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ROMÂNIA OCCIDENTALĂ

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AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NATO

75 YEARS OF NATO
ROMANIA, 20 YEARS OF NATO

Forewords ▪ Messages ▪ Interviews
Editorials and reminiscences
Evaluations and case studies
Book review

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President Harry S. Truman, Address on the Occasion of the Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949

The nations represented here have known the tragedy of those two wars. As a result, many of us took part in the founding of the United Nations. Each member of the United Nations is under a solemn obligation to maintain international peace and security. Each is bound to settle international disputes by peaceful means, to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territory or independence of any country, and to support the United Nations in any action it takes to preserve the peace.

That solemn pledge—that abiding obligation—we reaffirm here today.

We rededicate ourselves to that obligation, and propose this North Atlantic Treaty as one of the means to carry it out.

Robert Schuman, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, Remarks at the NAT signing ceremony, Washington DC, April 4, 1949

We are uniting, with the intention of providing a common and reciprocal protection. We want to discourage in advance any aggression, by making it more and more dangerous for the aggressor. Only a potential aggressor could legitimately consider it aimed at him.

The exclusive concern of France is to make impossible any invasion of her own territory or the territory of peace-loving nations.

Dr. Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, May 9, 1955, Paris, on the occasion of his country becoming a member of NATO

The objectives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - in particular its purely defensive tasks - are, in view of the world wide political tension, in full harmony with the natural interests of the German nation which, after a dreadful experience gained in two world wars, is longing as ardently as any other nation in the world for security and peace.



FOREWORD BY H.E. LUMINIȚA ODOBESCU, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ROMANIA AND PRESIDENT OF THE ROMANIAN DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTE



I am truly honored to introduce to our readers this anniversary volume, as it provides us with a unique opportunity for taking stock about Romania's path to and membership in NATO, as well as about the Alliance's role in these turbulent times. I would also like to express the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' gratitude to the esteemed list of authors, whose insightful contributions bear testament to the importance of this celebratory moment when we mark both 20 years since Romania joined the North Atlantic Alliance and the 75th anniversary of NATO.

In 2004, Romania took back its rightful place among Euro-Atlantic democracies after the dark era of communism. In the communist bloc, states did not have the freedom to choose their own foreign policy, and subsequently their own security arrangements. A reality that our NATO membership keeps at bay today, allowing member states to act freely for the security and prosperity of their own people.

As this year we also celebrate NATO itself, it is paramount to remember that the North Atlantic Alliance has never been a purely military construct. The Allies made this clear as early as 1949, when they included in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty the commitment to *safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.*

Born out of the ashes of World War II, NATO remains today as relevant and essential as ever, underpinning the rules-based international order, safeguarding the security and

well-being of its members. It embodies the spirit of partnership and collective defense, offering a safer, more secure future for generations to come. Today, 75 years on, the Alliance is an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, and security, while the Allies form a unique family of shared values. A family that continues to grow. Last year's Finland and, most recently, Sweden's accession to the Alliance have demonstrated that no storm is strong enough to close NATO's door.

Since 2004, Romania has been not only a beneficiary, but also a solid contributor to Euro-Atlantic security. Our country has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with its NATO Allies and partners on a daily basis, for the Alliance's collective defense and for crisis management around the world. Our country has repeatedly demonstrated, over the years, its capabilities and expertise.

Our responsibility to ensure the security of Romanian citizens and to protect the values of the Alliance is underpinned by our determination to act as a reliable Ally and a bastion of the Eastern Flank. The strengthened Allied presence and NATO's reinforced deterrence and defense posture on our national territory underline the importance of our region.

The Black Sea, an area of strategic importance for the Alliance, is the center of gravity of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the instability in the area profoundly affects European and Euro-Atlantic security, as well as the rules-based international order. In this context, Romania continues to respect its commitment to unequivocally support Ukraine in its fight for survival and liberty, therefore also contributing to the defense of vital international law principles such as the sovereignty and territorial integrity. Romania also continues to lend its support to other vulnerable partners such as the Republic of Moldova who aspire to belong to the community of democracy, rule of law, prosperity.

Released from the weight of the Iron Curtain, Romania gradually emerged over the last decades into a trusted and valued NATO partner to ultimately become NATO's anchor of stability on the Eastern Flank. It is under this *shield against aggression and the fear of aggression* (as the Alliance was defined at its inception back in 1949) that Romania is striving to provide security and prosperity for its citizens and to the benefit of the entire Euro-Atlantic area.

Today, Romania is anchored in the Euro-Atlantic community. We are a pro-active Ally, contributing to the debate and decision-making within the Alliance in view of promoting its values and objectives, ensuring that the Alliance remains the most successful politico-military Alliance in history.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I would like to take this occasion to celebrate the diplomats whose professionalism, tireless efforts, dedication and, many times, imagination, made Romania a member of NATO 20 years ago and who continue to keep a pro-active and robust profile of our country in the North Atlantic Alliance.

