

## The Future of NATO After the Ukraine War: The Emperor's New Clothes

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**Abstract:** The article aims to envision the prospects of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Examining the historical and practical aspects of the issue, the starting premise is that NATO has become an obsolete and dangerous alliance. Ever since the end of the Cold War, marked by the collapse of socialism and the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact, the Alliance has been in a perpetual search for new enemies, i.e., a *raison d'être*, at the expense of global peace and security. During this process, NATO has tried to conceal its genuine interests in sustaining American hegemony and preserving its bureaucratic existence. The war in Ukraine is a direct consequence of NATO's "cosmopolitan militarism" on a global scale. The concept of a "global NATO" or "globalised NATO" lies at the core of this study. The article presents tentative conclusions, outlining possible scenarios for NATO's position in the aftermath of the Ukraine War.

**Keywords:** NATO, Ukraine, Russia, China, international security, militarization.

### Introduction

In just a few short years, NATO has seemingly gone from a "brain dead" alliance, as French President Macron put it (*Economist* 2019), to a revitalised force with renewed legitimacy and vigour. Recently, two states previously known for their longstanding neutrality, Sweden and Finland, applied for membership in the club; the latter made it in April 2023, while Sweden is expected to follow suit in July. While the ongoing war in Ukraine is often cited as the main catalyst for this shift, we argue that this explanation merely scratches the surface of global developments. As far as these two states are concerned, observant analysts have indicated a paradigm shift in their

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national security policies towards more military-based options for quite some time. The war on their borders only catalysed what had been underway.

NATO, as an actor on the international stage, is neither the most important nor the most influential one. The period between the end of the Cold War and the current one can be viewed as a transitional phase, during which the United States asserted itself as a global hegemon and an exceptional nation. While the “unipolar moment”, as some have referred to it (Krauthammer 1990), was relatively short-lived, it left deep traces in the corridors of American power. As a result, the political, business, and military elites remain resolute in extending this era for as long and as widely as possible, even if it means bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear disaster.

What the US’s elites failed to anticipate was the organised response of the “Rest” of the world to the unwelcome and imposed hegemony. The Russian Federation, which had been sending warnings for years, found itself backed into a corner and responded militarily in Ukraine. China has not only emerged as a global power and a competitor to the United States, to quote John Mearsheimer, but it also demonstrates a greater capacity and willingness to take diplomatic and other actions for the sake of a world that no longer depends on *Pax Americana*. Additionally, the majority of the world’s states and populations – the so-called Global South – have seized the momentum to demand a more just world order where they are not exploited or bullied by Washington, D.C., particularly in economic and financial terms. The seeds of a multipolar order had already been planted prior to the Ukraine conflict, but now the time seems ripe for a more dramatic global shift.

In this context, we approach the past, present, and future of NATO from a critical peace studies perspective. Regardless of the period examined, one thing remains constant: NATO has always been dependent on the political will and military input of the United States. As the American Empire continues to decline, NATO may become its “last resort” for disciplining allies and weaker states, but the Alliance’s further existence will undoubtedly be seriously questioned. The Empire is in decline, but it still tries to put on different “clothes”, i.e., to gain some sort of legitimacy. The provisional conclusion is that there is an increasing number of actors ready to cry, “The Emperor is naked!” just like in Hans Christian Andersen’s children’s fairytale.

## **NATO's Quest for Purpose (1989-2022)**

The end of the Cold War, especially its symbolic act in the form of the 1989 Berlin Wall's fall, was celebrated as a watershed event in the world's history. The enthusiasts saw an exceptional opportunity to gain from the expected peace dividend, i.e., the possibility to redirect financial means and human efforts from the war sphere to civilian/public aims. Other scholars, notably Francis Fukuyama, declared the "end of history", which was a euphemism for the triumph of liberal (Western) democracy over backward and authoritarian socialism. This refrain was repeatedly and uncritically reiterated by a generation of post-Cold War scholars and intellectuals; it has become the "alpha and omega" of international state-building and the compradorial elites of neocolonialism (Milanovic 2023). The result was the creation of a simplistic Western narrative of triumph and defeat. The role of the Soviet leadership, particularly that of Mikhail Gorbachev, has been disregarded and considered irrelevant in offering peaceful solutions and a new vision for Europe and the post-Cold War world. However, other scholars were more cautious and warned that soon we would want to restore the balance of power linked to the Cold War period.

