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**Post-Cold War NATO (1991-2004):
an obsolete Organization?**

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Introduction

Although post-Cold War NATO has often been criticized and deemed unnecessary because of the end of the bipolar confrontation in Europe, historical evidence shows how the Atlantic Alliance is still standing, alive and well. In contemporary history, no other alliance has been able to last so long and no other international organization – apart from NATO – has been able to equip itself with an integrated army. The history and the features of the Atlantic Alliance mark the presence of some peculiarities that makes it one of a kind, a particularly challenging case-study. I was interested in studying such an international actor because it has deployed its functions in two historical contexts and international orders that were very different from each other. The first context was marked by the bipolar equilibrium of the Cold War, while the second one was marked by the so-called “unipolar” (i.e. US-led) international order which, since the early 2000s, has been replaced by an increasingly multi-polar system.

The comparison between the two international orders serves to see to what extent the context could influence – or even determine – NATO’s existence and its course of action and to evaluate if there have been also other factors – beyond the structure in which it operates – explaining the reasons for its persistence. It is useful to assess the elements that justify the Alliance’s survival while of course the post-Cold War context represents an element of discontinuity. The core-issue of my analysis is the survival of NATO after the dissolution of the USSR.

The collapse of the USSR and the end of Communism in Europe led to a heated debate over the role of NATO and the shape of the future collective security system. The Alliance’s future was challenged by the end of the Cold War, since its foremost function, safeguarding Europe’s security and freedom against the Soviet Empire, had no longer reason to exist. So, why NATO did not dissolve? What is NATO’s new *raison d’être* in a post-bipolar world? And is its persistence justified? These are only some of the questions I try to answer in my thesis. This research work aims to answer the question “Did post-Cold War NATO (1991-2004) become an obsolete Organization?”. Such a question makes it necessary to go back to NATO’s origins, since it is useful to analyse the Alliance’s original tasks and responsibilities and then analyse its post-conflict renewed prerogatives.

The genesis of NATO – defined as an international defensive military Organization created by the Western powers on the two sides of the Atlantic – is to be found in the Cold War setting. After the end of World War II, the Western powers had to face the alleged threat of the Soviet hegemonism and influence in Western Europe. The episode of the “Berlin Blockade” and the Western airlift is particularly meaningful, as it gradually laid the foundations for a much more integrated and structured cooperation between the Western powers.

As a consequence, the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty – occurred on the 4th of April 1949 in Washington – marked a memorable moment in the history of the 20th century. It was signed as a form of mutual defence and deterrence against the alleged expansionism of the USSR.

That result was achieved in spite of numerous obstacles such as the American isolationism and the traditional disunity of the European countries. As Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay – NATO’s first Secretary General – famously said in 1957: the purpose of the Alliance was “to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down”. Once that mission had been achieved, new problems were going to arise.

The purpose of my thesis is to verify if NATO has become obsolete after the implosion of the USSR or if it has been able to maintain its relevance and validity in the new world (dis)order. NATO’s relevance has been extensively discussed and analysed. Existing literature shows that this is a widely debated issue. A good evidence of this is given by the contrasting opinion of important scholars such as Kenneth N. Waltz (2000) and John J. Mearsheimer (2001) – who stated that NATO’s persistence would trigger a renewed Russian aggressiveness – and David S. Yost (2003) – who asserted the permanent utility of NATO.

In my thesis, I critically trace the main events of NATO’s history and I assess how those events have changed the Alliance’s nature. This research work is organized as follows.

The first chapter starts from describing the new international environment after the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. Rob de Wijk (1998) has been one of the first to explain the Alliance’s adaptation process to the new post-Cold War reality, whereas Massimo De Leonardis (2001) has extended the research by illustrating the debate between Minimalists – those who wanted NATO to dissolve – and Maximalists – those who wanted NATO to survive. Through the consultation of NATO official documents, I analyse the 1990 NATO’s London Declaration and the 1991 NATO’s New Strategic Concept, listing the new tasks, goals and responsibilities through which NATO has tried to restructure itself.

Mentioning the main refrain of the early 1990s – going *out of area or out of business* – has been useful to understand how the debate has evolved between two options: turning the Alliance into a “global organization” and expanding its responsibilities or remaining a “regional organization” in a Euro-Atlantic context that was not the same as before. Then, I address the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, carried out to alter the foreign policy of Slobodan Milosevic. The military intervention in Kosovo is of particular interest because of the heated dispute on its legitimacy.

The conflict is here described through Stephen T. Hosmer (2001) and Benjamin S. Lambeth (2001) while the use of UN official documents and principles of political philosophy – such as the *Just War* theory –

have helped me to focus on the legitimacy of NATO's military campaign, with particular reference on the method adopted by the Alliance (Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, 2000). The focus on the military campaign in Afghanistan is crucial to explain the first-ever activation of the Washington Treaty's Article 5 (Bruno Tertrais, 2016), how NATO member states react to the beginning of the War on Terror and how the post-war situation was managed by the allies.

The second chapter addresses the issue of NATO's waves of enlargement, laying out the positions of Institutionalists (Frank Schimmelfennig, 1998 and Daniel Freid, 2008) – who were in favour of the expansion – and Neorealists (George F. Kennan, 1997 and John Lewis Gaddis, 1998) – who were against the expansion. The enlargement's consequences on the Euro-Atlantic area and on the relationship with Russia is carefully deepened (Elias Götz, 1994, Hilary Driscoll et al. 2003).

A large part of this chapter is dedicated to post-Cold War NATO-Russia relations and, in particular, I study how those relations between the two former enemies developed (NATO official documents), mentioning the distrust of both parts.

In the attempt to tackle all these complex issues, the interview with President Giuliano Amato – a witness to shed light on the topics of my thesis – represents a crucial mean to highlight how NATO-Russia relationship could have developed with Putin's rise to power and whether there have been mistakes of both sides in managing their rapprochement process.

Finally, the third chapter aims to evaluate the status of relations between NATO and the European Community. Tracing the development of European military capabilities and explaining its main impact on NATO's major partner is a core goal of this work. This chapter, based on the study of EU and NATO official documents, has a twofold goal: on one hand, analysing the progress made in terms of mechanisms and areas of cooperation between the Western European Union – the armed wing of European Countries – and the Atlantic Alliance (Richard G. Whitman, 2006); on the other, analysing what has avoided a really affective form of cooperation between NATO and EU.

The study cannot prescind from the changings that the international scenario has undergone, especially in the phase following the Cold War, a phase in which the substantial nature of NATO had to evolve because of contingencies that imposed a reassessment of its defending approach.

It is inevitable to deepen the corollary of these evolutionary mechanisms, that leads to a different partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, that could translate into cooperation or competition (Paul Cornish, 2006). The chapter pays attention to the Iraqi war, defined as the main cause of severe transatlantic divergencies due to the new US foreign policy imposed by President George W. Bush (Douglas Kellner, 2003).

Overall, my argument is that the Atlantic Alliance has brilliantly succeeded in outliving the defeat of its enemy, managing to find its place in the new post-Cold war international environment. Despite various mistakes and hardships, NATO has given proof of its capability to acquire new capabilities, prerogatives and responsibilities, granting its effectiveness in the face of multi-faceted and multi-directional threats and therefore becoming anything but obsolete.

CHAPTER I: The Post-Cold War NATO from 1991 to 9/11

1.1 The 1991 Rome Summit and the formulation of the New Strategic Concept

The collapse of the USSR certainly represents one of the crucial and most relevant geopolitical events in the history of XX century. The fall of the Berlin Wall, together with the insurgencies in the satellite States and the serious economic troubles triggered the dissolution of the Soviet Union, after almost 70 years since its birth, and the break-up of the Warsaw Pact. When the Russian Federation succeeded to the USSR at the end of 1991, the Cold War ended. The winners of the bipolar clash were NATO and the West, not only thanks to their political and military power, the so-called *Hard Power*, but also thanks to the work done by the USA which exercised its Soft Power, defined as the power of persuading, attracting and co-opting through the “role of culture, values and ideas”¹. NATO had achieved its primary target: acting as a deterrent to the aggressive approach of the Soviet Empire and avoiding a disastrous conflict between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc. For 40 years, the Atlantic Alliance had managed to defend the West from a hypothetical Soviet military aggression and it did it in a preemptive way, dissuading the USSR from attacking.

The rise of a new full-fledged international order was the consequence of the Cold War’s end. According to some scholars, such as Francis Fukuyama, 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall depicted a historic caesura and outlined “the end of history”², realizing therefore the final pacification of the world under the banner of western values, including democracy and free market, after the collapse of totalitarianisms. Fukuyama saw a dialectical development within history, according to which a society breaks down due to internal contradictions, giving life to a new less conflicting international system, until arriving to a system devoid of internal contradictions capable of destroying everything: this system represents the final stage of history, a point towards which people tend and beyond which one cannot go. In Francis Fukuyama’s perspective, that society was liberal democracy.

The focus of the post-Cold War period was about understanding how the profound change of the international context could affect NATO and which path it could follow to make its way within the new post-bipolar international order. What changed after 1989 was the unpredictability of the new world. On the one hand, during the aftermath of the World War II, relations among states were channelled into the strict contrast between USSR and USA, which drew a clear line among enemies and allies, making everything else dependent on the two superpowers; on the other hand, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Empire radically changed the balance of power inside international politics, freeing up the fractures and all the interests which had been previously constrained by the bipolar logic³.

¹ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs (2004)

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History?*, The National Interest (1989)

³ It was the case of Central and Eastern European countries and the case of Balkans

During the Cold War, the world was basically based on the supremacy of the USA and the USSR, which were enormously stronger than the other states in terms of economic and military resources, while the post-bipolar world saw a larger number of countries who could assert themselves on the international stage. First and foremost the United States of America, China, Japan and then the great European powers such as France, Britain, the reunified Germany and Russia. None of these great powers had enough force for a global supremacy and namely for a joint control over Europe and Asia. The new context made the situation more complex and the interactions between states less predictable, mixing cooperation with competition.

The difficulty to territorially detect national interests was exacerbated by one more factor of unpredictability of the post-bipolar world: the mix of elements that were normally summarized under the label of “globalization”. The ever-growing commercial, political and financial globalization, the development of communications, the electronic revolution have deeply increased the unpredictability of the world for their complexity and for their supranational nature, which made national policies – that had ruled for a long time the forces of society and economy – powerless. These phenomena aggravated the global unpredictability also in another way: by enhancing the interdependence among many states and, as a consequence, by linking the wellness of each state to the affairs of all the other states. In fact, in such a situation, the threats to the security of each country could come from every part of the international system, with the result that the interests of each power ended up being ubiquitous. If we take all this into account, the international scenario in the post-bipolar world seemed to be more undefined and uncertain compared to when, a few years before, clear and unequivocal threats were on the pitch. Therefore, it is not surprising that President George H. W. Bush identified more intangible dangers stating, on May 1990, that uncertainty and instability had become the new enemies.

The collapse of the USSR and the end of Communism in Europe led to a heated debate over the role of NATO and the shape of the future collective security system⁴. The Alliance’s future was challenged by the end of the Cold War, since its foremost function, safeguarding Europe’s security and freedom against the Soviet Empire, had no longer reason to exist.

The implosion of the USSR as a political entity and as an international bloc, dropped the substantial reason why the Atlantic Pact was signed: the presence of an enemy so powerful that the western countries were obliged to join together and coalesce against the Soviet Empire. NATO no longer had a counterpart and it found itself facing a dilemma: why NATO should have survived without the threat that had justified its existence? That is why many analysts and scholars questioned the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, observing the absence of any purpose in the new post-Cold War Period. A clash between a minimalist approach and a maximalist approach about the role of the Alliance occurred. As

⁴ M. A. Smith, *NATO in the First Decade after the Cold War*, Kluwer, Dordrecht (2000)

regard to the minimalist approach, scholars from the realist school of thought called for NATO to dissolve and required that the Alliance gave way to the United Nations or to new organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)⁵. According to them, the fall of the Soviet Bloc had destroyed any clear threat to international security and therefore there was no need for a collective action. It was claimed that the Alliance was in a deep crisis and it was given a new meaning to the acronym N.A.T.O. which was *No Alternative to Obsolescence*. Once the enemy, which had given birth to NATO and had kept it alive, was dead, it seemed logic to disband the Alliance. NATO was believed to transform into a shield behind which each State would have freely furthered its own interests. Despite the operational capability of the Alliance, there was a perceived trend towards the renationalisation of security. Moreover, the evolution of the international situation was prone to promote short-lived, flexible and limited coalitions, as recognised by the Pentagon, while NATO foreshadowed rigid and standing commitments.

The maximalist approach⁶, instead, underlined the permanent utility of NATO. The US President Clinton later said that “the expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization was a logic and essential consequence of the Iron Curtain’s end and of the necessity of broadening the European unity based on shared democratic values”⁷. In the aftermath of Cold War, NATO began to be rethought. The crucial change proposed was about a changing from a containment policy to a concert policy, a new form of organization without a precise enemy and with the aim of developing the tasks of a security community, a group of nations among which war was to be tacitly excluded. According to David S. Yost, NATO survived because of several reasons: maintaining the American commitment for European security; solving the European dilemmas within Western Europe; avoiding nuclear proliferation in Europe; promoting a shared management of the defence issue through a forum for the coordination of the Western security policies; providing economic benefits to the allies and encouraging democracy⁸. Then, the word “NATO” had become a metaphor behind which the relationship between the USA and the allies got stronger.

Throughout history, there are few military alliances which managed to outlive the defeat of its enemy. Once the main reason at the base of the common effort disappeared – prevailing against the opponent – the contracting parties of the pact traditionally entered in conflict with each other or, at the very best, split up, satisfied about the outcome achieved. Obviously, if NATO wanted to survive, it had to transform and evolve. It had to give itself new tasks, enlarge and rebalance its internal relations. After

⁵ Christoph Bertram, *NATO on Track for the 21st Century*, Security Dialogue (1995)

⁶ Some of the maximalist approach’s exponents were Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin. Cfr. *The Promise of Institutional Theory*, International Security. Vol. 20 No. 1 (1995)

⁷ Richard Holbrooke, *America, a European Power*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 74, No. 2 (1995)

⁸ David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance’s New Roles in International Security*, United States Institute of Peace (1999)

the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical circumstances were not the same as before and that's why the Atlantic Alliance had to progressively adapt to the new strategic context, moving between the safeguard of the original mission as an instrument of collective security and the takeover of new missions and duties, related to the onset of new threats or new risks to the member states security. The definition of security gradually widened, and a new focus was put on risks rather than threats.

The end of the Bipolar World required a far-reaching restructuring of the Organization. On May 1989, a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the North Atlantic Council was discussing about the modernisation of short-range nuclear arms while, on December 1989, a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the idea to revise NATO to make it more suitable to the new international environment prevailed. Within one year, NATO passed from a debate on how to manage arms to a debate on how to change in order to survive. Therefore, the idea to disband the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance was not taken into consideration by western countries, despite the potential economic benefits and the greater freedom of action that could result from that decision. Along these lines, the first step during the post-Cold War phase was represented by the adoption of the 1990 London Declaration⁹, whose main outcome was the recognition of an evolving political landscape. As a result, a hand of friendship was extended by NATO to eastern European nations, the former Warsaw Pact countries which were no longer perceived as enemies. Then, the second crucial step in the new strategic framework was the Rome International Summit and the subsequent formulation, for the first time, of the *New Strategic Concept*, a document through which the member states of NATO defined the new role of the Alliance, the strategic perspectives and the renewed approach to the international security. The tasks were established in light of the common threats evaluation. Furthermore, the document contained an element of military doctrine, indicating not only the goals but also the means used to achieve the development of the military forces. The New Strategic Concept was strictly necessary since the strategic framework in which NATO worked had radically changed. More in general, it allowed the Allies to reassert the common basis of values on which the bond of mutual solidarity lied.

The heads of State or Government of NATO met in Rome in 1991 and, by undertaking a fundamental strategic review, agreed on the necessity to transform the Atlantic Alliance in order to reflect the new and hopeful age in Europe. While confirming that the basic principles on which the Alliance had worked since the beginning were unchanged, member states acknowledged the developments taking place in Europe and the large-scale consequences on the way their goals had to be pursued in the future. There was not enough room for a real codification in terms of post-Cold War behaviour, considering that the Berlin Wall had fallen just two years before and that the Soviet Union still existed in November 1991, but the Strategic Concept was strictly linked to the 1990 London Declaration which promised a

⁹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm

transformation within the Alliance and the establishment of revolutionary changes in order to guarantee NATO's continuity.

The first pivotal change had to be found in the fact that the former allies of the USSR had recovered their sovereignty while the rising Russian Federation was facing radical changes towards a new form of government. All the countries that were NATO's enemies had broken up the Warsaw Pact and dismissed their ideological hostility towards the West. At different levels, they embraced policies aimed to reach a pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, the respect for human rights and a market economy. The division of Europe, which had been one of the root causes of the struggle characterizing the Cold War, was going to be overcome¹⁰.

Furthermore, also Western Europe saw significant changes taking place. Germany was unified in 1990 under the leadership of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and remained under the umbrella of the Atlantic Alliance and the European institutions¹¹. Then, the countries of the European Community were working on the creation of a political union, including the evolution of a European security identity in the process of European integration. Thanks to the development of a European defensive role, the creation of the Alliance's European pillar began to take shape, not only as a function of European interests but also as a function of a better integrity, cohesion and effectiveness of NATO as a whole. Considerable progress was achieved on the field of arms control, reducing the level of armaments and increasing military transparency and mutual trust. In this respect, the 1986 Stockholm Agreement, the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the implementation of the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) depicted a new international scenario characterized by a higher degree of stability. Then, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) served as a frame of reference, playing a role of consultation and cooperation which was complementary to the role of NATO and to the process of European integration for the purpose of peace.

The challenges and the risks that NATO had to face in the area of international safety were obviously different from those of the past. The threat of a complete and simultaneous attack on all the European fronts of NATO had been eliminated and therefore it was no longer the focus of the Alliance's strategy. Unlike the main danger in the past, the residual risks for the security were multi-faceted in nature and multi-directional and accordingly hardly predictable and evaluable. It was less likely that the security risks were related to a deliberate attack against the territory of the Alliance; instead, it was foreseeable that the new risks were about an instability in Europe due to the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including those caused by the ethnical antagonism and the territorial disputes which were involving many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. During the 1990 London Summit, NATO

¹⁰ Federico Romero, *Storia della Guerra fredda*, Einaudi (2009)

¹¹ Mary Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Princeton Studies, International History and Politics (2014)

member states identified new major security threats such as the “weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, the interruption of the flow of resources essential for life, the consequential migration of inhabitants caused by conflicts in the periphery and then terrorism and sabotages¹²”. The unrests, that could arise, were not supposed to represent a direct threat to the security and to the territorial integrity of the Alliance’s member states but they were likely to trigger harmful crisis for the European stability and armed conflicts, which could affect external powers or extend to NATO countries with a direct effect on the Alliance’s security field.

Great emphasis was put on the development of friendly relations with the countries situated in the Mediterranean area and in the Middle East. In fact, stability and peace of Europe’s southern periphery were of paramount importance for the security of the Alliance, as shown by the 1991 Gulf War, especially thinking about the terrorism acts, the military deployments, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles in that region, able to reach the territory of some member states of NATO. The end of the East-West struggle had considerably reduced the potential of major conflicts in Europe. There was a higher risk about minor-scale crisis that could rapidly arise and spread, requiring a quick response.

The new strategic framework did not distort NATO’s life but it rather underlined its persistent validity and robustness. Basing its work on the common values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had fought, since the begin, for the creation of a pacific, fair and lasting order in Europe and would have continued to preserve it. Despite having new opportunities to frame its strategy within a wide approach to the security issue, the Atlantic Alliance maintained the traditional basic goals, stated in the 1949 Washington Treaty and reaffirmed in the London Declaration: safeguarding freedom and the security of all its member states through political and military means, in accordance with the UN Charter principles; representing a forum for security consultations and upholding the Transatlantic security link.

NATO traditionally embodied the Transatlantic link, according to which the security of Northern America was enduringly tied to that of Europe. The shared commitment and the mutual cooperation between sovereign states, in support of the indivisibility of security among the member states, were the distinguishing mark of the Atlantic Pact. The solidarity within the Alliance ensured that none of the member states was alone in dealing with the challenges concerning safety. Without depriving the member states of their right and duty to assume their sovereign responsibilities in the security field, the Alliance allowed them to improve their capability to achieve essential security goals. This mechanism contributed to the general stability within Europe and to the creation of the conditions designed to promote a higher cooperation. Among the means through which the Alliance pursued its security policy,

¹² *Ibidem*

the maintenance of a military potential to prevent war and provide an efficient defence, together with the efforts to control arms reduction, represented a crucial element.

NATO served as a consultation forum on any topic concerning the basic interests of member states, as the appropriate context for coordinating the efforts in the common interest's field, safeguarding the strategic balance in Europe. Dialogue, cooperation and an effective military capability were the key concepts to delete crises and prevent conflicts. To this end, NATO started to really support the role of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and the role of other bodies, including the European Community, the Western European Union (WEU) and the United Nations (UN).

The Alliance did not consider itself as an opponent of anyone and its purpose continued to be purely defensive: none of its weapons would have been used except for self-defence. Then, the main goal was to convince any potential aggressor that the use of force against the territory of any ally would have caused the collective response of all the member states and that the risks behind a conflict were greater than any predictable advantage. The security's indivisibility meant that the attack towards one member state amounted to an attack towards all the others.

The New 1991 Strategic Concept constituted the basis for further developments in terms of defensive policies, nuclear and conventional forces, peaceful conflict settlement and planning mechanisms of collective defence. It marked the evolution of NATO strategies after the Cold War's end, paving the way to fundamental transformations within the organization, such as the widening of the agenda through the inclusion of numerous new issues and the broadening of the scope of NATO territorial commitments. According to some scholars, the new trend undertaken by the Alliance was counterproductive. Sven Biscop argued that "the response to global challenges and the relation with third states require a much broader, comprehensive approach that encompasses all of foreign policy, from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military. While NATO can contribute, it is not equipped to take the lead"¹³. On the contrary, according to Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, "NATO was supposed to continue to play a leading role in what constitutes its core business: hard security – both defence against threats to our territory and global military crisis management. Here lies the strength and the continued relevance of the Alliance"¹⁴. However, the new Alliance's strategy represented not the end of a debate but rather its beginning.

The new risks, after the East-West struggle, significantly varied in terms of nature, origin, response modes and degree of urgency perceived by the different member states. The drawing-up of a common

¹³ Sven Biscop, *NATO, ESDP and the RIGA summit: no transformation without re-equilibration*, Royal Institute for International Relations, Egmont Papers (2006)

¹⁴ Jens Ringsmose, Sten Rynning, *NATO's New Strategic Concept: a Comprehensive Assessment*, Danish Institute for International Studies (2011)

strategy became a conceptually harder exercise for the allies, called firstly to agree on the type of threat and secondly on possible countermeasures. Moreover, the disappearance of an immediately perceptible and existential threat involved, for the allied leaders, an unprecedented difficulty: explaining to their respective public opinion the reasons why NATO was still remarkable for their national security. In order to support the claim that the Alliance, while remaining the main security instrument of its member states, did not consider any country as an enemy, the allies opted for a transparency policy, a useful measure to maintain popular consensus. As a result, the post - Cold War Strategic Concepts soon became more political than military documents, guidance and public documents instead of confidential documents. There was the need of a synthesis that considered the implications of the major international novelties (not necessarily in the security field), by taking advantage of the previous experiences accumulated by NATO during its history over time. Even without a rule about the Strategic Concepts' processing times, a mid-term time horizon was established for that kind of document.

Western powers identified three great factors of potential conflict. The first one was linked to the political evolution of what was left of the old enemy, the USSR. The huge military endowment, developed during the Cold War, made USSR a superpower on a regional scale, a major player in the European and Asiatic chessboard. That's why the political future of the rising Russian Federation was particularly important for western countries, because the likelihood of an authoritarian involution could put a deadly military power at the service of newly aggressive projects in foreign policy. The uncertainties accompanying the Russian Federation's changing process could not be considered separately from the fact that its conventional forces were meaningfully larger than any other European countries and its wide nuclear stockpile was comparable to that of the USA.

Strategically speaking, Russian military capabilities remained one of the main concerns for the Alliance, even in a non-confrontational relationship. Preserving the strategic balance within Europe continued to be a fundamental goal. This resulted in fighting the residual Soviet power in Europe and in keeping the US influence within Europe. The second factor of potential conflict was represented by the former Soviet Bloc's countries and by the Balkans: the ethnic and religious conflicts that ravaged Russia and the Balkans; the tensions behind the resurgence of territorial disputes of Central and Eastern Europe; the economic difficulties and the political instability of those countries, which could spark impressive and uncontrolled migration flows. These problems didn't constitute a direct threat for western countries but they were full-fledged sources of local tensions which could dangerously occur in the area next to the NATO member states' territory, leading to a hardly controllable crisis. Then, the third factor of conflict was linked to the fact that some of the most relevant threats to the western security came from regions which were far from the territories of the western countries.

Those threats included the diffusion of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, especially among east and central Asian countries and Middle East countries. Moreover, the danger of international terrorism

had empowered due to the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to the diffusion of the Islamic Fundamentalism and the possibility of dangers for the trade routes and mineral resources was a danger for the economic welfare of western powers.

Nonetheless, the mix of those factors did not explain all the problems the allies had to face after the Cold War's end. Those factors constituted the external threats to the western security while the internal threats were linked to the relations between NATO's member states. The fall of the Berlin Wall reopened the issue that had characterised the 20th century international politics: the German question. Despite the general improvement in the relations between European states during the second post-war period due to their economic and political integration, there was the fear that a unified Germany could rekindle the rivalries from the past, undermining the European unification process thereby jeopardizing the continental political order.

1.2 The debate behind the “out of area” issue: the Bosnian Crisis (1992-1995)

One of the focus points of the debate which followed the Cold War’s end was represented by the so called “*out of area* issue”. The new strategic context put NATO on the horns of an existential dilemma: on the one hand there were those who agreed to transform the Alliance into a “global organization”, which could intervene by transcending its member states’ territory; on the other hand there were those (France, firstly) who did not agree and thought the right approach was about maintaining NATO as a “regional organization”, which kept its traditional tasks within its traditional member states’ borders.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise of the new world order, NATO had to reorient its strategy-making. As mentioned before, during the early 1990s, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization started to look for a meaningful new role, trying to give a new sense to its activity. The foremost concern was about the possibility that the Alliance – one of the most successful military organizations in modern history – could transform into something irrelevant. Those officials feared that, once accomplished the mission against the Soviet threat, explaining to people the high price of keeping alive expensive armed forces could become a hard task. They claimed the necessity for NATO to broaden its horizons and to deploy its armed forces “*out of area*”, namely beyond the borders of the 16 nations’ region that the Atlantic Alliance was founded to defend in 1949. Moreover, according to them, the engagement in peacekeeping operations beyond its boundaries should have become a stable feature of the Alliance.

The US Senator Richard Lugar, during a speech in the early 1990s, said he wanted NATO to abandon its ban on “*out of area* operations”. Hence, his famous expression “NATO should either go out of area or out of business”¹⁵. According to this perspective, the Alliance’s main purpose, in the aftermath of the Cold War, would undergo a fundamental transformation: from safeguarding a common territory to defending the common interests of NATO’s member states. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization soon turned into an alliance of collective interests, a mean through which North American and Western European powers could manage the threats to all the shared interests, no matter where those threats were located. Within few years, NATO managed to transform itself from a military organization focused on the territorial safeguard to an institution focused on a larger territory, the “*out of area*”. In doing so, NATO would expand its scope for action and find its collocation within a global rather than a regional context. It was a revolutionary achievement.

The new era of globalization required the Alliance to ban its limits on the aims and the extent or otherwise NATO members would face a serious marginalization in the foreign policy and security field since the interests (and the threats to those interests) could be located well beyond the geographical borders of the Euro-Atlantic region. Europe was then in a condition of relative peace. Its stability, for

¹⁵ Stephen S. Rosenfeld, *NATO’s Last Chance*, The Washington Post (1993): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1993/07/02/natos-last-chance/22054ea7-5958-44b0-9e6a-212ee1da51de/>

the first time in a century, was not under the threat of a major power – Germany or the Soviet Union. During the 1990s the peace of Europe was threatened by Serbia, a significant danger but of course not a systemic menace – like the USSR – to European stability or NATO countries.

Warren Christopher and William J. Perry – respectively former US Secretary of State and former US Secretary of Defence – talking about the future of the Alliance, stated that “the danger to the security of its members was not primarily aggression to their collective territory, but threats to their collective interests beyond their territory. Shifting the alliance’s emphasis from defence of members’ territory to defence of common interests was the strategic imperative”¹⁶. Alongside the focus on collective defence, NATO agenda began to include a focus on “non-article 5 missions” (conflict resolutions, peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations), which made reference to all the “out of area” activities implemented not to respond to a direct aggression to a member state but instead to stabilize troubled areas, which could be located also outside the allied territory. Hence, cooperative security and crisis management gradually turned into the core tasks of the Alliance, together with collective defence, as it was then stated by NATO’s New Strategic Concept, elaborated in Washington in 1999. The “out of area” threats were about “the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons), disruption of the flow of oil, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, human rights abuses, genocidal violence and political instability related to wars of aggression in other regions that could threaten to create great disruption”¹⁷ within the allied territory.

Of course the defence of member states’ territory continued to represent a serious commitment but the allies had to take into account that new threats - such as instability - could spread into NATO’s region from an outside area. The new approach adopted by NATO was the outcome of the new global scenario which came out from the end of Cold War. All the interconnections behind globalization meant that developments occurring in one place could affect the state of prosperity, security and well-being of people everywhere. The Alliance started to understand that the best way to defend its territory and its citizens against remote threats was to challenge them at their source. The new world order and the new geopolitical circumstances enforced a historic change within NATO. The Alliance was looking for new *raison d’être* and managed, to some degree, to encounter them in crisis management in Europe and in areas beyond the borders of the Alliance. NATO, the world’s first international military organization, was perfectly suited to preserve global stability and to respond against any danger through the important contribution of the most prosperous nations.

The downfall of the Yugoslav Federation in June 1991 and the subsequent wars in Yugoslavia soon became the chances for NATO to show its potential in crisis management circumstances, thanks to the

¹⁶ Warren Christopher, William J. Perry, *NATO’s true mission*, New York Times (1997)

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

new strategic role acquired through the 1991 New Strategic Concept. The wars in Yugoslavia could represent a direct threat to the security of the European allies and the Article 4 could be activated if the conflict involved Hungary in the north or Turkey in the east or led to a massive movement of refugees towards western Europe.

After Tito's death in 1980, the economic situation of the Federation sharply deteriorated, widening the gap between the richest republics such as Slovenia and Croatia and the rest of the Federation and strengthening the centrifugal forces towards a policy of secession¹⁸. A strong sentiment of nationalism re-emerged in the whole Balkan region. By holding a referendum, Slovenia and Croatia were the first republics to declare their independence from the Yugoslav Federation, triggering the military reaction of the Serbian nationalist President Slobodan Milošević who did not want the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation and used the pretext of protecting the Serbian minorities in those areas to militarily intervene. Serbian troops were deployed first against Slovenian troops and then against Croatian troops but the two republics which were pushing for independence prevailed.

The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina became soon different and more complicated to manage. In 1992, also Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence and the result was the same of the previous cases: war and deaths. The fact that the population was mixed, composed of Serbs, Croats and Muslims strongly complicated the scenario. A strong Serbian minority, supported by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army, took control of a large part of Bosnia, a country with a Muslim plurality, because Milošević aimed to build a "Greater Serbia" in an area controlled by Muslims. Serious internal conflicts broke out and Serbs threatened a bloodbath in the case of a secession from Bosnia by Muslims and Croats. Milošević's military campaign seemed to be an appropriate challenge for the EU members. The war was in the Europeans' own backyard and involved more European interests rather than American ones. The American position was explicated by the message Secretary of State James A. Baker sent to the European allies in 1992 when he declared "we don't have a dog in this fight"¹⁹. Unlike the Persian Gulf War, where the dependence of the West on natural resources played an active and decisive role, the Balkan War did not fall within the national interests of the United States and, then, there were no conditions for a victory at minimal costs.

The Yugoslav army was heavily armed and it was able to defeat any invader by exploiting the mountainous terrain. The US President George H. W. Bush and its administration believed that the Bosnian War represented a useful opportunity for Europeans to show their ability to act regardless of the United States, following the principles of the 1992 Maastricht Summit. The response of the allies was not effective. Germany lined up against a military initiative beyond the boundaries of NATO while

¹⁸ Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*, Brookings Institution (1994)

¹⁹ Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency*, Simon & Schuster, New York (1994)

the United Kingdom and France initially chose to consider the Bosnian War as a civil war in which both sides of the conflict were guilty. Although the European leaders recognized the aggressive nature of Milošević's action, they believed that their foremost role was about aiding the United Nations in guaranteeing a neutral presence while safeguarding the life of innocent civilians from the casualties inflicted by conflicting parties²⁰.

The UN Security Council condemned the Serbian aggression and the UN Secretary-General decided to deploy peacekeeping teams. The hope of NATO allies was that the UN representative Cyrus Vance and the EU representative David Owen could solve the conflict in a peaceful way. In 1992, the United Nations was not able to wage a war against the Serbs in order to enforce its resolutions. Gradually and accidentally the United States ended up being involved in the Balkan War. A feeling of anger grew up as the Europeans promoted the dissolution of Yugoslavia and then watched the Serbs massacring the defenceless Bosnian Muslims. The protection of civilians through the implementation of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was found to be powerless. The new President of the United States Bill Clinton, who had underlined the importance of supporting Muslims in his presidential race, tried to enhance the involvement of America without putting the life of American soldiers at risk. The initial measure was about employing US planes under the auspices of NATO in order to deliver food and supplies to Muslims. That decision proved to be too modest and ineffective and constituted a wrong signal to Milošević, since it demonstrated fear rather than audacity and determination. In 1993 NATO was requested by the UN to enter into action through the implementation of a no-fly zone to avoid Serbian aircrafts over Bosnia²¹. A cooperation between NATO and the United Nations was supposed to supply the assistance of NATO infrastructure to the UN, legitimizing the new NATO task of preserving stability in Europe. The only doubt was about the timing of that possible synergy. NATO was facing a tough situation, as its member states had different positions about the intervention in Bosnia. France did not agree with taking part to a NATO contingent unless it was completely under UN mandate and Britain had a lightly armed peacekeeping force in Bosnia that was exposed to a Serb retaliation.

Then Germany, which was outside the UN Security Council, did not guarantee its intervention beyond NATO's borders because it was more worried about its internal problems. In this way, NATO capabilities were really ineffective.

As regard to the senior NATO partner, the United States, it feared to remain involved in a quagmire. The condition for an actual participation of the USA lied in the peaceful resolution of the differences among the Alliance's member states. The 1956 Suez debacle was the last time in which Europeans and Americans had been so divided. Americans railed against Europeans' reluctance to manage the Bosnian

²⁰ Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*, Yale University Press (2011)

²¹ <https://www.nato.int/ifor/un/u921110a.htm>

issue in their own neighbourhood while Europeans condemned the Americans' unwillingness to deploy troops for the UN mission. With reluctance, the allies decided to accept the adoption of airpower to enforce UN safe zones but then proved to be fearful of making the menace of armed intervention credible to the Serbs.

The principle of consensus within NATO did not come into force because the USA refused to take up the leadership of the mission and Europe failed to step in. Article 4 of the Atlantic Pact was not so clear to produce a feeling of cohesion among the allies. Moreover, the Franco-led Eurocorps and the British-led Rapid Reaction Force showed their unpreparedness in intervening to stop the massacre that was occurring in the Balkans. The scenes of ethnic cleansing shook the consciences of Europeans and Americans and led to the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 781 in December 1992, thanks to which all flights over Bosnia not authorized by the United Nations were banned. On the one hand the allies expressed their veto against the US recommendation to shoot down who violated that resolution, on the other hand they accepted the role of US AWACS aircraft to monitor the situation and supplied troops of peacekeepers under UN auspices "for the first time" in the Alliance's history, as the NATO press release stated in December 1992.

Bosnia represented the best example to carry out what came out from the 1991 Rome Summit as regard to a threat arising not from a "calculated aggression against the territory of the Allies but rather from the adverse consequences of instabilities"²². NATO instead failed to enforce its no fly-zones. The cooperation between North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United Nations was really confused, it restrained the actual effectiveness of the two international organizations and did not discourage Serbian aggression. Then, France and United Kingdom were unwilling to endanger their soldiers in Bosnia and they seemed to be contradictory about the defence of the Balkan country's territorial integrity. Despite the intensification of the war in 1993, the new US administration led by Bill Clinton and the Europeans continued to be in sharp contrast. Indeed, the USA did want the European partners to activate one of the European security organizations designed in 1991 and 1992 while the Europeans, rejecting the US pressures, railed against President Clinton since he refused to deploy its troops within the framework of a UN peacekeeping plan. An agreement was reached by the two parts in March 1994, when a pact to build a Muslim-Croat Federation in Bosnia was signed and the decision to establish a "Contact Group" including the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia was adopted. Actually, the US airpower was used by NATO against Serb military terminals after Milošević, through its artillery, provoked the death of many citizens in a really crowded Sarajevo marketplace. That reaction was able to temporarily stop Serb attacks and symbolized the unity of the allies even though it was only a warning signal. Then the "Contact Group's" division of the nation was rejected by the Bosnian Serbs.

²² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

Despite the transatlantic division over the Balkan issue, the conflict was regional and not continental or global. The need was to find a final compromise between the two sides of the Atlantic. So, Clinton administration supplied up to 25.000 troops in order to support, if necessary, UN peacekeepers, showing a high degree of accommodation with the European allies which did not exist before. Likewise, more productive lines of communication were provided by Britain and France, as a demonstration of their new decisiveness. The rise to power of Jacques Chirac, successor of President Mitterrand, in May 1995 indicated a more active European role and, as a consequence, France pushed Britain and the Netherlands in June 1995 to strengthen the role of UNPROFOR. This new form of cooperation notwithstanding, the evidence was that, with respect to Bosnia as the first Atlantic Alliance's military challenge, there was no "NATO method".

The ruthless Serbian attack against one of the UN-protected enclaves of Srebrenica led to a carnage of apparently protected civilians and marked the end of the UN's and NATO's stasis during the summer of 1995. The Western world was shocked by the role played by the Dutch UNPROFOR peacekeepers, who witnessed the massacre without being able to do anything due to their light military equipment. The death of over 8.000 Bosnian Muslims meant a decisive event for a breakthrough. As a consequence, impressive NATO air strikes took place for over 22 days, succeeding in destroying the Serbian heavy weapons and in leading the warring parts to the negotiating table. Thanks to the support of Croats, a large portion of Bosnian Serb territory was occupied by the allies and Milošević had no choice but giving up and presenting himself as a peace broker at the Dayton Conference, Ohio, under US auspices. At the begin of Dayton negotiations in November 1995, the absence of many United Nations representatives was clearly visible. In fact the UN slightly contributed to bring peace through the deployment of unarmed police forces to monitor Bosnian police, forcing NATO, with all the limits on its action, to intervene. Actually, the victory in the Bosnian war was more an American rather than a NATO achievement. The Dayton agreements were not the result of a council action but mostly the result of the work of the chief US negotiator in Bosnia, Assistant Secretary of State Richard C. Holbrooke. This was demonstrated by the fact that the peace agreements between Croats, Muslims and Serb leaders were signed in a midwestern American city, an episode which conveyed a strong message to the European allies.

The success of the Bosnian campaign temporarily eased the tensions between the US and its allies. Britain and France greatly contributed to peace efforts by providing 14.000 and 10.000 troops respectively even though the strength of the airpower displayed by President Clinton was dominant.

According to the Dayton Agreements, the state of Bosnia Herzegovina was divided into two entities: the Croat-Muslim Federation (which held 51% of the Bosnian territory) and the Republika Srpska (which held the remaining 49% of the Bosnian territory).

Then, three sectors were recognized within Bosnia and they were kept under control by the United States, Britain, France. Global powers agreed on the establishment of an Implementation Force (IFOR)²³ firstly and a Stabilisation Force (SFOR) secondly, in order to preserve security in the Balkan country, in accordance with Dayton Agreements. Other countries were involved in the transition phase toward peace and stability. Germany, who had previously limited its action, decided to send around 5.000 noncombat personnel to the NATO command and later added combat troops. Minor partners, such as Spain and Belgium, also participated to the new mission while Italy worked as a major staging area for NATO troops. In addition, many non-NATO countries provided logistic support to the IFOR mission because they were part of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, which was conceived during the Brussels meeting of the North Atlantic Council in January 1994. Eighteen nations, including former Warsaw Pact countries and current members of the Arab League, joined the operation under the NATO command. The crucial element was that Russia, a traditional partner of Serbia, was the first country in terms of contribution to the peacekeeping mission. The airborne brigade dispatched by the rising Russia enjoyed an autonomous status on paper but ultimately it was acting under NATO command in a US – controlled sector.

“It could be said that Bosnia Herzegovina saved NATO”²⁴. These were the words of the US ambassador to NATO, R.E. Hunter, who underlined the key role of the USA and how the allies had been capable of deploying the Alliance’s forces in a different scenario from that for which NATO was designed to work. The perimeter defined by the Washington Treaty was overcome and, for the first time, NATO intervened *out of area*. Bosnia showed the necessity of an international military organization like NATO, the renewed prominence of the American leadership and the willingness (albeit with hardship) to share responsibilities among the allies.

The ambassador depicted the hazardousness of the Bosnian campaign for the future of NATO, for the cohesion of its member states and for the job carried out with Russia till then. He declared that no other issue had torn the cohesion of the allies more than the Bosnian campaign, explaining that the case of Bosnia almost destroyed the Alliance. The standstill in the transatlantic relationships was interrupted by the Yugoslavia facts, since the Bosnian crisis demonstrated that Europe was militarily powerless and that continental security problems could be faced only through the political-military guidance of the United States.

²³ Also known as “Operation Joint Endeavor”, the IFOR operation became the successor of the UNPROFOR

²⁴ Robert E. Hunter, *NATO at Fifty: Maximizing NATO: A Relevant Alliance Knows How to Reach*, Foreign Affairs, Washington (1999)

1.3 NATO and Kosovo (1999): a legitimate military intervention?

After the Bosnian war and the aid provided to Bosnia by NATO, the conflict moved to Kosovo, the autonomous province of Serbia. NATO soon became involved in a new challenge, which sharply contributed to the development of the Alliance capabilities to join crisis management circumstances. Unlike the Bosnian campaign, it was a clash which saw the step by step entrance of NATO before the warring parties themselves gave life to a stalemate. The situation in Kosovo represented the most complex commitment for the Alliance, due to its marked humanitarian aspect and to its nation-building horizon alongside with a democratization target.

Throughout the 1980s, Kosovo was wrapped into a spiral of permanent violence and tension. While being formally linked to Serbia, Kosovo was inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Albanians (around 90%) and by a small minority of Serbs (around 8%). A huge part of the Kosovar Albanians majority, after Tito's death and during all the 1980s, began to protest against the harsh conditions in which the region was living and, above all, they pushed for a greater autonomy from Serbia. Once again, the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević opposed to any attempt to reach an independence within the framework of Yugoslavia, with the purpose of keeping his "Greater Serbia" project alive. His coming to power coincided with the withdrawal of the constitutional autonomy of Kosovo, with the closure of the Albanian-language autonomous schools and with the launch of a forced assimilation policy against Kosovo. At first, Kosovar Albanians reacted to the loss of their constitutional rights with a nonviolent resistance, headed by the League for Democratic Kosovo (LDK), led by Ibrahim Rugova. They boycotted the institutions and the official elections, opting for establishing a parallel election and declared the independence of the Kosovo Republic (recognized only by Albania) on 2 July 1990 through the adoption of a new constitution. A referendum on the independence was then held in 1992 and 98% of the voters chose to approve the independence, even without international recognition.

Kosovar Albanians were encouraged by the successful precedents of Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina while the Serbs, defeated in Croatia and Bosnia, intended to defend what they considered a crucial region such as Kosovo. Violence escalated rapidly after 1995, when Milošević began to ruthlessly suppress the protests and to carry out a brutal and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Albanian majority of Kosovo. As a consequence, Kosovar Albanians abandoned its pacifist ambitions and started an armed struggle, whose leadership was assumed by the new Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a Marxist military organization supported by the regime of Tirana. Milošević responded by deploying police forces, paramilitary groups and the Yugoslav army to "reclaim" the region. The international community had to realize that, in order to avoid a new case like that of Bosnia, it had to face the new problems arising in that area and manage them. Therefore, the United Nations, together with NATO, began to pay increasing attention to the ongoing situation in Kosovo. The outbreak of violence, which

took place in 1997 and 1998, led the “Contact Group” and the UN Security Council (resolution 1160) to equally condemn the “disproportionate use of force” of both conflicting parts. If, on the one hand, a large part of the West viewed the Kosovo Liberation Army as a terrorist organization up until the 1990s, on the other hand, during the phases of the conflict, the North Atlantic Alliance started to consider the KLA as a direct result of the repression implemented by the Serbian government. As the clash intensified in 1999, the international arbitration led by the US Assistant Secretary of State Richard C. Holbrooke failed to improve the situation due to the weakening of Rugova’s leadership and to the fact that the Serbs had reconquered the region’s control.

The analysis of the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (IICK) revealed some terrible numbers about the conflict with mention to the period going from February 1998 to March 1999, showing that it had provoked around 1.000 civilian casualties and that over 400.000 people had left the country or had been forced to abandon the country, heading toward Albania. Belgrade’s goal was to close its military campaign and to avoid the international community’s intervention. But the Kosovo issue could determine the fate of Milošević’s regime or the fate of the Kosovar Albanian population. On 9 June 1998, the US President Bill Clinton announced the state of emergency because of the “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States imposed by Yugoslavia and Serbia over Kosovo”. Milošević and the Yugoslav Army were identified as the only responsible of the ongoing humanitarian disaster by the UN and, if the Serb President had not complied with the requests made by the international community, the UN Security Council reserved to “consider further action and additional measures to maintain or restore peace and stability in the region²⁵”. To enforce the decision, on September 24th, 1998, the USA and its Western partners provided to NATO supreme commander Wesley Clark the authorisation to launch the *Activation Warning*.

Nevertheless, the international pressure proved to be ineffective on Milošević. That’s why NATO turned the *Activation Warning* into an *Activation Order*, therefore delivering to Javier Solana, the Alliance’s Secretary-General, the power to engage in a limited military campaign. NATO’ activism then found the support of the United Nations, as the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 1203 on October 24th,1998, through which, for the first time, an official link between the UN and NATO was established. That resolution was particularly important because it imposed the establishment of democratic and sovereign institutions, the return of refugees to Kosovo and the freedom of movement in order to put in place some Verifications Missions²⁶ by the international community, within the framework of a

²⁵ UN Security Council, Resolution 1199, 23 September 1998

²⁶ The Kosovo Verification Missions were some OSCE missions enforced to verify the compliance of the Serbian and Yugoslav Forces with the end of massacres, the withdrawal of armed forces from Kosovo and the protection of human rights: <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/u981024a.htm>

requested cooperation with NATO and with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The outcome was an umpteenth escalation of the conflict, which found its peak in Račak, on January 15th, 1999, when the Kosovo Liberation Army killed three Yugoslav soldiers, causing the retaliation of the special Serb forces and the brutal execution of 45 Kosovar Albanians. A last diplomatic attempt was carried out at Rambouillet, where the “Contact Group” proposed the “Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo” to both warring parties. Acting under Chapter VII of the San Francisco Charter²⁷, the UN and NATO indicated the following key-points of the agreement: the prompt end of the conflict; a peaceful outcome of the hostilities; a three-year timeframe before choosing the final Kosovo status; the self-government for Kosovo; the establishment of human rights and freedoms; the safeguard of minorities and free elections under the OSCE supervision; amnesty for the acts linked to the battle; the withdrawal of the majority of Yugoslav armed forces and the implementation of an international peacekeeping force under the control of NATO in Kosovo.

The negotiation failed, since the agreement was signed only by the Kosovar Albanian delegation, while the Serbian refusal remained extremely clear, due to their belief that the presence of a multinational force in Kosovo represented a breach of Serbian sovereignty. Moreover, Kosovar Albanians were not really satisfied by the solution of the Kosovar Status because of the failure to ensure them a real independence after the three-year period. However, their dissatisfaction was balanced by NATO’s strong peacekeeping presence in that area.

At national level, Milošević’s political and military action was effective in receiving the support of public opinion and in achieving a firm control on the State. At international level, instead, the ongoing sequence of news, pictures and videos about the violence perpetrated by the Serbs resounded widely throughout the entire world. Then, what happened a few years before in Bosnia Herzegovina with regard to the Muslim population contributed to strengthen the will to stop humanitarian catastrophe which was taking place in Kosovo. On 24 March 1999, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana gave the order to start the *Allied Force Operation*, a large-scale air campaign carried on by NATO for more than two months with the aim to stop the ethnic cleansing and all the military actions perpetrated by the Serbian forces, to bring Milošević back to the negotiating table and to implement the key-points agreed upon after the Rambouillet meeting. The bombings against Serbia marked the second large-scale military campaign in NATO’s history after the 1995 NATO mission in Bosnia Herzegovina. It was the second time that NATO conducted an *out of area* military intervention.

²⁷ It depicts the UN Security Council’s powers to preserve peace, allowing the Council to “determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and to take military and non-military action to restore international peace and security”

During the airstrikes period, around 863.000 civilians left the country, swelling the ranks of the 590.000 internally displaced persons and the ranks of the 463.000 civilians who had previously fled or had been expelled from the country. The air operation saw the involvement of a great number of States (the United States, Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the UK and Turkey) but the crucial role was played by the USA, which bore the greatest military burden of the campaign. The US indeed supplied 61% of all the jet fighters and accomplished 62% of all combat flights while European powers provided a minor contribution²⁸.

The 78 days length of the operation exceeded the time expected by NATO and the public opinion. On average, Serbia suffered around 600 air raids per day. The bombing implemented by NATO forces destroyed barracks and fundamental military installations but also public buildings, bridges, official government facilities, industrial plants and private companies, causing the death of around 500 civilians, according to the data collected by NGOs. But the Alliance's strikes, unlike what the military command thought, did not discourage Milošević from committing atrocities, since the policy of ethnic cleansing against Kosovar Albanians strongly intensified during the third week of NATO bombings and the option of surrendering was never taken into account by the Serbian Government.

For that reason, a heated debate was started within NATO about the possibility to support the *Allied Operation Force* with a ground offensive, a hypothesis discussed also in Washington during the conference organized on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Alliance. President Clinton declared its reluctance to deploy US forces for a ground operation because he wanted to minimise, as much as possible, the losses in terms of human life as he did not want to put at increased risk the life of American soldiers, at least not without a clear definition of the mission and a clear exit strategy. The discussion around the conversion of the air campaign into a ground campaign pushed the Clinton Administration to solve the conflict before the implementation of a land invasion became inevitable, raising the risks of American casualties.

The military escalation reached its peak when the bombings amounted to 714 missions within 24 hours. In fact, Serbia, despite its extraordinary capacity to psychologically and physically resist, was starting to face serious logistic difficulties. After more than two months of intense bombings, Milošević had to realise that, given the numerous struggles, none of the NATO coalition's countries was taking into consideration the hypothesis of interrupting the operation. Belgrade's strategy had avoided an unconditional surrender and safeguarded the existence of Milošević's regime but the North Atlantic Alliance's military superiority imposed the resumption of talks, even if by means of Russian mediation, as a guarantee of Serbian demands. The G8 meeting in Petersberg, near Bonn, was the opportunity to

²⁸ France contributed with 84 planes, Italy with 58 planes, Great Britain with 39 planes and Germany with 33 planes

elaborate a new diplomatic strategy. That meeting saw the participation of the major NATO members and the participation of Russia.

The outcome was the signing of the *Kumanovo Agreement* between NATO and the governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the Republic of Serbia, in what is now Northern Macedonia, on 9 June 1999. The *Allied Force Operation* ended after 78 days of bombings with the capitulation of the Serbian President Milošević. The key provisions of that arrangement were: the end of the hostilities between NATO and the FRY, followed by the end of the bombing campaign on 10 June 1999; the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo; the establishment of a 25 km air safety zone and 5 km ground safety zone around Kosovo's borders, which became inaccessible by the FRY without UN consensus. The crucial outcome was the UN Security Council's Resolution 1244, which was adopted on 10 June 1999 and authorized a civilian and military international presence within Kosovo, putting it under the Interim Administration of the United Nations. Therefore, the winning parties decided to create an international military force led by NATO, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), which was responsible for avoiding new struggles between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians and restoring order and peace within Kosovo, for supporting humanitarian efforts and for encouraging the return of refugees to Kosovo, which was starting to experience a first form of autonomy. Nevertheless, the control over the territory proved to be very difficult because, after the atrocities ordered by Milošević, Kosovar Albanians started (as a retaliation) a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Serbs. NATO presence was coordinated by the USA but divided into 5 different zones, each one entrusted to a different State (United States, UK, France, Germany, Italy).

The *Operation Allied Force* marked a divergence between what the NATO allies expected and what they achieved at the end of the war. The allies failed in forecasting that Kosovo could become the most serious humanitarian disaster after World War II. Even though, at the beginning, the Alliance succeeded in destroying Serbia's air defences, it soon found out that the Serbian government was using a strategy to make its surface-to-air missiles not detectable and therefore hard to find and hit. Then NATO air forces were obliged to carry out bombing attacks from an altitude of 15.000 ft or higher because of the Serbian anti-aircraft artillery. In doing so, the visual identification of targets became really difficult, making the distinction between military convoys and civilian refugees an arduous task. The *Operation Allied Force* was guilty of committing a lot of bombing mistakes, such as in the case of civilians affected or in the case of the unintentional bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which triggered a huge problem in terms of diplomatic relationships between China and the USA.

The military campaign raised a number of issues as regard to its overall strategy and implementation. The allies were wrong in not considering Kosovo's deep historical and cultural meaning to Serbia and this led them to assume that Milošević would surrender due to NATO requests without engaging in a bloody war. The operation was then hindered by the necessity to settle the differences among the member

states about whether using force in a humanitarian mission and an agreement on some imposed rigid rules of engagement was to be found. The coalition restraints were flanked by serious internal disagreements within the US over target priorities and a more massive soldiers' deployment, which further weakened the effectiveness of NATO's action.

The *Operation Allied Force* proved to be the most intense military campaign which had ever been carried out since the end of the second world war. It was the first time NATO made use of a really extended use of military force and the first time air forces forced an enemy leader to surrender without the employment of ground forces. According to John Keegan, the defeat of Serbia in the Kosovo war represented a historic turning point in the history of warfare's history and it "proved that a war can be won by air power alone"²⁹. The failure of diplomacy was clearly visible and the stationing of NATO ground forces was far from being activated when Slobodan Milošević gave his consent to a peace deal. It has been argued that, in order to be effective and to push people to end hostilities, bombings need to wreak havoc on the enemy and minimise civilian casualties. By looking at the Kosovo case, that was not really accomplished also because of the constraints put in place by the resilience of the Serbian government. Although Serbia demonstrated remarkable military capabilities, sooner or later it was bound to succumb before a coalition comprehending 13 equipped powers. Moreover, Milošević's will to stay in power led him to indulge some of the powerful companies interests but the ongoing air strikes, which provoked really expensive infrastructural damages, pushed those powerful companies to undermine their support toward the President, who gradually realized to no longer have a strong consensus inside his country.

Russia's decision to support the West and to compel Milošević to capitulate, on 3 June 1999, was probably the defining event in putting an end to the war. The Serbian government surrendered the same day. At that time, due to a deep financial crisis, Russia strongly depended on Western economic aids and therefore was particularly vulnerable to the pressures brought by NATO to stop supporting Serbia. The fact that the UN had indicted Slobodan Milošević to be a war criminal made the possibility of Russia providing again support to him less likely. Nevertheless, the presence of an international civil and military presence under UN and NATO command allowed Russia to enforce its veto power in case of threats to Serb interests.

According to General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, "the planning of a massive ground operation pushed Milošević to concede". He declared that the Yugoslav capitulation took place when the US President Bill Clinton had a meeting with his military command to discuss the feasibility and opportunity to carry out a ground-force mission in the case of the air war's failure. However, Germany and France were resolutely against a ground offensive. In particular France estimated that a hypothetical invasion of Serbia needed an army of around 500.000 soldiers in order to be successful. This

²⁹ Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, *Kosovo and the Great and Air Power Debate*, Columbia Law School (2000)

made NATO, and especially the United States, realize that there was a substantial lack of support toward a ground operation. Keeping that in mind, the USA restated its faith in the air mission. Anyway, the general reluctance of NATO to deploy ground forces was known and it is accordingly less likely that Serbia surrendered due to its fear of a ground invasion.

The legitimacy of NATO 1999 intervention was strongly challenged. The discussion was focused on whether the Alliance's engaging in the war was "just" or not, whether there was a justification or not. It fell within the theoretical framework of *just war tradition* and *jus ad bellum*, as defined by Michael Walzer, one of the foremost American political thinkers in political theory and moral philosophy. *Just war theory* is an ongoing doctrine which explains us what justifications make sense when governments decide to start a war. According to just war tradition, humanitarian interventions are allowed only when there is the necessity to put a stop to any kind of harms or atrocities which overcome a determined threshold which is given by humankind morality. It can be assumed that the justification of humanitarian intervention passes through high standards. An armed intervention is justified when it "is on behalf of socially basic human rights"³⁰. In this way, *jus ad bellum* – the right to go to war – acquires a new value and a new range of circumstances under which it is possible to justify a war. It implies that humanitarian interventions become part of the just war theory.

The criteria behind the international law and the *jus ad interventionism* will be now illustrated and then tested with reference to NATO's intervention in Kosovo in order to verify if the attack against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia met those criteria and was morally justifiable, even if it was not legitimate under the rule of the UN Charter.

Just war theorists have been facing the "creation of a human rights norm as an imperative for action"³¹, questioning the inviolability of state sovereignty if a state is believed to have left behind its responsibility to protect its citizens by seriously breaching their individual rights. A moral dilemma comes out from the decision to start a defensive war on behalf of a third state's citizens because it would break the non-intervention principle provided for by the UN Charter in order to prohibit "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state"³². The use of force could be justified if there are humanitarian or peaceful ends.

After the NATO military mission in Kosovo, the international community engaged in a debate on how to answer to systematic violations of human rights. The case of Kosovo sharply contributed to develop the norm of *Responsibility to Protect* within the framework of the United Nations. That principle "embodies a political commitment to end the worst forms of violence and persecution"³³ such as

³⁰ David Luban, *Just War and Human Rights*, Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 9, No. 2, (1980)

³¹ Deen K. Chatterjee, Don E. Scheid, *Ethics and Foreign Intervention*, Cambridge University Press (2003)

³² Charter of the United Nations, article 2.4

³³ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing³⁴. Each state has the responsibility to protect its people from every kind of atrocities and the international community must help states to implement that responsibility, also through diplomatic and peaceful tools. In the eventuality in which peaceful means fail to accomplish their function and certain states continue to breach human rights, collective interference becomes a real possibility, in conformity with what is declared in the Charter of the UN.

So, responsibility to protect, for several reasons, is dissimilar from humanitarian action. While the latter implies the adoption of military means, the former fosters the use of measures designed to prevent the risk of atrocities before they happen. However, both concepts state that sovereignty is not something untouchable because it embodies the burden to safeguard citizens' rights and, when a state is unsuccessful in doing so, the responsibility becomes an obligation of the international community. According to Chapter VI and VII of the Charter of the UN, humanitarian interventions must be the last resort. They become feasible in case of "gross violations of human rights", as stated by the UN Charter, but only if certain conditions are met. Indeed, the adoption of military force against another state should become reality after all the peaceful means have been exhausted.

The foremost diplomatic and pacific tools could be the breaking-off of diplomatic relations, economic relations or, above all, economic sanctions. As suggested by Professor Alexander L. George, the latter measure mentioned belongs to the framework of "coercive diplomacy"³⁵, an approach which provides for putting pressure on a counterpart with a reasonable and influential threat that will lead the antagonist to stop its contested actions. In particular, economic sanctions, in my view, prove their inadequacy within the strategy of contrasting serious encroachments of fundamental rights. I do believe that sanctions prove their effectiveness only after a certain range of time and, in cases of serious human rights violations, loosing time would mean a terrible increasing of deaths. This measure should be endorsed only during the initial steps of a crisis or as a crisis breaks out, not when the situation is jeopardised. When human rights are the core of international crises, it is crucial to give an effective and a prompt answer because diplomatic tools only extend in time the suffering and the pain of people harmed by an atrocious violence.

Even today, NATO military operation in Kosovo under the code *Operation Allied Force* still represents a controversial issue. The foremost reason behind this controversy lies in the fact that, for the first time, the Alliance's intervention had not the United Nations Security Council's mandate because the USA and its European allies did not bring the entire matter up to the Security Council due to their fear that Russia and China would express their veto on the decision to wage war. Both Russia and China perceived that

³⁴ United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948)

³⁵ Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991

military action as an interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, considering it a risky precedent.. The UN Security Council (which represented and still represents the foremost right authority in the case of humanitarian intervention) was bypassed by NATO due to the failure to gain its authorization. The right authority principle, provided for by the international law, was not met. Moreover, achieving the Security Council's consensus was not a goal of the Clinton Administration because it would have meant being constrained during the fulfilment of the intervention itself. That's why the USA, since summer 1998, tried to find reasons asserting the feasibility of a mission even without the explicit approval of the UN Security Council. The Security Council's assessment of the situation occurring in Kosovo has been gradual and took place through the enforcement of several Resolutions.

After the bombings had begun, the Security Council declined to condemn the war led by the Alliance by a vote of 12:3. The three states proposing a resolution denouncing the use of force were Russia, Namibia and China, which tried to end the three-day-old air strikes asking for a new substantial round of negotiations. The opposition of two big powers such as China and Russia could not be underestimated: Kosovo war left a mark on international relations, producing negative effects, given that relations with two large, fundamental, and troublesome formerly communist countries, Russia and China, were seriously weakened by the *Operation Allied Force*. "One's worst fears are being fulfilled now. The virus of lawlessness is encompassing more spheres of international relations" declared, in that circumstance, Sergey Lavrov, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations³⁶. In the same way, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia depicted the Alliance's campaign as an "illegal war of aggression against a sovereign country" and underlined the violation of the international law due to the lacked consensus by the UN Security Council.

The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted the basic responsibility of the UN Security Council for preserving international peace, condemned the fact that NATO's action lacked the UN authorization but he didn't call into question the necessity of a shared military intervention. Then, during a joint session of the UN Assembly, he claimed: "*While the genocide in Rwanda will define for our generation the consequences of inaction in the face of mass murder, the more recent conflict in Kosovo has prompted important questions about the consequences of action in the absence of complete unity on the part of the international community. It has cast in stark relief the dilemma of what has been called, humanitarian intervention': on one side, the question of the legitimacy of an action taken by a regional organization without a United Nations mandate; on the other, the universally recognized imperative of effectively halting gross and systematic violations of human rights with grave humanitarian consequences*"³⁷.

³⁶ <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990326.sc6659.html>

³⁷ <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990920.sgs7136.html>

The USA and the other NATO member states used the concept of “humanitarian intervention” in order to justify the start of the bombing campaign. A humanitarian war was launched by NATO, triggering the debate among those who argued that the mission had degrees of moral legitimacy and those who opposed the idea that NATO had the moral right to open an operation with humanitarian aims, stating that invading a sovereign state was wrong.

J.L. Holzgrefe, one of the most prominent experts in history of international relations, defined the humanitarian intervention as “the threat or use of force across state borders by a state (or groups of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals other than its own citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied”³⁸. The mention to “groups of states” is particularly pertinent, as the attack against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was conducted by a group of states which waged war moving outside the dimension of traditional international law. The campaign was outlined following the language of humanitarianism, with reference to military interventions as a reaction “to only certain kinds of moral concerns, such as protecting the welfare of some groups of people, where this involves preventing genocide, or preventing mass expulsions³⁹”.

Alongside with the principles mentioned above, a universally recognized notion of both human rights and human rights encroachments should be set. Surely, right to life should be considered as the milestone of humanity, the imperative and mandatory condition for the existence and survival of all the other rights of humans being. The violation of right to life could represent a universally recognized reason for intervening, in cases of “crimes that shock the moral conscience of mankind⁴⁰”. Those crimes make reference to genocide, ethnic cleansing, serious human rights abuses from which individuals cannot defend themselves. Walzer believes that the violation of states’ sovereignty could be allowed “to rescue innocent civilians from the threat of enslavement or massacre by the state⁴¹”, which was the justification advanced by NATO as regard to Kosovo. Then, a military action would be justifiable as long as there is a “reasonable expectation of success by the interveners⁴²”.

According to this interpretation, a doubt could rise about why giving life to military engagements in certain countries and not in others. This is what Professor Martin Binder calls “selective humanitarian intervention”⁴³. In line with his perspective, this approach can be explained through different considerations. Firstly, we should take into account the magnitude of human sufferings. Secondly, it should be contemplated the likely spread of that crisis to bordering countries.

³⁸ J.L. Holzgrefe, Robert O Keohane, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas* (2003)

³⁹ Deen K. Chatterjee, Don E. Scheid, *Ethics and Foreign Intervention*, New York, Cambridge University Press (2003)

⁴⁰ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, New York: Basic Books (1977)

⁴¹ *Ibidem*

⁴² *Ibidem*

⁴³ Martin Binder, *The United Nations and the politics of selective humanitarian intervention* (2017)

As regard to the Kosovo war, the ongoing violence was judged as a danger for regional stability and, consequently, as a justifiable concern of the Alliance. For that reason, NATO believed to have a legitimate interest in the situation occurring in Kosovo, given the risk behind a possible spread of instability into the whole region. Thirdly, the target state's capacity of withstanding an external attack could generate more risks, reducing the prospects of winning. Military activities in a third state must guarantee to not produce more injuries to human rights than the injuries they want to fix or avoid happening again, according to the principle of proportionality. Calculations of war's impacts on everyone must always be done because the action concerned intends to grant a moral reaction to an immorality issue. The final aim is protecting and rescuing people, not making them suffer again with an act that should extinguish their pain. In this regard, the capacity of withstanding of Serbia was undervalued by the intervening states. The aerial bombing campaign proved to be chaotic and absolutely not well-planned.

The principle most vigorously mentioned as a justification by the Alliance is that Kosovo was facing a serious humanitarian catastrophe and, as a result, the allies stated that an external action was necessary. Before the decision to act was implemented, thousands of Kosovar Albanians were killed during the conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serbian troops and thousands of civilians were displaced. There was a reasonable expectation that, without a NATO's intervention, Serbs would consolidate their control over Serbia's province through killing more and more people. Therefore, the moral conscience of the allies was shocked and led NATO to take action.

The *last resort* principle was undoubtedly met. The prolonged negotiations between President Slobodan Milošević and Richard Holbrooke at Rambouillet did not succeed in reassuring that human rights violations in the region would end, convincing NATO member states that there was no alternative to the military intervention.

Some basic criteria of moral legitimacy were not really met, according to important scholars. One of those principles was the *right intention*, which is a deeply disputed principle as some scholars argue that, despite the willing to relieve human sufferings should represent the fundamental reason for taking action, "it is unrealistic to expect morally pure motives⁴⁴" and what is sure is that "motives are not discredited just because they are shown to be mixed⁴⁵", since what matters is that humanitarian ends are accomplished. In particular, Diana Johnstone, accuses the United states of being material and selfish and believes the US used the pretext of the humanitarian crisis to impose its influence over Europe and strengthen NATO's regional supremacy⁴⁶, something which proved to be easier to realize in a case of a "rogue state". Kosovo war was defined as a "selective humanitarian intervention" and a comparison was

⁴⁴ Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention, Ideas in action*, Polity Press (2007)

⁴⁵ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan*, Paperback (2004)

⁴⁶ Diana Johnstone, *Fools Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*, Pluto Press, London (2002)

made with other cases of humanitarian crisis, not only with reference to the previous decade but also to some situations in which NATO decided not to intervene. Critics underlined the allies' inaction in defence of Kurdish or East Timorese human rights from the violations perpetrated by, respectively, Turkey and Indonesia and mentioned that fact as a strong example of the selectivity carried out by the Western world and its moral conscience⁴⁷. Western powers could assert to not have the capabilities to intervene in every case of human rights violations and thus they should take action to bring peace where they can.

To draw some conclusions, NATO's attacks against Milošević in 1999 was found to be successful by many Western powers. Undoubtedly there was a humanitarian catastrophe but the methods adopted by the Alliance to settle the crisis were highly improper and flawed and, as I stated before, failed to respect the principle of proportionality by provoking more harm than good. The intervention of ground forces would have been the most appropriate option and would have guaranteed a more precise targeting against the Serbian troops, avoiding a slaughter of innocent civilians.

According to the Pentagon planners, European powers and the USA decided to deploy air raids despite being alerted by intelligence officials that continuing the bombings without using ground troops could not avoid a criminal genocidal ethnic cleansing and that President Milošević was likely to launch an assault against Kosovar Albanians in case of an air attack.

Other voices of dissent gradually emerged. Senior officers strongly criticized the project of air attacks without ground forces, declaring that none of the allies wanted to run the risk of employing 100.000 or 200.000 troops to stop Serbs from killing more people. Those officers then added: "we said from the outset that we couldn't prevent atrocities and crimes against humanity with an air campaign but, knowing that we had to keep an alliance of 19 nations together, we knew that if we asked for ground troops we would be asking the impossible".

The Alliance made a huge mistake in conceiving an air campaign alone, which ended up intensifying the ethnic cleansing handled by Serbs and causing several serious casualties on civilians.

The methods used by NATO and the effects they had on civilians were strictly questioned. Although the leaders of the *Operation Allied Force* repeatedly declared their aim to minimise civilian casualties, the adoption of a strategy entirely focused on air bombings vigorously challenged those statements. During the operation, the Alliance underlined that it was only hitting military installations, fundamental means used by the Serbs to commit atrocities against Kosovar Albanians. Nevertheless, Henry Shue, a prominent American philosopher and Professor Emeritus of Politics and International Relations, stated that "the majority of NATO's bombs and missiles struck Serbia proper and its infrastructure, not the

⁴⁷ Noah Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo*, Pluto Press, London (1999)

Serbian military, paramilitary, and police in Kosovo”⁴⁸ and denounced “NATO intentional targeting of electricity supplies to provoke civilian misery, hopefully pressuring Milosevic into surrendering to NATO’s terms”⁴⁹.

Estimates of the *Independent International Commission on Kosovo* (IICK) and *Human Rights Watch* tell us that around 500 civilians died during the Kosovo bombing campaign and almost 800.000 people left Kosovo heading to neighbouring states, creating a humanitarian catastrophe and a mass-displacement of both Serb and Albanian Kosovars. Alongside with military targets, the Organisation hit non-military public buildings such as houses, bridges, roads, railways, factories and other public buildings like schools, hospitals and even the Belgrade headquarters of Radio Television of Serbia. NATO’s leaders stated that the Radio Television of Serbia “was making an important contribution to the propaganda war which orchestrated the campaign against the population of Kosovo” and the attack against its headquarter was “necessary to disrupt and degrade the command, control and communications network of the Yugoslav Armed Forces”.

All these elements made harder to classify the intervention as “just”. As I mentioned before, the proportionality principle claims that a military activity must produce more benefits than damages and it is surely not the case of Kosovo. NATO soldiers fully knew the plausible consequences of adopting a bombing strategy and, despite this, they still chose not to use a land invasion campaign. Employing ground troops would have represented a less risky option for the lives of citizens while striking targets from 15.000 feet would have produced fewer risks for NATO soldiers. A higher value was attributed to the lives of Western soldiers and, as a consequence, the value of local civilians’ lives was put in second place. That decision left NATO’s credibility in shambles. It was “not a possible moral position”⁵⁰ as “you can’t kill unless you are prepared to die”⁵¹. Hoping for the capitulation of Serbia through the continuation of the bombing campaign from a safe distance of 15.000 feet meant prolonging the sufferings of people. The option of ground troops was not contemplated but the unsatisfactory results of the campaign could lead President Clinton to outline a new strategy in order to rescue the Balkans from Milošević’s evil projects over the Balkans and NATO from a big failure. By positioning a huge number of troops along Kosovo’s borders with Macedonia and Albania, the allies could force Serbs to aggregate in defensive formations, making them an easier target from the air.

Furthermore, a serious diplomatic struggle between the USA and the People’s Republic of China occurred after the Chinese Embassy was hit by the USA air forces on 7 May 1999. President Clinton promptly declared that the bombing had been a “terrible mistake” due to the use of out-of-date maps and

⁴⁸ Henry Shue, *Bombing to Rescue? NATO’s 1999 Bombing of Serbia*, in Dean Chatterjee & Donald Scheid, *Ethics and Foreign Intervention*, Cambridge University Press (2003)

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*

⁵⁰ Michael Walzer, *Arguments about War*, New Haven, Yale University Press (2004)

⁵¹ *Ibidem*

expressed “profound condolences to the Chinese people and especially to the families of those who lost their lives” during that attack. China defined that bombing as a “barbarian act” and did not trust the version of events released by the US officials. The deep diplomatic tension between the two big powers was then arduously settled.

However, a few months after that event, US and European senior military and intelligence sources asserted that NATO deliberately blew up the Chinese Embassy because the allies had discovered that it was used as “a rebroadcast station for the Yugoslav army after the Alliance jets had successfully silenced Milošević’s own transmitters”. Moreover, the intelligence sources suspected China of “monitoring the cruise missile attacks on Belgrade, with a view to developing effective counter-measures against US missiles”. That issue was never completely clarified and doubts on that day remain still today.

The conduct of the campaign was not the only focus of criticism. NATO’s leaders failed to take care of refugees that Milošević, together with the humanitarian war, was creating. British officials clarified that the allies did not contemplate the choice of preparing refugee camps because they feared that a choice like that could work as a magnet, encouraging major ethnic cleansings.

Finally, even if the *Operation Allied Force* was declared “illegal”⁵² from the international law perspective, it could not be said that it was unjust, illegitimate or an unjust violation of a third state’s sovereignty. The humanitarian crisis that was taking place in Kosovo required a timely external action by NATO, the most powerful military organization of the world. Although the military campaign carried out by the Atlantic Alliance succeeded in bringing Milošević to the negotiating table and in ending the conflict, I do believe that the *Operation Allied Force* proved to be a substantial “failure” because of the methods adopted by the Organization and because of the lacked decision to adopt ground forces, a measure that could minimise civilian casualties.

⁵² <https://reliefweb.int/report/albania/kosovo-report>

1.4 9/11: the first invocation of the Washington Treaty's Article 5

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security”⁵³

This is the content of the Washington Treaty's Article 5, the cornerstone of the Atlantic Alliance 's architecture. Its activation was invoked for the first and only time by NATO as a response against the brutal terrorist attacks against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, occurred in New York City and Washington on September, 11, 2001.

