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## **Introduction**

This thesis consists of a comprehensive analysis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since its creation in 1949. The central research question is: *How did NATO's historical evolution, partnerships, and agreements shape its operational and strategic conduct, and what lessons do these dynamics offer for the Alliance's future challenges?* This thesis aims to elucidate how military operations, diplomatic negotiations, and strategic partnerships shaped NATO's responses towards international security challenges. Therefore, it illustrates the Alliance sequential posture in a bipolar (after WWII), unipolar (after the Cold War), and multipolar (today) world order. Additionally, special attention is given to assessing military operations and their subsequent peacekeeping or peacebuilding initiatives. To this end, it analyses NATO's cooperation with other multilateral actors, such as the UN, the EU, and the OSCE, through case studies of operations in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, the Mediterranean, Georgia, and others. The aim is to determine how lessons from the past can help direct NATO action, whether towards deterrence or diplomacy, to address increased geopolitical instability in the most responsible way, for the safety of its citizens, and to enhance the security architecture of the global community. The case studies were selected based on the Alliance's implications in the regions examined during the last decades of the previous and current centuries. The cases of Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and the Mediterranean illustrate the Alliance's strengths and weaknesses in practice. Instead, the Georgian and Ukrainian cases help assess NATO's diplomatic response and strategic partnerships (joint exercises, contact groups, etc.) in countries whose geographic situation condemns them to frozen or open conflicts. Finally, China, Iran, or Russia has been selected to assess the Alliance's posture

to adversarial or at least competing regimes. On the one hand, the choice of this topic stems from the fact that literature on NATO operations, negotiations, and partnerships, especially since the Cold War, tends to be scattered. Therefore, this work aims to summarize them in a single document for each country under study. On the other hand, like many students in International Relations, I dream of the possibility of working for NATO one day. Therefore, I believe it might be useful for individuals who share the same ambition to have access to a thesis that might help them enhance their understanding of NATO, its history, structure, and paradigmatic evolutions, and future challenges. The observations of this thesis derive primarily from NATO reports, communiqués, archives, and NATO Defence College publications. These sources are complemented by government reports, UNSC resolutions, essays, and books, which altogether constitute the necessary research material to reach the conclusions presented.

# **1) Historical evolution of NATO**

## **1.1) From 1949 until the end of the Cold War**

Founded on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1949 under the Washington Treaty, NATO initially comprised 12 member states (the United States, Canada, Italy, France, the UK, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway). Its membership reflected a global order consequential to the outcomes of the Second World War, with Russia excluded. By 1952, Greece and Turkey joined NATO. Their decision was consequential to increased pressure from the Soviet bloc. Indeed, the USSR viewed its strategic geographic positions, which provided access to the Mediterranean and Black Sea, as valuable assets for its geo-strategic ambitions.

By 1954, the idea of a European Defence Community emerged. While such a project would have suited West Germany's integration, the idea was ultimately rejected by the French Senate, and West Germany acceded to NATO in 1955. The German accession led to the signature of the Warsaw Pact (1955) as a direct response to NATO's expansion. Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and East Germany centralized their military capabilities to the service of the Soviet Union. More than a military alliance, the pact also enabled the eradication of potential uprisings and opponents of the Communist regime. The end of the Korean War in 1953 led to a questioning related to the roles of conventional and nuclear weapons. In this regard, 1954 marked the beginning of a shift oriented towards a doctrine of massive retaliation. John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State at the time, was the first to propose this concept. His arguments

assumed that the Korean War engendered excessive expenses for conventional weapons. Therefore, he suggested enhancing reliance on nuclear weapons and deterrence. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1954, Dulles gave a famous speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City. On this occasion, he exposed the doctrine of massive retaliation, echoing previous statements he had made at the National Press Club at the end of 1953. In his speech, he underlined the necessity *“to depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our choosing.”* These statements were reiterated on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1954, when the NATO Military Committee 48 (MC48), the Alliance’s new strategy document, was implemented. Its release marked a paradigmatic change in the propensity to employ nuclear arsenal. Indeed, MC 48 had no ambiguity and advocated for the use of nuclear weapons in case of military aggression by foreign powers. The document in question reported the following statements:

*“ The advent of atomic weapons systems will drastically change the conditions of modern war”.  
As a result, “superiority in atomic weapons and the capability to deliver them will be the most important factor in a major war in the foreseeable future”.*

A month later, the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Session on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December validated the above statements and provided preliminary political legitimacy for further integrating the use of nuclear weapons into alliance strategy.

1956 was marked by the Suez Crisis. That year, former Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal to achieve greater independence from Western powers present in the region. As a response, the United Kingdom, France, and Israel launched a military offensive, preventing Egypt

from achieving its independence initiative. It was not the violent action that caused major discord, but rather the decision-making process. Indeed, the US President wasn't consulted before the offensive launch. This was an issue as NATO decision-making, as its founding articles suggest, is required to operate by consensus. Eisenhower, fearing USSR retaliation and a deterioration of relations with the Arab countries, decided to negotiate with the three responsible countries. By pressuring them with further economic sanctions and reminding them why such an initiative was not in their respective interests, he eventually secured agreement to withdraw the tripartite troops. Before that, the US President called for the First London Conference. On that occasion, more than twenty states, either canal users or major maritime powers, were summoned to discuss the relevance and justification of Nasser's decision. The Suez Canal Users Association was the primary proposal to the Egyptian President to address the interdependence between former colonial powers and Egypt's interests. The former was characterized by international supervision of the Canal, which facilitated a transitional phase in Egyptian nationalist emancipation. Eventually, negotiations failed because Nasser refused, and the aforementioned powers intervened without consulting their allies. Although NATO reached a consensus to withdraw, it was more the result of the US's economic pressure on the UK than of negotiations. This episode highlighted the fragility of NATO's core elements and advocated consensus in decision-making. It stemmed from an internal mistrust, as the US learned that granting greater strategic autonomy to European powers might lead to operations not aligned with the defensive scope of the North Atlantic Alliance.

In April 1957, the NATO Military Committee 14 (MC14) was established to legitimize the MC 48 statements in favour of the massive retaliation doctrine. The document formalised its inclusion in the Alliance's overall strategic concept. While MC 48 examined the potential role of nuclear

weapons in future conflicts, MC 14 addressed the possibility of such an event. The document stated as follows:<sup>1</sup>

*We must first ensure the ability to carry out an instant and devastating nuclear counteroffensive by all available means and develop the capability to absorb and survive the enemy's onslaught.*

*Concurrently and closely related to the attainment of this aim, we must develop our ability to use our land, sea, and air forces for the defence of their territories and sea areas of NATO as far forward as possible to maintain the integrity of the NATO area, counting on the use of nuclear weapons from the outset.*

That considered, MC14 specified that the use of nuclear weapons should be at the discretion of the attacked party, and its inherent considerations regarding proportionality and necessity of such action in the established scenario.

In September 1963, the MC 100.1 draft came out. The document's function was to adapt NATO's strategic concept in light of lessons learned from the adoption of the massive retaliation doctrine. Specifically, greater flexibility was introduced to enhance the Alliance's responsiveness to potential aggression. Unlike in the cases of MC 48 and MC 14, the MC 100.1 draft prioritized the use of conventional weapons in response to an eventual act of aggression. Nevertheless, it maintained the possibility of resorting to nuclear weapons in such a scenario where conventional weapons prove to be insufficient. Various allies, including France, disagreed about such a

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<sup>1</sup> NATO Archives, "MC 14/3 - OVERALL STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE NATO AREA," November 3, 1967, <https://archives.nato.int/mc-14-3-overall-strategic-concept-for-the-defence-of-the-nato-area>.

paradigmatic shift. As a result, a stalemate emerged, hindering efforts to effectively reform NATO's strategy. Additionally, Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 and Johnson's subsequent focus on Vietnam further undermined the prioritization of NATO's strategic reform.

On political and military grounds, the twelve signatory states were granted a certain degree of discretion in fulfilling the obligations they had agreed to. The most striking examples of such flexibility were Iceland and France. The first had no military forces, while the second maintained some distance from military obligations, as De Gaulle (1966) sought to preserve a certain degree of independence from the US. Indeed, the French leader questioned the US's propensity to support it if an open conflict were to occur. The rationale behind this move was to enhance EU strategic autonomy within the defence sector. To counterbalance the risks posed by this independence in the event of a Soviet invasion, France signed two complementary technical agreements, ensuring its support from other members despite their absence from the Nuclear Planning Group and the Defence Planning Committee. The latter consisted of the North Atlantic Council membership, excluding France.

In 1966, France withdrew from NATO's command. Consequently, the Alliance Headquarters were relocated to Brussels, and the NATO Defence College (NDC) to Rome. Despite Paris's objective of securing some degree of strategic autonomy, France proved to be a major contributor and a formidable asset when engaged in joint NATO interventions. NATO was sometimes described as an organization that subjects its members to the US. This vision will be illustrated later in the discussion of specific negotiation cases involving the US and NATO allies. However, this episode showed us the contrary. Indeed, France was able to negotiate a relatively high degree of independence, which would have been completely impossible under the Warsaw Pact framework.

A transforming NATO doctrine characterized the second part of the 60's. The latter transitioned from a policy of deterrence to a focus on maintaining peaceful relations, especially with the USSR bloc. The report "Future tasks of the Alliance" was delivered in this regard by Belgian foreign minister Harmel in front of the NATO Atlantic Council.

On the first of August 1975, the Helsinki Final Act was signed. The agreement was concluded between 35 countries, including NATO members and the USSR. The Helsinki Final Act established guidelines for behaviour structured around democratic values. Understanding this dimension was crucial to understanding the nature of the agreement. While NATO allies recognized the USSR's sphere of influence both militarily and politically, a misunderstanding arose among them. The USSR believed that this recognition provided guarantees for the perpetuation of its influence, without fear of NATO expansion. Eventually, NATO continued its expansion, justifying it by invoking the democratic values the USSR had agreed to in the Helsinki Final Act.

By the end of the 70's, tensions had once again arisen. After more than ten years of efforts to improve relations between NATO and the USSR, the two sides faced a major geopolitical challenge. In 1979, Russia invaded Afghanistan, according to them, to impede the latter from falling under Western influence. This deployment once again unlocked the deterrence paradigm not employed by NATO since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Eventually, the allies moved different missiles close to their Eastern borders, fomenting the aggressive circle initially awakened by the USSR. In the section on Afghanistan, NATO's role in the conflict is clarified. For the moment, let us simply regard the conflict as a major military debacle for the USSR, which, among other things, laid the presuppositions for negotiations that led to the end of the Cold War. In the short term, it allowed the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987. The negotiation

enabled the elimination of various types of military infrastructure. Principally, both cruise and ballistic missiles with medium-range capability were prohibited.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and with it the USSR. This historic moment altered NATO's perspective and called into question its utility in a global order that could no longer be considered bipolar. A global order that, yesterday, was conceived as bipolar has now become unipolar, characterized by the presence of a single hegemony, the United States of America. Therefore, the defensive perspective on European soil, the main constitutive point for NATO's creation, was no longer considered as a major preoccupation. After 1989, NATO security translated into a need for stability in countries such as Afghanistan, whose security is directly linked to NATO allies. Anticipation was a key term here, as NATO's objective was to prevent an imminent threat. While in previous decades security was analysed through the lens of defence, it has since been transformed and expanded. The question that arose, therefore, was whether an Alliance formed under a defensive perspective could legitimately evolve with the definition of security itself. The challenge became even tougher as public opinion over security expenses changed. Logically, since imminent threats were no longer at Western Europe's door, the propensity to invest in such a sector declined. While it is easier to crystallize the usefulness of a military operation by specifying precise tactical objectives, it is far more complicated to explain the extent to which deploying forces and financial resources in areas far from European borders would become mutually essential for the country in question and for NATO allies' security.

In 1991, NATO adopted its new strategic concept<sup>2</sup>t based on the conclusions of the Rome Summit:<sup>3</sup>

*To protect peace and to prevent war or any kind of coercion, the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe and kept up to date where necessary, although at a significantly reduced level. Both elements are essential to Alliance security and cannot substitute one for the other. Conventional forces contribute to war prevention by ensuring that no potential aggressor could contemplate a quick or easy victory or territorial gains by conventional means. Taking into account the diversity of risks with which the Alliance could be faced, it must maintain the forces necessary to provide a wide range of conventional response options. But the Alliance's conventional forces alone cannot ensure the prevention of war. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of any aggression incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace.*

As with flexible doctrine, the new strategic concept advocated a mixed use of conventional and nuclear weapons in the event of aggression. Instead, the main updates concerned the roles of diplomacy, peacekeeping operations, and cooperation. It was the first time in history that a NATO strategic concept was not limited to military and deterrence response.

## **1.2) From the end of the Cold War until Russia-Ukraine conflict**

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<sup>3</sup> NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)," Official Texts and Resources | NATO, November 8, 1991, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1991/11/08/the-alliances-new-strategic-concept-1991>.

The Partnership for Peace NATO Program (PfP) was proclaimed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> January 1994 at the NATO Brussels Summit<sup>4</sup>. Its rationale was to enhance cooperation grounded in NATO's constitutive democratic values. Consistent with the 1991 Rome Summit conclusions, the program emphasized the need for further cooperation among Alliance members. Also, it insisted on the content of its Article 10<sup>5</sup>, reaffirming that accession would be granted to countries that demonstrate determination and commitment to the process. Additionally, it reinforced cooperation with non-member countries, including Sweden and Finland. The partnership committed to inviting non-member countries to participate in political and military activities taking place at NATO Headquarters.

In total, five main points emerged as the new areas of enhanced cooperation between the Alliance and non-member states.<sup>6</sup>:

- (a) facilitation of transparency in national defence planning and budgeting processes;*
- (b) ensuring democratic control of defence forces.*
- (c) maintenance of the capability and readiness to contribute, subject to constitutional considerations, to operations under the authority of the UN and/or the responsibility of the CSCE;*
- (d) the development of cooperative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training, and exercises in order to strengthen their ability to undertake missions*

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<sup>4</sup> NATO, "Declaration of the Heads of State and Government," January 11, 1994, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1994/01/11/declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-and-government>.

<sup>5</sup> NATO, "The North Atlantic Treaty," April 4, 1949, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>.

<sup>6</sup> NATO Archives, "NATO Partnership for Peace 1994," January 10, 1994, [https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137903/0325\\_NATO\\_Partnership\\_for\\_Peace\\_1994\\_ENG.pdf](https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137903/0325_NATO_Partnership_for_Peace_1994_ENG.pdf).