Very few were aware (or cared about the fact) that socialism collapsed due to its internal contradictions and the exhausting arms race that prevented it from achieving declared public goods. Also, the majority turned a blind eye to the fact that the remnants of the Berlin Wall fell over people's heads. In other words, all social and other collective goods and socialist benefits were lost overnight because liberalism promoted an individualist agenda at the expense of the collective good. One could say that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented both a victory for liberal democracy and a loss for many people who relied on the socialist state framework for their livelihoods and social support. The social effects of the so-called shock doctrine were particularly harsh for Russia (Klein 2008).

While ex-socialist armies went through hard times (and in some cases, even traumatic developments)<sup>2</sup>, global changes nevertheless affected

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<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on the Western military establishment through the North Atlantic Alliance, so the issue of military reform in the former socialist states is not discussed further.

Western militaries. The same applied to their Alliance, NATO. Even though they were made to believe they were victorious, seen through the Western military brass' eyes, it was not a good time but rather a challenge to preserve its relevance in the absence of an archetypical adversary. The feeling was illustrated in the best way by Martin Van Creveld's opening line of his book *The Transformation of War* (1991, 1): "A ghost is stalking the corridors of general staffs and defence departments all over the 'developed' world – the fear of military impotence, even irrelevance". The process of military reform in Western countries went on by widening the military missions to include operations and actions seen as not typical for classical army forces. The first challenge was "operations other than war", while the second was "operations out of area".

The Western militaries (notably the American one) needed reorganisation and a new *raison d'être*. The modern mass military, typical of the era of nationalism, should have adapted to the needs of the allegedly post-modern period, i.e., the post-Westphalian one. Western scholars developed the concept of "post-modern armed forces" (Moskos and Burk 1994). The military was expected to shift its focus to the international arena rather than on the defence of a State's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Almost immediately, a parallel process took place in the form of the privatisation of the military and warfare (Leander 2005). Ever since, the internationalisation and privatisation of military force have become two sides of the same coin: militarization on a global scale at different levels. Actually, NATO is the best example of this dialectics: apparently, the Alliance is supposed to present an image of international military cooperation (beyond the national State), but at the same time, it has been known for hiring private military and security companies in the places of its interventions (Krahmann 2016).

The Fukuyamian world order was characterised by the fading risks of traditional inter-state wars and the rise of intra-state conflicts, which called for international intervention. The Western world is presented as a zone of peace where war has gone into the realm of improbability. For instance, Jung (1997) argues that classical war is an exception within the context of mass violent conflicts. During the unipolar moment, a wide majority of authors discussed regional conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, and even corruption and organised crime as post-modern *modus operandi* of violent clashes. At first, this worldview was not welcomed by the top military brass, as they feared

that missions other than war would be a waste of already limited shares of the military budget as well as missions that would turn the military away from its primary mission.

According to the former US Assistant Secretary of Defence Lawrence Korb (1997, 24), the top brass' resistance to military interventionism was based on two assumptions: "First, the military did not want to become involved in another long-drawn-out Vietnam-type quagmire. If force were to be used, the chiefs felt it should be applied massively and only for the most urgent reasons. Second, the military did not want to undermine its readiness for real combat by being diverted to peacekeeping or humanitarian operations. As Secretary of Defence William Perry was to remark in November 1994, 'We field an army, not a Salvation Army.' Powell and his colleagues structured the armed forces to fight two major regional contingencies simultaneously. This position, which was popularly known as the Powell Doctrine, was opposed by many civilian policymakers, especially Madeleine Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. At one point in the spring of 1993, she exploded in frustration at Powell. 'What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?' The current secretary of state embraced what she called a doability doctrine, that is, America should use its military power in flexible ways to address practical if limited goals".

Ironically enough, it was the Yugoslav wars and conflicts that assisted the Western military establishment in settling its dilemmas. At first, with the UN Security Council's blessing, NATO forces intervened in the Bosnian War (1992-1995), but the real turning point was the 1999 bombing campaign against the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over Kosovo province. The latter coincided with the jubilant summit, which proclaimed its new global interventionist "out of area" doctrine adopted at the Washington Summit. That moment was probably the peak of US hegemony, which was legitimised by the scholars and policymakers who subsequently constructed R2P (Responsibility to Protect) and human security concepts. Both could be elaborated through Chomsky's notion of "new military humanism" (1999). Other authors have rightly argued that this shift represented not only a change of military and political mind in terms of the use of force but, more importantly, a change in understanding of state sovereignty. Even former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the General Assembly that "strictly

traditional notions of sovereignty can no longer do justice to the aspirations of peoples everywhere to attain their fundamental freedoms”.