FOREWORD BY H.E. ANGEL TÎLVĂR, MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE OF ROMANIA



Together with six other Central and Eastern European countries, Romania deposited, 20 years ago, in Washington D.C., the instruments of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty. It was the last step which enabled the fulfillment of the most important national objective after the fall of the communist dictatorship regime in Romania, which catalyzed all the nation's energies for the permanent break with the values of the past, leaving the grey area behind and joining the Euro-Atlantic community of free, democratic and prosperous countries.

This special moment in our country's history is one of reflection and pride for us, but also of great responsibility. The Romanians understood, after breaking away from the darkness of the communist rule, the importance of consolidating the democratic values, freedom, security, and national defense, deciding, with an overwhelming majority, to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Thus, Romania has undertaken the mission of becoming a pillar of stability and security in the Black Sea region, by initiating an unprecedented modernization process of its armed forces.

Now, 20 years after its accession, we fully understand the value of this historic option, given the current security context. In addition to the fact that, as a NATO member, Romania enjoys the most robust security guarantees in its' entire history, the integration into the Euro-Atlantic security space has catalyzed and facilitated the fulfillment of the other national strategic objective pursued by the Romanians – the accession to the European Union.

The two-decade landmark of our official admission to NATO is not only an occasion for celebration, but also one to reiterate our commitment to the Alliance and its fundamental values, which are currently more important than ever.

Romania will remain a dedicated and trustworthy ally within NATO. We are committed to working alongside our allies to strengthen and promote shared values and to ensure a safer and more prosperous future for all our citizens. In an ever-changing world, marked by various threats and complex challenges, the unity and solidarity of allies are more important than ever.



NATO, A PILLAR FOR SECURITY AND DETERRENCE IN EUROPE

**Ana Tinca, Secretary of State for Strategic Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs**



Over the last couple of years, NATO has made quite a few headlines – in 2024 the Organization was in the spotlights on account of its important anniversary and the many celebrations of various allies. But NATO has been a headliner especially in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which has made many reflect more deeply and discuss more passionately about this organization’s role and responsibilities.

On the one hand, some have taken the occasion to point out how NATO’s essential role of deterrence and collective defense has gained, during the war waged by Russia, the same fundamental importance it had at the time of the Alliance’s creation. Romania subscribed to this trend as for us, joining NATO had the political significance of returning to the Euro-Atlantic family and to a community of values to which we rightfully belong; moreover, from a security perspective, it offered our country firm guarantees. The war waged today in our immediate vicinity, against one of the neighboring countries, only confirms the validity of our decision, from both a political and a security point of view

On the other hand, some have tried, with limited success, to steer the discussion in the direction of blaming NATO, accusing the Alliance of contributing to the outbreak of the war against Ukraine through its own policies.

The statement which presents the expansion of the Alliance as the alleged cause of Russian aggression is baseless, as something fundamental is at stake for all of us. One of the primary questions in the matter is whether in the 21st century the principle affirming that States have the right to make their own foreign policy and their own security options is a non-negotiable one. There is only one answer – and this positive answer is clearly relevant, because the expansion of NATO is achieved as a result of a State’s choice of becoming a member. Moreover, the aspirants strive to fulfil all the criteria and oftentimes have to rely on patience for years in a row waiting for a favorable decision from the current members.

Obviously, a state’s decision to join an alliance has a multitude of reasons and each state has its own agenda, but the fact that Sweden and Finland – two states that have been neutral for hundreds of years – decided in 2023 to become members of NATO is a telling development and speaks volumes about the reasons that underlie such decisions.

Switzerland also is analyzing its foreign and security policy in the light of the new security context.

NATO's enlargement is not an aggressive policy; on the contrary, it is precisely the risk of aggression and especially the fear of the Russian threat that contribute to NATO's popularity.

There is a causal relationship between, on the one hand, Russia's aggressive behavior towards its neighbors, the total lack of respect for the rules-based order, for the commitments that Kremlin made and on the other hand, the successive rounds of enlargement of the Alliance. Russia knows these facts and apprehends the political and strategic conditions that led to NATO's enlargement 20-25 years ago. Today Russia claims otherwise and those claims are a forced and hardly credible justification for what Moscow chose to do against Ukraine and against other neighbors.

While celebrating its 20th anniversary as a NATO member, Romania, just like other „more recent“ allies, the Baltic countries or Poland, sees the war against Ukraine tragically revalidating the decision to join the Alliance. This aggression proves every single day that conventional war has returned to Europe, with all its long-term devastating consequences in the region and beyond, despite hopes that after the end of the Second World War this scenario would be long gone.

