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THESIS

**NATO'S STRATEGIC CONCEPTS
AND POST-COLD WAR DETERRENCE**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 shook the European security architecture and created tensions between Russia and the West. In response, NATO announced in its 2022 Strategic Concept that it would regard Russia as the greatest threat and strengthen its deterrence and defense posture. Given ongoing tensions, the Alliance needs to reevaluate its deterrence and defense concepts. This thesis critically analyzes NATO's post-Cold War Strategic Concepts, focusing on NATO's role in shaping deterrence policies in response to the changing dynamics of NATO-Russia relations.

The thesis concludes that the Allies and Russia have come into conflict due to differing worldviews. The expansion of NATO's collective security space followed Russia's decision to adopt a more confrontational stance. This conflict is not reflected in NATO's first three post-Cold War Strategic Concepts but changed with Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014. NATO increasingly adjusted its deterrence and defense posture in Eastern Europe, culminating in its 2022 Strategic Concept, in which the Alliance henceforth restored NATO's core historical policy. Whether NATO can continue to rely on deterrence by punishment or shift to deterrence by denial remains open to debate. The latter would result in the Allies considering a complete redesign of the European security architecture to deploy troops at the Russian border permanently.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	Anti Access/Area Denial
ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
aCFE Treaty	adapted CFE Treaty
ARF	Allied Reaction Force
ATTU	Atlantic to the Ural
AWACS	NATO Airborne Warning and Control System
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defense
CAP	Comprehensive Assistance Package
CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
EDI	European Deterrence Initiative
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
JFC	Joint Force Command
JSEC	Joint Support and Enabling Command
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFIUs	NATO Force Integration Units
NFM	New Force Model
NRF	NATO Response Force
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RNAC	Russia–North Atlantic Council
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
START II	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II

tFP	tailored Forward Presence
TLE	Treaty Limited Equipment
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
U.S.	United States
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

How have NATO's Strategic Concepts for deterrence evolved in the post–Cold War period in light of the changing Russian threat? This thesis investigates the hypothesis that as the relationship between NATO and Russia has deteriorated since 1991, the Alliance's policy toward Russia has increasingly emphasized the need for deterrence, returning NATO to its historical roots as an Alliance for collective defense. While conventional and nuclear deterrence requirements fluctuated in the 1990s, de Wijk stated that the need for deterrence regained prominence in the 2000s due to tensions between Russia and the West. He continued that with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent war in the Donbas, deterrence gained significant attention within NATO.¹ With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the importance of deterrence came to the forefront of Alliance policy. The war has raised questions about how Western states can stop, contain, or even prevent further Russian expansionism.

According to Tanisha Fazal, the anachronistic nature of the territorial conquest by Russia through a military invasion of Ukraine has changed the status quo of the European security architecture.² Rolling tank formations, the bombardment of capital cities, and the destruction of major cities like Mariupol have been reminiscent of combat during World War II. Furthermore, Fazal pointed out that challenging and changing borders by force violates the norm of state sovereignty, which has long gone uncontested in the international system. She continued that interstate wars aimed at conquering a state have been considered extremely rare since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In the

¹ Rob de Wijk, "The Role of Deterrence in a New European Strategic Environment," SIRIUS — Zeitschrift für Strategische Analysen 2, no. 1 (March 14, 2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sirius-2018-0023>.

² Tanisha M. Fazal, "The Return of Conquest? Why the Future of Global Order Hinges on Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2022, 20.

past 30 years, Fazal noted that only Iraq tried to conquer an internationally recognized country, Kuwait, in 1990.³

According to Kagan, the primary explanation was that the only remaining superpower, the United States, could enhance its global hegemony due to the lack of competitors that possessed the capabilities to conduct a territorial conquest.⁴ In this context, Kagan noted, the United States could increase its political influence actively, as in the Middle East, through military intervention and diplomatically through support for partnership programs and promoting democratic values, including guarantees of security, freedom, prosperity, and autonomy. This counts especially for eastern European and former Warsaw Pact countries integrated into the Euro–Atlantic community.⁵ While Westernized Europe and some former parts of the Soviet Union prospered economically and pursued cooperation after the Cold War, and military conflicts had almost disappeared, Russia did not manage to participate effectively in this process, insisting on its great power status and spheres of influence.⁶

In this context, NATO has served as one of the leading security institutions for the collective defense of the Western allies by bringing security concerns about Russia into the Alliance for discussion and formulating and implementing concrete policies with military capabilities behind them. The Alliance has also changed over the decades and adapted its strategy, as indicated in the 1991, 1999, 2010, and 2022 Strategic Concepts. The concepts can be seen as elements in an evolving process and reactions to specific political circumstances or changes. The documents define NATO’s *raison d’être* and describe the Alliance’s approach to addressing security challenges.⁷ To this extent, an analysis of the four Strategic Concepts offers the opportunity to clarify how NATO has evolved, adapted, and adjusted to meet the growing Russian threat.

³ Fazal, 20.

⁴ Robert Kagan, “The Price of Hegemony,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2022, 10.

⁵ Kagan, 13.

⁶ Fiona Hill and Angela Stent, “The World Putin Wants: How Distortions About the Past Feed Delusions About the Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 25, 2022, 109.

⁷ Thierry Tardy, introduction to *NATO’s New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 1–2, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on NATO's Strategic Concepts in terms of deterrence in 1991, 1999, 2010, and 2022. It critically compares and analyzes these documents considering the evolution of NATO–Russia relations and identify continuities, changes, and adjustments. In this context, explanations for these developments will also be considered, and their significance will be assessed.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The Russian–Ukrainian war has endangered security in Europe to a great extent.⁸ Aside from conflicts and wars in the Balkans and the South Caucasus, it is the first European interstate war since World War II and, thereby, an extraordinary event on the European continent. Unleashing war threatens other states, including NATO member states bordering Russia and Ukraine, representing an existential threat. This calls NATO into action as a collective defense Alliance; NATO remains the most crucial security institution due to its political and military capabilities, which can cope with such a situation, the Allies hold, especially with regard to deterrence.⁹ Since the Strategic Concept of 2010, much has changed in Europe in terms of the security architecture in relation to Russia. The 2010 strategy did not anticipate the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or the subsequent war in Donbas or the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine since 24 February 2022.¹⁰

At present, in terms of NATO's eastern flank, Russia poses the biggest threat to Western countries owing to a foreign and security policy based on revisionist and expansionist ambitions, zero-sum thinking, and power competition.¹¹ But that wasn't always the case in the Post–Cold War era. Notably, the improbability of interstate war and the rare appearance

⁸ Tardy, 2.

⁹ Daniel Kochis et al., *The Russian Threat: Bolstering NATO Deterrence at a Critical Time*, Issue Briefs, no. 525 (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2022), <https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/IB5252.pdf>.

¹⁰ Tardy, Introduction, 1–2.

¹¹ Liana Fix and Steven Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, Policy Brief, April 2022 (Washington, D.C.: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2022), 2–4; Hill and Stent, “The World Putin Wants,” 108–22.

of such a war pushed concepts such as deterrence, which were embedded in specific security architectures, into the background in recent decades.¹²

However, due to the Russian–Ukrainian war, it is appropriate—indeed, imperative—to reassess the concepts of deterrence. To this extent, it is NATO’s responsibility to give a reasonable answer to the developments. How did the West come into conflict with Russia, and what role did NATO play? How have NATO’s concepts of deterrence evolved since the end of the Cold War? What are the continuities, changes, and adaptations in NATO policy regarding deterrence toward Russia? Have adequate measures been taken by the Alliance so far to compensate for the erosion of security in Europe, or do deficiencies suggest that Europe’s security is at further risk? To answer these huge questions, the Allies need a clear understanding of their collective defense since 1991.

Only when the Allies understand how they have interpreted their relationship with each other, how changes and adaptations, but also continuities, have been pushed, can the Allies develop inferences for the present and appropriate strategies for the future. The aforementioned questions underline the significance of the research question: How have NATO’s Strategic Concepts for deterrence evolved in the post–Cold War period in light of the changing Russian threat? How must a future NATO strategy be structured if it is to cover the new threat hotspots and horizons? In this respect, this thesis aims to clarify the importance of NATO’s deterrence strategy toward Russia as one of the essential aspects of the security of Europe.

C. DISCUSSION OF DETERRENCE CONCEPTS

To analyze how NATO’s strategic deterrence concepts have evolved in the post–Cold War era in light of the changing Russian threat, it is necessary to elaborate briefly on what deterrence means in general and to highlight NATO’s discussion surrounding deterrence concepts. Rostoks argued that Deterrence in international relations has the task of discouraging an adversary from taking hostile actions and convincing the opponent that such

¹² Hill and Stent, “The World Putin Wants,” 108–22.

actions will not achieve intended goals and will result in heavy casualties.¹³ However, Rostoks further adds that deterrence is designed not only to prevent war but also to influence the decision-making of the adversary in such a way as to preclude military aggression as a political act.

Thus, several eminent authors in the field of deterrence have emphasized that deterrence always intends to influence an adversary's actions. Glenn Snyder defines deterrence as "the power to dissuade as opposed to the power to coerce or compel."¹⁴ Alexander George and Richard Smoke define deterrence as "the persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh the benefits."¹⁵ Michael Howard states that "the object of deterrence is to persuade an adversary that the costs to him of seeking a military solution to his political problems will far outweigh the benefits."¹⁶ In John Mearsheimer's view, deterrence, "in its broad sense, means persuading an opponent not to initiate a specific action because the perceived benefits do not justify the estimated costs and risks."¹⁷

The political evolution around deterrence depends mainly on three factors: the military balance, the credibility of deterrence, and the respective interests of political adversaries.¹⁸ The military balance in the form of capabilities acquires significance in deterrence concepts in that an inferior or equal opponent is likely to refrain from attacking due to its risk of suffering high casualties and the unlikelihood of victory. Thus, the defender's deterrence has

¹³ Toms Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," in *Detering Russia in Europe* (Routledge, 2018), 20.

¹⁴ Glenn Herald Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 9, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=4071297>.

¹⁵ Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 9.

¹⁶ Michael Howard, "Reassurance and Deterrence: Western Defense in the 1980s," *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations, December 1, 1982), 317.

¹⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1rv61v2>.

¹⁸ Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (June 1999): 30–34, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.25>.

been successful.¹⁹ However, the opponent will also refrain from attacking only if it firmly believes that the defender has the capabilities to repel an attack.²⁰ In this respect, the credibility of deterrence also plays an essential role in the concept. Lastly, the prospective interests of the respective competitors always play a role in deterrence.²¹ Competitors will likely come into conflict with each other because of opposing interests.

Two main deterrence strategies can be identified to deter an adversary: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment.²² Deterrence by denial means that in the event of an attack, the enemy should be stopped right at the homeland's border, thereby denying him operational success and the gain of territory and other assets.²³ In this respect, deterrence by denial aims to prevent the adversary's objectives from the beginning of an attack.²⁴ To this extent, deterrence by denial essentially requires offensive and defensive combat capabilities to defeat an adversary.²⁵ The wide range of capabilities is aimed at stopping the enemy's attack and enabling counterattacks to re-establish the territorial integrity of the defender.²⁶

Deterrence by punishment means that the opponent must fear attacks on his homeland in case of war and is often related to nuclear weapons, but this is not obligatory.²⁷ Fundamentally, the concept assumes that deterrence can both succeed and fail.²⁸ In case of failure, the deterrence concept through the threat of punishment allows the defender to adjust

¹⁹ Huth, 30.

²⁰ Huth, 30–31; James J. Wirtz, "How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 64–66.

²¹ Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict," 34; Robert Peters, Justin Anderson, and Harrison Menke, "Deterrence in the 21st Century: Integrating Nuclear and Conventional Force," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 18.

²² Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," 23.

²³ Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, 14–15.

²⁴ Wirtz, "How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?," 70.

²⁵ David S. Yost, "NATO and Tailored Deterrence: Surveying the Challenges," in *NATO and 21st Century Deterrence*, ed. Karl-Heinz Kamp and David S. Yost, NDC Forum Paper 8 (Rome: NATO Defense College, Research Division, 2009), 13.

²⁶ Wirtz, "How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?," 70.

²⁷ Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, 15.

²⁸ Wirtz, "How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?," 68.

his actions with regard to the opponent's behavior while also giving the opponent the opportunity to refrain from his attack.²⁹ In any case, deterrence by punishment requires capabilities that allow the defender to drive the cost to the opponent so high by punitive retaliation that the opponent abandons an attack.³⁰ Rostoks argued that these two deterrence concepts are not fundamentally different in that they have the same goal of deterring the adversary from undertaking hostile behavior.³¹ According to Rostoks, both concepts can be applied at the same time.

At this point, the concept of extended deterrence should also be mentioned, mainly as it is used in the context of NATO. The United States has offered extended deterrence protection to allies and security partners in the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East, not necessarily with nuclear weapons. The United States has sought to defend its NATO allies against potential opponents and has thus participated in the concept of extended deterrence since 1949.³² Furthermore, deterrence does not have to rely only on military means.³³ In this respect, it is relevant to highlight that NATO sees the non-military resilience of the member states' societies as a part of its deterrence concept against Russia, which was mentioned for the first time in such a concept.³⁴ Similarly, deterrence need not always be directed against military means, as hybrid methods also permit aggressive behavior by an adversary.³⁵

After the Cold War ended in 1991, NATO adjusted its concept of deterrence from a forward presence to a reliance on nuclear weapons.³⁶ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in Corbett's view, NATO deterrence concepts played a subordinate role vis-à-vis Russia

²⁹ Wirtz, 68.

³⁰ Yost, "NATO and Tailored Deterrence," 13.

³¹ Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," 23.

³² Rostoks, 23–24.

³³ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, 9.

³⁴ North Atlantic Council, *NATO 2022 – Strategic Concept* (Madrid: NATO Heads of State and Government, 2022), 1, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf.

³⁵ Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," 26.

³⁶ Andrew Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," in *Deterring Russia in Europe: Defence Strategies for Neighbouring States* (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 53–54.

because Western countries increasingly cooperated with Russia in the 1990s. From then on, nuclear weapons formed the backbone of NATO's deterrence by punishment capabilities but played a role only in the event of existential threats and were not considered as a military means, for example, in the context of international crisis management, to which NATO increasingly devoted itself during this period.³⁷ The issue of nuclear weapons played a role, especially in the 2000s when the USA considered installing a missile defense system in Europe, which made Russia feel threatened and fear a nuclear imbalance.³⁸ Since NATO predominantly relies on U.S. nuclear weapons, the issue has mainly been discussed in the context of extended deterrence.³⁹ However, in recent years, NATO's nuclear deterrence approach has been building on continuity and has been seen as part of the Alliance's overall deterrence posture.⁴⁰

Due to the tensions resulting from the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent war in the Donbas, conventional deterrence has regained importance as a concept within NATO.⁴¹ From Rostoks' point of view, the contemporary discussions in NATO revolve mainly around protecting the countries that share a border with Russia and strengthening the credibility of NATO deterrence to deter Russia from further military aggression. In 2018, Zapfe and Vanaga concluded that there was a military imbalance in favor of Russia in Eastern Europe between NATO and Russia.⁴² In this context, the challenge is to create an effective deterrent in terms of a military balance, but one that is very likely to create increasing political instability at the same time as Russia.⁴³ Against this background, NATO

³⁷ Corbett, 55.

³⁸ Corbett, 57.

³⁹ Corbett, 58.

⁴⁰ Corbett, 67.

⁴¹ Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," 31.

⁴² Martin Zapfe and Nora Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," in *Deterring Russia in Europe: Defence Strategies for Neighbouring States*, ed. Nora Vanaga and Toms Rostoks (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 38–39, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351250641>.

⁴³ Rostoks, "The Evolution of Deterrence from the Cold War to Hybrid War," 31.

feared either a fait accompli by Russia, especially in the Baltics, or a subversion of NATO's eastern territories and associated political instability.⁴⁴

To counter the Russian threat in Eastern Europe, for example, NATO created the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the NATO Response Force (NRF) at its 2014 summit in Wales.⁴⁵ While the VJTF was deployed temporarily as a spearhead in Eastern Europe and intended to serve as a kind of tripwire for possible attacks, the NRF had the task of being deployed as a second wave into the conflict area. With tensions with Russia continuing, at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO focused on enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), which involved permanently deploying small troop contingents directly to Eastern Europe based on rotational deployments.⁴⁶ The 2018 NATO summit in Brussels again focused on how forward-deployed forces under the current deterrence concept can be reinforced as quickly as possible by follow-on forces in a conflict.⁴⁷ In this respect, NATO had slowly begun to adapt its deterrence-by-punishment approach with elements of an enhanced deterrence-by-denial approach.

In this respect, NATO as a defense Alliance has always had a deterrence concept that has changed and been adapted over time. The increasing tensions between NATO and Russia in recent years and, above all, the current war in Ukraine, therefore, create a need for further discussion on the extent to which—and how—the current deterrence concepts will be adapted and which concepts will be used against Russia in the future.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

A seemingly endless number of focused works and associated studies are available for analyzing NATO's Strategic Concepts and the Alliance's relationship with Russia. Therefore, this literature review focuses primarily on analyses centered around the NATO–Russia relationship and deterrence. It will also concentrate more on recent literature comparing past concepts and measures with the current state and lines of development.

⁴⁴ Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 39.

⁴⁵ Zapfe and Vanaga, 40–43.

⁴⁶ Zapfe and Vanaga, 43–46.

⁴⁷ Zapfe and Vanaga, 46–49.

Nonetheless, foundational works that go back further in history will be consulted as long as they provide a broad picture considering the NATO–Russia relationship and NATO’s deterrence approaches in specific time periods.

1. NATO’s Post-Cold War Transformation Phase

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the opportunity was seen by the Western states community to win Russia as a partner and slowly integrate it into the Western structures. At the same time, mutual deterrence no longer seemed necessary after the end of the Cold War. Patrick Morgan dealt exclusively in his analysis with deterrence in a post–Cold War world shortly after the turn of the century and concluded that the odds are excellent for no return of great power rivalries.⁴⁸ As a result, nuclear deterrence tended to take a back seat worldwide during this period.⁴⁹ In this sense, he also saw the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 as justified because Russia is to be considered a friendly state in a close relationship with NATO. Therefore, nuclear deterrence no longer appeared necessary. Moreover, he emphasized that due to the decline of interstate wars, the concept of deterrence has been replaced by the concept of crisis prevention in the context of collective security.⁵⁰

While Morgan provided a positive view of the NATO–Russia relationship, David Yost offered a multilayered overview of developments in the 1990s. After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO lost its focus on collective defense in favor of crisis management, he found, even though critics pointed out that the Alliance should not forget that NATO’s main task remained collective defense.⁵¹ He saw the collapse of Russian military capabilities, which seemed unlikely to be built up in the near future, as one of the main reasons for the reassessment of Alliance alignment in the 1990s. In this respect, he noted that the old adversary, Russia, was then viewed in a more cooperative relationship to conduct

⁴⁸ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491573>.

⁴⁹ Morgan, 247–50.

⁵⁰ Morgan, 257.

⁵¹ David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance’s New Roles in International Security* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), 273.

primarily international crisis management through foreign area operations as part of a broader security concept.⁵² This did not contradict the concept of collective security but complemented it. Nonetheless, it raised the question of whether realignment due to a lack of an adversary would make NATO obsolete in the future.⁵³ In this respect, Yost emphasized that the Alliance should continue prioritizing collective defense in the sense of a strategic balance in Europe.⁵⁴ According to Yost, this also applies to Russia, which remains one of the most plausible threats to the Western community in Europe.⁵⁵

Martin Smith did not subscribe to the view of an increasingly positive relationship with Russia. For him, the NATO–Russia relationship in the 1990s presented itself as a political up and down.⁵⁶ In his view, this relationship was positively influenced by Russia’s possible membership in NATO. Russia’s attitude changed, however, when the first formerly Communist countries, such as Poland, began to express an interest in NATO membership. NATO’s Partnership for Peace program also made Moscow nervous, as did NATO’s interventions in the wars in the Balkans.⁵⁷ Similarly, the possible admission of new Eastern European NATO members triggered Russian fears of a military imbalance in Europe, prompting Russia to demand guarantees that NATO military capabilities would not be deployed in Eastern Europe. To provide Russia with the required security, the NATO–Russia Founding Act was concluded to strengthen mutual trust between the two actors. At the same time, the Kosovo War led to renewed tensions that highlighted the faltering NATO–Russia relationship.⁵⁸

Sergei Plekhanov likewise took a rather critical stance and was concerned at this time that NATO’s eastward expansion will especially have a negative impact on East–West

⁵² Yost, 275.

⁵³ Yost, 276–77.

⁵⁴ Yost, 282.

⁵⁵ Yost, 300.

⁵⁶ Martin A. Smith, “A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination? NATO–Russia Relations, 1991–2002,” *European Security* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830208407548>.

⁵⁷ Rick Fawn, *Realignments in Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 59, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=214569>.

⁵⁸ Fawn, 60–66.

relations.⁵⁹ He saw, above all, the decline of living standards after the collapse of the Soviet Union and burgeoning nationalism as dangers that may lead the government in Moscow not to accept increasing Western influence in Eastern Europe and therefore declare the Alliance a scapegoat for the precarious situation in Russia. In this respect, he described the elites' will in Russia as early as the 1990s to build a counterweight to Western influence to consolidate and expand the existing power base in the newly created Putin System at the end of the decade.

In this respect, Andrei Tsygankov described three political currents in Russia in the 1990s: pro-Western representatives, great power representatives, and pragmatists.⁶⁰ He claimed that NATO enlargement caused the success of the great power representatives over the pro-Western representatives.⁶¹ For Russia, in his view, NATO expanded its sphere of influence to the East. In Tsygankov's view, because of Russia's current weakness, the great power representatives and the pragmatists were allying so as not to strain relations with the West while continuing to strive for the goal of great power status with its own sphere of influence to counterbalance that of the former adversary.

2. NATO's Crisis Management and Rising Tensions with Russia

Tensions between NATO and Russia also increased in the 2000s after a brief period of cooperation, which repeatedly fueled hopes of winning Russia as a partner in the following years. While NATO became increasingly involved in international conflict management, such as in Afghanistan, and focused less on Russia, Moscow felt sidelined by increasing Western influence in Eastern Europe and Russia's lack of impact in world politics. David Yost pointed out that with regard to Russia, NATO officially maintained a cooperative relationship in the 2000s, but tensions between NATO and Russia increased owing to Russia's criticism of Western military interventions and its intention to expand the Alliance eastward with an eye toward Ukraine and Georgia. On issues of deterrence, Yost critically noted that NATO has

⁵⁹ Sergei Plekhanov, "NATO Enlargement as an Issue in Russian Politics," in *The Future of NATO: Enlargement, Russia, and European Security*, ed. Charles-Philippe David and Jacques Lévesque (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 183–85.

⁶⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 6th edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 61.

⁶¹ Tsygankov, 57.

neglected conventional military capabilities without considering Russia in this regard.⁶² Furthermore, he identified tensions between the three Core Tasks of the Alliance, which were defined in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept.⁶³ He stated that this tension was between collective defense, which includes, above all, the field of deterrence, and the intention to deal with instabilities worldwide within the framework of crisis management as well as to spread democratic values within the framework of cooperative security. In this respect, he claimed that NATO gave itself a great many tasks, making it no longer clear what its focus is.⁶⁴

In 2004, Dmitry Polikanov also described the first cracks in the NATO–Russia relationship. While at that time the relationship with the West was viewed primarily as the sign of a future partnership, especially in the fight against terror, for Russia, he claimed that NATO enlargement, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty developed into points of contention with the West.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Polikanov described an unequal relationship in which a dominant NATO with the U.S. at its head conducted world politics while Russia played only a minor role. Russia, in turn, had a greater need to deal with an imbalance of power in Europe at this time. Therefore, Polikanov believed it is likely that a strengthened Russia will again come into conflict with the West.⁶⁶

Marcel de Haas came to a conclusion similar to that of the other experts. He described Russian policy at the beginning of the century as appeasing and patient so as not to unnecessarily antagonize the West from a weak position.⁶⁷ This attitude changed, however, after pro-Western regime changes took place in Georgia and Ukraine, whose authors Russia saw in the West.⁶⁸ With regard to a military balance in Europe, Russia's main points of

⁶² David S. Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2014), 111.

⁶³ Yost, 343–44.

⁶⁴ Yost, 344–45.

⁶⁵ Dmitry Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations: Present and Future," *Contemporary Security Policy* 25, no. 3 (December 1, 2004): 493–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1352326042000330619>.

⁶⁶ Polikanov, 495.

⁶⁷ Marcel De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, Contemporary Security Studies (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 156, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=515367>.

⁶⁸ De Haas, 157.

contention with the West included the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, nuclear deterrence, and a missile defense system in Europe sought by the United States. Later, Russia also opposed Georgia's and Ukraine's attempts to join NATO, ultimately leading to the Russia–Georgia War in 2008. De Haas further argued that these developments have turned the U.S. and also NATO into threats in Russia's perception.⁶⁹

Andrei Tsygankov had a similar view and saw a deterioration of relations between Russia and the West in the 2000s.⁷⁰ Thus, according to Tsygankov, Russia accused the U.S. of pursuing a unilateralist world policy in which Russian interests are not considered. He assessed the Russian military interventions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine as examples of Russia executing geopolitical revenge against the West to strengthen Russia's position on its periphery. Especially in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, it was a struggle for spheres of influence between Russia and the West.⁷¹

In this respect, Tuomas Forsberg addressed an ambivalent relationship between NATO and Russia.⁷² On the one hand, there is still hope in the West that cooperation between NATO and Russia can be expanded. On the other hand, Russia never gave up its rejectionist attitude towards NATO during the 2000 years. Forsberg held that the reason for this included the increasing NATO activity in Eastern Europe.

Dominik Jankowski and Tomasz Kowalik suggested a further reason for the ambivalent relationship: although hostilities between the former adversaries ceased after the Cold War, the respective mutual expectations of the remaining actors could not be mutually fulfilled.⁷³ These experts stated that despite joint attempts to reach out to each other, the NATO–Russia relationship deteriorated significantly. They continued that Russia views both NATO enlargement and the possible admission of Georgia and Ukraine to the Alliance as

⁶⁹ De Haas, 158.

⁷⁰ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 125–26.

⁷¹ Tsygankov, 130.

⁷² Tuomas Forsberg, "Russia's Relationship with NATO: A Qualitative Change or Old Wine in New Bottles?," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 341–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270500183488>.

⁷³ Dominik Jankowski and Tomasz Kowalik, "NATO–Russian Relations in the New International Security Environment," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2010): 76–77.

highly critical questions. Nonetheless, NATO assessed Russia's aggressive behavior toward its neighbors as unacceptable.

Jeffrey Mankoff claimed that hopes for a positive relationship between NATO and Russia are based on false assumptions.⁷⁴ In his view, the hopes for a democratic Russia joining the West had never been based on reality. Instead, he saw Russia adopting a foreign policy through which it tries to counterbalance the United States in particular but also NATO as a whole to once again aspire to the status of a great power. Mankoff assumed that Russia never really abandoned its confrontational stance toward the West since the end of the Cold War.⁷⁵

Mark Webber, James Sperling, and Martin Smith argued that, despite the attempt to build a common relationship through institutions, Russia has never stopped thinking in terms of great power politics.⁷⁶ According to these experts, numerous factors, such as NATO enlargement, missile defense, arms control treaties, and NATO activity in the Caucasus, caused a deterioration of NATO–Russia relations, which originated as early as the 1990s and whose negative effects continued into the 2000s.

3. The Re-Emergence of Deterrence after Crimea in 2014

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, many analyses concluded that Russia has abandoned the existing European order and would henceforth pursue a revisionist policy. Crimea is understood as the final turning point from the desired cooperation to an increasingly hostile attitude in the NATO–Russia relationship. Looking at Europe, Andrei Tsygankov emphasized that from the Russian perspective, NATO interventions in the former Yugoslavia, NATO enlargement rounds, Western support for regime changes in Eurasia, and

⁷⁴ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, A Council on Foreign Relations Book (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 120–22.

⁷⁵ Mankoff, 121.

⁷⁶ Mark Webber, James Sperling, and Martin A. Smith, *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory: Decline or Regeneration?*, New Security Challenges Series (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 125–26, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137271617>.

U.S. missile defense plans are unresolved problems.⁷⁷ Against this background, a view developed among the Russian elite that this threat had to be met by an expansionist foreign policy to ensure Russia's survival.⁷⁸ Consequently, he further described Russian fears after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that NATO could permanently expand its military potential in Eastern Europe and that Russia would therefore have to find a military response.⁷⁹

From NATO's perspective, Russia once again emerged as a threat to which it must respond. In this respect, the number of analyses that see NATO returning to its roots also increased. This is primarily a matter of defending and securing its members, and this was why the need for deterrence also returned to the agenda. In this respect, Andrew Michta explained that NATO went through five phases after the Cold War: (1) downsizing in terms of deterrence, (2) NATO enlargement, (3) the Balkan War, and (4) the terror attacks of September 11 in 2001.⁸⁰ With Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, he believed the 5th phase has emerged in which the Alliance must reorient itself to deter Russia.

For example, Svein Efestad and Rolf Tamnes described Russia in 2020 as the most challenging competitor for NATO because of its military and hybrid capabilities and its willingness to use them.⁸¹ In their view, it was essential to note that Russia's ultimate goal beyond regime survival is re-emergence as a great power. These goals once again forced NATO to view Russia as a threat, starting in 2014 at the latest, and to rethink its stance on deterrence after decades of focusing more on expeditionary warfare.⁸² Efestad and Tamnes recommended that NATO do everything possible to build a deterrent posture that keeps

⁷⁷ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 51, no. 2, Special Issue: NATO, Russia, and Regional Security in Europe and Eurasia (June 2018): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2018.04.002>.

⁷⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 204.

⁷⁹ Tsygankov, 174.

⁸⁰ Andrew A. Michta, "Conclusion: Building on ISAF, Looking to the Future," in *The Future of NATO*, ed. Paal Sigurd Hilde and Andrew A. Michta, Regional Defense and Global Security (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 180–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.6980805.14>.

⁸¹ Svein Efestad and Rolf Tamnes, "NATO's Enduring Relevance," in *Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities*, ed. John Andreas Olsen, Whitehall Paper 95 (Abingdon: RUSI | Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2020), 15.

⁸² Efestad and Tamnes, 17.

Russia from undertaking a *fait accompli*. Alexander Vershbow and Philip Breedlove added that a deliberate military action against NATO territory can no longer be ruled out due to Russia's stance. Therefore, the credibility of the Alliance for deterrence must be strengthened.⁸³ In addition, they noted that the current deterrence posture is failing, and therefore further strengthening is needed to gain credibility.⁸⁴ Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Jeffrey Edmonds saw hybrid threats from Russia as the biggest challenge in 2020.⁸⁵ However, they also noted that there is a local military asymmetry in favor of Russia against NATO in specific areas of Eastern Europe at the time of writing. Therefore, they concluded, NATO should rethink its thinking on deterrence.

Authors from the Rand Corporation came to a similar conclusion in 2015: in the annexation of Crimea, a point has been reached from which Russia turned away from integration in Europe and adopted an openly confrontational attitude toward the West.⁸⁶ They deplored the fact that, at this point, NATO did not have a comprehensive strategy to respond to Russian aggression adequately. As a result, they recommended that NATO develop a strategy focused on deterring Russia and keeping Alliance vulnerabilities low. In this regard, NATO's deterrence posture should be moderately increased in order not to provoke Russia but also to signal to Russia that it will not be allowed to escalate further.⁸⁷ Another comprehensive 2017 Rand Corporation study assessing possible Russian responses to a strengthening of NATO's position in Eastern Europe claimed that there was primarily a conventional military imbalance between NATO and Russia in Eastern Europe.⁸⁸ Even if

⁸³ Alexander R. Vershbow and Philip M. Breedlove, "Permanent Deterrence and the U.S. Military Presence in Europe," in *Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities*, ed. John Andreas Olsen, Whitehall Paper 95 (Abingdon: RUSI | Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2020), 27.

⁸⁴ Vershbow and Breedlove, 33.

⁸⁵ Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Jeffrey Edmonds, "The Evolution of the Russian Threat to NATO," in *Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities*, ed. John Andreas Olsen, Whitehall Paper 95 (Abingdon: RUSI | Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2020), 64.

⁸⁶ Olga Oliker, Michael J. McNerney, and Lynn E. Davis, *NATO Needs a Comprehensive Strategy for Russia*, Perspective (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), 1, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE143.html>.

⁸⁷ Oliker, McNerney, and Davis, 18–19.

⁸⁸ Bryan Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), ix, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1879>.

they rated the likelihood of an attack as low, the past wars in Georgia and Ukraine have shown that Russia accepts calculated risks to achieve strategic goals, including by military means.⁸⁹ From a NATO perspective, it was recommended that actions be cautious and prudent to avoid unintended escalation and to create a stable strategic balance.⁹⁰

In 2018 Magnus Petersson described how Russia has increasingly pursued its foreign policy goals by using military means to expand its sphere of influence on its periphery.⁹¹ This is significant for NATO because Russia has begun destabilizing eastern NATO member states through nonmilitary means.⁹² Militarily, Petersson stated that Russia has additionally started to conduct large-scale exercises on its borders with NATO members after the annexation of Crimea, which has led to increased threat perceptions, particularly in those countries. According to Petersson, NATO's decisions at the Wales and Warsaw summits have adequately increased its military deployments and improved its operational readiness to respond to the growing threat from Russia.⁹³

Rebecca Moore and Damon Coletta reached a similar conclusion in 2017. They maintained that NATO has a renewed obligation to return to its roots of containing Russia in Eastern Europe owing to Russia's expansionist policies, especially with regard to Ukraine.⁹⁴ In this respect, NATO has reached a pivotal moment due to a changing strategic balance in Europe, which has prompted the Alliance to adapt its strategy toward Russia.⁹⁵ In another 2017 contribution, John Deni stated that NATO is not ready to counter Russian aggression

⁸⁹ Frederick et al., xiii.

⁹⁰ Frederick et al., xiv.

⁹¹ Magnus Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order: The Atlantic Alliance and Its Enemies* (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 9–10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351118385>.

⁹² Petersson, 12–13.

⁹³ Petersson, 22.

⁹⁴ Rebecca R. Moore and Damon V. Coletta, "Introduction: Alliance, Identity and Geopolitics," in *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond*, ed. Rebecca R. Moore and Damon V. Coletta (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 1–2.

⁹⁵ Moore and Coletta, 3.

due to its diluted conventional military capabilities. Thus, the Alliance cannot perform its primary task, the defense of its members.⁹⁶

Jeffrey Larsen, following the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, described a revisionist Russia that insists on spheres of influence and pursues an aggressive foreign policy, while NATO, in the spirit of defense, has taken moderate measures to fulfill its obligation to defend its members.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, to ensure security in Europe, NATO must do more and strengthen its deterrence posture.⁹⁸ Against this backdrop, Robin Allers concluded that NATO has reverted from reassuring its members within the Alliance to a concept of deterrence within a short time period following Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁹⁹ At this time, Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning also stated that within NATO, in addition to strengthening the deterrence posture, they were also considering whether former NATO–Russia agreements are still binding and whether it would be appropriate to station more NATO troops permanently in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁰ Julie Wilhelmsen and Jakub Godzimirski perceived a general new dynamic in the NATO–Russia relationship, characterized by mutual distrust, due to the previously mentioned developments.¹⁰¹ Both explain that a spiral may be created when

⁹⁶ John R. Deni, “Force Posture after NATO’s Return to Europe: Too Little, Too Late,” in *NATO’s Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond*, ed. Rebecca R. Moore and Damon V. Coletta (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 37–39.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey A. Larsen, “NATO’s Responses to Russian Belligerence: An Overview,” in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 8–9, <https://www.routledge.com/NATO-and-Collective-Defence-in-the-21st-Century-An-Assessment-of-the-Warsaw/Friis/p/book/9780415786294>.