The NATO military intervention lacked formal legal authority in the absence of a UN Security Council mandate, but the advocates of the intervention (largely the Western powers) claimed that the intervention was humanitarian and thereby had moral legitimacy and reflected the rise of new international norms not accounted for in the UN Charter (*Independent International Commission on Kosovo*, 2000). In that context, David Chandler rightly argues that the concept of R2P was hardly a moral shift away from the rights of sovereignty and that the dominance of the liberal peace thesis, in fact, reflected the new balance of power in the international sphere (2004, p. 59). Thus, the Western states, led by the US, took over the role of moral arbiter and defender of human rights all over the world. Then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana explicitly said that NATO had just got a new (global) mission: “NATO, as you know, is an organisation founded on key principles and key values, but those are not only proclaimed values; NATO actually defends these values. This is why we had a responsibility to act in Kosovo, and that is why we have done so. To my mind, there is no better way for NATO to commemorate its 50th anniversary than to do what we should, that is, to uphold the values on which the Alliance is based” (NATO 1999).

Then British Prime Minister Tony Blair went so far as to introduce the so-called “Doctrine of the International Community”, in which he defined the intervention as a “just war”, not based on territorial ambitions by NATO but rather on shared values (Blair 1999). In other words, in the absence of a classical enemy, the Western powers invented a messianic mission for themselves and their military apparatus. Values were securitized to a degree to which one could intervene militarily in a sovereign state. Furthermore, the notion of an “international community” was promoted on the basis of values defined solely by the West. NATO remained shielded by impunity for war crimes committed during the campaign, which was only an overture to the forthcoming expeditions in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, etc. (see more: *Better World Info*). The allies usually follow the steps of the key player, except in Iraq. In that particular intermezzo in the North-Atlantic relationship, the US showed its readiness to bypass the Alliance and use another mechanism, the Alliance of the Willing.

The attacks of 9/11 by Al-Qaeda gave impetus to the Alliance, which had been almost described as “No Action, Talk Only”; it opened the era of a war with no end against a new enemy, i.e., Islamic fundamentalism and the global war on terrorism. Phyllis Bennis noticed that the newly created “enemy” provided “a new way to justify expanding the longstanding US drive for power and control of resources” (2007, 15). This event was taken as a golden opportunity for gaining sympathy and even inciting a wave of solidarity and mutual cooperation against the invisible adversary. On the other hand, in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, US military power was needed to “help discipline the world” (Woodward and Balz 2002). The war against Afghanistan was just the beginning of a list of interventions with a similar pretext. In the background, the military-industrial complex has been thriving. In the case of Afghanistan, Hakan Wiberg rightly emphasised the concept of “war for war’s sake”, i.e., the US addiction to war (2010). In short, the United States of War, to quote David Vine, has always been behind NATO’s existence and interventionism.

However, American hegemony has not relied on muscle and military power alone. NATO’s enlargement policy eastward, regardless of all warnings from Gorbachev to Putin, represents the “soft side” of militarism. Merje Kuus deconstructs the practices through which NATO exempted itself from its military content and transferred it to the sphere of fundamental human values. She sheds light on the practices by which military force and military solutions are linked to moral good. These practices are central to the militarization of social life (2007). In a later article, Kuus (2009) defined this phenomenon as the normalisation of military institutions through the narrative of global cooperation, naming it *cosmopolitan militarism*. Namely, NATO uses global spatial imaginaries to frame military approaches to political problems by presenting them as enlightening and good (but also necessary). This cosmopolitan subjectivity, in turn, produces a teleological narrative of natural progress in which political actors gradually transcend their national contexts and start seeing NATO, but also themselves, as promoters of global peace (2009, 559).

NATO’s overall operation of “disciplining the world” was only a small piece in the global puzzle, which is dubbed MIMAC – Military-Industrial-Media-Academic Complex. The notion of a military-industrial complex seems self-explanatory and obvious, but the role of media propaganda and

academic whitewashing of militarism have probably played a much stronger role in the “Westernisation” of the Rest (as a part of the West).