*in the fields of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed;*

*(e) the development, over the longer term, of forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance.*

In 1997, the NATO Madrid Summit was the occasion to invite three new countries into the Alliance <sup>7</sup>. By 1999, it was the turn of the Czechia, Poland, and Hungary to join NATO. This wave of accession was crucial, as it marked the first major expansion toward Eastern countries. Although the Berlin Wall had collapsed by 1989, those three countries faced years of transition across political, military, and economic dimensions to fully emancipate themselves from communist influence. Their accession paved the way for additional demands by Eastern European countries in subsequent years. In 2004, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Slovenia joined the Alliance. Those countries were subsequently followed in 2009 by Croatia and Albania, in 2017 by Montenegro, in 2020 by North Macedonia, in 2023 by Finland, and finally in 2024 by Sweden. Since 1949, NATO members increased from twelve to thirty-two. While it made NATO the world's most important collective defence organisation and favoured the spread of democratic values among acceding countries, these subsequent waves of accession didn't please Russia. Indeed, Moscow considered that its traditional sphere of influence had been compromised; therefore, it subsequently deteriorated its diplomatic relations with NATO.

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<sup>7</sup> NATO, "Madrid Declaration 1997," July 8, 1997, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1997/07/08/madrid-declaration>.

Another milestone in NATO's history was its intervention in Libya. In March 2011, UNSCR 1379 was adopted to impose an arms embargo on the country. NATO initially supported the initiative by enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya. Subsequently, it was decided that the Alliance should command the military campaign. Therefore, Operation "Unified Protector" (OUP) was launched. The latter was based on three main objectives<sup>8</sup>:

- *Enforcing an arms embargo in the Mediterranean Sea to prevent the transfer of arms, related materials and mercenaries to Libya.*
- *Enforcing a no-fly zone to prevent aircrafts from bombing civilian targets.*
- *Conducting air and naval strikes against military forces involved in attacks or threatening to attack Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas.*

To reach its objectives, NATO cooperated with the UN and other regional organisations. In the following months, NATO intensified its efforts to defend the civilian population and supported the destabilization of Gaddafi's regime. Tripoli was liberated from the regime's forces in August 2011. Ferocious fights persisted in the months to come. Eventually, the rebels' determination and NATO's support led to the end of Gaddafi's forty-two-year reign. Indeed, the dictator was killed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2011. NATO troops were withdrawn by the end of October, while the

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<sup>8</sup> NATO, "NATO and Libya," April 4, 2012, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/nato-and-libya-february-october-2011>.

Alliance committed to providing necessary assistance in the future, if requested by Libyan authorities, for structural reforms in the security and defence sectors<sup>9</sup>.

The intervention in Libya marked a pivotal moment in the Alliance's development, particularly regarding political cooperation, mandate interpretation, and the limits of crisis management, as applied in this case. Lessons learned from Libya shaped later discussions about NATO's role in the Middle East. Therefore, NATO's involvement in Iraq should be seen as part of this ongoing shift toward regional appeasement, capacity-building, and partnership.

During the NATO Brussels Summit 2018, the Alliance decided to intervene in Iraq at the request of the local government. The "NATO Mission Iraq" (NMI) was mandated with the main function to provide the necessary support for the improvement of Iraq's security architecture. NMI cooperated with the UN and the EU to attain its objectives. Its initial mandate can be summarized in the following points<sup>10</sup>:

- *Contributes to the fight against terrorism by helping Iraq strengthen its security institutions and armed forces so that they themselves are better able to fight terrorism, prevent the return of ISIS/Daesh and stabilise their country.*
- *Advises the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, Federal Police Command, the Office of the National Security Advisor, the Prime Minister's National Operations Centre and national security education institutions to build more sustainable, transparent, inclusive and effective security institutions and structures.*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> NATO, "NATO Mission Iraq," June 3, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/nato-mission-iraq>.

- *Instructs on the rule of law, the law of armed conflict, countering corruption, the protection of civilians, children and armed conflict, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.*
- *Is a non-combat mission founded on partnership and inclusivity as well as on full respect for Iraq's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.*

In 2021, NMI's scope was expanded following consultations with the Iraqi government. The latter also required support in the formation of security actors with highly specialized profiles, such as federal agents. Previous interventions in Libya illustrated the sensitivity of military intervention. Therefore, NMI mobilized military personnel solely to train local law-enforcement responders, not for combat.

## **2) NATO's partnerships and agreements**

### **2.1) EU-NATO**

The first point of this section is to analyse the historical context in which NATO and the EU came into existence. From there, I examined how the two entities coexisted over the past seventy-five years and how this coexistence shaped their functionality. Finally, the issue of EU/NATO cooperation over the past 10 years has been raised. This last point aims to clarify the foundations of the cooperation in question. First, to understand its strengths and limitations; second, to propose solutions for enhanced interoperability.

In 1948, the Treaty of Brussels was signed by France, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The latter created the Western Union, later rebaptised Western European Union, and included allies such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Germany. While its mandate included enhancing cultural, economic, and social collaboration, collective defence also constituted a founding pillar<sup>11</sup>. While its prosperity may have granted a wider degree of autonomy in European defence, it eventually lost effectiveness as NATO became the primary actor for multiple decades.

The EU's origins were rooted in the post-World War context, which also saw the creation of NATO in 1949. In a period of crisis, which, as stated by Monnet, "I always believed that Europe would be built through crises, and that it would be the sum of their solutions".

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<sup>11</sup> NATO, "The Brussels Treaty 1948," March 17, 1948, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1948/03/17/the-brussels-treaty>.

At the end of World War II, European countries were in ruins. The international order promoted until then, largely based on the Westphalian model, revealed its core dysfunction. It illustrated the extent to which blind competition in an anarchic international system could lead to the destruction of humanity. The need to find more viable alternatives to the realist paradigm in international relations was more evident than ever to Europeans. This lucidity crystallized through Robert Schuman and Monnet's mouths, among others. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1950, Schuman proposed the creation of a coal and steel community. His words were the following<sup>12</sup>: *"The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe."* Schuman identified the divergent yet interdependent needs of nations to avoid future conflicts while maintaining the production of materials critical to their security. The ECSC treaty was signed in Paris and helped end the historical rivalries between France and Germany that culminated in World War II. Therefore, it paved the way for a more united Europe. While economic unity was a start, the need to expand the scope of action to the military sector immediately arose. In 1952, the European Defence Community Treaty was signed by European partners. Ironically, as history may have it, this project was aborted by the same force that initiated the process of European unification: France. This same attitude of preserving their strategic autonomy was corroborated by De Gaulle's statement in 1966, when France left NATO's strategic command. The 1954 failure demonstrated that the European project was fragile and that the tendency to privilege national interests over international ones remained, as if the war had not occurred ten years earlier. Following the Paris decision, security and defence matters were entrusted to NATO's

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<sup>12</sup> European Union, "The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950"[https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950_en)

responsibility. Consequently, the conception of Europe promoted by its founding fathers had already shifted, moving from the ambition of a federal entity to a focus on a common market.

The extent of allies' subordination under such a security architecture, in which the US plays a preponderant role, remains evident today. Nevertheless, the first signs of erosion and a further reconsideration of EU allies began to crystallize by the early 1990s.

In 1991, the new NATO Strategic Concept was elaborated. The latter entailed a valorisation of European allies. Indeed, it affirmed its view of the EU not as a competing actor but as a complementary, crucial force for the Alliance. A year later, the Petersberg Declaration was signed in June 1992<sup>13</sup>. The latter affirmed the WEU countries' commitment to order the deployment of the necessary military personnel in case of an accident involving one of the allies. Additionally, the declaration stated clearly that such assistance would also be provided to another NATO ally if and when required. The said assistance involved the following points:

- *humanitarian and rescue tasks;*
- *conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks;*
- *tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking;*
- *joint disarmament operations;*
- *military advice and assistance tasks;*
- *post-conflict stabilisation tasks.*

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<sup>13</sup> European Union, "Petersberg Tasks," June 1992, [Petersberg tasks - EUR-Lex](#).

While the model appeared viable, it generated operations in which the US was not enthusiastic about participating. Therefore, it was convened in 1998, during the St. Malo meeting<sup>14</sup> (including France and England), that the EU requires greater independence in security-related decisions. The latter's shift paved the way for the elaboration of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which was integrated by the late 2000s.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the shift entailed reciprocal concessions regarding the UK's propensity to prioritize transatlantic cooperation, in direct opposition to France's vision, which advocated further European autonomy. In 2002, the European Union-NATO Declaration on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was signed. The said Declaration contained the following principles and objectives<sup>16</sup>:

#### Common principles

*The Declaration solemnly affirms the principles on which the strategic partnership between the two organisations is founded:*

- *partnership, which mutually reinforces two organisations of a different nature;*
- *effective mutual consultation, dialogue, cooperation and transparency;*
- *equality and due regard for the decision-making autonomy and interests of the European Union and NATO;*
- *respect for the interests of the Member States of the European Union and NATO;*

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<sup>14</sup> Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, "Joint Declaration on European Defence Joint Declaration Issued at the British-French Summit in St.Malo," December 4, 1998, [Franco-British St. Malo Declaration \(4 December 1998\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> European Parliament, "EU-NATO Cooperation," July 2025, [EU-NATO cooperation](#).

<sup>16</sup> EUR-Lex European Union, "Cooperation with NATO," December 2022, [Cooperation with NATO | EUR-Lex](#).

- *respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations;*
- *coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of the military capability requirements common to the two organisations.*

### Objectives

*Three objectives are identified:*

- *the European Union will ensure the fullest possible involvement of the non-EU European members of NATO within ESDP;*
- *NATO will support ESDP and give the European Union assured access to NATO's planning capabilities;*
- *both organisations will adopt arrangements to ensure the coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of their common capability requirements.*

By March 2003, the Berlin Plus arrangements were concluded. First, the latter permitted the Alliance to conduct operations without full consensus among its members. Second, NATO agreed to share assets and capabilities with the EU, including configurations in which the operation would be led by the EU rather than NATO. Finally, the two parties agreed on the necessity of enhancing the exchange of information<sup>17</sup>.

These commitments yielded the first tangible results between 2005 and 2006. Indeed, the process was facilitated through the establishment of military liaison offices, illustrated by NATO's

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<sup>17</sup> NATO, "Relations with the European Union," June 20, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/relations-with-the-european-union>.

operatives' presence in the EU Military Staff or, inversely, by the EU's operatives present at NATO SHAPE<sup>18</sup>.

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is considered a branch of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, enabling member states to manage security crises more effectively and to further establish conditions of stability and peace in such scenarios. CSDP was one of the main outcomes of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and was codified in Articles 21-46 of the Treaties of the European Union. The articles in question are based on three major pillars. The first is directly related to the international ambition to preserve security, as defined according to international Law. Secondly, it constitutes the preamble to furthering autonomy in security and defence capabilities for the European Union, in the context of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis traditional transatlantic cooperation. Finally, CSDP is entrusted with both preventing and managing conflict. Its composition comprises the following entities: the European Defence Fund, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, the Foreign Affairs Council, and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). Furthermore, to ensure its functioning, CSDP is supported by the European Defence Agency and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), whose EU countries' adhesion entails greater commitment to cooperation and interoperability among the partners, as well as increased defence spending.

The following statements represent the opening paragraphs from the EU-NATO Joint Declaration signed in July 2016: “ *We believe that the time has come to give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership. In consultation with the EU Member States and the NATO Allies, working with, and for the benefit of all, this partnership will take place in the spirit*

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<sup>18</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, EU-NATO Relations: State of Play and Future Prospects, Brussels: European Parliament, 2025, 10, [EU-NATO cooperation](#)

*of full mutual openness and in compliance with the decision-making autonomy and procedures of our respective organisations and without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of any of our members*”<sup>19</sup>. The parties concluded that additional joint exercises and enhanced interoperability are necessary to address hybrid and cybersecurity threats. The declaration did not express a negative view of new EU mechanisms that enable greater autonomy in defence matters. Indeed, NATO believed that greater autonomy for EU member states would benefit the Alliance, given the obligations entailed in the NATO founding treaties.

The second Joint Declaration, signed in 2018, committed to further cooperation between the two organisations. Additionally, NATO endorsed initiatives such as the European Defence Fund, in line with the first joint declarations.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.2) Russia-NATO**

Negotiations are dynamic processes, profoundly shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of those who lead them. On 9 February 1990, Washington and Moscow appeared to inch closer to common ground over Europe’s future. Yet beneath appearances, the very mechanisms that enabled an agreement were, according to some observers, born to die. In this case, the analysis by Orsini<sup>21</sup>, is very interesting to grasp the upcoming events. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1990, a

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<sup>19</sup> NATO, “Joint Declaration,” July 8, 2016, [Joint declaration | NATO Media advisory](#)

<sup>20</sup>European Union and NATO, “EU-NATO Joint Declaration,” July 10, 2018, [Joint declaration on EU-NATO cooperation - Consilium](#)

<sup>21</sup> A. Orsini, *Casa Bianca–Italia: La corruzione dell’informazione di uno stato satellite*. Rome: Castelvecchi Editore, 2024.

meeting between Gorbachev and James Baker, former US Secretary of State under the Bush Presidency, took place. During the meeting, the two counterparts negotiated an unprecedented agreement. The US agreed not to further expand NATO's membership in the East, while Russia agreed to discuss a potential German reunification peacefully. The meeting transcripts regarding Baker's position said exactly this: "*NATO won't expand to a single centimetre East from its current position*". A position that would be confirmed a day later by Kohl, the former German chancellor. Surprisingly, or rather not that much, when Baker came back to the US convinced that he had negotiated the deal of the century in terms of further global peace and stability, he was brutally scolded by Bush, who, by that time, already had in mind to grant Polish accession. From that day, until the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1990, the date of effective German reunification, Gorbachev insisted on the fact that NATO's further expansion, betraying Baker's promises, would be intolerable for the USSR.

It is noteworthy to complement this analysis under a theory of negotiation perspective. Polizzi gives us one of the most exhaustive definitions of "negotiation": "*A process of activity of two or more parties, holders of divergent but interdependent interests concerning a common issue, aimed at reaching an agreement on the same issue through reciprocal concessions*"<sup>22</sup>. In our case study, the "parties" in question are the US and NATO allies on one side, and the USSR on the other. The "divergence in interests" precisely resided in the fact that NATO aimed first to achieve German reunification and, subsequently, to expand its sphere of influence Eastward. On the other hand, the USSR requested strong guarantees from NATO that NATO wouldn't expand, thereby threatening the USSR's security. Now, things get interesting in analysing the level of

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<sup>22</sup> G. Polizzi, *Compendium of Theory, Methodology, and Technique of Negotiation* (2021), 19. [Amazon.com: Compendium of Theory, Methodology, and Technique of Negotiation: 9781716084423: Polizzi, Giovanni: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Compendium-of-Theory-Methodology-and-Technique-of-Negotiation-9781716084423-Polizzi-Giovanni-Books/dp/1716084423)

interdependence among those divergent interests. Both affirmed their commitment to a stable Post-Cold War order characterized by peaceful relations. Let's therefore assume that both parties were honest in terms of intention and explore the "manipulative" perspective successively. Concerning the latter part of the definition, we are reaching the character of negotiation, which is "the common issue". In this case, the latter is the need for alignment regarding Germany's status. Finally, let's explore the "reciprocal concessions" resulting from the Baker-Gorbachev meeting to find an agreement. While Russia agreed not to obstruct Germany's reunification, the US confirmed orally its determination to respect Russia's security concerns by refraining from expanding eastward. By strictly adhering to the definition, the negotiation process appeared to be respected, but it was ultimately ineffective.