That episode represented a breaking point with respect to the past, since the Article 5 of the Atlantic Pact was originally designed to face a potential armed attack by the Soviet Union or by one of the Warsaw Pact countries to Europe and it was then invoked for the first time as a reaction against a terrorism act carried out not by a sovereign state but instead by a *non-state actor*, namely individuals belonging to an international terrorist organization. Moreover, European states, together with a supportive Russia, came to the aid of the United States (the superpower itself) while, instead, during the context of the Cold War, the USA were supposed to defend the territory of the European allies in the case of a Soviet aggression.

In a world in which Western countries' most hostile enemies are at the same time the weakest countries - which had less incentives to integrate into the international system and were not able to militarily face a superpower and its allies – terrorism could become the primary source of international conflicts, a recurring form of the international violence obliged by disparity in resources on the field. Not by chance, after 9/11, leading a war to stop terrorism became a priority, recalling, in some respects, the Cold War scenario. Similarly to the bipolar clash, the fight against terrorism was perceived as a long-term conflict, with a high ideological content which simplified the international spectrum of states and had a global nature considering space and means. It was a struggle that it was supposed to happen on the political, military and economic front. Indeed, President George W. Bush, during a joint session of the Congress on 21 September, defined the war against terrorism as a battle against the third millennium's totalitarianism, recalling the tone taken by President Harry S. Truman during the Cold War. The fight

⁵³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

against a similar enemy reduced the strategic centrality of Europe: international terrorism could be faced only through wide coalitions, chasing terrorists down whereas they organized themselves and whereas they were protected, namely outside Europe, in Central Asia. If NATO wanted to follow the new enemy wherever it was, it should have faced a further transition, complicated by the problem to find an equilibrium among the extra-European interests of its member states. The alternative was about becoming an Alliance that safeguarded a still insidious but no longer extremely crucial continent like Europe.

After the assault to the World Trade Center and to the Pentagon, “Islamist” terrorism became a global priority in the field of international security and a vital theme for NATO. The threat gained a new dimensions as it was a frontier-less terrorism with a powerful potential scale. A sort of polarization within the Alliance was one of the effects of terrorism. The new war shed light on the differences between Europe’s approach and the US approach, considering conflicting definitions of terrorism and how to deal with it. The two approach are well explained by “Rumsfeld⁵⁴ 5 Ds” – “defeat international terrorism by denying the terrorists financing and freedom of movement, by disrupting their actions and plans, by degrading their capabilities and by destroying them and their infrastructure”⁵⁵ – and by the “UK’s 4 Ps” – “reduce the threat by preventing underlying causes and by pursuing the terrorists, and reduce vulnerability by protecting the public and by preparing new legislation and resilience measures”⁵⁶. It was necessary to comprehend that divergences in views complicated cooperation in the fight against a “global network of loosely associated and often independently acting terrorists”⁵⁷. NATO should have found a common understanding on: the roots of terrorism; its breeding ground; an evaluation of military means together with political, judiciary financial, economic means; the definition of the Alliance’s role in the framework of UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and of the Security Council’s resolutions.

According to the *2001 NATO’s military concept for defence against terrorism (Annex A)*, “terrorism” is defined as any illegal or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or properties in an attempt to compel or intimidate governments or societies in order to achieve political, religious or ideological goals. Due to its generalization, the definition turns out to be labile, thus symbolizing how terrorism was a problem subjected to different national sensibilities and experiences. That definition is the demonstration of how, within NATO, member states preferred not to deepen the theoretical outlook of terrorism in an effort to establish a practical cooperation among them or otherwise there would’ve been conceptual disputes. The complexity to identify clearly which were the borders of the terrorism’s concept

⁵⁴ US Secretary of Defence under the Presidency of George W. Bush

⁵⁵ Klaus Wittmann, *Towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO*, NATO Defence College, Rome (2009)

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*

(as well as the actors who were guilty of that) was evident. Besides, as stated in a famous aphorism, “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”⁵⁸.

Despite the above mentioned difficulties, 9/11 initially seemed to strengthen the transatlantic relationship and to revitalize the Atlantic Alliance, providing it the relevance it did not have before. Canada and all the other European powers promptly reacted giving their instantaneous support to NATO’s senior partner. Terrorist attacks also produced an event which was not conceivable until shortly before: a sort of convergence of interests between NATO and Russia emerged as a result of the necessity to bring order and stability to the borders of Eurasia. Just one day after the assault, the North Atlantic Council stated that if the attack was proved to have a foreign origin then it would be considered as an action covered by Article 5 of the Washington’s Treaty. The attack was later recognized as coming from Afghanistan and this implied the application of Article 5. The attack on American soil was considered as an attack against all the allies and the principle of mutual assistance was activated. The United Nations Security Council defined that terrorist attack as a threat to peace and international security, authorizing the use of every means to fight terrorists and those who supported and protected them around the world.

Article 5 was set in motion in response to the US Secretary of State Colin Powell’s declaration that 9/11 constituted an act of war against democracy. The European Union, which had previously been in contrast with the United States, did not hesitate to make available every means it had. There was a new awareness inside the Organization. NATO’s former Secretary-General Javier Solana, who at that time was the European Union foreign policy chief, asserted that terrorism, which had involved European nations (i.e. the IRA in Britain, the Basques in Spain, the Red Brigades in Italy), had become a global problem and a serious threat to NATO. This attitude was shared by every ally but the most determined leader was Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair. Indeed, when Afghanistan was identified as the headquarter of Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda, Tony Blair was even more resolute than the US President Bush in asking for a full-scale military intervention targeting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, that spirit of good feeling toward the United States gradually waned. Within a few weeks, old contrasts and cleavages once again materialized within the Alliance, endangering the survival of an Alliance which had endured over half a century.

On the eve of the conflict, Washington did not send concrete signals to the allied partners about their involvement in the counter-offensive against Al Qaeda. Practical reasons were soon clear. The US administration did not want to ask for a military aid from the Alliance because of the deep imbalance in resources between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, the hesitation of the United States was due to the command and control problems with the allies encountered during the Kosovo War. That

⁵⁸ Rik Coolsaet, *Al-Qaeda, the Myth: The Root Causes of International Terrorism and how to tackle them*, Academia Press (2005)

intervention, in particular, had shown that a divided authority over the management of a military intervention was associated to a great confusion. The fear of the United States was based on the idea that a substantial contribution from European allies would interfere with the American way of conducting the intervention.

According to the US perspective, Afghanistan's military campaign had to be rapid and devastating while Americans believed that the inter-allied coordination would be ineffective and harmful for the purpose of the mission. The solution was to circumvent NATO, giving life to a special coalition legitimized by Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which would allow Washington to act on a formal multilateral level with rules established by the United States itself. Americans then decided to take advantage of Britain, which was, according to them, the only power capable of providing a substantial aid thanks to its armed forces and its historical experience in the area. Surely, Bush administration didn't do much to involve European partners, especially if reference is made to the emblematic opinion expressed by Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Secretary of Defence, when he compared the Alliance to a pair of handcuffs which tied the hands of the United States. In this context, on 3 October 2001, all the military capabilities of NATO were made available to the United States. President Bush decided to accept an external aid, but only for marginal operations instead of major combat operations⁵⁹.

On 7 October 2001, the USA began bombing Afghanistan through the *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF), based on Article 51 of the UN Charter. The US unsuccessfully called upon the Taliban to extradite Osama Bin Laden. As a consequence, the US administration, appealing to the right of individual and collective self-defence, decided to eradicate the Taliban regime. The international policy concerning Afghanistan was about dismantling the threat of terrorism to the USA and leaving to the Afghan political authorities the task of managing the country's internal affairs. The only condition put by Americans was that the new regime would not be a regime openly opposed to the United States. Attacking Afghanistan, recognized as a failed state due to the Taliban regime, represented the begin of the global War on Terror. Unlike the Kosovo war, the debate about the legitimacy of military intervention in Afghanistan was less controversial. Many legal scholars believed that it was in accordance with international law as an act of self – defence. Some others thought that exercising acts of self – defence was something possible only as a consequence of an attack coming from a sovereign state. Al Qaeda was not a state and therefore it seemed difficult to invoke self – defence as a legitimating reason. Another part of the doctrine claimed that, despite the UN Resolution had not explicitly authorized the war, the reference to the threat to peace could be considered as an implicit authorization. The debate on the judicial legitimacy was easier to follow. Indeed, the United Nations, on several occasions, endorsed the presence of a NATO coalition in Afghanistan by establishing the *International Security*

⁵⁹ Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *A Strategic Odyssey: Constancy of Purpose and Strategy-Making in NATO, 1949-2019*, NATO Defence College, Research Division, Rome (2019)

Assistance Force (ISAF) and no foreign state ever condemned the military action in Afghanistan. It could be stated that there has been a fairly broad international consensus on the intervention.

In order to enforce Washington Treaty's Article 5, "NATO allies took such steps as intelligence sharing, increased security of US facilities on their territories, overnight clearances of US and allied aircraft, and access for the United States to ports and airfields in all member nations for operations against terrorism"⁶⁰. One of the specific actions implemented by NATO was the deployment of five AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) – *Eagle Assist Operation* - to safeguard the eastern coast of the United States, while US air forces were deployed in Middle East. The decision by Europe to dispatch planes over the American territory could be compared to the decision by the USA to station its soldiers in Europe during the early days of the Cold War. Then, several naval forces were sent to the eastern Mediterranean (*Operation Active Endeavour*) to show up the solidarity and the determination of NATO. That operation had supervisory and deterrence tasks against terrorists. Some allies – such as Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey – offered to the US means and men of their armed forces. The solidarity of NATO had been full and substantial but, as an organization, its involvement in military operations proved to be really weak. The European allies were informed rather than consulted on strategic decisions.

In addition to *Operation Active Endeavour* and *Eagle Assist Operation*, the US asked NATO to: strengthen the inter-allied intelligence information sharing; adopt new measures to increase the security of American and allied bases on the Euro-Atlantic domain; authorize the access to European ports and airports in order to allow the transit across Euro-Atlantic skies to American planes.

By doing so, according to Bush administration, every ally could contribute in accordance with its (limited) capabilities to the war against terrorism. Actually, it was little more than a consolation for all the NATO allies which had witnessed the debasement of their solidarity's offer. A sense of dissatisfaction began to vigorously emerge among the ranks of the allies. The US State Department tried to reduce tensions recalling how NATO had not been employed during the Vietnam War and during the first Gulf War. The European uneasiness was increased by George W. Bush decision to ask for greater defence investments from the allies and a commitment to support the US if the conflict was supposed to extend to other rogue nations.

According to Lawrence S. Kaplan, "one advantage of the loose construction of Article 5 that the United States had imposed on its allies in 1949 was the freedom of the members to interpret according to their own judgements. Some members would be more active than others in executing their roles under Article

⁶⁰ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: the evolution of an Alliance*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers (2004)

5”⁶¹. An example of a stronger activity was represented by France and Germany, two states that agreed to deploy military troops in the fight against the Taliban, proposing therefore to do more than providing intelligence support and weeding out terrorist cells. That proposal triggered mixed reactions within the US administration, aggravating tensions. If, on one level NATO partnership seemed to be strengthened, on the other the European intents were perceived as a sneaky attempt to exercise a strong influence over the military campaign in Afghanistan.

The difficulties in the relationship between Europe and America concerned “the ability of the EU to maintain a military establishment independent of the US-dominated NATO”⁶². Due to the lack of funds, European powers failed to offer around 60.000 EU Rapid Reaction Forces. Enlarged defence budgets required a reduction in the European security systems. On October 2001, NATO’s Secretary-General, George Robertson, remarked that the US proposal was about increasing the expenditures on defence up to \$328.9 billion within 2002 while France, Britain and Germany were respectively projecting \$35.5 billion, \$34.9 billion and \$21.7 billion. Those numbers explained why the military campaign against Al Qaeda took the shape of a substantial American war.

However, the harsh unilateralism imposed by President Bush gradually slowed down, even if he doubts raised by the American administration over the European capabilities within the campaign still remained in place. The contributions put in field by the allies were still too limited and NATO did not have the same authority it had during the Kosovo campaign but, despite that, the gaps in equipment and personnel were filled by the allies, generally satisfying America. “Germany’s 3900 personnel were designed to serve carefully targeted needs in response to American requests. These included some 250 troops to evacuate wounded, 500 more for air and materiel transport, and up to 800 soldiers to operate especially equipped armored vehicles capable of checking terrain for nuclear, biological, and chemical contamination”⁶³. New NATO member states, namely central and eastern European countries, did whatever it took to offer a prompt support to the USA. Two countries were particularly active at that juncture: Poland provided an elite command unit and Czech Republic offered an anti-chemical weapons component that had been deeply useful during the Gulf War at the begin of 1990s. Those countries felt the need to demonstrate they could be trusted. It was something they felt to owe to a country like America that had so strongly supported their entrance into the Atlantic Alliance. No conditions were posed by the new NATO allies as they rejected any kind of interference in the US management of the intervention. That state of things complied with an old pattern of behaviour within NATO. Indeed, according to the first strategic concept approved in January 1950, the Americans would provide the strategic airpower and the Europeans would play a lesser role, offering ground forces.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*

⁶² *Ibidem*

⁶³ *Ibidem*

The Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban forces soon achieved important results, as they succeeded in securing most of Afghanistan during the first two weeks of November. Those successes “were due to a successful command-and-control arrangement overseen by the US Central Command thousands of miles from the scene”⁶⁴. Much of the contribution given by the allies was seen as a token contribution. Even Tony Blair, who proved to be the most resolute leader in the face of terrorism, provided little more than the deployment of few missiles. The real question is: would France and Germany have made a different outcome of the war possible?

What it was clear to Europeans was that they could add little to the firepower, intelligence capabilities and communications network that the United States provided to the Northern Alliance. The Taliban regime and its headquarter was quite quickly destroyed within mid-December 2001 due to the outside enormous pressure.

The following phase was more difficult to make: what was next for Afghanistan?

The international community dealt with that crucial issue and, after few weeks from the collapse of the Taliban regime, achieved a fundamental agreement in Bonn. On 20 December, 2001, the UN Security Council, through resolution 1386, authorized the institution of a crucial international mission in Afghanistan, the so-called *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), put in place in order to preserve peace and security in the country since the war was not over and Taliban insurgencies again began to devastate the country. From August 2003, NATO took officially charge of the ISAF. The foremost goal was to “enable the Afghan government to provide effective security across the country and develop new Afghan security forces to ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists”⁶⁵.

Hence, the international mission was also focused on the training, advising and assistance given to the Afghan National Security Forces aiming to lower the potential of uprisings in the country. The *International Security Assistance Force* was originally designed to ensure security in and around the capital Kabul but it was then extended to the whole country. ISAF’s core business gradually passed from seeking revenge against Al Qaeda to democratizing and modernizing Afghanistan. After having fought with rebels, NATO strongly contributed to the build-up process of the Afghan security forces, secured a stable environment for the activity of other international institutions, accomplished the country’s reconstruction through *provincial reconstruction teams* (PRT) and created both infrastructure and state institutions. It was a counterinsurgency mission combined with defining the founding elements of a modern state.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*

⁶⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm

Finally, NATO started to be effectively and concretely involved in the second phase of the conflict with the ISAF. The Alliance was essentially cut off from the first phase of the conflict against international terrorism. That meant a step backwards compared to the project of a global NATO in accordance with the *out of area* issue, which could make Europe a strategic partner of the USA within the management of international security. European leaders had to bilaterally negotiate their participation to the operations. By doing so, the Alliance, which had previously been a framework of equal relations among a multitude of member states with different weights, turned into a galaxy of bilateral relations in which the USA occupied the centre while all the other allied countries occupied the periphery.

In 2011, Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009, reflected on the treatment given to the Atlantic Alliance at the time of the Afghanistan campaign. In her book “No Higher Honor. A memoir of my Years in Washington”, she said: *“as time went on, the allies felt frustrated that they hadn’t been fully included in our response to 9/11. I have wondered many times if we somehow missed an opportunity to make the declaration of Article 5 have meaning for the Alliance. It was true that we were capable largely on our own to initiate war against the Taliban.*

It is also true that, after years of neglecting their military capabilities and concurrent failure to modernize for the war we’d eventually fight, most members of the Alliance were unable to move their military forces quickly. And we were single-minded, bruised and determined to avenge 9/11 and destroy Al Qaeda and its dangerous sanctuary as quickly as possible. Nonetheless, I’ve always felt that we left the Alliance dressed up with nowhere to go. I wish we’d done better”⁶⁶.

Serious tensions between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean kept alive and prepared the ground to a major crisis, the one about Iraq.

⁶⁶ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor. A memoir of my Years in Washington*, Crown (2011)

CHAPTER II: The Normalization Process with the East and Russia

2.1 Eastern Europe, a no longer untouchable horizon

The end of the Cold War offered NATO an extraordinary opportunity to build a new security architecture in the whole Euro-Atlantic area, providing increased stability and security without giving life to new dividing lines. NATO's broad concept of security – including political, economic and defence components – was supposed to become the basis of the new system through the interplay of existing multilateral organizations in Europe, such as the European Union, the Western European Union (WEU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It was important to determine how NATO's enlargement could contribute to stability and security in conjunction with those other international institutions. Each of them would have a role to play in compliance with its responsibilities and purposes in achieving security while the entire process would see the Alliance as the cornerstone of stability in Europe. In this perspective, NATO enlargement seemed to represent a crucial step in the direction of a more secure and stable area, extending to new members the benefits of common defence and integration into the Euro-Atlantic world.

Achieving NATO's security goals and upholding the integration of new members were presented as complementary goals of the enlargement process, in accordance with the Alliance's strategic concept. The arguments in favour of increasing membership were part of a post-Cold War Western strategy that considered international organizations, democracy, peace and trade as mutually reinforcing. As the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright asserted: "To protect our interests, we must take actions, forge agreements, create institutions, and provide an example that will help bring the world closer together around the basic principles of democracy, open markets, law, and a commitment to peace"⁶⁷. On the heels of the 1991 NATO Strategic Concept⁶⁸, Albright encouraged the international community to build a renewed European security architecture by promoting the growth of democratic institutions.

The instrument to realize such a massive project was NATO enlargement, which gradually proved to be the major part of the Alliance's crucial adaptation process to the new international order. The foremost document focused on that historic process was developed in 1995, in response to Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) belonging to the former Soviet sphere of influence. Indeed, during the early years of 1990s, there were rising hopes and expectations from those states, that were trying to establish deeper relationships with NATO. On September 1995, their expectations were satisfied since the allied Ministers for Foreign Affairs approved and published the so-called "Study on NATO enlargement",

⁶⁷ Madeleine Albright, *The Testing of American Foreign Policy*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 77, No. 6 (1998)

⁶⁸ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

through which the Alliance spoke in favour of the enlargement process, considering it as a way to overcome Cold War's divisions, and started negotiations to accomplish it. That document "considered the merits of admitting new members and how they should be brought in"⁶⁹. As Bebler asserted:

*"The Study spelled out, albeit still too generally, the political conditions for being seriously considered as a candidate. These conditions came close to but still clearly fell short of the explicit criteria of admission. They could be characterized as informal considerations or expectations. But since the Study was issued officially by NATO, in spite of its ambivalent title, it was taken (mistakenly) by many in the candidate countries as the definitive list of official criteria of admission"*⁷⁰.

The Study on NATO enlargement did not outline the benchmarks for joining NATO. Rather, the document delineated the guidelines for applicant countries on how to get closer to the Alliance and to be recognized as formal candidates for membership. As stated in Chapter 1, "there is no fixed or rigid list of criteria for inviting new member states to join the Alliance. enlargement will be decided on a case-by-case basis and some nations may attain membership before others"⁷¹. As a result, the nature of the enlargement process was flexible and it was linked to the results of assessment of individual countries. It could not be predicted which state would be part of NATO or when it would happen. The Study, however, provided a number of fundamental principles and conditions that aspiring members were supposed to meet before officially entering into the Alliance.

Those guidelines and conditions included: "a functioning democratic political system (encompassing free and fair elections and respect for individual liberty and the rule of law); a market economy; democratic-style civil-military relations; treatment of minority populations in accordance with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) instructions; resolution of disputes with neighbouring countries and a commitment to solving international disputes peacefully; a military contribution to the Alliance, comprehending a willingness to take steps to achieve interoperability with other Alliance members"⁷². Moreover, it was stated that no country should have joined the Atlantic Alliance aiming to close the door through its vote as a member to block other candidates' admission.

According to the Study on NATO enlargement, "the expansion would proceed in accordance with the provisions of the various OSCE documents which confirmed the sovereign right of each state to freely seek its own security arrangements, to belong or not to belong to international organizations, including

⁶⁹ NATO, *Enhancing Security and Extending Stability Through NATO Enlargement*, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2004)

⁷⁰ Anton A. Bebler, *The Challenge of NATO Enlargement*, Praeger Publishers, Westport (1999)

⁷¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

⁷² *Ibidem*

treaties of alliance. No country outside the Alliance should be given a veto or *droit de regard* over the process and decisions”⁷³.

The Study asserted that the enlargement process would be based on the Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty⁷⁴, confirming that the pillar of the expansion relates to the conditions included in that part of the founding Treaty. Together with the 1995 Study on NATO enlargement, the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty constituted the benchmark to decide upon the inclusion of new members into the Alliance. These documents were crucial, as they explained the conditions that had to be met by an aspiring country to join NATO.

According to the North Atlantic Treaty’s Article 10:

“The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession”.⁷⁵

The general conclusion that could be drawn from the above-mentioned Article was about the fact that a member state of the Alliance could not be a country from beyond the Euro-Atlantic area e.g. Africa or Asia. Moreover, an applicant European country was supposed to be capable of enhancing the security of the current member states of NATO. This statement could give life to two general problems. The first was about how the geographical boundaries of Europe were identified. The second problem dealt with an estimate of the contribution of applicant countries to the security of the whole Euro-Atlantic area. Establishing whether a specific applicant state would have strengthened the security of the Alliance (and to what extent) seemed a question of pure interpretation. Member states could evaluate differently a state’s potential contribution to collective security, as a result of national interests, historical experience or even tactical reasons. It was necessary for member states to maintain a coherence in evaluating how a candidate state was assessed, because a country could be invited to join NATO only by “unanimous agreement”. Moreover, the implicit requirements for membership “could be deduced from the short preamble and Articles 1, 2 and 3, which state very general goals of justice, democracy, stability, economic collaboration and well-being”⁷⁶.

⁷³ *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*

⁷⁶ Anton A. Bebler, *The Challenge of NATO Enlargement*, Praeger Publishers, Westport (1999)

Then, there were two other implicit responsibilities for member states: the first one refers to the preamble of the Treaty and is linked to the “purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations”⁷⁷ (e.g. general obligations such as settling disputes through peaceful means); the second one refers to the military capabilities of a potential member state. Basically, there was an obligation upon countries to implement adequate military capacities in order to effectively contribute to the defensive system of NATO. Furthermore, the issue of a member state’s political system was of prominent importance: indeed, a member of the Alliance should have been a democratic state, as stated by the preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty through the “principle of democracy”⁷⁸. Nevertheless, not all countries that were included into NATO, during the Cold War era, were entirely democracies. That is the case of Portugal – one of the twelve original signatories of the Atlantic Pact – which had an authoritarian government until the 1970s. Likewise, Turkey and Greece were not democracies when they joined the Alliance.

Besides, “there is no legal basis for the ejection of a state from NATO, within the North Atlantic Treaty or elsewhere”⁷⁹. By “ejection”, it is meant “revocation of a state’s status as a signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty, and thereby of the benefits of the security commitment in Article 5. The only mention of exit from the treaty is in the Article 13 of the Washington’s Treaty, which allows for voluntary exit with a year’s notice”⁸⁰. However, when NATO dealt with members that were not democracies – such as Greek and Turkish military regimes during 1960s and 1970s – other Allies isolated or excluded them from crucial discussions. Nonetheless, the lack of a specific framework does not necessarily make expulsion from NATO impossible. Of course, NATO membership was not imposed on countries. Each state, as sovereign, was free to decide about its own security agreements and about whether to join any treaty or alliance. This important principle is depicted in international agreements such as the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.

The debate on the enlargement was taking place in a really different context with respect to the one of the Cold War. Considering the new post-Cold War security challenges and risks, the decision to include new members was implemented through a different path. The 1991 Strategic Concept stated that “the threat of a simultaneous, full-scale attack on all of NATO's European fronts”⁸¹ had effectively been dismissed, confirming that the threat of a re-emergent large-scale military attack had sharply declined. Nonetheless, risks to European security remained in place but they became multi-faceted and multi-

⁷⁷ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

⁷⁹ Dan Reiter, *Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy*, Quarterly Journal, International Security, vol. 25. no. 4, International Security (2001)

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*

⁸¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

directional and therefore hard to predict and evaluate. If European security and stability were to be preserved, NATO had to be capable of facing those risks and challenges.

The enlargement process of the Alliance proceeded in parallel with that of the European Union. Indeed, both NATO and the European Union shared crucial strategic interests as well as a broad definition of security and stability including political, economic, social, environmental and defence dimensions. Both expansion processes aimed to enhance the stability of the post-Cold War European framework.

The Atlantic Alliance considered its own enlargement and that of the EU as “mutually supportive and parallel processes aiming to contribute to strengthening Europe's architecture”⁸².

From the beginning, NATO member states foresaw the possibility to enlarge the Alliance. NATO itself was the result of an enlargement, when nations belonging to the Brussels Treaty⁸³ – UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg – were concerned about the Berlin Blockade decreed by Stalin and therefore, in July 1948, opened talks with the US and Canada on a possible cooperation in the field of defence, leading to the signing of the Washington Treaty on April 1949⁸⁴.

Before the Cold War ended, on three occasions, new states joined NATO: Greece and Turkey on 18 February 1952; West Germany on 6 May 1955; Spain on 30 May 1982. Those three rounds of enlargement took place during the Cold War period, when decision-making was enforced through strategic considerations. If we look at the first round of enlargement, there was a clear desire of security. Both Greece and Turkey were facing a direct Soviet threat: Greece was undergoing the influence of the USSR, that was supporting communist Greek rebels during the Civil War that had ravaged the country between 1946 and 1949⁸⁵; Turkey was facing the demands made by the Soviet Union about a shared control of the Dardanelles Strait and of the Turkish north-eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan⁸⁶.

The Truman Doctrine⁸⁷, announced as a response to these kinds of threats, effectively prepared the ground to the integration of Greece and Turkey into NATO. The US and Turkey shared the great concern about the threats to western interests brought by a potential Soviet expansion in the Middle East. The admission of those two countries allowed the Alliance to “shore up its southern flank to forestall Communist military action in Europe at the height of the Korean War”⁸⁸. Turkey’s geographic location, in particular, was perceived by NATO as a crucial factor. It “served as the organization’s vital eastern

⁸² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

⁸³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17072.htm

⁸⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

⁸⁵ Amikam Nachmani, *Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Greece: 1946-49*, Sage Publications, Ltd, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1990)

⁸⁶ David Binder, *Greece, Turkey, and NATO*, Mediterranean Quarterly, Duke University Press (2012)

⁸⁷ In 1947, it was established as the instrument through which the United States would provide political, economic and military assistance to all countries that were undergoing threats from external or internal authoritarian forces

⁸⁸ United States General Accounting Office, *NATO Enlargement*, Report to Congressional Committees, Washington (2002)

anchor, controlling the straits leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and sharing a border with Syria, Iraq, and Iran”⁸⁹. Turkey’s military capabilities were also of great importance: indeed, still today, it has the second largest military force within NATO, after that of the United States⁹⁰.

The integration of the Federal Republic of Germany into the Alliance was a *sui generis* event. The main challenge was to overcome Western Europe’s fear (France’s) of a possible German rearmament after the war⁹¹. Indeed, that inclusion meant that one of the main adversaries during the Second World War was becoming part of the most powerful Alliance of the Western world. After that, on August 1954, France took down the European Defence Community (EDC) – a project which provided for the establishment of a supranational European army with a German component – while Western European Union (WEU) and NATO emerged as the only frameworks within which Germany was allowed to rearm, respecting certain limits and reassuring the other European countries. The admission into NATO gave Germany much of its sovereignty, which had been suspended during the post - World War Two occupation period. Then, after the unification of Germany in October 1990, the former Eastern Germany - or German Democratic Republic - was integrated into the Alliance.

The adhesion of Spain to NATO in 1982⁹² had something in common with that one of Czech republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999. Spain was getting out from a long period of dictatorship and its entrance into the Atlantic Alliance was seen as the acknowledgement of the fact that transition to democracy had been successfully realized and consolidated. Unlike Central and Eastern European countries, Spain joined NATO after three decades of bilateral military cooperation with the USA, due to an agreement signed in 1953 as regard to the hosting of sea and air bases⁹³. The inclusion of Spain was particularly appreciated within the Alliance, since it was strategically meaningful: indeed, it was located at the southern end of Europe at the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, and Straits of Gibraltar. Nonetheless, Spain was close to leave the Alliance when, after the application, “the Socialist Party, officially hostile to the Alliance, took power and Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez promised a national referendum on NATO membership”⁹⁴. That referendum was held in 1986 and Spaniards voted to remain within NATO.

⁸⁹ Elena Calandri, *Il Mediterraneo e la difesa dell'Occidente, 1947-1956: Eredità imperiali e logiche di guerra fredda*, Il Maestrale (1997)

⁹⁰ Gülnur Aybet, *Turkey’s Security Challenges and NATO*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2012)

⁹¹ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2005/06/01/germanys-accession-to-nato-50-years-on/index.html>

⁹² <http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/en/PoliticaExteriorCooperacion/ProyeccionAtlantica/Paginas/EspLaOTAN.aspx>

⁹³ *Ibidem*

⁹⁴ Charly Salenius-Pasternak, *From Protecting Some to Securing Many NATO’s Journey from a Military Alliance to a Security Manager*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki (2007)

2.2 *The first (1999) and the second (2004) round of NATO's enlargement*

During the early 1990s, NATO's future role in Europe began to be considered by the US government. President Bill Clinton promoted a post-Cold War vision of the Alliance that involved new members, precisely former Warsaw Pact countries⁹⁵. In January 1994, his strong statement supporting their inclusion became really emblematic: “now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how. This enlargement will not depend on the emergence of a new threat in Europe. It will be an instrument to promote stability and security across the entire region”⁹⁶. That declaration constituted a bureaucratic basis for implementing NATO enlargement. At the July 1997 Madrid summit, NATO ushered in the so-called *open door policy*⁹⁷. On that occasion, the Atlantic Alliance invited Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to start accession talks over their membership⁹⁸. On March 1999, they officially turned into the new members of the Alliance. During the following years, nine other countries - Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – followed them and formally applied for membership. Two of them – Albania and Macedonia – were excluded while the other seven aspiring countries were included through the so-called “big bang” expansion, which occurred in 2004⁹⁹.

President Clinton thought that the development of Eastern European democracy represented a crucial US security interest, explaining that “if democracy in the East fails, then violence and disruption from the East will once again harm us and other democracies”¹⁰⁰. In February 1995, Secretary of Defence William Perry introduced the so-called “Perry Principles”, which would be useful to establish which countries would be included to NATO. According to Perry, there were four principles constituting the basis of NATO's past success: “collective defence; democracy; consensus and cooperative security”¹⁰¹. Thus, applied to enlargement, “this meant that new members must: have forces able to defend the Alliance; be democratic and have free markets, put their forces under civilian control, protect human rights, and respect the sovereignty of others; accept that intra-Alliance consensus remains fundamental; and possess forces that are interoperable with those of existing NATO members”¹⁰².

⁹⁵ Jan Jireš, *The Heyday of Multilateralism: Clinton Administration and NATO Enlargement*, Institute of International Relations (2003)

⁹⁶ James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings (1999)

⁹⁷ R. D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*, Columbia University Press, New York (2002)

⁹⁸ NATO, *Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic security and cooperation*, Official Text (1997)

⁹⁹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*

¹⁰¹ William J. Perry, *Remarks to the Wehrkunde Conference on Security Policy*, Munich, Germany, February 5, 1995.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*

The inclusion of the Central and Eastern European countries was a gradual and relatively slow process, that was implemented through different important steps. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, no one planned to enlarge NATO, whose survival was put in doubt. It was believed that Central and Eastern European countries had not so much to offer from a military and an economic point of view. Sir Michael Howard, an influential British military historian, stated that the best things to do was guaranteeing to the USSR a certain “droit de regard”¹⁰³ on those states. During an interview in 1991, NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner declared:” if we’d push our military frontiers further east, we will send a wrong signal to the USSR. NATO’s goals are not about enlarging the membership but rather about continuing to contribute to stability and peace-building in Europe”¹⁰⁴. That’s why, on 20 December 1991, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NAAC)¹⁰⁵ was founded and then – in 1994 – approved as an immediate alternative to the enlargement process. It included, along with 16 NATO members, 22 former enemies – as former members of the Warsaw Pact – and other states as observers.

The attitude of the CEECs began changing at the end of 1992, evolving from a request for cooperation with NATO to a request of imperative adhesion; in particular, the worsening of the Yugoslav crisis strongly affected Hungary while the worsening of the situation in Russia affected Poland. According to Paul E. Gallis, an authoritative American analyst, the *elites* of the Visegrad countries – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia – perceived the content of the Washington Treaty’s Article 5¹⁰⁶ (i.e. the commitment to a collective defence) as the fundamental reason to join the Alliance, due to their concern for the return of an aggressive Russia. Actually, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary believed that Russian behaviour – especially its democratic deficit – continued to show some worrying features and to represent a threat, especially considering that, in Eastern Europe, democracy was successfully consolidating¹⁰⁷. The enlargement policy was viewed by Eastern European states as part of the containment process against Russia. In particular, the concerns of Poland were about a potential new Russian imperialism or even a sort of “liberal imperialism”. According to Poland, Russian secret services had interfered with Polish foreign affairs – in particular with the energy sector – by using spies within oil companies to undermine Polish interests¹⁰⁸.

Moreover, Poland raised the point of a new buffer zone. Indeed it did not want to be crushed between Russia and Germany, suggesting that Ukraine would substantially constitute a fundamental buffer. It was a perspective inspired by Zbigniew Brzezinski – the former US national security adviser – who argued

¹⁰³ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History*, Yale University Press (1992)

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2004/08/01/manfred-woerner-nato-visionary/index.html>

¹⁰⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69344.htm

¹⁰⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

¹⁰⁷ https://www.rand.org/natsec_area/products/czechnato.html

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Braun, *NATO Enlargement and the Politics of Identity*, Centre for International Relations, Martello Paper, Kingston (2007)

that Russia suffered from imperial nostalgia, that it had alienated all its neighbouring states, adding that Ukraine in NATO would represent a crucial buffer¹⁰⁹. Brzezinski's attitude towards Russia was quite dangerous. An eventual enlargement to Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus would have raised walls and created buffer zones, increasing the feeling of segregation in Russia's government. Such approach would have been risky and counter-productive. Despite the fact that Ukraine could want to join NATO, it was doubtful that it would want to be a "buffer state" for Poland or any Eastern NATO members. Moreover, warning about the risk of an irredeemable Russia, the risk of a power that could not turn to democracy and implementing the above-mentioned policy would have led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, that kind of strategy would have made Russia more insecure, encouraging nationalism and authoritarian forces in that state and leading to the building of "the kind of political order that the new NATO members feared"¹¹⁰.

As in 1947 the Marshall Plan was launched to restore European economy and strengthen therefore liberal democracy in Western Europe, in the aftermath of the Cold War the enlargement of the European Union was believed to be the best suited instrument to achieve the same targets in Central and Eastern Europe but the European Union was internally too focused on implementing the new principles of the Maastricht Treaty. As a consequence, for the CEECs, NATO represented a sort of "psychological refuge", a sign of full re-integration within Europe, a symbol of a renewed democracy and a guarantee of stability. The determination of the CEECs (not all of them because, at the beginning, especially Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic wanted to enter into the Organization¹¹¹) to join NATO was reinforced by the disappointment with the results of the 1994 Budapest Summit¹¹², which marked a change from CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) to OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). The Czech President Vaclav Havel clearly expressed important words on NATO expansion process: "the expansion process must be accompanied by something deeper: an improved definition of the purpose, the mission and the identity of NATO"¹¹³, which was supposed to become an instrument of democracy, a bastion of political and spiritual values, "not a pact among nations against an enemy, but a guarantor of the euro-american civilization and a global security's pillar". According to him, Russia could not join the Atlantic Alliance because it was a Eurasian nation but it had not to be considered as an enemy since it could become a "partner for developing shared values"¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁹ Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty, *Zbigniew Brzezinski Assesses US-Russia Relations* (2005):

<https://www.rferl.org/a/1058818.html>

¹¹⁰ Daniel Braun, *NATO Enlargement and the Politics of Identity*, Centre for International Relations, Martello Paper, Kingston (2007)

¹¹¹ A 1995 survey about the public opinion within 10 CEECs countries indicated that, on average, 61% of people wanted to join NATO. The highest level was reached in Poland (98%) and the lowest one in Bulgaria (53%). Cfr. Tatiana Kostadinova, *East European Public Support for NATO Membership: Fears and Aspirations*, *Journal of Peace Research* (2000)

¹¹² <https://www.osce.org/mc/58703>

¹¹³ Vaclav Havel, *NATO's Quality of Life*, *The New York Times* (1997)

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*

During 1993, within the Clinton administration, there was a growing consensus about the enlargement of NATO, in line with the *enlargement and engagement* strategy¹¹⁵ and with the idea of fortifying international organizations whose politics could be led by Washington. At the same time, within the Department of Defence, there was a strong urge for a solution that was less risky than the enlargement of NATO to new members. As a consequence, the 1994 Brussels Summit produced the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) program¹¹⁶ in order to develop relations between NATO and Eastern European democratized countries. It was also believed to be a “precursor for the preparation of perspective states interested in eventual NATO membership”¹¹⁷. By the end of 1994, 23 states adhered to the Pfp, even if many of the partner states defined the program as a postponement policy.