### **A Military Leviathan: Towards a Global NATO?**

If there had been prior doubts, the perception that the US and NATO had a hegemonic position in the European security order and that they could use military power without the UN’s approval if they so wished definitively got consolidated during the Kosovo war (Marten 2017). Everything that followed from that moment on only confirmed this conclusion. NATO’s strategy of positioning itself as a force for stability and security in Europe and beyond is a façade that masks its true objective of promoting US imperialism. And as it goes with imperialism, it is insatiable and non-constrained.

At the time, both Russia and China were not strong enough to oppose the US march “out of area”. The global war on terror, however, offered temporary legitimacy for various operations not only on a global but also on a national level, so many countries remained idle during that period. The attack on Syria (and generally, the so-called Arab Spring) as well as the US’s strategy in the Asia-Pacific (notably, over Taiwan) raised red alarms both in Moscow and Beijing, as their national interests were deeply concerned.

Outlining where US strategy stops and where NATO strategy begins has always been a tough task, as there has always been mimicry between the two. Interestingly, in the aftermath of 9/11, the US government at first did not even want to activate Article 5 of NATO’s Statute; it called upon NATO only after the invasion of Afghanistan. As already explained, the UN mandate and resolutions were misused on many occasions, while Washington behaved as if no one could prevent him from reaching as far as possible in the extension of “US national interests”.

The 1999 Washington Summit was a turning point in terms of the factual re-definition of NATO’s own fundamental act. At the Summit, NATO leaders declared their intention to take on a more global role in promoting security and stability beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. This included expanding partnerships with non-NATO countries, increasing cooperation with other international organisations, and engaging in crisis management operations outside the NATO area. NATO’s efforts to go global were further solidified at subsequent summits, such as the 2002 Prague Summit, the 2008 Bucharest

Summit, the 2010 Lisbon Summit, etc., up to the latest 2020 Madrid Summit (see more *NATO 2023*). Obviously, throughout time, NATO has continuously emphasised the importance of partnerships with non-NATO countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, but most notably in Asia, on the grounds of a “changed security environment”, new global threats, and a changed security agenda.

From today’s perspective, the Bucharest Summit is particularly important: it clearly marked another important step in NATO’s global ambitions, particularly in the Russian Federation’s near neighbourhood. Namely, NATO leaders declared their intention to expand the Alliance further eastward by inviting countries such as Georgia and Ukraine to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP). This declaration could be seen as a sort of answer to President Putin’s warnings at the 2007 Munich Conference. NATO decided to disrespect not only the promises given to Gorbachev but also the current Russia’s red line. Moscow responded soon with a military operation in Georgia. However, in the meantime, Ukraine has become a *de facto* NATO member state or a bulwark of US interests regarding Russia. This has recently been explicitly said by the Ukrainian defence minister (*BBC 2023*), a statement that echoed a previous one by Ukrainian President Zelensky. These are not only political statements but rather confirmations of what has been going on since the 2014 Euromaidan (coloured) revolution. During the conflict, as noted by military expert Scott Ritter (2022), the developments reconstituted the Ukrainian military, which had become a *de facto* proxy of the US-led NATO Alliance. Yet the US’s ambitions do not stop in Europe.

The new strategic approach, which names NATO’s enemies (Russia and China), *de facto* spells the end of the fallacy of the original NATO (*NATO 2022*); it is an overt proclamation of the so-called global NATO. Obviously, there is a fundamental contradiction even in the term “global NATO”. In that context, the Orwellian statement of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that “weapons are the way to peace” is also not surprising (*NATO 2023a*). Furthermore, EU High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell speaks of “making Ukrainian victory possible” (2023) and also criticises the “enormous naivety” of those who believe that the war could end with a ceasefire or diplomatic negotiations if the West stopped sending weapons to Ukraine (*Euractiv 2023*). It seems that

Western leaders are ready to derogate the fundamental principle of the UN Charter – peace by peaceful means – for the sake of so-called “just peace”. Originally defined as regional (i.e., “North Atlantic”), the Alliance is showing its geostrategic ambitions to *de facto* swap the UN collective security system (Vankovska 2022). Almost 20 years ago, a well-known Western pundit went so far as to suggest that NATO should compete with other international organisations, including the UN and even regional organisations in Africa (Tanner 2006, p. 3). The advances to other (non-Western) parts of the world, as already indicated, had been going on for a long time, from the Arctic to the Pacific and Africa (*No Cold War* 2023). However, the number of leaders openly protesting the US’s bullying of the smaller states (especially in the context of the Ukraine war) is growing by the day. The Global South is becoming “disrespectful” now that the states see other global alternatives.