First problem related to the definition concerns the conception of negotiation as a process of activities. Both Bush and Baker tackled the continuity of the process. Whether Bush, who gave unclear guidelines and did not allow the agreement to be applied, and Baker, by going beyond his authorized role under his negotiating mandate, provided. This element leads us to the second point.

The second problem concerns the parties' good faith, specifically the US's. The latter has to be linked to the concept of "negotiating representation". It refers to both the power and the responsibilities of the negotiator when acting on behalf of a particular party. Its two constitutive elements are therefore: the power of replacement of the negotiator with respect to the parties represented, and the discretionary power, which implies the authorization granted by the party to the negotiator. The possibility here is dual. On the one hand, it might be Baker himself, who, eager to conclude an agreement, didn't follow the guidelines provided by the party represented, the US government. On the other hand, Bush might have deliberately provided unclear guidelines

regarding interests to reach an agreement; he could subsequently break it to fulfil his true intentions. These scenarios illustrate how poor communication can fundamentally undermine the principle of good faith in State negotiations. The problem was that, after his meeting with President Bush, Baker debriefed NATO state representatives, especially Kohl, the principal chief of state responsible for the agreement. However, he did not communicate with Gorbachev, leaving him unaware of the disagreements with President Bush. This poses a major issue, as good faith is a crucial principle in international law governing the interpretation of state-to-state agreements. Indeed, Article 2 of the UN Charter requires its signatories to fulfil their mutual obligations under this principle. According to this article, not informing Gorbachev about internal disagreements consequently undermined the principle in question. Furthermore, good faith is also recognized in Article 26 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), thereby underscoring the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, which holds that the obligations the parties agreed upon are binding and must be fulfilled in good faith.

The third issue concerns an imbalanced perception of the degree of interdependence among divergent interests. When Baker told Gorbachev there would be no reason to pursue further expansion, it marked a turning point in the agreement's dysfunction. The former leader of the USSR believed interdependence had been established and took Baker's words very seriously. On the other hand, US geopolitical ambitions were far from being conciliable with the agreement. Divergence (competition) remained, as it should in every negotiation. However, interdependence (cooperation), which is equally crucial, was non-existent. Given that trust is the cement of negotiation agreements, Baker's failure to inform Gorbachev about US interests undermined the foundations of any further possibility of reaching a viable accord.

Fourthly, we are confronted with a representation issue. Since the agreement concerned the security of NATO allies, not only Russian and American ones, it would have been constructive for the allies to also have a seat at the negotiating table. By incorporating additional perspectives, their participation could have enabled them to address each ally's security concerns, leading to a more durable and robust foundation for the agreement. Notwithstanding that, including the allies at the time would have been very unlikely, NATO undeniably lost an opportunity.

Lastly, the agreement's form amplified its dysfunction. In fact, its unwritten codification facilitated ad hoc interpretations. This ambiguity fostered a Western-biased rhetoric, allowing the deal to succeed. Nevertheless, not every agreement requires a written form to be effective.

Regarding USSR-US relations, for example, we can mention the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). In that scenario, Moscow agreed to withdraw its missiles in exchange for Kennedy's guarantee that he would not invade Cuba. Another example is the Gentlemen's Agreement concluded between Japan and the US between 1907 and 1908. Tokyo committed to the US that it would do anything in its power to limit further emigration of its citizens to the US. In exchange, the latter granted improved treatment to Japanese citizens already on American soil. Although those two agreements were never codified, they were initially respected by the parties engaged in their respective negotiations. The two agreements mentioned above had stronger mutual incentives not to be breached, and the risk of rupture would have been detrimental to both parties. In the Gorbachev-Baker negotiation, Russia was in a weaker position from the beginning because it lost the Cold War.

In 1997, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed between the counterparts. The latter was based on several key principles: democratic rule, transparency, respect for other countries'

territorial integrity, increased interdependence, and respect for the rule of law<sup>23</sup>. It was intended to operate under a Permanent Joint Council (PJC), a hub for consultation and coordination between the two parties. Subsequently, the Rome Declaration on NATO–Russia Relations was signed on the 28th of May 2002 at the Pratica di Mare air base. These agreements represented the culmination of appeasement and cooperation between Russia and NATO, as they may have paved the way for Russia's future accession to NATO. The parties agreed to create the NATO-Russia Council, the successor of the PJC. The main difference was that the NRC was authorized to make joint decisions on collective operations, whereas the PJC was limited to consultations, intelligence sharing, and political symbolism. Importantly, the NRC changed Russia's status from a +1 to an integrative participant in the discussion. In the former, NATO partners met among themselves before the exchanges with Russia. In the latter, the principle of “joint decisions, joint actions” was adopted to foster mutual trust and the beneficial cooperation that accompanies it. Such an unexpected achievement was directly related to the enhanced cooperation in counter-terrorism operations since the 9\11 attacks. Indeed, the parties concluded that, given the interconnectedness of their respective security challenges, further cooperation was necessary in peacekeeping operations, non-proliferation commitments, and counterterrorism. While expectations from both parties were very optimistic, subsequent years dashed those aspirations for further cooperation. Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Slovenia's accessions in 2004 deteriorated diplomatic relations, which went from bad to worse with the eventual Russian war of aggression against Georgia in 2008.

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<sup>23</sup>NATO, “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France,” May 27, 1997, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1997/05/27/founding-act>.

In February 2007, Putin made a memorable speech at the Munich Security Conference. The latter crystallized Russian ambition to restore a global order akin to that preceding the end of the Cold War, thereby weakening the European security apparatus<sup>24</sup>. Nonetheless, aware of the historical distrust it had inspired among its neighbours, Russia had no intention of annexing any of the countries along its Western borders. Indeed, the costs of such a strategy, if that scenario were to occur, would have been deleterious in both economic and public-opinion terms. Instead, the creation of frozen conflicts constituted an effective strategy for establishing buffer zones between Russia and the West. The latter, confronted with internal disorder, might slow their efforts to expand partnerships with either the EU or NATO. Therefore, neighbouring countries are not the final goal of Russian foreign and military policy. They are rather pieces of a puzzle that, when aggregated, constitute a strategy based on the creation of disorder and the capitalization of the latter. The divide et impera concept derives from the imperialist tradition. It is based on a risky calculation where Putin aims to show that every time it intervenes, NATO does not retaliate. NATO's legitimacy and integrity are threatened by such an attitude based on the assumption that the Alliance has too much to lose in directly confronting Russia in an open conflict, which could trigger the use of nuclear arsenal. However, the Russian autocrat is not naïve and knows that the possibility of an open conflict cannot be entirely ruled out. Therefore, after the intervention in Georgia in 2008, Russia organized a massive military exercise in 2009 called *Zapad* and simulated a potential nuclear attack on Polish soil<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Munich Security Conference, "Speech by Vladimir Putin 2007 - Munich Security Conference," February 10, 2007, <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/books/selected-key-speeches-volume-i/2000-2009/speech-vladimir-putin-2007/>.

<sup>25</sup> S. Sakkov, *Why the Baltics Matter.: Defending NATO's North-Eastern Border*, 2019, 3. <https://www.ndc.nato.int/new-rd-publication-why-the-baltics-matter-defending-natos-north-eastern-border/>

During its 2010 Summit in Lisbon, NATO partners agreed on the need to strengthen collaboration with Russia based on the principles of peace, stability, and security.<sup>26</sup> It constituted a major message of trust towards Russia, despite its war of aggression against Georgia two years before, which created an unprecedented frozen conflict with the disorder that goes with it. In the following years, interventions in Syria and then Donbas elucidated Putin's imperialist vision and the difficulties for cooperation between the Kremlin and NATO. The most recent developments concerning the counterpart relations are subsequently addressed in the section on Ukraine, in the future challenges chapter under the Ukraine war implications section, and in the section on the reinforcement of autocratic regimes.

### **2.3) Bosnia and Herzegovina-NATO**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1992, the Bosnian government, led by President Alija Izetbegovic, declared its independence from Yugoslavia. The voting results reflected the divisions affecting the country at the time. While Bosnian Croats and the Muslim community were highly in favour, the opposite was observable for Bosnian Serbs. In two months, the country was recognized by most of the international community and admitted to the United Nations. This fact carried significant political weight, as it affirmed the international consensus on recognizing one state as a “victim” and the other as liable for breaches of international law. Indirectly, it contributed to the elaboration of UN Security Council Resolution 827, which established the International Criminal

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1.

Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1993<sup>27</sup>. Its jurisdiction encompassed all crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia since 1991. Concretely, the ICTY had three main functions. First, it identified violations of international humanitarian law and assessed those responsible. Second, the tribunal established reparations for the victims concerned. Finally, the ICTY promoted the reconciliation process and ensured compliance with ceasefire provisions. <sup>28</sup>

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, and it was implemented three weeks later in Paris. Consequently, the country was divided into two nearly equal-sized entities: the Bosniac-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1995, the London Peace Implementation Conference took place. Its membership regrouped more than fifty states and multiple international organizations. In this set-up, NATO's mandate was crucial to implement the following established goals:

- *The creation of a climate of stability and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the achievement of a durable and lasting political settlement.*
- *The establishment of new political and constitutional arrangements for Bosnia and Herzegovina that will bring the country together within a framework of democracy and the rule of law.*

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<sup>27</sup> UNSCR 827, S/RES/827 (1993) (1993), [https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute\\_827\\_1993\\_en.pdf](https://www.icty.org/x/file/Legal%20Library/Statute/statute_827_1993_en.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> J. Dobbins, J. G. McGinn, K. Crane, S. G. Jones, R. Lal, A. Rathmell, R. Swanger, and A. Timilsina, "Bosnia," in *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), 95, [Chapter Six BOSNIA from America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq](#), 87–110,

- *The protection and promotion of human rights and the early return of refugees and displaced persons.*
- *The establishment of an open, free-market economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*
- *A kick start to economic reconstruction.*
- *The normalisation of relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and her neighbours, the region and the rest of the international community.*
- *The creation of a direct and dynamic contractual relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union within the framework of a regional approach.*
- *Successful implementation of the Basic Agreement on the region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium.*
- *Important economic opportunities for countries neighbouring former Yugoslavia.*

Therefore, it was convened to appoint a High Representative to oversee the implementation of the agreement<sup>29</sup>. On the military side, the Implementation Force (IFOR) was authorized under UNSCR 1031, which assigned its supervision to NATO<sup>30</sup>. The mission command was divided into three units. First, the US supervised the Multinational Division North. Second, France commanded the Multinational Division Southeast. Third, the British directed the Multinational Division Southwest. Initially, more than 60.000 soldiers were mobilized. Among these, the

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<sup>29</sup> Office of the High Representative, "Conclusions Of The Peace Implementation Conference Held At Lancaster House London," August 12, 1995, <https://www.ohr.int/pic-london-conclusions-6/>.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, "UN Security Council Resolution 1031," December 15, 1995, file:///C:/Users/benja/Downloads/S\_RES\_1031(1995)-EN.pdf.

majority came from NATO allies. Nevertheless, Russia and other Eastern European countries also contributed.<sup>31</sup> This force, was led by NATO and entrusted with stopping armed hostilities and stabilizing the Bosnian political situation, as detailed in the Dayton Peace Agreement.<sup>32</sup> Its convened mandate had a one-year duration and was considered the first step in implementing the peacekeeping function. Specifically, the mission involved establishing a buffer zone to reduce skirmishes between the parties in conflict. The latter was called the Zones of Separation (ZOS) and covered an area of 4 km. In this area, IFOR ensured the withdrawal of local and foreign military units. Furthermore, the mission was entrusted with ensuring the disarmament of the contending factions.<sup>33</sup> IFOR was effectively mobilized by early 1996 across four different countries (Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Hungary). Initially, mission implementation faced challenges in military logistics due to adverse weather conditions and divergent views on the steps to be taken to fulfil its initial mandate. Nevertheless, its final assessment was relatively positive regarding peacekeeping and disarmament. On the one hand, IFOR managed to confine the belligerent parties to their respective territories while reducing casualties. Additionally, the operation's operatives repaired and reconstructed critical infrastructure, including airports, bridges, and roads. This step proved crucial to facilitating the mission's peacekeeping function. On the other hand, limits on the detention of arms were set by June 1996. Even so, this part resulted more complex to implement and violations by the parts were observed after the deadline. Finally, IFOR managed to go beyond its mandate and

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<sup>31</sup> Dobbins et al., "Bosnia," in *America's Role in Nation-Building*, 87–110. [Chapter Six BOSNIA from America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq on JSTOR](#)

<sup>32</sup> Swanee Hunt and Douglas Lute, "Inclusive Security: NATO Adapts and Adopts," *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016): 6–19. [Inclusive Security: NATO Adapts and Adopts NATO Adapts and Adopts on JSTOR](#)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

facilitated the enhancement of civic initiatives<sup>34</sup>. These achievements respected the one-year mandate set out in the Dayton Peace Agreement.

On December 20, 1996, NATO transformed its IFOR mission into SFOR. The latter was initially entrusted with an eighteen-month mandate intended to terminate in June 1998. The transition was intended to further integrate peacebuilding into the mission's scope, as its operational activities were primarily focused on military duties. Indeed, the allies acknowledged that rebuilding Bosnia and Herzegovina was as important as peacekeeping initiatives and that the country's relative stability provided a favorable momentum to build on. Ultimately, SFOR's evaluation did not prove as positive as its predecessor's. The September 1996 election results crystallized the rationale for this conclusion. Unsurprisingly, Bosnian voters cast their ballots based on purely nationalist considerations. Consequently, cleavages increased, and politicians based their legitimacy on fomenting mutual-hatred rhetoric.

In conclusion, NATO's initial involvement was considered a partial success. On the one hand, elections were held relatively soon, which could have allowed a smooth democratic transition. On the other hand, a weak constitutional mandate and evident links to organized crime prevented the Bosnian government from implementing the necessary structural reforms.