⁹⁸ Larsen, 14.

⁹⁹ Robin Allers, “Modern Deterrence? NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence on the Eastern Flank,” in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 30–31, <https://www.routledge.com/NATO-and-Collective-Defence-in-the-21st-Century-An-Assessment-of-the-Warsaw/Friis/p/book/9780415786294>.

¹⁰⁰ Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, “Can NATO’s New Very High Readiness Joint Task Force Deter?,” in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 21–22, <https://www.routledge.com/NATO-and-Collective-Defence-in-the-21st-Century-An-Assessment-of-the-Warsaw/Friis/p/book/9780415786294>.

¹⁰¹ Julie Wilhelmsen and Jakub Godzimirski, “NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust,” in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 63, <https://www.routledge.com/NATO-and-Collective-Defence-in-the-21st-Century-An-Assessment-of-the-Warsaw/Friis/p/book/9780415786294>.

an action causes a counter-reaction. As a result, both NATO and Russia have turned away from each other and relied on mutual deterrence since 2014.¹⁰²

Joseph Day also observed that following Russia's annexation of Crimea, NATO has made adjustments to its defense and deterrence posture in Eastern Europe, such as enhanced Forward Presence or tailored Forward Presence (tFP), to shore up the Alliance's credibility.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, in his view, these forces were insufficient to ensure a balance against Russian forces in the region. Although NATO has begun to focus primarily on improving the situation for follow-on forces in the event of a conflict on the ground in terms of command structures and logistics, there is still a need to follow the imperative to increase capabilities.¹⁰⁴

Tom Rostock noted that Russia's increasingly assertive foreign policy and the relatively weaker Russian neighbors has raised concerns about further aggressive political steps from Moscow.¹⁰⁵ For this reason, deterrence has become part of the Western European security debate again, causing a rethinking of defense expenditures and adapting strategies together with NATO vis-à-vis Russia.

While the aforementioned analyses looked at 2014 as a turning point and the return of the deterrence theme, the debate increasingly shifted focus to NATO's shortcomings. Even though NATO has taken adjustment measures regarding its deterrence posture in Eastern Europe, several experts concluded that the measures are insufficient to deter Russia effectively from pursuing a revisionist foreign policy. In 2019 Alexander Lanoszka and Michael Hunzeker saw the Baltic States as a future potential flashpoint between NATO and Russia.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, 66–67.

¹⁰³ Joseph A. Day, *Reinforcing NATO's Deterrence in the East*, General Report, 168 DSC 18 E fin (NATO Parliamentary Assembly Defence and Security Committee (DSC), 2018), 1, <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2018-deterrence-east-day-report-168-dsc-18-e-fin>.

¹⁰⁴ Day, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Toms Rostoks, "Introduction: The (Un)Expected Return of Deterrence to Europe," in *Deterring Russia in Europe: Defence Strategies for Neighbouring States*, ed. Nora Vanaga and Toms Rostoks (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 3, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351250641>.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Dr. Lanoszka and Michael A. Dr. Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, Monographs, Books, and Publications 381 (Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), xi, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/381>.

With this in mind, they believed it makes sense for the Alliance to adopt a robust deterrence posture in this area to contain Russia's revisionist intentions but without provoking Moscow.¹⁰⁷ According to these authors, it must also be taken into account that Russia's resources are limited and that conquest of the Baltic States and Poland is unlikely.

However, Viljar Veebel identified a weakness in NATO's 2010 strategy regarding the Alliance's conventional deterrence posture.¹⁰⁸ These developments threatened the Baltic states in particular, as there was no military balance in the area, including NATO's decided measures to strengthen its presence in Eastern Europe. Veebel feared that Russia could use hybrid methods to undermine this balance of power below the threshold of open warfare so that NATO nations do not coherently decide to activate their forces for defense.¹⁰⁹

Rob de Wijk argued that the discussion on deterrence in NATO continues where it left off after the Cold War.¹¹⁰ He stated that NATO's theoretical defense and deterrence approach is no longer sufficient owing to increasing tensions between Russia and Western countries, requiring an overhaul. To this extent, he argued that the Cold War debates about deterrence by punishment or denial would dominate the future debate. In this sense, he also included topics such as destabilizing Western societies and energy security.

Several authors from the Institute for National Strategic Studies identified in their analysis that NATO's deterrence posture in Eastern Europe has a more significant effect if the conception of deterrence is focused more on denial than punishment to reduce Alliance vulnerabilities.¹¹¹ The institute's authors saw the advantage of a deterrent defense in that the pressure on NATO decision-makers would decrease, and a direct defense would become

¹⁰⁷ Lanoszka and Hunzeker, xiii.

¹⁰⁸ Viljar Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2018.1463518>.

¹⁰⁹ Veebel, 245.

¹¹⁰ de Wijk, "The Role of Deterrence in a New European Strategic Environment," 1.

¹¹¹ Robert M. Klein et al., *Baltics Left of Bang: The Role of NATO with Partners in Denial-Based Deterrence*, Strategic Forum 301 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2019), 15–16, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/2010884/baltics-left-of-bang-the-role-of-nato-with-partners-in-denial-based-deterrence/>
<https%3A%2F%2Finss.ndu.edu%2FMedia%2FNews%2FArticle%2F2010884%2Fbaltics-left-of-bang-the-role-of-nato-with-partners-in-denial-based-deterrence%2F>.

much more accessible. Ultimately this would significantly reduce the likelihood of a conflict between NATO and Russia.

In this respect, Dan Reiter and Paul Poast contended that NATO's tripwire approach in Eastern Europe does not generate sufficient deterrence. At the same time, forward deployments significantly reduce the likelihood of aggression.¹¹² The inadequacy of the tripwire approach stems from the fact that deployed troops might be sacrificed in the event of an attack, creating a negative effect on public opinion on the home front and weakening the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture. Likewise, these troops cannot stop the enemy, leaving the territory to the enemy and, thus, a solid defensive position.¹¹³ They are not intended to "stop the enemy" but to create a situation in which larger formations could take action—hence, the deterrent to prevent aggression.

Sten Rynning argued that NATO's deterrence concept is primarily preventing aggression based on punishment with some elements of denial in 2020.¹¹⁴ According to his view at this time, NATO's deterrence posture was not enough to defeat a full Russian attack on NATO territory. However, NATO has begun to assure its member states not only that it intended to defend them but that it would do so by providing a more robust deterrent with concrete military means. However, Rynning identified a problem of unity within the Alliance about how to cope with Russia regarding the balance of power. In this respect, he emphasized NATO's inability to read the intent of its Eastern rival, Russia.

Viljar Veebel saw a problem in the attempt to bind Russia to the existing international order dominated by the West in that Russia, as a weaker power, will not abide by the rules of this system and will therefore try to subvert it to gain advantages for itself.¹¹⁵ Thus, deterrence

¹¹² Mark David Nieman et al., "An International Game of Risk: Troop Placement and Major Power Competition," *The Journal of Politics* 83, no. 4 (October 1, 2021): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1086/711716>.

¹¹³ Nieman et al., 34–35.

¹¹⁴ Sten Rynning, "Deterrence Rediscovered: NATO and Russia," in *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020*, ed. Frans Osinga and Tim Sweijts, NL ARMS (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2021), 41–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-419-8_3.

¹¹⁵ Viljar Veebel, "Misperceptions in Deterring Russia: What Is the West Doing Wrong?," in *NATO at 70 and the Baltic States: Strengthening the Euro-Atlantic Alliance in an Age of Non-Linear Threats*, ed. Mark Voyger (Tartu: The Baltic Defence College, 2019), 198–200, https://www.baltdefcol.org/files/files/publications/NATO_AT_70_and_Baltics.pdf.

concepts of the West do not always work with regard to Russia because these actor thinks on different levels. To this extent, it is essential to focus on the credibility of military deterrence to avoid misleading perceptions.

4. After the Expansion of the Russia–Ukraine War in February 2022

The shocking event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 once again prompted a debate on deterrence within NATO. The new NATO Strategic Concept was the main focus of the analysis in 2022. Marcin Zaborowski stressed that NATO's new Strategic Concept contains elements of continuity since the last 2010 concept, including NATO's three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.¹¹⁶ However, what has changed was the renewed strong focus on defense and deterrence, as well as on Russia as an adversary rather than a cooperative partner.¹¹⁷ Consequently, on short notice, NATO has adapted to the new security environment by highlighting defense and deterrence as one of its major tasks. To this extent, Thierry Tardy highlighted that NATO redefined one of its core tasks from collective defense to deterrence and defense, meaning a highlighting of deterrence issues, which is, according to Tardy, the reformulated main effort of the Alliance.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Patrick Keller noted that despite the events in Ukraine and the related intention to prioritize NATO's deterrence of Russia as the Alliance's primary focus, NATO has struck a balance between its three core missions.¹¹⁹ However, he suggested that too rigid a focus on deterrence would have a negative impact on the Alliance's flexibility to respond to other future crises. Mark Webber disagreed with the aforementioned commentators

¹¹⁶ Marcin Zaborowski, "NATO Strategic Concept in the Shadow of the War," in *NATO's New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 43, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

¹¹⁷ Zaborowski, 44.

¹¹⁸ Thierry Tardy, "Six Takeaways From NATO's New Strategic Concept," in *NATO's New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, No. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 9–10, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

¹¹⁹ Patrick Keller, "The New Status Quo Concept," in *NATO's New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 35–36, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

considering the new Strategic Concept.¹²⁰ In his view, a shift away from foreign deployments, such as the end of the Afghanistan mission, took place to collective defense. With this in mind, Webber believed that the new concept breaks with the old concepts by prioritizing the core task of defense and deterrence over the other tasks.

However, most experts emphasized that NATO needs to significantly strengthen its deterrence posture after the invasion of Ukraine. Henryk Larsen believed that NATO must counter Russia's revisionist policies with military means by strengthening its credibility and resolve to deny Russia success in further aggression.¹²¹ He advised decision-makers not to overestimate Russia's poor performance in the war in Ukraine because a warlike confrontation with NATO could be completely different. Accordingly, he advised strengthening NATO's deterrent position in Europe so that Russia does not get the idea of claiming NATO territory for itself. Sean Monaghan took a similar view and concluded that the strategic balance in Europe has shifted in favor of Russia, and therefore NATO must adapt its no longer valid assumptions regarding deterrence measures.¹²² For Monaghan, it was not just about a reset of NATO's defense and deterrence posture but a crucial task to unite the Alliance in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine.¹²³

In view of the strategic imbalance in Europe, John Gilliam and Ryan Van Wie argued that the NATO force's structure and capabilities are not suitable to prevent a swift Russian fait accompli, especially in the Baltics.¹²⁴ The main reasons for these shortcomings are

¹²⁰ Mark Webber, "The Strategic Concept and the US-China-Russia Strategic Triangle," in *NATO's New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 49, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

¹²¹ Henrik Larsen, *NATO's Adaptation to the Russia Threat*, application/pdf, CSS Analyses in Security Policy, no. 306 (Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zürich, 2022), 2, <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse306-EN.pdf>.

¹²² Sean Monaghan, *Resetting NATO's Defense and Deterrence: The Sword and the Shield Redux*, CSIS Briefs (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies., 2022), 7, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220628_Monaghan_ResettingNATO_DefenseDeterrence.pdf?VersionId=j73cwvXqZmuKo5VBYY.xPMp3Z7X2y7Yx.

¹²³ Monaghan, 8.

¹²⁴ John B. Gilliam and Ryan C. Van Wie, *Feasible U.S. Steps to Strengthen NATO Deterrence in the Baltics and Poland*, Security, Strategy, and Order (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Policy at Brookings/The Brookings Institution, 2022), 15, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FP_20220322_nato_deterrence_gilliam_van_wie.pdf.

insufficient defense spending by the member states: increased spending might ensure a proper defense and deterrence posture. Still, in reality, NATO cannot implement this due to limited resources and the inadequate political will of its member states for increased defense spending.

In this context, several experts of the Heritage Foundation emphasized the importance of Art. 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty for resisting armed attacks like a *fait accompli*. This need is closely connected to the widespread perception in favor of increased defense spending by NATO member states. To achieve this aim, the experts claimed that NATO must ensure the support of the member states' populations, meaning being ready to spend more and defend an ally.¹²⁵ Even though NATO underlines its willingness to provide its member states' safety and territorial integrity, it is unsure whether the member states would act in this sense.¹²⁶ However, according to the experts, NATO displayed a high level of cohesion and unity at the Madrid summit, indicating that the member states were serious regarding their defense and deterrence commitments.

However, Stanley Sloan was concerned that the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept does not specify how to finance an increased defense posture on the Alliance's eastern flank, not to mention what and from where troop deployments are to be generated.¹²⁷ Consequently, he stressed that the European NATO member states must share this burden in terms of appropriate military capacities, which also constitutes an issue of Alliance cohesion.¹²⁸

Further studies addressed how NATO should best counter the Russian threat through deterrence. Regarding the new Strategic Concept, Bruno Tertrais pointed out that it is striking that it hardly contains any content for a forward presence. However, especially the Eastern

¹²⁵ Kochis et al., *The Russian Threat*.

¹²⁶ George Beebe, *NATO's Tunnel Vision*, Quincy Briefs, no. 28 (Washington, D.C.: Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, 2022), <https://quincyinst.org/report/natos-tunnel-vision/>.

¹²⁷ Stanley R. Sloan, "NATO in an Evolving World Disorder," in *NATO's New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 18, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

¹²⁸ Sloan, 23.

European NATO countries have repeatedly pushed for it.¹²⁹ In this sense, Tertrais concluded that the U.S., as the dominant decision-maker in NATO, probably does not want to signal to China that it intends to focus more on Europe than on East Asia as a part of the global power competition.

Even though NATO has announced bolstering its defense and deterrence posture in its Eastern member states, Sean Monaghan argued that the announced changes mean only a thicker tripwire approach that appears almost the same as before the war.¹³⁰ Predominantly, the NATO Allies that are neighbors of Russia have raised concerns about the current structure of the defense and deterrence posture and have argued for the need for deterrence by denial capabilities—that is, enough forces to repel and defeat a possible Russian attack.¹³¹ Correspondingly, NATO has not changed much concerning its defense and deterrence posture.

In this context, NATO also seeks to advance the resilience of the member state societies in terms of democratic backsliding, election interference, and economic pressure.¹³² Jordan Becker, Douglas Lute, and Simon Smith argued that this overall society approach is something new for NATO because it does include not only military means but also civil efforts with which NATO has little experience. How NATO will address this issue is not part of its new Strategic Concept and the Alliance lacks concrete action to increase the resilience of the member states' societies.

Nonetheless, resilience is particularly threatened by hybrid threats. Russia appears to have a problem with its full-fledged military offensive against Ukraine in terms of military

¹²⁹ Bruno Tertrais, “An Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary, Strategic Concept,” in *NATO’s New Strategic Concept*, ed. Thierry Tardy, NDC Research Paper, no. 25 —September 2022 (Rome: NDC Public Affairs Office, 2022), 26, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1737>.

¹³⁰ Sean Monaghan, “The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO’s New Strategic Concept,” *War on the Rocks* (blog), August 23, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-sword-the-shield-and-the-hedgehog-strengthening-deterrence-in-natos-new-strategic-concept/>.

¹³¹ Sam Meredith, “Russia’s Neighbors Fear NATO’s Defense Plans Are Not Fit for Purpose and They Could Be Quickly Overrun,” *CNBC*, June 27, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/27/russia-ukraine-war-baltic-nations-push-for-change-at-nato-summit.html>.

¹³² Jordan Becker, Douglas Lute, and Simon Smith, “Don’t Let Russia Dominate the Strategic Concept,” *War on the Rocks* (blog), June 28, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/06/dont-let-russia-dominate-the-strategic-concept/>.

progress, performance, and costs. According to Sweijts, the relatively unsuccessful military campaign increases the likelihood that Russia will not stick to its current military pattern in the future.¹³³ Instead, he continued that Moscow could adapt its warfare with hybrid methods, as Russia had done in the case of annexed Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas. Therefore, according to Sweijts, the war in Ukraine must not lead NATO to refocus only on conventional warfare and disregard other methods of aggression threatening member states.

While hybrid threats could undermine NATO's defense efforts, using unconventional weapons also plays an important role. Monaghan claimed that although NATO mentioned its willingness to use nuclear weapons as a deterrence measure and a means of last resort, he highlighted NATO's reluctance to threaten to use nuclear weapons.¹³⁴ In contrast, Russia threatens nuclear weapons use without necessity. For example, Monaghan proposed a more prominent and flexible role for nuclear weapons in NATO politics.¹³⁵ In this sense, NATO's credibility may be questioned and should be mentioned in a strategic document and represented more vigorously in public.

E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

According to the classification made in the literature review, NATO went through four phases after the Cold War. During these phases, NATO made efforts to adapt to the changing security environment in Europe and worldwide through its Strategic Concepts and alignments over time. Thus, in the first phase, mutual deterrence in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union no longer played as great a role as it did during the Cold War. While NATO sought new tasks in international crisis management within the framework of collective security, Russia went through a period of instability, through which, however, the possibility of integrating Russia into Western security institutions was seen. This fueled hopes that Russia could be integrated into the Western community of states. At the same time, however, the first cracks began to form in the relationship between Russia and the West in

¹³³ Tim Sweijts, *Between War and Peace: 'Hybrid Threats' and Nato's Strategic Concept* (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022), 2–3, <https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Between-War-and-Peace-HCSS-2022-V2.pdf>.

¹³⁴ Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog."

¹³⁵ Monaghan.

general and NATO in particular. The reason for these rifts was different views on international relations. While the Allies pursued the concept of sovereign states with the right to freely choose alliances, Russia understood international relations more as a concert of great powers with spheres of influence.

In the second phase, the cracks were widening in a world order dominated by the United States. While NATO was increasingly involved in out-of-area missions, there were still hopes of winning Russia as a partner in international crisis management. Territorial deterrence as a security issue, therefore, played only a disorderly role in the Alliance. However, Russia increasingly felt sidelined and accused NATO, particularly, of not keeping to agreements regarding Eastern Europe. The main issues were NATO's eastward expansion and a feeling that the West was increasingly exerting influence on the post-Soviet space and, thus also, on Russia. The expansion of the Western security space thus conflicted with Russia's concept of a great power with spheres of influence, prompting Moscow to launch military countermeasures, such as in Georgia in 2008.

The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in Donbas can be seen as a rupture between Russia and the West and the beginning of the third phase. Since then, Russia has been seen as a threat, especially in Eastern Europe, and NATO has responded by adjusting its deterrence and defense posture. While NATO's first three Strategic Concepts dealt with the issue of deterrence instead in the background, the importance of the topic increased in subsequent debates in the Alliance. Initially, lines of argumentation assumed a moderate adjustment to avoid provoking Russia. However, as tensions between Russia and the West increased over the years, more and more efforts were demanded in terms of deterrence. Russia therefore felt increasingly compelled to respond to NATO's adjustments so as not to risk losing further influence in Eastern Europe, which would simultaneously undermine its great power concept.

The war between Russia and Ukraine can be considered the beginning of the fourth phase, in which NATO again adopted a Strategic Concept that described Russia as the main threat and significantly strengthened its deterrent position in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the increasingly deteriorating security situation in Europe owing to the war in Ukraine led to further debates about deficiencies in NATO's deterrence posture and further calls for a more

effective and stronger defense of Alliance members to prevent further aggression by Russia. Therefore, the issue of deterrence came back into focus for the Alliance, and it became clear that the different world views of the Allies and Russia led to a direct confrontation, which was fought out with armed forces in Ukraine. To this extent, NATO's ability to effectively deter and defend against Russia's militarized foreign and security policy depends on the Alliance's cohesion and sustained effort over time, as well as the recognition that adjusting the deterrence and defense posture will lead to reciprocal antagonism between NATO and Russia.

F. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for this thesis relies exclusively on interpretive text analysis, discussion, and comparison. In this respect, the analysis focuses on the four NATO Strategic Concepts as milestones in the Alliance's development in the Post-Cold War era. In addition, the periods between the publication of the Strategic Concepts are analyzed to examine NATO's response to an increasing Russian threat and the Alliance's adaption in terms of deterrence.

Therefore, the analysis comprises four phases that flow smoothly into one another. In the respective following phases, events from the previous phase are taken up and put into context to ensure a constructive evolution of NATO strategy concerning deterrence. Consequently, the analysis will, in a follow-on step, critically compare these documents and identify continuities, changes, and adaptations with regard to deterrence. In this context, it will also consider explanations of these developments and offer judgments as to their significance.

Primary sources include the four NATO Strategic Concepts and other official and publicly released Alliance documents, as well as official press releases and announcements, which ensure a general document analysis. Secondary sources include political science literature and media reports on NATO, focusing on the NATO–Russia relationship and deterrence issues. With the help of deductive reasoning, the sources are evaluated, weighed, and discussed. This interpretative approach is always aligned with the research question guiding the findings.

G. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is organized as follows. The first chapter introduces the research question and its significance, followed by a discussion of deterrence concepts, a literature review and the hypothesis. The chapter closes with the research design and an overview of how to approach the topic. According to the literature review and the hypothesis, chapters two, three, four, and five cover four phases: (1) NATO's Transformation Phase, (2) NATO's Crisis Management and Rising Tensions with Russia, (3) The Re-Emergence of Deterrence after Crimea in 2014, and (4) After the Expansion of the Russia–Ukraine War in February 2022. Each chapter includes an analysis of the respective NATO Strategic Concepts in terms of deterrence, followed by an overview of the relevant developments in NATO–Russia relations. Thereupon, the individual chapters deal further with adjustments in NATO's deterrence posture and specific developments in deterrence that have been particularly important. In the sixth chapter, the results identified are compared and assessed to answer the research question. Chapter seven includes the bibliography.

II. NATO'S POST-COLD WAR TRANSFORMATION PHASE

A. NATO'S 1991 STRATEGIC CONCEPT

The Soviet Union collapsed almost two months after NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept was published. However, the authors of NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept had already considered the political upheavals in the Soviet Union and its doubtful future. At the beginning of the document, the Allies referred to the new strategic environment that global political change had created, including the establishment of new sovereign states in Eastern Europe.¹³⁶ The document differed from NATO's previous Strategic Concepts in that it did not reflect the risk of an immediate confrontation.¹³⁷ The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact meant that its member states were no longer hostile to NATO. On the contrary, at that time, most of these Eastern European states had initiated democratic reforms, which meant that they considered the former division of Europe to have been overcome.¹³⁸

The NATO Allies held that divisions should be replaced by dialogue and cooperation and that crises should be resolved through a broad security approach by the international community.¹³⁹ In this respect, the strategic situation had changed in favor of the NATO member states with improved prospects for democratic peace in Europe. Furthermore, NATO noted that various arms control treaties, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction (START) Treaty, and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, had strengthened European and international stability and security and mutual trust as well as transparency among treaty partners.¹⁴⁰ In this context, the planned withdrawal of former Soviet troops from Eastern Europe also played a significant role.

¹³⁶ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)* (NATO, 1991), par. 1, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

¹³⁷ "Strategic Concepts," NATO, last modified July 18, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

¹³⁸ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)*, par. 1.

¹³⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 1.

¹⁴⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 3.

Overall, it can be said that the Alliance expected a significant relaxation of political-military tensions in Europe.

Nevertheless, NATO defined potential security crises that differed from those of the past. A possible attack by the Soviet Union was considered extremely unlikely. “Particularly in Central Europe, the risk of a surprise attack has been substantially reduced, and minimum Allied warning time has increased accordingly.”¹⁴¹ While the Allies ruled out a conventional attack on NATO member states, threats from internal instabilities came to the fore. While the Alliance remained focused on Europe, NATO maintained that security threats could have global implications, such as spreading weapons of mass destruction, disrupting trade routes, and fostering terrorism.¹⁴² To that extent, it was up to NATO to address these threats to ensure the security of its member states within the framework of Articles 5 and 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty. At this point, NATO addressed the Soviet Union’s forces, which dwarfed those of other former Warsaw Pact states in size and which included nuclear capabilities.¹⁴³ To this extent, the Allies agreed: “Even in a non-adversarial and cooperative relationship, Soviet military capability and build-up potential, including its nuclear dimension, still constitute the most significant factor of which the Alliance has to take account in maintaining the strategic balance in Europe.”¹⁴⁴ This finding suggested that the erstwhile adversary continued to be perceived as a potential threat from a NATO perspective.

For this reason, NATO concluded that it would continue to exist as an Alliance to secure peace in Europe and to address future threats with a broad security approach.¹⁴⁵ To accomplish this task, the Alliance aimed to provide military capabilities designed to prevent war and provide an effective defense.¹⁴⁶ To ensure the security of Europe, NATO set itself four core tasks:

¹⁴¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 7.

¹⁴² North Atlantic Council, par. 12.

¹⁴³ North Atlantic Council, par. 10.

¹⁴⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 13.

¹⁴⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 14.

¹⁴⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

I. To provide one of the indispensable foundations for a stable security environment in Europe, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in which no country would be able to intimidate or coerce any European nation or to impose hegemony through the threat or use of force.

II. To serve, as provided for in Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, as a transatlantic forum for Allied consultations on any issues that affect their vital interests, including possible developments posing risks for members' security, and for appropriate co-ordination of their efforts in fields of common concern.

III. To deter and defend against any threat of aggression against the territory of any NATO member state.

IV. To preserve the strategic balance within Europe.¹⁴⁷

In summary, in 1991, NATO defined itself as the security institution that shapes and defends security in Europe.

The Alliance's security policy aimed at dialogue, cooperation, and collective security to cope with these tasks.¹⁴⁸ The Alliance saw dialogue and cooperation as prerequisites for European collective security. Dialogue and cooperation were intended to build mutual trust with NATO, especially regarding the former Warsaw Pact countries, and to break down former dividing lines. Arms control and disarmament should also play their part in ensuring security with as few forces as possible.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the military dimension and the associated military capabilities remained essential for Europe's security.¹⁵⁰ In this respect, NATO in Europe aimed to reduce former Cold War tensions in a targeted manner while maintaining military capabilities to ensure security.

However, due to the changed security risks, NATO saw the need to adapt its military strategy to the new broad security challenges.¹⁵¹ "The forces of the Allies must therefore be able to defend Alliance frontiers, to stop an aggressor's advance as far forward as possible, to maintain or restore the territorial integrity of Allied nations and to terminate war rapidly by

¹⁴⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 20 I-IV.

¹⁴⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 24.

¹⁴⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

¹⁵⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 30.

¹⁵¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 34.

making an aggressor reconsider his decision, cease his attack and withdraw.”¹⁵² With the end of the Cold War, however, these forces must additionally be capable of countering global threats. “The primary role of Alliance military forces, to guarantee the security and territorial integrity of member states, remains unchanged. But this role must take account of the new strategic environment, in which a single massive and global threat has given way to diverse and multi-directional risks. Alliance forces have different functions to perform in peace, crisis and war.”¹⁵³ Against this backdrop, NATO sought forces that could be used for both traditional defense and global crisis management.¹⁵⁴

To this end, the member states agreed on a mix of nuclear and conventional forces.¹⁵⁵ In this context, Conventional forces are aimed at denying potential attackers a quick victory or the seizure of territory. Furthermore, nuclear weapons act as a safeguard for the Alliance; they make the consequences of aggression against the Alliance so incalculable that an attack is unlikely. Moreover, while U.S. forces were expected to continue to play a significant role in the defense of Europe, the European nations of NATO were assuming greater responsibility for the defense of Europe.¹⁵⁶ In this regard, NATO’s reference to a new military strategy was not a fundamental departure from old Cold War approaches. However, the Alliance wanted to increase the flexibility of the armed forces through a broad approach to facing new security risks.

According to the Alliance, the size, readiness, availability, and deployment of armed forces should continue primarily to ensure the defense of member states. Still, the military should be adapted to the new security environment within the framework of arms control treaties.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the armed forces should be reduced for this purpose. “This means in particular: a. that the overall size of the Allies’ forces, and in many cases their readiness, will

¹⁵² North Atlantic Council, par. 35.

¹⁵³ North Atlantic Council, par. 40.

¹⁵⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 42.

¹⁵⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 38.

¹⁵⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 36.

¹⁵⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 45.

be reduced.”¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, a military presence must continue to be maintained in the member states and adapted to geographic and strategic circumstances. “The peacetime geographical distribution of forces will ensure a sufficient military presence throughout the territory of the Alliance, including where necessary forward deployment of appropriate forces.”¹⁵⁹ To meet the aforementioned missions, these reduced forces must be capable of increased mobility and readiness.¹⁶⁰ “They will be of sufficient quality, quantity and readiness to deter a limited attack and, if required, to defend the territory of the Allies against attacks, particularly those launched without long warning time.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, the forces were to be appropriately matched in numbers in relation to the current threats at hand.¹⁶² Should a major conflict occur in Europe, it was, therefore, all the more important that force structures provide sufficient follow-on forces that can be generated as quickly as possible.¹⁶³ To this extent, member states were required to maintain rapid reaction forces and main forces representing the bulk of the armed forces and augmentation forces.¹⁶⁴ In shaping force structures, the NATO plan in 1991 would take a two-pronged approach in which, on the one hand, reduced forces could serve as defense capabilities and, at the same time, be deployed as quickly and flexibly as possible for crisis management.

In detail, NATO assigned specific tasks to the respective component forces. Ground forces were designed to hold or regain territory. However, the “majority will normally be at lower states of readiness and, overall, there will be a greater reliance on mobilization and reserves.”¹⁶⁵ Because of their mobility and flexibility, operations involving naval forces were seen primarily in connection with international crisis management and nuclear deterrence. “Their essential missions are to ensure sea control in order to safeguard the Allies’ sea lines

¹⁵⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 45a.

¹⁵⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 45b.

¹⁶⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 46.

¹⁶¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 46a.

¹⁶² North Atlantic Council, par. 46b.

¹⁶³ North Atlantic Council, par. 46d.

¹⁶⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 47.

¹⁶⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 48a.

of communication, to support land and amphibious operations, and to protect the deployment of the Alliance's sea-based nuclear deterrent."¹⁶⁶ The Allies assigned air forces a variety of tasks to perform both international crisis management and defense missions. "Their role in supporting operations, on land and at sea, will require appropriate long-distance airlift and air refuelling capabilities. Air defence forces, including modern air command and control systems, are required to ensure a secure air defence environment."¹⁶⁷ It should be emphasized here that the majority of land forces are to be in a lower state of readiness, which indicates that less attention was paid to deterrence. Similarly, the dual-track defense and crisis management approach can be readily seen in the planned composition of NATO forces.

Nuclear forces were accorded a distinctive role in NATO, reflecting the political intent of keeping the peace and avoiding war. "The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfil an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies' response to military aggression. They demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option."¹⁶⁸ One of the consequences of this policy is NATO's rejection of a no-first-use pledge. In this respect, the U.S. nuclear forces serve to defend the Allies. In addition, the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France contributed to the overall deterrence of the Alliance. However, the new security environment that emerged after the Cold War also affected NATO's nuclear weapons posture, in which the Allies assessed a nuclear exchange as unlikely. "They can therefore significantly reduce their sub-strategic nuclear forces. They will maintain adequate sub-strategic forces based in Europe which will provide an essential link with strategic nuclear forces, reinforcing the trans-Atlantic link."¹⁶⁹ Overall, NATO's post-Cold War intention to limit and reduce its arsenal can also be seen in nuclear weapons.

¹⁶⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 48b.

¹⁶⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 48c.

¹⁶⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 54.

¹⁶⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 56.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF NATO–RUSSIA RELATIONS

1. The Origins of Russia’s Fear of NATO

The basis for Russia’s relationship with NATO can be seen in its past.¹⁷⁰ In addition to conducting many offensive wars, Russia has engaged in various defensive wars aimed at protecting Russian civilization from external forces. For example, towards the end of the 19th century, the Russian imperial general staff declared that Russia had fought thirty-eight wars between 1700 and 1870, only two of which were offensive.¹⁷¹ In the Cold War period, a narrative of victimization was also supported by the ideological confrontation with the West. In this context, NATO was presented at the time as an adversary against which Russia must defend itself.¹⁷² In Tsygankov’s view, this hostility and the associated antagonistic posture toward NATO never really ended with the Cold War.

Nevertheless, in November 1990, the NATO member states and the Warsaw Pact states agreed to no longer regard each other as adversaries.¹⁷³ As a result, the Warsaw Pact dissolved, and NATO remained the only collective defense organization in the European area.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, in the early 1990s, most Western governments no longer considered Russia a threat.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, at this time, elites in Russia shared this view and saw possible aggression against Russia by the West as extremely unlikely, a judgment that was also expressed in Russian military doctrines of the decade.¹⁷⁶

However, despite this rapprochement, two views of European security concepts collided shortly after the Cold War.¹⁷⁷ NATO’s intention to admit more countries to the

¹⁷⁰ Tsygankov, “The Sources of Russia’s Fear of NATO,” 103.

¹⁷¹ William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁷² Tsygankov, “The Sources of Russia’s Fear of NATO,” 103.

¹⁷³ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Yost, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Deni, “Force Posture after NATO’s Return to Europe,” 21.

¹⁷⁶ Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 148–49, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.3410>.

¹⁷⁷ Polikanov, “NATO–Russia Relations,” 482–83.

Alliance led to the perception in Russia that Russian efforts to integrate with the West were not being taken seriously.¹⁷⁸ While NATO's approach focused on collective defense and peacekeeping operations as well as support for the spread of democracy and a free market economy, Russia understood international relations more in terms of a concert of great powers, a policy framework in which Russia defended its borders and regime as well as asserting a right to influence in its "near abroad," meaning predominantly the post-Soviet space.¹⁷⁹

2. NATO Enlargement

The first slight tensions after the end of the Cold War between NATO and Russia developed against the background of NATO's intention to admit additional members. Under President Boris Yeltsin, Russia initially pursued a policy of rapprochement with the West, expressed in the government's consultations with NATO about possible membership.¹⁸⁰ However, Smith argued that this Western rapprochement with Russia received its first damper as early as 1993 after NATO debated the Alliance's possible enlargement to include former Soviet republics and former Yugoslav republics.¹⁸¹ According to Smith, the intention to expand NATO primarily set in motion forces in Russia that opposed Yeltsin's Western rapprochement and perceived the enlargement as a threat to Russia as a former adversary. In the 1990s, this threat perception was expressed not so much in concrete military means as in fears among Russian elites that their country would lose its influence and standing as a great power in Europe.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 103.

¹⁷⁹ Webber, Sperling, and Smith, *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory*, 125; Stephanie Pezard and Ashley L. Rhoades, *What Provokes Putin's Russia?: Deterring Without Unintended Escalation*, Perspective (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), 2–3, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE338.html>.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 55; Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations," 483.

¹⁸¹ Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 56.

¹⁸² Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 153; Webber, Sperling, and Smith, *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory*, 126.

