw Pact states joined NATO in a relatively short time. Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary were explicitly invited by NATO to join. NATO did not consider Russia’s interests and actually chose an opposite direction, despite the absence of the previously existing military and ideological struggle²⁸. 2015 became a critical year, as NATO started to actively build up forces in the eastern flank. NATO conducted special exercises such as “Noble Jump,” “Trident Juncture,” and also established the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force²⁹. Funds significantly increased, military assistance to Ukraine increased too and troops together with equipment were transferred to former Warsaw Pact states. All these maneuvers were conducted in close proximity to Russia, as if challenging Putin. This situation vaguely mimics the Cuban Missile Crisis, a major Cold War event, when the Soviet Union established its ballistic missiles in Cuba, which is close to the US. Back then, the world was on the brink of a nuclear war because of that challenge; however, diplomatic efforts helped to end this dangerous standoff. Currently, NATO has its troops and weapons close to Russia and is still unwilling to enter into dialogue with Putin, while perfectly knowing that its proximity to Russia, as well as the issue of enlargement, is a flashpoint

²⁵ Of Ultimatums and Ukraine - And Why NATO Enlargement Is Not the Problem, (Institut Montaigne, 2022)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The Origins of the Ukraine Crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West, (Global Policy, 8:1, pp. 82-91, 2016)

²⁸ NATO and Russia: A View from Moscow, (Politique étrangère, volume 5, pp. 107-121, 2009)

²⁹ From Wales to Warsaw and Beyond: NATO’s Strategic Adaptation to the Russian Resurgence on Europe’s Eastern Flank, (Connections QJ 15, no. 4 (2016): 45-65, 2016)

for the Russian president. At the same time, NATO appears to be careful and indecisive about how to act in the current situation we have now. Even though some NATO countries have sent weapons to Ukraine for defensive purposes, NATO in general does not intervene, fearing a full-scale Third World War, mainly between the West and Russia³⁰. The alliance is able to predict consequences of its actions, and therefore there are no barriers to apply this style of behavior to the discussion of the enlargement issue. NATO should carefully consider priorities when it comes to European peace.

The current conflict in Ukraine can potentially make Ukraine's accession to NATO faster, but at the same time Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky became dissatisfied with NATO's lack of action to defend his country³¹. So, the process could slow down too. We just need to see how events develop. Still, NATO has two choices available: either to fulfill the promise made at the Bucharest summit in 2008, or to take into account the interests of Russia.

4. Make Russia a partner again

NATO and Russia can still become partners. Hopefully, this possibility is not excluded in the light of recent events. At this point, it would be useful and present some recommendations for the alliance on how to behave with Moscow.

³⁰ Ukraine conflict: What is Nato and how has it responded to Russia's invasion?, (BBC News, 2022)

³¹ In nod to Russia, Ukraine says no longer insisting on NATO membership, (France24, 2022)

4.1 Adaptation of the status-quo policy regarding Ukraine's accession to NATO

First of all, it is clear that the issue of enlargement is so critical that something needs to be done about it. It would be impossible to convince Russia to change its attitude to Ukraine's membership in NATO, and this would require a colossal amount of diplomatic work. Therefore, the most appropriate option, in order to not escalate the geopolitical situation in an already stressful time, is to adopt a status quo policy. NATO can keep a partnership status for Ukraine, but not actually admit Ukraine to the alliance. It is recommended that NATO follows the thinking of John Mearsheimer, a political scientist who argued that Ukraine should be a *neutral* buffer, sort of a conditional border between NATO and Russia. Mearsheimer argues that by promising Ukraine to join NATO the West provoked the Russian president³². Ukraine's unhappiness with its perspectives of joining the alliance was provoked at the same time too. So, it is a double failure of the West. To correct this mistake, the West should contribute to the neutrality of Ukraine in the West-Russia confrontation. Neutral does not mean "demilitarized." Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak even said that Ukraine is not afraid to discuss its neutrality with Putin³³. This can be a starting point then. Ukraine's neutrality can look like a win-win situation: NATO would not be obligated to desperately take Ukraine into alliance, and Putin would feel more relaxed about Russia's security.

³² Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault, (Foreign Affairs, 2014)

³³ Ukraine ready for talks with Russia on neutral status - official, (Reuters, 2022)

Also, neutrality can help to transform Russia-Ukraine relationships too. They are in a stalemate and are in a need of transformation. This does not mean at all that Ukraine would be Russia's servant, but at least its role would be important in relaxation of tensions in the region.