By 1998, SFOR forces could count on 32.000 troops, slightly more than half of the force entailed in the IFOR initial mobilization. That said, this cutback did not reduce security in the country over time. On the contrary, their prolonged presence has helped to ease ethnic tensions.

In 2004, NATO handed over the lead for peacekeeping operations to the EU. Nevertheless, the Alliance was still present at Sarajevo's Headquarters. The change in command resulted from the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

2003 Berlin Plus agreement signed by the EU and NATO. The latter, as discussed in the EU-NATO section, marked a milestone in enhancing the two partners' interoperability. The switch to EUFOR Althea's preponderance was driven by the end of high-intensity fighting following the IFOR and SFOR missions. Therefore, focus was needed on instilling the conditions for long-term peacebuilding. Even so, EUFOR was primarily a military mission, as it was agreed that reconciliation, stability, and development required military oversight to mitigate potential escalations among the communities.

Despite its reduced on-the-ground presence, NATO maintained a strong political commitment to Bosnia's future accession. In 2010, the Alliance invited Bosnia to its Membership Action Plan (MAP). The latter was ideated in 1999 during the Washington Summit. It constituted a multi-year program designed to implement necessary reforms across different sectors. When acceding to MAP, the country must submit the Annual National Programme (ANP). The report must include the provisions the country has adopted to improve its compliance with NATO standards. It is structured around reforms on economic, political, legal, defence, and security sectors. While significant efforts were made across the different segments of the MAP, major complications arose from the reconversion of immovable defence assets inherited by the Yugoslav People's Army after the war into assets that would reinforce the state's security apparatus. Indeed, Republika Srpska (RS) representatives affirmed that immovable military assets (training camps, logistical infrastructure, ammunition depots) were theirs, not of the State as a whole. This posture is completely uncompliant with the ambition of further accession to the Alliance. Therefore, MAP was temporarily stalled. This case perfectly illustrated how the Alliance could not tolerate internal political fragmentation. In the occasion of the Talinn NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting

(2010), it was specified to Bosnia how problematic this point was in an optic of further integration and eventual accession <sup>35</sup>.

The first challenge in NATO cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina concerns the interference of foreign actors in the country. Indeed, many actors have a strong geopolitical interest in undermining prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration. First, China made significant investments in the country's infrastructure. Therefore, NATO's efforts to pressure Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue democratic reforms were curtailed.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, Iran and the Gulf States are also involved and contributed to the construction of religious and educational structures.

During the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO described its posture towards Bosnia and Herzegovina as follows<sup>37</sup>:

*We reaffirm our commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a stable and secure Bosnia and Herzegovina and our full support for its membership aspirations. We encourage the leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue demonstrating political will and to work constructively for the benefit of all its citizens in pursuit of reforms. We will continue to support defence reform efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the recent agreement by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on principles for the defence review and urge its completion as soon as possible. We welcome the progress made on registration of immovable defence property to the state, but we look to the leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina to accelerate efforts toward meeting the requirements set by NATO Foreign Ministers in Tallinn in*

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<sup>35</sup> “Decision to Give NATO MAP to Bosnia and Herzegovina Made in Tallinn,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, May 4, 2010, <https://vm.ee/en/news/decision-give-nato-map-bosnia-and-herzegovina-made-tallinn>

<sup>36</sup> I. Hope, *The Western Balkans and the Revenge of History* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2017), [The Western Balkans and the Revenge of History on JSTOR](#)

<sup>37</sup> NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” July 9, 2016, [Warsaw Summit Communiqué | NATO Media advisory](#).

*April 2010 so that its first Membership Action Plan cycle can be activated as soon as possible, which remains our goal. Allies will keep developments under active review. We commend Bosnia and Herzegovina for its contributions to NATO-led operations and for its commitment to regional dialogue, cooperation, and security.*

## **2.4) Kosovo-NATO**

In 1989, communist President Slobodan Milosevic decided to revoke Kosovo's independence. This choice was justified by a nationalist rhetoric aimed at centralizing political power with strongly authoritarian tendencies. In the following decade, violence and repression grew incrementally at the expense of the Kosovo population. By 1999, the international community, especially NATO allies, decided to open diplomatic channels to de-escalate the conflict. The main negotiation concerned the possibility of achieving peace in Kosovo through a NATO-stationed stabilization force. The talks took place in February and March 1999 on French territory. While Kosovo, whose number of refugees was already higher than 250.000, seemed favourable to this external intervention, we cannot say the same about Serbia. Therefore, the first negotiation attempts proved futile. The necessity of employing military means gradually crystallized as the only viable path to reach the negotiating table. Between March and September 1999, NATO massively bombed the Yugoslav territory. The absence of ground intervention was due to the veto power of China and Russia within the UN Security Council. Despite this complication, the fleet demonstrated surgical precision, hitting more than 95% of the assigned targets throughout the campaign. In total, the Alliance's military aircraft performed more than

38,000 flights, according to Klaus Naumann's report for "Global Governance"<sup>38</sup>. Miraculously, none of the military personnel involved was killed during the campaign. Furthermore, only two aircraft were destroyed by the Yugoslav air defence system. Consequently, the campaign was considered one of the biggest military successes in the Alliance's history. Eventually, the Yugoslav government, under pressure, decided to sit at the negotiating table in Northern Macedonia. Through the Kumanovo Agreement, signed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, NATO and Yugoslavia negotiated the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo, which was replaced by NATO forces, namely KFOR. On the same line, Serbian local law enforcement entities and civilian administration were also requested to leave Kosovo<sup>39</sup>. KFOR's establishment was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The mission had both military and civilian grounds. On the military side, its primary task was to oversee the effective withdrawal negotiated under the Kumanovo agreement<sup>40</sup>. On the civilian side, KFOR was tasked with contributing to the UN civilian mission, namely the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which aimed to stabilize the country over the long term. To this end, the Kosovo Liberation Army was disbanded and reformed as the Kosovo Protection Corps, whose mandate was to support UNMIK in addressing the humanitarian emergency. Despite minor disagreements over the pace of KFOR's withdrawal, both parties largely agreed on the need to demilitarize the area. Until 2004, the situation consequently improved. From that year, tensions among cultural and ethnic groups reemerged. Hence, KFOR mobilization in strategically sensitive sites was

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<sup>38</sup> K. Naumann, "NATO, Kosovo, and Military Intervention," *Global Governance* 8, no. 1 (2002): 13–17, [NATO, Kosovo, and Military Intervention on JSTOR](#)

<sup>39</sup> A. Bebler, "The Serbia-Kosovo Conflict," in *"Frozen Conflicts" in Europe*, 1st ed., ed. A. Bebler (Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2015), 151–170, [The Serbia-Kosovo conflict from "Frozen conflicts" in Europe on JSTOR](#)

<sup>40</sup> "Security Council Resolution 1244," *United Nations Security Council*, June 10, 1999, [Resolution 1244 - Unofficial UN Security Council Resolution Website](#)

convened. In this scenario, KFOR played a major role in negotiations by creating the stability necessary to begin the talks. By 2006, the first oral exchanges between Serbia and Kosovo regarding Kosovo's independence had begun.

In 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. Ninety-two states, such as China, Russia, and many Eastern European countries, were unfavourable to this decision. On the contrary, 26 countries, including many Western European countries, the US, and Canada, recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. Time made of this position a very controversial one. Indeed, NATO justified the bombardment of Serbia because of Milosevic's repressive policies. However, when Kosovo fighters massacred Serbian civilians who were attempting to escape the belligerent region, NATO closed an eye as they knew it would accelerate the process of adhesion to the Alliance.

From a negotiation perspective, NATO temporarily stabilized the situation in 1999 or 2004 to compel its counterpart to negotiate. That said, it lacked the foresight to prevent the spread of distrust in Russian eyes. Moreover, by sustaining Islamist groups in Kosovo, it indirectly allowed those groups to permeate local society further, granting them direct access to the Mediterranean.

Since 2008, the country's tensions have diminished, and NATO has reduced its on-the-ground military presence. Despite this adjustment, its military workforce demonstrated its effectiveness when tensions escalated in the country's north in 2011. On that same year, the EU launched its facilitated dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. KFOR contributed to the European diplomatic effort by ensuring a complementary military presence. Eventually, this joint effort led to the Brussels Agreement in 2013. The latter included a Serbian commitment to dismantle militias in Northern Kosovo, which was detrimental to stabilization. In return, Kosovo agreed to increase the quota for Serbs in the local police. Additionally, municipalities with a Serbian

majority were granted additional autonomy. Between 2014 and 2016, KFOR's focus was on supporting Kosovo in the formation of law enforcement responders and in creating its own army. During the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO assessed its mission in Kosovo as follows<sup>41</sup>:

*In accordance with UNSCR 1244, the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) will continue to contribute to a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement in Kosovo, working in close cooperation with the Kosovo authorities and the EU. While we welcome the progress achieved through the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, the security situation in Kosovo is broadly stable, though challenges remain. Changes in our troop presence will remain conditions-based and not calendar-driven. Furthermore, the Alliance will continue to support the development of the security organisations in Kosovo, including through the NATO advisory team on the ground and in accordance with Allied decisions, and will keep the nature of further support under review. We note Kosovo's request for an enhanced relationship with NATO and will respond no later than the December Foreign Ministerial on ways to further develop our support.*

NATO was satisfied with the evolution of cooperation with Serbia and commended the EU's efforts to facilitate the Pristina-Belgrade Dialogue. Nevertheless, the Alliance insisted that the counterparts fulfill their commitments to stabilize the region permanently. To this end, 4500 NATO troops remain operational on the ground. The latter are crucial actors to preserve the mandate established by UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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<sup>41</sup> NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," July 9, 2016, [Warsaw Summit Communiqué | NATO Media advisory](#).

## **2.5) Afghanistan-NATO**

After the 9/11 attacks, President Bush declared a War on Terror intended to: “*not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.*”<sup>42</sup>

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created in 2001. NATO assumed command in 2003, a role previously entrusted to the United States. Afghanistan constituted the first NATO mission outside Europe. ISAF was also the first operation involving non-NATO member states, further complicating its setup<sup>43</sup>. The principal goal was to stabilize Afghanistan's territory and reconstruct it after a long period of destruction. To do so, an HQ was established in Kabul, five regional commands, and twenty-five Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were established across the territory<sup>44</sup>. The triggering element was the 9/11 attacks. In virtue of the Alliance's Article 5, mutual defence was invoked for the first time in NATO's history. The UNSC issued subsequent resolutions 1386, 1444, 1510, 1563, 1623, 1659, and 1707 to confirm the mission mandate. Initially focused on Kabul, the ISAF mandate was subsequently extended to the rest of Afghanistan through UNSC resolution 1510<sup>45</sup>. The latter was granted such authority

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<sup>42</sup> M. Brenes, M. Beckley, Z. Cooper, J. Gledhill, J. Lind, S. Maitra, M. Poznansky, J. Shapiro, M. Soliman, and A. Wyne, “After the Age of Trump: Rejecting Competition,” in *New Visions for Grand Strategy*, ed. E. Ashford and N. J. Lee (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2025), 64, [After the Age of Trump: Rejecting Competition Rejecting Competition from New Visions for Grand Strategy on JSTOR](#)

<sup>43</sup> A. Khan, “NATO in Afghanistan: Post Riga,” *Strategic Studies* 27, no. 1 (2007): 59, [NATO IN AFGHANISTAN: POST RIGA on JSTOR](#)

<sup>44</sup> A. Kobieracki, “The Comprehensive Approach: NATO Responses from an Operational Standpoint – The Case of Afghanistan,” *Connections* 6, no. 2 (2007): 88, [The Comprehensive Approach: NATO Responses from an Operational Standpoint – The Case of Afghanistan NATO Responses from an Operational Standpoint – The Case of Afghanistan on JSTOR](#)

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1510 (2003),” October 13, 2003, [Resolution 1510 \(2003\) /](#)

by the United Nations. From the outset, its mandate was ambiguous and ambitious, and it was not based on a structured politico-military strategy<sup>46</sup>. Originally, the United States had to address the formation of the Afghan army. Second, the fight against the narco-trade was entrusted to the United Kingdom. Third, Germans had to establish reliable local law enforcement bodies and focused on police formation. Finally, Italy was entrusted with the elaboration of a functioning judicial system, while Japan dealt with disarmament and the dismemberment of local militias<sup>47</sup>. While this diversification initially seemed consistent with Afghan needs, it proved unrealistic and inconsistent with the realities on the ground. For example, Germany and Italy adopted a peacekeeping approach because the regions affected by the conflict were relatively calm. Instead, the UK and US zones of control were focused on counter-insurgency operations. The first issue was related to cost dispersion, which became inevitable when a mission had to focus on such diverse aspects. Another major issue concerned the command structure. In its early years, rotational leadership was implemented. The continuous changes it introduced had detrimental effects on the mission's operational effectiveness. Moreover, troops from different countries were operating under specific mandates and restrictions. In the first years, this asymmetry exposed US, British, Canadian, and Dutch soldiers more than their Italian, French, or Spanish colleagues. While the former had to deal with the Southern and Eastern parts of the country (the most dangerous), the latter were assigned to training and basic peacekeeping

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<sup>46</sup> S. Rynning, "NATO's Futures," in *NATO's Futures: The Atlantic Alliance Between Power and Purpose* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2019), 22–23, [2 NATO's Futures from NATO's Futures: the Atlantic Alliance between Power and Purpose on JSTOR](#)

<sup>47</sup> S. Monaghan, A. Palmer, and C. H. Park, "Appendix B: NATO's ISAF Mission in Afghanistan (Case Study 2)," in *Fighting with Allies: Transforming Multinational Strategic Planning in the U.S. Department of Defense* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2025), 37–41, [Appendix B: NATO's ISAF Mission in Afghanistan \(Case Study 2\) NATO's ISAF Mission in Afghanistan \(Case Study 2\) from Fighting with Allies: Transforming Multinational Strategic Planning in the U.S. Department of Defense on JSTOR](#)

missions in the Northern territories. This point highlighted the Alliance's fragility, raising the question of why certain military contingents were more exposed than others. In 2006, more than 4000 people died in Afghanistan, including foreign troops, Afghan soldiers, policemen, civilians, and Taliban themselves. Poor coordination and intelligence sharing resulted in inaccurate airstrikes, which affected the local population. Moreover, drug trafficking consequently increased. Finally, only 8 billion were granted to reconstruction and civilian support (10% proportion of the budget)<sup>48</sup>. The aggregation of those elements fostered distrust among the Afghan civilian population and foreign public opinion toward the mission. In November 2006, the NATO Riga Summit took place. The latter was intended to address the observed dysfunction by increasing contributions and coordination and reducing asymmetries in troops' mandates. As a result, by 2007, leadership and command functions were exclusively entrusted to the United States. In 2008, NATO Headquarters developed the Comprehensive Strategic Political-Military Plan (CSPMP) to address issues arising from the diversification of the ISAF mandate<sup>49</sup>. On the same wave, the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) was established in 2010. The latter's mandate was limited to establishing the police and the army. It was agreed that Afghanistan could not reach stabilization without an autonomous security apparatus. Despite the efforts made to achieve the goal, high levels of corruption and infiltration by insurgent groups led to limited results, due to structural issues affecting the country.