What had been envisioned and drafted in the *NATO 2023 Report* is now displayed publicly: Russia is pointed out as a direct enemy, while China represents “a systemic challenge”. The developments of 2022-23 and the collective West’s responses show evidently that what the West (i.e., the US) fears the most is precisely a change of the world in the direction of multipolarism. De-dollarization and other geopolitical shifts also weaken the US hegemony, and without the Empire, NATO is a paper tiger. The idea of a “global NATO” is but a chimaera: the original Alliance struggles with its internal problems and the attrition and depletion of its military capacities in Ukraine. The rickety relationships among the Asian partners (and their mutual relations with either Russia or China, or both) make it impossible to even think of a classical institutional design that would fit the one in Brussels. The US Secretary of Defence denies any intention to establish an Asian NATO, but at first sight, the actions on the ground speak otherwise (RFA 2022). At the 2022 NATO Summit, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand were invited as observers/guests. The US’s “pivot to Asia” policy relies on a few initiatives, i.e., military and political alliances that are expected to only resemble NATO (as a new NATO is not possible). They include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad 2.0) made of the US, India, Japan, and Australia (Rai, 2018) and the AUKUS (2021), a mini Asian NATO, as it is often named (see: *Oniroco Tribune* 2022; Crabtree 2022), which is an alliance made of the US, Australia, and the UK. Its end result is the augmentation of the alleged China threat, an increased military budget, and the nuclearization of Australia. The Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) were promoted in the

summer of 2022 to get together the US, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK in order to counter development opportunities provided by China's Belt and Road Initiative (Garin and Romanov 2022). More or less, each of them has the goal of keeping the key states in the wider region within the anti-China fold (Vankovska 2022a).

Globalised NATO is supposed to be a sub-contractor for the Anglo-Saxon one, i.e., to provide the Emperor with new clothes. In sum, the concept of a "global NATO" is supposed to serve the same purpose as the Anglo-Saxon one, i.e., to create a pretence of international legitimacy and unity over the so-called "rules-based order". Phyllis Bennis (2022) lucidly points out that it has *de facto* replaced the reference to international law: "We do not hear about international law anymore, we hear about this amorphous thing named 'rules-based order'. Nobody ever says what are these rules? Who makes the rules? Who has to abide by those rules? But we know that the rules are set ultimately by the US".

### **The Post-Ukraine NATO: Conceivable Scenarios**

Ever since the Bucharest Summit, both openly and by other more subtle methods, Ukraine has been NATO-ized, or, as many have suggested, it has become an object of the creation of a *de facto* member state (although the chances of its formal accession were not entirely certain). But the symbolic war with Russia had already begun. For instance, the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* (Stephens 2006), expressing the opinion of the American establishment, declared that "it is time to start thinking of Putin's Russia as an enemy of the United States". Only a few years later, Putin will indeed become the archetypal enemy of the West and thus of NATO.

The territory of Ukraine has been acknowledged as a line of potential and highly probable conflict between the West and the East, even when such terminology of division ceased to be used. Ukraine has become a testing ground for NATO's enlargement policy as a democratisation and peace zone (or security community) as well as for NATO's military capability. Just three years before the current proxy war, NATO was facing the culmination of its long-lasting identity crisis. Its 70th anniversary at the London Summit in December 2019 was celebrated in a tedious atmosphere. Analysts agree that

no matter how much we talk about NATO's birthday, the event was more like a funeral (*Defence News* 2019).

What are the benefits of NATO? This has been a question that has been posed for a long time. As early as 2011, the *New York Times* editorial asked, "Who needs NATO?". According to the author "The Americans have not hidden their dissatisfaction with the contribution of European partners in NATO since 1949. President Eisenhower then stated: "The fact that we have troops there does not mean that the Europeans have fulfilled their share. They do not want to make sacrifices and prepare their soldiers for their own defence". He added: "If the US relationship with Europe assumed ambivalent bargaining from the outset, the treaty organisation has at least once shown its clear purpose. Now, if Americans ask why they should cover three-quarters of NATO spending at a time of 'politically ill budget and subsidy cuts', as Gates put it, then Europeans can answer a much more fundamental question: what is the point of the organisation at all? Who needs NATO?" (Wheatcroft 2011).