Despite the Western rapprochement, the Russian elites hoped Moscow would have a considerable capacity and political power to shape future developments in Russia's interests. The fact that NATO enlargement was based on the sovereign will of applicant states did not convince the elites in Moscow, who feared an increasing influence of the United States and NATO in Eastern Europe and a power imbalance.¹⁸³ At this time, Clunan held that Russia sought to oppose the world order, which Moscow regarded as increasingly dominated by the United States.¹⁸⁴ According to Clunan, the Russian government called for recognition of a "multipolar world order" and a new "concert of great powers" in conjunction with military power that should be used responsibly and with restraint to protect the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the spheres of influence of great powers. Despite Russia's rapprochement with NATO, in which membership was also debated, Russian elites never intended to make Russia an Alliance member, partly because it might thereby lose its claim to be a great power.¹⁸⁵ When the first post-Cold War round of NATO enlargement took place, the Allies did not sufficiently address Russian concerns about enlargement from the Russian perspective.¹⁸⁶ In this context, Russia consistently assessed NATO as a political threat in its 1997 security strategy.¹⁸⁷

In contrast to the Russian elites' worldview, the Allies no longer understood the international environment as a concert of selected great powers but as an international community of states with nominally equal legal rights. In this context, Yost stated that the reasons for NATO enlargement were seen by the Allies primarily as the desire to avoid forming blocs in the future but to pursue a holistic and integrated approach to security.¹⁸⁸ According to Yost, government representatives of European countries spoke out in favor of

¹⁸³ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 133.

¹⁸⁴ Anne L. Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351181242-2>.

¹⁸⁵ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 155.

¹⁸⁶ Plekhanov, "NATO Enlargement as an Issue in Russian Politics," 171.

¹⁸⁷ Nataliya Bugayova, *How We Got Here with Russia: The Kremlin's Worldview* (Washington, D.C.: ISW | Institute for the Study of War, 2019), 13.

¹⁸⁸ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 100–102; Plekhanov, "NATO Enlargement as an Issue in Russian Politics," 170; Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 141.

enlargement, and former Warsaw Pact states sought admission to gain security in general by becoming NATO member states. In this context, NATO countries considered the former Warsaw Pact members sovereign countries that had the right to seek admission in accordance with NATO policy.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, a Study on NATO Enlargement initiated by the Alliance in 1995 outlined reasons for pursuing the enlargement goals. According to the study, these include promoting democracy, integrating new members, establishing good neighborly relations in the Euro–Atlantic Community, and jointly shaping security measures to increase stability.¹⁹⁰ Finally, at its summit in Brussels in 1994, NATO declared that it was ready to pursue enlargement within the framework of Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty.¹⁹¹

In Russia, however, NATO’s path to enlargement led to a political backlash that the government in Moscow had to consider. Due to his initially cooperative attitude toward NATO, Yeltsin came under increasing pressure from members of the Russian parliament and military critical of NATO enlargement, so he changed his policy approach.¹⁹² Supporting this view in the Russian government was the claim that James Baker, then the U.S. Secretary of State, had promised Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 not to expand NATO.¹⁹³ Then, under domestic political pressure, Yeltsin feared that NATO enlargement would isolate Russia again in Europe.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the Russian president at the time feared that NATO enlargement would create a security buffer in Eastern Europe in which Russia had no stake.¹⁹⁵

NATO’s integration offers failed because the Allies saw Russia as a sovereign state, while Moscow insisted on being recognized as a great power with a special place in Europe. As a result, NATO allies tried to convince Russia to view NATO enlargement positively. The

¹⁸⁹ Kathryn E. Stoner, *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190860714.001.0001>.

¹⁹⁰ “Study on NATO Enlargement,” NATO, last modified September 3, 1995, par. 3, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm.

¹⁹¹ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 103.

¹⁹² Julianne Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies., 2008), 2; Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 142.

¹⁹³ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 74.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, “A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?,” 57.

¹⁹⁵ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 74.

U.S. government argued that NATO's expansion would serve stability and peace in Europe and thus also benefit Russia.¹⁹⁶ In addition, Clunan stated that efforts were made to further engage Russia, such as in NATO's Partnership for Peace program.¹⁹⁷ According to Clunan, however, Russia showed little interest in being perceived as an equal member and insisted on its unique status as a great power.

On the military level, the government in Moscow was critical of the approach of NATO troops to Russia's borders. In terms of military balancing, Russia was primarily concerned that the admission of Eastern European states would result in the deployment of nuclear weapons and other NATO capabilities and insisted on a minimum of deployments.¹⁹⁸ In this regard, at least at the nuclear level, NATO accommodated Russia by officially promising in 1996 and 1997 that it had no plans, intentions, or reasons to initiate the deployment of nuclear weapons within the territories of new member states.¹⁹⁹ However, NATO's enlargement plans led to political countermeasures in Russia, which delayed the ratification of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II.²⁰⁰

At the same time, NATO's intention of enlargement weakened Boris Yeltsin's policy of Western rapprochement in Russia, strengthening anti-Western forces.²⁰¹ This was the basis of the newly developing Russian nationalism, in which NATO was perceived as a threat, and thus shaped the Russian perception of Russia's place and prospects in international relations.²⁰² To this extent, Russia acted out of weakness and entered into other cooperative security projects, such as joint counterterrorism efforts, with NATO. Nevertheless, the

¹⁹⁶ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 131–32.

¹⁹⁷ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 159.

¹⁹⁸ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 141; Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 59; Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 142; Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 60.

²⁰⁰ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 189.

²⁰¹ Charles Philippe David and Jacques Lévesque, eds., *The Future of NATO: Enlargement, Russia, and European Security*, Foreign Policy, Security, and Strategic Studies (Montreal: Published for the Centre for Security and Foreign Policy Studies and the Teleglobe+Raoul-Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies by McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 172, <https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400985>.

²⁰² David and Lévesque, 175; Plekhanov, "NATO Enlargement as an Issue in Russian Politics," 181; Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations," 480.

decision favoring NATO's eastward expansion caught the elites in Moscow cold. They had hoped until the end that the West would relent.²⁰³

While NATO tried to appease Russia on enlargement, Moscow protested when it could and tried to protect its interests through the Allies' offers. Although NATO's primary justification for its enlargement was to counter political instability in Europe, the government in Moscow understood enlargement as a projection for the containment of Russia.²⁰⁴ Therefore, with the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between Russia and NATO in 1997, the Russian government also attempted to institutionalize its relationship with NATO and compensate for what it regarded as the negative security effects of NATO enlargement for Russia.²⁰⁵ At the same time, NATO's objective with the Founding Act was to assure Russia that it had no hostile intentions.²⁰⁶ Then, in 1999, despite Russia's protest, NATO admitted three more members, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.²⁰⁷

3. Wars in the Balkan

In addition to the issue of NATO enlargement in the 1990s, the violent conflicts in the Balkans and NATO's use of military means to contain them also played a role in the Russian government's threat perception of the Alliance. Yost asserted that Moscow feared that Russia's weakness at that time would leave it with little influence over NATO's readiness to intervene and that this influence would continue to be exercised to Russia's detriment in the future.²⁰⁸ According to Yost, as early as its 1994 summit in Brussels, NATO declared its

²⁰³ David and Lévesque, *The Future of NATO*, 181.

²⁰⁴ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 142.

²⁰⁵ Martin A. Smith, "NATO–Russia Relations: Will the Future Resemble the Past?," in *NATO in Search of a Vision*, ed. Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca R. Moore (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 102, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=547773>; Webber, Sperling, and Smith, *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory*, 126; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 104.

²⁰⁶ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 165.

²⁰⁷ The founding members of NATO in 1949 were: United States, Canada, Great Britain, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. NATO accepted the following members during the Cold War period: Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982. "Enlargement and Article 10," NATO, last modified April 12, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm.

²⁰⁸ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 78.

willingness to participate more fully in peacekeeping operations such as those authorized by the United Nations. However, the wars in the Balkans and NATO's intervention in 1994 raised concerns in Russia that NATO might pursue further expansionist intentions by military means.²⁰⁹ Although Russia still participated in NATO-led operations in Bosnia Herzegovina, NATO's intervention in the Kosovo conflict in 1999 drew increased criticism from Russia that the Alliance was increasingly failing to abide by international rules.²¹⁰

The Kosovo War, in particular, generated a defensive attitude toward NATO among Russian elites, who feared that the Alliance would continue (in their eyes at least) to disregard international rules in its own interest. During the Kosovo War, Tsygankov stated that the Russian government accused NATO of waging a war against Serbia, a traditional ally of Russia, that was not legitimized by a UN Security Council resolution.²¹¹ According to Tsygankov, NATO's behavior in Russia was understood against the background of U.S. "hegemonic" claims with the help of changing sovereign state borders recognized by international law and, from NATO's perspective, more as a military intervention to pacify the conflict. The combination of expansionism and the use of military means fueled Russia's critical attitude toward NATO. The Alliance was increasingly perceived in Russia as the greatest threat to Russia.²¹² Furthermore, fears arose in Russia that NATO would expand further and thus encircle Russia from the Baltic to Ukraine and the Caucasus.²¹³

Even though Russia encountered difficulties in defining a counter-policy toward NATO regarding the Kosovo intervention, NATO's actions generated indignation among Russian elites toward their own government, which had not been able to assert itself. In this respect, the NATO military intervention against Serbia strengthened nationalists within Russia, who accused Yeltsin of being neither able to lead an independent policy nor to defend

²⁰⁹ Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 58.

²¹⁰ Smith, 63–64; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 104; Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 9–10.

²¹¹ Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations," 481–82; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 104.

²¹² Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 80–81; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 104.

²¹³ David and Lévesque, *The Future of NATO*, 182–83.

allies.²¹⁴ The 1999 incident at Pristina airport in Kosovo, in which Russian troops initially occupied the airport site before NATO marched into the country, can also be seen in this context. For a moment, it looked as if an armed conflict would break out between NATO and Russia, but this was avoided.²¹⁵ However, despite this criticism, Russia refrained from adopting a confrontational stance toward NATO during this phase of relations because it had neither the political means to influence NATO nor the will to isolate itself in foreign policy terms.²¹⁶

4. Interim Conclusion

In the 1990s, a one-sided threat perception toward NATO developed in Russia, mainly due to Russia's political weakness after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a different political worldview. Although NATO allies and Russia briefly did not perceive each other as a threat after the Cold War, the Alliance's promotion and enlargement of a collective security space led Russia to perceive this policy as a loss of influence and an imbalance of power in Europe. NATO, on the other hand, hoped to further integrate Russia into the West and win it as a partner for security policy projects and therefore did not develop a concrete threat perception toward Russia. NATO and Russia did not agree on different world views because the Allies did not see the world as a concert of great powers with spheres of influence, as in the Russian sense, but as an international community of sovereign independent states. Russia's fears and criticisms of NATO were then further fueled when the Alliance actively engaged militarily in the Balkans to combat political instability, which Moscow in turn perceived as an expansionist and revisionist policy. Although Russia did not have the political power to oppose the Alliance's concept of collective security in the 1990s, the discussion of NATO enlargement was a recurrent starting point for Russian criticism of the Alliance and Russia's antagonistic and defensive stance toward NATO.

²¹⁴ Eric Shiraev and Konstantin Khudoley, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 1st ed. 2019 edition (London: Springer, 2018), 162, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/russian-foreign-policy-9780230370975/>.

²¹⁵ Shiraev and Khudoley, 162.

²¹⁶ Smith, "A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?," 63–64.

C. ADJUSTMENTS IN NATO'S DETERRENCE POSTURE

In principle, NATO largely adjusted its deterrence and defense posture in the first post-Cold War decade in line with the 1991 Strategic Concept, in which changes in the strategic environment were identified. While NATO's Cold War concept of forward defense aimed to halt and repel a possible Soviet attack, primarily at the inner-German border and the border with Czechoslovakia, this deterrence and defense concept became obsolete with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact as well as with the German reunification.²¹⁷ At the end of the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact was considered to outnumber NATO three to one in terms of military equipment. This ratio promptly turned in NATO's favor, making a Cold War equivalent deterrence and defense position against Russia no longer seem necessary.²¹⁸

Even though Russian forces posed the greatest conventional threat in Europe, as NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept observed, the Allies assumed that these forces would not be directed against the Alliance because of Russia's anticipated westward economic integration and rapprochement with NATO countries. The perception of Russia as a threat increasingly fell out of focus over the decade due to the view that Russia was becoming a Western-style democracy.²¹⁹ For NATO, deterring Russia was a less immediate challenge than concentrating on regional security, such as in the Balkans.²²⁰ Thus, it was no longer troop deployments for deterrence at national borders that were of concern but rapid intervention forces for international crisis management.²²¹ At this point, it became clear that although NATO had adopted a two-pronged approach in its 1991 Strategic Concept regarding collective defense and international crisis management, it had neglected collective defense due to the impression that the threat had substantially diminished.

²¹⁷ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 191–92.

²¹⁸ Yost, 84.

²¹⁹ Yost, 82.

²²⁰ Patrick M. Morgan, ed., "Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World," in *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 260, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491573.008>.

²²¹ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 192.

Therefore, during the 1990s, collective defense in NATO increasingly played a subordinate role after the Cold War in favor of international crisis management. The military structures were also aligned with this new orientation, which meant they could no longer fully fulfill the classic deterrence and defense mission.²²² In Yost's view, one of the reasons why the Alliance had assumed a new role was that threat perceptions regarding possible Russian aggression against NATO were judged to be extremely low. In this context, most NATO countries abandoned or scaled back conscription because they saw no need to fear a Russian invasion of Western Europe.²²³ For this reason, deterrence and defense capabilities were significantly reduced or permanently abandoned.

In this respect, a transformation of forces took place in NATO to meet the demands of international crisis management and thus conform to the broad security approach prescribed by NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept. With regard to the defense readiness of NATO armies, however, it must be noted that the focus on international crisis management was accompanied at the same time by a shift in the armed forces toward rapid and mobile forces, which fundamentally meant that they were less suited to national defense and thus, in principle, deterrence capabilities were likewise reduced.²²⁴ In 1993, for example, the Allies agreed to reduce national forces by 25 percent in peacetime compared with 1990 levels, a commitment that continued increasingly throughout the decade.²²⁵

Admittedly, the adapted and downsized forces were in line with NATO's Strategic Concept in terms of reducing tensions in Europe. However, these adapted forces did not require the strength and scope of a classic forward defense, ultimately leading to a general reduction in defense spending on the NATO side, thus downsizing Western forces.²²⁶ This included the provision of large-scale units, the number of which was significantly reduced.²²⁷

²²² Yost, 273.

²²³ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 20.

²²⁴ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 260.

²²⁵ Stanley R. Sloan, *Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union and the Transatlantic Bargain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 130.

²²⁶ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 22–24.

²²⁷ Deni, 25–27.

In addition, numerous NATO members gradually withdrew their forces stationed in West Germany over the next two decades.²²⁸ Finally, the view prevailed in the Alliance that international crisis management would generate stability that would eliminate the need for further deterrence measures as in the Cold War.²²⁹

However, it would be going too far to assert that NATO had completely deviated from its classical deterrence approach. Despite the absence of a great power confrontation in the 1990s (except for the Kosovo crisis in 1999), deterrence concepts continued to exert a specific relevance on both the NATO and Russian sides.²³⁰ Even with the Soviet Union gone as an adversary, NATO initially sought to adhere to a classic concept of deterrence and defense as a reassurance because of the uncertainties that arose with the end of the Cold War.²³¹ The importance of deterrence was visible, for example, in the intervention in Iraq in the early 1990s, when attacks on Turkey were feared, which led NATO to think more broadly about collective defense and security to maintain deterrence positions due to post-Cold War uncertainties.²³² Therefore, with Russia in mind, basic military capabilities within NATO were maintained, even though in the 1990s, Russia was not expected to develop into a serious military threat soon.²³³ Due to the generally poor condition of the Russian armed forces caused by economic instabilities in the 1990s and due to the military deficiencies shown in the first Chechen war, Western analysts also concluded that NATO need not fear Russia as a threat.²³⁴ In this respect, national and NATO forces were not pushed territorially in a specific direction; within the Alliance, the view prevailed that the end of the bloc confrontation made NATO territorially independent, which at the same time freed up capacities for international crisis management.²³⁵

²²⁸ Deni, 27.

²²⁹ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 262.

²³⁰ Yost, 81; Morgan, “Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World,” 254.

²³¹ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 104.

²³² Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 81.

²³³ Yost, 274.

²³⁴ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 127; Deni, “Force Posture after NATO’s Return to Europe,” 21.

²³⁵ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 277.

In this respect, NATO's concept of deterrence and its force structures also changed. NATO's deterrence and defense posture changed from a forward presence to a partial forward presence and an adapted flexible response.²³⁶ Although NATO has certain collective radar, surveillance, and communications capabilities, its forces were (and remain) composed primarily of member state forces.²³⁷ In this sense, the forces were and continue to be and remain nationally led in peacetime. Military deterrence was thus based primarily on the national armed forces of NATO members and the Alliance's promise of collective defense.²³⁸

With respect to the Alliance's promise of collective defense, the nuclear weapons of the NATO member states played the greatest role in terms of deterrence. As early as the 1990s, NATO refrained from directing its nuclear weapons at specific targets, a decision noted in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept toward the end of the decade.²³⁹ Furthermore, these weapons' operational readiness was significantly reduced.²⁴⁰ In addition, the nuclear part was excluded from major NATO exercises at the beginning of the decade.²⁴¹ The U.S. nuclear forces in Europe under NATO auspices in the 1990s were limited to gravity bombs that could be delivered by aircraft.²⁴² In this respect, nuclear weapons policy was also consistent with NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept in terms of an absence of specific threats.

Consistency with the Strategic Concept was also present in arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation. Although NATO has never been a treaty actor for arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation, these issues had relevance to the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture in the 1990s.²⁴³ In Yost's view, most treaties negotiated either bilaterally or multilaterally ultimately had consequences for the available capabilities of the

²³⁶ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 27; Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 51–53.

²³⁷ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 77.

²³⁸ Yost, 278–79.

²³⁹ David S. Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 85, no. 4 (2009): 758.

²⁴⁰ Morgan, "Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World," 253.

²⁴¹ Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 54–55.

²⁴² Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," 756.

²⁴³ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 309.

Allies and thus on NATO's deterrence and defense potential. For example, on November 19, 1990, the member states of NATO and the then Warsaw Pact signed the CFE Treaty, which entered into force on November 9, 1992.²⁴⁴

The CFE Treaty aimed to reduce the number of battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery systems, combat aircraft, and combat helicopters in the armed forces of all signatory states to prevent surprise attacks and a military conflict in Europe.²⁴⁵ In doing so, Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland described that the signatory states must adhere to the ceilings set in the treaty for the respective types of weapons.²⁴⁶ According these experts, the treaty thus prevents concentrations of forces, prescribes the destruction of weapons systems in the event of reductions, and obliges the signatory states to allow other states to inspect their military holdings and comply with information regulations.

Furthermore, under the 1997 Founding Act, NATO and Russia once again underscored their commitment to disarmament and again agreed further to reduce their respective conventional forces under the CFE Treaty:

NATO and Russia believe that an important goal of CFE Treaty adaptation should be a significant lowering in the total amount of Treaty-Limited Equipment permitted in the Treaty's area of application compatible with the legitimate defence requirements of each State Party. NATO and Russia encourage all States Parties to the CFE Treaty to consider reductions in their CFE equipment entitlements, as part of an overall effort to achieve lower equipment levels that are consistent with the transformation of Europe's security environment.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Anne Witkowsky, Sherman Garnett, and Jeff McCausland, *Salvaging the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty Regime: Options for Washington*, Arms Control Series Paper 2 (Foreign Policy at Brookings/The Brookings Institution, 2010), 5.

²⁴⁵ Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (1990), 1, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/14087.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland, *Salvaging the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty Regime*, 6.

²⁴⁷ "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France," NATO, last modified May 27, 1997, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.

To this extent, Morgan stated that the number of conventional forces in Europe was again significantly reduced.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, according to Morgan, the United States withdrew a third of its forces from Europe in the 1990s, and for Russia, even larger numbers were very likely to apply. In this context, the contracting parties focused primarily on Eastern Europe:

In addition, in the negotiations on the adaptation of the CFE Treaty, the member States of NATO and Russia will, together with other States Parties, seek to strengthen stability by further developing measures to prevent any potentially threatening build-up of conventional forces in agreed regions of Europe, to include Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴⁹

In this respect, the CFE Treaty provided an important framework for NATO's disarmament efforts in the 1990s and significantly limited the signatory states' deterrent potential.

Besides conventional forces, the Alliance depends on the capabilities of its members for nuclear weapons, which primarily include those of the United States, followed by those of Great Britain and France.²⁵⁰ In the case of the United States, however, these weapons have been significantly reduced jointly with Russia through the bilateral Treaty on Further Strategic Nuclear Arms Limitations and Reductions (START II).²⁵¹ The U.S. and Russia reduced their arsenals under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) to about 20% of what the two superpowers possessed at the end of the Cold War.²⁵² The United States eliminated all nuclear artillery and ground-launched short-range nuclear missiles.²⁵³ In accordance with the 1991 Strategic Concept, NATO supported nuclear weapon reductions and declared its

²⁴⁸ Morgan, "Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World," 253.

²⁴⁹ NATO, "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France."

²⁵⁰ Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 56.

²⁵¹ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 179.

²⁵² Morgan, "Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World," 253.

²⁵³ Shuyler Foerster, "NATO's Return: Implications for Extended Deterrence," in *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond*, ed. Rebecca R. Moore and Damon V. Coletta (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 52.

intention to dismantle most of its sub-strategic nuclear weapons.²⁵⁴ In this regard, NATO announced in 1996 and 1997 that it had no plan, intention, or reason for nuclear weapon deployment on the territory of new member states.²⁵⁵ Thus, the former military confrontation was replaced mainly by arms control regimes, and therefore mutual deterrence between NATO countries and Russia took place only on a very low level.²⁵⁶ In this respect, NATO reduced these weapons in line with its Strategic Concept as part of disarmament efforts intended to ease the strategic situation.

The Alliance pursued the intentions articulated in its 1991 Strategic Concept of keeping strategic tensions low and establishing regional stability through the concept of dialogue and cooperation also propagated in the Strategic Concept. In terms of deterrence, therefore, it is worth noting that in the 1990s, NATO intended to add more countries to the Alliance to create a Euro–Atlantic area of collective defense and security that would not be directed against other powers, such as Russia.²⁵⁷ Under the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement, the Alliance intended to gain advantages by jointly expanding common defenses to counter instabilities.²⁵⁸ In addition, the new Eastern European member states also sought membership for general protection under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, including from Russia.²⁵⁹ In this respect, NATO enlargement can also be understood within the framework of the Alliance concept of collective defense and thus also in a narrower sense as part of an adjustment of deterrence.

As the security situation in Europe changed in the 1990s, the military balance shifted in NATO’s favor to such an extent that it could hardly be called an even balance. Due to the asymmetries in the great power competition, NATO was the only remaining collective defense institution in Europe, with the only remaining superpower, the United States, at its head. This power shift had a direct impact on NATO’s concept of deterrence. While the

²⁵⁴ Corbett, “NATO’s Nuclear Deterrence Deficit,” 54.

²⁵⁵ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 142; Smith, “A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?,” 60.

²⁵⁶ Morgan, “Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World,” 253.

²⁵⁷ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 170.

²⁵⁸ NATO, “Study on NATO Enlargement.”

²⁵⁹ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 170–71.

Alliance considered full-scale military deterrence necessary in its 1991 Strategic Concept, this ambition waned significantly as the decade progressed. Border deterrence was no longer as essential as quick reaction forces to counter political instabilities in international crisis management. As a result, NATO's forces also changed from comprehensive conventional defense forces to rapid reaction forces, which were much smaller in size.²⁶⁰ While rudimentary capabilities for defense were maintained, they were no longer used in the sense of a forward presence for deterrence by denial but rather in the context of a flexible response capability for deterrence by punishment. Even though NATO's credibility for territorial defense diminished due to its transformation process, the Alliance did not suffer any significant security disadvantage because deterrence against a concrete adversary was no longer needed at least in the near term. Furthermore, the changed strategic situation in Europe led to considerations in terms of arms control and disarmament to diminish political tensions. The arms control and disarmament approach to reducing military equipment was thus in line with the concept of rapid reaction forces and promoted security thinking within NATO in which full-scale deterrence and defense no longer had a place.

²⁶⁰ Justin V. Anderson, Jeffrey A. Larsen, and Polly M. Holdorf, *Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance: Key Concepts and Current Challenges for U.S. Policy*, INSS Occasional Paper 69 (USAF Academy, CO: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, 2013), 58, <https://www.usafa.edu/app/uploads/OCP69.pdf>.

III. NATO'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND RISING TENSIONS WITH RUSSIA

A. NATO'S 1999 STRATEGIC CONCEPT

In NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, the Alliance continued to hold that with the end of the Cold War, new diverse threats had emerged that must be addressed, including oppression, ethnic conflict, economic distress, the collapse of political order, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.²⁶¹ Thus, the authors of the document were significantly influenced by the wars in the Balkans, notably in the former Yugoslavia.²⁶² In this light, the Alliance saw itself as an institution for maintaining collective security and defense on the one hand and global crisis management on the other.²⁶³ To this extent, the new strategic concept represented a continuation of the 1991 concept, in which post-Cold War adjustments took place to adapt and shape the realities of the new strategic environment.

Nevertheless, the 1999 Strategic Concept no longer made any reference to the strategic balance in Europe.²⁶⁴²⁶⁵ In this sense, Yost noted that Russia was no longer presented as a strategic threat but merely mentioned in reference to dialogue, cooperation, and partnership. While the primary purpose of NATO remained to further secure peace in Europe, the Allies addressed future threats with a broad approach.²⁶⁶ In this respect, the Alliance expanded its core purpose beyond keeping the peace in Europe by actively shaping the international security environment to avoid instability wherever possible.²⁶⁷

²⁶¹ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999)* (NATO, 1999), par. 3, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm.

²⁶² NATO, "Strategic Concepts."

²⁶³ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999)*.

²⁶⁴ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*.

²⁶⁵ Yost, 12.

²⁶⁶ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999)*, par. 5.

²⁶⁷ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 12.

In Part I of NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, the Alliance defined five core missions: security, consultation, deterrence and defense, crisis management, and partnership.²⁶⁸ Accordingly, European disputes should be resolved peacefully within the framework of Euro-Atlantic security, mainly through consultation within NATO under Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Furthermore, "to provide one of the indispensable foundations for a stable Euro-Atlantic security environment, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in which no country would be able to intimidate or coerce any other through the threat or use of force."²⁶⁹ In matters of deterrence and defense, the Alliance seeks to "deter and defend against any threat of aggression against any NATO member state as provided for in Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty."²⁷⁰ Deterrence and defense were also seen against this backdrop in the context of international crisis management and security partnership building. In this respect, the Alliance maintained its role as a defense institution to ensure security and peace under an expanded and ambitious concept of security in Europe.

In Part II of the document, the Alliance understood deterrence and defense in addition to classical terms in the context of global crisis management and the expansion of partnerships, including Russia, as well as cooperation with other international institutions.²⁷¹ The additional realignment came to fruition through the newly created Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept, through which NATO sought to establish rapid reaction forces for international crisis management.²⁷² Furthermore, arms control treaties, disarmament, and mutual confidence, including measures, played a significant role in promoting security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.²⁷³ In this regard, compared to the Cold War, NATO continued to pursue a two-pronged approach that encompassed

²⁶⁸ North Atlantic Council, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999)*, par. 10.

²⁶⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 10.

²⁷⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 10.

²⁷¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 12.

²⁷² North Atlantic Council, par. 13.

²⁷³ North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

territorial defense under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty as well as preparedness to deal with non-Article 5 security challenges.

In this respect, NATO also no longer felt exposed to conventional threats. “Notwithstanding positive developments in the strategic environment and the fact that large-scale conventional aggression against the Alliance is highly unlikely, the possibility of such a threat emerging over the longer term exists.”²⁷⁴ According to the document, security risks were most prevalent on the periphery of NATO territory, where both military and civilian threats could threaten international stability through spillover effects.²⁷⁵ Globally, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was perceived as the most significant security threat to NATO.²⁷⁶ In this context, non-state actors were targeted by NATO in addition to state actors. Overall, the Allies noted that the overall threat environment had fundamentally changed and had become more multi-layered.

In Part III of the document, NATO described plans to address these threats with a broad approach, including a strong Atlantic link, development of a common security identity, an open door policy, continued cooperation through partnership and dialogue, arms control and disarmament, as well as maintaining a deterrence and defense posture with effective military capabilities.²⁷⁷ In this context, NATO addressed the need for military capabilities to meet the demands of this broad-based approach. “Military capabilities effective under the full range of foreseeable circumstances are also the basis of the Alliance’s ability to contribute to conflict prevention and crisis management through non-Article 5 crisis response operations.”²⁷⁸ The two-pronged approach became clear again at this point, where NATO intended to address regional and global security threats without losing its focus on deterrence and defense in support of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

²⁷⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 20.

²⁷⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 20.

²⁷⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 22.

²⁷⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

²⁷⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 29.

Russia was mentioned in the Strategic Concept. It was noted that the NATO–Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security aimed to strengthen the relationship between the two actors in terms of common interests.²⁷⁹ “NATO and Russia have agreed to give concrete substance to their shared commitment to building a stable, peaceful, and undivided Europe.”²⁸⁰ The contribution of Russia showed that NATO perceived a good relationship with Russia towards the end of the century and remained optimistic about this development in the future.

In addition, the Alliance sought to enhance NATO’s security in the domain of arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation, with force reductions contributing to this effort.²⁸¹ “The Allies seek to enhance security and stability at the lowest possible level of forces consistent with the Alliance’s ability to provide for collective defence and to fulfil the full range of its missions.”²⁸² According to NATO, the CFE Treaty, in particular, was essential in reducing forces to strengthen European security. Moreover, the intention to minimize forces under arms control treaties indicates again that allied threat perceptions were significantly reduced.

In Part IV of the document, however, NATO explicitly addressed the structure of the Alliance’s forces, which were still supposed to be capable of deterrence and defense despite reduced threat perceptions and transformation efforts considering international crisis management.

The security of all Allies is indivisible: an attack on one is an attack on all. With respect to collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the combined military forces of the Alliance must be capable of deterring any potential aggression against it, of stopping an aggressor’s advance as far forward as possible should an attack nevertheless occur, and of ensuring the political independence and territorial integrity of its member states.

²⁷⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 36.

²⁸⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 36.

²⁸¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 40.

²⁸² North Atlantic Council, par. 40.

They must also be prepared to contribute to conflict prevention and to conduct non-Article 5 crisis response operations.²⁸³

In this respect, NATO's 1999 strategic concept showed that the Alliance was concerned with maintaining a balance between classical conventional defense and the new field of international crisis prevention. Accordingly, North American and European forces were to contribute equally to NATO's defense readiness, although it was noted that the European contribution was to be increased.²⁸⁴ To this end, overall forces should be kept at the lowest possible level at which they could meet the requirements of adequate deterrence and defense, with the ability to surge in the event of fundamental strategic changes in the security environment. In general, NATO forces were supposed to be capable of performing as follows:

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 minimum sufficient level. Taking into account the diversity of risks with which the Alliance could be faced, it must maintain the forces necessary to ensure credible deterrence and to provide a wide range of conventional response options.²⁸⁵

Therefore, the Alliance's force posture was supposed to have the following capabilities:

The Alliance's forces must therefore be able to deter and defend effectively, to maintain or restore the territorial integrity of Allied nations and – in case of conflict – to terminate war rapidly by making an aggressor reconsider his decision, cease his attack and withdraw. NATO forces must maintain the ability to provide for collective defence while conducting effective non-Article 5 crisis response operations.²⁸⁶

In this respect, the force's capabilities were supposed to be aligned with the new strategic environment and, in addition, have the capacity to act in the context of

²⁸³ North Atlantic Council, par. 41.

²⁸⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 42.

²⁸⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 46.

²⁸⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 47.

international crisis management.²⁸⁷ “The size, readiness, availability, and deployment of the Alliance’s military forces will reflect its commitment to collective defence and to conduct crisis response operations, sometimes at short notice, distant from their home stations, including beyond the Allies’ territory.”²⁸⁸ Although NATO’s 1999 Strategic Concept states the complex claim regarding collective defense and international crisis management, the Alliance notes “that the overall size of the Allies’ forces will be kept at the lowest levels consistent with the requirements of collective defence and other Alliance missions; they will be held at appropriate and graduated readiness.”²⁸⁹ For the deployment and distribution of the armed forces, this means:

that the peacetime geographical distribution of forces will ensure a sufficient military presence throughout the territory of the Alliance, including the stationing and deployment of forces outside home territory and waters and forward deployment of forces when and where necessary. Regional and, in particular, geostrategic considerations within the Alliance will have to be taken into account, as instabilities on NATO’s periphery could lead to crises or conflicts requiring an Alliance military response, potentially with short warning times.²⁹⁰

In general, according to NATO’s 1999 Strategic Concept, conventional force capabilities should have a comprehensive range to meet the demands of the two-pronged approach.²⁹¹ The Alliance’s nuclear strategy had changed only slightly since 1991 and continued to serve primarily as a political deterrent in the context of collective defense after it was determined that sub-strategic nuclear weapons had been massively reduced in numbers within the Alliance and that NATO posed no active nuclear threat to any state.²⁹² The increased focus on NATO’s two-pronged approach showed that the Alliance was in the midst of a transformation process that sought to strike a balance between collective defense and international crisis management on the periphery of NATO territory.

²⁸⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 48.

²⁸⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 52.

²⁸⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 53a.

²⁹⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 53b.

²⁹¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 54.

²⁹² North Atlantic Council, par. 62–64.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF NATO–RUSSIA RELATIONS

1. Short Window of Cooperation

At the turn of the century, despite tensions in the late 1990s, a brief period of cooperation developed between NATO and Russia. The September 11 terrorist attacks, in particular, led to NATO and Russia increasingly engaging in security cooperation.²⁹³ As a product of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Russia–North Atlantic Council (RNAC) was created to institutionalize further existing formats for talks between NATO and Russia.²⁹⁴ Moreover, within NATO, the RNAC was associated with giving Russia a say in the Alliance’s decision-making process concerning matters involving Russia to dispel mutual distrust between the Allies and Russia.²⁹⁵

Even though there were attempts in Russia to take a critical view of NATO policy, the Russian government continued to focus on rapprochement and cooperation. At this time, Russian President Putin took the pragmatic policy approach of being perceived as an equal partner with in the new Council, while NATO members hoped that Russia would support a pro-Western policy in the future.²⁹⁶ Likewise, Putin pushed critical concerns among the elites in Russia about NATO’s 2004 enlargement into the background to urge cooperation projects with Western partners and focus on Russian economic development.²⁹⁷ In 2001 Putin still declared that he did not regard NATO as an enemy.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, Forsberg argued that the Russian and NATO member governments debated the possibility of Russia joining NATO again without concrete action.²⁹⁹ According to Forsberg, these debates were inclusive due to the negative attitude of new NATO members, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, towards a possible admission of Russia.

²⁹³ Polikanov, “NATO–Russia Relations,” 485–86; Smith, *The NATO–Russia Relationship*, 5–6; Tsygankov, “The Sources of Russia’s Fear of NATO,” 104–5.

²⁹⁴ Smith, “A Bumpy Road to an Unknown Destination?,” 67.

²⁹⁵ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 143.

²⁹⁶ Smith, “NATO–Russia Relations,” 109–10; Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 144; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 229.

²⁹⁷ Forsberg, “Russia’s Relationship with NATO,” 339.

²⁹⁸ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 76.

²⁹⁹ Forsberg, “Russia’s Relationship with NATO,” 346.