By the end of the year, NTM-A and ISAF, in general, ended their mandate. The mission was replaced by Operation “Resolute Support” in December 2014. The shift enabled greater focus on

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<sup>48</sup> A. Khan, “NATO in Afghanistan: Post Riga,” *Strategic Studies* 27, no. 1 (2007): 69, [NATO IN AFGHANISTAN: POST RIGA on JSTOR](#)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

strengthening an autonomous Afghan security response. While ISAF's mandate allowed offensive operations, Resolute Support was only authorized to open fire in case of self-defence. Indeed, its attention was devoted to exchanges with relevant political figures and to the design and creation of structures that could serve as command hubs for Afghan forces. Additionally, assistance was provided for operational strategies and their inherent logistical, budget allocation, and planning components. Finally, the formation of local security responders, as in previous operations, was a crucial part of the mandate. Resolute Support legal framework was based on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The latter clarified the conditions under which NATO should operate in Afghanistan, thereby enhancing the local government's centrality. Local hubs were established across the country (Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, and Jalalabad) to improve proximity to the civilian population and better understand their needs. The latter depended on a central hub in Kabul<sup>50</sup>. Between 2015 and 2016, it was agreed that the mission's mandate needed to be updated at least until 2020. Additionally, it was established that NATO's civilian personnel responsible for the formation of local security actors must maintain their presence even after the eventual end of Resolute Support. At the NATO Warsaw Summit 2016, the Alliance acknowledged similar difficulties encountered during NTM-A, including high levels of corruption, desertion, and infiltration among local security responders and enforcers. Nevertheless, it was agreed that a renewed commitment towards the stabilization of the country was necessary. For the said reason, a financial commitment of more than 15 billion dollars (2016-2020 arc) by numerous countries and international organisations in support of Afghanistan followed the meeting<sup>51</sup>. In 2017-2018, NATO partners agreed to increase the number of military

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<sup>50</sup> "Afghanistan," *U.S. Mission to NATO*, [Afghanistan - U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#)

<sup>51</sup> "NATO and Afghanistan," *NATO*, [NATO and Afghanistan | NATO Topic](#)

personnel on the ground from approximately 13.000 to 16.000. Additionally, the mission saluted the Government of National Unity's efforts to advance a peace proposal issued from peace dialogues initiated with the Taliban. After that moment, the Alliance's involvement consequently reduced. While NATO still politically supported all attempts to reconcile the Afghan communities and commitments towards long-term stability, it understood that its presence was no longer welcomed under the Taliban's authority. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2021, NATO announced the imminent withdrawal of its troops. By the end of September 2021, following the Afghan Government's collapse, the entire Resolute Support military workforce was withdrawn. Nevertheless, the Senior Civilian Representative Office was maintained in Kabul to ensure a reduced but tangible diplomatic presence within the country's borders, despite the momentary suspension of cooperation in almost all areas. The evacuation of personnel from Afghanistan was the largest in its history. Estimates by NATO suggest that more than 120.000 people were evacuated in the two weeks following the government's fall. As Resolute Support was interrupted, Operation Sollace replaced it. Its mandate was based on the capability to relocate the evacuated people across allied countries.

To summarize, NATO's missions in Afghanistan had mitigated results. As in countries abroad in previous sections, the mission was able to relatively stabilize conflictual scenarios, even if in a less effective way than it did in Bosnia or Kosovo. Nevertheless, it did not resolve the structural divisions and issues that undermine Afghanistan's capacity to deliver a long-term solution to the country's prosperity.

I would like to conclude this section by discussing how Afghanistan's geostrategic position has shaped NATO's relations with Russia and China. After the military debacle resulting from the 1979-1989 war, Russia was initially supportive of ISAF engagement in mitigating Taliban

expansion. As the mission was restructured due to unrealistic objectives and succeeded by Operation Resolute Support in 2014, Russia's engagement changed. Moscow forged links with the Taliban, adopting a strategy based on the promotion of strategic disorder<sup>52</sup>. This attitude was motivated both to eliminate NATO influence and to mitigate the expansion of the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISKP), whose members were hostile to the Taliban. Furthermore, it was already predictable at the time that NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan was a matter of "when" rather than "if". Therefore, the Taliban's integration into the Afghan political spectrum as a major actor has become increasingly clear. This assumption further motivated Russia's opportunistic move in reinforcing ties with the Taliban faction to obtain leverage in case of a peace settlement and underlying political reorganization.

China adopted a relatively neutral position towards counter-terrorism operations led by NATO on Afghan soil. However, it expressed concern about potential CIA settlements in the country and the detrimental impact they could have on Beijing's security<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, several Chinese diplomats affirmed that NATO was responsible for infrastructure damage to Afghan roads, bridges, and canals. Consequently, they advocated for the costs of reparations to be shared among NATO allies<sup>54</sup>. Apart from this aspect, China's concerns relative to Afghanistan were more related to the Uyghur community partners situated at its borders.

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<sup>52</sup> D. G. Lewis and A. B. Tabrizi, "Great Powers," in *Regional Powers and Post-NATO Afghanistan* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2021), 35–36,[3 Great Powers from Regional Powers and Post-NATO Afghanistan on JSTOR](#)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>54</sup> International Crisis Group, "Shifting International Policy on the Afghan Economy," in *After the Aid Axe: Charting a Path to Self-Reliance in Afghanistan* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2025), 3–12.[II. Shifting International Policy on the Afghan Economy from After the Aid Axe: Charting a Path to Self-reliance in Afghanistan on JSTOR](#)

## **2.6) Georgia-NATO**

South Ossetia, a Georgian northern region adjacent to Russian territory, had enjoyed a degree of autonomy until December 1990. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the former nationalist President of Georgia, ordered the suppression of South Ossetia's autonomous status. By the fifth of January 1991, the Georgian National Guard attacked Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. Supported by the Russian Government, the separatists dragged the conflict into June 1992. In that month, South Ossetia enjoyed effective independence from Georgia. Arbitrated by Russia, the 1992 Dagomys Agreement imposed a fragile peace. A joint military force commanded by Russian, Georgian, and South Ossetian officials was created despite the shared hostility between Georgia and Russian/separatists. However, the international community did not recognize the proclaimed independent status. In March 1992, Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council<sup>55</sup>. This accession marked the beginning of informal dialogue following the end of the Cold War. Although merely symbolic, it paved the way for further strategic cooperation among the parties. One of the many components of a broader political strategy to identify new security partners among Western countries. This political move did not please the Russian Federation. In August 1992, the war between Abkhazian separatists supported by Russia against Georgia broke out. Consequently, Tbilisi lost effective control over its Northwestern region. Indeed, Abkhazia

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<sup>55</sup> "NATO Chronology," *Embassy of Georgia to the Kingdom of Belgium and Mission to NATO*, [Chronology of Important Events | Georgian Mission to NATO](#)

became an independent entity, even if the international community still recognized Georgian sovereignty over the territory.

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are illustrative examples of Moscow's ability to disseminate frozen conflicts. Those situations are characterized by the state's (in this case, Georgia's) inability to regain control of lost territory and to assert its legitimate sovereignty. Furthermore, they typically present a scenario where the separatist entity is not recognized by the international community as entitled to self-determination. This ambiguous position benefited Russia in a strategy of disorder aimed at preventing the expansion of NATO and EU spheres of influence while assisting military or economically one or both counterparts to gain underlying trade advantages.<sup>56</sup>

Formal cooperation between NATO and Georgia began in 1994, when the Partnership for Peace (PfP) was signed. Negotiation challenges were considerable, as by that year, Russian troop presence in the northern and northwestern parts of the country (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) was significant. Despite this, Georgia agreed to greater military transparency with NATO, to participate in further military exercises, and to use the PfP consultation mechanism in the event of a military invasion on Tbilisi's territory. The agreement was grounded not only in practical military cooperation but also sent a strong political message to Russia, whose influence was no longer welcomed.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Frozen Conflicts: A Tool Kit for US Policymakers," *Atlantic Council*, [Frozen Conflicts: A Tool Kit for US Policymakers - Atlantic Council](#)

<sup>57</sup> "NATO Chronology," *Embassy of Georgia to the Kingdom of Belgium and Mission to NATO*, [Chronology of Important Events | Georgian Mission to NATO](#)

One year later, Georgia signed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). While PfP had strong political support, SOFA was understood as the legal mechanism necessary to make PfP effective. By 1997, SOFA was ratified and effectively integrated into Georgian domestic law<sup>58</sup>.

In the same year, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council was established. The latter aimed to further refine the initial military cooperation established through the PfP<sup>59</sup>. Indeed, by replacing the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the EAPC encompassed a broader notion of security than purely military operations. This revolution was necessary as the Cold War ended, since (as anticipated previously) the bipolarity of yesterday's world was over, and the new world order was characterized by the presence of a unique hegemonic power (the US). An order which entailed the need for a security of "anticipation" rather than a security of "reaction" towards external threats. EAPC created spaces for political discussion. For Tbilisi, this transition was crucial because it reshaped the role of NATO partners in the organization's decision-making process. It gave them greater influence, whereas in the NACC framework, partner countries were much more subject to the Alliance's decisions. That said, although EAPC expanded the scope of security cooperation, negotiations to conclude the agreement respected Georgia's willingness to cooperate only in areas it deemed appropriate. Indeed, Russian interventionist tendencies could have been accelerated by the sudden increase in cooperation between NATO and Georgia, undermining the post-Cold War status quo.

In 1998, Georgia's diplomatic mission to NATO had opened. The latter was not an obligation deriving from EAPC integration. However, with the expansion of cooperation areas from NACC to EAPC, it seemed logical to have diplomats on Georgian soil to facilitate exchanges between

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Relations with Georgia," *NATO*, [Relations with Georgia | NATO Topic](#)

NATO and the Caucasian country. In terms of concrete negotiation, having a diplomatic mission facilitated Tbilisi's accession to the Planning and Review Process, also known as PARR, of the PfP program. This enrolment was crucial for Georgia to further affirm its commitment to aligning with NATO standards. Also, it allowed the Caucasian country to increase the weight of its voice when it comes to NATO-partners joint operations. By late 2000, Georgian diplomats and NATO representatives began negotiations on how to improve their political meetings. In 2001, it established regular exchanges between the Head of NATO's Political Directorate and Georgia's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Specifically, it enabled the translation of political commitment into tangible measures to strengthen security in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, while the spectrum of potential cooperation was articulated in the EAPC, the platform clarified the areas for effective dialogue and created an agenda to improve the implementation of political decisions. From that moment, Georgia will be frequently invited to participate in meetings with NATO allies, often as the only non-allied member. This scenario exerted political pressure on Russia while sending a reassuring message to Georgia about the Alliance's willingness to include Georgia in the future. Between 2001 and 2002, Georgia hosted multiple military training exercises on their soil. NATO allies' forces were present, which marked a major achievement for Georgian diplomacy in negotiating closer ties with the Western Alliance. By the end of 2002, the Georgian Parliament issued Resolution 1661, which outlined an incremental accession path to NATO<sup>60</sup>. While negotiations with the Alliance were still underway to agree on the precise parameters, Resolution 1661 had significant symbolic value. Mikheil Saakashvili became Georgia's president in 2004. Saakashvili recognized the critical need to modernize Georgian

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<sup>60</sup> "NATO Chronology," *Embassy of Georgia to the Kingdom of Belgium and Mission to NATO*, [Chronology of Important Events | Georgian Mission to NATO](#)

military equipment. Before his election, Georgia disposed of obsolete and aging military equipment dating back to the Cold War.

In August 2008, Vladimir Putin ordered a military intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the motivation of protecting the Russian-speaking population present in those two regions adjacent to the Russian border. The Georgian army, initially determined to retake Tskhinvali (South Ossetia), was pushed back. To facilitate the process, a second front was opened in the first days of the Russo-Georgian War. Indeed, Abkhazian separatists supported by Moscow attacked the northwestern part of the country and conquered the last strongholds under Georgian control. As in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Putin's strategy was based on the instigation of disorder and the creation of a frozen conflict. The advantage was twofold. On one hand, frozen conflict implies the necessity of strong deterrence, allowing Putin to sell his weapons to the separatist movements and make a profit. On the other hand, it paves the way for establishing buffer zones. This strategy, fueled by Russian propaganda, reinforces the rhetoric of the fight against Western imperialism, nourishing a nostalgic view of the former USSR, dear to public opinion. When the military confrontations ceased in September 2008, the NATO-Georgia Commission was created. Its primary function was to facilitate Tbilisi's accession to the Alliance, as stated at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit.

Since 2011, Georgia has hosted an annual NATO military exercise called Agile Spirit. Until 2014, the exercises involved only U.S. and Georgian military forces. By 2015, other countries began participating in the exercises. Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria were included to enhance Georgia's interoperability. For the 2025 edition, thirteen countries participated. The last five years of exercises primarily focused on deterrence against the Russian threat.

In 2014, the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP) was signed to support Georgia's alignment with NATO standards and to prepare for future integration.<sup>61</sup> The latter contained the following goals:

- *To act as a catalyst for the implementation of Georgia's defence reforms;*
- *To enhance Georgia's interoperability with NATO;*
- *To support Georgia's efforts to contribute to Euro-Atlantic security;*
- *To enhance accountability and transparency;*
- *To enhance Georgia's resilience;*
- *To enhance Georgia's interagency coordination and interaction; and*
- *To bring Georgia closer to the Alliance.*

In 2015, Abkhazia and Russia signed the Peace and Integration Treaty, followed shortly after by South Ossetia. The two separatist territories agreed to integrate Russian sovereignty over their defence and foreign policy.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the multiple partnerships discussed in this section, the current geopolitical situation suggests that Georgia's accession to NATO would be a major geostrategic mistake. Confronted with separatist fragmentation along its northwestern and central borders, Russia would interpret accession as a provocative affront. Instead, the country offers a perfect opportunity to grant

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Wolff, A. T. (2015). The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis. \*International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)\*, 91(5), (pp.1117–1118). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24539021>

Russia concessions and restore peaceful dialogue. NATO might prefer to focus on Balkans integration and solidify it. That is why I advocate for a NATO that does not expand blindly but rather strategically. I adopt this reasoning for different reasons. First, considering that the founding principle of the Alliance is to preserve its members' security, which is not possible by systematically disrupting geopolitical balances. Second, NATO was founded in the aftermath of WWII, a historical period that illustrated where the fallacies of imperialism and extreme nationalism can lead. After the conflict, it was clear that cooperation through greater interdependence was the only way to prevent further violent confrontations. However, the force and the limit of this liberal vision resided in its intolerance towards non-democratic regimes. Today, it is more important than ever to establish a buffer zone that addresses Russia's security concerns and maintains a healthy geopolitical equilibrium.