The following statement was at the base of the Pfp:” the Partnership for Peace will have an important role in the evolution process of NATO expansion”. A statement that was open to different interpretations, deliberately ambiguous and imprecise, something which could be interpreted as premise of closer relations or as an instrument to avoid more demanding relationships.

It was explained that the Pfp was not promising or precluding the entrance into NATO. In a few weeks’ time, the Pfp was transformed into a waiting room in view of the enlargement for the candidates and into a sort of recreation room for those who would remain indefinitely excluded. The document of the Partnership reaffirmed the values of freedom, justice, peace and democracy on which the cooperation was founded, along with the commitment to refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or the political independence of each state, to respect the existing frontiers and to settle disputes with peaceful means. Secretary-General Wörner underlined the flexibility of the Pfp, which, for some countries, could constitute a step for the entry into NATO. His successor Willy Claes, about a year later, still talked about the Pfp as the best mean to prepare a possible adhesion. Finally, Secretary-General Javier Solana, in 1996, believed that the Pfp represented more than an evaluation for the entrance into NATO. The call to adhere to the Pfp was met by all the countries of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, including the observers.

Among the European states, Germany proved to be the most convinced supporter of NATO’s expansion: Chancellor Helmut Kohl declared that his country could not indefinitely remain the eastern border of Europe and of the West¹¹⁸. In 1994, the enlargement process was launched; in 1995, NATO member states, through the *Study on NATO Enlargement*, explained why and how to extend the Alliance,

¹¹⁵ Douglas Brinkley, *Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine*, Foreign Policy (1997)

¹¹⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm

¹¹⁷ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

¹¹⁸ Rodric Braithwaite, *NATO enlargement: Assurances and misunderstandings*, European Council on Foreign Relations (2016)

providing the eligibility criteria for joining NATO. One of those criteria was particularly important, since it was about the preventive regulation of potential border disputes¹¹⁹. The states which pushed to join the Alliance were encouraged to sign a series of agreements: a conciliation agreement between Poland and Germany; a fundamental treaty on minorities between Romania and Hungary concerning Hungarians in Transylvania; an agreement between Hungary and Slovakia; a border treaty between Ukraine and Romania, relative to the exploitation of gas and oil deposits located in the Black Sea. Finally, contacts between NATO, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary led to an important meeting: the 1997 Madrid Summit¹²⁰. That meeting was the venue through which NATO – on the basis of the Atlantic Pact’s Article 10 – invited those three Eastern European states to start accession talks for the formal adhesion, which then occurred on April 1999. Before the Summit occurred, nine European governments¹²¹ had declared their willingness to join NATO. The Alliance reassured that the inclusion of the *Visegrad Three* represented only the beginning of the *open door policy* and that the future summit – scheduled for April 1999 – would be focused on the status of the other states’ applications. Romania and Slovenia were considered as leading countries for the future round of selection. The decision of NATO about which candidates to include was based on the guidelines outlined in the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement. The main goal was to provide the Alliance with a new shape in view of the 21st century and the hope of the allies was to explain that the Organization was not only opening to other candidates but also evolving to comply with the new defence agenda and with the new equilibrium between US and European responsibilities within the Alliance. The US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright commented the first round of enlargement by declaring that “a wider NATO will make us safer, expanding the area in Europe where wars simply do not break out”¹²². According to Americans, the Alliance had put an end to the European power politics.

The *Washington Declaration* of April 1999 stated that the Alliance would continue advancing its goals, aiming to build a “stronger and broader Euro-Atlantic community of democracies, a community where human rights and fundamental freedoms are upheld”¹²³, regardless of where those democracies are geographically located; “where borders are increasingly open to people, ideas and commerce; where war becomes unthinkable”¹²⁴. Through that declaration, NATO closed an intricate path that, from the start of the ‘90s, had led it to include three new members – Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary – and prepare the ground to a future second round of admissions. By judging the enlargement process on the basis of

¹¹⁹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

¹²⁰ NATO, *Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic security and cooperation*, Official Text (1997)

¹²¹ Those countries were: Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

¹²² Congressional Research Service, *The Enlargement of NATO. Why adding Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO strengthens American National Security*, (February 1998)

¹²³ <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-063e.htm>

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*

its outcomes, it seemed quite impressive, if we take into account its geographic scope and the number of countries involved. Before explaining the extent of its consequences on the international scenario, it is appropriate to shortly define the intertwining of interests that have triggered and then guided the process. On the western side, the openness of NATO to some countries of the former Soviet bloc satisfied a complex of multi-faceted demands. First among them, the one about involving countries – that had been freed by the dissolution of the Soviet Empire – in forms of political and military cooperation that would have led to a stable and ordered geopolitical framework of the continent. Indeed, the admission into NATO imposed that those countries realized some internal reforms in order to become more homogenous to western countries: political and economic reforms to make their institutions democratic aiming to promote their integration in a free-market system. Moreover, reforms in the military apparatus were to be approved to increase transparency within the management of control mechanisms¹²⁵.

Alongside the interest to build general stability conditions, western countries – in particular Germany – had geopolitical specific interests. As NATO's traditional border was shifting to east, the Alliance would have created a buffer zone between Western Europe and Russia, decreasing the danger of a direct aggression to the allied territory. It is no coincidence that the first countries to fully join NATO were Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. They were the first former USSR satellites to embrace political and economic western models and, then, they stood between Germany and Russia, across the defensive line along which NATO had deployed most of its conventional forces during the whole Cold War. The more the NATO's sphere of influence expanded, the more the former enemy's sphere of influence shrank: the result was the configuration of a proper geopolitical containment process against Russia. By doing so, the USA managed to control the evolution of Europe to safeguard its global interests both in the field of politics and economy. Then, from the point of view of Central Eastern European states, the involvement in the Western political and military system promised to realize: major development's possibilities; an opportunity to control internal conflicts; a strong bulwark against any new form of Russian dominion without having to accomplish an autonomous (expensive) modernization of its defensive system. Despite a quite marked convergence of interests, the enlargement process met some obstacles, both on the western side and eastern side of the continent. European countries welcomed the process itself but discussed among themselves on how to accomplish it, since it was interwoven with the enlargement process of the European Union, something which caused problems on the selection of countries to be admitted into one or the other organization.

While sharing the geopolitical needs behind the enlargement, European countries saw some potential drawbacks: would the presence of politically unstable members within the Alliance have determined the

¹²⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

risk to involve the allied forces in uncontrollable conflicts? Doubts were raised about whether the enlargement was doomed to create a dividing line inside Europe, increasing the probability of aggressive policies by Russia against its neighbouring countries. Indeed, NATO's enlargement has been sharply hampered by Russia through an unprejudiced opposition since, during December 1991, President Yeltsin raised the issue of Russia's admission into NATO, without finding western availability – braked especially by the USA. After that attempt had failed, Russia tried to block the process of political-military cooperation that, at worst, was about to bring nuclear arms and conventional NATO forces not far from Moscow, transforming Russia into a sort of “island” within Europe. Western strategy was twofold: on the one hand, drawing countries – that were likely to successfully join the Alliance and to produce major advantages – into its sphere of influence; on the other hand, reassuring Russia about the fact that the enlargement process was not going to produce threats against it.

During the Washington Summit in April 1999¹²⁶, NATO instituted a Membership Action Plan (MAP)¹²⁷ to help countries aspiring to join the Alliance in the preparatory phase by giving advice and support. Initially, nine countries adhered to that plan, namely Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. Seven of those countries – Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – were later invited at the Prague Summit in 2002 in order to start accession talks. The MAP was based on the experience gained in supporting Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to become NATO member states¹²⁸. It aimed to assist applicant countries to meet the goals and priorities outlined within it and provided a “range of activities designed to strengthen each country's candidacy, thereby giving substance to NATO's commitment to keep the door to membership open”¹²⁹. The Plan was not a simple checklist to be fulfilled by aspiring countries and “participation in the MAP did not guarantee future membership”¹³⁰ while “decisions to invite aspirants to start accession talks are taken by consensus among NATO member countries and on a case-by-case basis”¹³¹.

According to the MAP, each applicant country had to submit an “individual annual national programme on preparations for possible membership, covering political, economic, defence, military, resource, security and legal issues”¹³². NATO committed itself to give political and technical advice and to organize annual meetings between all NATO members and individual candidates in order to estimate

¹²⁶ <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-063e.htm>

¹²⁷ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm

¹²⁸ C. Masala, K. Saariluoma, *Renewing NATO's Partnerships: Towards a Coherent and Efficient Framework*, NATO Defence College, Research Division Paper, Roma (2006)

¹²⁹ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*

¹³¹ *Ibidem*

¹³² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm

progress, making reference to an annual progress report. Objectives, targets and work schedules were annually set and updated. At the end of the cycle, the Alliance reported progress for all the countries taking part to the Membership Action Plan. These elements were at the basis of a discussion between the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the country involved in the progress report.

Before a country could be invited to join NATO, it had to satisfy certain prerequisites to be eligible for membership: the country had to be geographically within Europe; it had to be a democracy; there had to be the capacity and willingness to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. If these prerequisites were met, the country could be invited to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP). This Plan provided tailored advice and support on different aspects of membership, ranging from defence and military to political and legal issues. After delivering the necessary reforms, accession talks were held. Over the course of these talks, the invitee country was supposed to accept the commitments, rights and obligations of NATO membership. The next step required every member of the Alliance to sign and ratify the Accession Protocol. While the ratification process was ongoing, the invitee country was also being integrated into certain aspects of NATO's work. During the final step of the process, the invitee country needs to adopt and deposit its own bill of ratification to join NATO. Countries regularly did so according to their national democratic procedures: for some countries, these procedures included a national referendum; for others simply a parliamentary vote. Once the bill of ratification was passed, the country successfully became a NATO member.

Accession talks involved a team of NATO experts and representatives of applicant countries. The ultimate goal was to secure the ratification from candidate countries of their readiness and ability to satisfy the political, legal and military requirements and commitments of NATO membership, as it is portrayed in the Atlantic Pact and in the Study on NATO Enlargement. The talks occurred through two sessions with each invitee. During the first session, political, defence or military issues were to be debated, basically giving the opportunity to determine that the preconditions for membership had been achieved. The second session was instead "more technical and included discussion of resources, security, and legal issues as well as the contribution of each new member country to NATO's common budget"¹³³. This was established on the basis of proportionality, in compliance with the size of their economies compared to those of the other Alliance member states. The outcome of these discussions was a timetable to be presented by each invitee for the implementation of necessary reforms, which were likely to continue even after those countries have joined NATO.

¹³³ *Ibidem*

The second step of the accession process laid down that each invitee country was supposed to confirm its acceptance of the obligations and commitments of membership through a letter of intent from each foreign minister to be sent to the NATO Secretary General. The sending of this letter was flanked by the submission of individual reform timetables. Accession Protocols to the Washington Treaty were then prepared for each invitee by NATO. Once signed and ratified by the Allies, those protocols allowed the invited countries to join the Treaty. Once all NATO members had communicated the acceptance of the protocols on the accession of the aspirant new members to the United States – the depository of the Atlantic Pact –, the Secretary General invited the new countries to officially become part of the Treaty, in accordance with their national procedures.

The 2002 Prague Summit¹³⁴ represented a further fundamental turning point in the transformation process of NATO. As the former Italian Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo asserted, that meeting “showed that America and Europe were on the same wavelength and that they wanted to go forward together”¹³⁵. The former Ambassador believed that the enlargement to new members allowed to share the burden of safety among more countries, as well as to extend the stability area within Europe, from the Baltic countries to the Black Sea¹³⁶. There was a strong consensus around considering the extension of the Alliance as a strategic imperative. Indeed, together with the expansion of the European Union, the enlargement of NATO was supposed to contribute to consolidate Europe as an area of common security. It was a crucial step toward the transformation of Europe into a continent within which wars would never break out. As stated in the Prague Summit Declaration – issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in the Czech Republic’s capital – the transformation and the adaptation of NATO had not to be perceived as a threat by any country or organization, but rather as a proof of the allies’ determination to “protect their populations, territory and forces from any armed attack, including terrorist attacks, directed from abroad”¹³⁷. The main goal was to “deter, disrupt, defend and protect against any attacks on us, in accordance with the Washington Treaty and the Charter of the United Nations”¹³⁸. The international disorder in the aftermath of the Bipolarism had changed the assumptions at the basis of the Alliance and imposed on the West the responsibility to gradually implement an eastward expansion in order to avoid the chaos effects. Central Europe was no longer the major source of instability.

In the perspective of heads of state and government, admitting Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia into the Alliance would enhance NATO’s skills to face the new and

¹³⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm

¹³⁵ Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, *La NATO dopo Praga*, ISPI – Relazioni Internazionali, anno XI – n. 13 (2003)

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*

¹³⁷ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*

future challenges. Those eastern European states had given proof of their “commitment to the basic principles and values outlined in the Washington Treaty, the ability to contribute to the Alliance's full range of missions including collective defence, and a firm commitment to contribute to stability and security, especially in regions of crisis and conflict”¹³⁹. The second round of NATO enlargement officially ended after two years from the 2002 Prague Summit: on 29 March 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – after taking part to the Membership Action Plan (MAP) – officially became NATO members.

The inclusion of all those countries occurred not on NATO’s initiative but rather as a response to former USSR satellite states’ requests for protection. The Baltic states feared not only a military threat by Russia but also a potential dragging into a Russian political, economic, and military sphere of influence. That’s why the Baltic leaders, for instance, attributed a crucial importance to the symbolic stationing of some NATO F-16 fighter aircraft to safeguard their air space. Further, Artis Pabriķis – Latvia’s minister of foreign affairs – defined Russia as the new Weimar Republic and stated that it was a country facing a serious crisis identity, where individual liberalism was not welcomed at all¹⁴⁰. Therefore, Eastern European states were asking the Alliance to provide “hard security guarantees”¹⁴¹ and to act more like a collective defence organization – rather than a collective security organization – due to the potential risks that could come from Russian instability or a renewed Russian attempt to threaten their security. The request for an Easternization of NATO’s international security policy by those states was viewed as alarming by Russia, also considering that Eastern Europe was offering military bases to the United States.

With the second round of admissions, NATO opened the door to new partners that covered an area ranging from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, a space which constituted the Iron Curtain in the past. The Heads of State and Government believed that the enlargement of the Alliance was something necessary to face the new serious threats – starting from international terrorism – and the new challenges of the 21st century. The accession of those seven new countries was considered as a way to “to help achieve the common goal of a Europe whole and free, united in peace and by common values”¹⁴². According to David S. Yost, the second post-Cold War round of enlargement was supposed to end the long period of NATO’s crisis and it represented the right answer to cover the strategic vacuum – which had been the

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁰ Aurel Braun, *Enlargement and the perils of containment*, in *NATO–Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century* ed. by Aurel Braun, Routledge (2008)

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁴² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm

result of the USSR's collapse – as it provided guarantees to the member states that joined NATO during 1999 – Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary¹⁴³.

According to the US administration, NATO's enlargement was part of a wider process, aimed to heal divisions within Europe, which, during the 20th century, had made the political, economic and military intervention in Europe necessary. In 1997, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright 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"¹⁴⁴. Indeed, after both world wars, global powers had missed the opportunity to eradicate the seed of future conflicts and divisions in Europe.

Both post-Cold War rounds of expansion were different from the previous Cold War enlargements. In particular, the enlargements were "qualitatively and quantitatively different"¹⁴⁵ from the previous enlargements. "Quantitatively because, in the space of five years, the number of NATO members rose from 16 to 26. The 1999 and 2004 enlargements significantly increased the size of the area under NATO collective security umbrella in Europe by nearly 30 percent"¹⁴⁶. Instead, the qualitative difference from the past was recognizable from the fact that NATO included a considerable number of states that had been part of the USSR's empire and viewed the security issue in military terms.

As regard to the 2004 round of NATO enlargement, it could be said that 9/11 played a fundamental role in the admittance of the nations from not only Eastern and Central Europe but also from the Western Balkans. The geographic location of Bulgaria and Romania proved to be really strategic for the US in the conflict against international terrorism. Indeed, as stated by the Bush Administration, "Bulgaria and Romania became beneficiaries of the September 2001 crisis. Admission of these two could give NATO a coherent and geo-strategically significant 'southern dimension', connecting Hungary through the Balkans to Greece and Turkey"¹⁴⁷.

The enlargement process certainly constituted one of the main challenges that the Alliance faced in the post-Cold War era. It was carried out as a response to the new security context and as an instrument to stabilize the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole. The new identity of NATO was defined through the

¹⁴³ David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Roles in International Security*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington (1998)

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁵ Salonius-Pasternak, *From Protecting Some to Securing Many, NATO's Journey from a Military Alliance to a Security Manager*, Helsinki (2007)

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁷ Michael Clarke, Paul Cornish, *The European Defence Project and the Prague Summit*, International Affairs (2002)

enlargement process. Scholars from different schools of thought argued about why the Organization expanded and diverged on whether the enlargement process was positive or negative for the international order. The Neorealist school of thought¹⁴⁸ generally views NATO enlargement as a dangerous and harmful process. According to the perspective of Robert W. Rauchhaus – one of the exponents of the Neorealist school – :the “enlargement is puzzling because, as a result of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the Russian threat has so strongly diminished and the position of NATO in the international power structure has so vastly improved that enlargement is unnecessary as a balancing strategy”¹⁴⁹. Moreover, he believed that the enlargement process did not carry out the neorealist approach of maximizing power. Indeed, through the enlargement, NATO had increased its territory and population, but it had not significantly enhanced its military capabilities. Kenneth Waltz, the father of Neorealism, stated that the enlargement of the Alliance represented “an American policy designed to maintain and extend America’s grip on European foreign and military policies”¹⁵⁰, adding that ,“instead of demonstrating the resilience and strength of international institutions, NATO’s expansion shows how institutions are shaped to serve what strong countries believe to be their interests”¹⁵¹.

Therefore, NATO enlargement is generally perceived in a critical way by the Neorealist school of thought, whose focus is on the risks and the threats linked to that process. Neorealists believe that NATO’s enlargement could have “far-reaching negative consequences for European stability”¹⁵². They come out against the process because it “drew new lines of division in Europe and alienated those left out, especially Russia”¹⁵³. Therefore, relations with the Russian Federation and the risk of undermining Western relations with that country constitute the lens through which neorealists analyse NATO enlargement. The enlargement was believed to be a risky operation because it could pull Russia away from cooperation on strategic issues – such as arms control and peacekeeping in the Balkans – and turn Russia back toward aggressiveness and even ultranationalism. Unlike the supporters of NATO enlargement, the arguments of Neorealists were focused on the likelihood of a renewed Russian belligerence rather than an insurance policy behind the expansion.

¹⁴⁸ According to Neorealists, world politics is a field of conflict among actors looking for power. International politics is dominated by states – which are the central actors – and the role of international organizations in enforcing rules is denied. The role of power is stressed and there is a lower degree to which states share a set of common interests

¹⁴⁹ Frank Schimmelfennig, *NATO’s Enlargement to the East: An Analysis of Collective Decision-making*, EAPC-NATO Individual Fellowship Report (1998-2000)

¹⁵⁰ Robert W. Rauchhaus, *Marching NATO eastward: Can international relations theory keep pace?, Explaining NATO enlargement*, Contemporary Security Policy (2007)

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁵² *Ibidem*

¹⁵³ Kenneth N. Waltz, *NATO Expansion: A Realist’s View*, in *Explaining NATO Enlargement*, ed. by Robert W. Rauchhaus, London: Frank Cass Publishers (2001)

The main concern was about jeopardizing Western relationships with Russia. George Kennan – author of the famous *containment* policy¹⁵⁴ that constituted the US core-strategy against the USSR – declared: “Expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of the entire post–cold war era”¹⁵⁵. Likewise, the historian John Lewis Gaddis critically stated: “Some principles of strategy are so basic that when stated they sound like platitudes: treat former enemies magnanimously; do not take on unnecessary new ones; keep the big picture in view; balance ends and means; avoid emotion and isolation in making decisions; be willing to acknowledge error. NATO enlargement, I believe, manages to violate every one of the strategic principles just mentioned”¹⁵⁶.

Nonetheless, some of the most serious predictions concerning the Russian response to NATO expansion – such as the likely Russian refusal to sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) or the possible withdrawal from the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty – have not come true. The second post-Cold War round of enlargement – in 2004 – was bringing NATO up to Russia’s borders and, according to the critics’ perspective, was going to ravage Russia-Western relations more than the *Visegrad-three* round of enlargement. The main risk was not really in triggering a revival of the Cold War but rather in pushing Russia away from the idea that the West was a trustworthy ally in international relations.

The other concern was that the financial costs behind that process would reduce NATO’s military power and make decision-making within the Alliance more difficult. According to Waltz, “the expansion of NATO extended its military interests, enlarged its responsibilities and increased its burdens; not only new members required NATO’s protection, they also heightened its concern over destabilizing events near their borders”¹⁵⁷. Hence, potential liabilities and threats are seen as part of NATO enlargement. Inviting new countries into the Alliance implied extended obligations and expenses (due to the fact that new members had limited military capabilities and lower investment capacity) and the exposure to new crisis to live up to (i.e. Western Balkans). NATO expansion was also emphasized as the mean through which implementing the democratization process in Eastern and Central Europe, something which was sharply criticized by Waltz: “One may wonder, however, why a military rather than a political economic organization should be seen as the appropriate means for carrying it out. The task of building democracy is not a military one. The military security of new NATO members is not in jeopardy; their political development and economic well-being are”¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁴ It is a term expressed in his influential essay: *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, Foreign Affairs (1947)

¹⁵⁵ George F. Kennan, *A Fateful Error*, New York Times (1997)

¹⁵⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *History, Grand Strategy, and NATO Enlargement*, Survival, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1998)

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*

By contrast, the sociological institutionalist theory¹⁵⁹ – the second school of thought – identifies a divergent rationale behind NATO’s enlargement in the aftermath of the Cold War and positively welcomes NATO expansion. According to the sociological perspective, the Atlantic Alliance was created as a military Organization but, over the years, it turned into a transatlantic community focused on shared values. Consequently, NATO was configured not “simply as a military alliance but also as the military organization of an international community of values and norms”¹⁶⁰.

That community was crucially founded “on the liberal values and norms shared by its members such as liberal human rights: individual freedoms, civil liberties, and political rights are at the centre of the community’s collective identity”¹⁶¹. Countries that respected those norms and reformed their state system were encouraged to join the Organization. As Daniel Fried – the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs – stated: “NATO is not just a military alliance. It is an alliance of values, and NATO’s success in the past and promise for the future reflect its fusion of strength and democratic values”¹⁶². As a result, the sociological institutionalist theory establishes that the sharing of common values represents the crucial reason why NATO has extended its membership admitting new members from Central and Eastern Europe.

These shared values are identifiable in the founding document of the Alliance – the North Atlantic Treaty – and in the Study on NATO enlargement. As a result, the sociological view – unlike that of neorealists – does not underline the Alliance’s role in heightening military security and, thus, it does not consider the pooling of military capabilities as the core issue. By following this interpretation, the extension of membership has served as a powerful incentive to spread democracy across Eastern Europe, contributing to stabilize the entire area since democracies are generally unlikely to fight each other, in accordance with the “democratic peace theory”¹⁶³. As former United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick declared: “There is only one reliable guarantee against aggression. It is found in the spread of democracy. It derives from the simple fact that true democracies do not invade one another and do not engage in aggressive wars”¹⁶⁴.

According to the supporters of NATO enlargement, there would be several benefits behind the spread of democracy: “democracies would engage in higher levels of trade with each other; democratic

¹⁵⁹ Institutionalists believe that international organizations play a key-role in boosting cooperation between states and therefore in promoting global peace

¹⁶⁰ Frank Schimmelfennig, *NATO’s Enlargement to the East: An Analysis of Collective Decision-making*, EAPC-NATO Individual Fellowship Report (1998-2000)

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁶² Daniel Fried, *NATO: Enlargement and Effectiveness*, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (11 March 2008)

¹⁶³ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795)

¹⁶⁴ US Congress, *The Debate on NATO Enlargement*, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 105th Cong., 1st sess., October–November 1997

governments would be less likely to violate the human rights or commit genocide against their populations, and democracies less likely to experience famine”¹⁶⁵. Membership in NATO was seen as a way to achieve those goals of democratization and strengthen the Alliance. Furthermore, the likelihood of a renewed Russian aggressive approach against any of NATO applicants was perceived as extremely remote. The supporters of enlargement believed that Russia had not shown willingness to re-found the Soviet Empire through the use of threat or force, especially against the countries that were going to join NATO. The docility of Russia could be explained through the absolute lack of a military threat from Western Europe and through the recognition that an aggressive posture would destroy the emerging architecture of Western-Russian cooperation. Then, leaving aside the intentions, Russian military capabilities were thought to be much less powerful than those owned by the USSR during the Cold War. In addition, a further element supporting this perspective was given by the fact that Russia’s economy had grown weak since the end of the Soviet Union and its GDP had decreased by 45% since 1991. That’s why supporters of NATO enlargement did not see any particular reason to consider Russia as a great power.

We can conclude that, NATO – through the post-Cold War waves of enlargement – asserted its massive role and influence on the international stage. It succeeded in stabilizing Eastern Europe, as it served as a vehicle for extending the zone of stability and security and therefore spreading, building and consolidating democracy in a space that had been under the USSR rule for almost fifty years. The fact that many countries, despite the Cold War’s end, were continuing to apply for NATO membership confirmed the relevance and validity of the Atlantic Alliance. A powerful Western commitment to former communist countries in that region was believed to forestall any future renewed aggressive approach by Russia. Moreover, the enlargement decreased the possibility of struggles among NATO members, improving security dilemmas and forcing them to recognize new borders and peacefully settle disputes.

Therefore, NATO enlargement aimed to build not only a single security space, but also a single normative space – a space in which democratic principles, respect for human rights, free market economies and a long lasting peace could flourish. There was a considerable number of international organizations trying to pursue that goal – the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – and, among them, NATO played a crucial role. Together with the expansion of the European Union, NATO expansion has made a large scale-war between European countries nearly impossible and has enhanced the capability of all European countries to jointly face potential security challenges.

¹⁶⁵ James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson and Tressa E. Tabares, *The Political Determinants of International Trade: The Major Powers, 1907–1990*, American Political Science Review, Vol. 92, No. 3 (1998)

2.3 Post-Cold War NATO – Russia relationship: a new era or back to the past?

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has considered the development of cooperative, constructive and positive relations with Russia as a crucial factor of security and stability for the whole international community. Over the years, extensive work has been done to transform the old antagonism – founded on ideological, political and military struggles – into an emerging and formally constituted partnership based on shared interests and constant dialogue.

NATO and Russia soon realized that they would need each other to avoid – and eventually face – any future conflict in Europe. Post-Cold War events sharply accelerated in the direction of a gradual rapprochement process between the newborn Russian Federation and NATO. In December 1991, the Atlantic Alliance – as a first stage of that process – was already inaugurating the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), giving life to a new strategic framework for the geopolitics of Europe. It was instituted by the Allies as an important and strategic forum for dialogue and cooperation with NATO's former Warsaw Pact opponents. The new independent states were helped in satisfying their aspirations to participate as democratic states in facing multinational concerns. The pace of changing in Europe was so fast and meaningful that the first meeting of the NACC soon became an historic event: when the final communiqué was ratified, the Soviet ambassador declared that the USSR had dissolved during the meeting and that he was only the representative of the rising Russian Federation¹⁶⁶.

Of course the adhesion of the former Communist countries constituted a crucial step for the building of a new effective Eastern security architecture but not as much as the adhesion of Russia. The NACC proved to be “a manifestation of the ‘hand of friendship’ extended at the July 1990 summit meeting in London, when Allied leaders proposed a new cooperative relationship with all countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the wake of the end of the Cold War”¹⁶⁷. Together with Russia, 11 former Soviet republics – which at that time belonged to the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States – were encouraged to participate in the NACC. Georgia and Azerbaijan firstly entered into the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992 together with Albania, and the Central Asian republics soon did likewise. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the NACC welcomed consultations on the remaining security concerns stemming from Cold War, such as the disengagement of Russian soldiers from the Baltic States or regional conflicts that were exploding in parts of the former Soviet Union or within Yugoslavia. Thanks to the NAAC, security and defence-related issues were faced with a high degree of political

¹⁶⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69344.htm

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*

cooperation, contributing to build confidence between NATO and Russia from the begin of the 1990s and breaking new ground in view of new forms of practical political cooperation.

Establishing good relations between the two former Cold War enemies would not only contribute to improve European security, but also to improve global security. In the late 1990s, David Yost stated that “no issue was more central to the Alliance’s goal of building a peaceful political order in Europe than relations with Russia”¹⁶⁸. The main goal of the NACC was to institutionalize NATO’s new relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and with Russia, creating a new channel for a dialogue. Indeed, this can be interpreted as a vital move to provide Russia with a formal framework for preserving its participation to the decision-making process in Europe and also to prevent a sort of Balkanization of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The NACC was part of a strategy outlined within the 1991 NATO New Strategic Concept. It was an instrument through which implementing a broad approach to security reflecting elements such as: dialogue, cooperation and the collective defence capability. With the Cold War over, the likelihood to achieve goals through political channels became greater than ever before. In particular, dialogue and cooperation were required to address all the international security challenges: the risk of conflict coming from misunderstanding; the need to face dangerous crisis for the allied security; the commitment to enhance mutual understanding and confidence between the countries of the Euro-Atlantic area and Russia; the need to develop new initiatives to expand partnership opportunities to address common security issues. The NACC was developed not as a forum for individual cooperative relations with NATO but rather as a forum focused on multilateral dialogue.

Things changed in 1994, with the establishment of the Partnership for Peace (Pfp), which added a new dimension to the relationship among the Atlantic Alliance and its partner countries. The Pfp was built as a “programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual partner countries and NATO. It allowed partners to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation”¹⁶⁹. It was an invitation to countries belonging to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to join NATO in a “wide-ranging programme of practical cooperation designed to further the capability of working together in undertaking peacekeeping, crisis management and humanitarian tasks”¹⁷⁰. The Programme was thus focused on the commitment to democratic principles and its purpose was to improve stability, reduce

¹⁶⁸ David Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance’s New Roles in International Security*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington(1998)

¹⁶⁹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm

¹⁷⁰ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

threats to peace and give life to strengthened security relationships between NATO and non-member countries within the Euro-Atlantic area.

The key aspect of the Partnership for Peace was that each partner could establish intensive cooperative bilateral relationships with NATO, in compliance with each country's individual interests and capabilities. Individual activities were chosen by partner countries according to their aspirations and – as a “Presentation Document” – were put forward to NATO. Then, the Alliance and each partner country jointly agreed on an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme. The final step was given by the access to the Partnership and Cooperation Menu, which comprised around 1600 activities. The activities offered under the Pfp programme covered every field of NATO activity: “defence-related works, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues”¹⁷¹. If we look at the defence's field, the Programme aimed to “enhance respective peacekeeping abilities and capabilities through joint planning, training and exercises, and by so doing increasing the interoperability of the Partner country's military forces with those of NATO”¹⁷².

As in the case of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the Partnership for Peace Programme included a lot of countries but the most important adhesion was the one of Russia, which could benefit of a “window” into NATO operations. The first fundamental challenges for the Pfp Programme came in the second half of 1990s, with Bosnia (SFOR and IFOR) and Kosovo (KFOR), and during the early 2000s, with Afghanistan (ISAF). SFOR, IFOR and KFOR were the first peacekeeping operations that saw the involvement of thousands of Russian troops – together with troops from other 18 non-NATO countries – against Serbia's Milosevic. Then, Russia played a crucial role in the ISAF peacekeeping mission, that was defined as “a driver not only of interoperability, but also of logistics synchronization, harmonization and coordination”¹⁷³. Russia joined the operation as a partner for logistic support, as demonstrated by the transportation of non-military means through the territory of Afghanistan.

In 1997, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council was replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Council, which proved to be an organism similar to the previous one except for having a wider scope, comprehending both political and security issues. It reflected NATO's willingness to develop a security forum, which was supposed to include Western European countries and countries from other parts of the world (Eastern

¹⁷¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm

¹⁷² NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

¹⁷³ Heidi Reisenger, *Not only “Containerspotting” – NATO's Redeployment from Landlocked Afghanistan*, Research Paper, NATO Defence College, Rome (2013)

Europe and Asia) and to implement a better suited operational partnership. Many states enhanced their cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance, especially making reference to defence reforms and transition to democracy. Moreover, various partners then chose to support the NATO-led peacekeeping mission carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The conflicts spreading within the Balkans – firstly in Bosnia and secondly in Kosovo – shocked Russia, not only because of the historic, cultural and religious link with Serbia but also for the concerns about the *modus operandi* of NATO and USA, implemented through the so-called *Clinton Doctrine* – that was outlined during a public speech on February 26, 1999:

“It is easy to say that we really have no interests in who lives in this or that valley in Bosnia, or who owns a strip of brushland in the Horn of Africa, or some piece of parched earth by the Jordan River. But the true measure of our interests lies not in how small or distant these places are (...) The question we must ask is, what are the consequences to our security of letting conflicts fester and spread. We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must be prepared to do so”¹⁷⁴

From the perspective of Russia, the US doctrine of interventionism represented a strategic and geopolitical concern because it was also perceived as a way to project the US influence over the world. In the decade after the Cold War’s end, Russia found itself at a crossroads: embracing an isolationist policy – and therefore keeping alive the belief that Russia still remained the old enemy – or being part of the new European and global political order, showing up a new face and trying to cooperate with the winning Alliance on different strategic fields. Despite several difficulties, Russia chose the second option and followed a path which was supposed to bring it much closer to the Western world, also through the withdrawal of Russian troops from Central and Eastern Europe and the reduction of conventional and nuclear forces. Surely, establishing new forms of effective cooperation was in Russia’s interests.

On its side, NATO had to choose between leaving Russia alone and isolated in the international scenario – finding again the old enemy – or involving Russia in a shared decision-making process on the most important fields of interest – and therefore avoiding the rise of a new Russian aggressive approach through diplomatic and political means or agreements. The post-Cold War context paved the way to a transformation of the Alliance, that rapidly turned into a system of collective security with a new architecture and a new project: wider scopes and a high degree of openness to participation of former enemies, including the archenemy. As the challenges – raised by the new international (dis)order –

¹⁷⁴ Michael T. Klare, *The Clinton Doctrine*, The Nation (1999)

varied, NATO realized that an effective defence of Europe (e.g. from the crisis in the Balkans) could be carried out only through the joint effort and participation of Russia. Moreover, NATO member states feared a new possible aggressive policy of the Russian Federation. That's why the Atlantic Alliance opted for a shared decision-making process with Russia for future challenges.

In 1997, NATO and Russia found an important convergence of interests formalizing the “NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security” (NRFA)¹⁷⁵, namely a road map for a new kind of relations. It was the result of a four months-intensive negotiation between NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and Russian Foreign Minister Primakov. The NATO-Russia Founding Act was the reflection of a changed security environment in Europe, a context in which the Cold War struggle had left room to the promise of a deeper cooperation between former enemies. It embodied the practice of consultation and cooperation set up between the Alliance and Russia during the previous years, as demonstrated by the Russian troops working side by side with those of NATO and other partner countries in the IFOR and SFOR international missions. NATO and Russia reaffirmed to no longer consider each other as enemies. The Founding Act was the most remarkable example of an enduring commitment to found together a lasting and inclusive peace and security architecture in Europe. The ultimate goal of that partnership was to “build a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe”¹⁷⁶. It was not only in the interest of NATO and Russia but also of all countries located in the Euro-Atlantic area.

The Founding Act was composed by four sections. Section I depicted the principles upon which the NATO-Russia cooperation was based. These include the responsibility to respect norms of international behaviour as stated in the UN Charter and OSCE documents, as well as “more explicit commitments such as respecting states’ sovereignty, independence and right to choose the means to ensure their security, and the peaceful settlement of disputes”¹⁷⁷. Both parties promised to strengthen the OSCE, aiming to create a common area of security and stability within Europe. Section II defined the creation of the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC), established “to build increasing levels of trust, unity of purpose and habits of consultation and cooperation between NATO and Russia, in order to enhance each other's security and that of all nations in Europe”¹⁷⁸. It was a forum dedicated to consultations, consensus building and cooperation through joint decisions between the two former adversaries.

¹⁷⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25470.htm?selectedLocale=en

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁸ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm

The PJC was supposed to: “hold regular consultations on a broad range of political or security related matters; based on these consultations, develop joint initiatives on which NATO and Russia would agree to speak or act in parallel; once consensus has been reached, make joint decisions, if appropriate, and take joint action on a case-by-case basis”¹⁷⁹. Those joint decisions could include peacekeeping operations, to be implemented under the authority of the UN Security Council or the OSCE. Indeed, Section III provided a detailed description of the range of topics on which NATO and Russia could consult and cooperate, including peacekeeping, the prevention and settlement of conflicts, the prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the information exchanging on security and defence issues. Then, Section IV was focused on military topics and, in particular, on “mechanisms to foster closer military-to-military cooperation between NATO and Russia, including by creating military liaison missions on both sides”¹⁸⁰. Moreover, the Alliance declared its unwillingness to station nuclear weapons on the territory of new members and established to change any element in the Alliance’s nuclear approach or policies. The two former enemies committed themselves to implement the work linked to the adaptation of the Treaty on conventional forces in Europe (CFE), ensuring interoperability and integration policies in order to reflect the changings in Europe’s security environment since the adoption of the Treaty in 1990.