Nevertheless, the Russian approach to NATO based on rapprochement and cooperation gave way over time to the view developed in the 1990s of a Russia that, as a great power, had a specific role to play in the world. Russian elites continued to develop the view that Russia must once again achieve a status like that once enjoyed by the Soviet Union.³⁰⁰ Therefore, President Putin came under domestic political pressure during this phase because he maintained pragmatic cooperation with the West in the international fight against terrorism.³⁰¹ Russian military representatives stated as early as 2003 and 2004 that if NATO continued its current anti-Russian policy, the Ministry of Defense would reconsider Russia's nuclear strategy.³⁰² Furthermore, Russia significantly expanded its military capabilities on its border in the Western Military District.³⁰³ To this extent, the Russian leadership under Putin further cultivated the nationalism developed in the 1990s into a state-supporting patriotism.³⁰⁴ In this respect, the phase of rapprochement between the West and Russia lasted only briefly.

A change in the NATO–Russia relationship occurred when the Russian government increasingly focused on Russian great power aspirations in addition to the cooperative approach. Clunan argued that Putin slowly expanded his power in Russia and promoted an aspiration to great power status distinct from Western states' values.³⁰⁵ According to Clunan, these ideological efforts laid the groundwork for Russia's rift with the West and, eventually, with NATO. The leadership in Moscow pursued this approach because it would strengthen Russia's sovereignty and support Russia's power status beyond its objective capabilities.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁰ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 165.

³⁰¹ Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 7.

³⁰² Forsberg, "Russia's Relationship with NATO," 345; Stephen J. Dr. Blank, *The NATO–Russia Partnership: A Marriage of Convenience or a Troubled Relationship?*, Monographs, Books, and Publications 707 (Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2006), 6; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 228.

³⁰³ Jan Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War: Geopolitics and Impacts for International Security*, Global Power Shift (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 53.

³⁰⁴ Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 4.

³⁰⁵ Clunan, 4.

³⁰⁶ Clunan, 6.

While Russia initially promoted such a great power concept internationally in rhetorical terms, it slowly changed its action policy in the 2000s, resulting in conflicts with Western nations. After the Kosovo War, views grew in Russia that the West was projecting its democratic ideas onto all states regardless of their distinct histories and political circumstances.³⁰⁷ On the other hand, Western states understood the use of military means in terms of NATO's security concept to combat instability and, more pointedly, to act as a "force for good" that was not oriented toward asserting national interests.³⁰⁸ However, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq played a special part in Russia's increasing criticism of the United States' use of power projection by military means, which the Russian leadership saw in connection with Afghanistan and Kosovo and, to some extent, in connection with NATO.³⁰⁹ Even without UN Security Council resolutions, the United States' projection of power stood in contrast to Russia's concept of power, which focused primarily on the sovereignty of states. In 2005, Putin declared that, despite considerations of joint military cooperation, the debate about possible Russian accession to NATO was over, as it was perceived to threaten Russia's sovereignty and restrict its freedom of action.³¹⁰

2. CFE Treaty

The relationship between the NATO Allies and Russia also deteriorated in the disarmament and arms control field. By the mid-1990s, it became clear that the CFE Treaty no longer reflected the changing political circumstances in Europe.³¹¹ Witkowsky, Garnett and McCausland noted, for example, that the treaty spoke of group ceilings, which reflected the bloc confrontation of the Cold War, but which had ceased to be relevant since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Moreover, according to these three experts, especially during the Chechen war, it proved increasingly difficult for Russia to

³⁰⁷ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 168.

³⁰⁸ Janne Haaland Matlary, "Political Risk and Military Strategy: Can Europe Deter and Coerce?," in *Military Strategy in the 21st Century: The Challenge for NATO*, ed. Janne Haaland Matlary and Robert Johnson (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), 60.

³⁰⁹ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 100–102.

³¹⁰ Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 3.

³¹¹ Anne Witkowsky, Sherman Garnett, and Jeff McCausland, "Arms Control Series Paper 2 • March 2010," *Foreign Policy*, 2010, 6.

comply with the CFE Treaty in the Caucasus since the Caucasus is one of those regions in the Atlantic to the Ural (ATTU) zone where the so-called flank rule comes into play. This rule limits the quantities of Treaty Limited Equipment (TLE) even more. With this prospect at hand, Russia insisted on modernizing the treaty.³¹²

NATO took its time negotiating the modernization of the CFE Treaty. Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland stated that it was not until the 1999 OSCE Summit in Istanbul that negotiations on the adaptation of the Treaty took concrete shape.³¹³ According to the experts, the adapted CFE Treaty (aCFE Treaty) was intended to replace the group ceilings of the two Cold War superpowers with national and territorial ceilings. However, Russia and three other states only signed the treaty.³¹⁴ Due to Russia's violations of the flank rule in Chechnya and the Caucasus in the 1990s, NATO insisted on ratifying the aCFE treaty only if Russia fulfilled the Istanbul commitments it had made to Russia during the negotiations, which included the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and Moldova.³¹⁵

Russia was reluctant to comply with the Istanbul commitments in light of NATO's subsequent planned enlargement at that time. This was because the aCFE Treaty had been examined in Russia in the context of security policy discussions within the government, mainly in the NATO context.³¹⁶ For Russia, the main problem in 2002 was that the Baltic states and Slovenia, as new NATO members, were not part of the treaty, and thus NATO would have the hypothetical option of stationing more troops there outside the treaty framework pending the accession to the treaty by the new NATO allies.³¹⁷ NATO enlargement in 2004, therefore, complicated the negotiations on the aCFE Treaty and

³¹² Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland, 7; Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 324.

³¹³ Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland, "Arms Control Series Paper 2 • March 2010," 6.

³¹⁴ Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland, 7.

³¹⁵ Witkowsky, Garnett, and McCausland, 7–8.

³¹⁶ Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 5.

³¹⁷ Blank, 6; Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 146.

hardened the position of the contracting parties.³¹⁸ Similarly, Russia's refusal to withdraw its troops from Georgia led to greater tensions with Georgia, which in turn increasingly sought a Western alignment.³¹⁹

After further rounds of NATO enlargement, the Russian government increasingly demanded that the Alliance ratify the aCFE Treaty. Mankoff stated that the reason for this resided in the agreements concluded in 2005 between the United States, Romania, and Bulgaria on establishing military bases.³²⁰ According to Mankoff, Russia saw this agreements as a violation of the CFE Treaty that justified the stationing of Russian troops in Moldova. Blank, on the other hand, pointed out that this was not a NATO agreement made little difference to the government in Russia.³²¹ However, according to Blank, one year later, the Russian government insisted that NATO member states ratify the aCFE Treaty. Within the Russian government, there was concern that further delay in ratification of the aCFE treaty would push more and more U.S. and NATO infrastructure further toward Russia's borders.³²² To this extent, NATO's enlargement is linked to a change in the balance of power in conventional forces, notably in the light of the deployment of NATO troops in the new East European NATO member states. This balance of power shift explained Russia's fundamental desire to secure the entry into force of the CFE Treaty.³²³

The conflict over the aCFE Treaty then culminated at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. In Munich, President Putin criticized NATO's hesitation over ratification of the aCFE Treaty.³²⁴ Since no agreement was reached between the NATO Allies and Russia in 2007, Putin unilaterally suspended Russian compliance with the CFE

³¹⁸ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 146; Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 84.

³¹⁹ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 146.

³²⁰ Mankoff, 147.

³²¹ Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 9; Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 10.

³²² Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 11.

³²³ Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations," 490; Duncan B. Hollis, "Russia Suspends CFE Treaty Participation," *ASIL Insights* 11, no. 19 (July 23, 2007), <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/11/issue/19/russia-suspends-cfe-treaty-participation>.

³²⁴ "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," President of Russia, last modified February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

Treaty at the end of the year.³²⁵ The unresolved issue of the CFE Treaty then indirectly affected the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, in which Russia violated the treaty's so-called flank region on the border with Georgia due to tensions surrounding the prospect of membership in NATO of the South Caucasian country.³²⁶

3. European Missile Defense System

Another issue that worsened NATO–Russia relations was a debate about a European missile defense system. The increasing importance of missile defense for NATO after the Cold War was already noted in NATO's Strategic Concepts in the 1990s and further addressed at the NATO Summit in Prague in 2002.³²⁷ The main concern was to protect NATO troops from missile attacks and incidentally to provide for limited territorial defense of the NATO area.³²⁸ The issue initially gained prominence in the U.S.–Russia bilateral relationship after U.S. President George W. Bush announced plans to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to build defenses against Iran and North Korea.³²⁹ The U.S. government argued concerning Russia at the time that the ABM Treaty was a relic of the Cold War and that Russia posed no specific threat.³³⁰

After the U.S. government withdrew from the ABM Treaty and articulated plans to move more military infrastructure to Europe close to Russia's borders, these decisions fueled suspicions in Moscow that these measures were directed against Russia.³³¹ As a result, the Russian government declared that the signature of Russia on START II was no longer binding, thereby putting an end to the country's endeavors to bring the treaty into force.³³² However, Russia's fears were based less on military conclusions than on a

³²⁵ Witkowski, Garnett, and McCausland, "Arms Control Series Paper 2 • March 2010," 7.

³²⁶ Smith, "NATO–Russia Relations," 114–15.

³²⁷ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 98–99.

³²⁸ Yost, 99.

³²⁹ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 5; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 230.

³³⁰ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 230.

³³¹ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 105.

³³² Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 183; Shiraev and Khudoley, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 161.

political threat perception, which was rooted in increasing Western influence in Eastern Europe.³³³

The following planned negotiations between the U.S., Poland, and the Czech Republic in 2007 on deploying a missile defense system in Europe accelerated the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the West.³³⁴ Sloan stated that for this purpose, U.S. interceptor missiles were to be installed in Poland and the associated radar in the Czech Republic.³³⁵ According to Sloan, this missile defense was aimed at protecting the United States and its Allies from intercontinental ballistic missile attacks through a global missile defense network. However, President Putin declared that Russia regarded plans for a missile defense system in Eastern Europe as a security threat that would strain relations between the West and Moscow and could even lead to a new arms race.³³⁶ Efforts by Russia to participate in the system were unsuccessful and rejected by the United States.³³⁷

At the 2008 Bucharest NATO summit, NATO members agreed that U.S. elements of a missile defense system stationed in Europe would henceforth be used to complement European systems (Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence) in defense of both NATO territories and NATO operations.³³⁸ However, one year later, President Obama initially deviated from the former plans and announced the pursuit of sea-based capabilities after President Medvedev threatened that such a deployment would force Russia to deploy

³³³ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 150; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 231; Tsygankov, “The Sources of Russia’s Fear of NATO,” 105.

³³⁴ Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 10–11.

³³⁵ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 231.

³³⁶ President of Russia, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

³³⁷ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 150.

³³⁸ “Ballistic Missile Defence,” NATO, last modified November 28, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49635.htm.

nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad.³³⁹ Eventually, the United States stopped pursuing the program bilaterally and successively transferred it to NATO.³⁴⁰

From then on, the issue was further addressed within the Alliance. At the Lisbon NATO Summit in 2010, the Allies stated: “The threat to NATO European populations, territory and forces posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles is increasing. As missile defence forms part of a broader response to counter this threat, we have decided that the Alliance will develop a missile defence capability to pursue its core task of collective defence.”³⁴¹ According to the summit declaration, NATO saw an increasing ballistic missile threat and therefore wanted to make efforts to expand the Alliance’s missile defense capabilities and make them more effective. However, neither the United States nor NATO has been able to convince the Russian government that the system is not directed against Russia and does not affect the strategic balance.³⁴²

4. The Color Revolutions and the Second NATO Enlargement

The Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space, especially in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, significantly reinforced critical views in Russia toward NATO. Fix and Keil’s claimed that Putin grew increasingly suspicious as color revolutions spread through post-Soviet states.³⁴³ According to the authors’ view, liberal revolutions in the post-Soviet space, which also fundamentally raised questions about the Russian political system, and the Russian president saw them as a concrete threat. Russian elites considered these revolutions as primarily Western-initiated promotions of democracy that were also aimed at preparing a coup in Moscow.³⁴⁴ From the Russian perspective, Western states sought to

³³⁹ Smith, “NATO–Russia Relations,” 116.

³⁴⁰ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 231.

³⁴¹ North Atlantic Council, “Lisbon Summit Declaration of November 20, 2010,” NATO, last modified November 20, 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68828.htm.

³⁴² Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 103–5.

³⁴³ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 5.

³⁴⁴ Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 9; Tsygankov, “The Sources of Russia’s Fear of NATO,” 105.

contain, surround, and weaken Russia.³⁴⁵ From Moscow's point of view, Western influence in this respect had less to do with the countries concerned than with Russia itself and the attempt to prevent it from re-establishing itself as a great power.³⁴⁶

It was precisely the foreseeable loss of influence over Georgia and Ukraine that worried the government in Moscow. Both countries pursued a pro-Western and an anti-Russian course after experiencing color revolutions, with the respective intention of becoming members of NATO.³⁴⁷ The same applied to Moldova.³⁴⁸ In addition to the loss of spheres of influence, Russia also feared an increasing presence of the Alliance in the Black Sea area due to the admission of additional post-Soviet states to NATO, with simultaneous fears of losing access to the sea should the treaty about Sevastopol for the Russian Black Sea fleet with Ukraine expire in 2017.³⁴⁹ The Russian government henceforth viewed NATO's concentration on the Caucasus and Central Asia with skepticism, which fueled fears of encirclement in Moscow.³⁵⁰

The developments in Georgia and Ukraine, worrying from a Russian perspective, were also considered in Russia in connection with NATO enlargement and an associated loss of influence in the post-Soviet space. To this extent, with the second post-Cold War accession of former Warsaw Pact countries to NATO, Russia's political influence in its former sphere of influence was significantly reduced.³⁵¹ In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia formally became members of NATO.³⁵² Russian elites again felt betrayed by the West because of the second post-Cold War enlargement.³⁵³ In particular, the intended admission of the Baltic states to NATO

³⁴⁵ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 104.

³⁴⁶ Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 170.

³⁴⁷ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 41 & 45.

³⁴⁸ Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 9–10.

³⁴⁹ Blank, 33; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 235.

³⁵⁰ Polikanov, "NATO–Russia Relations," 491–92.

³⁵¹ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 5.

³⁵² NATO, "Enlargement and Article 10."

³⁵³ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 146.

provoked a storm of indignation among Russian elites because it was perceived as crossing a red line that Yeltsin had already declared in the late 1990s.³⁵⁴ For this reason, Putin adjusted his policy toward NATO, which became slowly but increasingly confrontational. In this regard, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated as early as 2006 that he would view NATO accession by Georgia or Ukraine as a major geopolitical shift in Europe and that this would mean a more confrontational policy for Russia.³⁵⁵

Russia implemented the policy change threatened by Lavrov in the form of conflicts in the energy sector vis-à-vis post-Soviet states moving closer to the West. For example, a tense relationship developed between Russia and the Baltic states between 2000 and 2006, reflected in denied and delayed energy supplies by Moscow to these states, which at that time were dependent on their eastern neighbor in this regard.³⁵⁶ The Russian government also used energy as a political lever to maintain Moscow's influence in Georgia and Ukraine, at least since the Color Revolutions.³⁵⁷ Already at that time, members of the Russian government shared imperial views on the post-Soviet space and expressed their conviction that Russia should enjoy a certain sphere of influence in it. At the same time, the Russian elites held that other powers should be denied this influence.³⁵⁸

Perhaps the most famous expression of the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the West, NATO included, was seen in President Putin's incendiary speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. In the speech, it became clear which foreign policy points the Russian government disagreed with the West about. In his speech, Putin noted a unipolar moment in the world, in which the United States and the West, including NATO, decisively determined international relations and, in the past, had extensively used military means to promote foreign policy interests, which is no longer compatible with

³⁵⁴ Mankoff, 145.

³⁵⁵ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 105.

³⁵⁶ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 38.

³⁵⁷ Stoner, 45.

³⁵⁸ Blank, *The NATO-Russia Partnership*, 7.

international law.³⁵⁹ In Putin's view, the behavior of the United States would lead to more instability in the world. Likewise, he stated that he no longer understood NATO expansion in terms of more security for all the states concerned but as a provocation against Russia. He also criticized the U.S.-led plans to install a missile defense system in Europe. In addition, he criticized the Allies for not having ratified the aCFE treaty so far, despite Russia's failure to honor the treaty terms.

5. Russia–Georgia War

Russia's increasingly assertive policy toward its Western post-Soviet neighbors became sharper as the Allies expanded their relations with these states. The struggle for influence in the post-Soviet space then affected NATO–Russia relations as the Alliance discussed possible membership for Georgia and Ukraine, which have continuously pursued a policy of Western integration.³⁶⁰ The revolution in Georgia had already led to the Russian elites increasingly believing that preventing the country from joining the West and becoming a member of NATO was imperative.³⁶¹ In the run-up to the Russia–Georgia War, Tsygankov noted that at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, member states discussed the possible inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine in the Alliance's Membership Action Plan (MAP).³⁶² According to Tsygankov, the potential admission of the two countries to NATO generated threat perceptions in Russia, which were shared by a majority of the population. In this respect, Russia signaled to Ukraine and Georgia that membership in NATO could only be had at the cost of territorial integrity.³⁶³

Russia also understood the conflict over Georgia against the background of its status quo policy based on sovereignty. Besides the NATO enlargement discussion,

³⁵⁹ President of Russia, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy."

³⁶⁰ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 103; Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 5.

³⁶¹ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 104.

³⁶² Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 11; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 105.

³⁶³ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 105.

Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, which came about with the help of the Western community of states, reinforced Russia's critical stance toward the West and warned of a precedent that could also apply to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.³⁶⁴ Both Georgian provinces have sought secession since the collapse of the Soviet Union and have always aligned themselves politically with Russia.³⁶⁵ In this respect, Russia's apparent threat indicated that it was prepared to deviate from its declared status quo policy if necessary.

The debate within NATO over the possible admission of Georgia and Ukraine reinforced fears within Russia that NATO would continue to seek territorial expansion and pursue policies disregarding state sovereignty, as in the case of Kosovo. Even if NATO could not reach an internal agreement on including Georgia and Ukraine in the MAP and thus allay Russia's concerns about these countries joining the Alliance, a brief war broke out between Russia and Georgia later in the year.³⁶⁶ Russia's reaction was due to NATO's intention not to rule out admitting both countries in the long term and thus fueling Russia's threat perception toward and fear of a future loss of influence.³⁶⁷ Smith stated that in this context, when Georgia launched a military offensive to incorporate the breakaway province of South Ossetia, Russia responded with a counteroffensive, occupying both South Ossetia and Abkhazia and recognizing both provinces as independent states.³⁶⁸ According to Smith, the latter decision allowed Moscow to station its troops on Georgian territory illegally. In this respect, the action can also be seen as a kind of tit-for-tat retaliation for

³⁶⁴ Svante E. Cornell, Johanna Popjanevski, and Niklas Nilsson, *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008), 7, https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2008_08_PP_CornellPopjanevskiNilsson_Russia-Georgia.pdf; Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 13; Smith, "NATO–Russia Relations," 114.

³⁶⁵ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 40–41.

³⁶⁶ Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 12; Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 89–90.

³⁶⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, "Postimperial Empire," *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2023, 68, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/europe-war-russia-postimperial-empire>.

³⁶⁸ Smith, *The NATO-Russia Relationship*, 12; Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 89–90.

the Westernized approach to Kosovo.³⁶⁹ Russia's attack on Georgia was aimed at showing NATO that acting against Russian interests would have consequences in the post-Soviet space while signaling to Kyiv, Tbilisi, and other Alliance-less capitals that Russia would not accept increasing Western influence.³⁷⁰

In this respect, Russia was also able to prevent Georgia from at least moving closer to NATO, thus preventing the Western community of states from spreading eastwards. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the war, President Medvedev reiterated in a speech on his country's foreign and security policy that Russia, as a great power, had a claim to a sphere of influence, the violation of which was perceived as a threat to the nation.³⁷¹ In this context, Russia justified the intervention primarily by claiming an obligation to protect Russian citizens in the said provinces.³⁷² This rationale was then expressed in the Strategy for National Security to 2020, published in 2009.³⁷³ In this document, it was also stated that Russia should once again become a great power and that the current European security architecture with NATO as a pillar was no longer appropriate.

Efforts by the Russian government to win support for the Russian view of the world in terms of the sovereignty of the great powers and spheres of influence met with little response from the Western community in the aftermath of the war. The Russian government sought to counter developments surrounding the potential NATO admissions of Georgia and Ukraine through a diplomatic initiative.³⁷⁴ President Medvedev proposed a new security treaty for Europe about cooperation in security issues, a common security space, a ban on military interventions, respect for the sovereignty concept, and a focus on international organizations, especially the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

³⁶⁹ Robert E. Hamilton, *August 2008 and Everything After: A Ten-Year Retrospective on the Russia-Georgia War*, Black Sea Strategy Papers (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2018), 11.

³⁷⁰ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 140.

³⁷¹ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 91–92; Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War*, 70.

³⁷² Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 42.

³⁷³ Jankowski and Kowalik, "NATO–Russian Relations in the New International Security Environment," 86–87.

³⁷⁴ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 238; Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 106.

Europe (OSCE).³⁷⁵ However, NATO refused to discuss the Russian proposal for a new security treaty in the NATO–Russia Council and subsequent attempts by Russia to bring a new treaty into being were given little attention or taken seriously by the Western community.³⁷⁶

Overall, the Russia–Georgia War was the first violent conflict in which a NATO policy resulted in a Russian military response. As a result of the war between Russia and Georgia, NATO initially suspended all joint activities with Russia.³⁷⁷ Despite tensions between NATO and Russia over the war in Georgia, however, NATO still avoided viewing Russia as an adversary and continued to refer to it as a partner in the Alliance’s 2010 Strategic Concept.³⁷⁸ However, at the same time, the Russia–Georgia War fostered debates within NATO about collective defense and adding more members to protect against Russia, which were sparked primarily in NATO’s Eastern European new member states.³⁷⁹

6. Interim Conclusion

In the 2000s, NATO made a few changes to its Russia policy while Russia’s one-sided threat perception toward NATO increased significantly. Especially in the early years, the Alliance continued to focus on integrating Russia into the Western community of nations as part of the fight against transnational terrorism. Russia used this opportunity for cooperation to bring the country back to the forefront economically after the 1990s. However, this was also accompanied by great power ambitions, which were already beginning to be seen in the 1990s. For this reason, Russia increasingly went into a confrontation with NATO, for example, in its criticism of the increasing use of military

³⁷⁵ Richard Weitz, *The Rise and Fall of Medvedev’s European Security Treaty* (Berlin, Brussels: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2012), 3, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/resrep18640>.

³⁷⁶ Weitz, 2–3.

³⁷⁷ Smith, *The NATO–Russia Relationship*, 12; Smith, “NATO–Russia Relations,” 120.

³⁷⁸ Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 34–35.

³⁷⁹ Smith, *The NATO–Russia Relationship*, 13; Helga Haftendorn, “The Alliance and the Credibility of Extended Deterrence,” in *The Future of NATO*, ed. Andrew A. Michta and Paal Sigurd Hilde, Regional Defense and Global Security (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 98, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.6980805.10>.

means by the West, the discussion about the military imbalance in Europe within the framework of the CFE Treaty, or the stationing of military infrastructure in Eastern Europe within the framework of missile defense discussions. Besides the aforementioned issues, however, it was primarily the further expansion of the security space propagated by NATO that fueled Russia's threat perception toward the Alliance. The spread of Western-style democratic revolutions in Russia's sphere of influence threatened the newly established system under Putin, and the expansion of NATO would, from the Russian perspective, cement Western change to Russia's disadvantage. For this reason, the Russian discussion about admitting Georgia and Ukraine to NATO culminated in a war to keep NATO from further rounds of enlargement. On the Allied side, this aggressive Russian response did not initially lead to a fundamental change in NATO's Russia policy, but it did change the Alliance members' view of Russia, which had previously been perceived as a partner rather than a threat for nearly two decades.

C. ADJUSTMENTS IN NATO'S DETERRENCE POSTURE

NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept was significantly influenced by the wars in the Balkans and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which further pushed the Allies' military strategy toward international crisis management. The terrorist attacks of 2001 prompted the Allies to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in the history of the Alliance. From then on, NATO members became increasingly involved in the fight against transnational terrorism, and stated at the NATO summit in Riga in 2006:

From Afghanistan to the Balkans and from the Mediterranean Sea to Darfur, in six challenging missions and operations in three geographic regions, we are advancing peace and security and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with those who defend our common values of democracy and freedom as embodied in the Washington Treaty.³⁸⁰

To some degree, the respective NATO members had focused on collective defense or international crisis management.³⁸¹ However, with a continued commitment to

³⁸⁰ North Atlantic Council, "Riga Summit Declaration of November 29, 2006," NATO, last modified November 29, 2006, par. 3, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_37920.htm.

³⁸¹ David S. Yost, "NATO's Evolving Purposes and the Next Strategic Concept," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 86, no. 2 (2010): 495.

international crisis management, Article 5 and non-Article 5 tasks became increasingly blurred. Out-of-area operations became the Alliance's primary day-to-day focus.³⁸² In this regard, the focus of the Alliance's collective deterrence and defense continued to shift increasingly from national and Alliance defense to international crisis management.

Therefore, the Allies relied on expeditionary force capabilities as part of NATO's post-Cold War force transformation for international crisis management. At the NATO summit in Prague in 2002, the Alliance aimed with the Prague Capability Commitment to focus henceforth on capabilities such as air-to-ground surveillance, strategic airlift, aerial refueling, suppression of enemy air defenses, and combat support.³⁸³ Investing in the necessary capabilities was reiterated at the Istanbul NATO Summit in 2004.³⁸⁴ The aforementioned capabilities that NATO wanted to focus on in the future indicated that the Alliance wanted to concentrate on asymmetric adversaries, which require military interventions in which rapidly deployable forces were brought into a country to provide a secure environment and stability.

Similarly, the Allies established the Combined Joint Task Force envisioned in the 1999 Strategic Concept. To this end, the NATO Response Force (NRF) was created and reached full operational readiness as early as 2006 with a strength of up to 25,000 troops.³⁸⁵ This force was supplemented by the Immediate Response Force, consisting of 14,000 troops. The task force was composed of various units from the member states on a rotating basis.³⁸⁶ Yost stated that the goal of this task force was always to have forces ready to respond quickly in the event of an emerging crisis.³⁸⁷ From then on, according to Yost, the NATO Response Force could be deployed worldwide on a selective basis in

³⁸² Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," 17.

³⁸³ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 80–81.

³⁸⁴ North Atlantic Council, *Istanbul Summit Communiqué of June 28, 2004*, NATO Press Release, (2004)096 (Istanbul: NATO, 2004), par. 20, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2004/p04-096e.htm>.

³⁸⁵ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 83.

³⁸⁶ Yost, 84.

³⁸⁷ Yost, 83.

support of NATO operations. Once again, it became clear that NATO relied primarily on flexible deterrence as part of international crisis management.

Furthermore, as part of NATO's expeditionary forces concept, the Alliance declared that it would reduce its command structures. This decision was fundamentally consistent with the intent in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept to build small but effective intervention forces. With this respect, the Allies agreed that there would be

two strategic commands, one operational, and one functional. The strategic command for Operations, headquartered in Europe (Belgium), will be supported by two Joint Force Commands able to generate a land-based Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) headquarters and a robust but more limited standing joint headquarters from which a sea-based CJTF headquarters capability can be drawn. There will also be land, sea and air components. The strategic command for Transformation, headquartered in the United States, and with a presence in Europe, will be responsible for the continuing transformation of military capabilities and for the promotion of interoperability of Alliance forces, in cooperation with the Allied Command Operations as appropriate.³⁸⁸

The focus on fewer command structures made it clear that NATO still intended to adapt its forces in this way, without a specific geographic focus, but with readiness to pursue a global approach.

According to NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, Russia did not yet pose a threat in the context of global realignment. However, although NATO did not focus on Russia because of the asymmetry of great power competition in Europe, Moscow's military potential was nevertheless considered in rudimentary terms. By the middle of the new century's first decade, NATO forces significantly outnumbered Russia.³⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Eichler argued that Russia countered the military imbalance by expanding its Western Military District, and three armies and the forces in Kaliningrad formed a military

³⁸⁸ North Atlantic Council, "Prague Summit Declaration of November 21, 2002," NATO, last modified November 21, 2002, par. 4b, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm.

³⁸⁹ Rob Johnson, "Military Strategy and Conventional Warfare," in *Military Strategy in the 21st Century: The Challenge for NATO*, ed. Janne Haaland Matlary and Robert Johnson (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), 211–12.

counterweight to NATO that was not to be despised.³⁹⁰ According to Eichler, this military buildup included comprehensive Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities that could significantly disrupt a NATO military buildup in conflict. In this respect, Yost asserted that the Allies, first and foremost the United States, concluded that it was necessary for the Alliance to hold on to nuclear weapons in light of Russia's arsenal as a basic deterrence capability.³⁹¹ However, according to Yost, this view was not publicly emphasized held so as not to jeopardize possible cooperation opportunities with Russia. At NATO summits between 2002 and 2006, Russia was mostly referred to as a partner with which joint cooperation took place within the framework of the NATO–Russia Council.³⁹²

In this respect, NATO continued to rely on nuclear weapons in its deterrence and defense posture against potential aggressors, including Russia. Therefore, the ultimate security guarantee for NATO members in Europe and North America remained U.S. nuclear forces.³⁹³ Therefore, the United States continued to rely on gravity bombs and other capabilities for nuclear deterrence protection of its European Allies throughout the 2000s, pursuing the four goals of assurance, dissuasion, deterrence, and defeat under the Quadrennial Defense Review.³⁹⁴ To this extent, the Allies continued to plan with a minimum nuclear capability because the likelihood of nuclear confrontation with potential adversaries was judged to be extremely unlikely.³⁹⁵ In principle, NATO's deterrence concept regarding nuclear weapons did not change in the two decades after the Cold War.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁰ Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War*, 53; Johnson, "Military Strategy and Conventional Warfare," 213.

³⁹¹ Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," 759.

³⁹² North Atlantic Council, "Prague Summit Declaration of November 21, 2002," par. 8; North Atlantic Council, *Istanbul Summit Communiqué of June 28, 2004*, par. 39; North Atlantic Council, "Riga Summit Declaration of November 29, 2006," par. 40.

³⁹³ Foerster, "NATO's Return," 54.

³⁹⁴ Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," 756.

³⁹⁵ Yost, 758.

³⁹⁶ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 90–91; Foerster, "NATO's Return," 54.

In addition to providing nuclear safeguards for the Allies, the United States encouraged discussions about missile defense as an increasingly prominent element of the Alliance's territorial deterrence and defense. Even though the U.S. initially pushed the issue of European missile defense after its withdrawal from ABM Treaty, the issue also found its way into NATO. Already at the Prague NATO summit, the Allies underlined the importance of missile defense for the defense of the Alliance territory.³⁹⁷ Although the issue received little public attention in NATO after Prague, it became increasingly important at the end of the decade. At the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon, the Allies declared that the Alliance would develop ballistic missile defense capabilities in the future.³⁹⁸ In this context, Corbett stated that an agreement was reached within the Alliance to install a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) in Europe, even though Russia frequently expressed its concerns about the topic.³⁹⁹ According to Corbett, naval units and land-based components were to be used, primarily in Poland, Romania, and Turkey.

Missile defense played a particular role for the new NATO members, who expected U.S. and NATO deployments in their countries to enhance security and provide a more effective and credible deterrent against potential aggression. As the war between Russia and Georgia revealed, it was precisely in these "near abroad" states that fears of a Russian threat developed anew. For the new Eastern European NATO members such as Poland and the Czech Republic, it was vital to station U.S. and NATO troops in the country as part of U.S. missile defense plans for Europe to ensure credible collective defense within the Alliance.⁴⁰⁰ The same principle applied to Hungary under NATO's Strategic Airlift Component, which has been operating a multinational deployment in the country since 2009.⁴⁰¹

Besides the debate about a European Missile Defense, tensions with Russia also slowly developed in the field of arms control and disarmament. Despite disagreements

³⁹⁷ North Atlantic Council, "Prague Summit Declaration of November 21, 2002," par. 4g.

³⁹⁸ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 76.

³⁹⁹ Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 57.

⁴⁰⁰ Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," 767–68.

⁴⁰¹ Yost, 768.

between the Allies and Russia over the adaptation of the CFE Treaty, NATO accorded the treaty important significance regarding the strategic balance in Europe, which in the background developed into a conflict with Russia. Even though there were disagreements between the Allies and Russia regarding the aCFE Treaty and the Istanbul Commitments, NATO emphasized the importance of the treaty regime for stability and security in Europe.⁴⁰² At the Istanbul Summit in 2004, NATO renewed its intention to uphold to the CFE Treaty but criticized Russia's negligence in supporting the Istanbul Commitments from an Alliance perspective.⁴⁰³ Furthermore, even though Russia unilaterally suspended its compliance with the CFE Treaty in 2007, NATO reaffirmed its commitment to arms control and disarmament at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 to avoid regional instability and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴⁰⁴ This stance was again reinforced by the publication of NATO's Strategic Concept in 2010, which viewed arms control and disarmament as essential components of cooperative security.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, at the 2010 Lisbon summit, the NATO Allies stated that they would continue to adhere to the CFE Treaty and its adaptation and promote arms control.⁴⁰⁶

Expanding the collective security space to ensure a secure environment also played a role in NATO's deterrence and defense posture through the concept of dialogue and cooperation. Within NATO, the United States in particular shared with the new Allies the vision of a free and peaceful Europe by allowing nation-states to join international institutions, in this case, NATO, to stabilize the continent.⁴⁰⁷ Accordingly, the Alliance prepared for the membership of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia and considered other countries such as Albania, Macedonia, and Croatia for

⁴⁰² North Atlantic Council, "Prague Summit Declaration of November 21, 2002," par. 15.

⁴⁰³ North Atlantic Council, *Istanbul Summit Communiqué of June 28, 2004*, par. 17.

⁴⁰⁴ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 314.

⁴⁰⁵ North Atlantic Council, *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (2010)* (Lisbon: NATO Heads of State and Government, 2010), 7, <https://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁶ North Atlantic Council, "Lisbon Summit Declaration of November 20, 2010."

⁴⁰⁷ Dušica Lazarević, "NATO Enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia: Old Wine in New Bottles?," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 09, no. 1 (2009): 42, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.09.1.02>.

membership in the future.⁴⁰⁸ In this respect, Russia was still considered a partner in NATO's Partnership for Peace program and the within the framework of the recently created NATO–Russia Council and Ukraine as well within the framework of a Partnership for Peace program since 1994.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, shortly after the 2004 NATO enlargement, the Alliance reiterated its open door policy at the Istanbul NATO summit.⁴¹⁰ Thus, other countries were mentioned within the framework of partnership programs, such as Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro.⁴¹¹ In addition, the Alliance reaffirmed its intention to intensify security partnerships with Ukraine and Georgia at the NATO summit in Riga in 2006.⁴¹²

At the follow-up summit in Bucharest in 2008, the discussion on the possible inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine in NATO's MAP became a political issue within the Alliance, with Russia playing a role. While the United States, supported by most of the new Eastern NATO members, advocated the future inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine in the MAP, Lazarević emphasized that Germany and France took a contrary position at the Bucharest summit.⁴¹³ According to Lazarević, both Western European countries argued that Georgia and Ukraine did not have the capacity to adopt NATO standards and that they, instead of provoking Russia, wanted to continue to rely on cooperation with Moscow. As a result, NATO agreed not to consider the inclusion of the two countries in the MAP for the time being but to continue talks in this direction.⁴¹⁴ The debate showed that there were different notions of security within NATO. Germany and France, for example, saw continued NATO expansion as an unnecessary provocation against Russia. On the other hand, the United States and the new NATO members concluded that the expansion of the Alliance would generate more security. However, NATO did not abandon its open-door

⁴⁰⁸ North Atlantic Council, "Prague Summit Declaration of November 21, 2002," par. 5.