## **2.7) Ukraine-NATO**

Since 1917, Ukraine was already a territory contested between East and West. Taking advantage of the Russian Revolution and the fighting between the White and Red Armies, Ukraine declared itself a Popular Republic. While most of their territory corresponded to the country's current geography, its Western part was controlled by the independent National Republic of Western Ukraine. Therefore, the two factions decided to join forces to confront the oppressive threats surrounding them. However, the Alliance won't last long, as both Ukrainian factions face escalating threats to their security. On the Western side, Poland took control of territory adjacent to its borders in less than a year. On the other hand, the Popular Republic collapsed by 1920 due to the bloody war with the Red Army, the victor of the Russian Revolution and precursor to a

new regional order. This turnover obliterated Ukrainian hopes to live under a democratic system and paved the way for their subjection to the Soviet dictatorship. In the 1930s, Stalin's collectivisation policies had devastating effects on Ukraine. Because of the starvation policies led by the USSR's chief, Ukraine lost more than three million people in those years. As World War II began, Ukraine was once again the object of division among the great powers. Initially, as an Alliance was created between the Russians and the Germans, most of the Ukrainian territory remained under Bolshevik control, while Hitler controlled the Polish neighbouring regions. Eventually, the Germans broke the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact concluded with the USSR by launching the Russian campaign and invading its former ally's territory. While the regions close to Poland tended to welcome the Nazi invasion as a liberatory event for their people, the inner land, as well as the territories closer to Russia, fervently fought the new oppressor. However, the resistance did little against the unstoppable Wehrmacht, which was rapidly advancing into Russian territory. The occupation resulted in the deportation of half a million Ukrainian Jews. If the Nazis were the principal perpetrators of such horror, they were also supported by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The latter, obsessed with racial puritanism, undertook a process of massacres with the Nazis' validation. Soon enough, Germans began to worry about the OUN's speeches advocating Ukrainian independence. The reason they decided to imprison their members. After Stalingrad, noticing that the wind was changing and that a German victory seemed increasingly unlikely, all these people were released to help the Nazis and mitigate the USSR's counter-offensive. Many Ukrainians still view OUN members as a brave force of resistance.

In February 2014, Russian forces annexed Crimea. The operation originated from a separatist wave in Luhansk and Donetsk. In those two regions, the local population has stronger socio-

cultural ties with the Kremlin than in the Western part of the country. By April 2014, uprisings erupted, and separatist fighters managed to take control of political institutions in both Luhansk and Donetsk. This control translated itself into the proclamation of the ‘‘People’s Republics’’ in the respective regions. Eventually, the offensive moved Eastwards and attained the city of Sloviansk. By summer, the latter had become the theatre of bloody military confrontations between Kyiv and its detractors. Petro Poroshenko, the newly elected Ukrainian President, was already under pressure and had mobilized significant military resources to counter the advancing offensive. This strategy pushed back the separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk. Aware of the advantageous momentum, Poroshenko proclaimed a unilateral ceasefire at the end of June. Soon enough, the latter failed, and the first attempt to restore peace to the separatist regions proved unsuccessful. In July, the regular Ukrainian army continued to advance and destabilize separatist forces in their initially conquered territories. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the famous Malaysian Airlines MH17 was shot down in Donbas territory held by separatist troops. The event triggered EU indignation and led to sanctions on Russian critical sectors, including energy. Furthermore, it obliged Russia to mitigate its support to separatist groups because of the fear of further sanctions extension. The wind seemed to change in the government’s favour, at least until the end of August 2014. In the first days of August, Ukraine launched a massive offensive to take back the city of Ilovaisk from separatist forces. The latter was considered a crucial asset for both military and civilian logistics capabilities. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of the same month, Ukrainian forces managed to enter the city and engaged in bloody confrontations with separatist groups. On the battleground was also the famous and controversial Azov unit, known for its brutality. While the first days of the offensive appeared favourable to Ukrainian forces, the balance quickly shifted. Urban fighting proved difficult for the regular army, especially given the separatists' defensive setup.

Furthermore, Ukraine did not properly organize its supply channels. Therefore, some troops were deprived of ammunition and orders. Additionally, reinforcements struggled to reach the battlegrounds, placing Ukrainian forces in an increasingly isolated position and significantly affecting their morale. Although the situation was already severe, it worsened over the following days. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, which is also Ukraine's Independence Day, an unprecedented intervention occurred. Fearing the possibility of a Ukrainian military takeover, Russia entered the battle by sending regular army troops in support of the separatist groups. Although this intervention was strategically relevant to deter Ukraine's push, it was also politically and symbolically driven by the choice of the 24<sup>th</sup> of August. The intervention sent the message that Ukraine's sovereignty was fragile and constituted a major humiliation for Ukrainian leaders and people. Already tired from days of urban guerrilla, the Ukrainian army had to face regular Russian soldiers with a radically different military preparation than the separatist groups. In only one day, Ukrainian troops were completely encircled by the Russians. Nearly 1,500 soldiers were caught in this deadly trap, forcing Kyiv's commanders to ask for negotiations. Aware of their force, the Russians continued the military operation relentlessly. A few days later, Russian officers agreed to the establishment of a corridor allowing the retreat of Ukrainian soldiers. However, while they started the retreat on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, the Ukrainian army faced a tragic ambush, resulting in the death of more than a thousand people. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, the battle was officially over. The heavy losses, coupled with disenchantment regarding the possibility of retaking the Donbas, forced Ukraine, with a very few alternatives, to sit at the negotiating table. What happened between the 29<sup>th</sup> of August and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September needs to be analysed to understand the dynamics of the negotiations and the role of NATO, which is central to our research question. After the Ilovaisk tragedy, Poroshenko and his government were

disconcerted by the event. He declared, one day later, that the 29th of August would be a day of national mourning. In the meantime, his government sought to involve NATO and EU militaries in response to the unprecedented Russian intervention. The transatlantic allies refused, fearing a global escalation to the conflict. That said, the allies did not remain helpless in the face of the situation. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2014, the European Council convened to discuss the need to hold an emergency summit ahead of the Wales NATO summit, which took place a few days later. The conclusions of the emergency summit were twofold. On the one hand, partners agreed to impose new sanctions on Russia and firmly condemned its military intervention. This choice was dictated by the escalatory nature of Russian behaviour and the inherent need to show unity against an imperialist attitude, antithetical to European founding values. Specifically, sanctions included travel bans, asset freezes, restrictions on Russian companies' ability to raise capital in the EU single market, restrictions on arms imports and exports, and even on dual-use goods (goods with both military and civilian applications). On the other hand, the importance of negotiating with the Russian government became clear to partners. This vision explained the choice to support the OSCE as a neutral mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Negotiations began under the Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, Russia, OSCE) framework. The latter was politically led by the Normandy Format (France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine). While the US was formally outside, President Obama agreed informally with its German and French counterparts (Merkel and Hollande) on the relevance of adopting such a strategy. As NATO is first and foremost an organization of defence, it was agreed that the Alliance would rather focus on its deterrence function, as illustrated at the Wales Summit a few days later. My analysis leads me to conclude that NATO was not absent, as it seemed, even in diplomatic terms. The choice of such a strategy was intended to avoid a confrontation that would revive Cold War ghosts. The choice of

mediators was based on the likelihood of achieving a peaceful, lasting settlement. In the days that followed the summit, France and Germany opened diplomatic channels, creating the possibility of participating in negotiations. As a result of their work, Putin and Poroshenko spoke by phone on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2014. A few days later, the Minsk Protocol was concluded. Before analysing the latter's implications, it is crucial to examine what happened at the NATO Wales Summit on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2014. Indeed, the Wales Summit and the Minsk Protocol constituted NATO allies' two-track strategy to balance deterrence (as highlighted at the summit) without compromising diplomatic channels with Russia (as attempted through the Protocol).

On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, the NATO Wales Summit took place. The summit declaration, derived from the discussions, was the longest in the Alliance's history.

Notwithstanding the increased diversity in NATO membership, the partners managed to adopt unilateral positions on the Russian invasion of Crimea. As illustrated by Larsen, in a report published by the NATO Defence College<sup>63</sup>, this limited progress nonetheless sent a message of unity to the rest of the world, especially to Russia. This was crucial because, at the time, the NATO Wales Summit represented the most significant gathering of allies since the end of the Cold War. The principal reason for this craze was, of course, the Russian intervention in Crimea. Nevertheless, the rise of ISIS, the situation in Afghanistan, migration in the Mediterranean, and allies' respective contributions were the other major themes that justified the importance accorded to the NATO Wales Summit by many experts and NATO allies' representatives.<sup>64</sup> With

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<sup>63</sup> J.A. Larsen, "The Wales Summit and NATO's Deterrence Capabilities: An Assessment," *NATO Defense College, New Research Division Publication: "The Wales Summit and NATO's Deterrence Capabilities – An Assessment" – NATO Defense College*

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

regard to the invasion of Ukraine and the threat from Russia to NATO's eastern borders, the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) were adopted. The latter explicitly stated the Alliance's intention to deploy troops, military vehicles, and border security measures if Russia's aggressive posture persisted. However, Larsen suggested that such a change of attitude towards Russia remained vague. Eventually, the Alliance mobilized terrestrial forces in the Baltic countries. Furthermore, the United States mobilized strategic bombers for exercises in the same regions. Nevertheless, the troops were insufficient in number. Therefore, security concerns for countries such as Poland or Estonia remained vivid. This careful posture was motivated by the fact that, since the end of the Cold War, NATO had been particularly careful to avoid the mobilization of its troops in ex-USSR countries. Indeed, the Alliance was determined to maintain a cordial relationship with Russia and emphasize its defensive function rather than an aggressive role, often depicted by Moscow to its population. The NATO Wales Summit report emphasized that such an attitude was inherently political and not grounded in any legal regulation. Therefore, many partners suggested resuming discussions on troop mobilization in the Baltic countries. In response, some members argued that such a strategy would undermine efforts at appeasement in the aftermath of the Cold War. Nevertheless, there was broad agreement that the Russian imperialist attitude could only be mitigated by a combination of deterrence and diplomacy, with deterrence privileged over diplomacy, given the invasion of Crimea. This paradigmatic change, already stimulated by the Russo-Georgian War, crystallized during the Wales Summit. Also, the communiqué suggested the need to improve missile defence capabilities and to continue efforts to enhance the US Navy's integrated air and missile defence system (AEGIS) mobilization, both on land and at sea. Additionally, it

emphasized that the development and production of missile defence technologies must be pursued in a way that excludes Russian participation<sup>65</sup>.

In the meantime, the Minsk Protocol was signed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2014. The Trilateral Contact Group (Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE) was engaged in negotiations. The Protocol consisted of the twelve following points.<sup>66</sup>:

1. *Ensure the immediate bilateral cessation of the use of weapons.*
2. *Ensure monitoring and verification by OSCE of the regime of non-use of weapons.*
3. *Implement decentralization of power, including by enacting the Law of Ukraine on the interim status of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Law on Special Status).*
4. *Ensure permanent monitoring on the Ukrainian-Russian State border and verification by OSCE, along with the establishment of a security area in the border regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.*
5. *Immediately release all hostages and unlawfully detained persons.*
6. *Enact a law prohibiting the prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with the events that took place in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.*
7. *Continue an inclusive national dialogue.*

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.,7. [The Wales Summit and NATO's Deterrence Capabilities An Assessment on JSTOR](#)

<sup>66</sup> "Minsk One Agreement (Protocol, 2014)," *Glostat*, [Minsk I Agreement \(Minsk Protocol\) \(2014\)](#)

8. *Adopt measures aimed at improving the humanitarian situation in Donbass.*
9. *Ensure the holding of early local elections in accordance with the Law of Ukraine on the interim status of local self-government in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Law on Special Status).*
10. *Remove unlawful military formations and military hardware, as well as militants and mercenaries, from the territory of Ukraine.*
11. *Adopt a programme for the economic revival of Donbass and the resumption of vital activity in the region.*
12. *Provide personal security guarantees for the participants of the consultations.*

The Protocol's premise of success rested on the need to secure a ceasefire. Indeed, none of the subsequent points could be fulfilled without such preconditions. The ceasefire was violated the following day, and hostilities never ceased. The Protocol's failure prompted another attempt in February 2015. In February 2015, Minsk II was signed. Initially, positions seemed difficult to reconcile. Indeed, Ukraine wanted to reacquire sovereignty over its territories, while Russia advocated for the recognition of separatist entities. In this regard, Russia did not want to halt its operations until it met its demands, whereas the Trilateral Contact Group advocated for an immediate ceasefire before negotiations began. Eventually, the negotiating parties agreed on the following points, among others.<sup>67</sup>:

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<sup>67</sup> "Minsk Two Agreement (2015)," *Glostat*, [Minsk II Agreement \(2015\)](#)

- *Immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine and its strict implementation starting from 00.00 AM (Kiev time) on the 15th of February, 2015.*
- *Ensure effective monitoring and verification of the ceasefire regime and the withdrawal of heavy weapons by the OSCE from the day 1 of the withdrawal, using all technical equipment necessary, including satellites, drones, radar equipment, etc.*
- *Carrying out constitutional reform in Ukraine with a new Constitution entering into force by the end of 2015, providing for decentralization as a key element (including a reference to the specificities of certain areas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, agreed with the representatives of these areas), as well as adopting permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in line with measures as set out in the footnote until the end of 2015<sup>1</sup>.*
- *Based on the Law of Ukraine “On interim local self-government order in certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions”, questions related to local elections will be discussed and agreed upon with representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group. Elections will be held in accordance with relevant OSCE standards and monitored by OSCE/ODIHR.*
- *Intensify the work of the Trilateral Contact Group including through the establishment of working groups on the implementation of relevant aspects of the Minsk agreements. They will reflect the composition of the Trilateral Contact Group.*

As observed, the themes subject to negotiation were substantially similar in Minsk I and II. The main differences lay in the degree of technicality and conditionality required to achieve the

announced objectives. For example, the disarmament process was specified in security distance guidelines for each heavy-weapon type (MLRS = 70km; Tornado-C, Uragan, Smerch, and Tochka = 140km; light artillery = 50km). From a humanitarian perspective, the parties are committed to maintaining access to humanitarian aid for the population affected by the war. Additionally, the border control configuration was a key difference in the Minsk II agreement. It was agreed that Ukraine would regain sovereignty over the separatist regions under various conditions, including constitutional reform on the status of the Donbas and the planning of local elections. Furthermore, OSCE was granted additional capacity to monitor the effective implementation of the ceasefire, including the use of drones and satellites. Finally, the modalities related to the electoral process following the ceasefire were clarified. It was agreed that the OSCE would play a crucial role in determining electoral guidelines. Finally, the organization was selected to monitor a subsequent election and ensure its fairness.