This position echoes the thesis and criticism of Robert Kagan, who concluded that the United States is from Mars and Europe from Venus, alluding to the fact that the former invests more in military defence while the latter invests more and more in so-called soft power. Some analysts have pointed out that the Alliance is simultaneously endangering American lives and flooding the country with many strategic responsibilities as a result of its expansion (Ruger 2019; Cancian and Cancian 2019). *The Wall Street Journal* (2019) found that the Alliance was effectively dead. Douglas McGregor (2019) argued that saying "dead" is not enough because NATO is a zombie. According to Barry Posen (2019), one of the most eminent scholars in the field of international relations, President Trump had many bad ideas, but rethinking America's role in NATO was not one of them. Former US President Donald Trump accused European allies of financial and military dependence on US protection. The end of the summit came as a relief.

Stephen Cohen, one of the best connoisseurs of Russian and Eastern European history and politics, wrote: "The split of the new Cold War is already happening in Europe – not in Berlin, but on the borders of Russia. The worst is yet to come. If NATO forces move to Poland's borders with Ukraine, as called for in Washington and Europe, Moscow could send troops to eastern Ukraine. The result would be the danger of war that can only be

compared to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (2019, 29). But that the behaviour of states (and their alliances) in international relations depends on the anarchic international system, and their perception of its survival would make Mearsheimer (1993) anticipate in the 1990s that relations between Ukraine and Russia were ripe for an outbreak of military conflict between them. Later in 2014, as in 2022, he reiterated that the blame for Ukraine's fate should be sought in the West (2014). Despite the seemingly different prism of looking at world division lines, Huntington (2010, p. 46) would agree that "it is possible to divide Ukraine into two parts, a division which, according to cultural factors, could be more violent than the division of Czechoslovakia but less bloody than in Yugoslavia".

In a 2014 article, even Kissinger said about Ukraine that "internationally, it should hold a position similar to that of Finland. Such a nation leaves no doubt about its firm independence, cooperates with the West in many fields, but carefully avoids institutional enmity with Russia". But the opposite happened. Ukraine's determination to join the Western sphere of interest, followed by permission to use the territory not only for advanced weapons systems but also for Western instructors and bases, has made the country a *de facto* NATO country. The resumption of hostilities and the rising cost of human lives and destruction are creating growing frustration with the Kyiv government over NATO's impotence. Brussels has a good excuse not to directly intervene in the conflict: first, Ukraine is not a NATO member; second, it does not want to risk a nuclear conflict with Moscow; and third, it has finally proved to its European allies why NATO is useful (due to its security and nuclear umbrella). Even Macron has acknowledged that the war in Ukraine has acted as an "electric shock" on NATO, giving it "the strategic clarity it lacked" (Reuters 2022). The best indicator of NATO's new life force and significance is the intention of traditionally neutral countries, such as Finland and Sweden, to join the Alliance.

Nevertheless, NATO's military powerlessness could be seen in a few dimensions. First, despite all available intelligence about a possible Russian intervention, Plan B did not exist. In fact, it was only later that an announcement was made for the internal restructuring and stationing of permanent troops on Russia's eastern borders (especially in the Baltic and Black Sea regions), as well as a regular consultative council. Although it sounds decisive, it is still on a level of improvisation because no one knows

who will cover the costs of such permanent bases, who will provide manpower and weapons, etc. In fact, the pressure is again on the United States because all European countries demand that it serve as a protective umbrella. Second, despite its enormous military power, in recent decades NATO has had experience only in some remote parts of the world which had no military power to respond, unlike Russia. The experience of Iraq and Afghanistan is useless (even if military failure is overlooked) for a confrontation with a large military force through conventional warfare. Third, behind the declarative unity, NATO is not a monolithic bloc: individual members calculate first with their own national interests and only then with collective solidarity (the examples of Turkey and Hungary are most evident). NATO's growth also means a decline in the EU's political, economic, and security influence, so the loser in each case is the EU. Lord Ismay's adage could now be read differently: even militarily ineffective, NATO succeeds in keeping the EU/Germany down, the United States in (Europe) and Russia, with the expectation of destruction or defeat that would enable NATO to focus on its main rival, China.