⁴⁰⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 8–9.

⁴¹⁰ North Atlantic Council, *Istanbul Summit Communiqué of June 28, 2004*, par. 25.

⁴¹¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 32–35.

⁴¹² North Atlantic Council, "Riga Summit Declaration of November 29, 2006," par. 37–39.

⁴¹³ Lazarević, "NATO Enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia," 45.

⁴¹⁴ Lazarević, 46.

enlargement policy due to the disunity in the Alliance and the Russia–Georgia war but admitted Albania and Croatia in 2009. This expanded the collective defense space, but without coming into conflict with Russia.⁴¹⁵

While Russia was hardly the focus of NATO’s deterrence and defense posture at the beginning of the decade, this slowly changed due to the tensions between the Alliance and Russia in the context of the Russia–Georgia War. After the war, the new Eastern European NATO members’ fears of Russia engendered a credibility problem within NATO regarding collective defense under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁴¹⁶ Thus, these members demanded more political support from NATO’s leading nation, the United States, for credible assurance that, in the event of an attack, it would also defend these countries in any case.⁴¹⁷ In addition, Yost pointed out that there were calls to adjust contingency plans within NATO for the collective defense of the Baltic States and Poland concerning Russia, which occurred in 2009.⁴¹⁸ However, since the accession of these members, such defense plans were not prepared, according to Yost.

In this respect, the war set in motion a process within NATO that reasserted Russia’s status as a potential military adversary. Since the newly initiated NATO Defense Planning Process was initiated in 2009, Yost stated that equipment procurement and force mobilization within NATO have changed.⁴¹⁹ According to Yost, the goal at that time was to be able to conduct two large and six smaller operations in parallel. From then on, members of NATO could assume responsibility for specific capabilities and, if necessary, provide them within the Alliance or a member state.⁴²⁰ The goal was for NATO countries to coordinate their capabilities increasingly and always to be able to provide capabilities within the framework of the Defense Planning Process. The triggered planning process also

⁴¹⁵ Ash, “Postimperial Empire,” 68.

⁴¹⁶ Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 35.

⁴¹⁷ Yost, “NATO’s Evolving Purposes and the Next Strategic Concept,” 499.

⁴¹⁸ Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 37.

⁴¹⁹ Yost, 77.

⁴²⁰ Yost, 78.

put the issue of defense spending on the agenda within NATO, as it was determined that current expenditures did not meet the Alliance's needs.⁴²¹

The asymmetrical military balance in Europe that was already prevalent in the 1990s continued into the 2000s. While NATO continued to drive forward its transformation process with expeditionary forces limited in size with a global orientation, Russia was not initially the focus of the Alliance's deterrence and defense concept.⁴²² Instead, NATO's concept of deterrence and defense continued to shift away from border deterrence due to the Alliance's increasingly global orientation and the fight against transnational terrorism. For this reason, there continued to be no political pressure to focus on established deterrence and defense preparations against a potential adversary.⁴²³ Instead, with an eye on Russian capabilities, NATO continued to rely ultimately on nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, this deterrence concept applied not only explicitly to Russia but generally to the security of the Alliance. To this extent, member states made only minor adjustments in force posture at the individual and collective levels in the 2000s.⁴²⁴ Declining defense spending and the global economic crisis in 2008 played their part in further reducing rather than increasing the Alliance's forces.⁴²⁵

Even though the Alliance did not see itself in conflict with Russia, opposing views developed in Russia in the same period. Disagreements arose with Russia. For example, the Allies wanted to strengthen their territorial defense through a missile defense system and in the field of conventional military balance under the CFE Treaty, while NATO members could not agree with Russia on the Istanbul Commitments.⁴²⁶ However, more concrete adjustments did not occur within NATO until the end of the decade in the area of missile defense. In the field of conventional arms control and disarmament, NATO

⁴²¹ Yost, 79.

⁴²² Haftendorn, "The Alliance and the Credibility of Extended Deterrence," 96; Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 278.

⁴²³ Haftendorn, "The Alliance and the Credibility of Extended Deterrence," 97.

⁴²⁴ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 29.

⁴²⁵ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 81.

⁴²⁶ Yost, "NATO's Evolving Purposes and the Next Strategic Concept," 500.

continued to hold firm, even though Russia's suspension of its compliance with the CFE Treaty meant that no further significant developments took place. The most considerable dispute between NATO and Russia revolved around NATO expansion as part of the Alliance's deterrence and defense concept. While NATO continued to pursue an open-door policy after its 2004 enlargement, the Alliance's intentions were increasingly met with disapproval in Moscow. This was expressed especially in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, which led to tensions with Russia and eventually resulted in the Russia–Georgia War. As a result of the war, threat perceptions developed, especially among the new Eastern European NATO members, who led NATO to view Russia if not as an adversary, at least more critically. Adjustments in deterrence and defense posture took place less, but discussions followed within the Alliance about the credibility of NATO deterrence and, if necessary, about adjustments that will be needed in the future.⁴²⁷ In this respect, regarding Russia, little changed in the 2000s in terms of the military balance in Europe and NATO's deterrence and defense posture, although the first cracks in the relationship between the Alliance and Russia became apparent at the political level. These cracks manifested themselves in a collision of two political world views, expressed in the Russia–Georgia War. While Russia pursued a great power policy with spheres of influence and increasingly classified NATO as a threat as a result of the events in 2008, NATO continued to focus on expanding its collective security space and began to discuss the extent to which Russia posed a threat in this regard.

⁴²⁷ Yost, 498.

IV. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF DETERRENCE AFTER CRIMEA IN 2014

A. NATO'S 2010 STRATEGIC CONCEPT

While in the 1990s NATO's international crisis management was mainly limited to Europe due to the Balkan wars, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 led to a significant expansion of NATO's area of operations, which was reflected in the 2010 Strategic Concept.⁴²⁸ The war on terror still decisively shaped the document, even though the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were conducted nearly 10 years previously.⁴²⁹ NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept stated that the world was changing but that NATO would continue to function as a security guarantor in Europe.⁴³⁰ Against this backdrop, NATO defined three core tasks in its 2010 Strategic Concept:

- a. Collective defence. NATO members will always assist each other against attack, in accordance with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. That commitment remains firm and binding. NATO will deter and defend against any threat of aggression, and against emerging security challenges where they threaten the fundamental security of individual Allies or the Alliance as a whole.
- b. Crisis management. NATO has a unique and robust set of political and military capabilities to address the full spectrum of crises – before, during and after conflicts. NATO will actively employ an appropriate mix of those political and military tools to help manage developing crises that have the potential to affect Alliance security, before they escalate into conflicts; to stop ongoing conflicts where they affect Alliance security; and to help consolidate stability in post-conflict situations where that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security.
- c. Cooperative security. The Alliance is affected by, and can affect, political and security developments beyond its borders. The Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership with relevant countries and other international organisations; by contributing actively to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament; and by keeping the door

⁴²⁸ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 14.

⁴²⁹ NATO, "Strategic Concepts."

⁴³⁰ North Atlantic Council, *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (2010)*, par. 1.

to membership in the Alliance open to all European democracies that meet NATO's standards.⁴³¹

According to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the collective defense commitment, the Allies would defend themselves jointly against any aggression against one or more member states. Crisis management meant that NATO would use political and military instruments to manage international crises threatening the Alliance's security. The Allies planned to rely on cooperative security to promote international peace through cooperation in partnerships with non-NATO states and other measures. In this respect, the two-pronged approach, including collective defense and international crisis prevention complemented by cooperative security, showed that NATO had remained fundamentally faithful to its previous Strategic Concept of 1999.

After the Allies addressed the core tasks, they examined the security environment. The authors of the document noted that the Euro–Atlantic zone remained predominantly at peace and that attacks on member states were therefore unlikely.⁴³² Nevertheless, NATO maintained that conventional military threats remained, especially in ballistic missiles and through the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴³³ Furthermore, terrorism was seen as a threat to regional stability and NATO member states.⁴³⁴ In addition, NATO identified threats, especially concerning communications and transit routes.⁴³⁵ In this context, scarce resources were considered a key factor in future security environments. The security environment section showed that NATO, in the tradition of its previous Strategic Concepts, continued to focus on a broad approach to security that required the Alliance to be global in scope. The first mention of terrorism underscored this as a threat and highlighted the associated need to secure communication and transit routes.

Despite NATO's global ambition, the Alliance devoted a separate section to deterrence and defense, considering the territorial integrity of its member states. "The

⁴³¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 4.

⁴³² North Atlantic Council, par. 7.

⁴³³ North Atlantic Council, par. 8–9.

⁴³⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 10–11.

⁴³⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 13.

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.”⁴³⁶ Therefore, the Alliance’s deterrence posture should include a mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities.⁴³⁷ Nonetheless, NATO’s nuclear forces serve as the ultimate guarantee of security for its allies: “The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.”⁴³⁸ Accordingly, the armed forces should “maintain the ability to sustain concurrent major joint operations and several smaller operations for collective defence and crisis response, including at strategic distance.”⁴³⁹ These operations explicitly mentioned defense against ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, which could also take place in cooperation with Russia.⁴⁴⁰ However, NATO forces should also be able to counter terrorist threats and secure communications and transit routes.⁴⁴¹ In this respect, the Alliance sought to transform maximally operational forces with coherent and joint capabilities due to a changing security environment.⁴⁴² In principle, a two-track approach can still be seen in the force structure, but one that clearly emphasizes the flexible nature of the forces for multiple types of missions.

The subsequent sections of the 2010 Strategic Concept dealt primarily with the other two core tasks of crisis management and cooperative security.⁴⁴³ Against the background of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, “NATO seeks its security

⁴³⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 16.

⁴³⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 11.

⁴³⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 18.

⁴³⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

⁴⁴⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

⁴⁴¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

⁴⁴² North Atlantic Council, par. 19.

⁴⁴³ North Atlantic Council, par. 20–35.

at the lowest possible level of forces.”⁴⁴⁴ In the spirit of the partnerships, NATO continued to promote an open-door policy on enlargement and sought close partnerships with the United Nations and the European Union.⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, the document particularly highlighted the partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine and their orientation or aspiration to become members of the Euro–Atlantic community.⁴⁴⁶

NATO also saw the partnership with Russia as relevant to Europe’s security, which the Alliance needed to expand. “NATO–Russia cooperation is of strategic importance as it contributes to creating a common space of peace, stability and security. NATO poses no threat to Russia. On the contrary: we want to see a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia, and we will act accordingly, with the expectation of reciprocity from Russia.”⁴⁴⁷ In this connection, the Alliance invoked the NATO–Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration, particularly regarding respect for democratic principles and the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all states in the Euro–Atlantic area.⁴⁴⁸ Unspecified “differences on particular issues”⁴⁴⁹ between NATO and Russia were mentioned, with the hope for “a strong and constructive partnership.”⁴⁵⁰ To achieve a constructive partnership, NATO was determined to the following:

- enhance the political consultations and practical cooperation with Russia in areas of shared interests, including missile defence, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy and the promotion of wider international security;
- use the full potential of the NATO–Russia Council for dialogue and joint action with Russia.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

⁴⁴⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 27–32.

⁴⁴⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 35.

⁴⁴⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 33.

⁴⁴⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 34.

⁴⁴⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 34.

⁴⁵⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 34.

⁴⁵¹ North Atlantic Council, 34.

In this part of the 2010 Strategic Concept, the first discord between NATO and Russia became apparent, even if it was not clearly stated. While NATO remained committed to international partnerships, such as with Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia, the political consequences of the 2008 Russia–Georgia war and related tensions between NATO and Russia suggested that there were specific differences between NATO and Russia.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF NATO–RUSSIA RELATIONS

1. The Road to the Conflict over Ukraine

While NATO took no significant military action after the Russia–Georgia war and only indirectly criticized Moscow in light of the Alliance’s 2010 Strategic Concept, Russia pursued a whole-of-government realignment of its military in the following years. To this end, the government of Russia ordered an armament and modernization program for its armed forces.⁴⁵² In the process, Stoner noted, Russia first restructured its military, streamlined the organization, and planned to renew its equipment.⁴⁵³ According to Stoner, the restructuring was also reflected in steadily rising arms spending, which had already increased in 2000 and continued to grow significantly from 2008 until 2016.

The Russian modernization program was primarily oriented toward NATO. Russia’s follow-on doctrine, its Strategy for National Security to 2020, declared that NATO, with its continuing expansionist intentions from Russia’s perspective, as the main security threat.⁴⁵⁴ Furthermore, the strategy stated that the existing European security architecture with NATO as a pillar was no longer current. In this respect, Russian foreign and security policy was henceforth aligned with NATO’s enlargement policy and was thus directly related to it for Russia.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 184.

⁴⁵³ Stoner, 187.

⁴⁵⁴ Jankowski and Kowalik, “NATO–Russian Relations in the New International Security Environment,” 87.

⁴⁵⁵ Jankowski and Kowalik, 87.

Consequently, Russia's threat perception toward NATO became apparent in its military orientation in the following years. In the aftermath of the Russia–Georgia War, a Russian exercise involving the occupation of the Baltic states and a nuclear attack on Poland generated fears within NATO that Russia could use military means to change the geostrategic environment in its favor and demonstrated that Russia perceived NATO as an adversary.⁴⁵⁶ Russia fueled these fears within NATO through increased military activity, such as fighter aircraft patrols in international airspace and the ZAPAD series of exercises, which have been conducted regularly since 2009.⁴⁵⁷ Yost argued that these fears were also fueled by Russia's armed intervention in Georgia, by wanting to protect Russian minorities in the affected provinces. According to Yost, the Baltic NATO members feared that Russia might use a similar argument in the future to justify intervention in these states.⁴⁵⁸

Although there was concern within NATO about Russian foreign and security policy, the Alliance remained cautious in its criticism so as not to provoke further conflict with Russia. Notwithstanding, Yost stated that the new eastern NATO members insisted that NATO reconsider its collective defense after the war between Russia and Georgia.⁴⁵⁹ According to Yost, this led to a rethinking and adaptation of collective defense plans within NATO, especially for the Baltic States and Poland, but without reference to Russia. However, the West tended not so much to punish Russia as to try to de-escalate the situation to restore normal relations with Russia as quickly as possible.⁴⁶⁰ This was also evident in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, in that, despite tensions between NATO and Russia over the war in Georgia, NATO continued to refer to Russia as a partner and reluctantly expressed criticism.⁴⁶¹

Further political turmoil in the Maghreb and the Middle East created a basis for an increasing loss of trust between NATO and Russia. Clunan argued that the Arab Spring in

⁴⁵⁶ Yost, *NATO Transformed*, 34.

⁴⁵⁷ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 34.

⁴⁵⁹ Yost, 37.

⁴⁶⁰ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 92.

⁴⁶¹ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 33.

2011 renewed fears among Russian elites that the West would continue promoting regime change policies and liberal revolutions.⁴⁶² In Clunan's view, the resulting unrest and instability in the Maghreb and Middle East were undoubtedly seen in Russia as related to the Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space. She stated that Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 can also be explained in Russian eyes as pursuing a status-quo policy and opposing Western hegemony's expansion. In the same year of the Arab Spring, NATO's intervention in Libya reinforced the Russian view that the West was exploiting military means to advance its interests in regime change entirely.⁴⁶³

The relationship between Russia and NATO was then significantly determined by events in Ukraine in the years that followed until the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent war in Donbas, even if NATO was initially uninvolved. Instead, a political tug-of-war between the European Union and Russia over Ukraine developed, with Ukraine initially pursuing a two-track policy.⁴⁶⁴ Tsygankov noted that Russia attempted to establish a Eurasian Economic Union, the first steps of which were taken in 2010 with a customs union for Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and which culminated with the signing of the founding treaty for an economic union in 2011.⁴⁶⁵ According to Tsygankov, President Putin also had plans to include Ukraine in the economic union. Ukraine's two-track policy of the government of the day reached a point in 2013 when it was decided to choose sides.⁴⁶⁶ In this respect, a planned association agreement between the EU and Ukraine was rejected by the Ukrainian government in 2013 to move politically closer to Russia, as the state was virtually broke, and ultimately, only Russia was willing to grant the necessary loans. Unrest broke out in the country, which was directed against the Ukrainian government and Russia as a supposed supporter.⁴⁶⁷ When the opposition

⁴⁶² Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," 11.

⁴⁶³ Bugayova, *How We Got Here with Russia*, 19.

⁴⁶⁴ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 93; Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 175; Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 24.

⁴⁶⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 175.

⁴⁶⁶ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 93–94.

⁴⁶⁷ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 175; Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 24.

protestors on the Maidan, with some political support by European foreign ministers, who pushed through new elections to de-escalate the situation, political pressure on President Viktor Yanukovych increased, which prompted him to leave the country.⁴⁶⁸ As a result, a more pro-Western interim government replaced the former government.

The establishment of a pro-Western government in Kyiv led Russia to judge that the Russian propagated worldview of Russia as a great power with spheres of influence was under direct threat. In Moscow, the elites interpreted the pro-Western development with concern that Ukraine could, from then on, withdraw even further from Russia's sphere of influence and move further westward.⁴⁶⁹ In Russia, Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU and the subsequent unrest due to the collapsed association agreement also generated fears that the country could not only drift out of Moscow's sphere of influence but also move closer to NATO.⁴⁷⁰ Considering the upheavals in Ukraine in 2014, Tsygankov stated that President Putin was convinced that the West initiated the Euro-Maidan protests.⁴⁷¹ According to Tsygankov, the unrest in Ukraine reinforced nationalist views and anti-Western resentment in Russia. In his opinion, any pledges by Ukraine not to move closer to NATO or to continue to grant Russia unrestricted access to Crimea, which was used militarily by Russia, did not convince the hardliners in Moscow. Instead, he further claimed that these developments would have led Putin to find support for the annexation of Crimea and to foment a territorial conflict in the Donbas.

2. Annexation of Crimea 2014

What followed was a covert Russian military operation in which Russia succeeded in annexing the Crimean Peninsula and promoting a secessionist movement in the Donbas, which caused a civil war to break out within Ukraine. In both cases, Russia initially denied it had anything to do with the developments.⁴⁷² However, Freedman noted, Russian special

⁴⁶⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 175.

⁴⁶⁹ Tsygankov, 174–75.

⁴⁷⁰ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 94.

⁴⁷¹ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 106.

⁴⁷² Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 93.

forces could covertly detach a territory from Ukraine in a virtual coup d'état without firing a single shot.⁴⁷³ According to Freedman, Russia had the advantage that Russian troops had already been stationed on the peninsula through the naval base in Sevastopol. In addition, he noted, support for the separatists in eastern Ukraine was also provided covertly by the Russian military on Ukraine's eastern border. The subversion and infiltration strategy of the Russian military, which became prominent as Hybrid Warfare, quickly resulted in an advantage for Russia and rapidly created facts on the ground in the country shaken by unrest.⁴⁷⁴ After Georgia, Russia again showed that it was prepared to use military means to assert its foreign and security policy interests.⁴⁷⁵

At this point, the strategic importance of the Black Sea port of Sevastopol should not be underestimated. It is the only port the Russian Black Sea fleet can use to enter the Mediterranean and, in a sense, militarily underpin Russia's influence in this region.⁴⁷⁶ Moreover, since the Russian fleet was allowed to use the Ukrainian port under a lease, Eichler stated, there was a fear in Russia that with Ukraine moving closer to the EU or NATO, this access could be lost. It, therefore, stands to reason that this factor also played a role in Russia's considerations regarding annexation.

Another reason why Putin took the opportunity to intervene in Ukraine is based on domestic politics and has less to do with NATO per se. When Putin was re-elected president of the Russian Federation in 2012, there were widespread protests in Russia.⁴⁷⁷ The authors of the aforementioned RAND Corporation study stated that Putin's increasingly autocratic style of government no longer generated the high level of popular support that Putin enjoyed due to the country's economic recovery after the turmoil of the 1990s. They further argued that Putin saw his fears of Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space and the associated Western influence confirmed in Russia. Two years later, in the Duma

⁴⁷³ Lawrence Freedman, "Why War Fails: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and the Limits of Military Power," *Foreign Affairs*, June 14, 2022, 16.

⁴⁷⁴ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 47–48.

⁴⁷⁵ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War*, 76.

⁴⁷⁷ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 95.

elections, Putin's party, United Russia, won resoundingly, without opposition parties gaining even a remotely significant share of the vote.⁴⁷⁸ Against this background, the intervention in Ukraine can also be explained as a national rally-around-the-flag effect to strengthen regime stability in Moscow.

President Putin used this domestic support to invoke the historical illegitimacy of Crimea's transfer to Ukraine in 1954 and the strategic importance of the peninsula, particularly in the context of potential NATO expansion, as justifications for Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁴⁷⁹ The Russian government further justified the intervention in Ukraine by asserting the obligation to protect the Russian diaspora in Crimea and Donbas from nationalists in Kyiv and their NATO Allies.⁴⁸⁰ A similar approach was already observable in the war with Georgia.⁴⁸¹ Finally, Russia legitimized the annexation of Crimea with the will for self-determination of the population living there after a questionable referendum resulted in support for annexation to Russia.⁴⁸²

Accordingly, Russia's intervention in Ukraine was Moscow's response to the threat perception of increasingly losing influence in Ukraine and political stability at home. In this respect, Moscow gained Crimea, with its important strategic location in the Black Sea, and initially avoided a de facto absorption of Ukraine into Western institutions through the war in the Donbas. At the same time, the West tended to sit on the sidelines in the context of these developments.⁴⁸³ In this respect, Russia used the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine to negotiate European-brokered ceasefires (Minsk I and Minsk II) in Moscow's favor and turn the war into a frozen conflict which, for the time being, had prevented the Western community of states from further integration efforts toward

⁴⁷⁸ Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, "NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust," 68.

⁴⁷⁹ Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War*, 79.

⁴⁸⁰ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 24; Bugayova, *How We Got Here with Russia*, 21.

⁴⁸¹ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 47–48.

⁴⁸² Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, "NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust," 66.

⁴⁸³ Freedman, "Why War Fails," 16.

Ukraine.⁴⁸⁴ Furthermore, Moscow could continue leveraging its influence on Kyiv's government through the ongoing conflict in the Donbas.⁴⁸⁵

The Allies, on the other hand, strongly opposed Russia's actions and stood united against Russia. NATO condemned Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014, which led to a cohesive and unifying approach within the Alliance.⁴⁸⁶ The Allies assessed Russia's actions as a significant breach of international law and imposed economic sanctions on Russia.⁴⁸⁷ Furthermore, due to the events in Ukraine in 2014, NATO suspended all cooperation formats with Russia.⁴⁸⁸ In addition, the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas encouraged NATO's Eastern European members, particularly those who share a border with Russia, to bring the discussion of NATO military reassurance against Russia to the forefront of Alliance policy.⁴⁸⁹

3. The Road to the Invasion of Ukraine

Russia aligned its foreign and security policy against NATO after the events in Ukraine in 2014, primarily at the military level. This policy was based on two premises.⁴⁹⁰ First, Russian elites were convinced that military power was the most appropriate way to deter NATO from further expansion. Second, such deterrence could reduce the risk that the West would exert increasing influence over Russia. Petersson and Stoner asserted that the reason for this is that Russia does not have the economic and social capabilities of the West to build an attractive state community model.⁴⁹¹ However, according to both authors, Russia did have enough to keep its former adversaries at a distance on the international

⁴⁸⁴ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 48.

⁴⁸⁵ Freedman, "Why War Fails," 16.

⁴⁸⁶ Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, "NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust," 65.

⁴⁸⁷ Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, 65–66.

⁴⁸⁸ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 280.

⁴⁸⁹ Heinrich Brauß and András Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, DGAP Report, No. 1 | January 2021 (Berlin: DGAP | German Council on Foreign Relations, 2021), 20.

⁴⁹⁰ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 18; R. D. Hooker Jr., *How to Defend the Baltic States* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2019), 7, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/How-to-Defend-the-Baltic-States-full-web4.pdf>.

⁴⁹¹ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 18; Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 18.

stage, both politically and geographically. To this extent, Moscow's goal was to establish a buffer zone between Russia and the West or NATO, which in the Kremlin's view, has become smaller and smaller due to continuing NATO expansion.⁴⁹² Therefore, in the following years, Russia responded with a massive buildup of troops on its western borders in Eastern Europe.⁴⁹³ Since then, Russia has significantly increased its military activities on the borders with Scandinavia, across the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.⁴⁹⁴ To this extent, in Russia's foreign and security policy, the military became a primary tool to achieve political goals in Europe.⁴⁹⁵

For example, Moscow practiced escalating a conflict with an adversary as part of Exercise ZAPAD 2017, whose primary objective was to stop the adversary's follow-on forces.⁴⁹⁶ In this context, fears arose, especially among NATO's eastern member states, that Russia was preparing to invade NATO's easternmost countries. After the events in Ukraine, the Baltic states and Poland, in particular, called for more commitment in terms of deterrence and defense within the framework of NATO.⁴⁹⁷ The Hybrid Warfare theme played a vital role in these fears, in which it has been assumed that Russia, as in the Crimean annexation and the subsequent war in the Donbas, will continue to use its military in combination with non-military means, such as information operations, cyber operations, and propaganda, to undermine NATO and its members.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, Russia again had patrol flights conducted in 2015 by nuclear bombers moving along the borders of NATO members' airspace.⁴⁹⁹ Furthermore, Russia made great efforts to expand and modernize

⁴⁹² Kendall-Taylor and Edmonds, "The Evolution of the Russian Threat to NATO," 56.

⁴⁹³ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 108.

⁴⁹⁴ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 12.

⁴⁹⁵ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 4.

⁴⁹⁶ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 13.

⁴⁹⁷ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 32.

⁴⁹⁸ Kendall-Taylor and Edmonds, "The Evolution of the Russian Threat to NATO," 59; Brauß and Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, 6.

⁴⁹⁹ Jacek Durkalec, "NATO Nuclear Adaptation at the Warsaw Summit," in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London, New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 42, <https://www.routledge.com/NATO-and-Collective-Defence-in-the-21st-Century-An-Assessment-of-the-Warsaw/Friis/p/book/9780415786294>.

its fleet in the Black Sea.⁵⁰⁰ Overall, Russia was considered to have escalation dominance over NATO due to its steady preparations and activities on the eastern borders of the NATO member states.⁵⁰¹

Russia's threat perception toward NATO was also evident in Russia's 2014 military doctrine, which identified the Alliance expansion and military Alliance interventions as the main threat.⁵⁰² Furthermore, from Russia's perspective, the National Security Strategy also assessed the deployment of NATO military infrastructure to Russia's borders as a national security threat.⁵⁰³ In this sense, the installation of NATO missile defense systems near the Russian border was also mentioned. Russia perceived developing a missile defense system within NATO as a step that would change the strategic balance in Europe to Russia's disadvantage.⁵⁰⁴ In addition, Russia underpinned its defensive readiness in the doctrine of nuclear weapons, which would be used if Russia felt its existence threatened by aggression with conventional weapons.⁵⁰⁵ Likewise, the 2015 National Security Strategy adopted this threat perception.⁵⁰⁶

This NATO-focused strategic realignment was reflected in numerous threats by Russia to NATO that its enlargement policy would cause a further redefinition of Russia's foreign and security policy toward the Alliance. For example, when NATO invited Montenegro to join the Alliance in 2015, Pezard and Rhoades stated that the Kremlin threatened that its admission would have consequences for Russia, forcing it to redefine its relationship to NATO. According to Pezard and Rhoades, Russia also repeatedly

⁵⁰⁰ Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, "NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust," 67.

⁵⁰¹ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 16; Lanoszka and Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, xii.

⁵⁰² Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 108.

⁵⁰³ Wilhelmsen and Godzimirski, "NATO and Russia Spiral of Distrust," 67.

⁵⁰⁴ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 42; Pezard and Rhoades, *What Provokes Putin's Russia?*, 4.

⁵⁰⁵ Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 58.

⁵⁰⁶ Tsygankov, "The Sources of Russia's Fear of NATO," 108.

threatened Sweden and Finland in subsequent years if either country considered NATO membership.⁵⁰⁷

The Allies, in turn, did not share the same view of Russia as a threat for a long time but changed it as a result of the events in Ukraine. Between the end of the Cold War and Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014, NATO focused predominantly on creating a collective security space in Europe and countering violent instabilities. After the Cold War, the Alliance was initially preoccupied with expansion and conflict management in the Balkans and then focused on counterterrorism, mainly in Afghanistan.⁵⁰⁸ Despite tensions between NATO and Russia over the Russia–Georgia War in 2008, the Alliance underscored its commitment to cooperation with Russia in its 2010 Strategic Concept.⁵⁰⁹ However, at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, it became clear that the Allies perceived Russia as a threat again after the events in Ukraine.⁵¹⁰ For example, the NATO Response Force (NRF) was expanded, and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) was created as part of the NRF.⁵¹¹

In this respect, Russia's militarized foreign and security policy in the post-Soviet space reinforced the Allies' view of securing NATO's eastern member states with military capabilities and building a deterrence posture on its eastern flank. To be sure, the Allies debated the extent to which deterrence against Russia was necessary. The Baltic states and Poland, in particular, urged NATO to do more in terms of deterrence and defense, while Germany, for example, advocated a balance between deterrence and détente.⁵¹² Nevertheless, the Allies stated at the NATO Wales summit that Russian aggression against Ukraine had fundamentally changed the security architecture of Europe.⁵¹³ Zapfe and

⁵⁰⁷ Pezard and Rhoades, *What Provokes Putin's Russia?*, 3–4.

⁵⁰⁸ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 278.

⁵⁰⁹ North Atlantic Council, *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (2010)*, par. 33.

⁵¹⁰ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 308.

⁵¹¹ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 17.

⁵¹² Allers, “Modern Deterrence?,” 26.

⁵¹³ North Atlantic Council, “Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014,” NATO, last modified September 5, 2014, par. 1, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

Vanaga stated that the Allies feared that Russia might take further aggressive actions against member states of the Alliance.⁵¹⁴ Both authors gave reasons for this, such as the coincidence of former Soviet and NATO territory in the Baltics, the Russian minorities living in these countries, and their geographic location, which makes defense difficult. According to these authors, these circumstances increase the likelihood that Russia will consider military intervention, similar to its actions in Georgia and Ukraine.

At the following NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, the Alliance again noted that Russia posed an increasing threat and was using its armed forces to achieve political goals, thus endangering the security of the Euro–Atlantic area.⁵¹⁵ In this respect, the Alliance noted that Russia was broadly violating the principles and commitments in the NATO–Russia relationship, such as the 1997 Basic Document of the Euro–Atlantic Partnership Council, the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act, and the 2002 Rome Declaration.⁵¹⁶ Furthermore, the Allies criticized Russia for illegally annexing Crimea, violating international borders, and breaking international law.⁵¹⁷ Moreover, NATO Allies declared behavior in supporting the war in Eastern Ukraine. In addition, Russian military activity on NATO’s borders and in the Black Sea increased, countering the Vienna Document. Other activities, such as violations of Alliance airspace and aggressive nuclear rhetoric, were causing concern among the Allies. While NATO was still open to cooperation and dialogue with Russia at the Wales Summit, the cooperation part fell away in Warsaw.⁵¹⁸ The Alliance declared that due to Russia, NATO would adapt its deterrence and defense posture because the previously existing relationship could be restored for the time being if Russia continued its policy of aggression.⁵¹⁹ Against this backdrop, the

⁵¹⁴ Zapfe and Vanaga, “NATO’s Conventional Deterrence Posture,” 39.

⁵¹⁵ North Atlantic Council, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué of July 9, 2016,” NATO, last modified July 9, 2016, par. 5, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

⁵¹⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 9.

⁵¹⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 10.

⁵¹⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 15.

⁵¹⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 11.

enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) was created, with additional multinational NATO forces temporarily stationed in the Baltics on a rotating basis.⁵²⁰

NATO's stance toward Russia intensified in nuances again at the 2018 Brussels summit, at which Moscow accused the Alliance not only of destabilizing actions in Eastern Europe but beyond that in other parts of Europe.⁵²¹ In addition, the Alliance deployed additional NATO troops under the Alliance Readiness Initiative.⁵²² At the following NATO summit in Brussels in 2021, the Alliance continued to express concerns about Russia's military activities on the eastern borders of NATO territory. Specifically, it addressed the diversification of Russia's nuclear arsenal in this case.⁵²³ In this respect, NATO noted that Russia had built up capabilities through short-range and intermediate-range missiles that could threaten NATO member states.

Fix and Keil pointed out that the relationship between NATO and Russia in the conflict over Ukraine acquired an escalation potential in connection with Russia's 2020 Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence.⁵²⁴ According to Fix and Keil, the document declares that Russia keeps nuclear weapons for defensive and deterrence purposes. However, the policy also allows for a threat to use nuclear weapons to de-escalate a conflict. Consequently, this policy encouraged fears in the West that Russia may use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, for example. These fears were nourished when Russia violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty by deploying missiles in its western military district in 2018 capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear warheads.⁵²⁵ As a result, the Allies accused Russia of violating the INF Treaty, ultimately

⁵²⁰ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 18.

⁵²¹ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Declaration of July 11, 2018," NATO, last modified July 11, 2018, par. 6, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

⁵²² North Atlantic Council, par. 14.

⁵²³ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Communiqué of June 14, 2021," NATO, last modified June 14, 2021, par. 13, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm.

⁵²⁴ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 3.

⁵²⁵ Brauß and Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, 21.

leading the U.S. to withdraw from the treaty.⁵²⁶ These weapons could target major European cities, as well as critical civilian and military infrastructure, NATO bases necessary for conducting operations, and key locations for supporting endangered Allies.⁵²⁷

NATO's measures to deter Russia were, in turn, used by Moscow to underpin its foreign and security policy. On the Russian side, NATO activities on the Russian border and in the Black Sea were viewed critically and used as an argument to justify Russia's increasing military activities.⁵²⁸ In this context, the Russian military leadership also spoke of a "Strategy of Active Defense" meant to destabilize NATO members, mainly through incessant military provocations and threats.⁵²⁹

President Putin published an article on Russia–Ukraine relations in 2021 in which he accused the United States and NATO of pursuing a hegemonic expansionist policy. He further accused NATO of taking covert external control over Ukraine and increasingly installing military infrastructure there.⁵³⁰ As a result, in mid-2021, the Kremlin decided to abandon the policy of maintaining a low-intensity conflict in Ukraine to prevent further NATO rapprochement and, from then on, to pursue a policy of subjugating Ukraine.⁵³¹ This political change was expressed primarily in massing troops on the Ukrainian border, with about 190,000 Russian troops constituting about 120 battalion tactical groups.⁵³² In addition, Moscow announced that in the event of an unspecified escalation in the Donbas, Russia would protect its citizens in that region.⁵³³ Russia's confident military posture can

⁵²⁶ "NATO and the INF Treaty," NATO, last modified August 2, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_166100.htm.

⁵²⁷ Brauß and Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, 21.

⁵²⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 207.

⁵²⁹ Brauß and Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, 6.

⁵³⁰ Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

⁵³¹ Adam Stulberg and Dennis Murphy, *Deciphering Russia's Playbook: Lessons from the Lead-Up to Putin's War in Ukraine*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, No. 811 (Washington, D.C.: PONARS Eurasia, 2022), 2.