The US Secretary of State Albright declared not to expect that Russia would suddenly fall in love with NATO but she hoped that it would become aware of the true nature of the Alliance: not a threat to Russia but simply an institution that could help Moscow to further integrate into the European framework. Of course, the Founding Act was not designed to restrict the ability of either side to take decisions independently and it did not give NATO or Russia the right of veto over the actions or decisions of the other partner. As time went on, the Founding Act – together with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) – proved to be a quite “empty” mean through which NATO provided Russia an active voice in the Alliance’s affairs without proposing membership. Something more was surely needed in order to create a truly effective “special-status relationship” with a great power like Russia. There were several reasons at the base of the necessity to bring Russia closer to NATO. First of all, Russia was the only country with nuclear and conventional capacities which could threaten the security of the Alliance’s member states. Secondly, Russia aimed to once again become a global power in international politics and its institutions could boast an undeniable knowledge of regions – such as Afghanistan and the Balkans – which had gained importance for NATO over the previous years. Thirdly, the entire post-Soviet space – where Russia had substantial influence – was facing latent conflicts. Fourthly, NATO European member states were strictly dependent on the USSR and Russia for energy and therefore they wanted Eastern Europe to be stable and peaceful.

¹⁷⁹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25470.htm?selectedLocale=en

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*

The first considerations about a different system of relations between Moscow and NATO were made by Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and other minor partners, united by the belief that the new international environment – especially after 9/11 – was stressing the necessity of a breakthrough in the cooperation between the two former enemies¹⁸¹. Indeed, the terrorist attacks against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon prompted the necessity to bring NATO-Russia relations to a qualitatively higher level. Intensive negotiations between NATO member states led to the *2002 Pratica di Mare Summit*¹⁸², an important NATO meeting which drew new cooperative relations between Russia and the Alliance. The meeting was held in the Pratica di Mare Air Base, outside Rome because of exceptional security requirements after the 9/11 attacks and brought, for the first time, the new US President George W. Bush and the new Russian President Vladimir Putin around the same negotiating table, also thanks to the role played by the Italian President Silvio Berlusconi – who had a really close relationship with President Putin. The main result of the Summit – whose Declaration was based on the goals and principles of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security – was surely the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which replaced the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). The NRC was set up as “an improved mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and joint action”¹⁸³. Within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, “the individual NATO member states and Russia have worked as equal partners on a wide spectrum of security issues of common interest, standing together against common threats and risks to their security”¹⁸⁴. Indeed, the formula “19+1” soon turned into the formula “at 20”: that meant that Russia was given a status of formal parity with respect to the other NATO member states, despite not being part of the Organization.

Therefore, NATO member states and Russia started to work side by side as equal partners, identifying opportunities for jointly decide and jointly act across a wide range of security issues and challenges within the Euro-Atlantic area. The switch from the PJC to the NRC gave life to a new and more effective approach and contributed to build an enhanced climate of confidence, transforming consultations and the simple information exchange into a real concrete cooperation. NRC meetings were chaired by NATO Secretary General and were held at different levels: “at least once a month at the level of ambassadors, twice a year at ministerial level and as needed at summit level”¹⁸⁵. Moreover, the rules established that meetings had to be held once a month between military representatives and twice a year between chiefs of defence staff. The *2002 Pratica di Mare Summit* reflected the awareness that NATO allies and Russia had – at that moment – the same strategic priorities since they had to deal with substantially common

¹⁸¹ NATO Handbook, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

¹⁸² <https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2002/0205-rome/rome-eng.pdf>

¹⁸³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50091.htm

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁵ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

threats. The key areas where they shared common interests and concerns were: “the fight against terrorism, crisis management, non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons, arms control and confidence-building measures, theatre missile defence, logistics, military-to-military cooperation, defence reform and civil emergencies”¹⁸⁶.

The 2002 Rome Declaration explained that the NRC would focus its work on constant political dialogue on security issues between its members, providing to identify emerging problems, define an optimal common approach and – eventually – carry out joint missions, as appropriate. As Lord Robertson, the NATO Secretary General and the Chairman of that new forum, asserted at the end of the meeting:

*“There will be high expectations of all. Expectations that this will not be just another glitzy protocol event, but a real breakthrough. Expectations that the NATO-Russia Council will not just talk but will act, not just analyse but prescribe, not just deliberate but take decisive action. We have a profound obligation to ensure that these expectations are not disappointed. And if we need a reminder of why, then there is a simple answer. There is a common enemy out there”*¹⁸⁷

The building of the NATO-Russia Council had not only opened the possibilities to develop a mutually fruitful partnership but had also contributed to the strengthening of trust and predictability within the cooperation among Moscow and NATO. It could be considered as a stepping-stone in providing an institutional feature to the partnership between the two international actors. The atmosphere became constructive and allowed the discussion upon the major problems of regional security: the situation in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Middle East and in the Balkans. No Organization, however great and mighty, could enforce security by itself. Unquestionably, NATO made the right choice, by following the path of cooperation with Russia, United Nations, European Union, OSCE and other regional organisms in the interest of a more secure international security order.

NATO-Russia relations have traditionally been subject to internal processes of transformation, which proved to be not coincident all the time. Indeed, during the 1990’s, Russia was facing its transition process, moving from the greatness of the Soviet Union’s power, through Yeltsin’s chaotic rule and weak state, to the new role of powerful regional power with global aspirations, implemented by Vladimir Putin – as new Russian President from 1999. Likewise NATO faced a transition phase. Indeed, post-Cold War NATO tried to reinvent itself by turning into a global Organization – with a new *raison d’être* through the *out of area* missions – and strove to assume a more political nature, also through two rounds of enlargement. Relations between the two international actors developed through ups and downs. Despite

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2002/05-may/e0528a.htm>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2002/05-may/e0528a.htm>

different forms of cooperation, tensions between them began to rise with the first and, above all, the second round of NATO Enlargement. That process did not start on NATO's initiative: it started during the last days of the USSR, when Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia chose to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. As stated by Mikhail Gorbachev – the last Soviet leader – in the 1990 Charter of Paris, those countries had gained the right to abandon the communist side and establish their own security arrangements. The Visegrad states strongly desired to join NATO in order to be protected from a new potential Russian aggression, but a considerable amount of time passed before NATO thought about including new members. When, in December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and split into fifteen independent states, NATO began to take into account the aspirations of the former Communist bloc's countries. As time went by, the US and its allies expected that NATO enlargement – along with the enlargement of the European Union – would guarantee democracy, human rights and security in Central and East Europe. Instead, Russia was unstable and had to face upheavals and riots after the constitutional crisis of October 1993 and two violent civil wars in Chechnya. At that time, NATO's biggest concern was not represented by a renewed expansion of Russia but rather by a persistent Russian anarchy and collapse.

The Kremlin never chose to establish a democratic control over its military or intelligence forces, making Russia unreliable from the Western perspective. Moreover, President Yeltsin gradually implemented an ever increasing authoritarian rule, amending the constitution to strengthen his power, a trend that President Putin would have carried on from the begin of the 2000s.

NATO was available to include new members as long as they could contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area and most of Western political leaders were worried that adding Russia would instead undermine the Alliance. That is why, during the 1990s, the allies committed themselves to provide Russia with a special status within the new security architecture in Europe, achieving the so-called “two-track cooperation policy” with the Kremlin, alongside NATO expansion. That's why high-level negotiations between Russia and NATO led to the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. In particular, the NRFA was designed to ease Russian acceptance of NATO expansion by stressing Moscow's importance in the European post-Cold War security framework. Indeed, it was a mean through which Russia gained a voice and special consultative place with NATO.

The rapprochement between NATO and Russia started in late 1991 and early 1992, when Russia asserted that it wanted to build a closer relationship with the West. President Yeltsin even raised the – quite difficult – possibility for Russia to join NATO. Then, in the face of NATO's activism in Central and East Europe, Moscow began to assume a critical approach, as demonstrated by the letter that President Yeltsin

sent to the governments of United States, Germany, France and United Kingdom, declaring: “In general, we advocate that relations between our country and NATO be a few degrees warmer than those between the Alliance and Eastern Europe”¹⁸⁸. Then, he added that “the spirit of the treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the East”¹⁸⁹. The reference was to the gentlemen’s agreement – reached by Gorbachev and western leaders in 1990 – that “NATO would not go beyond the borders of the Federal Republic of Germany, if the Soviet Union provided for smooth unification of this country”¹⁹⁰.

The decision to join the PfP was adopted by Russia in order to exert a sort of influence on the possibility of enlarging the Alliance but, however, it became soon clear that the PfP membership could not be used as a brake on NATO’s expansion. In July 1994, President Clinton made an announcement to the Polish Parliament in Warsaw, underlining that “no country should have the right to veto any other democracy’s integration into Western institutions, including those ensuring security”¹⁹¹.

Indeed, according to Russia, the West should have welcomed a Russian veto over NATO membership for countries that were no longer under the former USSR’s yoke. Nevertheless, the concession of the veto power to the Kremlin would have realized a de facto preserving of the Cold War divisions and a disavowal of a country’s right, depicted in the 1975 Helsinki Charter, to decide about its own alliances.

Although the West reassured Russia that its expansion would not be put in place against her, many policymakers and military scholars disagreed. In June 1995, the Russian Council on Foreign and Defence Policy published a report – “Russia and NATO” – explaining Moscow’s approach to NATO enlargement, which – as the report declared – could lead to the “first serious crisis in relations between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War”¹⁹². Additionally, it denounced the United States’ will to secure and consolidate the geopolitical space earned by winning the Cold War. Even if the interests of Central and Eastern European countries were considered to be understandable and legitimate, Russia did not believe that membership in the Alliance was an “optimum and well-balanced response to their anxiety”¹⁹³. Then, Russian feared that the inclusion of those countries into NATO would have guaranteed their security at the cost of Russian Security.

¹⁸⁸ *Retranslation of Yeltsin Letter on NATO Expansion*, National Security Archive, George Washington University, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4390818-Document-04-Retranslation-of-Yeltsin-letter-on>

¹⁸⁹ Dmitry Polikanov, *NATO-Russia Relations: Present and Future*, in *Where is NATO Going?* (ed. by Martin A. Smith), Routledge, London (2006)

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹⁹¹ Adrian Bridge, *Clinton pleases Poles with cash and NATO carrot*, Independent, July 8 (1994):

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/clinton-pleases-poles-with-cash-and-nato-carrot-1412366.html>

¹⁹² Kimberly Marten, *Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO*, Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action (2017)

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*

Russian military establishment firmly opposed the eastward enlargement of NATO, threatening to carry out some radical countermeasures such as the stationing of nuclear weapons in the western part of Russia and Kaliningrad, the withdrawal from arms control agreements and military missions in Eastern Europe. During private conversations with President Clinton, Yeltsin stressed his concerns for a bigger Alliance but he did not express any direct threat because Russia was living a difficult economic situation and it was depending on Western financial aids. As a result, negotiations between Russia and NATO led to the formal reinsurance that the Alliance would not deploy nuclear weapons, military means and troops on the territory of new member states. When Yeltsin finally realized that he could not do anything to stop the process, he asserted: “I need to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of this for Russia. I am prepared to enter into an agreement with NATO not because I want to but because it is a forced step”¹⁹⁴. The agreement mentioned was the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security.

Even after the signing of that agreement, huge parts of the Russian political elites maintained their worries about NATO’s eastward extension. That was explained in detail in the National Security Concept – which was issued in December 1997 –: “NATO’s expansion to the East represents a direct threat to Russia’s national security. Its transformation into a dominant military-political force in Europe create the threat of a new split in the continent which would be extremely dangerous given the preservation in Europe of mobile strike groupings of troops and nuclear weapons”¹⁹⁵. Thus, even if NATO allies reassured Russia about the pacific nature of their project and their good intentions, the Kremlin never felt to be safe and strictly remained against NATO enlargement process across its borders.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Conradi, *Who Lost Russia? How the World Entered a New Cold War*, Oneworld, London (2017)

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*

2.4 Theories and interpretations behind Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement

The analysis of the sources of Russia's opposition to NATO's eastward expansion occupies a place of prominent importance in the "who lost Russia" debate among Western scholars¹⁹⁶ and has represented a matter of controversy for years. There are generally three different kind of explanations within the existing literature: the first one refers to the role played by strategic imperatives and national security concerns; the second one is about ideational factors such as the Kremlin's status concerns and its Cold war logic; the third one is instead focused on Russian domestic political determinants.

The first hypothesis – the one about strategic imperatives and military security concerns – is focused on Russia's worry about America coming ever closer to its borders. The enlargement of the Alliance was believed to reshape the balance of power in Europe and make Russia feel less confident because of the progressive expansion of Washington's sphere of influence. As Yevgeny Primakov – first, Speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and then chief of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) – stated, NATO expansion was about to "bring the biggest military grouping in the world, with its colossal offensive potential, directly to the borders of Russia. This possibility would trigger the need for a fundamental reappraisal of all defence concepts on our side, a redeployment of armed forces and changes in operational plans"¹⁹⁷. Russia perceived that process as a form of encirclement. When the USSR still existed, Soviet satellite states served as a buffer zone in the face of potential Western offensives. With the inclusion of former Communist countries, Russians believed to get caught. The first round of enlargement would increase the Alliance's domain by 650 to 750 kilometres and therefore the buffer zone between NATO and Russia would be considerably reduced.

By analysing NATO and its project, the liberal leader of the opposition Grigory Yavlinsky declared that "saying that this is a different NATO, a NATO that is no longer a military alliance, is ridiculous. It is like saying that the hulking thing advancing towards your garden is not a tank because it is painted pink, carries flowers, and plays cheerful music. It does not matter how you dress it up; a pink tank is still a tank"¹⁹⁸. Basically, the opposition to the projects of NATO brought together a lot of Russian policymakers, despite several disputes on social, economic and political issues. President Yeltsin and its government focused their attention on capabilities rather than intentions. As Russian Foreign Minister

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁷ Mike Bowker, *Russian Policy toward Central and Eastern Europe*, in *Russian Foreign Policy Since 1990*, Peter Shearman, ed. Boulder, Westview Press (1995)

¹⁹⁸ Michael C. Williams, Iver B. Neumann, *From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity*, Millennium 29, no. 2 (2000)

Primakov asserted: “For any reasonable politician, plans are a variable factor but potential is a constant factor. Having a powerful military bloc being formed on our borders or near our territory irrespective of whether it poses a threat today or not, is unpleasant. It is against our interests”¹⁹⁹. Moscow’s concerns grew up due to the open-ended nature of NATO expansion, confirmed by the 1997 Madrid Declaration: “The considerations set forth in our 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement will continue to apply with regard to future aspirants, regardless of their geographic location. No European democratic country will be excluded from consideration”²⁰⁰. Indeed, by the second half of the 1990s, Western policymakers began to consider a second round of enlargement, with the future inclusion of other Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Baltic states. Once again the second expansion process was perceived by the Kremlin as a further offense to its ascendant power and – in particular – as a “zero-sum game”, in which NATO member states were trying to boost their power and strategic influence at the expense of Russia.

As the Russian Foreign Minister Primakov warned, “Russia cannot remain indifferent to the factor of distance, given the Baltic countries’ proximity to our vital centres. Should NATO advance to new staging grounds, the Russian Federation’s major cities would be within striking range of not only strategic missiles, but also tactical aircraft”²⁰¹. In case of a second enlargement, Yeltsin would have imposed a strategic revision of Russia’s attitude towards NATO because the Kremlin still considered the former Soviet area as a “near abroad”, a direct expression of its sphere of influence because of historical, economic, cultural and geopolitical reasons. Strategic imperatives were linked to Russia’s anxiety about a likely moving of NATO’s infrastructure closer to its borders.

The second hypothesis makes reference to Russia’s status concerns and Cold War thinking. Some analysts and observers asserted that Russia – from the early years of the 1990s – was suffering from a “Cold War hangover”: the perception of the United States and NATO as potential threats due to a residual Cold War mistrust. This statement is based on the assumption that Russia was the direct heir of the USSR and that “Russian politicians and journalists were almost all themselves products of the USSR”²⁰². Therefore, “a mistrust of Western, and especially American, motivations was inculcated in them during their childhood school days and in their early professional careers”²⁰³. It is certainly true, NATO and Russia cooperated on a wide spectrum of issues – the fight against the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, counter-terrorism and military crisis management during the wars in former Yugoslavia – and

¹⁹⁹ Peter Shearman, *NATO Expansion and the Russian Question*, in Robert G. Patman, ed., *Security in a Post-Cold War World*, New York, St. Martin’s Press (1999)

²⁰⁰ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25460.htm?mode=pressrelease

²⁰¹ Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe (2009)

²⁰² J.L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (1999)

²⁰³ *Ibidem*

all this would not be possible and thinkable during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the two waves of NATO enlargement made Russia feel involved into a renewed Cold War logic. Surely, the “Cold War hangover” thesis did not represent the only source at the base of Russia’s resentment towards NATO’s eastward expansion.

The ideational argument relies also on the role played by Russian status concerns. For instance, Hilary Driscoll and Neil MacFarlane have argued that “[NATO] enlargement ran directly counter to commonly held Russian perceptions of themselves as a great power”²⁰⁴. According to this perspective, Russian opposition to NATO expansion could be attributed to problems in dealing with the loss of the previous powerful empire and the Great Power international status. Russia’s resentment was not due to the perception of a direct military threat from NATO but rather to crucial psychological considerations linked to the loss of prestige and identity after the collapse of the USSR and the Cold War’s end. Undoubtedly, Moscow’s foreign policy was “status-sensitive”. As a proof, President Yeltsin tried to bring Russia into the G7 group, the group which included the seven most advanced industrialized countries in the world. Moreover, he asked to have an explicit understanding of Clinton’s idea of the Alliance’s enlargement because he only saw “nothing but humiliation for Russia”²⁰⁵, also considering the Russian conception of great-power status as linked to a sense of legitimacy over the regional sphere of influence along its peripheral countries. Russia feared to be excluded from the crucial security decision-making process and isolated from the West, making the growth of extreme nationalism inside Russia more likely. Russian nationalism was propelled by the belief that Gorbachev had been too passive by making too many unilateral concessions to Western nations: the USSR and its alliance had dissolved without any legacy; Germany had peacefully realized its unification process through Soviet help; Soviet republics had become independent states. By contrast, according to Russia, NATO had turned into a more assertive Organization with respect to the past.

In 1994, during the Balkan civil wars, it implemented a no-fly zone in Bosnia and then hit Serbian paramilitaries through airstrikes. In that context, Russian support began to falter, as Serbia – at that time – was one of Moscow’s allies. Distrust reached the peak in 1999, when NATO chose to militarily intervene against Serbia to stop the humanitarian emergency in Kosovo, without the UNSC consent and against Russian will. The Alliance asserted the necessity of protecting Kosovar civilians and Russia then participated to the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo. Nonetheless, that circumstance demonstrated that NATO no longer considered one of Russia’s most crucial tools: its Security Council veto power. In

²⁰⁴ Hilary Driscoll, Neil MacFarlane, *Russia and NATO after the Cold War*, in *Almost NATO: Partners and Players in Central and Eastern European Security*, ed. by Charles Krupnick, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield (2003)

²⁰⁵ Report on the meetings between President Clinton and President Yeltsin, The Kremlin, May 10, 1995: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57568>.

particular, Yeltsin feared that post-Soviet Russia would be isolated and downgraded to a second-ranked power without a real influence in the post-Cold War continental order. The Kremlin was initially sceptical about a possible adherence to the Pfp program because that program did not provide for a special-status relationship with Russia and put on the same level the great power of Russia and the other post-communist states.

Finally, the third hypothesis is based on the idea that domestic political factors played a crucial role in explaining Russian hostility to NATO enlargement process. Allen Lynch – one of the scholars that support this thesis – claimed that “the communist-nationalist political opposition to Yeltsin’s government at home quickly realized that the prospect of NATO’s extension eastward could be exploited so as to undermine the government’s nationalist credentials”²⁰⁶. As a reaction, Yeltsin – in 1995 – endeavoured to adopt the same approach of communists towards the massive NATO expansionism, so that there was no longer a major divergence between government and opposition on that issue. According to this perspective, President Yeltsin began to firmly oppose NATO enlargement because it was functional to “placate communist-nationalist forces and those who challenged his presidency”²⁰⁷ - and not because of strategic imperatives or status concerns. In order to promote his nationalist credentials, Yeltsin would have assumed a more assertive posture towards the West and NATO in particular. This thesis lies on the fact that Yeltsin would have changed his foreign policy's approach in view of the December 1993 parliamentary elections.

For sure, he had suffered the pressure from communist and nationalist reactionaries since fall 1992 and it could be argued that he was right in placating nationalist voters during the run-up to the national elections. If that was the plan, Yeltsin's attempt failed because the right-wingers – led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky – won the elections by gaining 23% of the seats. Then, many opinion polls – which were carried out during the 1990s – highlighted that the majority of Russian citizens was not properly interested in foreign affairs issues and that, in particular, “ordinary Russians were largely apathetic on the issue of NATO enlargement”²⁰⁸. Indeed, their main concerns were about low living standards, rising crime and increased social insecurity. That said, it becomes difficult to understand why Yeltsin would have wanted to embrace a more assertive approach towards the West for electoral reasons. Although Yeltsin's political survival and Russian elections were some of the topics within the talks between Russia and United States, it is clear that Yeltsin did not explain Russia's resentment towards the Alliance's expansionism through his re-election campaign or domestic politics issues.

²⁰⁶ Allen C. Lynch, *Russia and NATO: Expansion and Coexistence?*, The International Spectator 32, no. 1 (1997)

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁰⁸ William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (2002)

Accordingly, status concerns could help to explain why Russia sharply opposed NATO enlargement's open-ended nature and the likelihood that former Soviet republics would be included within the Alliance but, however, they are not to be analysed as the root cause of Moscow's resentment. Indeed, it is here argued that Moscow's strong hostility to NATO expansion was motivated by an interplay between strategic imperatives and status concerns, which mutually reinforced each other amplifying Russian response. Nevertheless, asserting that NATO was encircling Russia was not properly correct. That kind of statement ignored geography. Indeed, Russia's land border covered over 20.000 kilometers and less than one-sixteenth of that size (1.215 kilometers) was shared with NATO member states. Moreover, Russia shares land borders with 14 countries and only 5 of them belonged to the Atlantic Alliance. Then, if we consider NATO's presence outside its territory, the Alliance only had military corps in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Both peacekeeping operations had been carried out through the consensus of the UN Security Council, of which Russia was an important member.

The rise to power of Vladimir Putin in 1999 and 2000 as the new Russian President produced a more realistic approach on international order with respect to the one adopted by Yeltsin. Putin decided to put aside the contradictory nature of foreign policy during the Yeltsin as he became aware that the hegemonic distribution of power was likely to remain in force in the future. For the second time in history Russia could have joined NATO but it did not happen. Mindful of the recent past, Putin stated the necessity for Russia to play an increasingly active role in regional and global affairs. The natural consequence was not to abandon the concept of multipolarity but, rather, to redefine it in a much pragmatic sense, in which Russia was going to find partners anywhere mutual interests on crucial issues existed. What counted in Russia's project was not the world order in itself, but its place in that world order. That new approach could include partnership relations with the USA and with other Western states but also partnerships with countries that did not reflect at all goals and perspectives of the transatlantic community. Therefore, the Russian government realized that it could not challenge the United States directly on issues where the American administration had crucial interests at stake. The risk behind directly resisting to US actions was perceived as very costly and would have led to substantial humiliation.

Surely, it was a less ambitious foreign policy but Putin had to reckon with a realistic evaluation of Russia's place in the post-Cold War world. Russia was no longer a global superpower but, at the same time, it was not an ordinary regional power. The Kremlin had suffered from a massive erosion of its regional strategic location: the Warsaw Pact buffer was no longer in Russia's hands and the former USSR republics had left the pact to join NATO.

It did not have the power to counteract NATO's progressive penetration in the former Soviet space and it did not count on the "soft power" dimension – that was largely used during the communist era by the USSR to extend its sphere of influence.

When Putin became the new Russian President in 2000, he inherited a country which had been ignored on every crucial issue during the 1990s when it diverged from NATO and Western states' decisions: the first wave of NATO enlargement, the 1995 NATO military intervention in Bosnia, the 1999 NATO mission in Kosovo against Serbia. The priority of Putin was to defend and preserve the unity of Russia and to rebuild its status as a great power in the international stage. As Alexei Pushkov stated, "on 26 March 2000, Vladimir Putin inherited a weak, corrupt, and paralysed country on the verge of disintegration (...) Putin's strategic goal was to get Russia back on its feet"²⁰⁹. The first move of Putin in international affairs was to build and support external conditions that allowed domestic recovery. During his first presidential term, Putin said that "Russia's activity in foreign affairs must enable us to concentrate efforts and resources as far as possible on addressing the social and economic tasks of the state"²¹⁰. The plan provided for exploiting foreign policy achievements to restore Russia's domestic strength.

As a consequence, the key feature of Russian foreign policy became "partnership" – with Europe, the USA and even with China. Multipolarity rested on the will to create managed cooperative relationships between different centres of power in the world. The awareness of Russia's weakness and of the need to come to terms with major players while facing crucial domestic issues produced a nuanced conception of international politics. On the one hand, Russia cooperated with NATO and the USA in the tight battle against international terrorism while, on the other hand, it proved to be unhappy with NATO second round of enlargement, without making an issue of it. The difference with Yeltsin's management of that issue seems clear, since the former Russian President had talked about a "cold peace". Putin's attitude, instead, implied that Russia did not like NATO expansionism at all but stressed that, at that moment, it could not do anything to stop it, so it was better to let that process go.

The 1990s and the early years of 2000s were years of crucial changes and challenges. The international global order could take different shapes at any moment. Certainly, the progressive evolution and transformation of NATO and Russia, together with their relationship, were the most crucial topics of world politics. In order to have a better and clearer perspective on the NATO-Russia relationship and on how the rise to power of Vladimir Putin could have drastically changed it, I was honoured to interview

²⁰⁹ Alexey Pushkov, *Putin at the Helm*, ed. by Dov Lynch, *What Russia Sees*, Chaillot Paper No. 74, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris (2005)

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*

Giuliano Amato, the former Italian President of the Council of Ministers from 1992 to 1993 and, later, from 2000 to 2001. He represents a direct and precious witness to shed light on the above-mentioned topics of my thesis since he was the first foreign Prime Minister to receive the visit of Vladimir Putin in 2000. Moreover, he has a solid background in international relations, which is focused on balances of power and on NATO's history. The interview with Giuliano Amato²¹¹ has been particularly useful in order to have a better and clearer perspective on NATO-Russia relationship and on how the rise to power of Vladimir Putin could have drastically changed it. According to his perspective, the first Putin was really open to enjoy the Western world and NATO. He believes that NATO missed a historic chance by failing to turn into an "Organization for the European security" and to include Russia, as the then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana had proposed in 1996. Of course, including Russia as a full new member would have represented an organizational and political challenge, leading to an historic and revolutionary transformation of the Alliance. Therefore NATO would have turned into a collective security organization – that resembled an UN-style body – rather than into a collective defence alliance.

Undoubtedly, the West has made some crucial mistakes in managing the relationship with Russia. It could be argued that the West and Russia realized two different readings of 1989. According to the West and NATO, 1989 marked the winning of the Cold War and the possibility to reap all the benefits from that, also at the expense of Russia, that had lost that conflict. Keynes would have not agreed with that view. Indeed – as stated in his famous book "The Economic Consequences of the Peace", related to the 1919 Treaty of Versailles – he believed that a "punitive peace" would finally create a new enemy, or at least a rival. Russia, instead, expected to receive some compensations because of the pacific attitude held after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. For sure, it did not expect the progressive eastward enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance. The reality is that we haven't been able to read the world coming from the fall of the Berlin Wall and from the end of Communism. The West failed in resetting itself in the light of the new international context: the post-Cold War world would have not seen the massive spread of liberal democracies and free market; on the contrary, new sources of conflict were about to explode. The new world was featured by divergences, that were no longer locatable within the two old blocs, and the Western world did not promptly react.

The words expressed by President Amato highlight a serious mistake made by the West and NATO. He firmly believes that history could have gone differently. Putin's Russia and NATO could have converged on Javier Solana's proposal and established a new peaceful international order. According to him, the West should have started a serious negotiation to include Russia into NATO during the 1990s. Of course, including Russia as a full new member would have represented an organizational and political challenge, leading to an historic and revolutionary transformation of the Alliance. As a consequence, NATO would

²¹¹ The full interview is available in the Appendix

have turned into a collective security organization – that resembled an UN-style body – rather than into a collective defence alliance.

In the post-Cold War international scenario, NATO enlargement was the right choice, especially if we consider the beneficial effects it produced on the whole Euro-Atlantic area. Probably, it could be implemented and carried out differently. Russia could have been consulted and informed about all the steps that would have brought former communist countries into NATO. Only an approach that took into consideration the configuration of interests and power would have created a more stable European security architecture and a less hostile relationship with Russia. The alternatives to NATO expansion were to build a Pan-European security organization – which was supposed to provide security guarantees – based on the OSCE or to keep NATO alive but without embracing new members: a hypothesis that Moscow would have appreciated but that would have happened at the expense of Central and Eastern European countries – which proved to be ready and eager to join the Atlantic Alliance. It could be said that, in the 1990s, the West took advantage of Russia's instability and weakness. It would be not surprising since it is a normal item of international politics: the winning actor – the most powerful one – decides how to manage the future of the defeated opponent and gets its way. For instance, it is likely that, if the Soviet Union had won the Cold War, it would have behaved in the same way as the West and NATO and it would have extended the Warsaw Pact to other countries.

The natural consequence of what Amato states is that the non-inclusion of Russia into NATO – or at least into a real and much closer relationship with the West – has succeeded in pushing Russia towards the East and towards different multilateral organizations. Among those frameworks, in my view, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) represents a particularly crucial international body. The SCO was an intergovernmental Eurasian organization which promoted cooperation on politics, economics and security. It was founded on the basis of the 1996 “Shanghai Five”, which brought China and Russia together, with three Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Then, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five turned into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The SCO represented a really important part of Russia's Asian Policy, implemented by Putin after the failed attempt to join NATO and the West. Indeed, Putin's strategy was not only focused on deepening relations with China but also on developing closer relations with India, Japan, South Korea – as strategic partners for importing technology and investments – and the other countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)²¹². Bilateral and multilateral partnerships – as part of BRICS (Brazil,

²¹² The ASEAN was founded in 1967. It is a regional intergovernmental organization including a multitude of Southeast Asian countries, which aims to promote intergovernmental cooperation on economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural issues among its members and other Asian countries

Russia, India, China, South Africa) or RIC (Russia, India, China) – were the formats through which Russia, that was surely not a dominant player, tried to create a more stable and predictable global order and build conditions for a balance of power with powerful or advanced countries.

The SCO's starting objective was to provide security and stability in the region and to fight the so-called three evils: terrorism, separatism and extremism. Nonetheless, it was clear how one of the priority interests was that of containing the presence and role played by the United States and NATO in the Central Asian region, although the cooperation with Washington was believed to be fundamental to fight terrorism. The strategic position of the region led to a polarization of the struggle between the two sides: on the one hand, the SCO – with Russia and China in particular – wanted to resize the sphere of influence of NATO in that region; on the other hand, NATO pushed for using the region in order to face terrorism. Even if it was initially not designed to deal with a military apparatus, the Alliance progressively started to carry out military exercises, establishing that the militaries of the member states “should be more active in conducting joint exercises and training, exchanging information about peacekeeping operations, and holding conferences and other exchanges”²¹³. At the 2000 Dushanbe Summit (Tajikistan), the SCO leaders – after having signed a declaration on a “multipolar world” – agreed to “support the efforts of one another in safeguarding national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and social stability”²¹⁴ of the six member states.

The first problems between NATO and SCO arose in 1996, when the Taliban conquered Kabul after a long series of victories in Pakistan during the previous year. In the wake of those events, the American strategy began to gain a precise profile: the main goal was to install military bases in Central Asia, enlarging the sphere of influence of NATO to the Central and Eastern Asian countries in order to better face terrorism. After the war with the Taliban started, NATO's military presence in the Asian region became massive, as several military bases were built in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In 2004, SCO member states asked for the removal of NATO bases from Central Asia, since the terrorist threat in Afghanistan had been broadly addressed and the conditions for US deployment in that area no longer were in place. Moreover, the Asian organization requested a timetable for the withdrawal of US bases from Central Asia. In particular, NATO and the US were accused of using the war against Afghanistan and terrorism as a pretext to militarily occupy a part of the Central Asian region.

Gradually, the SCO began to be regarded as “the Alliance of the East” or “NATO of the East”, because it constituted the primary security pillar of the region and it gained increasing centrality in Asia – Pacific.

²¹³ Bates Gill, *Shanghai Five: An Attempt to Counter US Influence in Asia?*, Brookings (2001): <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/shanghai-five-an-attempt-to-counter-u-s-influence-in-asia/>

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*

As a matter of fact, also Russia considered the SCO “as a counterweight, and potentially even a geopolitical rival to NATO”²¹⁵. Moreover, the Kremlin viewed the SCO as a venue for carrying out its foreign policy goals. Probably defining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as the “NATO of the East” was not properly correct but the risk of an Alliance – disguised under a veil labeled “cooperation” – counterbalancing NATO was real and extremely dangerous.

In 1997 Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that “the control of the Eurasian landmass is the key to global domination and control of Central Asia”²¹⁶. Russia and China seemed to accurately follow Brzezinski's theory, given the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, apparently to fight against extremism in the region and strengthen border security but most probably to counterbalance NATO and US influence in Central Asia. The future main goal of Russia could become that of creating a new global order – opposed to the western one under NATO’s leadership – and making NATO irrelevant for an entire continent.

²¹⁵ Stewart M. Patrick, *The SCO at 10: Growing, but Not into a Giant*, Council on Foreign Relations (2011)

²¹⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *A Geostrategy for Eurasia*, Foreign Affairs (1997)

Chapter III: NATO-EU: the evolution of the Transatlantic Partnership

3.1 Shaping a new relationship between NATO and the EC/EU

Since their inception, both NATO and the European Union (EU) contributed to preserve and enhance the security environment in Western Europe. NATO carried out that goal through its capabilities as a powerful defensive political-military alliance and, after the Cold War's end, spread peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area both by expanding its membership and by promoting other partnerships, especially with Russia. On its side, the European Union strengthened stability by developing a gradual political and economic integration, at first among Western European countries and then also through the inclusion of new countries. As a result of both organizations' expansion processes, a large number of European countries took part to a political, military and economic development and many of them became members of both organizations.

Throughout the Cold War period, the parallel development of NATO and the European Community was put in place on the basis of a strict separation of roles and responsibilities. Both sides shared goals and common interests in many fields but there were weak institutional contacts between them. Even if the Western European Union – created in 1948 – constituted the structural basis for a European Security and Defence role, Western European security was exclusively managed by NATO, for practical purposes. For its part, the WEU was in charge of carrying out a number of specific tasks, especially in relation to post-war arms control agreements in Western Europe. Nonetheless, its range of responsibilities was limited and its membership was not the same as that of the European Community.

Starting from 1984, the Western European Union (WEU) “acted as the interface for cooperation between NATO and those European countries seeking to build a stronger European security and defence identity within NATO”²¹⁷. The Western European Union (WEU) was a European political and military Alliance. It was born on the basis of the Brussels Treaty²¹⁸ – that in 1948 had created the Western Union²¹⁹ against the potential rebirth of the German threat – and it evolved in 1954 through the inclusion of Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The inclusion of the FRG met the need of contributing to the common defence of Western Europe while allowing, at the same time, the control of the German rearm. The Organization constituted a coordinating forum as regard to matters of European security and defence and it contributed to institute the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Gradually, the WEU turned into the foremost defence organization of the European Union, even if it abandoned that role in 2001.

²¹⁷ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division (2006)

²¹⁸ Antonio Varsori, *Il patto di Bruxelles (1948): tra integrazione europea e alleanza atlantica*, Bonacci, Roma (1988)

²¹⁹ It was formed only by France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

After the signature of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, military responsibilities of the Western Union – then Western European Union – were incorporated by the Atlantic Alliance. For that reason, the WEU remained inactive for 30 years and it was reactivated in 1984 in order to create a European defence identity. Since then, the WEU's member states have tried – on the one hand – to make the WEU a European pillar within the Atlantic Alliance and – on the other hand – to entrust it with the task of developing a European Union's common defence policy.

So, the main plan was about promoting a common European defence identity through a mutual effort among its member states in the military and security field and enhancing the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance. Just before the Cold War ended, – in August 1987 – Western European Union experts discussed about the possibility of a joint action in the Gulf to “ensure freedom of navigation in the oil shipping lanes of the region”²²⁰; and in October 1987, WEU member states coordinated their military action in the Gulf after the attacks on shipping in that area.

The “Platform on European Security Interests”²²¹ was useful to delineate the WEU's partnership with NATO and with other international organizations and “the conditions for the further development of its role as a forum for regular discussion of defence and security issues affecting Europe”²²². The Western European Union has contributed, for instance, to carry out peacekeeping missions on a mandate from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – then OSCE – and from the United Nations, implementing maritime interdiction missions in the Adriatic Sea and on the Danube (1993-1995) in order to ensure – together with NATO – the respect of the UN embargo against the former Yugoslavia states.

The end of the Cold War equilibrium between NATO and the USSR paved the way to a new kind of relationship between NATO and the European Community, which assumed a new physiognomy after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty²²³ in 1992.