Ultimately, Minsk II was considered a partial failure across military, humanitarian, and political dimensions. Indeed, the ceasefire collapsed in a few days, and Russian presence remained a reality despite Moscow's commitments. Additionally, the elections were held without adequate supervision, and so was the implementation of the ceasefire. As the diplomatic track was compromised, the deterrent role of NATO and the enforcement of the measures discussed at the Wales Summit became priorities.

The Warsaw Summit was held in July 2016. Its communique illustrated a determined response towards the implementation of the commitments underlined during the Wales Summit.

Specifically, it acknowledged Russia's responsibility for violations committed after the Minsk

agreement. This posture was particularly illustrated by paragraph 19 of the communique, which stated as follows:<sup>68</sup>

*Russia, as a signatory to the Minsk Agreements, bears significant responsibility in this regard. Despite its declared commitment to the Minsk Agreements, Russia continues its deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, in violation of international law. Russia continues to provide weapons, equipment, and personnel, as well as financial and other assistance to militant groups, and to intervene militarily in the conflict. We are extremely concerned by the destabilisation and deteriorating security situation in eastern Ukraine. We call on Russia to desist from aggressive actions and to use its considerable influence over the militants to meet their commitments in full, especially to allow for the observation of the ceasefire regime, implementation of confidence-building measures, and disarmament.*

Afterwards, NATO commended the OSCE and the Trilateral Contact Group for their commitment to restoring Ukrainian sovereignty in the region. In the same regard, NATO condemned separatist attempts to tackle OSCE supervision. Furthermore, it was underlined how the cooperative work with the EU and OSCE was necessary in complement of the increased deterrent posture consequential to Russia's actions in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the paradigmatic change with increased reliance on deterrence at the expense of diplomacy was clear. Indeed, for the first time since 2009, allies increased their defence expenditures, and the Warsaw communiqué affirmed the importance of continuing efforts toward the 2% spending objective. The difference with previous summits was that NATO did not limit itself to political denunciation. Indeed, troops were successively mobilized in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and

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<sup>68</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," *NATO*, July 9, 2016, [Warsaw Summit Communiqué | NATO Media advisory](#)

Estonia to underscore NATO's commitment to regional security and its capacity for intervention in the event of further escalation with Moscow. Additionally, the level of cooperation achieved with partners such as Finland and Sweden in the security sectors was unprecedented.

Furthermore, NATO declared itself ready to increase cooperation. Specifically, the allies emphasized the importance of maintaining and expanding political consultations and joint military exercises.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the Alliance committed to an enhanced dialogue with Georgia and Ukraine to address their respective security concerns. These resolutions were rooted in paragraph 6 of the Warsaw communiqué. The latter illustrated this shift from diplomacy (a component of the OSCE's efforts) to deterrence and the increasing role of NATO in this configuration. The paragraph states as follows:<sup>70</sup>

*The evolving security environment demands the ability to address challenges and threats from any direction. Based on solidarity, Alliance cohesion, and the indivisibility of our security, NATO remains the transatlantic framework for strong collective defence and the essential forum for security consultations and decisions among Allies. The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. And so renewed emphasis has been placed on deterrence and collective defence. At the same time, NATO must retain its ability to respond to crises beyond its borders, and remain actively engaged in projecting stability and enhancing international security through working with partners and other international organisations.*

To realise the stated goals, the communiqué insisted on prioritising three main military areas: nuclear weapons, missile defence capabilities, and conventional weapons. For NATO, these three

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

pillars would ensure a robust deterrent posture and enhance the Alliance's cohesive capabilities through an appropriate division of functions.

This posture was reinforced by NATO's efforts to enhance dialogue with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council. The communiqué regretted that Russian actions had undermined global security and were inherently inconsistent with the basic principles necessary for genuine dialogue and cooperation.

To summarize, the Warsaw Summit operationalized the premises enounced in the Wales Summit 2014. It shifted the approach to Russia toward greater reliance on deterrence capabilities. The meeting's conclusions outlined a strategy to be adapted at subsequent summits. Indeed, the Brussels Summits (2017 and 2018) and the London Summit (2019) followed the same path and expanded deterrence to other domains, including space.

## **2.8) China– NATO**

In 1999, China firmly condemned NATO's intervention in Kosovo. In general, it repeatedly criticized NATO's expansion. This position allowed it to close its ties with Russia during the last few decades.<sup>71</sup> In the same year, 1999, China's Embassy compound in Belgrade was accidentally bombed by NATO forces. In concomitance, Chinese political authorities argued that the act was intentional. Although the veracity of such statements was denied, the relationship between

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<sup>71</sup> M. de Haas, "Partners and Competitors: NATO and the (Far) East," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 37, no. 3 (2013): 9–14. [Partners and competitors: NATO and the \(Far\) East NATO and the \(Far\) East on JSTOR](#)

Brussels and Beijing did not start on the best of terms<sup>72</sup>. The episode froze the relationship between the two actors until 2002. In that year, the Chinese ambassador was invited to NATO headquarters to discuss the intervention in Afghanistan and its reciprocal security implications<sup>73</sup>.

In the early 2010's, China strengthened its military forces and experienced a sustained economic growth. Its heightened salience in geopolitical terms has challenged the United States' hegemonic role since the end of the Cold War. This drew NATO members' attention, as they recognized that their diplomatic relations with Beijing posed the main challenge of the twenty-first century.

However, this perspective was asymmetric. The US took this threat way more seriously in terms of hard power than Europe did. The latter, due to its geostrategic position, was more focused on Russia's expansion in neighbouring regions, such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, and, more recently, on the invasions of Crimea and the Donbas. May-Britt Stumbaum<sup>74</sup>, defined this asymmetry as follows:

*“Europe does not and will probably never share the United States’ hard power perspective on Asia-Pacific. The U.S’ rebalancing to Asia-Pacific was spurred by strategic military consideration and is seen in an economic view only secondarily, with the Trans-Pacific Partnership under negotiation. For the Europeans, and particularly Germany, the Asia-Pacific region and the relationship with China is shaped by the “tyranny of distance,” with Russia in*

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<sup>72</sup> F. Ceylan and T. Ildem, *Ebbs and Tides in NATO-China Relations* (Istanbul: Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, 2022), 2, [EBBS AND TIDES IN NATO-CHINA RELATIONS on JSTOR](#)

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> M.-B. Stumbaum, “Transatlantic Cooperation on China: More Than an Ocean Between,” *American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS)*, December 8, 2014, [Transatlantic Cooperation on China: More than an Ocean Between – AGI](#)

*between consuming most of the strategic thinking and resources that Germany and Europe entertain eastward*<sup>75</sup>.

The European members of NATO saw China's development as an opportunity for trade and increased interdependence. From China's perspective, the advantages of increased interdependence do not depend solely on economic and trade opportunities. The primary rationale for this attitude is geopolitical considerations. Indeed, China could divide the Alliance and isolate the United States while increasing its economic and political ties with the European Union<sup>76</sup>. However, not all EU member states shared the same stance on China. For example, countries bordering Russia were more reluctant to engage in partnerships with China, as China might jeopardize their relationship with the US, which they could not afford, given Russia's imperialist posture. The same applied to Great Britain, which has a largely privileged relationship with Washington. On the other hand, Western European countries, facing rising sovereign debt, were strengthening their relationships with China. The latter also served, and still serves, as a critical hub for European exports<sup>77</sup>.

To overcome these differing perspectives, the US pressured EU countries to reconsider their relationship with China. The Obama, Biden, and Trump administrations insisted that, despite the economic advantages of increased cooperation with China, China is at odds with freedom-related Western values. Therefore, the impact that increased cooperation with Beijing might have on the diffusion of these values must not be underestimated. Consequently, most Americans advocated

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> "China's Rise and NATO," *Strategic Analysis* 37, no. 3 (2013): 280 [NATO'S NEW ROLE: The Alliance's Response to a Rising China The Alliance's Response to a Rising China on JSTOR](#)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

codifying NATO norms and principles for interactions with third countries. The latter implementation may pressure China to move toward democratization and further solidify NATO members' relationship.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2017, President Donald Trump issued a strategic directive called the National Security Strategy (NSS). The document outlined shifts in priorities for the challenges the US faces across the different subfields of national security. It identified Russia and, in particular, China as the primary security threats to the United States. It marked a significant strategic shift from the previous decade, when the US identified the Middle East and counterterrorism as its main priorities. To translate this strategic shift into military planning, the Secretary of Defence, James Mattis, implemented the National Defence Strategy (NDS) on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2018.

During the 2019 NATO Summit in London, the allies convened for the first time to discuss whether China's expansion might constitute a major challenge for the Alliance. The London Declaration emanating from the meeting stated as follows: "*We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance*"<sup>78</sup>. In recent years, European allies developed awareness about China's capability to acquire fundamental infrastructure necessary for European security<sup>79</sup>. This realisation proved crucial in restructuring the vision not only of conventional military threats, but also of unconventional ones. The change in attitude led to a decline in Chinese investment in

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<sup>78</sup> M. R. Olesen, *What to Do About China?: Forging a Compromise Between the US and Europe in NATO* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2021), 2, [WHAT TO DO ABOUT CHINA?: Forging a compromise between the US and Europe in NATO Forging a compromise between the US and Europe in NATO on JSTOR](#)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Europe relative to the 2010s. During the NATO Brussels Summit in June 2020, the former NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, stated that the rise of China might pose a threat to the Alliance's future, without, however, addressing the impact on any specific ally<sup>80</sup>. However, in the 2021 Brussels Summit communique, China appeared only twice, suggesting that NATO allies' positions were not perfectly aligned with U.S. foreign policy, despite efforts by American administrations to reduce this potentially divisive dynamic within the Alliance. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2020, the NATO 2030 Report was aligned with the London Summit. It clarified that China must be regarded as a strategic rival rather than an imminent military threat.

The Interim National Security Guidance issued by the Biden administration in March 2021 confirmed the strategic shift resulting from the NSS and NDS under the Trump administration. This document classified China as “an assertive and competitive power”. Furthermore, it confirmed the need to prioritize security issues in the Asia-Pacific region over those originating from Russia.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi met during the UNGA taking place in New York. Given the ambiguity described in the previous paragraphs regarding the alignment of US and NATO foreign policies, it was necessary to initiate a diplomatic dialogue with China to understand better its perspective and potential areas for further cooperation across diverse sectors. Wang Yi affirmed that China had no expansionist ambitions regarding influence and was not determined to challenge NATO's stability. The Chinese Foreign Minister emphasized China's readiness to deepen collaboration to promote peace and stability worldwide. Furthermore, he insisted that both parties avoid

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

misconceptions that could undermine current and future cooperation. Finally, Wang Yi confirmed China's role as a promoter of peace talks to solve the Ukrainian conflict.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister neither condemned Russia's actions nor advocated a security architecture to maintain peace and stability in the region. On the other hand, Stoltenberg clarified that NATO did not see China as a direct rival. Also, he underlined the need for further China-NATO cooperation, especially in terms of arms control and climate change-related challenges.<sup>82</sup>

## **2.9) Iran-NATO**

Iran-Russia's growing collaboration is one of NATO's greatest concerns, especially over the last decade. Ideologically opposed for most of their histories, Russia and Iran began cooperating only in the last 35 years. Indeed, Russia engaged in the dialogues with its counterpart at the end of the Cold War. In 1995, the two countries signed their first major agreement. The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant Agreement aimed to finalise the construction of the plant on Iranian soil. When Vladimir Putin was elected in 2000, he immediately underlined the urgency of enhancing collaboration with Tehran. Hence, the Treaty on the Foundations of Relations and Principles was signed in 2001—the said agreement established the basis for bilateral cooperation. When the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, Russia and Iran further reinforced their ties. Indeed, both countries supported Assad forces, considered a stronghold preventing Western influence from perpetuating in the Middle East. In 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOA) was

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<sup>81</sup> “Wang Yi Meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, [Wang Yi Meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#)

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

concluded between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany. During the negotiations, Russia played a crucial role in easing the sanctions imposed on Iran. When the Russian invasion of Ukraine started in 2022, the degree of cooperation between the two actors was substantially enhanced. Russia's strategic ambitions aligned with Iran's ideology and underscored the consistency of continued collaboration to confront NATO as a geopolitical and ideological adversary. Across the war, Iran supplied drones such as the Shahed 131, Shahed 136, and the Mojaher 6<sup>83</sup>. Those UAS are known to reconcile production costs with damage capability efficiently. Furthermore, Russia opted to purchase those drones because they allowed it to circumvent international sanctions. It seemed that this cooperation was not punctual and might be extended, affecting current geopolitical equilibria. Indeed, Iran supported Russia in the creation of new drone factories in the Tatarstan region. Tehran offers several advantages for increasing cooperation. First, having an ally among the permanent members of the UNSC may prove useful, as illustrated by the PCJOA negotiations. Second, in exchange for its support, Russia furnishes Iran with military equipment confiscated on the battlefield. As American equipment is the most technologically advanced, reverse engineering can only benefit Iranian military innovation and enhance self-sufficiency. Most of the components required for Iranian UAS production are sourced from Western industrial suppliers. Indeed, for the Shahed 131 and 136, more than 80% of components are sourced from Western factories. Therefore, Iran needs to buy those indirectly to avoid sanctions.

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<sup>83</sup> K. Fricke, T. Hankins, and V. Jones, *Two to Tango: Russian-Iranian Drone Cooperation* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2025), 3, [Two to tango: Russian-Iranian drone cooperation Russian-Iranian drone cooperation on JSTOR](#)

### **3) NATO's Current and Future Challenges**

#### **3.1) The War in Ukraine and Its Implications**

Based on deterrence capabilities adopted at NATO summits since 2017, the Ukrainian invasion began in February 2022, posing a new challenge to NATO: the capacity to confront it on a unified front. Indeed, the Alliance needs to effect the inverse paradigmatic change it effected during the Cold War by the end of the Cold War. When the latter ended, and the USSR collapsed, NATO prioritized peacekeeping operations across the continent, to the detriment of the deterrence posture it had maintained until then. Today, it is crucial for NATO to intensify support for Ukraine, despite Russia's internal efforts to divide public opinion among NATO members. Granting concessions now would incentivise Putin to pursue expansion based on the ideological and political restoration of the Soviet Union. Additionally, it would send a powerful message to other authoritarian regimes that countries can pursue their geostrategic ambitions, notwithstanding the international rules intended to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the international community.