⁵³² Freedman, "Why War Fails," 10.

⁵³³ Stulberg and Murphy, *Deciphering Russia's Playbook*, 6.

be explained by other factors that led the government to take high political risks, such as its successes in Crimea or Syria, Russia's large financial reserves, NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Western disputes about NATO funding between the U.S. and Europe under Donald Trump's U.S. presidency.⁵³⁴

In addition to the troop surge, a subsequent diplomatic initiative showed that Russia would not allow any further loss of influence or rapprochement of Ukraine with the West, defining a red line. At the end of 2021, Moscow demanded that the United States and NATO provide Russia with a security guarantee and refrain from future expansion.⁵³⁵ Furthermore, the Russian government demanded that NATO's military presence be restored to its 1997 status and that military cooperation with neighboring states in the east be discontinued. Furthermore, Moscow expected Ukraine to approach the separatists in the east of the country within the framework of the Minsk II Agreement and to grant them political autonomy. These drastic demands demonstrated that the leadership in Russia felt massively threatened by the West.⁵³⁶ As a result of these tensions between Russia and the West, Moscow continued its troop presence on the border with Ukraine at the turn of the year, prompting worldwide speculation that Russia was preparing to invade the country.⁵³⁷

On the day Russia invaded Ukraine, President Putin accused NATO of moving ever closer to Russia.⁵³⁸ Putin explained that attempts to negotiate Europe's security had failed while NATO was moving more and more military infrastructure eastward. He commented that Russia could not allow external forces to create an anti-Russian sentiment on its borders. He went on to say that the last attempt at mediation with the Alliance failed at the end of 2021. Therefore, in his opinion, it was no longer acceptable to allow NATO to continue entrenching itself in Ukraine.

⁵³⁴ Freedman, "Why War Fails," 18.

⁵³⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 210; Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 6.

⁵³⁶ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 210.

⁵³⁷ Tsygankov, 211.

⁵³⁸ President of Russia, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 21, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

4. Intermediate Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Russia–Georgia War in 2008, the first severe cracks in NATO’s relationship with Russia were noticeable, but with the latest events in Ukraine in 2014, the Alliance increasingly perceived Russia as an adversary and a military threat.⁵³⁹ Since 2014, a concrete threat perception has developed against Russia within NATO, which increasingly has showed a preparedness to use military means to protect its member states. In this regard, the Allies have also feared Russian influence on member states, up to and including military aggression, which is why NATO expanded its deterrence and defense posture vis-à-vis Russia. NATO’s countermeasures, in turn, reinforced Russia’s threat perception toward NATO, which had already been increasingly evident for a decade and, at the latest with the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, gave rise to a militarized Russian foreign and security policy that was primarily NATO-oriented. To this extent, Russian threat perceptions toward NATO have developed as a result of a variety of actions taken by the West, such as NATO enlargement and thus moving closer to Russia’s borders; a resulting military-strategic imbalance; NATO cooperation programs with countries in the post-Soviet space, leading to the loss of Russia’s influence; and the consequent increase in Western influence threatening Russia’s political system.⁵⁴⁰ The overall result of the differing views between NATO and Russia on international relations was that each side saw its interests threatened by the actions of the other, setting in motion a spiral of conflict that eventually led to the war in Ukraine and has been the low point of NATO–Russia relations ever since.

C. ADJUSTMENTS IN NATO’S DETERRENCE POSTURE

NATO’s adjustments in its deterrence posture in the 2010s were primarily driven by Russia’s policy of aggression toward Ukraine and derived less from NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept. Before Russia annexed Crimea and war broke out in the Donbas, Yost noted that the European Allies were primarily concerned with the United States’

⁵³⁹ Richard Sokolsky, *The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 2.

⁵⁴⁰ Sokolsky, 1; Pezard and Rhoades, *What Provokes Putin’s Russia?*, 3.

announcement that it intended to focus on Asia in the future. However, after the United States announced in 2012 that it would increasingly shift its strategic focus to Asia and intended to reduce its troop contingents in Europe, Yost stated that debates arose within NATO about the extent to which the remaining member states could still perform the territorial deterrence and defense task in addition to international crisis management, given low defense budgets.⁵⁴¹

In this respect, the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review published a reassessment of its overall deterrence and defense posture. According to NATO's 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, the Alliance noted that while an attack on member states is assessed as unlikely, at the same time the risk of a conventional threat from NATO cannot be ignored.⁵⁴² The goal here was to strengthen cohesion within the Alliance and enhance the credibility of its deterrence measures.⁵⁴³ However, at this time, NATO saw predominantly security challenges caused by globalization, regional instabilities, failed states, non-state actors, transnational terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the most significant threats.⁵⁴⁴ In this respect, the Alliance continued to find itself caught between ambitions for territorial defense and a focus on global and regional instabilities.

According to the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, NATO continued to view its members' nuclear capabilities as a core component of its deterrence and defense strategy, alongside conventional forces and missile defense.⁵⁴⁵ In this context, the Allies reaffirmed that they remain a nuclear Alliance but also indicated that they will continue to work toward global nuclear disarmament. With respect to conventional forces, NATO initially continued to rely on both forces capable of collective defense and those deployable

⁵⁴¹ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 88.

⁵⁴² "Deterrence and Defence Posture Review," NATO, last modified May 20, 2012, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm.

⁵⁴³ NATO, par. 3.

⁵⁴⁴ NATO, par. 4.

⁵⁴⁵ NATO, par. 8.

at a strategic distance, according to NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept.⁵⁴⁶ The member states agreed that the financial resources of these forces were of particular importance to meet NATO's requirements regarding a broad range of security threats. According to the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, the Alliance's forces would undergo comprehensive reform in the future to meet changing threats. "This package will continue the important work on transformation and reform of Alliance structures and procedures that are already underway, as part of an effective and financially responsible approach to the development of capabilities."⁵⁴⁷

Furthermore, according to the review, missile defense gained increasing importance in deterrence and defense as ballistic missile proliferation increased worldwide.⁵⁴⁸ As a result, "NATO's ballistic missile defence capacity will be an important addition to the Alliance's capabilities for deterrence and defence."⁵⁴⁹ In this respect, NATO declared that components of the Alliance's missile defense had achieved an interim operational readiness.⁵⁵⁰ However, the Allies' goal should remain to install a fully deployable interoperable missile defense system for the territorial security of member states. In doing so, NATO stressed that these missile defense plans could not be directed against Russia or undermine Russia's strategic deterrent.

NATO missile defence is not oriented against Russia nor does it have the capability to undermine Russia's strategic deterrent. The Alliance, in a spirit of reciprocity, maximum transparency and mutual confidence, will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia and, in accordance with NATO's policy of engagement with third states on ballistic missile defence, engage with other relevant states, to be decided on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁶ NATO, par. 14.

⁵⁴⁷ NATO, par. 16.

⁵⁴⁸ NATO, par. 18.

⁵⁴⁹ NATO, par. 18.

⁵⁵⁰ NATO, par. 19.

⁵⁵¹ NATO, par. 21.

In the context of NATO's 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, the Allies likewise assessed arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation.⁵⁵² In 2011, NATO Allies stated that they still felt bound by certain CFE Treaty obligations.⁵⁵³ At the NATO summit in Chicago in 2012, the Alliance declared that NATO members would again fully comply with the treaty if Russia returned to the treaty regime.⁵⁵⁴ According to the review, successes in the above-mentioned areas could lead to greater security and stability in the Atlantic–European area. Nuclear disarmament was another goal that was to be achieved in cooperation with Russia. However, in terms of arms control and disarmament, experts from the new Eastern European NATO members called for the Alliance to concentrate on collective defense rather than disarmament in the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review.⁵⁵⁵ This priority can be seen as an indicator that the approach should be outdated very soon. In this regard, the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review analysis showed that NATO did not perceive Russia as a threat then but was still predominantly focused on balancing its deterrence and defense posture in the context of low defense spending, according to its 2010 Strategic Concept.

However, at the NATO Wales Summit in 2014, NATO's deterrence and defense posture at its eastern flank notably came to the forefront of discussion within the Alliance.⁵⁵⁶ As a result of events in Ukraine in 2014, the Allies discussed possible aggression by Russia against NATO member states, such as the Baltic states and Poland.⁵⁵⁷ Deterrence concepts returned to the forefront of security debates within NATO.⁵⁵⁸ In this context, Zapfe and Vanaga stated that the Allies feared either a fait

⁵⁵² NATO, par. 22.

⁵⁵³ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 325.

⁵⁵⁴ North Atlantic Council, "Chicago Summit Declaration of May 20, 2012," NATO, last modified May 20, 2012, par. 63, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87593.htm.

⁵⁵⁵ Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 314.

⁵⁵⁶ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 17.

⁵⁵⁷ Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 39.

⁵⁵⁸ Rostoks, "The (Un)Expected Return of Deterrence to Europe," 3.

accomplish or a subversion strategy used by Russia to undermine the sovereignty of these countries.⁵⁵⁹

Therefore, NATO assured the collective defense of primarily the eastern member states at its summit in Wales in 2014.⁵⁶⁰ After the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in Donbas, the Alliance responded initially with “assurance measures” that emphasized air defense and surveillance, deployment of maritime forces, and conducting military exercises.⁵⁶¹ The discussion at the summit centered on reassuring NATO’s eastern members and ensuring increased collective defense readiness in the context of the deterrence and defense posture.⁵⁶² As a result of the events in Ukraine, NATO was seeking increased military activity on a rotational basis on its eastern borders under the agreed NATO Readiness Action Plan to reaffirm the Alliance’s assurance of collective security.⁵⁶³ In this context, the Allies decided to establish the VJTF as part of their NRF to be ready for deployment within a few days. While the size of the NRF before the Wales Summit was about 13,000 personnel, it was decided to increase this to 40,000, including three brigades.⁵⁶⁴

The VJTF was to consist of appropriate air, sea, and land units and be tasked with deterrence and defense missions for member states on the periphery of the NATO area.⁵⁶⁵ The VJTF was composed of a multinational brigade of 5,000 troops on a rotating basis, the location of which was determined by the lead nation.⁵⁶⁶ Furthermore, NATO Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast was to grow up in Szczecin to be able to lead the VJTF.⁵⁶⁷ Additionally, the Alliance strengthened the Baltic Air Policing Mission and focused the

⁵⁵⁹ Zapfe and Vanaga, “NATO’s Conventional Deterrence Posture,” 39.

⁵⁶⁰ North Atlantic Council, “Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014,” par. 3.

⁵⁶¹ Vershbow and Breedlove, “Permanent Deterrence and the U.S. Military Presence in Europe,” 29.

⁵⁶² Allers, “Modern Deterrence?,” 25.

⁵⁶³ North Atlantic Council, “Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014,” par. 5.

⁵⁶⁴ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 17.

⁵⁶⁵ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 20.

⁵⁶⁶ Deni, “Force Posture after NATO’s Return to Europe,” 30.

⁵⁶⁷ Petersson, *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order*, 20.

NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) on Poland, Romania, and the Black Sea.⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, it was decided within NATO to increase multinational exercise activities regarding collective defense.⁵⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Allies planned to build a NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia. In addition, the Framework Nation Concept was established within NATO to improve cooperation among Allies in the development of forces and capabilities and to allow smaller nations to lean on larger nations.⁵⁷⁰

Likewise, the United States established the U.S. European Reassurance Initiative in 2014, renamed the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) in 2017, aiming to increase the presence of U.S. forces in Europe and enhance cooperation with NATO Allies.⁵⁷¹ These forces are exclusively U.S. forces in the size of four brigades deployed on a rotational basis, primarily to Poland and the Baltic States, to enhance allied capabilities and readiness.⁵⁷²

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas also brought the issue of nuclear deterrence back to the fore from the sidelines.⁵⁷³ What NATO lacked, however, was a nuclear strategy guided by geographic benchmarks, such as the Baltics or western Russia, as a potential flashpoint for conflict.⁵⁷⁴ At the NATO summit in Warsaw, the Alliance made slight adjustments to its nuclear strategy, but these hardly deviated from the 2010 Strategic Concept:

The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. Nuclear weapons are unique. Any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote. If the fundamental security

⁵⁶⁸ Petersson, 20.

⁵⁶⁹ North Atlantic Council, "Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014," par. 8.

⁵⁷⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 67.

⁵⁷¹ Tania Lațici, *European Deterrence Initiative: The Transatlantic Security Guarantee*, Briefing (Brussels: EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018), 1.

⁵⁷² Lațici, 2.

⁵⁷³ Jeffrey H. Michaels, "Nuclear Strategy," in *Military Strategy in the 21st Century: The Challenge for NATO*, ed. Janne Haaland Matlary and Robert Johnson (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), 200.

⁵⁷⁴ Michaels, 202.

of any of its members were to be threatened however, NATO has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that an adversary could hope to achieve.⁵⁷⁵

With this additional statement, which is not included in the 2010 Strategic Concept, NATO implied that the use of nuclear weapons would be conceivable as soon as there is an existential threat to one of its members.⁵⁷⁶ This adjustment did not represent a fundamental change, but it did testify to a change in threat perception within the Alliance.

The adjustments to NATO's defense and deterrence posture were also accompanied by academic debates, most of which focused on the fact that NATO's European forces were in poor condition and significantly inferior to Russian forces on the eastern flank. In this regard, NATO's readiness to defend against an attack by Russia was criticized as insufficient. According to Wijk, several studies had concluded that Russia could take the Baltic States in a short time.⁵⁷⁷ He further stated that another study found that of the European NATO members, only Germany, France, and the United Kingdom could field significant battle groups, and their readiness was questionable. According to Frederick, after the events in Ukraine in 2014, a military imbalance still existed between NATO and Russia in Europe.⁵⁷⁸ While NATO had about 3.4 million active military personnel in 2015, the Russian military comprised about 800,000 military personnel. However, this ratio changed when considering only NATO's eastern flank, including the Baltic states and Poland, where about 126,000 personnel were stationed.⁵⁷⁹ Russia had about 400,000 forces in its Western Military District, nearly half its personnel, and about 80,000 near the Baltic States alone.⁵⁸⁰ A similar picture emerged in the area of military capabilities, where

⁵⁷⁵ North Atlantic Council, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué of July 9, 2016," par. 54.

⁵⁷⁶ Durkalec, "NATO Nuclear Adaptation at the Warsaw Summit," 44.

⁵⁷⁷ de Wijk, "The Role of Deterrence in a New European Strategic Environment," 10–11.

⁵⁷⁸ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 6–7.

⁵⁷⁹ Frederick et al., 7.

⁵⁸⁰ Day, *Reinforcing NATO's Deterrence in the East*, 3.

NATO as a whole outperformed Russia, but with regard to Europe's eastern flank, there was an imbalance in favor of Russia.⁵⁸¹

Against this background, it was critically summarized that NATO faced a complex challenge to build up a credible deterrence and defense posture. In military terms, Veebel noted that light national formations on the NATO side faced heavy formations on the Russian side during this period.⁵⁸² According to Veebel, furthermore, the geographic conditions of the Baltic region also made it challenging to track follow-on forces and their logistics. In addition, some critics held that NATO did not have sufficient transport infrastructure and was not prepared for a transnational deployment of troops across national borders in Europe.⁵⁸³

Following developments in Ukraine in 2014, there was also a discussion within NATO about Russia's subversion strategy in Eastern Europe.⁵⁸⁴ Magula, Rouland and Zwack explained that so-called hybrid warfare consists of conventional and unconventional methods using both military and civilian means below the threshold of an armed conflict to create unrest, insecurity, and chaos among the enemy. The two Russian military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, whose aim was to prevent the West or NATO from further integrating or incorporating these states, were also considered against this background.⁵⁸⁵ In this respect, the authors noted that it was feared that Russia would continue to use hybrid methods below the threshold of armed conflict to undermine NATO's concept of deterrence.⁵⁸⁶ However, the authors concluded that even if these methods undermined military deterrence concepts, a strong and credible military presence

⁵⁸¹ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 13.

⁵⁸² Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," 237.

⁵⁸³ Day, *Reinforcing NATO's Deterrence in the East*, 10; de Wijk, "The Role of Deterrence in a New European Strategic Environment," 11; Vershbow and Breedlove, "Permanent Deterrence and the U.S. Military Presence in Europe," 34.

⁵⁸⁴ Justin Magula, Michael Rouland, and Peter Zwack, "NATO and Russia: Defense and Deterrence in a Time of Conflict," *Defence Studies* 22, no. 3 (July 3, 2022): 502, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2022.2082957>.

⁵⁸⁵ Magula, Rouland, and Zwack, 503.

⁵⁸⁶ Magula, Rouland, and Zwack, 503–4.

on the borders with Russia could lead to successful deterrence.⁵⁸⁷ To this extent, the debates within NATO and the academic community centered on the extent to which one can credibly strengthen the deterrence and defense posture against Russia.

The Allies' threat perception toward Russia became more concrete at the follow-up NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016. As a result, NATO once again put the discussion of an appropriate deterrence and defense concept against Russia on the Alliance's agenda.⁵⁸⁸ In this respect, the Allies condemned Russia's military buildup on its borders with the Alliance, viewing it as a security threat.⁵⁸⁹ Consequently, NATO fleshed out the measures adopted at the previous Wales Summit under the Readiness Action Plan.⁵⁹⁰ According to the Summit Communiqué, these measures included the enlargement of the NRF and the declared readiness of the VJTF. Furthermore, eight multinational NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) were established on the territories of the eastern member states to ensure joint training and coordinate follow-on forces in the event of a conflict. In addition, it was decided to plan additional forces and conduct more continuous exercises.

The most significant change NATO decided at the Warsaw Summit regarding its deterrence and defense posture in Eastern Europe was the intention to establish an eFP consisting of four battalions deployed on a rotational basis to Poland and the Baltic States. "We have decided to establish an enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to unambiguously demonstrate, as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression."⁵⁹¹ The goal of the eFP was to serve as a "tripwire" in that deployed NATO forces would be involved in combat operations in the event of a Russian attack, which would most likely ensure the invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and thus draw the whole Alliance into the conflict.⁵⁹² With the creation of the eFP, the

⁵⁸⁷ Magula, Rouland, and Zwack, 505.

⁵⁸⁸ Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 43.

⁵⁸⁹ Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War*, 55.

⁵⁹⁰ North Atlantic Council, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué of July 9, 2016," par. 35.

⁵⁹¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 40.

⁵⁹² Day, *Reinforcing NATO's Deterrence in the East*, 5.

Allies began to install increasing numbers of forces in Eastern Europe, metaphorically building a barbed wire to signal that an attack on one member was an attack on all.⁵⁹³

Likewise, the Alliance decided to install a tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in the southeastern part of NATO territory at the Black Sea. To this end, a multinational brigade was established in Romania, and the Joint Enhanced Training Initiative was launched to coordinate joint exercises within NATO.⁵⁹⁴ Further, the concept of framework nations, introduced at the last NATO Summit in Wales, was seen in the Warsaw Summit Declaration as a partial contribution to the joint deterrence and defense posture, where member nations can rely on a framework nation for their specific capabilities to pool and collectively leverage capabilities.⁵⁹⁵

Despite the adjustments in Warsaw, however, subsequent debates on an appropriate concept of deterrence and defense again revolved around the question of how to defend the eastern border of the NATO area in the face of Russian military superiority. The amount of equipment of the Russian army still significantly exceeded that of the European NATO Allies in direct comparison.⁵⁹⁶ In 2016, Sokolsky noted that the number of maneuver battalions on the Russian side corresponded to about 25. On the NATO side, 17 elements were deployed and were to be supplemented by four more battalions in the framework of the Warsaw NATO Summit.⁵⁹⁷ According to Sokolsky, the United States could add two more brigades. However, he further stated that Russia could draw on massive combat support for its battalions in a conflict, thereby achieving overall Russian superiority.

Against this backdrop, doubts about NATO's posture existed within academic debates about the appropriate concept of deterrence and defense. Wargame studies repeatedly concluded after the events in Ukraine in 2014 that NATO had little chance of repelling a potential Russian attack with its respective current force posture, especially in

⁵⁹³ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 7.

⁵⁹⁴ Day, *Reinforcing NATO's Deterrence in the East*, 5.

⁵⁹⁵ Day, 5.

⁵⁹⁶ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 193–94; Johnson, “Military Strategy and Conventional Warfare,” 216.

⁵⁹⁷ Sokolsky, *The New NATO-Russia Military Balance*, 5.

the Baltics.⁵⁹⁸ Due to the Russian military buildup on NATO's eastern border, including the Baltic States and Poland, NATO has been confronted with the 1st Russian Army since 2015.⁵⁹⁹ According to Zapfe and Vanaga, the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which is highly armed with missile capabilities, is also counted. Similarly, the authors saw Russian superiority in A2/AD capabilities and operational readiness with rapid naval and airborne forces. According to a 2016 RAND study, Russian forces on the Baltic border could overrun the three NATO members Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in as little as 60 hours, while in the Kaliningrad enclave, a robust anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) bubble could protect such an approach.⁶⁰⁰ Therefore, the "tripwire" concept would damage the credibility of NATO deterrence because front-line forces would be likely to be destroyed in the event of a conflict, and this sacrifice would not have a positive impact on public opinion in NATO member states to oppose Russian aggression.⁶⁰¹ This analysis fueled fears within NATO that Russia could confront the Alliance with a *fait accompli* in the Baltics.⁶⁰² In this respect, the focus should be on a deterrence and defense posture based on deterrence by denial, and meaning a significantly bolstered approach.⁶⁰³

Furthermore, analysts saw the Baltics as difficult to defend due to their geographic proximity to Russia and the Kaliningrad enclave, since in the event of a conflict, everything would be confined to an extremely limited area with complex border lines, such as the Sulwalki Gap, where Kaliningrad, Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland border.⁶⁰⁴ In this context, Russia could significantly disrupt countermeasures through its A2/AD bubble; these weapons would have a range as far as Germany. Several Institute for National and

⁵⁹⁸ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 196.

⁵⁹⁹ Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 38–39.

⁶⁰⁰ David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Research Reports (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 1, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1253>.

⁶⁰¹ Dan Reiter and Paul Poast, "The Truth About Tripwires: Why Small Force Deployments Do Not Deter Aggression," *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 3 (June 2, 2021): 34, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13989>.

⁶⁰² Klein et al., *Baltics Left of Bang*, 1.

⁶⁰³ Reiter and Poast, "The Truth About Tripwires," 35.

⁶⁰⁴ Klein et al., *Baltics Left of Bang*, 3.

Strategic Studies authors pointed out that the Russian A2/AD bubble requires further revision of NATO's concept of deterrence and defense, which would increasingly need to rely on deterrence by denial with elements of punishment rather than solely on deterrence by punishment.⁶⁰⁵ Besides weaknesses in defense, the authors see NATO's strengths, such as the possibility of blockading the Baltic Sea to build up the Alliance own A2/AD bubble, including Kaliningrad. Furthermore, in terms of the defense of the Baltic States, emphasis should be placed on cost-effective systems and on asymmetric tactics to avoid direct engagement with Russian conventional forces.⁶⁰⁶

In addition to this critical examination of the inadequacies of NATO's capabilities to defend its eastern flank, the Alliance has been accused of being too cautious in its adjustments. Zapfe and Vanaga critically suggested that adjusting the defense and deterrence posture does not consider the nuclear component of the Alliance.⁶⁰⁷ The authors argued that, according to the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept, deterrence should consist of a mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities. The authors, therefore, argued that the Alliance had hardly any suitable capabilities to punish Russia in the event of an attack and would consequently be reluctant to do so.

The corresponding focus on conventional deterrence and defense, which was based on a rotating temporal basis with respect to deployed forces, showed further that NATO remained committed to not violating the NATO–Russia Founding Act.⁶⁰⁸ In this regard, NATO was confronted with the political problem of violating the NATO–Russia Founding Act of 1997, in which the Alliance permanently stationed troops in Eastern Europe. According to Ringsmose and Rynning, the Allies, therefore, relied on deterrence by punishment since deterrence by denial would mean a permanent large-scale deployment of NATO troops in Eastern Europe.⁶⁰⁹ In this regard, Deni viewed NATO's deterrence and defense posture in terms of troops and readiness, because of constant contingent changes,

⁶⁰⁵ Klein et al., 5.

⁶⁰⁶ Klein et al., 7–8.

⁶⁰⁷ Zapfe and Vanaga, “NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture,” 43.

⁶⁰⁸ Zapfe and Vanaga, 43.

⁶⁰⁹ Ringsmose and Rynning, “Can NATO's New Very High Readiness Joint Task Force Deter?,” 19.

as insufficient to deter Russia to refrain from a potential attack on eastern NATO members.⁶¹⁰

Although the realities of the Baltics and Russian military superiority at that time raised questions about the extent to which NATO could repel a potential attack, there were equally doubts about the readiness of Russian forces. For example, Kofman asserted that the mobilization and reserve system had been desolate, and insufficient command structures were in place to conduct a military operation to occupy a country.⁶¹¹ Kofman, therefore, suggested that an increased troop presence for deterrence and defense purposes might prompt Russia to build up its capabilities to the point where a conventional attack would be possible. In turn, Mueller, Shlapak, Johnson, and Ochmanek argued that it is precisely a weak deterrence and defense approach that leads an adversary to exploit conditions favorable to him.⁶¹² According to these authors, escalation could, therefore, best be avoided by adopting a robust approach without being too sensitive to the possible reactions of the adversary.

Although Russia built up military superiority on NATO's eastern flank after the events in Ukraine in 2014, and the Baltics, in particular, are difficult to defend, the Russian military faces similar challenges in the event of a conflict, such as from the NATO A2/AD bubble and the exposed location of Kaliningrad.⁶¹³ Likewise, Lanoszka and Hunzeker argued that it was questionable to what extent Russian modernization efforts would enable the Russian military to supply its troops over a longer distance and for a longer period of time.⁶¹⁴ However, according to both authors, in the event of a conflict, it could be assumed

⁶¹⁰ Deni, "Force Posture after NATO's Return to Europe," 33.

⁶¹¹ Michael Kofman, "Fixing NATO Deterrence in the East, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love NATO's Crushing Defeat by Russia," *War on the Rocks* (blog), May 12, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/fixing-nato-deterrence-in-the-east-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-natos-crushing-defeat-by-russia/>.

⁶¹² Karl Mueller et al., "In Defense of a Wargame: Bolstering Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," *War on the Rocks* (blog), June 14, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/06/in-defense-of-a-wargame-bolstering-deterrence-on-natos-eastern-flank/>.

⁶¹³ Lanoszka and Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, xii.

⁶¹⁴ Lanoszka and Hunzeker, xii; Brauß and Rácz, *Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region*, 9.

that the territorial integrity of the Baltics and Poland would not be entirely defensible. For this reason, it is appropriate to credibly adjust NATO's deterrence and defense posture so that Russia cannot launch a surprise attack or a *fait accompli*.⁶¹⁵ Nevertheless, the deterrence and defense posture should not be designed on worst-case scenarios not to waste resources but adapt to the situation efficiently. At this point, the authors feared that an inflationary increase in capabilities could lead to an unnecessary provocation of Russia.⁶¹⁶ On the contrary, Veebel argued that there were also concerns that the initially weak approach might contribute to escalation with Russia rather than deterrence.⁶¹⁷

The debate within NATO at the Brussels summit in 2018 shifted primarily to follow-on forces. Whereas in previous years, the focus had been on eFP and the VJTF as the second wave, the focus increasingly turned to the third wave, the bulk of NATO forces.⁶¹⁸ At its summit in Brussels, NATO reaffirmed that its deterrence and defense posture should be strengthened in all domains.⁶¹⁹ In this context, the Allies decided the following: "From within the overall pool of forces, Allies will offer an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium manoeuvre battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days' readiness or less. They will be organised and trained as elements of larger combat formations, in support of NATO's overall deterrence and defence posture."⁶²⁰ To provide these additional capabilities, Vershbow and Breedlove noted that improved command and control structures are planned, as well as improved infrastructure to ensure rapid readiness, like the Joint Force Command (JFC) in Norfolk, USA, or the Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) in Germany.⁶²¹ According to Vershbow and Breedlove, the goal of this further capability deployment was to continue to close the time gap that had been identified within NATO forces.

⁶¹⁵ Lanoszka and Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, xiv.

⁶¹⁶ Lanoszka and Hunzeker, 127.

⁶¹⁷ Veebel, "NATO Options and Dilemmas for Deterring Russia in the Baltic States," 238; de Wijk, "The Role of Deterrence in a New European Strategic Environment," 11.

⁶¹⁸ Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 46.

⁶¹⁹ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Declaration of July 11, 2018," par. 5.

⁶²⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 14.

⁶²¹ Vershbow and Breedlove, "Permanent Deterrence and the U.S. Military Presence in Europe," 30.

The provision of sufficient forces for NATO generated another debate about the European allies' insufficient defense spending. The issue of defense spending increasingly accompanied the discussion on NATO's deterrence and defense posture, which centered on the fact that NATO's European members spend too little on their defense and have insufficient capabilities to provide deterrence. Problems were recognized that member states would have to give only insufficient troops, which in turn generated a critical look at NATO countries' defense spending.⁶²² Compared to NATO's major European powers, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, Russia admittedly spent only slightly more than each of these three countries over the past two decades, while the United States spent about seven times as much on defense.⁶²³ Nevertheless, the issue moved to the forefront of political agendas within NATO.

Already at the Wales Summit in 2014, it was agreed to reverse the trend of declining member states' defense budgets to ensure that member states can provide adequate forces for collective defense within NATO.⁶²⁴ In this respect, the goal is for member states to spend at least 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense. Likewise, the Allies want to spend over 20% of their defense budgets on new equipment, research, and development to meet NATO standards. The decision was already bearing fruit at the NATO follow-up summit. At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO stated that the majority of Allies had increased their defense spending since the Wales Summit.⁶²⁵ At the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, the Allies again noted that all member states have begun to increase their defense spending.⁶²⁶ At the 2021 NATO Summit, the Alliance stated that ten of the NATO countries would spend 2% of their GDP on defense, and three-quarters of NATO countries would do so by 2024.⁶²⁷ In addition, the Alliance holds that 24 of the Allies spend

⁶²² Zapfe and Vanaga, "NATO's Conventional Deterrence Posture," 46–47.

⁶²³ Stoner, *Russia Resurrected*, 193.

⁶²⁴ North Atlantic Council, "Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014," par. 25.

⁶²⁵ North Atlantic Council, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué of July 9, 2016," par. 34.

⁶²⁶ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Declaration of July 11, 2018," par. 31.

⁶²⁷ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Communiqué of June 14, 2021," par. 35.

20% on equipment and research projects. Overall, it could be seen that NATO members are well on their way to achieving the self-imposed goals of higher defense spending.

Another area that NATO considered part of its deterrence and defense approach was the alliance's open-door policy. However, NATO's open-door policy did not experience the momentum in the 2010s that it did at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, despite Russia's continuous criticism of NATO enlargement, the Alliance held on to expanding the security space, believing that this was how security and stability were generated.⁶²⁸ As a result, NATO only admitted two small countries, Northern Macedonia in 2017 and Montenegro in 2020.⁶²⁹ This policy remained the same in 2020.⁶³⁰ In addition, the Allies believed that other long-time candidate states could eventually be admitted to NATO, such as Bosnia–Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine.⁶³¹

To sum it up, NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept hardly reflected the adjustments in NATO's deterrence and defense policies in the 2010s because the strategic situation had changed significantly in Europe with the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, caused by a militaristic and revisionist Russian foreign and security policy. Initially, NATO's 2012 defense posture review was still driven by the 2010 Strategic Concept's two-pronged approach between territorial deterrence and defense and international crisis management. This showed that NATO did not perceive Russia as a significant threat before the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas.

However, following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas, NATO significantly strengthened its deterrence and defense posture over the ensuing years.⁶³² With the adjustments, the Alliance showed the will to accept the situation and no longer see Russia as a strategic partner.⁶³³ Moreover, through strengthening the

⁶²⁸ North Atlantic Council, "Wales Summit Declaration of September 5, 2014," par. 92.

⁶²⁹ "Member Countries," NATO, last modified April 5, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm.

⁶³⁰ North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Communiqué of June 14, 2021," par. 66.

⁶³¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 67–69.

⁶³² Rynning, "Deterrence Rediscovered," 37.

⁶³³ Allers, "Modern Deterrence?," 30.

NRF, creating the VJTF, and deploying the eFP, NATO had taken steps to increasingly push its deterrence and defense posture from deterrence by punishment to deterrence by denial.⁶³⁴ With the deterrence and defense measures taken due to Russia's heightened threat perception due to events in Ukraine since 2014, NATO also strengthened the credibility of its deterrence and defense posture against Russia by building military capabilities on its eastern flank.⁶³⁵

However, the adjustment of NATO's deterrence and defense posture concerning the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas did not turn out to be dramatic.⁶³⁶ According to Rynning, despite these adjustments, a wide variety of experts concluded that NATO was not doing enough to prevent possible aggression by Russia. To that extent, he argued that NATO had built an insufficient deterrence by denial but an impressive capacity for deterrence by punishment.

Furthermore, Rynning argued that NATO held off on a broader deterrence and defense approach to Russia because the Alliance was still driving a global security approach before the Ukraine invasion and was heavily involved in Afghanistan, for example.⁶³⁷ According to Rynning, this theater-wide approach was also reflected in the 2019 military strategy, in which a compromise was reached between Alliance members who did not focus on Russia and those who pushed for an increased focus on Russia. Allers stated that this reluctance is also evidenced by the Alliance's continued adherence to tying its concept of deterrence and defense to the NATO–Russia Founding Act, which prohibits the permanent stationing of NATO forces in Eastern Europe.⁶³⁸ Allers further stated that with the adjustments, however, NATO members were willing to share common burdens, including increased defense spending. In this respect, these adjustments were instrumental in strengthening the credibility of NATO's deterrence and defense posture.

⁶³⁴ Rynning, "Deterrence Rediscovered," 38.

⁶³⁵ Frederick et al., *Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements*, 33.

⁶³⁶ Sloan, *Defense of the West*, 293.

⁶³⁷ Rynning, "Deterrence Rediscovered," 40.

⁶³⁸ Allers, "Modern Deterrence?," 30.

Overall, it could be seen that NATO significantly changed its deterrence and defense posture compared to two decades previously. While border deterrence was of little importance in Europe after the Cold War, the growing conflict between NATO and Russia created a concrete threat perception among the Allies towards their eastern neighbor. While Russia was predominantly confronted with a military imbalance vis-à-vis NATO in past decades, this changed significantly in the 2010s and became more pronounced as the focus shifted to NATO's eastern flank. However, it must be noted that NATO did not pursue an overall approach with its deterrence adjustments against Russia but was merely setting geographical priorities, such as the Baltic States and Poland.⁶³⁹ A fully deployed force with a permanent forward presence to deter along NATO's eastern borders, as existed during the Cold War, was not evident. Nonetheless, Russia increasingly became the focus of Alliance policy after 2014, which was very well illustrated by the decisions of the Alliance at its summits regarding deterrence and defense adjustments.

⁶³⁹ Rynning, "Deterrence Rediscovered," 39–40.