During the early years of the 1990s, it seemed clear that “European countries needed to assume greater responsibility for their common security and defence”²²⁴. The relationship between Europe and North America had to be rebalanced for two main reasons: the first one referred to the redistribution of the economic burden behind the provision of Europe's continuing security and stability; the second one was about the progressive development – within European countries – of a stronger, much powerful and more integrated European political identity, together with the feeling of many EU countries that Europe

²²⁰ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (1999)

²²¹ https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/1/29/444f642c-62ed-4fd9-8136-a129d2de3783/publishable_en.pdf

²²² *Ibidem*

²²³ European Union, Treaty on the European Union, Maastricht (1992): https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf

²²⁴ *Ibidem*

needed to foster its capabilities to militarily intervene in appropriate contexts where NATO was not militarily involved.

The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht²²⁵ represented a meaningful step towards a new security concept, establishing the will of EU leaders to create a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), together with “the eventual framing of a common defence policy which might in time lead to a common defence”²²⁶. The development process of the European Union was based on the role played by the Western European Union, which was responsible for drawing up and enforce EU resolutions and activities with defence implications.

In this way Europe was contributing to the Alliance’s activities while balancing the transatlantic partnership. The agreements between NATO and WEU from 1991 to 2000 prepared the ground for the future NATO-EU relationship, as they were “designed to ensure that if a crisis arose in which the Alliance decided not to intervene but the Western European Union chose to do so, the WEU could request the use of Alliance assets and capabilities to conduct an operation under its own political control and strategic direction”²²⁷.

On 19 June 1992, the Foreign and Defence Ministers of WEU countries – through the Bonn agreement – issued the so-called “Petersberg Declaration”²²⁸. That declaration, on the basis of the Maastricht principles, defined how the WEU should have evolved in the future. WEU leaders asserted “their preparedness to make available military units from the whole spectrum of their conventional armed forces for military tasks under the authority of the WEU”²²⁹. The so-called “Petersberg Missions” included: “humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks; and tasks of combat forces in crisis management including peace-making”²³⁰. WEU members committed themselves to support conflict prevention and peacekeeping, cooperating with the CSCE and with the UN Security Council.

In particular, the Petersberg missions were then included in the Treaty of Amsterdam²³¹ (1997), which established that the WEU was an integral part of the European Union’s evolution process. The WEU was supposed to support the EU in outlining its defence features; and the EU was consequently supposed to promote closer institutional links with the WEU, opening to the potential integration of the WEU into the EU. According to the Amsterdam Treaty, European Union “will avail itself of the WEU to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications”²³². Then, the European Council’s task was to define guidelines in respect of the Western European Union for those

²²⁵ https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf

²²⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Aa19000>

²²⁷ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (1996)

²²⁸ Petersberg Declaration: <http://www.weu.int/documents/920619peten.pdf>

²²⁹ NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (1999)

²³⁰ Petersberg Declaration: <http://www.weu.int/documents/920619peten.pdf>

²³¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/treaty/pdf/amst-en.pdf>

²³² *ibidem*

issues for which the EU would benefit of the WEU's work. Its role was to allow all EU member states contributing to become part – fully and on an equal basis – of decision-making processes within the WEU.

A further step in the direction of a EU defence system was taken at the 1994 NATO Summit in Brussels, when NATO and the EU agreed on developing a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI)²³³ within NATO, leading to practical agreements to allow the Atlantic Alliance in upholding European military operations managed by the Western European Union. European countries decided to take responsibility for a major European role as regard to security and defence matters. After several meeting in June 1996, Foreign and Defence Ministers decided to build the ESDI within NATO, as a crucial part of the internal adaptation process of the Atlantic Alliance. In such a way, European allies would have coherently and effectively contributed to the activities of NATO as a proof of their shared responsibilities and strengthened the transatlantic partnership.

The crucial aspect of the ESDI was the development of WEU operations through the participation of WEU and NATO, based on “identification within the Alliance of separable but not separate capabilities, assets and support assets and elaboration of appropriate multinational European command within NATO in order to prepare, support, command and conduct WEU-led operations”²³⁴. The European Security and Defence Policy served as a European pillar within NATO and allowed European countries to militarily intervene where NATO did not want to and to partially reduce the US financial burden of preserving military bases in Europe.

Things drastically changed at the end of the 1990s, when the EU leaders – facing the conflicts in former Yugoslavia – agreed on the necessity to promote a European Security and Defence Policy within the European Union itself, in cooperation with NATO, and established their commitment to carry out most of the functions that had been previously handled by the Western European Union. With the beginning of the new millennium, the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union began to work side by side aiming to promote a new framework for consultation and cooperation.

The push for a new approach to the European security dimension was probably a reaction to the conflicts that were taking place in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, since – in that circumstance – Europe proved its inability to prevent, intervene and settle those military disputes through a continental defence body. European countries realized that the European Union needed to correct the imbalance between its massive economic power and its (really) weak political and military power.

²³³ F. Stephen Larrabee, *The European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and American Interests*, RAND Corporation (2000)

²³⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/european_security_defence_identity.html

Such a new approach provided that a coordinated effort to settle conflicts by political and diplomatic means should have gone hand in hand with a credible military force²³⁵. As a consequence, the European Union decided to increase and deepen its commitment during the 1990s to prevent conflicts and manage crisis beyond its borders.

In December 1998, the Franco-British Summit at Saint Malo gave a new impetus to the changing of EU attitude towards the acquisition of military capabilities. France and the United Kingdom agreed on the necessity for the European Union to have “the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”²³⁶.

It was the first time that the two most important EU military powers had found an arrangement on such a bilateral statement, which aimed to equip the European Union with concrete capabilities. The European Union should have gained the capabilities to analyse and evaluate intelligence sources in order to simplify the decision-making process in cases in which military interventions were to be implemented without the participation of the whole NATO.

The Anglo-French initiative gave life to a new climate, where further measures could be taken. NATO Washington Summit in April 1999 became an important occasion for upgrading the European Security and Defence Policy: indeed, NATO leaders claimed that a stronger European performance would contribute to keep the Alliance effective, vital and not obsolete in the 21st century. It was then stated that, as that process continued, NATO and EU should have guaranteed an effective transparency, cooperation and mutual consultation, based on the mechanisms between the Atlantic Alliance and WEU. There were issues that proved to be difficult to solve, namely: “the participation of non-EU European Allies in the decisions and the operations that could be conducted by the European Union; and practical arrangements for ensuring EU access to NATO planning capabilities and NATO’s assets and capabilities”²³⁷.

St Malo’s statements and outcomes were welcomed at the European meeting in Cologne in June 1999²³⁸, where EU leaders – considering the Amsterdam Treaty and the subsequent incorporation of the WEU Petersberg tasks – paved the way to a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) for the European Union and committed themselves to provide the EU with means and capabilities in order to take a major responsibility for a common European policy on defence and security. In particular, they focused their work on the development of military capabilities in the field of crisis-management missions. The main

²³⁵ Tanguy de Wilde D’Estmael, *La Communauté européenne face à l’implosion yougoslave: aléas d’une gestion de crise par la coercition économique*, *Journal of European Integration History*, 10 (2004): 51–74

²³⁶ Joint Declaration on European Defence, issued at the British-French Summit (Saint-Malo, 4 December 1998): https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable_en.pdf

²³⁷ *Ibidem*

²³⁸ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/kol1_en.htm

goal was to allow – by 2003 – the deployment of military forces by the European Union in order to carry out the Petersberg tasks in a context of EU-led military operations where NATO as a whole was not militarily involved. According to the Cologne Declaration, there were two possible vehicles to enforce EU-led missions: through NATO assets and capabilities or without them. The question was “how much capability the EU needed to possess independently from NATO to guarantee the freedom for autonomous action”²³⁹, especially with reference to EU-led operations without relying on NATO assets and capabilities.

Furthermore, it was decided to build permanent political and military structures such as a Political and Security Committee, a Military Committee and a Military Staff, to guarantee a political and strategic guidance behind military interventions. At the Helsinki Meeting – in December 1999 –, the role of the Western European Union in managing crises circumstances was transferred to the EU while “the residual responsibilities of the WEU remained unaffected and were handled by a much reduced formal political structure and a small secretariat”²⁴⁰. Helsinki represented a crucial turning point for the European Union, since it moved “from aspirations to the possibility of operations”²⁴¹. Subsequently, the Treaty of Nice – ratified in December 2000 and entered into force in February 2003 – produced a EU permanent political and military framework. After the transfer of defence and security responsibilities from the WEU to the EU itself at the end of 2000, the relationship between NATO and the European Union assumed a new dimension.

Relations between the two international organizations were formalised and institutionalised through an exchange of letters between NATO’s Secretary General George Islay MacNeill Robertson and the EU Commission President Romano Prodi in 2001. It was an important step to determine the scope of cooperation and the modalities of “consultations and cooperation on questions of common interest relating to security, defence and crisis management, so that crises can be met with the most appropriate military response and effective crisis management ensured”²⁴². The main outcome was that joint meetings would have taken place at different levels: two joint meetings between NATO and European foreign ministers every year and at least three joint meetings per semester at ambassadorial level between the North Atlantic Council and the EU Political and Security Committee – also known as NAC-PSC Summits.

Since then, NAC-PSC Summits have represented a paramount element in the cooperative relations between the two organizations and the 9/11 terrorist attacks gave impetus for an enhanced cooperation,

²³⁹ Richard G. Whitman, *NATO, the EU and ESDP: Emerging Division of Labour?*, in *Where is NATO going?* ed. by Martin A. Smith, Routledge, London (2006)

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*

²⁴¹ Richard G. Whitman, *NATO, the EU and ESDP: Emerging Division of Labour?*, in *Where is NATO going?* ed. by Martin A. Smith, Routledge, London (2006)

²⁴² https://www.nato.int/summit2009/topics_en/21-nato-eu_strategic_partnership.html

made of formal and constant contacts and reciprocal participation in Summits. The Prague Meeting – in November 2002 – restated the commitment of both organizations to carry out peace-building and peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. The 2002 NATO-EU Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy was of prominent importance since the two organizations “welcomed the strategic partnership established between the EU and NATO in crisis management, founded on our shared values, the indivisibility of our security and our determination to tackle the challenges of the new century”²⁴³. During the following months, the Atlantic Alliance and EU implemented their strategic partnership through exchanges of classified information and cooperative actions in the field of crisis management.

Together with the St. Malo statements, the Berlin Plus Agreements – approved in December 2002 and adopted in March 2003 – marked a historic turning point in the progressive integration process between NATO and the European Union. As a matter of fact, those arrangements were a package of fundamental measures which provided “the basis for NATO-EU cooperation in crisis management by allowing the European Union to have access to NATO’s collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations, including command arrangements and assistance in operational planning”²⁴⁴.

The adoption of this kind of measure met the need to avoid an unnecessary reproduction of resources and, in effect, the EU could benefit from NATO’s support in EU-led interventions, as long as the Alliance as a whole was not involved.

The term “Berlin Plus” was based on the results achieved during the 1996 Berlin meeting, when NATO foreign ministers decided to improve the European military and strategic capabilities in order to rebalance European and North American responsibilities. EU-NATO permanent relations were based on the resolutions of NATO’s Washington Summit in 1999, the European Council in Nice in December 2000 and the EU-NATO joint declaration of 16 December 2002. According to the other features of the agreements: NATO should have adapted its defence planning system to assimilate more generally the availability of forces for missions led by the EU; an arrangement should have covered the exchange of classified information between both organizations.

The Berlin Plus Agreements constituted a fundamental framework through which the European Union launched its first-ever military intervention in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) – now North Macedonia – in December 2003, where an armed conflict between the Albanian National Liberation Army and the Republic of Macedonia’s security forces was destabilising the country since 2001. Indeed, given the high number of Albanians in the country, the Albanian National Liberation Army was fighting to ask that the Constitution was rewritten in order to grant more rights – including

²⁴³ *Ibidem*

²⁴⁴ https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5388/shaping-of-a-common-security-and-defence-policy_en

the linguistic ones – to the ethnic Albanian. Gradually, what was happening in the Republic of Macedonia became a focus of international concern, as the NATO’s Secretary General and the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy stressed their commitment to guarantee the security of the region. The mission to stabilise the country was initially carried out by NATO. It started in August 2001 with the *Operation Essential Harvest* and then it was implemented through the *Operation Amber Fox* and the *Operation Allied Harmony*.

Once the NATO-led peacekeeping missions were terminated, the task to safeguard peace came under the responsibility of the European Union, which started the *Operation Concordia* in March 2003: it was the first EU-led crisis management intervention making use of assets belonging to the Atlantic Alliance. The European Union deployed around 400 soldiers to secure EU and OSCE ensuring the implementation and the respect of the *Ohrid Framework Agreement*, signed to stop hostilities, disarm the ethnic Albanian armed groups and reform minority political and cultural rights. After having improved the security environment, the EU military operation was turned into an EU Police Mission, code-named EUPOL PROXIMA.

France’s request to implement a fully autonomous EU operation was opposed by United Kingdom and Germany, which claimed that it would have been considered as an antagonistic move to NATO²⁴⁵.

The *Operation Concordia* marked a historic step in the evolution process of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. As stated by the then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, the mission proved that “the EU – like few other international actors – could bring together different instruments and capabilities such as political leadership, military force, and economic support”²⁴⁶ and that Europe was “able to share the responsibility for global security”²⁴⁷ towards the construction of a better world. Moreover he claimed that – given the creation of the Common European Foreign and Security Policy in 1992 – “few then believed that the Union would send out men in arms under the EU’s flag”²⁴⁸.

Launched on the basis of the Berlin Plus agreements, it represented the begin of cooperation between the two most important international organizations in facing a crisis-management operation. Cooperation continued after the 2004 Istanbul Summit, when the Alliance leaders decided to conclude NATO’s peacekeeping missions – IFOR and SFOR – in Bosnia and Herzegovina after almost ten years and invited the European Union to take a major responsibility for a new operation, the so-called *Operation EUFOR Althea*.

²⁴⁵ Panos Koutrakos, *The EU Common Security and Defence Policy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (2013)

²⁴⁶ Javier Solana, *A joint Effort for Peace and Stability*, published in *Eleftherotypia* and *Der Tagesspiegel* (16 December 2003): https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/articles/78480.pdf

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

It was the second EU-led intervention founded on the cooperation between NATO and EU and therefore on the Berlin Plus agreements, aiming to: implement the Dayton agreements; serve as a “deterrent” presence; preserve a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The deployment of thousands of European soldiers fell into the EU’s comprehensive approach to defence and security, especially in relation to the stabilisation goals in the Western Balkans.

As long as the danger of a likely recurrence of violence and instability remained in place, European leaders understood that they could not afford to let a likely crisis spread into the neighbouring states, since the Balkans were right at the border of EU states. On their side, north American NATO leaders underlined that the Alliance would nevertheless maintain its role in stabilising the country through keeping a residual military presence. Further, NATO headquarters in Sarajevo would have carried out counter-terrorism activities and support the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Other issues of common interest and concern were covered by the strategic partnership between both international organizations. Those issues included a military and technical advice by NATO experts to prepare and implement the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP)²⁴⁹, conceived in November 2001. The ECAP was designed to achieve the EU Headline Goal – established at Helsinki in 1999 –, which aimed to provide the European Union with military assets within 2003.

By following the ECAP, EU member states agreed to “mobilise voluntarily all efforts, investments, developments and coordination measures, both nationally and multinationally, in order to improve existing resources and progressively develop the capabilities needed for the Union’s crisis-management actions”²⁵⁰. The main goals to achieve were: the development of European defence capabilities, by improving their efficiency; a bottom up approach, providing additional efforts on a national and voluntary basis; a better coordination between EU countries and a constant harmonization between EU and NATO.

While claiming that NATO would have remained the most important and powerful defence organization, EU leaders stated that the Union should have been able to act autonomously if necessary on security issues. Under the NATO-EU agenda and the Berlin Plus arrangements, it was decided – in 2004 – to create the EU Battle Groups, rapid military reaction forces belonging to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU.

Based on contributions from EU member states and on the guidance of a lead nation, those military units began to be considered as a “standing army”²⁵¹. Good evidence of this could be found in the words of

²⁴⁹ Burkard Schmitt, *European Capabilities Action Plan*, Institute for Security Studies (2001)

²⁵⁰ Gerrard Quille, *The European Security and Defence Policy: from the Helsinki Headline Goal to the EU Battlegroups*, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament (2006)

²⁵¹ Paul Reynolds, *New Force behind EU Foreign Policy*, BBC (2007): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6441417.stm>

the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who stressed the relevance of the EU Battle Groups in supporting the UN to face trouble spots²⁵².

Basically, the evolution of the EU military policies met the need for a rapid response capability that European countries should have deployed through “small forces at high readiness, including initial deployment of land, sea and air forces within 5–10 days”²⁵³. The EU Battle Groups were in charge of dealing with the Petersberg tasks, namely peacekeeping, peace-making and humanitarian operations, which should have been limited in size and intensity, considering the small-scale nature of the fighting groups.

Previously, the 2003 *Operation Artemis* provided a crucial operational template “for future rapid response deployments”²⁵⁴. It was the first EU-led “autonomous” intervention and the first EU rapid response operation, authorized by the UN and carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo to stop a violent conflict between two ethnic groups. Indeed, since 1999, the civil war had provoked around 50.000 deaths and more than 500.000 displaced people²⁵⁵. In order to avoid a further large-scale humanitarian crisis, the EU was asked to intervene by the UN and – through around 2.000 soldiers – succeeded in putting an end to the conflict and in stabilising the country. The *Operation Artemis* proved that the European Union could mobilise rapid reaction forces in a short time scale, autonomously managing an intervention.

Moreover, cooperation between NATO and the EU covered a considerable number of other issues. Indeed – through consultations, contacts and information exchanges – both international institutions implemented a joint work on matters such as the fight against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the cooperation in Afghanistan. Great efforts were made to safeguard people from chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear attacks and other civil emergencies.

²⁵² Deaglan De Breadun, *Value of EU Battlegroups plan stressed by Annan*, The Irish Times (2004): <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/value-of-eu-battlegroup-plan-stressed-by-annan-1.1162012>

²⁵³ Gustav Lindstrom, *Enter the EU Battle Groups*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper (2007)

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁵⁵ L. Ahoua, A. Tamrat, F. Duroch, Switzerland, R. F. Grais, V. Brown, *High mortality in an internally displaced population in Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2005: Results of a rapid assessment under difficult conditions*, Global Public Health (2007)

3.2 NATO and the European Union: Cooperation vs Competition

Starting from the 1990s, the European Union has gradually gone from being a “civilian power”²⁵⁶ – with military ambitions – to being an Organization able to use military force and to carry out EU-flagged armed operations beyond its boundaries²⁵⁷. In 2000, the push for transforming the EU into a “global civil power”²⁵⁸ – expressed by the then European Commission President Romano Prodi – had to deal with a progressive development of the EU as a military and security player since 1999, through the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Since the demise of the Cold War, the European Security architecture had been held by the supremacy of NATO, as the only credible international Organization to ensure protection, but the end of the 1990s marked an important transformation.

Indeed, an embryonic division of labour between NATO and the EU – through its ESDP – began to change the overall security landscape. That division of labour was something complementary and did not imply that one Organization was to be displaced at the expense of the other one.

After the end of the Second World War, NATO (1949) and the Warsaw Pact (1955) were the platforms through which Western and Eastern European governments decided to achieve national security goals. Membership of the Warsaw Pact was compelled by the USSR while membership of NATO replaced the one of the Western European Union, inducing Western European states to seek protection under the nuclear umbrella of the United States, given the huge threat represented by the USSR.

The Cold War period produced a clear division of labour between NATO as the provider of military security and the European Community as the rising economic Organization. The disappear of the Soviet Union’s threat triggered a debate over an alternative European security architecture and how Europeans should have responded to the new international environment: European leaders chose to shape new principles of military security as a part of the European integration process.

Surely, the creation of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) represented a huge innovation in the development of the European Union as a strategic and military actor. Indeed, in order to reflect the emerging ESDI, NATO Heads of State and Government endorsed the EU creation of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF): “combined” indicated that two or more military services would be used and “joint” indicated that two or more NATO countries would be involved in the task force. The CJTF represented one of the main outcomes of the 1994 Brussels Summit, which paved the way not only to new partner states but also to a likely division of labor between the United States and Europe in crisis

²⁵⁶ François Duchêne, *Europe’s Role in World Peace*, in R. Mayne, *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, Fontana/Collins, London (1972)

²⁵⁷ Mario Telò, *L’Europa potenza civile*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2004

²⁵⁸ Romano Prodi, *2000-2005 Shaping the New Europe*, Speech to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 15 February 2000, Brussels, European Commission, 2000: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_00_41

management circumstances, despite the failure in managing the Balkan crisis in the 1990s. The trouble with the CJTF was “how to activate it without also accentuating the differences between the European and the American conceptions of the task force’s assets”²⁵⁹.

Although the North Atlantic Council blessed the CJTF in 1994, it stressed that the military skills of the Western European Union and NATO would be “separable but not separate”²⁶⁰. The CJTF was a mean through which European partners’ aspirations to manage stress scenarios – of greater concern to them than to the US – were met.

The Bosnian context and the peacekeeping missions after the Dayton Agreements could have been the right opportunities to deploy the Combined Joint Task Force. The WEU could benefit from NATO structures to implement an all-European action in a scenario which was similar to the one of SFOR. The transformation of a European Security and Defence Identity into a Common Foreign and Security policy (CFSP) was a result of the 1994 Brussels Summit and should have developed in a framework in which Europe – and not the US – was the foremost player. Nonetheless, European leaders failed to reach a unity of purpose and therefore to meet the challenge: the bone of contention was the composition of the CJTF and, above all, which EU member state would lead the military forces.

In particular, France perceived the institution of the CJTF both as “an opportunity to exercise its influence and a symbol of European inferiority”²⁶¹. On the one hand, it represented an opportunity for France to join and lead a European force – which was “separable but not separate” from NATO – without the obligation to rejoin the Alliance’s integrated command structure²⁶². On the other hand, the EU failed to deploy the CJTF in Bosnia, since the US airpower – under NATO lead – almost monopolized the military intervention against Serbia. The Bosnian case proved that Europe was “an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm”²⁶³, as stated in 1991 by Mark Eyskens, Belgium’s then Foreign Minister.

The status of transatlantic relations remained one of the most serious problems. The nub of the issue was how much freedom EU member states would have to handle NATO assets without being subjected to NATO’s supremacy. The United States was well-disposed toward a progressive fulfilment of the ESDI aspirations by European countries without the American engagement, on condition that the EU or the

²⁵⁹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: the evolution of an Alliance*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers (2004)

²⁶⁰ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/1998/9804-05.htm>

²⁶¹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: the evolution of an Alliance*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers (2004)

²⁶² In 1966, De Gaulle brought France out of *NATO’s military integrated command structure* because of sharp contrasts with the United States in terms of a possible rebalancing of transatlantic relationships

²⁶³ Craig R. Whitney, *War in the Gulf: Europe; Gulf Fighting Shatters Europeans’ Fragile Unity*, *The New York Times* (1991): <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/25/world/war-in-the-gulf-europe-gulf-fighting-shatters-europeans-fragile-unity.html?pagewanted=1>

WEU would directly respond to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who had always been an American General.

It was not the European interpretation of the CJTF: indeed, France and the other European partners claimed that the ESDI was supposed to “function with NATO resources but not with NATO supervision”²⁶⁴. The need to get rid from the dependence on the US was at stake, together with the faculty to act freely. In 1996, France distinguished itself as the European leader in this search for independence and autonomy and tried to find solutions through nominating a European to the position of SACEUR or – if that option was refused – substituting the American commander of Allied Forces with a European commander. None of these proposals was accepted by the US and, as a consequence, France refused to fully reintegrate into NATO’s military structure.

Moreover, the 1997 Madrid Summit – known as the starting point for the first wave of NATO enlargement – fell into the dispute between Europe and the United States. Indeed, by providing membership to countries that were extremely compliant – or at least more approachable –, America was believed to overthrow European military autonomy. Romania’s candidacy for joining NATO by France and other European partners could be explained through the resentment towards America’s indifference to European demands.

The US approach towards Europe has historically been mixed. That is why this chapter is focused on whether NATO-EU – and US-Europe – relationship has evolved more toward cooperation or competition. On the one hand, American governments encouraged Europe to promote reforms of the defence apparatus demanding increased efforts, while, on the other hand, they welcomed progressive European improvements in the security field with suspicion, proving to be reluctant to cede their leadership.

In 1998, the then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright defined explicit redlines, requiring that “any initiative must avoid pre-empting Alliance decision-making by decoupling ESDI from NATO, avoid duplicating existing efforts, and avoid discriminating against non-EU members”²⁶⁵.

It became known as the *3 D’s approach*: “no decoupling of transatlantic security, no duplication of NATO, and no discrimination against non-EU NATO allies”²⁶⁶. Even if NATO and the EU had a substantially overlapping membership and Brussels as a common headquarter, their relationship went through ups and downs.

²⁶⁴ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: the evolution of an Alliance*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers (2004)

²⁶⁵ Madeleine K. Albright, *Statement to the North Atlantic Council*, US Department of State, December 8, 1998; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/981208.html>

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*

The push for an autonomous European capability became appealing as the European Union began to gain an ever-increasing political relevance. In 1992, the strategic scope of the Western European Union became linked with defence implications and crisis management, as outlined in the Petersberg Declaration²⁶⁷. Subsequently, the introduction of the ESDI within NATO was seen as a way to pursue European security priorities. The 1990s were a transition decade for the European defence system. Even if the EU wanted to intervene in the Balkans, it quickly had to admit that it could not stop violence there without the US support. France and the United Kingdom considered that inability to act in Europe's backyard as a shame and thought that it could represent a wake-up call for the entire Europe.

Accordingly, both France and the United Kingdom – during the St. Malo Summit – launched an initiative to allow the EU “to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage”²⁶⁸. Their initiative received the support of other EU members and, in 1999, led to the establishment of the Helsinki Headline Goal²⁶⁹, which stood for the first EU-military ambition and consequently the first really “challenge” to the US strategic and military hegemony.

Right after the demise of the Cold War, threats and challenges became multifaceted, dynamic and really complex and therefore required a comprehensive and integrated approach by the international system. Cooperation and a rational use of the strategic and military capabilities by the international organizations and the states seemed to be the only mean to create a more peaceful global order. As a consequence, the interlink between two key organizations such as NATO and the European Union in an ever more integrated world represented a crucial step, as they both tried to build a global security environment.

The globalisation of security threats imposed the necessity of a strict cooperation between the two organizations. Indeed, it was no longer conceivable to implement a Cold War-style separation of tasks between NATO and the European Community, with NATO exerting a hard or military power and the European Community exerting a soft or civil power.

There were imperative reasons to put in place an effective cooperation framework: both institutions pursued the so-called “Western values” (e.g. democratic principles); they addressed similar multifaceted and dynamic threats, that were no longer located in national and institutional boundaries; they shared the responsibility for the security and stability of Europe; there was a meaningful overlap in membership. Then, as stated in the Prague Summit Declaration, “the NATO Response Force²⁷⁰ and the related work

²⁶⁷ <http://www.weu.int/documents/920619peten.pdf>

²⁶⁸ Franco-British St. Malo Declaration, December 4, 1998:

https://www.cvce.eu/obj/franco_british_st_malo_declaration_4_december_1998-en-f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f.html

²⁶⁹ Gerrard Quille, *The European Security and Defence Policy: from the Helsinki Headline Goal to the EU Battlegroups*, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament (2006)

²⁷⁰ It comprised land, air, sea and special forces that could be deployed – with high readiness – wherever it was needed. It was instituted during the NATO Prague Summit

of the EU Headline Goal should be mutually reinforcing while respecting the autonomy of both organizations”²⁷¹.

In the early 1990s, the debate regarding a possible sharing of geopolitical responsibilities between NATO and the EU (previously the WEU) had offered two kind of solutions: “bifurcation” and “binarism”²⁷². On the one hand, “bifurcation” meant that both organizations should have carried out a functional division of tasks, with NATO facing high-level responsibilities – such as the Article 5 collective defence interventions – and the WEU undertaking low-level operations, such as the non-Article 5 tasks. On the other hand, “binarism” meant that the Atlantic Alliance would have abolished its integrated command, with the US and Europe taking responsibilities for their respective territorial defence.

As years went by, a mix of strategic, political and psychological factors curbed a real and further development of the Western European Union. The push for a European unity slowed down after the collapse of the USSR: indeed, the consequent dramatic military budget cuts stemmed the possibility to effectively transform the WEU into the armed wing of the European Union and therefore into the European pillar of NATO. Indeed, the passivity of Europe in the security field was also due to crucial financial considerations, which contributed to paralyze the progressive building of (really) effective European defensive structures.

The Europeanisation of NATO or the creation of a European army would have resulted in a massive structural investment while national parliaments and public opinions were not available to welcome an important economic spending in a new international environment in which the USSR no longer existed. As a matter of fact, during the years which followed the defeat of the Soviet Union, all the European countries had substantially reduced (or even halved) their military spending.

Moreover, European governments and parliaments wondered whether it was unprofitable to build a sort of “European NATO”, especially considering that NATO had protected the old continent for the previous 50 years and it was ready to extend that kind of guardianship. In this respect, Bosnia represented a daunting example for Europe, given that it failed to carry out a joint and effective intervention to stop the conflicts while the US and NATO were successful in a few months.

With the Cold War’s end, the European Community tried to adapt to the new international scenario through the Maastricht Treaty. Nonetheless, during the following five years, the entire programme of reforms was largely downsized, as the European leaders decided to focus more on the Union’s monetary and financial dimension while the political, military and strategic dimensions were overshadowed. This

²⁷¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm

²⁷² Paul Cornish, *EU and NATO: Cooperation or Competition*, Policy Department External Policies, European Parliament, Briefing Paper (2006)

misguided involution has in fact paralyzed the development potential that Maastricht could have produced. By doing so, Europe remained in an ambiguous condition of a former satellite, as it was unable to become autonomous and independent despite the end of bipolarism.

Actually, the failure in addressing the Bosnian crisis shed light on the necessity for Europe to equip itself with appropriate strategic and military structures to be able to control at least its inner courtyard.

One of the obstacles behind a meaningful progress in the field of European security was given by the rigidity of NATO, that was instinctively opposed to any advance of the Western European Union. Indeed, a gradual evolution of the WEU was perceived as a dangerous attempt to develop a political and strategic independence of the European Community and therefore as a considerable weakening of Washington's absolute strategic control over Europe, which had been consolidated by half a century of substantial protectorate. When the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, the European Community should have reviewed the whole new international strategic situation to adjust the Atlantic Alliance to the different needs that were emerging. By doing so, it could have recovered its strategic and military autonomy from the United States, as it happened between Russia and its former satellite states.

Instead, the US – influenced by its military and industrial compound and by the desire to preserve its great authority – convinced its allies to keep their total strategic dependence unchanged, ensuring the enduring full strategic domination of Washington over Europe.

The WEU seemed destined to a considerable and concrete development. Indeed, the EU determination to entrust it with the functions of EU armed wing and European pillar of NATO should have established a solid operating base.

As president John Fitzgerald Kennedy declared in 1962²⁷³, Western European Nations – long divided by violent hostilities – should have joined together, trying to achieve strength in unity, freedom and diversity. He proposed that the United States and a united Europe should have signed an “Interdependence Declaration” in order to create an equal political and economic community, allowing the West to ensure peace, stability, social and civil progress in the rest of the world. The United States – under Kennedy's rule – looked at that kind of initiative with hope and admiration since the Americans considered a strong and united Europe as a partner and not as a rival. Kennedy believed that a united Europe would be able to play a much more important role in the common defence field, to more effectively address the requests of poorer nations and to join the United States in developing common projects as regard to economics, politics and diplomacy.

Europe was seen as a partner with whom interacting on the base of full equality in all the great tasks related to the building and defending of a free nations' community. It was up to Europe to build that

²⁷³ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Address at Independence Hall*, Philadelphia (4th July, 1962)

kind of complete unity, essential for a productive partnership. The Atlantic Partnership would have not been supposed to only look inward, dealing with its own progress but it would have also focused on cooperation with all the other nations in solving their common concerns.

It was a really clear and challenging proposal, which did not receive support during the following decades, as Washington distinguished itself for managing alone the international order. Surely, it was especially Europe – starting from the end of the Second World War – to miss the appointment for a new kind of partnership with the USA.

Suffice it to say that, in 1954, Western European powers failed to institute a European Defence Community (EDC), an attempt to counterbalance the rising power of the Soviet Union in Europe. The ultimate goal of the EDC was to build a supranational European army, by also including West German forces to prevent a West German rearmament. It could be argued that, within NATO's context, the United States should have applied the so-called *Nixon Doctrine*²⁷⁴ to Europe. Adopted by President Nixon during the Vietnam war in 1969, the *Nixon Doctrine* provided for a progressive disengagement of US armed forces from Vietnam. Indeed, Nixon was convinced that the United States was no longer in the condition to fully defend South Vietnam allies and decided to withdraw ground troops while ceding US military resources and means so that South Vietnamese could fend for themselves.

Likewise, the United States – after the end of the Cold War – could have implemented the *Nixon Doctrine* with Europe by withdrawing its troops and allowing the European Community to develop its own army through the support of American logistical assets. By doing so, NATO was likely to become stronger, benefiting of a stronger European Union – as its European pillar – that could effectively give a hand in military issues. During the years which followed the implosion of the Soviet Union, the Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF) and the Berlin Plus agreements went in that direction but they did not represent radical measures to reform the Atlantic Alliance.

The WEU's integration into the EU served to equip the Union with an autonomous security and strategic dimension. In this way, the European Community could become more influential, independent and secure. Nonetheless, the important advances in European security were compromised by the decisions taken at the Helsinki Meeting, that made the WEU's survival doubtful.

That EU Summit had apparently strengthened European military capabilities through the decision to create – within 2004 – a “European army” composed by around 60.000 soldiers and equipped with political-military Councils. However, at the dawn of the new millennium, NATO and European leaders agreed on gradually incorporating WEU's tasks and functions into the European Union, instead of simply inserting those new structures into the Western European Union. In doing so, the WEU

²⁷⁴ Jeffrey Kimball, *The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding*, Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, Washington (2006)

progressively lost its powers until it was disbanded and the EU began to assume military and security tasks.

It is clear that having a specific military and security Organization (such as the WEU) – instead of having a political and economic Organization (such as the EU) which also carried out military tasks – would have been way better in order to build a military and strategic platform, as invoked by President John F. Kennedy with regard to a “European pillar”. By transferring most of the WEU functions to the EU, European leaders laid themselves open to an indefinite institutional subordination to North America within the context of NATO. Accordingly, the United States could more easily exert a unilateral political and strategic control over the whole Euro-Atlantic area, entrusting to Europe the task of strictly carrying out the *out of area* interventions established by NATO.

It can therefore be stated that developing the Atlantic Alliance on two equal pillars – Europe and the United States – would have ensured a major coordination and effectiveness in its action.

3.3 The Bush Doctrine and its impact on NATO: the case of Iraq

During the early years of the 21st century, EU-NATO relationships were going through a rough patch. Indeed, sharp contrasts between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean started to emerge on how to manage 9/11 and then on how to face the threat represented by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Considering that the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had been linked to the terrorist network of Al Qaeda by the Bush administration and its Pentagon planners, Iraq began to be depicted as a "rogue nation", as a part of the "axis of evil"²⁷⁵ – a notion that was first used by President George W. Bush to pinpoint foreign states which sponsored international terrorism and designed weapons of mass destruction and to gain popular support for the War on Terror. Saddam Hussein was not suspected of having taking part to the 9/11 attacks but the fear that a dictator like him could emulate a strike against the USA – through the use of nuclear or biological weapons – pushed Bush to link Iraq to 9/11. After all, the United States embodied the ultimate symbol of a repressive country against the Islamic world, a power that had deployed troops in Saudi Arabia and in the surrounding region, a leading player in renewing sanctions and no-fly zones over Iraq and in bombing Afghanistan.

The Middle-Eastern status quo was no longer tolerable by US policymakers and a regime change policy emerged as the best option to stabilize that part of the world²⁷⁶. Identifying Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a global danger was the crucial step to activate the so-called *Bush Doctrine*, a strategic foreign policy which aimed to pre-emptively "strike down terrorists before they could strike"²⁷⁷, securing the United States and its allies against countries that harbored or supported terrorist groups. The *Bush Doctrine* was explained and adopted through the *2002 State of the Union Address*. In that context, President Bush outlined the *National Security Strategy of the United States*, declaring that:

The security environment confronting the United States today is radically different from what we have faced before. Yet the first duty of the United States Government remains what it always has been: to protect the American people and American interests. This duty obligates the government to anticipate and counter threats, using all elements of national power, before the threats can do grave damage.

*The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. There are few greater threats than a terrorist attack with WMD. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defence.*²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ President Bush's "axis of evil" included Iran, Iraq and North Korea while the so-called "beyond the axis of evil" embraced Cuba, Lybia and Syria.

²⁷⁶ Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, Routledge, London (2013)

²⁷⁷ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United. The Evolution of an Alliance*, Praeger Publishers, London (2004)

²⁷⁸ The National Security Strategy (2002): <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/index.html>

“Pre-emption” and “unilateralism” were the core-concepts of the strategy. In the case of Iraq, Saddam Hussein was suspected by the US of developing weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological as well as nuclear weapons. The *Bush Doctrine* adopted crucial parts of the so-called *Wolfowitz Doctrine*²⁷⁹, designed by the US Under Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz. His Doctrine was considered as the first post-Cold War formulation of the US neoconservative agenda and theorized the role of the USA as the only global power, clarifying the necessity to pursue foreign policy goals through unilateral and pre-emptive actions. The main goal was to remove potential threats from other countries and prevent any other country from becoming a superpower, a rival for the US hegemony.

The decision to military address Iraq was not a bolt from the blue. As a matter of fact, President Bill Clinton had signed the 1998 *Iraq Liberation Act*, a United States Congressional statement declaring that “it should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq”²⁸⁰. Because of that law, the US administration was encouraged to finance different groups that opposed Saddam Hussein and to work for the regime change.