The ongoing war has had a significant impact on NATO's military capabilities and internal cohesion. Some of them include military capabilities, internal cohesion, defence spending, and relations with Russia. As far as military capabilities are concerned, NATO is determined to fight "until the last Ukrainian", so it is hard to truly detect the efficiency of NATO soldiers in direct combat with a strong adversary. Additionally, official and media sources indicate that Western military depots are depleted, which raises questions about the feasibility and grandiosity of the concept of a "global NATO." However, the key lesson from this ongoing proxy war relates to the (im)potence of military power in achieving strategic goals and avoiding nuclear disaster. What is certain is that the only winner in this war of attrition is the military-industrial complex. The war has had a huge impact on defence spending among NATO allies, which is also true for other parts of the world. The arms race is in full swing.

These impacts highlight the challenges that NATO faces in responding to the conflict in Ukraine and the ways in which the conflict is affecting the Alliance's military capabilities and internal cohesion. It remains to be seen how the conflict in Ukraine will continue to affect NATO in the future and how the Alliance will respond to the evolving security environment.

## **Conclusion**

During its history, the North Atlantic Alliance has had one particular constant: inventing ways to hide the bare truth of NATO as an American power instrument in Europe and beyond. For that purpose, various quests for legitimacy (and foes) have been tried: some more elusive, others more concrete. At the moment, on a factual level but also a normative one, NATO tends to confront two enemies: Russia (or even worse, a personalised enemy, Vladimir Putin) and China. If the first one calls for a revival of the idea of conventional war capacities against a respectable rival and a struggle over a geopolitical (territorial) span, the other one is much more peculiar. In the case of China, the collective West opposes and even declares as inimical the very idea of development and cooperation. In other words, what used to be a dominant mantra for the best way to create a security community and zones of peace (through functional interconnectedness, trade, exchange, etc., in sum, through globalisation), with the EU pointed out as the best example in this respect, now, in the case of China and BRICS+, this same (or similar) strategy is denounced as an act of hostility (towards Western economic, political, cultural, and military hegemony).

NATO's military capabilities are more likely equal to the US's military potential. And it has its limits - not only the obvious one in the form of a potential nuclear endgame. One should not fail to recall the 2021 failure in Afghanistan. Things are not going well or in accordance with Western interests in Ukraine either. On the other hand, NATO has also reached its limits in terms of its enlargement policy. Ironically, Ukraine was supposed to be a Western bulwark on Russia's border, but it has turned into a Russian bulwark on the Western borders. In short, there is a stalemate of some sort. The US warmongering over Taiwan poses the question of whether this is a new Ukraine in the making. The Western allies, even the ones across the globe (such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea), have more expectations from the US (nuclear) umbrella than abilities to be an equal military partner to the Empire.

In various conjectures, it seems as if NATO faces a few future scenarios, and each of them depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. They include the following: a) Business as usual and continued expansion. In this option, NATO is expected to continue to expand its membership. On the European continent, the options are limited, and on the global one, this

scenario looks unrealistic (at least in the form of a classical international organisation or alliance in compliance with the UN Charter). NATO is currently unable to embrace even a weak state such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo without deepening tensions with Russia and other countries or increasing the security dilemma. In short, business as usual is not an option anymore because the war business is getting close to nuclear one. b) Transformation into a global alliance means the ability of NATO to evolve into a global alliance, encompassing a wider range of security threats beyond Europe and North America. Before the war in Ukraine, the pretext was seen in deepening partnerships with other countries and organisations and increasing its focus on global security challenges such as terrorism, cyber-attacks, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Now this is a new world in which NATO/US cannot hide their global hegemonic interests behind a comprehensive security agenda. On the other hand, in a multipolar world, few things would likely remain truly “global”. The rivals will respond accordingly. c) The deterioration of transatlantic relations as a scenario at this moment looks highly unlikely. There were crises in the past, but now, in the new configuration of the world, they are less likely for an indefinite period of time. It means that for the time being, US disciplinary politics is tightening vis-à-vis its Western allies, particularly the European ones. d) The decreased relevance scenario assumes that NATO could face declining relevance in the face of new security challenges and changing global power dynamics. This could be due to a shift in priorities among NATO members, a decline in the willingness of NATO members to contribute military resources, or a decline in the perceived effectiveness of the Alliance. e) The renewed relevance scenario is the one that the Western leadership is sticking to at the moment. But after the de facto defeat in Afghanistan, NATO (and the US) can hardly afford to lose another war. NATO’s victory in Ukraine is not realistic at the moment, but even if it were, that situation would raise major concerns with Russia and other rivals.

These are just a few potential scenarios for the future of NATO. As said, the outcome of the war in Ukraine would make things more clear if the war ended any time soon. The quest for “just peace” is, ironically, a cry for “more war”.

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