V. AFTER THE EXPANSION OF THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR IN FEBRUARY 2022

A. NATO’S 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT

The new NATO 2022 Strategic Concept was released on June 29, 2022, about four months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the document’s preface, NATO stressed that Russia had disrupted the European security order and that it must be considered that Russia would probably further threaten its neighbors, including NATO member states.⁶⁴⁰ In this respect, the Alliance summarized the strategic environment as follows:

The Euro–Atlantic area is not at peace. The Russian Federation has violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies’ sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks define our broader security environment.⁶⁴¹

Based on the finding that NATO members are threatened and that the Alliance’s security environment is shaped by strategic competition, the Allies concluded that Russia should be considered the greatest threat to the Alliance: “The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and peace and stability in the Euro–Atlantic area.”⁶⁴² Furthermore, in the document, the Allies described Russia’s revisionist approach to date: “It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression, and annexation.”⁶⁴³ According to NATO, Russia proceeded as follows to enforce its revisionist approach: “It uses conventional, cyber and hybrid means against us and our partners. Its coercive military posture, rhetoric and proven willingness to use force to pursue its political goals undermine the

⁶⁴⁰ North Atlantic Council, *NATO 2022 – Strategic Concept*, Preface.

⁶⁴¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 6.

⁶⁴² North Atlantic Council, par. 8.

⁶⁴³ North Atlantic Council, par. 8.

rules-based international order.”⁶⁴⁴ Expressions of these measures included, for example, the modernization of Russia’s nuclear weapons and the threat of using them, the destabilization of NATO’s eastern and southern borders, the enhanced Russian ability to disrupt NATO reinforcements, and a general military build-up in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean seas.⁶⁴⁵

Against this backdrop of Russian activity, the Allies stated that they did not want to pose a threat to Russia but would respond to threats from Russia. “NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to the Russian Federation. We will continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a united and responsible way.”⁶⁴⁶ In this context, NATO declared its intention to strengthen its deterrence and defense posture regarding Russia. “We will significantly strengthen deterrence and defence for all Allies, enhance our resilience against Russian coercion and support our partners to counter malign interference and aggression.”⁶⁴⁷ In these circumstances, the Allies stated that NATO could no longer be Russia’s partner.⁶⁴⁸ Still, they wanted to keep all channels of communication open to avoid a possible escalation between NATO and Russia.

From an allied perspective, arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation have also been negatively affected by Russian aggression against Ukraine and by European political instability. “The erosion of the arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation architecture has negatively impacted strategic stability. The Russian Federation’s violations and selective implementation of its arms control obligations and commitments have contributed to the deterioration of the broader security landscape.”⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 8.

⁶⁴⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 8.

⁶⁴⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 9.

⁶⁴⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 9.

⁶⁴⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 9.

⁶⁴⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 18.

With respect to the changing strategic environment, in the document's part entitled Purpose and Principles, NATO described itself as a defensive Alliance, and its greatest responsibility is collective defense, according to Art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁶⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Alliance remains committed to fulfilling its three core tasks: deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.⁶⁵¹ In this context, NATO emphasized the territorial integrity of its member states. "While NATO is a defensive Alliance, no one should doubt our strength and resolve to defend every inch of Allied territory, preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Allies and prevail against any aggressor."⁶⁵²

In terms of deterrence and defense, the Allies declared that they rely on a "mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities."⁶⁵³ These military and non-military means will be employed in the case of a specific threat to give an appropriate response as determined by NATO.⁶⁵⁴ More specifically, NATO declared that its deterrence and defense capabilities could repel any aggression. Consequently, the Alliance intends to maintain a military posture capable of stopping and repulsing an attacking enemy at the very beginning of an assault.

In order to achieve the capability of repelling an attack, NATO promised to adjust its defense and deterrence posture and deploy robust and joint forces capable of all types of warfare supplied by appropriate logistics and infrastructure to reinforce all its member allies, even on short notice: "We will significantly strengthen our deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression. To that end, we will ensure a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea, and in the air, including through strengthened integrated air and missile defence."⁶⁵⁵ To achieve a more robust deterrence and defense posture, NATO planned to accomplish complex

⁶⁵⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 1.

⁶⁵¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 1.

⁶⁵² North Atlantic Council, par. 20.

⁶⁵³ North Atlantic Council, par. 20.

⁶⁵⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 20.

⁶⁵⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 6.

forward defense. The Alliance “will deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces, enhanced command and control arrangements, prepositioned ammunition and equipment and improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice.”⁶⁵⁶ To this end, the Allies aimed to strike a balance between in-place forces and reinforcements to strengthen the Alliance’s deterrence and defense posture in a credible, flexible, tailored, and sustainable manner.⁶⁵⁷

To this extent, NATO sought to ensure its credibility by being ready for all possible eventualities. Against this background, the Alliance continued to enhance the readiness, responsiveness, deployability, integration, and interoperability of the member states’ forces.⁶⁵⁸ Accordingly, the Allies planned to prepare for all types of warfare involving peer competitors. The Alliance “will individually and collectively deliver the full range of forces, capabilities, plans, resources, assets and infrastructure needed for deterrence and defence, including for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors.”⁶⁵⁹ For this purpose, NATO aimed to adapt its command structure, force structure, and defense plans.⁶⁶⁰ The changed deterrence and defense posture required additional military exercises to improve the decision-making process and the Alliance’s effectiveness in responding to a crisis.⁶⁶¹ Generally, NATO planned to improve its overall performance with regard to deterring Russia.

Furthermore, NATO sought to enhance its cyber capabilities regarding defense and interoperability and wanted to increase the resilience of its member states.⁶⁶² According to the commitment in the North Atlantic Treaty to resist armed attack, the

⁶⁵⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 21.

⁶⁵⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 21.

⁶⁵⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 22.

⁶⁵⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 22.

⁶⁶⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 22.

⁶⁶¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 22.

⁶⁶² North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

Alliance pursued greater resilience of its member states.⁶⁶³ In addition, NATO intended to establish non-military deterrence to address the coercive use of political, economic, energy, and information measures against its member states.⁶⁶⁴ Thereby, NATO underlined that the so-called hybrid threats, which are to be understood under these measures, could cause the invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁶⁶⁵ The steps above must be interpreted in the same light concerning Russia, widely credited with using hybrid tactics.

NATO's stance on nuclear weapons was primarily designed for deterrence and peacekeeping, not for use in a crisis. "The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion and deter aggression. Nuclear weapons are unique. The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote."⁶⁶⁶ Therefore, the Alliance aimed at maintaining effective deterrence. "The Alliance has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that any adversary could hope to achieve."⁶⁶⁷

While U.S. nuclear weapons served as the supreme guarantee of NATO's security, the weapons of the United Kingdom and France were under the sovereign control of these states to complicate adversary assessments of the decision-making process within the Alliance and disturb hostile calculations in terms of deterrence credibility.⁶⁶⁸ NATO's nuclear posture in Europe was described as follows: "NATO's nuclear deterrence posture also relies on the United States' nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe and the contributions of Allies concerned. National

⁶⁶³ North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

⁶⁶⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 26.

⁶⁶⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 27.

⁶⁶⁶ North Atlantic Council, par. 28.

⁶⁶⁷ North Atlantic Council, par. 28.

⁶⁶⁸ North Atlantic Council, par. 29.

contributions of dual-capable aircraft to NATO's nuclear deterrence mission remain central to this effort.”⁶⁶⁹

With respect to nuclear weapons, NATO fundamentally aimed to ensure deterrence credibility through integration and coherence regarding nuclear capabilities within the Alliance. “NATO will take all necessary steps to ensure the credibility, effectiveness, safety, and security of the nuclear deterrent mission. The Alliance is committed to ensuring greater integration and coherence of capabilities and activities across all domains and the spectrum of conflict while reaffirming the unique and distinct role of nuclear deterrence.”⁶⁷⁰

In the last paragraph of NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the Alliance underlined its commitment to global peace and stability.⁶⁷¹ The Allies emphasized that they “will continue to reinforce our political unity and solidarity and to broaden and deepen our consultations to address all matters that affect our security.”⁶⁷² Further, the Alliance promised to muster the will to adjust efforts for an adapted deterrence and defense posture in a new strategic environment. The Allies “will share equitably responsibilities and risks for our defence and security.”⁶⁷³ Furthermore, they “will provide all the necessary resources, infrastructure, capabilities and forces to deliver fully on our core tasks and implement our decisions.”⁶⁷⁴ Finally, NATO had the will to back up with economic resources the necessary capabilities for an adapted and strengthened deterrence and defense posture.⁶⁷⁵

In NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the Allies noted a fundamental shift in the Alliance's strategic environment, driven primarily by an aggressive and revisionist

⁶⁶⁹ North Atlantic Council, par. 29.

⁶⁷⁰ North Atlantic Council, par. 30.

⁶⁷¹ North Atlantic Council, par. 47.

⁶⁷² North Atlantic Council, par. 47.

⁶⁷³ North Atlantic Council, par. 48.

⁶⁷⁴ North Atlantic Council, par. 48.

⁶⁷⁵ North Atlantic Council, par. 48.

Russian foreign policy. Russia's attack on Ukraine led to a heightened threat perception within NATO concerning Russia, whose behavior severely fractured the international order in Europe. In contrast with the Alliance's previous Strategic Concepts, NATO in 2022 assessed Russia as a threat. Through this reassessment, the Allies decided to adjust the deterrence and defense posture to respond to this new threat. Regarding the conventional war in Ukraine, fears of further escalation have manifested themselves, which is why NATO's goal is to defend the territory of its member states effectively. In contrast to past NATO Strategic Concepts, in 2022, the Allies chose to shift to an as-yet-undefined forward defense to be supported by strong reinforcement forces. This should establish a credible deterrence and defense posture vis-à-vis Russia, for which NATO intends to provide adequate financial resources.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF NATO–RUSSIA RELATIONS

1. The Invasion of Ukraine

Immediately before the invasion of Ukraine, President Putin attempted to legitimize the attack by citing Russia's great power status and its past, as well as national security interests threatened by NATO and perceived right-wing nationalist tendencies in Ukraine. In a speech, Putin addressed the Russian Federation and declared that Ukraine was an inalienable part of Russian history and was created by Russia.⁶⁷⁶ According to Putin, Russia therefore has the right to intervene in Ukraine if it is in its security interests. He went on to say that he saw a danger to Russia from the rise of radical right-wing forces in the country and thus felt compelled to intervene. Furthermore, he related this to the increasing influence of the United States and NATO, including the stationing of military infrastructure in Ukraine, which he saw as a threat to Russia. In this regard, Putin accused NATO of not having kept promises as early as the 1990s not to pursue political military expansion. Although Russia has always expressed willingness to cooperate with the West, in Putin's view, this expansion has always been directed against Russia.

⁶⁷⁶ President of Russia, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation."

Putin's rationale for invading Ukraine once again underscored the Russian worldview in which great powers with spheres of influence determine international politics. Putin's remarks demonstrated a vision in which Russia dominates a Russian-led Eurasian order in which Russia enjoys certain prerogatives because of its history. Foreign powers are expected to avoid interference, particularly in matters related to Russian security interests.⁶⁷⁷ His speech made it clear that as soon as Russia's security interests were vitally violated in his view, Russia assumed the right to justify military intervention.

However, it became equally clear that by invading Ukraine, Russia was prepared to go beyond the goal of being a great power with spheres of influence and pursue imperial intentions. Hill and Stent noted that Russia was not merely seeking a sphere of influence but rather wanted complete control over it.⁶⁷⁸ With the invasion of Ukraine, Russia denied the country the right to be a nation and pursued the goal of reannexing territories of the former Russian Empire.⁶⁷⁹

Then, on February 24, Russian troops advanced into Ukraine on various axes from Belarus and Russia. One more time, Moscow justified its "special military operation" for protection against NATO and because of the growing influence of alleged Nazis in the Ukrainian elite and government.⁶⁸⁰ Initially, Russian troops attempted to seize the largest border metropolises, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson. Furthermore, Oliker noted that at the beginning of the invasion, Putin warned external powers that intervening in the event would have unforeseen consequences not seen before in history.⁶⁸¹ In this context, Putin raised the alert level of Russian nuclear forces.

⁶⁷⁷ Trine Flockhart and Elena A. Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine: Putin and the Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2022): 472, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2091591>.

⁶⁷⁸ Hill and Stent, "The World Putin Wants," 109.

⁶⁷⁹ Wolfgang Richter, *NATO-Russia Tensions: Putin Orders Invasion of Ukraine. With the European Security Order in Shambles, Further Escalation Must Be Prevented*, SWP Comment 16 (Berlin: SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit), 2022), 8.

⁶⁸⁰ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 211.

⁶⁸¹ Olga Oliker, "Putin's Nuclear Bluff," *Foreign Affairs*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/putins-nuclear-bluff>.

According to Oliker, this threat was directed primarily at the West in the hope that NATO would not initiate countermeasures. In this regard, Russia's militarized foreign and security policy to contain the West culminated in a full-scale war in Ukraine.⁶⁸²

Despite Russia's militarized foreign and security policy in recent years and the buildup of troops in the run-up to the invasion, there were doubts about Russia's intentions in the West. Bort noted that just before Russia invaded Ukraine, not many experts and analysts believed President Putin would give the order to attack.⁶⁸³ Instead, Bort contended, there had been an insistence that Putin would use hybrid warfare, similar to the annexation of Crimea, but not full-scale warfare. In addition, Bort argued that Putin has always been considered risk-averse and has tended to surprise the West with Russia's unpredictable actions. In his view, it was likely that Putin was counting on a quick success in occupying Ukraine with the attack to prevent a coordinated backlash from the West and to create a *fait accompli*.

While Russia was not confronted with military retaliation to NATO's establishment of Ukraine's sovereignty, Russia faced a united response from Allies within NATO and far-reaching agreed-upon measures within the Alliance. All European and Atlantic NATO allies uniformly condemned the attack, demanded that Russia withdraw, and imposed strengthened economic sanctions against the aggressor.⁶⁸⁴ As a result of the invasion of Ukraine, NATO declared Russia the greatest and most immediate threat to the Alliance under the 2022 Strategic Concept, in which it was stated that an attack on a member state could no longer be ruled out as unlikely.⁶⁸⁵ Russia thus

⁶⁸² Hill and Stent, "The World Putin Wants," 112.

⁶⁸³ Christopher Bort, "Putin the Gambler," *Foreign Affairs*, March 10, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/putin-gambler>.

⁶⁸⁴ Jan van Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities* (Washington, D.C.: CSBA (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments), 2022), 43, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8312_\(Deterrence_Defense_Baltic\)_web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8312_(Deterrence_Defense_Baltic)_web.pdf).

⁶⁸⁵ Claudia Major and Göran Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid: Norderweiterung, neues Strategisches Konzept und militärische Neuaufstellung*. [NATO after the Madrid Summit: Northern Enlargement, New Strategic Concept and Military Realignment.], SWP-Aktuell 49 (Berlin: SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit), 2022), 2.

moved to the top of NATO's threat perception.⁶⁸⁶ While Russia saw its position of power in Europe threatened by Ukraine's further rapprochement with the West, the Allies rejected any change in the European security architecture (to include NATO) and continued to invoke the independence of sovereign states and their freedom of Alliance.⁶⁸⁷ Furthermore, Russia's invasion of Ukraine stoked fears among NATO's Eastern European members that they would be attacked next. This has prompted NATO to deploy more troops in these countries.⁶⁸⁸ In this regard, NATO responded to Russia's attack on Ukraine with a major restructuring of NATO forces and adjusted the deterrence and defense posture in the Baltic and the Black Sea region.⁶⁸⁹

Nevertheless, NATO mainly remained on the defensive in the conflict over Ukraine while member states deliberated and decided on measures to support Ukraine outside the Alliance to keep the Alliance from becoming further embroiled in the conflict. Carson pointed out that the West reacted with restraint to Russian aggression to avoid involving NATO as a military alliance in a war with Russia that could escalate to the use of nuclear weapon.⁶⁹⁰ Nevertheless, shortly after the attack began, the Allies discussed a possible no-fly zone over Ukraine to prevent Russia from advancing its forces further, but this was rejected because of the risk of escalation.⁶⁹¹ Russia, in turn, warned NATO not to intervene in the war with troops, which would otherwise have serious consequences.⁶⁹² At this point, it became clear how far the political relationship between NATO and Russia had turned into antagonism.

⁶⁸⁶ Tardy, "Six Takeaways From NATO's New Strategic Concept," 8.

⁶⁸⁷ Richter, *NATO-Russia Tensions*, 4.

⁶⁸⁸ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 7.

⁶⁸⁹ "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance," NATO, last modified December 21, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm.

⁶⁹⁰ Austin Carson, "The Paradoxes of Escalation in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/paradoxes-escalation-ukraine>.

⁶⁹¹ Nigel Walker, *Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 – Present)*, Research Briefing, CBP 9476 (London: House of Commons Library, 2023), 45, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>.

⁶⁹² Walker, 54.

Despite these political tensions, the Allies did not refrain from passively supporting Ukraine in the fight against Russia by providing military equipment. However, according to Carson, the Allies' bilateral support was initially done cautiously but became more evident as the war progressed.⁶⁹³ He went on to say that Russia, too, had so far not allowed itself to be provoked into taking violent action against Allied arms deliveries, even though it had threatened to do so. In this respect, Carson argued that NATO, as part of the West, is more on the sidelines, while, however, the Alliance members, by supporting Ukraine, put themselves in a confrontation with Russia.

The Russian leadership had probably not expected such a firm response from the West and had hoped, above all, that it could use its energy supplies to many European states as leverage to prevent unified action by the West. Likewise, Putin probably did not expect a united response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, hoping that the economic sanctions and ban on Russian energy imports imposed by the West would lead to changes in government in the European states that would then be more sympathetic to Russia.⁶⁹⁴ However, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Allies quickly became independent of Russian energy supplies and imposed comprehensive economic sanctions on the country.⁶⁹⁵

The war in Ukraine also directly impacted northern Europe through the decisions by Sweden and Finland to join NATO, thus extending the Alliance's collective defense space to more of Russia's border. While Russia's militarized foreign and security policy sought to prevent NATO from expanding the Alliance's collective security space, its recent aggression against Ukraine had led Finland to join NATO and Sweden to do the same.⁶⁹⁶ Both countries concluded that Russian aggression in northern Europe could no

⁶⁹³ Carson, "The Paradoxes of Escalation in Ukraine."

⁶⁹⁴ Hill and Stent, "The World Putin Wants," 117–18.

⁶⁹⁵ David Miliband, "The World Beyond Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2023, 37, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/world-beyond-ukraine-russia-west>; Hill and Stent, "The World Putin Wants," 110.

⁶⁹⁶ Nicholas Lokker et al., *How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat: A Report of the Transatlantic Forum on Russia* (Washington, D.C.: CNAS Transatlantic Forum on Russia, 2023), 1, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/how-finnish-and-swedish-nato-accession-could-shape-the-future-russian-threat>.

longer be ruled out and that a membership in NATO was, therefore, necessary for collective defense.⁶⁹⁷ In this respect, Russia had achieved precisely the opposite of what it wanted. When Sweden and Finland announced their intention to join NATO simultaneously, Moscow indicated that the move would force Russia to reconsider its military position in northern Europe.⁶⁹⁸ As a result, Russia announced its intention to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus.⁶⁹⁹

As the relationship between NATO and Russia deteriorated during the war, the initial advance of Russian forces in Ukraine stalled and was even reversed. Therefore, Russia had also shifted and probably adjusted downward its goals in Ukraine in terms of conquering territories. In just a matter of weeks, the widely held belief in the indomitable strength of the Russian military was shattered. The objectives of the invasion were not accomplished, as Russian troops were compelled to retreat from the Kyiv area and suffered defeats in numerous other locations.⁷⁰⁰ After Russian forces largely withdrew from northern Ukraine and henceforth concentrated on the front line in the Donbas, President Putin signed a law providing that four occupied regions be annexed.⁷⁰¹ Green and Polyakove concluded that Russia's military performance so far showed that it is unlikely to be able to occupy Ukraine completely.⁷⁰² These experts, therefore, assumed that President Putin's goal was to occupy Ukraine's eastern provinces to declare a domestic victory.

⁶⁹⁷ Robert Pszczel, "NATO Review: The Consequences of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine for International Security – NATO and Beyond," NATO Review, July 7, 2022, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2022/07/07/the-consequences-of-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-for-international-security-nato-and-beyond/index.html>.

⁶⁹⁸ Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia Warns of Nuclear, Hypersonic Deployment If Sweden and Finland Join NATO," *Reuters*, April 14, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-baltic-nuclear-deployment-if-nato-admits-sweden-finland-2022-04-14/>.

⁶⁹⁹ Wojciech Lorenz, *Strengthening Deterrence a Priority for NATO at the Vilnius Summit*, ed. Sławomir Dębski, Łukasz Kulesa, and Wojciech Lorenz, Policy Paper, 1 (212) (Warsaw, Poland: PISM (The Polish Institute of International Affairs), 2023), 2.

⁷⁰⁰ Pszczel, "NATO Review."

⁷⁰¹ Adam Schreck, "Putin Signs Annexation of Ukrainian Regions as Losses Mount," AP NEWS, October 5, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-international-law-donetsk-9fcd11c11936dd700db94ab725f2b7d6>.

⁷⁰² Sam Greene and Alina Polyakova, "Russia Wants a Long War," *Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/russia-wants-long-war>.

Despite these failures on the battlefield, Russia continued to adhere to its great power policy with spheres of influence. In September 2022, Putin signed a decree on the “Concept of Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad,” which is part of Russia’s National Security Strategy.⁷⁰³ Generally, the concept describes a Russian World (Russkiy Mir) that transcends Russia’s borders and must be preserved by Russia. The document does not explicitly define what the Russian world comprises but can be described as a space where Russian culture is lived, and the Russian language is spoken.⁷⁰⁴ This concept fits well into Russia’s worldview as a great power with spheres of influence. Accordingly, Russia can use this doctrine to justify interventions abroad, as it had already done in Georgia and Ukraine.⁷⁰⁵ Therefore, Russia created a political basis to justify future aggression in the Russian world.⁷⁰⁶

Underlining a great power policy with spheres of influence immediately impacted NATO as a collective defense alliance. Thus, Russia had officially included the Baltic states in this Russian world, reserving the right to intervene in these states.⁷⁰⁷ In this respect, Russia’s new decree fundamentally contradicts the sovereignty of the Baltic states and thus stands in tension between Russia’s reservation of the right to intervention and Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty on the collective defense of all NATO member states.

In addition to this confrontational policy toward NATO, President Putin took a step rhetorically in that he saw Russia in an existential war with the West. In this regard, Putin accused NATO during an interview one year after the start of the invasion that due to the constant support of weapons to Ukraine by Western countries, the Alliance was virtually at war. Putin also claimed that the West tried dissolving Russia as a

⁷⁰³ Max Bergmann, Tina Dolbaia, and Nick Fenton, *Russia’s Adaptation Game: Deciphering the Kremlin’s “Humanitarian Policy,”* CSIS Briefs (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies., 2022), 1, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/221214_Bergmann_Russia_AdaptationGame_1.pdf?VersionId=r_Qjlb06qfEXPvUjwTTB4yh1y_Z4DU2h.

⁷⁰⁴ Bergmann, Dolbaia, and Fenton, 4.

⁷⁰⁵ Bergmann, Dolbaia, and Fenton, 4–5.

⁷⁰⁶ Bergmann, Dolbaia, and Fenton, 9.

⁷⁰⁷ Bergmann, Dolbaia, and Fenton, 5–6.

federation.⁷⁰⁸ The Russian president's remarks showed once again the low point in NATO–Russia relations.

2. Interim Conclusion

The war in Ukraine can be described as a turning point that shook the European security architecture and contributed significantly to its transformation, in which the different world views of the Allies and Russia precluded political compromise and led to a tense confrontation. Flockart and Korosteleva describe Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a turning point in international relations, the effects of which are significant but not yet foreseeable.⁷⁰⁹ The authors described a shift from a global rule-based world order to a diverse multi-order world in this context. With its war of aggression, Russia has shown that it rejects the Western European order and relies on a Russian model, a Eurasian order, that already manifested in Russia at the end of the 1990s. According to Flockart and Korosteleva, the intention of Finland and Sweden to join NATO can be seen as an expression of the clashing world views between the West and Russia, the impact of which is not limited to Ukraine.⁷¹⁰

Accordingly, the war in Ukraine represented a culmination point in which two different world views collided, and the associated political tensions are currently almost impossible to resolve due to fundamentally opposing views. Before the invasion of Ukraine, Putin's speech revealed a Russian worldview that emphasized great powers and spheres of influence, a dominant Russian-led Eurasian order, and the right to justify military intervention, even in NATO member states, when Russian security interests were threatened. On the contrary, the Allies remained committed to the existing European security framework, emphasizing the sovereignty and freedom of countries to form alliances as they choose. Therefore, Richter and Pszczel argued that the full-scale war between Ukraine and Russia, in which the West is involved to some degree, has

⁷⁰⁸ Franklin D. Kramer, *NATO Deterrence and Defense: Military Priorities for the Vilnius Summit*, Issue Brief (Atlantic Council, 2023), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/nato-summit-military-priorities/>.

⁷⁰⁹ Flockhart and Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine," 466.

⁷¹⁰ Flockhart and Korosteleva, 467.

largely nullified negotiated solutions and rendered obsolete previous agreements between NATO and Russia, such as the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act.⁷¹¹

Even though the war in Ukraine challenges the European security architecture, the event generated remarkable unity and determination in the Western community to oppose Russia, for example, through sanctions or by providing military support to Ukraine.⁷¹² The ongoing war in Ukraine made it clear, especially to the Eastern European NATO countries, that from now on, their eastern borders really are a front line from which an existential threat from Russia can emanate.⁷¹³ In particular, Russia’s inclusion of the Baltic states in the “Russian World” through the new decree contradicts the sovereignty of these states and creates tension with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Therefore, the Allies responded to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine by deploying more troops in Eastern European member states and restructuring NATO’s deterrence and defense posture in the Baltic and Black Sea regions to maintain the independence and freedom of the Alliance for sovereign states. The accession of Sweden and Finland are also likely to bring adjustments that, taken as a whole, will significantly influence Alliance policy and create a new rift in Europe after the Cold War.

C. ADJUSTMENTS IN NATO’S DETERRENCE POSTURE

NATO’s response to the war in Ukraine marked a turning point in Alliance policy, with the Allies announcing that they would henceforth focus on deterrence and defense against Russia. A month after the invasion of Ukraine began, NATO held a summit in Madrid where it condemned Russia for the attack, expressed solidarity with Ukraine, and adjusted its deterrence and defense posture concerning the Alliance’s eastern flank.⁷¹⁴ NATO assessed the Russian–Ukrainian war as the gravest threat to

⁷¹¹ Richter, *NATO-Russia Tensions*, 8; Pszczel, “NATO Review.”

⁷¹² Flockhart and Korosteleva, “War in Ukraine,” 470; Hill and Stent, “The World Putin Wants,” 116.

⁷¹³ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 43.

⁷¹⁴ North Atlantic Council, “Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government of March 24, 2022,” NATO, last modified March 24, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm.

European security in recent decades.⁷¹⁵ Consequently, the Alliance concretized its main effort on Russia. To this end, NATO adopted a comprehensive realignment marked by three major decisions: adopting the 2022 Strategic Concept, a military repositioning, and announcing Finland and Sweden's admission to the Alliance.⁷¹⁶ NATO's realignment also describes a turning point in its focus away from international crisis management toward collective defense.⁷¹⁷

The expression of the turning point in Alliance policy was, above all, the massive strengthening of its deterrent and defense position in Eastern Europe and further plans in this regard for the future. NATO confirmed its commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, meaning collective defense protection for one or more of its members in case of aggression.⁷¹⁸ In this context, the Alliance increased its military deployment from 10,000 to 40,000 troops at its eastern flank, consequently activating its defense plans. Furthermore, NATO created four additional battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia to ensure an adjusted conventional deterrence for the safety of its members and against Russia.⁷¹⁹ Since October 2022, NATO has deployed eight battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. According to NATO, this will also include increasing battlegroup stockpiles, deploying more capabilities forward, especially air and missile defenses, strengthening command structures, and adjusting defense plans.⁷²⁰

Furthermore, the Alliance declared its intention to adopt a new strategic concept at the NATO summit in Madrid, planned for the end of June 2022. In this light, the Alliance further sought to strengthen its long-term defense and deterrence posture, including a full force spectrum and necessary capabilities to ensure the credibility of

⁷¹⁵ North Atlantic Council.

⁷¹⁶ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 1.

⁷¹⁷ Major and Swistek, 1.

⁷¹⁸ North Atlantic Council, "Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government of March 24, 2022."

⁷¹⁹ North Atlantic Council.

⁷²⁰ NATO, "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance."

being ready to defend NATO territory.⁷²¹ In order to achieve such credibility, NATO announced plans to intensify its exercises in the spirit of collective defense and practice interoperability. In addition, NATO aimed to increase the resilience of the member states' populations and enhance its cyber defense capabilities. This also counted for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. In this respect, the events in Ukraine led to a general rethinking of NATO and its willingness to define an adapted strategic concept.

Shortly after the war began, the Allies initiated measures later recorded in the 2022 Strategic Concept. Russia's invasion of Ukraine led several NATO members including France, Germany, and the United States to deploy additional military personnel and equipment to eastern NATO countries, whether through additional deployments or by strengthening the eFP or new battle groups in Southeastern Europe.⁷²² Several experts saw NATO's approach to reinforcing eFP battalions on the eastern flank as improving its capability to conduct high-intensity combat.⁷²³ In this context, for the first time, NATO deployed parts of the NRF, including the VJTF.

NATO's relationship with Russia after the invasion of Ukraine was expressed in the 2022 Strategic Concept. While NATO, according to the old 2010 Strategic Concept, believed the Euro-Atlantic area to be at peace, in which a conventional attack was considered unlikely, NATO stated in its 2022 Strategic Concept that this could no longer be ruled out regarding Russia.⁷²⁴ In this regard, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept prioritized the deterrence and defense portion while still comprising the Alliance's three core missions.⁷²⁵

⁷²¹ North Atlantic Council, "Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government of March 24, 2022."

⁷²² Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 6.

⁷²³ Franklin D. Kramer and Barry Pavel, *NATO Priorities: Initial Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War*, Issue Brief (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, 2022), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/nato-priorities-initial-lessons-from-the-russia-ukraine-war/>; Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 57–58.

⁷²⁴ Tardy, "Six Takeaways From NATO's New Strategic Concept," 8.

⁷²⁵ Tardy, Introduction, 2.

With its new 2022 Strategic Concept, the Alliance made clear that it would not allow any aggression against any of its members and would resolutely use all means of collective defense to ensure this. NATO's rationale for adjusting its deterrence and defense posture was that a Russian attack on an Alliance member could no longer be ruled out.⁷²⁶ In this regard, the allied resolve is particularly evident in Strategic Concept 2022. "While NATO is a defensive Alliance, no one should doubt our strength and resolve to defend every inch of Allied territory, preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Allies and prevail against any aggressor."⁷²⁷

In order to ensure collective defense in this respect, a New Force Model (NFM) was adopted within NATO. In this regard, NATO announced that it would increase its high readiness forces to over 300,000, meaning seven-fold.⁷²⁸ Major and Swistek noted that NATO adopted the NFM to replace the NRF and VJTF. In the NFM, about 800,000 troops will be organized into three-tier groups.⁷²⁹ According to Major and Swistek, the Tier 1 group consists of 100,000 forces with a very high readiness of ten days, Tier 2 comprises 200,000 forces with high readiness of 10 to 30 days and the Tier 3 group represents the follow-on forces with 500,000 forces. In addition, other revisions will be made within the tier groups, such as replacing the NRF and VJTF with the Allied Reaction Force (ARF), which is expected to number about 40,000 forces.⁷³⁰ Major and Swistek noted, however, that this force generation did not exclusively represent a NATO force but that the bulk of the force is generated from member states' forces. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the cores of the NFM's Tier 1 and 2 forces are composed

⁷²⁶ Tardy, "Six Takeaways From NATO's New Strategic Concept," 9.

⁷²⁷ North Atlantic Council, *NATO 2022 – Strategic Concept*, par. 20.

⁷²⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Madrid Summit Ends with Far-Reaching Decisions to Transform NATO," NATO, last modified June 30, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197574.htm.

⁷²⁹ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 4.

⁷³⁰ Major and Swistek, 4.

primarily of European NATO forces rather than U.S. forces, which means that European nations must create a high level of readiness.⁷³¹

In addition to NATO announcements, the United States planned to provide additional capabilities on a bilateral basis to enhance the defense readiness of its allies in Europe.⁷³² These include building a headquarters in Poland, establishing another brigade on a rotational basis in Romania, reinforcing the Baltic States with further troop deployments, and providing more warships to Spain and fighter aircraft to the United Kingdom, as well as providing additional air defense capabilities in the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy.

The NFM formed one component of the turning point of the new Alliance policy, in which deterrence and defense were given priority. While NATO focused primarily on deterrence through punishment before Russia's attack on Ukraine, Major and Swistek explained that the new NFM is moving toward deterrence through denial.⁷³³ In addition, Major and Swistek explained that eFP forces would be increased to brigade-level multidomain capable formations, requiring increased forward deployment. Another innovation of the NFM was the assignment of forces in specific focus areas so that NATO member forces could better prepare for emergencies, such as by stockpiling ammunition and materiel or familiarizing themselves with the geographic environment in Eastern Europe.⁷³⁴

Although the Alliance initiated far-reaching measures in its deterrence and defense posture due to the war, criticism continued that NATO was still deploying too few forces on its eastern flank. Gotkowska and Tarociński noted that despite the war in Ukraine, NATO members could not agree on a permanent and robust deployment of

⁷³¹ Sven Biscop, *The New Force Model: NATO's European Army?*, Egmont Policy Brief 285 (Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2022), 1, https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/09/Sven-Biscop_PolicyBrief285_vFinal.pdf?type=pdf.

⁷³² Tertrais, "An Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary, Strategic Concept," 26.

⁷³³ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 5.

⁷³⁴ Major and Swistek, 4.

multinational forces in eastern member states.⁷³⁵ Gotkowska and Tarociński noted that the Alliance found a compromise by reinforcing troops already in place and focusing on rapidly deploying follow-on forces in the event of a conflict. In this context, Larsen repeated that in response to NATO's Strategic Concept 2022, military experts continue to criticize the Alliance's approach because the current strength of forces designated for deterrence and defense on NATO's eastern flank will remain insufficient against Russian forces in the region to deter Russia effectively.⁷³⁶ At the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces in the Baltics continued to outnumber NATO forces by about 1:5, which from a military tactical perspective, would still promise Russian success in the event of an attack.⁷³⁷ In this regard, Larsen continued that NATO still relied on follow-on forces rather than forward-deployed forces.

The discussion focused primarily on the assumption that NATO forces would continue to be temporarily deployed in Eastern Europe, undermining credible and effective deterrence and defense. NATO's eastern flank has moved further east and, therefore, requires a relocation of military bases to adequately supply forward deployments and provide follow-on forces with the ability to deploy effectively and quickly in the event of a conflict.⁷³⁸ In this respect, NATO needs to focus on how to deploy the largest possible number of troops to the east in the event of a conflict.⁷³⁹ Nevertheless, Von Tol, Bassler, Elgin, and Hacker suggest that the rotating deployment of troops on NATO's eastern flank should be abandoned in any case and replaced with permanent deployments of combat-ready troops.⁷⁴⁰ With the war in Ukraine having significantly worsened the strategic situation and stability in Eastern Europe, the

⁷³⁵ Justyna Gotkowska and Jacek Tarociński, *NATO after Madrid: How Much Deterrence and Defence on the Eastern Flank?*, OSW Commentary 462 (Warsaw, Poland: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2022), 2–3.