Including Iraq in the War on Terror gradually opened a profound transatlantic rift, since President Bush spoke of a war to be carried out “through a coalition of the willing or alone if necessary”²⁸¹. The US unilateral posture was focused on the Pentagon’s assumption that a Europe reluctant to increase its defence budgets would have constituted a burden – or even an impediment – on the American intervention. Accordingly, the US superpower believed it could fight against Saddam on its own. Indeed, Iraq was considered to be weaker than it was at the time of the 1990 Gulf War and an “easier and more manageable target than the elusive Al Qaeda”²⁸². Nonetheless, a wave of scepticism condemned the American’s rush toward the conflict. Doubts were raised about whether the United States was intervening to gain control of Iraq’s oil, to carry out what George W. Bush’s father – George H. W. Bush – did not complete in 1991, to gain votes in view of the 2002 midterm elections or to show off its ability to meet the challenge on its own while its allies supported the mission.

European allies mitigated Bush’s attitude, pushing for a cooperative relation with the United Nations, even if the President and his administration’s hawks kept on saying that the US action would not be constrained by the UN decisions. It was indisputable that the Middle East’s stability was endangered by Saddam Hussein, also considering the continuing violations of UN resolutions before and after the 1990 Gulf War. In November 2002, Iraq – through an ultimatum – was asked to accept inspections over the possession of weapons of mass destruction or otherwise undergo a military action. The then US Secretary of State Colin Powell worked to bring Russia, China and France together into an agreement at the

²⁷⁹ <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2008-003-docs1-12.pdf>

²⁸⁰ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/4655>

²⁸¹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United. The Evolution of an Alliance*, Praeger Publishers, London (2004)

²⁸² *Ibidem*

Security Council. Apparently, diplomacy was winning over military operations but it gradually became clear that there were sharp divisions between the United States and the United Kingdom – on the one hand – and France and Germany – on the other hand.

Russia and China – the old NATO enemies – quietly came out against an American war but remained on the sidelines, given that NATO allies split up over the appropriateness of a vigorous military action against Saddam Hussein. While France and Germany trusted the UN Security Council’s inspection teams that were in charge of checking if Iraq still had weapons of mass destruction, the United States and the United Kingdom defined those inspection missions as useless, regardless of how different they were compared to those implemented in the 1990s. The Western and the Muslim world believed that the United States was using the inspections and the United Nations “as a cover for its invasion”²⁸³. In particular, the *Bush Doctrine*’s focus on the US justification to unilaterally start a war if necessary was considered to be a good reason to question Bush’s attitude towards inspections.

The pressure brought on European leaders to join the war against Iraq triggered a huge resentment, fuelled by the EU conviction that the United States was supporting Israel in a long-standing and extremely violent conflict against Palestinians. According to the European Union, it was necessary to give priority to the dramatic situation that was taking place in Palestine rather than to the Iraq’s problem. The newly elected German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder promised that he would never deploy troops or supported a military effort and, by doing so, he freed Germany from the traditional acquiescence to America. The German anti-American posture was also shared by France and by a huge part of European public opinion, which considered the use of force as illegitimate, illegal and misguided. And as a matter of fact, the North Atlantic Council was unable to implement a consensus-based resolution over the American demand for support in case of a war, given the division inside Europe.

Moreover, France and Germany refused to back Turkey – one of the most important NATO members – even in a case of a military attack by Iraq, creating a further friction with President Bush. A US-led invasion of Iraq – considering civilian casualties and the hard post-war reconstruction likely – was believed to strengthen Al Qaeda’s recruitment action and to fuel terrorism rather than substantially weakening it²⁸⁴.

During its history, NATO experienced a series of important crisis: in 1956, the USA decided not to support UK, France and Israel in their military attempt to avoid the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt; in 1955, Europe opposed the US war in Vietnam; in 1967, the French President Charles De Gaulle withdrew France from NATO’s integrated military command; in 1979, the USA and its Western European allies split up on how to manage the Afghanistan’s invasion by the Soviet Union and then –

²⁸³ *Ibidem*

²⁸⁴ *Ibidem*

in the 1990s – on how to deal with the disarray occurring in the Balkans. Nevertheless, the crisis that the transatlantic relationship faced after the election of George W. Bush in 2000 was the most serious in the history of the Atlantic Alliance.

The emerging divergences between the USA and Europe were fueled by the unilateralist and anti-NATO posture of the new US government. Moreover, President Bush and his officials made some statements following the 9/11 attacks asserting that he no longer considered the Alliance worthy of being led by the USA and therefore excluding the other NATO countries before waging war against Iraq.

Since the end of the Cold War, a US assertive international leadership role was firstly claimed by the US President George H.W. Bush and secondly by President Clinton, who unilaterally decided to include only Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary in the first wave of enlargement, abandoning the NATO consultations process.

Then, the advent to power of George W. Bush raised a number of issues, including the likely withdrawal of US troops from the Balkans to let the Europeans assume a military control. The 9/11 facts opened a new season in the relation between Europe and the USA. If, on the one hand, the Bush administration's priority was to build a strong international coalition against international terrorism, on the other hand, it was at least questionable and unusual that the US President did not make reference to the use of the NATO framework. The Iraq war gradually brought US-European divergences to the surface.

The main focus was on the “structural gap” between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean, given that European states had proved their inability to develop adequate military capabilities in relation to post-Cold War security risks and challenges. As a consequence, the United States lost confidence “in the extent to which it could count on its European allies”²⁸⁵. The belief that America and Europe were breaking away was strongly supported by the scholar Robert Kagan, who asserted that it was “time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world (...) On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: they agree on little and understand one another less and less”²⁸⁶. It seemed that Americans and Europeans came from two different planets, as Robert Kagan argued, writing that “Americans are from Mars, Europeans from Venus”²⁸⁷.

The Cold War's end imposed on NATO to find a new purpose and underlined the necessity to better manage the US-Europe relations. As Van Ham stated, “for non-Americans, this is gradually becoming a world where the US acts as legislator, policeman, judge and executioner”²⁸⁸ and, consequently, Europe needed to counterbalance the American superpower. In sum, the Bush administration called into question

²⁸⁵ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (2003)

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁸⁸ Stanley R. Sloan, Peter van Ham, *What Future for NATO?*, Centre for European Reform (2002)

the future role of NATO. The United States was believed to no longer consider the Alliance relevant to its interests, even if the European “junior partners” wanted to keep NATO alive. Further, President Bush was suspected of wanting to preserve the Alliance “but mainly as an extension of controversial US foreign and security policies”²⁸⁹. The fact that George W. Bush made unilateralism his distinguishing feature pushed European countries to strengthen the European Union as a counterbalance to the US hegemony.

Such a new attitude led to an important meeting between Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg in April 2003, whose outcome was an agreement on “establishing a separate EU military planning cell independent of NATO”²⁹⁰. It was later defined as “the most significant threat to NATO’s future”²⁹¹ by the US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns.

Somehow NATO has managed to survive to *Bush Doctrine*, for several reasons. After being re-elected for a second term in 2005, President Bush started a campaign to regain trust and cooperation of European countries. Together with the Secretary of State, he visited all the main European capitals to fix the damages done during his first term, making particular reference to the decision to start a conflict against Iraq. For instance, the new American resolution allowed NATO framework to take control of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission in Afghanistan.

President Bush gradually changed his mind by declaring that “NATO is the most successful alliance in the history of the world. Because of NATO, Europe is whole and united and at peace. NATO is an important organization, and the United States of America strongly supports it”²⁹². As he was proving to overcome the divisions behind the Iraq issue, also European countries began to accept a renewed NATO-friendly US approach.

Then, the European Union failed to show up as a counterbalance to the American superpower. The approval of a European Constitution would have been a crucial step to build a powerful and solid international actor but the 2005 referenda held in France and the Netherlands – where the ‘no’ votes were the majority – substantially blocked the ratification process of the EU Constitution. In that circumstance, the desire to safeguard national identities and cultures prevailed over the possibility to consolidate and strengthen the role of the EU as a “counterbalance” in world politics. At that stage, for European governments there was no alternative but to preserve the Alliance, given that it represented the most crucial symbolic and operational feature of the transatlantic relationship. In spite of divergences over Iraq and other aspects – including global warming, abortion, death penalty, gun control, the use of

²⁸⁹ Stanley R. Sloan, *How and Why did NATO survive the Bush Doctrine?*, NATO Defence College, Research Division, Rome (2008)

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*

²⁹¹ *Ibidem*

²⁹² White House Press Release, February 22, 2005: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050222-3.html>

military force –, there were fundamental common Euro-Atlantic values such as democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

Moreover, Eastern and Central European countries stressed their commitment to NATO's maintenance, since the Atlantic Alliance was still considered as the most effective tool to deter – and eventually stop – a possible renewed Russian expansion in its former sphere of influence.

Given that the United States was keeping its military leading role, it should have learned how to exert its hegemony without acting like one, embracing the principles of multilateral cooperation in order to win the peace. As President Theodore Roosevelt recommended, the USA was supposed to “speak softly and carry a big stick”²⁹³, as part of the *Big Stick Ideology*: it meant that peaceful negotiations were to be held while using the threat of the “big stick” – a military intervention – in case things went wrong. American administrations could dispose of *ad hoc coalitions* provided that those coalitions did not replace NATO's cooperation framework otherwise American administrations would have given the impression to pursue their own interests without considering NATO allies' contributions.

As long as the European Union did not equip itself with meaningful military capabilities, burden-sharing disputes among the United States and Europe were likely to re-emerge and trigger new crises. The Iraq issue proved that President Bush had ignored European views, due to the little contribution that European countries could offer to military operations. Suffice it to say that the United States spent “twice as much as the European Union: \$393 billion in 2003, compared with \$200 billion of combined EU defence spending”²⁹⁴.

As Stanley R. Sloan stated: “preserving cooperation among democratic states, of which the transatlantic allies are the essential core, is essential for the future security and well-being of them all. For that matter, such cooperation is essential to the effective functioning of the international system more broadly. Putting that cooperation at risk is unlikely to be the best answer to any imaginable future security issues”²⁹⁵.

The transatlantic link was damaged by a diplomatic struggle: the then French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin accused Bush of being “simplistic”²⁹⁶ while the German Minister for Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer declared that NATO allies could not be treated as “satellite states”²⁹⁷ and the European

²⁹³ Stanley R. Sloan, *How and Why did NATO survive the Bush Doctrine?*, NATO Defence College, Research Division, Rome (2008)

²⁹⁴ Daniel Fiott, *Strategic autonomy: towards 'European sovereignty' in defence?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) (2018)

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem*

²⁹⁶ Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford (2003)

²⁹⁷ *Ibidem*

Commissioner for External relations, Chris Patten, warned that not even a superpower could do everything on its own²⁹⁸.

President Bush underlined that the strategy of deterrence could not work against an extra-territorial enemy such as international terrorism and therefore he restated that the United States would not hesitate to pre-emptively use military force²⁹⁹. The designer of American *containment* policies, George Kennan, denounced the lack of any realistic plan to face the grave state of confusion that would have prevailed after the removal of Saddam Hussein³⁰⁰.

Unlike Germany, France did not exclude *a priori* and asked for international legitimacy, a demand which made the UN Security Council the scenario of a deep struggle. On 22 January 2003, the struggle assumed a more general nature. After the Chirac - Schröder Summit, it was established that only the UN Security Council could take decisions and that the war was the worst solution³⁰¹. As a response, the US Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld declared: "Germany and France represent the 'Old Europe' and the 'Old NATO'. If we look at the European side of NATO, we could say that the centre of gravity is shifting towards East. Besides Germany and France, there is a large number of European countries that support the United States"³⁰². German and French leaders were really upset.

Controversies grew up when *The Wall Street Journal* published a collective declaration of support for Bush politics by eight European countries – all NATO members –: Denmark, United Kingdom, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary³⁰³. While the first five countries were already part of the European Union, the last three were about to join it. That is why Germany accused those states of undermining the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). On 5 February, a more explicit document in support of President Bush was signed by the so-called *Vilnius 10*: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Albania, Croatia and Macedonia³⁰⁴. That document triggered the strong reaction of Chirac, who saw the possibility of an *Atlantic Lobby* that – once entered into the EU – would have challenged the French-German leadership and acted as a Washington's Trojan horse³⁰⁵.

²⁹⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁹⁹ George W. Bush, *Graduation Speech at West Point*:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/200206013.html> (2002)

³⁰⁰ Albert Eisele, *George Kennan Speaks Out About Iraq*, History News Network (2002)

³⁰¹ François Heisbourg, *The French-German duo and the search for a new European security model*, The International Spectator, Taylor & Francis (2004)

³⁰² Massimo Amorosi, Germano Dottori, *La NATO dopo l'11 Settembre: Stati Uniti ed Europa nell'epoca del terrorismo globale*, Rubbettino, Roma (2004)

³⁰³ José María Aznar, José-Manuel Durao Barroso, Silvio Berlusconi, Tony Blair, Vaclav Havel, Peter Medgyessy, Leszek Miller, and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *United We Stand*, Wall Street Journal, January 30, 2003.

³⁰⁴ Massimo Amorosi, Germano Dottori, *La NATO dopo l'11 Settembre: Stati Uniti ed Europa nell'epoca del terrorismo globale*, Rubbettino, Roma (2004)

³⁰⁵ *Ibidem*

Then, the crisis directly affected NATO. The USA began to think about somehow using NATO's framework, trying to involve NATO allies in a war with a really weak consensus. The Undersecretary of Defence – Paul Wolfowitz – exposed four possible options for NATO action: supporting Turkey in case of Iraqi retaliation on its territory; logistically supporting the allies involved in the war; a broader participation to the conflict or a post-war role for the Alliance. After having ignored the Alliance, Bush desired to test its cohesion by checking its loyalty to the major partner. While France, Russia and China – that were permanent members of the UN Security Council – threatened to veto the war option, Germany and Syria – non-permanent members of the UNSC – simply threatened to vote against Bush's decision. Nevertheless, it was clear that a great power could not be stopped by a veto, which rather could avoid the legitimation of an attack.

In order to run the War on Terror, the Bush administration assembled “the broadest group of nations ever jointly committed to a single, pragmatic purpose”³⁰⁶. Only through such a big coalition – which included some of the most powerful European states – the USA could hope to successfully address the transnational challenge of international terrorism.

On 20 March 2003, Iraq was attacked and the *Operation Iraqi Freedom* – from the first day – was joined by 250.000 Americans, 45.000 British, 2.000 Australians, 194 Polish and 594 Danish. President Bush put in place a *coalition of the willing*, a term used by President Bush to define military operations that were not completely covered by the umbrella of the United Nations or NATO. On the eve of the military intervention against Iraq, the White House published a list of the coalition members, then composed by 49 countries³⁰⁷. Coalition member states contributed with: “direct military participation, logistical and intelligence support, specialized chemical/biological response teams, over-flight rights, humanitarian and reconstruction aid, to political support”³⁰⁸.

Actually, many of the *willing countries* were not able to concretely contribute to the operations. One of the paradoxes was that Germany – ostracized by Washington for its opposition to the military intervention – gave a higher support to the US by sending *Patriot* missiles in Turkey and granting the usage of its bases and the right of overflight on its territory while keeping in Kuwait all the vehicles to discover the potential presence of chemical and biological weapons³⁰⁹. In March 2003, despite the lack of a UN formal authorisation, the war started and hundreds of thousands of soldiers – mainly Americans and British – were deployed in Iraq. In less than one month, the Iraqi capital Baghdad was conquered while Saddam Hussein was captured and then condemned to death in December 2003. After the fall of Saddam, the UN Security Council unanimously recognized USA and UK as “occupying powers” and

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*

³⁰⁷ <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030327-10.html>

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*

³⁰⁹ Philip H. Gordon, Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at war: America, Europe and the crisis over Iraq*, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. (2004)

invited all its members to contribute to stabilize the Iraqi situation and to favour the Iraqi self-government through the resolution 1483³¹⁰. Accordingly, the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq soon became the most crucial near-term priorities.

The post-conflict stage was managed by NATO, which got involved in the Iraq's transition toward stability and democracy after the request of the Iraqi Interim Government and the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1546³¹¹. Through the so-called *NATO Training Mission*, a strict relationship between NATO and Iraq was established and – under the political control of the North Atlantic Council – the Atlantic Alliance began “training Iraqi personnel both inside and outside Iraq and supporting the development of security institutions to help the country build effective armed forces and provide for its own security”³¹². Contributions came from all NATO member states, through the deployment of soldiers – as in the case of Italy – financial aids or provisions of equipment – as in the case of France and Germany. The establishment of a structured cooperation framework between NATO and the Interim Iraqi government served as a way to enforce all those initiatives.

While the *NATO Training Mission* in Iraq was largely shared by NATO countries, it was not the same for the Iraqi war. Indeed, the management of the Iraq's case could have reasonably represented the issue on which the Atlantic Alliance was likely to split in two – or more parts – or to completely collapse. The substantial opposition to the conflict by Berlin and Paris could be explained as a way to defend multilateralism and their position of fundamental international actors. Basically, they aimed to build an international system in which the USA was not supposed to have free rein and the strengthening of the French-German axis was seen as a positive stepping-stone³¹³.

The debate about Iraq gradually constituted a real challenge to the transatlantic partnership and to the main institution behind the world order after the Second World War: the United Nations Security Council. Indeed, the UNSC did not achieve a consensus on how to deal with Iraq and was defined as “irrelevant” by President Bush³¹⁴. Moreover, NATO – considered as “the most successful and enduring military alliance in the history”³¹⁵ – was not able to unify its member states and, above all, “had great difficulty responding even to a request from one of its members, Turkey, to plan for its defence”³¹⁶. At the same time, the European Community was more than ever divided over the decision to wage war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

³¹⁰ United Nations Security Council: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc1483.pdf>

³¹¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sc8117.doc.htm>

³¹² NATO Handbook, Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels (2006)

³¹³ *Ibidem*

³¹⁴ George W. Bush, *Speech to the UN General Assembly*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/12/iraq.usa3>

³¹⁵ Philip H. Gordon, Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at war: America, Europe and the crisis over Iraq*, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. (2004)

³¹⁶ *Ibidem*

Indeed, after the Iraq crisis exploded, the future of European integration and the relationship with the United States soon became the main sources of tension among European governments. The Iraq issue gradually represented not just the result of transatlantic divergences but also a meaningful cause of them, contributing to depict the United States as “unilateralist and militaristic in European eyes and Europeans as unreliable and ungrateful allies in American eyes”³¹⁷. The famous scholar Francis Fukuyama - who had previously praised the common Euro-Atlantic values with the “End of History” after the Cold War's end – believed that the war option had created “deep differences”³¹⁸ within the Euro-Atlantic community and that “the US-European rift was not just a transitory problem”³¹⁹.

Further, the former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned that “if the existing trend in transatlantic relations continues, the international system will be fundamentally altered”³²⁰ while the famous American columnist Charles Krauthammer stressed the identity crisis of NATO³²¹. The Iraq crisis undoubtedly tarnished NATO's image as a whole.

The dispute over Iraq distinguished itself as a further proof that the United States and Europe crashed into each other when they had to define challenges or national priorities, determine threats and enforce foreign and defensive policies.

Surely, the divisions emerged during the Iraqi war highlighted growing structural differences in perspectives, capabilities and strategies between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Nonetheless, the Transatlantic Alliance was to be saved and preserved because of the common goals to pursue, namely democracy, the rule of law and global stability. Europeans and Americans were substantially on the same side of history.

It is evident that the entity of the new global challenges did not unite America and its NATO allies in the same way as the Cold War did. Despite the lack of a common threat – such as the USSR – that bound together NATO member states, both America and Europe shared a common interest in preserving expectations, structures, habits and a responsibility to cooperate within a framework of political and military Alliance. The possibility for the United States to build a close cooperation with other major actors – such as India, Russia, Japan, Israel and Australia – could not be seen as a way to perfectly substitute an Alliance with European countries, namely those powers that were America's most like-minded, longstanding, democratic and militarily capable partners.

The newly emerged world challenges – implementing the spread of democracy and free markets, preventing the spread of terrorism and avoiding the weapons of mass destruction proliferation – stressed

³¹⁷ *Ibidem*

³¹⁸ Francis Fukuyama, *The West May Be Cracking*, International Herald Tribune (2002)

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*

³²⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, *Repairing the Atlantic Alliance*, Washington Post, (2003)

³²¹ Charles Krauthammer, *Reimagining NATO*, Washington Post, (2002).

the necessity to enforce a strong cooperation between America and the European Union as a whole and therefore to strengthen NATO, the two most powerful international actor all over the world.

The US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld – one of the critics of the Alliance – was not against a cooperative relation with Europe or anyone else but he believed that “such cooperation is better pursued on an ad hoc basis of mutual interest as appropriate, since the mission should determine the coalition”³²². On their side, European leaders perceived those words as a demonstration that they no longer had any influence in Washington. The costs of a progressive implosion of the Transatlantic Partnership – and of the Atlantic Alliance – would have been extremely high, leading to: a feeling of distrust among the old partners; a status of confrontation rather than cooperation; a decreasing readiness to support each other in case of need; a political and strategic struggle in Middle East, Asia and Africa. It was not the ideal context in which global leaders would have wanted to act.

As stated above, Europeans showed deep solidarity with the American administration after 9/11 but they did not assume that they were living in a different global context. If, on the one hand, European leaders believed that September 11 had changed the United States, on the other hand, the USA was convinced that September 11 had changed the world. Indeed, President Bush saw the international environment only through the filter of international terrorism while Europeans still paid great attention to the consequences of the Cold War's end in terms of new challenges as a whole.

If we compare US and the European Community, we will see that America has gradually developed “a much lower tolerance for threats than their European counterparts”³²³, as it was clear during the 1970s and 1980s, when Americans did not feel comfortable with the mutually assured nuclear destruction policy - and tried to build alternatives - while Europeans agreed on living with it. Starting from the 1990s, the US made a change in its foreign policy by choosing to forcefully intervene against the so-called “rogue states”³²⁴ – such as Iran and Iraq – and consequently spend millions of dollars in order to ensure American security in the face of a likely ballistic missile attack.

Moreover, Europeans were against Iraq's intervention due to their general opposition to war, since they had experienced war on their continent for years and did not want to undergo – once again – its devastating consequences. As a consequence, the threshold to decide whether war became necessary was naturally much higher. Then, the lack of a really powerful military power encouraged European European leaders to peacefully settle potential problems.

After the long-lasting struggle between the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, the affinity between the US and the European Community began to be debated. The fact that America emerged as the only global

³²² Stewart M. Patrick, *The Mission determines the Coalition*, Council on Foreign Relations (2009)

³²³ *Ibidem*

³²⁴ Antony Lake, *Confronting Backlash States*, Council on Foreign Relations (1994):

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/1994-03-01/confronting-backlash-states>

superpower raised doubts on whether the two sides of the Atlantic shared or not the same principles, interests or even the same conception of the world order. The Iraq crisis seemed to confirm that state of affairs. Given the implosion of the Soviet Union, neither the US nor European countries accepted to subordinate their convictions on Iraq “to the greater good of the Atlantic Alliance”³²⁵. Despite all the possible divergences, there was need for saving the Transatlantic Partnership and – above all – the Atlantic Alliance, as it continued to be the leading Organization in preserving international security and peace.

NATO had always been the heart of the Transatlantic Partnership. If the allies wanted the Alliance to survive, it was necessary to restructure and reorganize it. Since the begin of the 1990s, that program seemed well under way, as NATO implemented its post-Cold War enlargements and carried out its first combat and peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. In this way, the Alliance gave proof of its continued relevance by gaining a new sense of purpose and dynamism. Nonetheless, NATO’s institutional breakdown in the Iraq case showed off that its continued relevance could not be taken for granted because of its previous successes, as well as its prestige could not rely on its victory in containing and defeating the Soviet Union. In this regard, the creation of NATO Response Forces – established at the Prague Summit in November 2002 – went in the direction of a strategic reform that would have allowed the Alliance to promptly intervene wherever there was an emergency around the world.

Furthermore, once again an effective strengthening of a common European Union security and defence policy returned to be a core issue for the future of the transatlantic relationship. If Europeans wanted to be taken seriously by Washington and the rest of the world, they had to strongly enhance their military capabilities. Due to fiscal stringencies, European countries were unlikely to substantially increase their defence budgets but they should have done it, at least to some degree. Radical reforms were to include “better spending through more joint acquisitions, rationalization of the defence industrial base, and cutting bloated, immobile forces”³²⁶. The assumption backing up that approach was that European leaders needed to conceive their military forces as part of a global Alliance with global tasks and responsibilities to accomplish. Just like the Bosnian case in the first half of the 1990s, Iraq represented a further occasion in which the USA did not particularly take into account its European NATO allies. The reason was – once again – the same: the disproportion between US military capabilities and European military capabilities.

The lack of an increased and better European defence spending would have forced the European Union to work alongside a constantly evolving US military in a condition of persisting discrepancy. Without that, a division of labour policy made its way as a possible hypothesis where US troops were deployed

³²⁵ Philip H. Gordon, Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at war: America, Europe and the crisis over Iraq*, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. (2004)

³²⁶ *Ibidem*

for combat operations and European troops were deployed in peacekeeping missions³²⁷. The likelihood of such a transformation threatened to erode the sense of shared risk that an alliance demanded. An effective common European defence policy that complemented rather than duplicated the duties and functions of NATO was in the interest of both Europe and America. The alternative was that the US administrations would have continued to individually relate to European countries rather than engaging with Europe as a whole. It can therefore be argued that America had much to gain from a Europe capable of carrying out crucial military operations because some of the real dangers came from the stabilization of Iraq and the fight against terrorism.

One of the lessons given by the Iraq case was that – even for the most powerful global nation – power and resolve were not sufficient to secure an increasingly interdependent world. The solitary action of the United States would have fueled a feeling of resentment and opposition to the US authority. The hard challenges of that time required the USA to gain a broad legitimacy and a large amount of resources, that only an alliance with democratic European countries could provide. The problem was represented by Europe’s weakness and not by its potential strength.

³²⁷ *Ibidem*

Conclusions

As Dan Reiter states, “Alliances are central to international relations: they are the primary foreign policy means by which states increase their security”. Out of all the permanent security alliances, NATO has certainly represented an enduring multilateral military alliance in the history, based on a high degree of institutionalization – given the presence of a secretary-general, a permanent staff, and detailed rules regulating relations among member states.

The present work has answered the question: “Did post-Cold War NATO (1991-2004) become an obsolete Organization?”. The first chapter has demonstrated that post-Cold War NATO – despite the collapse of the USSR – has been able to find its place in the new world order, to give itself new tasks, prerogatives and functions and to guarantee its effectiveness in the face of different and more hardly predictable global challenges. This outcome has become possible after the debate between those who called for NATO and those who wanted it to stay alive was largely won by the latter.

NATO’s identity crisis was solved through the 1990 London Declaration and the 1991 NATO’s New Strategic Concept, which have been carefully analysed to explain the transformation of the Alliance in terms of new roles, strategic perspectives and approaches to the international security environment. It has been proved that NATO survived because of several reasons: avoiding a renewed Russian aggressive expansionism and nuclear proliferation in Europe; maintaining the American commitment for European security; promoting a shared management of the defence issue through a forum for the coordination of the Western security policies; providing economic and security benefits to the allies and encouraging democracy, especially in Eastern Europe that represented a source of tension.

The *out of area* issue is here depicted as a way through which NATO maintained its relevance by transcending the Euro-Atlantic area – and therefore its member states’ territory – and expanding its scope for action. The choice to accomplish *out of area* operations has given evidence of the Alliance’s ability to adapt itself to the new threats and challenges coming from outside its traditional area. The serious ethnic conflicts occurring in Bosnia and Kosovo – because of Milosevic’s criminal projects – constitute the proof that an international military alliance like NATO could still be of prominent importance. In the case of Bosnia, the success of NATO is explained through the ISFOR and SFOR operations, able to guarantee a long-term peace in that country after years of violent conflicts.

The case of NATO’s military intervention in Kosovo is particularly interesting because of the heated debate that has been opened on its legitimacy. Even if it was declared “illegal” because of the lack of UN consensus, I argue that it could not be said that the intervention was unjust, illegitimate or a violation of a third state’s sovereignty. Indeed, the humanitarian crisis that was taking place in Kosovo required a timely external action by NATO. By using principles of the International Law and the *Just War Theory* – as defined by Michael Waltzer – I have demonstrated that the “moral duty” behind NATO’s

intervention cannot be underrated. Moreover, the risk behind a possible spread of instability into the whole Euro-Atlantic region has been remarked as one of the further reasons to stop Milosevic's plans.

However, the focus on the methods adopted to carry out the military intervention aims to highlight the huge mistakes made by the Alliance. Indeed, the decision to implement an aerial bombing campaign – instead of deploying ground troops – has been defined as a disaster, given the hundreds of civilian deaths due to the chaotic bombings. Therefore, even if the military campaign carried out by the Atlantic Alliance succeeded in bringing Milošević to the negotiating table and in ending the conflict, we may conclude that NATO's military action proved to be a substantial "failure" because of the methods adopted by the Organization and because of the lacked decision to adopt ground forces – a measure that could minimise civilian casualties. Kosovo was the proof that NATO still did not have a proper method. Despite the severe miscalculation, international crises like the one of Kosovo constituted a good evidence of the fact that NATO still had a crucial relevance for international security.

Then, I have analysed a further *out of area* operation, i.e. Afghanistan, in order to stress the first-ever invocation of the Washington Treaty's Article 5 – individual or collective self-defence in case of an attack against a NATO member state – after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Due to the American belief that the inter-allied coordination would be ineffective and harmful for the purpose of the mission, NATO European allies only provided a coordination work during the first phase of the conflict. Despite that, it is important to underline the important post-conflict role played by NATO in managing the *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)*, put in place to provide effective security across Afghanistan by training, advising and supporting the Afghan National Security Forces in the face of new potential terrorist threats. Once again, the Atlantic Alliance acted as a relevant international actor in the stabilisation process and in the fight against international terrorism.

The analysis has then shifted towards NATO's relationship with Eastern Europe and Russia after the Cold War. In the second chapter, I argue that NATO's *open door policy* and its subsequent implementation of NATO's enlargement have represented a crucial step to build a new security architecture in the whole Euro-Atlantic area, in the direction of a more peaceful and stable region through the spread of democratic principles and institutions. In this regard, the Study on NATO's enlargement has been useful to express its huge merits in overcoming Cold War's divisions and starting negotiations with Eastern European countries, firstly in 1999 and, secondly, in 2004.

Both waves of NATO's expansion are here described as a major part of the Alliance's crucial adaptation process to the new international order. The end of the Cold War had removed the threat of a simultaneous, full-scale attack on all of NATO's European fronts but risks to European security remained in place in multi-faceted and multi-directional forms and were therefore hard to predict and evaluate. In such a context, it has been demonstrated that the widening of the Euro-Atlantic area has successfully

enhanced the stability of the post-Cold War European framework, providing NATO with the capabilities and means to face those risks and challenges. The creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council – which later became Euro-Atlantic Council –, and the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) constitute a fundamental framework through which the Alliance has built a considerable degree of cooperation and dialogue with Eastern European countries and Russia, decreasing the risk of conflict coming from misunderstanding.

NATO and EU enlargements have proved to be mutually supportive and parallel processes, meant to strengthen the international security environment, by sharply declining the threat of a re-emergent large-scale military attack.

The debate upon NATO's enlargement has been functional to explain one of the leading thesis behind it: the “democratic peace theory”, which asserts that democracies are generally unlikely to fight each other. Despite being born as a military Organization, the Atlantic Alliance has also gradually turned into a transatlantic community focused on fundamental shared values: individual freedoms, civil liberties, and political rights. Therefore, NATO has been capable of creating not only a single security space, but also a single normative space – a space in which democratic principles, respect for human rights, free market economies and a long lasting peace could flourish.

It has been essential to underline NATO's massive role in stabilizing Eastern Europe, as it served as a vehicle for building and consolidating stability and democracy in a space that had been under the USSR rule for almost fifty years. The fact that many countries, despite the Cold War's end, were continuing to apply for NATO membership confirmed the relevance and validity of the Atlantic Alliance.

Along with the normalization process between NATO and Eastern Europe, the rapprochement process between NATO and Russia has covered a significant part of the second chapter. The focus on the “NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security” and on the “NATO-Russia Council” has given proof of NATO's ability to create a “special-status relationship”, choosing to involve the former enemy in a shared decision-making process on the most important fields of interest and therefore avoiding the rise of a new Russian aggressive approach.

My thesis has also aimed to provide a critical perspective on NATO-Russia relations, without undervaluing the sources for tension and the causes for division and dissent between the Cold War former enemies. It is therefore argued that NATO's enlargement produced a deterioration in the relationship between the Alliance and Russia. Moscow's strong hostility to NATO expansion has been motivated by an interplay between strategic imperatives – given that Russia perceived that process as a form of encirclement – and status concerns – given that Russia had lost its prestige and power and considered NATO's projects as a further offense to its ascendant power –, which mutually reinforced each other amplifying Russian response.

Nonetheless I conclude that the belief according to which NATO was encircling Russia was not properly correct and a little bit overstated. Indeed, Russia's land border covered over 20.000 kilometers and less than one-sixteenth of that size (1.215 kilometers) was shared with NATO member states. Moreover, Russia shares land borders with 14 countries and only 5 of them belonged to the Atlantic Alliance.

The rise to power of Vladimir Putin is depicted as a change of course with respect to Boris Yeltsin. In my study, the figure of President Putin is then strictly linked with the possibility of a new reconfiguration of NATO-Russia relationships. Indeed, the interview with President Amato has provided a proof that the first Putin was really open to enjoy the Western world and NATO. He has underlined the great opportunity lost by the West and NATO, that did not turn into an "Organization for the European security" and did not include Russia, as the then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana had proposed.

Then, the way in which NATO implemented both the waves of enlargement produced a progressive deterioration in the relationship with Russia. The former NATO's enemy could have been consulted and better informed about all the steps that would have brought former communist countries into the Alliance. As a consequence, NATO has succeeded in the negative outcome of finding again the old enemy and so did Russia with NATO and the West.

The non-inclusion of Russia into NATO – or at least into a much closer relationship with the West – has succeeded in pushing Russia towards the East – in particular China – and towards different multilateral organizations. Among those frameworks, in my view, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – defined as the "NATO of the East" – stands out as a particularly crucial body. The fact that Russia considered the SCO "as a counterweight, and potentially even a geopolitical rival to NATO" has been mentioned as a possible danger for the Atlantic Alliance.

The third chapter has proved that the development of an ever-closer relationship with the European Community represented a crucial factor through which the Atlantic Alliance has succeeded in maintaining its validity the new post-Cold War reality. Both NATO and the European Community – before and after the Cold War – have played a crucial role in preserving and strengthening the security landscape: NATO did it through its defensive political-military structure while the EU did it promoting stability through political and economic integration, together with evolving military capabilities. The focus on the Western European Union (WEU) has been useful to explain that it has represented not only a way to develop European defence capabilities but also a way to build and bolster the European pillar of NATO.

The so-called 1992 Petersberg Declaration is particularly important as it outlines the first step of NATO-WEU integration and cooperation. A crucial moment in the direction of a NATO's European pillar is represented by the establishment of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO. Through the ESDI, European allies have effectively contributed to NATO activities as a proof of their

shared responsibilities in strengthening the transatlantic partnership. The identification of European “separable but not separate capabilities” is defined as a revolutionary achievement in the balance of power between NATO and the European Community.

The European inability to address the conflicts that were taking place in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s produced a new approach to the common EU security dimension, given the discrepancy between its massive economic power and its military power. The end of the 1990s has marked a new relationship between the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union, which began to work side by side. The Franco-British Summit at Saint Malo is relevant in this regard, since it has given a new impetus to the changing of the EU attitude towards the acquisition of military capabilities. For the first time, France and the United Kingdom – the two most important EU military powers – were agreeing on the building of a European Security and Defence Policy and therefore on the creation of a European military force, able to autonomously act with readiness in the presence of international crises. It is a further response to the EU failure in addressing the Balkan wars during the 1990s. The 2003 “Headline Goal” is a direct consequence of the Saint-Malo Summit, given that it establishes the creation of a common European force of up to 60.000 soldiers.

The begin of the new millennium is characterized by the transfer of security responsibilities from the Western European Union to the European Union, which gives life to a new dimension in the NATO-EU relationship, as demonstrated by the 2003 Berlin Plus Agreements. Those agreements soon become a crucial step in the path towards an ever-increasing rapprochement between the two international Organizations. The fact that the European Union could draw on NATO's collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations marked a historic turning point in the progressive NATO-EU integration process. The first-ever EU military interventions – *Operation Concordia* and *Operation EUFOR Althea* – have been analysed to demonstrate how the EU has successfully made use of assets belonging to the Atlantic Alliance, implementing an effective cooperation.

The chapter argues that the development of European military capabilities and assets does not represent a disadvantage or a danger for NATO and the United States but rather an advantage for the Alliance as a whole. As long as the EU-NATO cooperation grows stronger, global challenges will be more effectively addressed. The focus on the relationship between European countries and the United States is functional to understand how American administrations perceived the progressive evolution of the Western European Union as a dangerous attempt to develop a political and strategic independence of the European Community and therefore as a worrying weakening of Washington’s absolute strategic control over Europe.