4.2 Changing verbal rhetoric

Kimberly Marten, Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, in her book *Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO*, stresses the importance of US policymakers in making Russia-NATO relations less critical: "with careful, concrete policy measures, Washinton can avoid unthinking slide down either of two dangerous paths [arms race and military conflict with NATO] in this time of uncertainty and change."³⁴ It is true that all participating sides must take measures to minimize the risks of having another full-scale Cold War with arms race. However, this cannot be done without showing respect to Russia and its treatment as an equally powerful participant in geopolitics. NATO should not try to show its superiority just because its communist analogy, the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist. Like real diplomats, Western politicians, especially American ones, should demonstrate a degree of *respect* to Russian officials if they want to contribute to long-term peace and to achieve something from Russia. In their rhetoric they need to use less words like "aggression," "aggressor," "threat," "dictator," and "violation." The reality shows that in response to these words Russia only closes itself more strongly from the West. The chances of

dialogue become zero. Simply throwing accusations at each other is not a solution. For instance, it is clear that neither the US nor Russia want each other's military at their doorstep. The US therefore should use the NATO platform to design a solution that considers Russian interests, does not undermine US national security, and fully backs Ukrainian sovereignty. This is how respectful treatment of a counterparty looks like.

4.3 Restore practical cooperation to fight global problems

Another thing that NATO should do is to restore practical cooperation with Russia that was suspended in 2014. This may sound very odd, especially right now. However, for the sake of sustaining peace and normalization of relations, NATO should still find points of connection with Russia. Abrupt, one-sided solutions should not prevail in conflict resolution. Yes, an argument can be that Russia cut ties with NATO as well. In 2021 Russia really did suspend its mission to NATO, but this was a response to the incomprehensible, defiant and undiplomatic expulsion of eight Russian military staff at the military alliance³⁵. The reasons for expulsion were not explained. NATO should stop this unfriendly approach if it ever wants to achieve something from Russia and find common topics to work on. For example, Russia and NATO can fight terrorism together. It should be pointed out nevertheless that according to Julianne Smith, the US ambassador to NATO, the alliance literally equated Russia with terrorism on its list of threats³⁶, which is totally unacceptable,

³⁴ *Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO*, (Council Special Report No. 79, p.3, 2017)

³⁵ Russia suspends its mission to NATO, (Deutsche Welle, 2021)

³⁶ Opinion: NATO must adapt to new threats and challenges, (Deutsche Welle, 2021)

because placing the whole country, including ordinary citizens, together with the greatest threat to humanity is a provocative act. NATO essentially does not hide the fact that Russia is its enemy, and this should change. Terrorism is something that Russia suffered a lot from just about twenty years ago. The US and European NATO countries are not an exception. So, a considerable amount of work can be done to fight one of the greatest threats to humanity. One of the threats for NATO is also climate change³⁷. For Russia climate change is a threat too, because it leaves its Northern populations and ecosystems vulnerable. So, this is another topic where Russia and the alliance can coordinate efforts and contribute to mitigation of climate change, together with the EU that has its own policy. It is also important to understand that smaller states are vulnerable to geopolitical shocks and therefore they rely on the wisdom and prudence of politicians representing such huge geopolitical actors. Finally, NATO should understand that Russia's current leader is about to stay in power for some more time. He secured this opportunity in the constitutional amendment referendum in 2020. So, sooner or later the West will have to look for an approach to work with him. It is impossible to keep the whole world in tension and fear for a long time.

4. Conclusion

The relations between Russia and the West have reached a critical point. The situation is not changing: both sides of the conflict are only more closed in their information

space. The world is now truly witnessing a new Cold War that threatens to be larger than the original one if the parties do not change their approach to their adversaries in the conflict. The West, which NATO is an integral part of, must immediately stop seeing Russia as an enemy and initiate concrete steps to resolve differences. The West should not wait until Russia starts the process. Today's Western rhetoric only accelerates Russia's chances for a symmetrical response leading to retaliation. To prevent such a course of events, NATO in particular must regularly discuss the most important topics where there are misunderstandings and learn to understand and respect the requirements of Russia. Russia must be treated as a participant in geopolitics with equal capabilities. NATO should also stop its practices that are clearly not conducive to a truce, such as pushing further the idea of Ukraine joining the alliance.

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³⁷ Ibid.

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