⁷³⁶ Larsen, *NATO's Adaptation to the Russia Threat*, 2.

⁷³⁷ Gilliam and Wie, *Feasible U.S. Steps to Strengthen NATO Deterrence in the Baltics and Poland*, 8.

⁷³⁸ Kochis et al., *The Russian Threat*.

⁷³⁹ Lloyd S. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe & America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁷⁴⁰ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 44.

Atlantic Council stated that it would be necessary for NATO to abandon its concept of deterrence by punishment with rapid follow-on forces as soon as possible and switch to a concept of deterrence by denial with permanent deployments on its eastern flank.⁷⁴¹

NATO would thus have to relearn how to prepare for and fight a full-scale war, for which deterrence through denial should play a decisive role. NATO's realignment requires the rebalancing of European forces away from the light military intervention for international crisis management back to the preparation for high-intensity combat, as has been the case every day in the war since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁴² In addition to the increased size of the armed forces, Kramer recommended that it is also necessary to replenish the essential stockpiles so as to avoid being confronted with bottlenecks in the event of a conflict, which will initially also require a significant increase in defense spending.⁷⁴³ According to Kramer, stockpiles on the eastern flank would at least reduce the pressure of rapid redeployment of follow-on forces. Furthermore, he stated that permanently stationed troops would also reduce the problem of follow-on forces because they can be used to build expertise in host countries on how to hand over follow-on forces. In addition, Kramer noted that this includes the increased development of transport infrastructure for the military deployment of large units. Likewise, Kramer considered that private-sector cooperation with the military in NATO member states must also be used to support the armed forces throughout deterrence and defense as well as in the event of a conflict. To build credible deterrence and defense, NATO must also conduct frequent exercises with the newly formed and established

⁷⁴¹ Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, *Defending Every Inch of NATO Territory: Force Posture Options for Strengthening Deterrence in Europe*, Issue Brief (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, 2022), 2, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/us-and-nato-force-posture-options/>.

⁷⁴² Ian Bond and Luigi Scazzieri, *The EU, NATO and European Security in a Time of War*, Policy Brief (London: Centre for European Reform, 2022), 12, https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/pbrief_IB_LS_nato_5aug22.pdf; Kramer and Pavel, *NATO Priorities*.

⁷⁴³ Kramer and Pavel, *NATO Priorities*.

battle groups to signal through increased interoperability that these formations are also combat-ready.⁷⁴⁴

Deterrence by denial, however, would require NATO to move east with substantially more military infrastructure, thus calling into question the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act. Several analysts’ demands for substantial forward defense combat forces on NATO’s eastern border would mean a denunciation of part of the NATO–Russia agreement, in which NATO agreed to forgo permanently stationed troops in Eastern Europe.⁷⁴⁵ As soon as NATO significantly adjusts its deterrence and defense posture in Eastern Europe, this will cancel old arrangements and treaties with Russia, which in turn may lead to an arms buildup spiral.⁷⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is important to officially abandon the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act to signal to Russia that NATO’s Eastern European countries receive the same security guarantees as all other members.⁷⁴⁷

However, if NATO remains reluctant to station troops in Eastern Europe, this could encourage Russia to further its intervention policy in the “Russian world.” On the contrary, some experts argued that by strengthening NATO’s deterrent and defensive position, Russia will likely be provoked to respond with countermeasures.⁷⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the potential for confrontation is reduced if the armed forces are stationed locally on the border with Russia for deterrence and defense purposes because this has a deterrent effect on the one hand but also promises stability and predictability in the

⁷⁴⁴ Andris Banka and Margit Bussmann, “Uncomfortable Neighbors: NATO, Russia and the Shifting Logic of Military Exercises in the Baltics,” *Defence Studies* 23, no. 1 (2023): 16–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2022.2089657>.

⁷⁴⁵ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 7; Larsen, *NATO’s Adaptation to the Russia Threat*, 2; Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, *Defending Every Inch of NATO Territory*, 2; Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 62.

⁷⁴⁶ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 62.

⁷⁴⁷ Lorenz, *Strengthening Deterrence a Priority for NATO at the Vilnius Summit*, 3.

⁷⁴⁸ Sean Monaghan, Pierre Morcos, and Andrew Lohsen, “Designing New Battlegroups: Advice for NATO Planners,” CSIS, last modified April 15, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/designing-new-battlegroups-advice-nato-planners>; Bryan Frederick, Samuel Charap, and Karl P. Mueller, *Responding to a Limited Russian Attack on NATO During the Ukraine War*, Perspective (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022), 46, <https://doi.org/10.7249/PEA2081-1>.

sense of continuity on the other.⁷⁴⁹ According to a Rand study, what matters most is which capabilities are used for deterrence and defense.⁷⁵⁰ However, the study's authors concluded that capabilities that excessively limit the competitor to be deterred and its military potential can lead to escalation. So, NATO must weigh how much it builds a deterrent and defense against Russia.⁷⁵¹

However, Russia continues to pose the threat that it will seek to undermine NATO members in Eastern Europe below the threshold of open war. Russia can be expected to continue attempting to use hybrid methods to disrupt the stability of NATO's eastern members in the future. Therefore, the Alliance must continue to be prepared to coordinate appropriate countermeasures.⁷⁵² If Russia were to carry out aggression against Eastern European NATO members, it is likely that Russian forces would try not to confront NATO forces but to create facts as quickly as possible in the sense of a fait accompli.⁷⁵³ In this context, NATO needs to determine at what point concrete aggression exists, when measures are initiated against it, and finally, when Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty applies.⁷⁵⁴

Therefore, NATO should seek to improve the resilience of its national societies, which is also mentioned in the 2022 Strategic Concept but not further specified. With Russia's attack on Ukraine against the backdrop of its great power ambition with spheres of influence, Moscow has simultaneously challenged the sovereignty of more former Soviet republics, which are now NATO member states.⁷⁵⁵ According to its 2022 Strategic Concept, therefore, NATO is striving to enhance the resilience of member

⁷⁴⁹ Stephen Watts et al., *Deterrence and Escalation in Competition with Russia: Executive Summary* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022), 8, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RAA720-2>.

⁷⁵⁰ Watts et al., 10.

⁷⁵¹ Watts et al., 10.

⁷⁵² Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 44.

⁷⁵³ Gilliam and Wie, *Feasible U.S. Steps to Strengthen NATO Deterrence in the Baltics and Poland*, 6.

⁷⁵⁴ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 45.

⁷⁵⁵ Tyler Bowen, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and NATO's Crisis of Nuclear Credibility," *War on the Rocks* (blog), April 20, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-natos-crisis-of-nuclear-credibility/>.

states' societies against threats such as democratic erosion, election manipulation, and economic coercion.⁷⁵⁶ Jordan Becker, Douglas Lute, and Simon Smith asserted that this holistic societal approach marked a departure from NATO's traditional focus on military strategy, as it encompasses non-military measures that NATO has limited experience with.⁷⁵⁷ However, NATO's new Strategic Concept does not address how it will tackle this challenge, and the Alliance has yet to take tangible steps to bolster its member states' societal resilience.

NATO's nuclear policy did not undergo any significant change in the Alliance's 2022 Strategic Concept, which was also criticized against the background of the Russian threat. Nevertheless, nuclear weapons have regained importance for the Alliance because of the Russian threat.⁷⁵⁸ In this respect, it should be critically questioned whether it is not necessary to subject a nuclear policy to a critical review because the last time this happened was during the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review.⁷⁵⁹ Tannenwald argued that Russia's nuclear weapons had initially prevented the West from intervening in the war and supplying weapons to Ukraine.⁷⁶⁰ As Russia's nuclear policy contemplates first use, the question must be asked whether, in the event of a conflict with Russia, Russian nuclear weapons would prevent a response of NATO conventional forces for fear of nuclear escalation. Precisely because Russian conventional forces are tied up in Ukraine, Russia will consider nuclear weapons as its deterrent against NATO.⁷⁶¹ Moreover, during the war, Russia had already announced that it intended to station nuclear weapons with its ally Belarus.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁶ North Atlantic Council, *NATO 2022 – Strategic Concept*, par. 6–9.

⁷⁵⁷ Becker, Lute, and Smith, "Don't Let Russia Dominate the Strategic Concept."

⁷⁵⁸ Tertrais, "An Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary, Strategic Concept," 29.

⁷⁵⁹ Keller, "The New Status Quo Concept," 39.

⁷⁶⁰ Nina Tannenwald, "The Bomb in the Background," *Foreign Affairs*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/bomb-background-nuclear-weapons>.

⁷⁶¹ Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, *Defending Every Inch of NATO Territory*, 2.

⁷⁶² Robbie Gramer and Jack Detsch, "All Unquiet on NATO's Eastern Flank," *Foreign Policy* (blog), April 13, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/13/nato-eastern-flank-battle-group-russia-poland-latvia-lithuania-estonia/>.

The importance of developing a clear nuclear strategy to deter Russia from escalating a conflict should be highlighted, how to use such weapons. While NATO declared that its nuclear weapons capabilities serve deterrence and defense purpose, it left out what should happen in the event of conflict escalation against a member state.⁷⁶³ In this regard, Corbett suggested that it is not enough to mention that one possesses nuclear weapons. Instead, he held that developing a strategy to use them is necessary. It is not so much the nuclear balance that matters but the political signal to Russia that crossing the nuclear threshold is not an option.⁷⁶⁴ In this respect, the nuclear strategy regarding deterrence against Russia should be adapted so that in the event of a conflict, Russia fails to dissuade the Allies from taking decisive countermeasures because of the nuclear threat.

But the extent to which Russia poses a threat must be considered against the backdrop of Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine and the resulting weakening for adjusting NATO's deterrence and defense posture. Numerous studies of Russian forces concluded that they would have been superior to NATO forces in numbers and combat power. However, the performance of Russian troops so far in Ukraine suggests that past analyses should be doubted.⁷⁶⁵ Russia's armed forces suffered heavy losses in Ukraine, indicating that they pose a smaller conventional threat to European security than had been imagined.⁷⁶⁶ For example, the war in Ukraine showed that Russia could not enforce air superiority in Ukraine. Both the Russian Aerospace Forces and Airborne Forces had suffered significant losses due to their attempt to seize the capital city of Kyiv.⁷⁶⁷ In the short term, Russia is not expected to undertake aggression against NATO member states, as most of its forces are tied up in Ukraine.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶³ Corbett, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Deficit," 65.

⁷⁶⁴ Bowen, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and NATO's Crisis of Nuclear Credibility."

⁷⁶⁵ Robert Dalsjö, Michael Jonsson, and Johan Norberg, "A Brutal Examination: Russian Military Capability in Light of the Ukraine War," *Survival* 64, no. 3 (May 4, 2022): 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2078044>.

⁷⁶⁶ Kramer, *NATO Deterrence and Defense*.

⁷⁶⁷ Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg, "A Brutal Examination," 19.

⁷⁶⁸ Gramer and Detsch, "All Unquiet on NATO's Eastern Flank."

However, Russia's perceived weakness should not cause the Allies to take their time adjusting their deterrence and defense posture, especially because NATO's armies in Europe are not in good shape. Strengthening the deterrence and defense posture on NATO's eastern flank means significantly contributing personnel and materiel for all member states in increasing forward-deployed NATO forces to brigade strength.⁷⁶⁹ Bergmann and Besch noted that even though the European NATO member's defense spending has increased significantly, the armed forces of these countries are still in a desolate state.⁷⁷⁰ These experts still need to see significant political efforts to initiate a fundamental transformation of the armed forces capable of building an adequate and effective deterrence and defense posture. As a result, they see that the European Allies remain significantly dependent on U.S. capabilities.

The Europeans' dependence on the Americans is critical to the world political stage in the emerging conflict between the United States and China. According to Bond and Scazzieri, the question is to what extent NATO's lead nation, the United States, can commit itself to Europe without neglecting the conflict with China that is on the horizon.⁷⁷¹ In addition, these experts noted that Europeans have a threat perception toward China different from that of the United States. Therefore, they continued, it would be appropriate for European NATO members to invest significantly more in their defense to relieve the United States.⁷⁷²

Therefore, Europe must muster the political will to significantly reduce its dependence on the United States.⁷⁷³ To ensure all the measures mentioned above, the member states of NATO are encouraged to increase their defense spending according to

⁷⁶⁹ Gramer and Detsch.

⁷⁷⁰ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, "Why European Defense Still Depends on America," *Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/why-european-defense-still-depends-america>.

⁷⁷¹ Bond and Scazzieri, *The EU, NATO and European Security in a Time of War*, 5.

⁷⁷² Bond and Scazzieri, 8; Jason W. Davidson, "The End of Strategic Cacophony? The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Future of NATO," *War on the Rocks* (blog), April 14, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/the-end-of-strategic-cacophony-the-russo-ukrainian-war-and-the-future-of-nato/>.

⁷⁷³ Bergmann and Besch, "Why European Defense Still Depends on America."

the Defense Investment Pledge agreed in 2014.⁷⁷⁴ Since 2014, most Allies have begun to increase their defense spending, and the war in Ukraine has reinforced this trend. Several NATO countries have even pledged to exceed NATO's 2% target. Germany stood out by announcing that, in addition to targeting 2% of its GDP for defense spending, it would invest an additional 100 billion Euros in its military.⁷⁷⁵ France will also invest 400 billion Euros over the next five years in new military programming laws.⁷⁷⁶ The trend indicated that European NATO countries are developing a willingness to invest more in their defense, paving the way for a more effective deterrent against Russia.

Allies should realize, however, that decades-long neglect of defense spending cannot be reversed by slowly increasing expenditures. Instead, substantial investments are needed to implement the projects planned in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. Although defense spending by NATO member states has grown steadily in recent years, the policy of low spending before the transition led to a loss of deterrence capabilities that must now be rebuilt at a cost.⁷⁷⁷ Increased readiness and sustainment of NATO forces will first require a significant increase in defense spending, as Germany and France have decided to invest billions of euros in their armed forces in addition to NATO's 2% goal.⁷⁷⁸ European states must likewise ensure that the European defense market adapts to the new realities, which include rapid solutions and an expansion of production.⁷⁷⁹

While NATO set new standards on the issue of conventional deterrence, it remained true to its open-door policy, with the Alliance expanding its collective security

⁷⁷⁴ North Atlantic Council, "Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government of March 24, 2022."

⁷⁷⁵ Dominika Kunertova and Niklas Masuhr, *The War against Ukraine Shapes NATO's Future*, application/pdf, CSS Policy Perspectives, 10(4) (Zürich, Switzerland: Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zürich, 2022), 1, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000550021>.

⁷⁷⁶ Vivienne Machi, "Macron Sends \$438 Billion Military Budget Plan to French Parliament," Defense News, April 4, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/04/04/macron-sends-438-billion-military-budget-plan-to-french-parliament/>.

⁷⁷⁷ Kochis et al., *The Russian Threat*.

⁷⁷⁸ Kramer and Pavel, *NATO Priorities*.

⁷⁷⁹ Bergmann and Besch, "Why European Defense Still Depends on America."

space as part of its deterrence and defense despite tensions with Russia. Due to these political tensions, Sweden and Finland preferred to speak out in favor of NATO membership. Negotiations on the admission of Finland and Sweden to NATO were difficult at first, as Turkey initially expressed reservations due to internal problems concerning the Kurdish minority in the country, which is fundamentally in a conflictual relationship with the Turkish government and supposed support for this minority by activists in Finland and Sweden.⁷⁸⁰ In the case of Finland, these concerns were overcome, and the country joined NATO on April 4, 2023.⁷⁸¹ In the case of Sweden, a decision in this regard is still pending, but the Alliance is assuming that it will be included in the near future.⁷⁸²

The two Scandinavian countries' accession will significantly change NATO's strategic and geographical relationship with Russia. Looking ahead to the future inclusion of Sweden and Finland, NATO must consider the extent to which it builds its deterrence and defense posture in these countries.⁷⁸³ Major and Swistek saw the inclusion of Finland and Sweden as a political and strategic gain, which meant that the Alliance could expand its collective security space and generate more stability.⁷⁸⁴ Both experts argued that this created a coherent defense space, even allowing it to better secure the previously difficult-to-defend Baltic region. In this regard, Sweden and Finland can be used as new deployment areas for NATO in case of conflict with Russia.⁷⁸⁵ However, both experts also noted that the addition of the two countries creates new challenges vis-à-vis deterring Russia, as NATO's eastern flank has grown

⁷⁸⁰ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 3.

⁷⁸¹ "Finland Joins NATO as 31st Ally," NATO, last modified April 4, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_213448.htm.

⁷⁸² "Relations with Sweden," NATO, last modified April 12, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52535.htm.

⁷⁸³ Bond and Scazzieri, *The EU, NATO and European Security in a Time of War*, 4; Larsen, *NATO's Adaptation to the Russia Threat*, 2.

⁷⁸⁴ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Andrea Ratiu, "How Allied Sweden and Finland Can Secure Northern Europe," *Atlantic Council* (blog), January 16, 2023, 12, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/how-allied-sweden-finland-can-secure-northern-europe/>.

about 800 miles longer. In this regard, the experts noted NATO and the two countries have not yet reached an agreement on whether multinational forces should also be stationed on their soil. However, the Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland will likely have fewer problems building an effective deterrence and defense posture based on long experience with NATO.⁷⁸⁶ Moreover, with the addition of Finland and Sweden, NATO gains professional and well-equipped forces with a long history of meeting NATO standards through partnerships and cooperative projects.⁷⁸⁷ Therefore, the admission of Sweden and Finland to NATO will change the center of gravity of the Alliance's east in favor of the Allies.⁷⁸⁸

However, this shift in emphasis will not only impact NATO's deterrence and defense posture but also lead to Russian security and defense policy reactions. With Finland's accession to NATO, the Alliance significantly increased its eastern flank; it can be assumed that Russia, too, will have to take this into account in its defense concept and, due to the strains of the war in Ukraine, will probably resort to threaten to deploy nuclear weapons on its western border.⁷⁸⁹ Moreover, it can be assumed that Russia's admission of the two Scandinavian states to NATO will cause it to reassess its northwestern flank militarily and presumably build up a threat potential in terms of encirclement fears.⁷⁹⁰ Therefore, in the long run, it will also be necessary to adjust NATO's deterrence and defense posture in Scandinavia, in ways similar to the Baltic region.⁷⁹¹

NATO even remains ready to offer Ukraine the prospect of joining the Alliance beyond Sweden and Finland. Zaborowski pointed out that even after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO continues to adhere to its open-door policy for Ukraine,

⁷⁸⁶Kramer and Pavel, *NATO Priorities*.

⁷⁸⁷ Bond and Scazzieri, *The EU, NATO and European Security in a Time of War*, 4; Lokker et al., *How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat*, 2.

⁷⁸⁸ Lokker et al., *How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat*, 2.

⁷⁸⁹ Beebe, *NATO's Tunnel Vision*; Lokker et al., *How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat*, 4.

⁷⁹⁰ Lokker et al., *How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat*, 3.

⁷⁹¹ Lokker et al., 6.

despite Russia citing this same policy as the reason for its aggression.⁷⁹² He went on to say that NATO is thus demonstrating its willingness to engage in conflict with Russia over spheres of influence, but without defining how to achieve this and how to avoid further escalating the conflict with Russia. According to Zaborowski, a continuous expansion of NATO's collective security space would further increase fears of encirclement in Russia. However, if the Allies fail to prevent Russia from annexing the eastern part of Ukraine, this could have severe consequences for the credibility of Western deterrence, opening the door to further aggression and thus also affecting NATO as an Alliance.⁷⁹³ In this respect, a link can be drawn between the credibility of NATO's deterrence and defense and the future of Ukraine.

For this reason, NATO provided steady support since Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016, the Alliance adopted a Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine, designed to enable the country through the Allies to take care of its security and build to NATO standards.⁷⁹⁴ According to NATO, the CAP was strengthened at the NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, including the supply of military equipment. Greene and Polyakova noted that during the war in Ukraine, the Allies provided Kyiv with successive military equipment, starting with simple infantry weapons and moving on to artillery and armored vehicles.⁷⁹⁵ At present, allied military aid to Ukraine is unbroken and should not be abandoned because otherwise, Russia could continue its aggression in Europe in the event of victory in Ukraine, making violent conflict with NATO more likely.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine heralded a new chapter in NATO's post-Cold War policy. While tensions between the Alliance and Russia had already increased in previous years, NATO policy from then on focused on Russia, while international crisis management took a back seat. Despite adhering to NATO's three core missions, the

⁷⁹² Zaborowski, "NATO Strategic Concept in the Shadow of the War," 46.

⁷⁹³ Greene and Polyakova, "Russia Wants a Long War."

⁷⁹⁴ "Relations with Ukraine," NATO, last modified April 4, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm.

⁷⁹⁵ Greene and Polyakova, "Russia Wants a Long War."

Allies decided to focus on deterrence and defense. In this context, the Alliance took far-reaching decisions to strengthen and reorganize its conventional defense in Eastern Europe. This repositioning was reflected in the NFM, which moves NATO's deterrence and defense concept further away from deterrence by punishment toward deterrence by denial. However, with a different emphasis on collective defense, NATO's new realignment will significantly shape Alliance policy in the years ahead.⁷⁹⁶

However, in the debate over the appropriate deterrence and defense posture, experts continued to criticize NATO for not doing enough to deter Russia. The main issue was the concept of forward-presence and follow-on forces, which experts believed was too complex and could not deter Russia from aggression, such as a *fait accompli*. Therefore, they recommended that the Alliance rely on a concept of deterrence by denial to ensure the greatest possible protection of NATO's eastern members. This requires fully equipped forces on the border with the associated bases. To this extent, it will remain a challenge how NATO adjusts its deterrence and defense posture because the 2022 Strategic Concept leaves funding and specific commitments open to member nations. In doing so, experts stated that it is equally necessary for European allies to significantly reduce their dependence to relieve the United States concerning China, thereby strengthening deterrence credibility simultaneously. Due to Russia's war in Ukraine, NATO should use the time to strengthen and credibly adjust its deterrence and defense posture because Russia will continue to be a threat in the future.⁷⁹⁷

Nevertheless, forward deployment would have the consequence of abandoning existing agreements with Russia regarding Europe's security architecture, such as the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act. In this respect, the question arose about what was necessary to deter Russia without unnecessarily provoking it. This involved not only the adjustment of conventional deterrence potential but also the resilience of the societies of NATO member states vis-à-vis Russian undermining efforts and the review of the Alliance's nuclear policy vis-à-vis the Russian threat potential. Nevertheless, Russia's

⁷⁹⁶ Major and Swistek, *Die Nato nach dem Gipfel von Madrid*, 1.

⁷⁹⁷ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 43.

threat potential because of the war would have to be reevaluated entirely after it became clear that Russian forces did not have the combat power that was assumed. In this context, Gilliam and Van Wie noted that Russia consistently relied on a full spectrum of land-based forces when deploying its forces in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014, and 2022. To that extent, Gilliam and Van Wie concluded that Russia's forces pose primarily a conventional land-based threat to NATO, which is why the Alliance should also focus on this.⁷⁹⁸

Finally, NATO remained committed to its decades-long policy of collective defense in Europe. The open-door policy led to Finland's admission and Sweden's prospective admission, significantly expanding the Alliance's collective security space in northern Europe. This expansion is extremely positive for the strategic situation vis-à-vis Russia and can be assessed as a gain for NATO. Nevertheless, expanding the collective security space also implies new responsibilities to protect the North as well as the Baltic and the Black Sea region because Russia will adapt militarily due to the changed strategic circumstances. In light of the war, NATO also did not alter its open-door policy and still reserves the right to consider Kyiv's application to join the Alliance. However, according to Russia, this open-door policy led to war in Ukraine and can thus be understood as an Alliance step to enter a confrontation with Russia, which was always avoided in the years before. The conflict between NATO and Russia is thus currently being played out indirectly in Ukraine. If Russia emerges victorious from the war, it may undermine the credibility of the Allies to provide security in Europe and encourage Russia to undertake further aggression, from which the need for allied support for Ukraine derives.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁸ Gilliam and Wie, *Feasible U.S. Steps to Strengthen NATO Deterrence in the Baltics and Poland*, 5.

⁷⁹⁹ Dmytro Kuleba, "Why NATO Must Admit Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/why-nato-must-admit-ukraine>.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the case of the NATO Allies and Russia, two different views on international relations have led to distinct threat perceptions between the actors in the past three decades. These threat perceptions of each side led the political leadership to take countermeasures to deter the other side and draw red lines. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO continued to act as a collective security Alliance and security provider to counter political instability outside the Alliance area through membership, partnerships, or military intervention. From a Russian viewpoint, while Russia initially intended to participate in this system, Russian political weakness and Western disregard for the Russian view on international relations led to a countermovement toward NATO. This was because, from the Russian point of view, the Alliance pursued an expansionist policy that threatened Russia's interests in the post-Soviet space. This threat perception did not manifest immediately with the first NATO enlargement, but it continued to evolve and become stronger as more states in the post-Soviet space sought NATO membership. In this respect, one can speak of an asynchronous threat perception in which Russia increasingly viewed NATO as a competitor. The Alliance, in turn, sought to win Russia as part of its collective security space.

While a threat perception toward NATO enlargement slowly developed in Russia, Russia had largely moved out of the Alliance's focus. Although NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept took a broad deterrence approach toward the Soviet Union, the Alliance moved away from border deterrence toward rapid reaction forces for crisis management in subsequent years. As a result, NATO's forces became smaller and more focused on flexible response capabilities for deterrence by punishment rather than denial. While NATO's credibility for territorial defense decreased, it did not suffer significant security disadvantages due to a missing competitor. The changed strategic situation in Europe also led to considerations for arms control and disarmament, promoting security thinking within NATO focused on rapid reaction forces and reducing military equipment. Territorial deterrence and defense were thus severely neglected and

formed a basis for the Allies, later being forced to rethink deterrence and defense potential. This included the largely inadequate defense readiness of member states' national armed forces.

In the 2000s, NATO continued integrating Russia into the Western community as part of the fight against terrorism. Still, Russia's ambitions to become a great power led to a one-sided confrontation with NATO. Russia criticized NATO's increasing use of military means, the imbalance of military power in Europe, and the stationing of military infrastructure in Eastern Europe. Russia also saw NATO's expansion and Western-style democratic revolutions in Russia's sphere of influence as a threat to its security and went to war in Georgia to keep NATO from further expanding. This aggressive response from Russia changed how NATO members perceived Russia, which was previously seen as a partner rather than a threat. However, the Alliance remained reluctant to initiate political and military countermeasures, despite Russia's increasingly confrontational attitude toward NATO. Distracted by its involvement in international crisis management, NATO did not want to admit that Russia had begun to try to assert its ambition of becoming a great power with spheres of influence in Eastern Europe by military means.

To this extent, NATO's deterrence and defense posture remained largely unchanged in the 2000s. The 1999 Alliance Strategic Concept focused significantly on the Alliance's transformation to international crisis management, while aspects of territorial deterrence and defense took a back seat. However, discussions in the following decade about adjustments in the deterrence and defense posture always led to conflict with Russia, as in the case of missile defense or the CFE Treaty. In both cases, the issue was that Russia feared that NATO would install additional military infrastructure in Eastern Europe. More significant for Russia, however, was NATO's continuation of the expansion of the collective security space, which the Alliance saw as part of its concept of deterrence and defense. In this respect, NATO during this period focused less on adapting the military arsenals of its member states, which remained tied up in international crisis management, and more on attracting additional members to the security of Europe. However, precisely this approach caused Russia to adjust its military

potential vis-à-vis NATO. Within NATO, the Russian adjustment only slowly came to the attention of the Allies during the Russia–Georgia War but without reacting to it with adjustments of their own.

Following the 2008 Russia–Georgia War, NATO’s relationship with Russia began to deteriorate, and events in Ukraine in 2014 led to NATO perceiving Russia as a military threat. After Georgia, Russia took further action in Ukraine against possible admission to NATO, which led the Allies to give more consideration to Russia as a threat to Alliance security policy besides international crisis management. Accordingly, NATO expanded its deterrence and defense posture against Russia, fearing Russian influence and military aggression toward member states. Russian threat perceptions towards NATO, in turn, developed due to a series of actions taken by the West, including NATO enlargement and cooperation with post-Soviet countries, resulting, from a Russian perspective, in a loss of influence as a great power. Accordingly, NATO’s actions reinforced Russia’s threat perception towards NATO, leading to a militarized Russian foreign and security policy that was primarily NATO-oriented. As a result, the Alliance and Russia saw their interests threatened by each other’s actions, leading to a spiral of conflict. In this respect, the mutual threat perceptions converged and underlined the incompatibility of the two different worldviews of the protagonists.

The 2010 Strategic Concept hardly reflected the deteriorating NATO–Russia relations and was outdated at the latest with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014. However, NATO only adjusted its deterrence and defense posture toward Russia when Moscow changed the strategic situation in Europe through its intervention in Ukraine. Only then NATO no longer saw Russia as a strategic partner and took steps to bolster its deterrence and defense posture. In addition, measures such as strengthening the NRF, creating the VJTF, and deploying the eFP increased the credibility of NATO’s deterrence and defense posture against Russia by building military capabilities on its eastern flank. These adjustments increasingly brought the issue of deterrence and defense back to the forefront of Alliance policy compared to two decades ago. However, this turnaround in the Alliance cannot be judged as complete since NATO’s actions in Eastern Europe merely provided a geographic focus but did

not completely dominate Alliance policy. Therefore, the deterrence and defense posture adjustment was also relatively moderate, although Russia's foreign and security policy focused on NATO. Russia's militarized foreign and security policy then drove NATO to make further adjustments again and again in subsequent years.

Only a full-scale war in Ukraine provoked a fundamental change in NATO's alliance policy. The war in Ukraine was a turning point that led to a tense confrontation between the Allies and Russia, significantly transforming the European security architecture. Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be seen as a shift from a global rule-based world order to a diverse multi-order world. Russia rejected the Western order in Europe and relied on a Russian model, a Eurasian order. In contrast, while Russia is fighting over Ukraine, Sweden and Finland decided to join NATO's collective security space. This change in Europe's security order, triggered by Russia, led the Allies to declare Russia as the main threat and thus also to realign Alliance policy to this threat. The war in Ukraine not only underlined the incompatibility of two world views between the West and Russia but also made clear that these world views cannot coexist at present, as Russia used military means to reshape the security order. On the other hand, NATO nations responded by deploying more troops in Eastern European member states and restructuring its deterrence and defense posture in the Baltic and Black Sea regions to maintain the independence and freedom of the Alliance for its sovereign states.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine marked a significant change in NATO's post-Cold War policy, with the Alliance shifting its focus to Russia and emphasizing deterrence and defense. NATO's decisions to strengthen and reorganize its conventional defense in Eastern Europe, reflected in the 2022 Strategic Concept and the related NFM, marked a move towards deterrence by denial rather than punishment. Moreover, NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept provided a tool for addressing the challenges ahead for the Alliance and the possibility of acting.⁸⁰⁰ This repositioning will significantly shape Alliance policy in the future, with a renewed emphasis on collective defense. In this regard,

⁸⁰⁰ Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog."

NATO's united response demonstrated that it remained capable of acting in the face of Russian aggression in recent years.

The question arose, however, as to whether the chosen approach would be sufficient to deter Russia effectively. Its initial effort did not change much regarding the military balance in Eastern Europe, which raises doubts about its capability to repel a possible Russian attack. Even though the two superpowers competed for spheres of influence in proxy wars during the Cold War, a full-scale war never occurred in Europe. Political tensions resulting from the war and related instabilities have reached levels not seen in Europe since World War II. In this respect, it is debatable whether NATO should continue to adhere to enhanced deterrence by punishment or switch entirely to denial, as it was during the Cold War. In the past, NATO had been slow to perceive Russia as a threat and, in response, slow to adjust its deterrence and defense posture. The current escalation in Europe must allow the question of whether it is not time to move from successive to complete adaptation in the direction of deterrence by denial. However, the goal of NATO must be to create a security architecture in Europe in which further aggression by Russia is not permitted, which would entail altogether abandoning the old security order to generate something new.⁸⁰¹

This does not mean, however, that Russia will be dissuaded in the foreseeable future from trying to impose the Russian model in Eastern Europe. Although Russia has had little success in its partial occupation of Ukraine, Beebe stated that there is little evidence that Russia would accept defeat, which implies that Russia will take high risks to impose its worldview as a great power with spheres of influence.⁸⁰² As NATO enlargement is perceived as the greatest threat among Russia's elites, Beebe concluded that even a successor to Putin is unlikely to make any fundamental policy changes, and the problem will thus remain indefinitely between the West and Russia. The important thing in deterring Russia is convincing the elites in Moscow that the Allies are willing

⁸⁰¹ Hill and Stent, "The World Putin Wants," 122.

⁸⁰² Beebe, *NATO's Tunnel Vision*.

to fight a longer-term conflict or even engage in war with Russia if it seeks to challenge NATO's collective security space.⁸⁰³

Either way, the West will be bracing for a prolonged conflict with Russia, which may also spill over into global competition with China. The conflicts with Russia and China will likely merge into a world conflict, with the West being challenged on every conflict line.⁸⁰⁴ Zaborowski saw this conflict as an emerging axis of authoritarian states such as Russia and China pursuing common interests in their anti-Western stance.⁸⁰⁵ Ashford argued that even if the mindset of a world with spheres of influence, as propagated by Russia, hardly prevailed within the West and in NATO, the collective security space created by the Allies is being challenged by Russia with the war in Ukraine in the sense of great power competition.⁸⁰⁶ She further claimed that even if the West finds it difficult to acknowledge this reality, it will be difficult to ignore the effects of the Ukraine war and future conflicts with Russia. Ashford further assumed that such a struggle for spheres of influence would not be limited to Russia but may also arise, for example, between the U.S. and China regarding Taiwan.

The Allies must realize that they have long since crossed the threshold of a confrontation with Russia regarding different world views and that this conflict will have the greatest security attention in Europe in the coming years. Russia's militarized foreign and security policy, its willingness to accept high risks, and the demand for maximum political objectives have led NATO to return to its core missions of deterrence and defense.⁸⁰⁷ Therefore, adjusting NATO's deterrence and defense posture is not only a military matter but also a political one, in which the Allies must realize that success can only be ensured through cohesion within the Alliance and sustained effort over a

⁸⁰³ Karl P Mueller, "Conventional Deterrence Redux: Avoiding Great Power Conflict in the 21st Century," 2018, 87.

⁸⁰⁴ Sloan, "NATO in an Evolving World Disorder," 21.

⁸⁰⁵ Zaborowski, "NATO Strategic Concept in the Shadow of the War," 42.

⁸⁰⁶ Emma Ashford, "The Persistence of Great-Power Politics," *Foreign Affairs*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/persistence-great-power-politics>.

⁸⁰⁷ Fix and Keil, *NATO and Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine*, 7.

long period.⁸⁰⁸ Adjusting the deterrence and defense posture requires not only the political will on the part of the Allies to provide and maintain the capabilities needed to do so but also an understanding that these measures will lead to antagonism between NATO and Russia that will then be reciprocal and no longer exclusively Russian, as has been the case in recent years.⁸⁰⁹ With the ongoing war in Ukraine, Western support with weapons against Russia, and the buildup of a reinforced deterrent in Eastern Europe, NATO finds itself in a confrontational situation with Russia that goes beyond the level of Cold War tensions.

⁸⁰⁸ Monaghan, *Resetting NATO's Defense and Deterrence*, 8.

⁸⁰⁹ Tol et al., *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region: New Realities*, 62.

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