Unlike the other US Presidents, President Kennedy’s words in favour of a united Europe as a partner – and not as a rival – have been mentioned as a symbol for a cooperation on an equal basis between the

two sides of the Atlantic. As it is explained, a major degree of autonomy and independence from the US has not been achieved due to the lack of courage and far-sightedness by European countries. A considerable European empowerment would have been fundamental to build the “European pillar” and to guarantee a greater effectiveness on the field. The building of NATO’s European pillar has never been realized also because of a resolute opposition by the United States, always reluctant to give up its strategic control over the European continent. This strict control has been exercised in several ways: prohibiting the European allies from coming together before Atlantic Councils; prohibiting the creation of European High Commands, able to study common strategies outside of NATO; entrusting the US Commander with an exclusive authority over European armed forces that were assigned to NATO, thus taking them away from individual national governments.

Moreover, American administrations tacitly pushed for the dissolution of the Western European Union (WEU) – the only European autonomous Organization in the field of continental defence – and placed American Generals at the head of the main European NATO Commands while removing the autonomy to the minor ones.

This condition of total European strategic subordination to the major partner could be tolerated during the Cold War, due to the serious Soviet threat, but it is impressive to observe how that condition continued to remain in force after many years after the end of the Cold War. The EU should have demanded for the adaptation of old NATO structures to the new international environment in order to facilitate the European unity’s progress, capable of – where necessary – helping the American ally through an autonomous military framework. This would have allowed the emergence of a renewed international EU authority. In order to claim some degree of major autonomy, I have asserted that European countries should have proved their existence as an independent political and strategic actor and to autonomously show their will as a whole. Internal divisions – emerged in the attempt to adopt the European Constitution and during the Iraqi war – did not contribute to fulfil that project.

The dissolution of the Western European Union – and the subsequent transfer of WEU functions to the EU – is described as a serious mistake. In spite of a political and economic Organization which also carry out military tasks (such as the EU), a specific military Organization – such as the Western European Union – could have been a better suited vehicle to build an effective European military platform. The dilution of military and strategic matter is linked with the decision to disband the WEU.

Finally, I have focused my attention on the *Bush Doctrine* and on the 2003 Iraqi war, testing the consequences of the new US neoconservative ideology on NATO. The transatlantic rift – which mainly involved France, Germany and the USA – behind the decision of waging war against Saddam Hussein has provoked the most severe crisis inside the Atlantic Alliance. Given that Bush considered the European military capabilities as inadequate, the notion of “coalition of the willing” has been used to

explain that the American administration's belief that European countries were more like a burden rather than an added value. The main goal was to show that NATO has survived to *Bush Doctrine* and namely unilateralism and pre-emptive conflicts. It was not an easy challenge and NATO's survival has been put to a severe test. The Iraq case is indeed of particular interest because it could have represented the issue on which the Atlantic Alliance was likely to split in two or more parts or to completely collapse. It has been a considerable cause of transatlantic divergences in terms of national priorities, threats, foreign and defensive policies.

My study has given evidence that – despite divergencies – the USA and the European countries share crucial common Euro-Atlantic values such as liberal-democracy, the rule of law, global stability and the responsibility to cooperate within a framework of a political and military Alliance. Moreover, this work shows that the United States could not build a close cooperation with other major actors because European countries are America's most like-minded, longstanding, democratic and militarily capable partners. These concepts are validated by making reference to the post-Cold War challenges, which required a broad legitimacy and a large amount of resources – that only an Alliance with democratic European nations could provide. The post-war NATO mission in Iraq – aimed to train Iraqi personnel and support the development of security institutions in charge of the country's own security – is here presented as a way to heal the wounds between the U.S and its NATO European allies.

This thesis concludes that preserving the Atlantic Alliance and cooperation among liberal-democratic states is something crucial for the future Euro-Atlantic security. Nevertheless, as long as European countries do not develop relevant military capabilities, problems of burden-sharing between the two sides of the Atlantic are more likely to re-emerge and trigger new crises. The strengthening of a common EU security and defence policy has turned out to be a core issue to show how crucial the burden-sharing was – and is – within the NATO framework. The conclusion is that European leaders need to conceive their military forces as part of a global Alliance, with global tasks and responsibilities to accomplish, otherwise the sense of shared risk that an alliance demanded would be eroded.

Appendix: Interview with Giuliano Amato³²⁸

Question: *Which was the status of NATO-Russia relationship after the end of the Cold War? How did it change after the rise to power of Vladimir Putin in Russia?*

Answer: *The collapse of the USSR paved the way to a new possible chapter, mostly for the new relationships that could be established between NATO (the West more in general) and Russia. Russia at that time was somehow eager and ready to join the West. Russians felt Europeans somehow because the side of their culture and soul that is European seemed to prevail at that time. It is no secret that President Yeltsin tried to persuade NATO about the possibility to include Russia. We can't forget that, in the early 90's, Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, sent its own peacekeepers to the Balkans – in support of our NATO soldiers – and it was included in the Partnership for Peace. In 1996, the appointment of Javier Solana as the new NATO Secretary General – from 1995 to 1999 – seemed to open a window on a historic turning point in the relations between Russia and NATO. He stood out as one of the best thinkers and most far sighted European leaders, as he proposed the transformation of NATO into an Organization for the European security that was able to include Russia: one of the crucial conditions to face the new world order. That kind of Organization would have been focused on common interests such as the containment of local conflicts and the fight against international terrorism.*

Nonetheless, NATO allies still had a great deal of distrust towards Russia and Russia, even supporting that hypothesis, had a very weak bargaining power. Therefore, Solana's proposal did not receive any substantial feedback and things turned out differently, creating the premises for a cosmetic rapprochement process between NATO and Russia and for the preservation of an order that became more and more difficult to read. After a long debate, NATO gave life to a "special relationship" with Russia through the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and the 2002 NATO-Russia Council: it was a way to assert the end of the conflict with the old enemy and, at the same time, its alienation with respect to the Atlantic Alliance. Surely, the Western belief that Eastern European states should have become members both of European Union and of NATO was not helpful. The first round of NATO enlargement – planned in 1997 and occurred in 1999 – brought the Alliance closer to Russia and began to undermine Yeltsin's and Russia's perception about NATO's intentions.

³²⁸ Constitutional Court, Roma, Italy, 29.10.2019

Nevertheless, with the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, there were new and solid opportunities to develop a different relationship between NATO and Russia. The first Putin was really open to enjoy the Western world and NATO. I am personally a witness of his degree of openness, as I have been the first foreign Prime Minister that President Putin met right after his first election. First of all, he wanted to push away the perception of Russia as a violent actor in managing the situation in Chechnya and then he reiterated his will to bring Russia into a geopolitical space that was near to European countries. Clearly he was ready to become part of a wider family and he cared about making Russia a great European country. The final step of that process would have been the inclusion of the Kremlin into NATO, as the first Putin wanted. It is not surprising, since he worked in Germany with the KGB and he took root within Middle-Europe. Unfortunately, the European interlocutors did not face that possible new partnership in the most appropriate way: Russia was seen as a power to stem rather than a power to engage with.

The second round of NATO enlargement drew a line under the possibility to develop a new kind of partnership between the two former enemies. NATO led that process up to an unacceptable point for Russia. Bringing NATO directly at the borders of Russia was a reckless move. Just think if that happened to the USA: the USA would have never accepted to have a hostile Alliance at its borders with Canada. Bringing NATO to the borders of a country like Russia that was historically proud of itself as long as it was strong toward the others did not help. As Henry Kissinger stated in his famous book – “World Order” –, there has always been a link between Russia’s border security and its aggressiveness. He warned us that, historically, Russians had always wanted to feel secure, to be respected in the international arena and that if they feel their borders at risk, they prefer to act before the others do it.

It is clear, Eastern European countries were asking for protection from Russia. In the aftermath of the Cold War, they were free from the USSR’s yoke and they were no longer colonies of the Cominform. Nevertheless, they did not perceive the end of Communism and of the USSR as the end of a potential aggressive approach by the new Russia. The West went along with the Eastern countries’ requests. Subsequently, the race of the eastern countries to defend from Russia and to open negotiations to join NATO and the European Union – together with the choice of the US to deploy a missile defence complex in Poland against Iran – proved to be key factors for the progressive deterioration of relations between Russia, the West and NATO. Little by little, we succeeded in the very much negative outcome of finding again the old enemy and so did Russia with NATO and the West.

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Summary

CHAPTER I: The Post-Cold War NATO from 1991 to 9/11

With the end of the Cold War, NATO had achieved its primary target: acting as a deterrent to an aggressive approach of the Soviet Union. For 40 years, the Atlantic Alliance had managed to defend the West from a potential Soviet military aggression and it had done so in a preemptive way. The rise of a new full-fledged international order was the consequence of the decades-long contention. In particular, the focus of the post-Cold War period was about understanding how the profound change of the international context could affect NATO and which path it could follow to make its way within the new post-bipolar international order. What changed after 1989 was the unpredictability of the new world. On one hand, during the aftermath of the World War II, relations among states were channelled into the strict contrast between USSR and USA, which drew a clear line among enemies and allies, making everything else dependent on the two superpowers; on the other, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Empire radically changed the balance of power in international politics, freeing up the fractures and the interests which had been previously constrained by the bipolar logic.

This research work aims to verify if NATO has become obsolete after the implosion of the USSR or if it has been able to maintain its relevance and validity in the new world (dis)order. Post-Cold War NATO no longer had a counterpart and – in the early 1990s – it found itself facing a dilemma: why should it have survived without the threat that had justified its existence? That is why many analysts and scholars questioned its role, stressing the alleged absence of any purpose in the new post-Cold War Period. A clash between a minimalist approach and a maximalist approach questioned the existence of the Atlantic Alliance. Scholars supporting the minimalist approach – such as Christoph Bertram – called for NATO to dissolve and required that the Alliance gave way to the United Nations or to new organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Realist school of thought – an expression of the minimalist approach – asserted that once the enemy – which had given birth to NATO and had kept it alive – was dead, it seemed logic to disband the Alliance. It was claimed that the Alliance was in a deep crisis and the acronym NATO was given a new meaning: *No Alternative to Obsolescence*.

Instead, scholars supporting the maximalist approach – such as Robert O. Keohane – underlined the permanent utility of NATO. In the aftermath of the Cold War, NATO began to be rethought. The major innovation proposed was about a changing from a containment policy to a concert policy, a new form of organization without a precise enemy and with the aim of developing the tasks of a security community, a group of nations among which war was to be tacitly excluded. According to David S. Yost, NATO survived because of several reasons: maintaining the American commitment for European security; avoiding nuclear proliferation in Europe; promoting a shared management of the defence issue through

a forum for the coordination of the Western security policies; providing military, strategic and political benefits to the allies while encouraging democracy.

NATO's survival was something memorable, since – throughout history – there had been few military alliances managing to outlive the defeat of its enemy. Obviously, if NATO wanted to reassert its relevance, it should have transformed and evolved, maintaining its authentic nature as an instrument of collective security and gaining new tasks and responsibilities. A first step towards a crucial restructuring of the Organization was represented by the adoption of the 1990 London Declaration, whose main outcome was the recognition of an evolving political landscape. As a consequence, NATO moved from confrontation to cooperation and therefore approached a rising Russian Federation and Eastern European countries, namely the former Warsaw Pact countries which were no longer perceived as enemies. Then, the second crucial step in the new strategic framework was the Rome International Summit and the subsequent formulation of the 1991 *New Strategic Concept*, a document through which the member states of NATO defined the new role of the Alliance, the strategic perspectives and the renewed approach to the international security. The tasks were established in light of the common threats evaluation.

The challenges and the risks that NATO had to face in the area of international safety were obviously different from those of the past. The threat of a complete and simultaneous attack on all the European fronts of NATO had been eliminated and therefore it was no longer the focus of the Alliance's strategy. Unlike the main danger in the past, the residual risks for the security were multi-faceted in nature, multi-directional and accordingly hardly predictable and evaluable. Western powers identified three great factors of potential conflict. The first was linked to the political evolution of what was left of the old enemy, the USSR, whose conventional forces and nuclear stockpile were meaningfully larger than those of any other European countries and comparable to those of the United States; the second factor of potential conflict was represented by ethnic and religious conflicts in former Yugoslavia and by tensions behind the resurgence of territorial disputes in Central and Eastern Europe; the third factor included the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, which constituted a serious threat to the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.

The so-called “*out of area* issue” embodied one of the main points of the debate which followed the end of the Cold War. The new strategic context posed NATO an existential dilemma: on one hand, there were those who agreed to transform the Alliance into a “global organization”, which could intervene by transcending its member states' territory; on the other, there were those who did not agree and thought the right approach was about maintaining NATO as a “regional organization”, which kept its traditional tasks within its traditional member states' borders. NATO Heads of State and government had to decide to “go out of area or out of business”. By following this perspective, it was decided to accomplish *out of area* operations, moving from safeguarding a common territory to defending the common interests of NATO's member states, no matter where the potential threats were located.

The downfall of the Yugoslav Federation in June 1991 and the subsequent conflicts in Yugoslavia could constitute a likely threat to the Euro-Atlantic area's stability and soon became the chances for NATO to show its potential in crisis management circumstances. In 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence, triggering the reaction of the Serbian nationalist President Slobodan Milošević who did not want the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation and used the pretext of protecting the Serbian minorities in those areas to militarily intervene and create a "Great Serbia". Given the huge number of deaths due to Bosnian-Serb paramilitary forces, in 1993, NATO was requested by the UN to enter into action through the implementation of a no-fly zone to avoid Serbian aircrafts over Bosnia. The ongoing massacre of Bosnian Muslims represented a real breakthrough. As a consequence, impressive NATO air strikes forced Milošević to give up. The Dayton Agreements (1995) dictated the conditions for peace in the country. Moreover, through the Implementation Force (IFOR) and the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), NATO deployed around 60.000 peacekeepers, successfully deterring hostilities and stabilising peace. The case of Bosnia proved that an Organization like NATO was still relevant, even if it still did not have a proper method.

The conflict rapidly moved to Kosovo, which soon became NATO's second *out of area* operation. After Tito's death and the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, a huge part of the Kosovar Albanians majority began to push for a greater autonomy from Serbia. Once again, the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević opposed any attempt to reach an independence within the framework of Yugoslavia. Violence escalated rapidly after 1995, when Milošević began to ruthlessly suppress the protests and to carry out a brutal and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Albanian majority of Kosovo. Hence, Kosovar Albanians started an armed struggle through the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). As civilian casualties increased, Milošević and its Army were identified by the UN as the only responsible of the ongoing humanitarian disaster. On 24 March 1999, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana gave the order to start the *Allied Force Operation*, a large-scale air campaign carried out by NATO to stop the ethnic cleansing and to bring Milošević back to the negotiating table. Moreover, the risk behind a possible spread of instability into the whole Euro-Atlantic region was remarked as one of the further reasons to stop Milosevic's plans. The bombing implemented by NATO forces destroyed barracks and fundamental military installations but also public buildings, bridges, official government facilities, industrial plants and private companies, causing the death of around 500 civilians. After more than two months of intense bombings, Milošević had to surrender. The Kumanovo Agreement (9 June 1999) between NATO and Milošević prepared the ground for a NATO-led military force, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), responsible for avoiding new struggles between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians and restoring order and peace within Kosovo.

The legitimacy of NATO intervention in 1999 was strongly challenged. Even if the *Operation Allied Force* was declared "illegal" due to the lacked consensus of the UN Security Council, it fell within the

theoretical framework of *Just War* tradition and *Jus ad Bellum*, as defined by Michael Walzer. Considering the crimes against humanity and the ethnic cleansings that were taking place in Kosovo, NATO had the “moral duty” to intervene: it was surely a justified campaign. Nonetheless, the methods used by NATO were highly questioned, since hundreds of people died because of the bombings. Although the military campaign carried out by the Atlantic Alliance succeeded in ending the conflict, the *Operation Allied Force* proved to be a substantial “failure” because of the methods adopted by the Organization and because of the lacked decision to adopt ground forces. NATO air forces were obliged to carry out bombing attacks from an altitude of 15.000 ft or higher because of the Serbian anti-aircraft artillery. In doing so, the visual identification of targets became difficult, making the distinction between military convoys and civilian refugees an arduous task. The *Operation Allied Force* was responsible for bombing mistakes, such as in the case of the unintentional bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade or in the case of civilians affected. Despite the severe miscalculation, international crises like the one of Kosovo constituted a good evidence of the fact that NATO still had a crucial relevance for international security.

A further demonstration of NATO’s relevance was provided by the following *out of area* operation: NATO’s military intervention in Afghanistan. It was carried out after the 9/11 terrorist attacks through the first-ever activation of the Washington Treaty’s Article 5 – individual or collective self-defence in case of an attack against a NATO member state. The War on Terror began on 7 October 2001, when the USA launched the bombing against Afghanistan through the *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF), based on Article 51 of the UN Charter. The US unsuccessfully called upon the Taliban to extradite Osama Bin Laden. As a consequence, the US administration, appealing to the right of individual and collective self-defence, decided to eradicate the Taliban regime. 9/11 initially seemed to strengthen the transatlantic relationship and to revitalize the Atlantic Alliance, as proved by the huge support given by Canada and all the other European powers to NATO’s senior partner. Nevertheless, that spirit of good feeling toward the United States gradually waned, since – within a few weeks – old contrasts and cleavages once again materialized within the Alliance, endangering the survival of an Alliance which had endured over half a century. Due to the American belief that the inter-allied coordination would be ineffective and harmful for the purpose of the mission, NATO European allies only provided a coordination work (air and naval operations) during the first phase of the conflict.

The European uneasiness was increased by George W. Bush’s requests for greater defence investments from the European allies. Once Kabul had been conquered, the United Nations – on December 2001 – endorsed the presence of a NATO coalition in Afghanistan. Therefore, the Atlantic Alliance started to play an important post-conflict role through the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), put in place to provide effective security across Afghanistan by training, advising and supporting the Afghan National Security Forces in the face of new potential terrorist threats. Once again, the Atlantic Alliance

acted as a relevant international actor in the stabilisation process and in the fight against international terrorism.

CHAPTER II: The Normalization Process with the East and Russia

One of the other crucial challenges for the Alliance was surely represented by the post-Cold War relationship with Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), which had gained independence from the USSR. The end of the Cold War was offering NATO an extraordinary opportunity to build a renewed European security architecture in the whole Euro-Atlantic area, providing increased stability, democracy and security without giving life to new dividing lines. The instrument to realize such a massive project was NATO enlargement, which gradually proved to be the major part of the Alliance's crucial adaptation process to the new international order. The so-called "Study on NATO enlargement" (1995) constituted a stepping-stone to start negotiations with CEECs and to progressively overcome Cold War's divisions. At the July 1997 Madrid summit, NATO ushered in the so-called *open door policy*. On that occasion, the Atlantic Alliance invited the *Visegrad Three* – Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland – to start accession talks over their membership. Then, on March 1999, they officially turned into the new members of the Alliance. After the 2002 Prague Summit, seven other countries – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – followed them and formally applied for membership, then joining NATO in 2004 through the so-called *big bang expansion*. Central and Eastern European countries perceived the content of the Washington Treaty's Article 5 (i.e. the commitment to a collective defence) as the fundamental reason to join the Alliance, due to their concern for a new potential Russian aggression. Thanks to the second wave of enlargement, the Alliance considerably expanded its scope of action, managing to cover an area ranging from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, a space which constituted the Iron Curtain in the past. Widening the Euro-Atlantic area was believed to be the best mean in the face of multi-faceted and multi-directional threats that were hard to predict and evaluate.

The main goal was to provide the Alliance with a new shape in view of the 21st century and the hope of the allies was to explain that the Organization was not only opening to other candidates but also evolving to comply with the new defence agenda and with the new equilibrium between US and European responsibilities within the Alliance. Scholars from different schools of thought argued about why the Organization expanded and diverged on whether the enlargement process was positive or negative for the international order. The Neorealist school of thought – whose main exponents were Kenneth Waltz and George F. Kennan – generally viewed NATO enlargement as a dangerous process for European stability, since it was likely to draw new lines of division in Europe alienating and turning Russia towards aggressiveness and even ultranationalism. Indeed, relations with the Russian Federation and the risk of undermining Western relations with that country constituted the lens through which neorealists analysed

NATO enlargement. By contrast, the sociological institutionalist school of thought – whose main exponents were Frank Schimmelfennig and Daniel Freid – identified a divergent rationale behind NATO's enlargement and positively welcomed NATO expansion. This theory argued that – despite being born as a military Organization – the Alliance also turned into a transatlantic community focused on fundamental shared values: individual freedoms, civil liberties, and political rights. The leading thesis behind this approach was the “democratic peace theory”, asserting that democracies were generally unlikely to fight each other. Therefore, NATO has been capable of creating not only a single security space, but also a single normative space – a space in which democratic principles, respect for human rights, free market economies and a long lasting peace could flourish.

Through both post-Cold War waves of enlargement, NATO asserted its massive role and influence on the international stage, succeeding in stabilizing Eastern Europe. Together with the expansion of the European Union, NATO expansion made a large scale-war between European countries nearly impossible and extended the zone of stability and security in a space under the USSR rule for the previous fifty years. The fact that many countries, despite the end of the Cold War, were continuing to apply for NATO membership confirmed the relevance and validity of the Atlantic Alliance. Along with the normalization process between NATO and Central-Eastern Europe, the rapprochement process between NATO and Russia has covered a significant part of NATO's agenda during the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. The development of cooperative, constructive and positive relations with Russia were indeed functional to a more secure and stable international community. Over the years, the two former enemies did an extensive work to transform the old antagonism – founded on ideological, political and military struggles – into an emerging and formally constituted partnership based on shared interests and constant dialogue.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Russia found itself at a crossroads: embracing an isolationist policy – and therefore keeping alive the belief that Russia still remained the old enemy – or being part of the new European and global political order, showing up a new face and trying to cooperate with the winning Alliance on different strategic fields. Despite several difficulties, Russia chose the second option and followed a path which was supposed to bring it much closer to the Western world. On its side, NATO had to choose between leaving Russia alone and isolated in the international scenario – finding again the old enemy – or involving Russia in a shared decision-making process on the most important fields of interest – and therefore avoiding the rise of a new Russian aggressive approach through diplomatic and political means or agreements.

NATO and Russia soon realized that they would need each other to avoid – and eventually face – any future conflict in Europe. The creation of the 1991 North Atlantic Cooperation Council – which later became the Euro-Atlantic Council in 1997 – and the 1994 Partnership for Peace (Pfp) constituted a fundamental framework through which the Alliance managed to build a considerable degree of

cooperation and dialogue on the most important international issues with Eastern European countries and Russia, decreasing the risk of conflict coming from misunderstanding.

While the NACC was a forum focused on multilateral dialogue, the PfP turned out to be a forum for individual cooperative relations with NATO, allowing single partners to choose their own priorities for cooperation. In 1997, NATO and Russia found an important convergence of interests formalizing the “NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security” (NRFA). The main outcome was the creation of the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC), a forum dedicated to consultations, consensus building and cooperation through joint decisions and joint actions among the two former adversaries. As time went on, the Founding Act – together with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the Partnership for Peace (Pfp) – proved to be an unsatisfactory framework in the eyes of Russia: it was an instrument through which NATO provided Russia with an active voice in the Alliance’s affairs without proposing membership.

Something more was surely needed in order to create a truly effective “special-status relationship” with a great power like Russia. The foremost reason at the base of the necessity to bring Russia closer to NATO was that it was the only country with nuclear and conventional capacities able to threaten the military security of the Alliance’s member states. Intensive negotiations between NATO member states led to the *2002 Pratica di Mare Summit*, an important NATO meeting which drew new cooperative relations between Russia and the Alliance. The meeting brought, for the first time, the new US President George W. Bush and the new Russian President Vladimir Putin around the same negotiating table. The main result of the Summit was the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which replaced the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) and set up “an improved mechanism” for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and joint action. Indeed, the formula “19+1” soon turned into the formula “at 20”: that meant that Russia was given a status of formal parity with respect to the other NATO member states, despite not being part of the Organization.

The switch from the PJC to the NRC contributed to build an enhanced climate of confidence, transforming consultations and the simple information exchange into a real concrete cooperation. The *2002 Pratica di Mare Summit* reflected the awareness that NATO allies and Russia had – at that moment – the same strategic priorities. The key areas where they shared common interests and concerns were: crisis management; the fight against international terrorism; non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons; arms control and confidence-building measures.

Nonetheless, despite different forms of cooperation, tensions between them had begun to rise with the first round of NATO enlargement and increased with the second one. That process did not start on NATO’s initiative: it started after the collapse of the USSR, when former Warsaw Pact countries pushed for joining the Alliance because of the concerns related to Russia. Although the West reassured Russia

that its expansion would not be put in place against her, many policymakers and military scholars disagreed. By analysing the sources of Russia's opposition to NATO's enlargement, there were generally three different kinds of explanation.

The first hypothesis was about strategic imperatives and national security concerns. It was focused on Russia's worry about the US and its NATO allies coming ever closer to its borders. The Russian President Yeltsin stressed his fear for a NATO's eastward expansion, as it represented – in the eyes of Russia – a direct threat to Russia's national security. The second hypothesis referred to Russia's status concerns and Cold War thinking. Some analysts and observers asserted that Russia – from the early years of the 1990s – was suffering from a “Cold War hangover”. The two waves of NATO enlargement made Russia feel involved into a renewed Cold War logic. This argument relied also on the role played by Russian status concerns. For instance, NATO enlargement substantially challenged the commonly held Russian perceptions of themselves as a great power. According to this perspective, Russian opposition to NATO expansion could be attributed to problems in dealing with the loss of the previous powerful empire and the Great Power international status. Finally, the third hypothesis was based on the idea that domestic political factors played a crucial role in explaining Russian hostility to NATO enlargement process. In 1995, Yeltsin endeavoured to adopt the same approach of communist forces towards the massive NATO expansionism – a strong opposition – so that there was no longer a major divergence between government and opposition on that issue. According to this perspective, President Yeltsin began to firmly oppose NATO enlargement because it was functional to placate communist-nationalist forces and those who challenged his presidency.

It can be argued that Moscow's strong hostility to NATO expansion was motivated by an interplay between strategic imperatives and status concerns, which mutually reinforced each other amplifying Russian response. Nevertheless, asserting that NATO was encircling Russia was not properly correct. That kind of statement ignored geography. Indeed, Russia's land border covered over 20.000 kilometers and less than one-sixteenth of that size (1.215 kilometers) was shared with NATO member states. Moreover, Russia shares land borders with 14 countries and only 5 of them belonged to the Atlantic Alliance. Then, if we consider NATO's presence outside its territory, the Alliance only had military corps in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Both peacekeeping operations had been carried out through the consensus of the UN Security Council, of which Russia was an important member.

The rise to power of Vladimir Putin in 1999 and 2000 as the new Russian President produced a new strategic approach. He became aware that the hegemonic distribution of power was likely to remain in force in the future and stated the necessity for Russia to play an increasingly active role in regional and global affairs. The Russian government realized that it could not challenge the United States directly on issues where the American administration had crucial interests at stake. Putin had to reckon with a realistic evaluation of Russia's place in the post-Cold War world. When Putin became the new Russian

President in 2000, he inherited a country which had been ignored on every crucial issue during the 1990s: the first wave of NATO enlargement, the 1995 NATO military intervention in Bosnia, the 1999 NATO mission in Kosovo against Serbia.

The 1990s and the early years of 2000s were years of crucial changes and challenges. The international global order could take different shapes at any moment. Certainly, the progressive evolution and transformation of NATO and Russia, together with their relationship, were the most crucial topics of world politics. In this context, the interview with Giuliano Amato – the former Italian President of the Council of Ministers from 1992 to 1993 and, later, from 2000 to 2001 – is particularly useful in order to have a better and clearer perspective on NATO-Russia relationship and on how the rise to power of Vladimir Putin could have drastically changed it. Amato represents a direct and precious witness to shed light on these topics since he was the first foreign Prime Minister to receive the visit of Vladimir Putin in 2000. According to his perspective, the first Putin was really open to enjoy the Western world and NATO. He believes that NATO missed a historic chance by failing to turn into an “Organization for the European security” and to include Russia, as the then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana had proposed in 1996. Of course, including Russia as a full new member would have represented an organizational and political challenge, leading to an historic and revolutionary transformation of the Alliance. Therefore NATO would have turned into a collective security organization – that resembled an UN-style body – rather than into a collective defence alliance.

Undoubtedly, the West has made some crucial mistakes in managing the relationship with Russia. Indeed, the way in which NATO implemented both the waves of enlargement produced a progressive deterioration in the relationship with Russia. The former NATO’s enemy could have been consulted and better informed about all the steps that would have brought former communist countries into the Alliance. As a consequence, NATO succeeded in the negative outcome of finding again the old enemy and so did Russia with NATO and the West. The non-inclusion of Russia into NATO – or at least into a much closer relationship with the West – gradually pushed Russia towards the East – in particular China – and towards different multilateral organizations. Among those frameworks, in my view, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – defined as the “NATO of the East” – stood out as a particularly crucial body. The SCO was an intergovernmental Eurasian organization which promoted cooperation on politics, economics and security. It was founded on the basis of the 1996 “Shanghai Five”, which brought China and Russia together, with three Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Then, with the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five turned into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The fact that Russia considered the SCO as a potential counterweight, and geopolitical rival to NATO constituted a serious concern and danger for the Atlantic Alliance.

CHAPTER III: NATO-EU: the Evolution of the Transatlantic Partnership

Together with the normalization process with Eastern Europe and Russia, the increasingly close and integrated NATO-European Union relationship contributed to strongly stabilise the Euro-Atlantic area. The role played by both international Organizations in preserving the security environment in Western Europe cannot be underestimated: on one hand, NATO carried out that goal by expanding its membership and by promoting other partnerships, especially with Russia; on the other, the European Community – firstly – and the European Union – secondly – strengthened stability by developing a gradual political and economic integration. Throughout the Cold War period, the parallel development of NATO and the European Community was put in place on the basis of a strict separation of roles and responsibilities. The Western European Union (WEU) constituted the interface for cooperation and consultation between NATO and those European countries trying to create a stronger European security and defence identity within NATO. It was a European political and military Alliance and it was born on the basis of the Brussels Treaty (1948). It evolved in 1954 through the inclusion of Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Since its reactivation in 1984, the WEU's member states have tried – on one hand – to make the WEU a European pillar within the Atlantic Alliance and – on the other – to entrust it with the task of developing a European Union's common defence policy. The end of the Cold War equilibrium between NATO and the USSR paved the way to a new kind of relationship between NATO and the European Community, which assumed a new physiognomy after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and through the creation of an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). On 19 June 1992, the Foreign and Defence Ministers of WEU countries issued the so-called "Petersberg Declaration", through which WEU leaders made their military units available to WEU missions such as humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping and peace-making missions in crisis management circumstances. A further step in the direction of an EU defence system was taken at the 1994 NATO Summit in Brussels, when NATO and the EU agreed on developing a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO. The ESDI represented a crucial part of the internal adaptation process of the Atlantic Alliance: European countries decided to take responsibility for a major European defence role. The crucial aspect of the ESDI was the development of WEU operations through the participation of WEU and NATO, based on the identification of "separable but not separate capabilities" within the Alliance. In order to reflect the emerging ESDI, NATO Heads of State and Government endorsed the creation of the EU Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF), military units that paved the way to a likely division of labor between the United States and Europe in crisis management circumstances.

The push for a new approach to the European security dimension was probably a reaction to the conflicts that were taking place in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, since – in that circumstance – Europe proved its inability to prevent, intervene and settle those military disputes through a continental defence body. European countries realized that the European Union needed to correct the imbalance between its massive economic power and its (really) weak political and military power. Such a new approach provided that a coordinated effort to settle conflicts by political and diplomatic means should have gone hand in hand with a credible military force. In December 1998, the Franco-British Summit at Saint Malo gave a new impetus to the changing of EU attitude towards the acquisition of military capabilities.

France and the United Kingdom agreed on the necessity for the European Union to have “the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”. Together with the St. Malo statements, the Berlin Plus Agreements – approved in December 2002 and adopted in March 2003 – marked a historic turning point in the progressive integration process between NATO and the European Union. As a matter of fact, those arrangements allowed the European Union to have access to NATO’s collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations. The adoption of this kind of measure met the need to avoid an unnecessary reproduction of resources and, in effect, the EU could benefit from NATO’s support in EU-led interventions, as long as the Alliance as a whole was not involved. The Berlin Plus Agreements constituted a fundamental framework through which the European Union launched its first-ever military interventions to stop conflicts and preserve peace: *Operation Concordia* in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) – now North Macedonia – in 2003; *Operation EUFOR Althea* in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004. As long as the danger of a likely recurrence of violence and instability remained in place, European leaders understood that they could not afford to let a likely crisis spread into the neighbouring states, since the Balkans were right at the border of EU states.

The status of transatlantic relations remained one of the most serious problems, given that the US approach towards Europe had historically been mixed. On one hand, American governments encouraged Europe to promote reforms of the defence apparatus demanding increased efforts, while, on the other, they welcomed progressive European improvements in the security field with suspicion, proving to be reluctant to cede their leadership. Indeed, a gradual evolution of the WEU was perceived as a dangerous attempt to develop a political and strategic independence of the European Community and therefore as a considerable weakening of Washington’s absolute strategic control over Europe. The dissolution of the Western European Union – and the subsequent transfer of WEU functions to the EU – progressively weakened the military power of European countries. In spite of a political and economic Organization which also carried out military tasks (such as the EU), a specific military Organization – such as the Western European Union – could have been a better suited vehicle to build an effective European military platform.

The development of European military capabilities and assets did not represent a disadvantage or a danger for NATO and the United States but rather an advantage for the Alliance as a whole. As long as the EU-NATO cooperation grew stronger, global challenges would have been more effectively addressed. As stated above, the building of NATO's European pillar has never been realized not only because of an EU fiscal stringency but also because of a resolute opposition by the United States, always reluctant to give up its strategic control over the European continent. This strict control has been exercised in several ways: prohibiting the European allies from coming together before Atlantic Councils; prohibiting the creation of European High Commands, able to study common strategies outside of NATO; entrusting the US Commander with an exclusive authority over European armed forces that were assigned to NATO, thus taking them away from individual national governments.

Moreover, American administrations tacitly pushed for the dissolution of the Western European Union (WEU) – the only European autonomous Organization in the field of continental defence – and placed American Generals at the head of the main European NATO Commands while removing the autonomy to the minor ones. This condition of total European strategic subordination to the major partner could be tolerated during the Cold War, due to the serious Soviet threat, but it was impressive to observe how that condition continued to remain in force after many years after the end of the Cold War. The EU should have demanded for the adaptation of old NATO structures to the new international environment in order to facilitate the European unity's progress, capable of – where necessary – helping the American ally through an autonomous military framework. Developing the Atlantic Alliance on two equal pillars – Europe and the United States – would have ensured a major coordination and effectiveness in its action.

Transatlantic divergencies – in terms of national priorities, threats, foreign and defensive policies – became evident before the Iraqi war took place in 2003. The decision to start the war was taken because the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction. Identifying Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a "rogue nation" and a global danger was the crucial step to activate the so-called *Bush Doctrine*, the US neoconservative ideology providing for unilateralism and pre-emptive conflicts in the face of international terrorism. The main goal was to remove potential threats from other countries and prevent any other country from becoming a superpower, a rival for the US hegemony. The rift – which mainly involved France, Germany and the USA – behind the choice to wage war against Saddam Hussein provoked the most severe crisis inside the Atlantic Alliance. President Bush considered the European military capabilities as inadequate and asserted that he no longer considered the Alliance worthy of being led by the USA. Once again, the main focus was on the burden-sharing and the "structural gap" between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean: the United States believed that European countries could offer a little contribution to military operations and lost confidence in the extent to which it could count on its European allies. By using the notion of "coalition of the willing",

Bush explained the American administration's belief that European countries were more like a burden rather than an added value.

Even if the UN Security Council did not achieve a consensus on how to deal with Iraq, the war was started on 20 March 2003 and Iraq was attacked through the Operation Iraqi Freedom. On December 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by the allied forces. The Iraq case could have represented the issue on which the Atlantic Alliance was likely to split in two or more parts or to completely collapse. Nonetheless, NATO somehow survived to the *Bush Doctrine*. Despite divergencies, the USA and the European countries shared crucial common Euro-Atlantic values such as liberal-democracy, the rule of law, global stability and the responsibility to cooperate within a framework of a political and military Alliance. Moreover, the United States could not build a close cooperation with other major actors because European countries were America's most like-minded, longstanding, democratic and militarily capable partners. The post-conflict stage was then managed by NATO, which got involved in the Iraq's transition towards stability and democracy after the request of the Iraqi Interim Government and the provisions of UN Security Council. Through the so-called *NATO Training Mission* (2004), the Alliance aimed to train Iraqi personnel and support the development of security institutions in charge of the country's own security. It was a way to heal the wounds between the US and its NATO European allies. Preserving the Atlantic Alliance and cooperation among liberal-democratic states was something crucial for the future Euro-Atlantic security. Nevertheless, as long as European countries do not develop relevant military capabilities, problems of burden-sharing between the two sides of the Atlantic will be more likely to re-emerge and trigger new crises. European leaders need to conceive their military forces as part of a global Alliance, with global tasks and responsibilities to accomplish, otherwise the sense of shared risk that an alliance demanded would be eroded.

Although post-Cold War NATO has often been criticized and deemed unnecessary because of the end of the bipolar confrontation in Europe, historical evidence shows how the Atlantic Alliance is still standing, alive and well. In contemporary history, no other alliance has been able to last so long and no other international organization – apart from NATO – has been able to equip itself with an integrated army. The Atlantic Alliance has brilliantly succeeded in outliving the defeat of its enemy, managing to find its place in the new post-Cold war international environment. Despite various mistakes and hardships, NATO has given proof of its capability to acquire new capabilities, prerogatives and responsibilities, granting its effectiveness in the face of multi-faceted and multi-directional threats and therefore becoming anything but obsolete.