To enhance the public support towards deterrence, there needs to be a process of reconciliation between NATO as an organization and the citizens of the countries it protects. The diffusion of rhetoric claiming that investing in defence offers no tangible benefits to citizens is spreading across Europe, regardless of political orientation. The point is that citizens don't understand how crucial deterrence is to face authoritarian regimes. It seems that decades of prolonged peace

excluded the conception of war re-emergence, especially for members in Western, Southern, and Northern Europe. However, the threat is real and growing in proportion to our inaction. This understanding must be strengthened at the local level through various measures. First, organizing local summits that include civil society is necessary to raise awareness of NATO's efforts and the challenges it currently faces. Additionally, citizens should be aware that they can benefit from rearmament by investing in a rapidly expanding sector. This realisation would benefit investors' portfolios and the defence industry by freeing up significant capital currently devoted to research and production. This virtuous circle may also improve technological progress, including for dual-use goods whose functions can be applied to both military and civilian use. Second, the education sector across member countries must devote significant effort to sensitizing the younger generation to current geopolitical dynamics and their multifaceted implications. Third, NATO must pursue partnerships with universities, NGOs, municipalities, and private actors. The organization of conferences, workshops, and community-based exercises will be crucial to fostering a shared sense of responsibility across civil society.

With regard to diplomatic mistakes, the most illustrative example is the Gorbachev-Baker talks.

In the section on the talks between Gorbachev and Baker, Orsini demonstrates how Russia felt betrayed by the United States' lack of clarity regarding future expansion and its implications.

While I agree that such communication errors are inadmissible, I don't think we should compromise regarding Ukraine. Indeed, Ukraine is a free, self-determined country, not a geopolitical objective. People must be free to choose their own future consciously without external interference. Furthermore, I don't believe there are grounds to justify Russia's actions.

NATO repeatedly reiterated that its role was exclusively defensive. Therefore, such commitment must be reaffirmed with determination to Russia. Additionally, it should be clarified that NATO's

expansion was the result of countries' free will and was not coerced. While deterrence is fundamental in NATO's new strategic vision, diplomacy must not be discarded, and Russia must be aware that, if it respects the self-determination of its neighbours, the Alliance would be ready to further cooperation to ensure regional and global security<sup>84</sup>.

### **3.2) The Reinforcement of Autocratic Regimes**

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski published its book *"The Grand Chessboard"*. The former U.S. National Security Advisor under the Carter administration (1977-1981) made highly foresighted observations. The most relevant is the following *"Potentially, the most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an "antihegemonic" coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances. It would be reminiscent in scale and scope of the challenge once posed by the Sino-Soviet bloc, though this time China would likely be the leader and Russia the follower."*<sup>85</sup>. Indeed, NATO's external future challenges are mainly derived from the relations with China, Russia, and Iran. On the one hand, these three countries are destabilizing their respective regions. First, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine raises one question for the allies: who is going to be next? And when? While NATO members increased their investments in defence and military capabilities, interoperability issues persisted and are addressed in this section. Second, China's potential intervention in Taiwan is increasingly likely, and its military capabilities continue to improve. Third, Iran is the principal country responsible

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<sup>84</sup> M. Ozawa, "Adapting NATO-Russia Dialogue," June 1, 2021, 2. [Adapting NATO-Russia dialogue on JSTOR](#)

<sup>85</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 55, [Zbigniew Brzezinski - The Grand Chessboard.pdf](#)

for destabilizing the Middle East. The evolution of its nuclear program, its financing of proxy wars against Israel, and the enhancement of its drone production constitute an undeniably major challenge for the Alliance. On the other hand, the reinforcement of ties among those three powers as the “authoritarian triangle” against NATO is the most concerning challenge NATO currently faces. For clarity purposes, bilateral relations with Russia, China, and Iran are first analysed. Subsequently, it is argued that Russia, China, and Iran pose a security issue through unified consolidated cooperation.

First, the most important challenge regarding the above-mentioned trilateral cooperation concerns China and Russia. It is now an “open secret” that Beijing supports Russia by furnishing critical materials needed to pursue its war of aggression. This support is critically problematic, as it undermines the efforts of the international community, including, among others, the use of economic and financial sanctions, to counter Putin’s ambition to restore the world order that existed before the end of the Cold War.

Another crucial challenge concerning the Russia-NATO relationship regards the influence on African countries. Moscow played a role in the last decade by destabilizing the relations between Africa and NATO. Indeed, Russia fomented disinformation and presented itself as a promoter of emancipation for African countries towards their former colonial powers<sup>86</sup>. Its strategy was based on reinforcing political ties with local authoritarian regimes rather than on development initiatives that directly affect the population's welfare. Among the latest developments, Putin supported Equatorial Guinea by sending 200,000 military instructors to President Obiang.

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<sup>86</sup> T. Guenov, *Addressing China’s Military Expansion in West Africa and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2025), [Addressing China’s military expansion in West Africa and beyond on JSTOR](#)

Moreover, during 2018-2023, the Wagner militia played a crucial role in maintaining Touadéra's regime in the Central African Republic. While Moscow cannot compete with Beijing in local investment, the growing ties between the two countries should be a central concern for NATO. Allowing a disruptive power such as Russia to cooperate with China's economic capabilities might result in NATO's exclusion from a continent with the greatest demographic prospects of the coming century.

Second, increased cooperation between Moscow and Tehran is of grave concern to NATO and its partners in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. On the one hand, Iranian drones were increasingly utilised in infrastructure attacks on Ukrainian soil, and inherent statistics provided by the NATO Defence College prove that the interception capacity was declining over the last year<sup>87</sup>. On the other hand, those drones could pose security issues to Israel, a major NATO partner in the Middle East. Israel is daily confronted to opponents financed by the Islamic Republic, and the events of June 2025 showed fragilities in its Integrated Defence Systems (IDS) capabilities that could be compromised proportionally to the Iranian military innovations. Additionally, the proliferation of military equipment could further escalate tensions in an already volatile region, where appeasement and peacebuilding are crucial. Second, as Iran solidifies its reputation as a major drone producer, this could lead to further agreements with third countries. In addition to the economic advantages Tehran might gain, closer collaboration with countries with advanced military engineering capabilities could heighten the security threat posed by the Islamic Republic in the Middle East. Therefore, the Russo-Iranian spread of military technologies must be a major priority for NATO, given the security implications at stake.

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<sup>87</sup> K. Fricke, T. Hankins, and V. Jones, *Two to Tango: Russian-Iranian Drone Cooperation* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2025), 8, [Two to tango: Russian-Iranian drone cooperation](#) [Russian-Iranian drone cooperation on JSTOR](#)

### **3.3) NATO-EU interoperability**

The Russian invasion of 2022 revealed the strengths and limits of current interoperability between NATO and the EU, as reflected in the Joint Declarations discussed in the NATO-EU section. The former was entrusted with its traditional task of deterrence, in the context of protecting the allies whose borders might be threatened by future Russian expansionism. The task involved increasing its mobilization capacity if the scenario requires it. The NATO Force Model was agreed upon by the allies during the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit.<sup>88</sup> for this specific function. It was agreed that the allies must select troops that can be placed at the disposal of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The Model divides troops according to their readiness capacity. The mobilization arc ranges from 10 to 180 days, and troops are grouped by readiness level. To ensure the proper and enhanced provision of troops by each state, the NATO Readiness Process was implemented.

While the Ukrainian theatre remains the primary test of NATO-EU interoperability, joint operations in the Mediterranean also pose a current challenge that requires improvement.

Over the past few decades, NATO has intensified its operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Operation "Active Endeavour" lasted from 2001 until October 2016. The latter's rationale was to protect the Alliance's southern borders from terrorist activity. Practically, it consisted of patrols

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<sup>88</sup> "NATO Force Model," *NATO*, [NATO Force Model | NATO Topic](#)

monitoring shipping activities<sup>89</sup>. The mission's operational area encompassed the entire Mediterranean Sea. The force mobilised by NATO during the operation included a naval and air fleet. The former was composed of two frigates, various submarines, and surface units. The second was exclusively reliant on maritime patrol aircraft. At the July 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit, it was decided that the Alliance's operational posture in the Mediterranean required a strategic shift. Operation “Sea Guardian” was conceived to perform a wider range of tasks than the previous mission’s mandate. Its rationale was grounded on the 2011 Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS). The latter emphasized the necessity of four elements for a successful maritime strategy. First, patrolling and gathering information were considered crucial, as they were during the implementation of Operation Active Endeavour. Second, Sea Guardian was designed to protect freedom of navigation. Third, AMS concluded that the Alliance must be able to prevent the transport of dangerous military materials, which could be detrimental to the Alliance and its partners. Finally, the strategy relied on protecting energy pipelines and communication channels that pass through the Mediterranean. Operation Sea Guardian arose amid a prolonged humanitarian crisis. Indeed, Europe faced an increase in entries within its territory. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 302.000 migrants crossed EU borders through either Western, Eastern, or Central routes. This observation, combined with the terror attacks that haunted Europe during the previous year, led the Alliance leaders to conclude that an appropriate security architecture must be adopted accordingly.

While NATO conceived Operation Sea Guardian, it involves interoperability with the EU. The latter launched EUNAVFOR MED in June 2015, renamed to Operation” Sophia” in September

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<sup>89</sup> A. G. Dibenedetto, “Implementing the Alliance Maritime Strategy in the Mediterranean: NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian,” *NATO*, December 1, 2016, [Implementing the Alliance Maritime Strategy in the Mediterranean: NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian NATO’s Operation Sea Guardian on JSTOR](#)

of the same year. The operation's goal was to disrupt human trafficking by tracking and intercepting the means of transportation serving the purpose of human smuggling. In July 2017, Operation Sea Guardian granted its logistic and surveillance assistance to favour Sophia's work without creating an overlap between each organization's functions. Subsequently, Sophia's mandate was updated to include establishing the Libyan Coast Guard and implementing the embargo against Libya. At the end of its mandate in March 2016, the operation had rescued almost 45,000 migrants. Although these numbers are impressive, the EU decided to progressively remove the technical capabilities that enable Sophia to perform its functions efficiently. The decision was primarily driven by Italy's reluctance regarding the selection of disembarkation hubs, the country of first entry responsibilities, and relocation measures. Therefore, Operation Sophia was succeeded by "MED Irini" on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2020.

Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI's focus was devoted to the application of the UN arms embargo towards Libya. The functions previously incorporated into Operation Sophia remained integral to the mandate, but their prioritization shifted from primary to secondary objectives.<sup>90</sup> Specifically, a fleet deployment was established to prevent the delivery of weaponry to the Libyan National Army (LNA) and its leader, General Haftar. The focus on the maritime side underestimated the extent to which the LNA received support from land and air.

To conclude on EU-NATO interoperability, the following points should be considered. First, rotational leadership must be implemented in joint missions to determine whether cooperation is possible not only in theory but also in practice. Second, the codification of who acts, when, and why must be clarified to avoid overlapping tendencies that are detrimental to the partners'

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<sup>90</sup> E. Greco, "Sophia, Irini, EU Mediterranean Policies, and the Urgency of Doing Something," *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, [From Sophia to Irini: EU Mediterranean Policies and the Urgency of "Doing Something" | Istituto Affari Internazionali](#)

functioning. Additionally, although considerable efforts have been made in this regard, it is necessary to establish the regularity of joint forums for ongoing review. Finally, the two partners must negotiate on the operationalization of task forces for those domains of overlapping competencies.

## **Conclusion**

Initially established in 1949 as a counterweight to the USSR bloc, NATO's area of intervention expanded by the end of the Cold War. Operations in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Afghanistan illustrated NATO's use of military force as a peacekeeping and peacebuilding instrument. For a few decades, it seemed that the deterrence posture did not require enhancement, given U.S. hegemony. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was the first signal of a revanchist Russia ready to use force to reanimate the ghosts of the Cold War. Indeed, while Russia pursued hybrid war in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia, and in Transnistria immediately after the end of the Cold War, direct intervention with territorial annexation only came later. This trend was confirmed by the successive Crimea operations (2014) and the Ukraine invasion (2022). Therefore, NATO allies understood the necessity to enhance their deterrence capabilities. While Russia is the Alliance's primary security concern, it is not the only one. Indeed, as we observed, Iran also represents a major challenge for the Alliance. Its supply of military equipment, especially drones, and its capacity to circumvent sanctions are major assets for Russia. The rapprochement between these two countries strengthens an authoritarian front that threatens the stability of a world order dominated by democratic values since the end of World War II. This observation is even more alarming when China is considered. The current geopolitical disorder created by Russia may further motivate Beijing to accelerate its invasion of Taiwan. Therefore, NATO must maintain bilateral contact with China to complement its deterrence capabilities with diplomatic channels. Those three

countries constitute the most serious adversarial challenges. Nevertheless, major future challenges are also based on the capability to interact among allies. In this regard, NATO and the EU must collaborate closely to avoid duplication and enhance interoperability. As discussed in the dedicated section, Joint Declarations and increased cooperation facilitated joint exercises and operations in the Mediterranean, as well as the development of models capable of mobilizing troops rapidly if required. NATO did not express strong opposition to Europe's increased autonomous strategy but demanded a stronger commitment under Trump's presidency to an equal and increased contribution to the Alliance budget. In a world where imperialism resurfaces, Europe must be able to affirm its strength and increase the defence and security budget, as it can no longer count on the peace dividend enjoyed until a few years ago. If deterrence capabilities and the degree of cooperation and unity among EU countries increase, Putin would think twice about continuing its expansionist policy. Transatlantic cooperation would be reinforced by this autonomy, which reduces subjection and encourages a more equal cooperation. This shift is necessary in a world where the US cannot be the world's police for long, and where autocratic and imperialist regimes are growing as mushrooms. Europe's strategic autonomy, complemented by further interoperability with NATO, is the key to counterbalance the increased cooperation between China, Russia, and Iran. Promoting a model where freedom, the rule of law, and democratic values are at the service of peace and mutually beneficial interdependence is crucial to preserve the efforts of our ancestors, who, by the strength of the transatlantic cooperation, eradicated authoritarianism and a world solely based on power relations where the strong crush the weak.

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