The intensification of Moscow's aggressive behavior followed a policy of *fait accompli* in its vicinity. Stationing troops without the consent of the host country or occupying the territories of neighboring states, as it happened in the Republic of Moldova or Georgia since the 90s, left these states and its neighbors no other choice than to adopt a vigilant stance and call for NATO itself to remain vigilant in the face of Kremlin's actions.

NATO's Eastern Flank members have been accused by Moscow of not being able to overcome the past and of not looking enough towards the future. Unfortunately, not only history, but also the present threats posed by Russia made it obvious that a scenario like the one underwent against Ukraine could not be ruled out. A forward-looking foreign and security policy and vision would only be an aspiration if the lessons of the past were simply ignored. This is something to keep in mind also when learning our lessons from the current war, while always carefully avoiding wishful thinking to come in the way of clearheaded, facts-based decisions.

NATO, A SPRINGBOARD FOR ROMANIA'S DEVELOPMENT

**Professor Liliana Popescu, Director General of the
Romanian Diplomatic Institute**



The current issue of the “România Occidentală” journal, marking three-quarters of a century since the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and 20 years since Romania joined the allied countries, serves as an opportunity for (self)evaluation, analysis, and historical reflection. At the same time, it invites us to reflect upon the impact the alliance has had on the world and Romania since the end of the Cold War, both militarily and politically.

Military and security aspects are, unquestionably, the most frequently addressed in this context. Romania's integration into NATO meant essential defense reforms, the modernization of its armed forces, and foreign policy harmonization with Western values and standards. The Partnership for Peace, launched in 1994, was a crucial first step in this process, offering Romania the opportunity to closely cooperate with the Alliance and, simultaneously, to prove its ability to contribute to regional security through involvement in international peacekeeping missions, such as those in Bosnia and Kosovo, which enhanced Romania's credibility and paved the way for its official accession to NATO. Throughout the past 20 years, Romania has proven to be an active and dedicated member of the Alliance, contributing to collective security and international peacekeeping missions. Romania's participation in NATO operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Western Balkans, and other regions has reflected our commitment to the shared values and goals of the Alliance. Romanian soldiers, who have served with honor and courage in these theaters of operations, have played an essential role in stabilizing conflict-affected areas.

Romania's contribution to NATO is not limited to participation in international missions. Our country has made outstanding investments in modernizing its defense infrastructure and developing military capabilities to address new security challenges. In addition, Romania has hosted numerous international military exercises and provided logistical and operational support for NATO forces deployed in the region. Moreover, Romania is a key pillar in ensuring the security of the Alliance's eastern flank, an area of major strategic importance, especially after Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022. With regard to the emerging threats in the Black Sea region, Romania has actively

supported the consolidation of NATO's military presence in this area, emphasizing the need for robust defense and credible deterrence.

Over time, NATO has represented more than a security guarantee for Romania. It has also been an anchor for democratic and economic reforms that have profoundly transformed Romanian society. After 1989, Romania had to rethink its own strategy and choose a path that would ensure its democratic development, stability, and prosperity. Therefore, our country established clear-cut foreign policy objectives: integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and accession to the European Union.

The political and economic benefits of Euro-Atlantic integration are less frequently discussed in this context, regrettably. In the limited space of this editorial, I will briefly discuss only a few of them, which I consider fundamental in terms of the positive impact they have had on our country's evolution over the past twenty years.

Firstly, NATO is an alliance of democratic values: freedom, political processes, human rights, and the rule of law. It is, therefore, a community that shares sets of political standards aimed at enhancing democratic resilience and, at the same time, harmonizing the various political systems of the allied states. As a NATO member, Romania had to adopt a series of political, economic, and social reforms that supported the efforts of Romanian citizens to democratize our society and adopt democratic standards shared by the member states, particularly in areas such as justice and combating corruption. Nowadays, our country enjoys institutional stability and predictability, with a strengthened rule of law and increased transparency in governance.

Secondly, all of this has also been reflected in the economic sphere, through increased economic stability and greater confidence among foreign investors in Romania. Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty emphasizes the importance of eliminating conflicts generated by the economic policies of its members, encouraging cooperation between them. For our country, this has meant a significant increase in foreign investment flows following NATO accession. Furthermore, NATO membership has strengthened Romania's integration into the global economy, making our country a strategic point for the transport and distribution of energy resources in the Black Sea region. Initiatives such as the *Vertical Corridor* for natural gas transportation, which connects Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, were made possible thanks to the political and economic support of NATO and European Union allies. Additionally, Romania has become a key partner in regional energy security initiatives, such as the *Three Seas Initiative*.

Thirdly, NATO membership has provided Romania with a significant platform to expand its influence on the international stage. Before the membership, Romania was seen as a peripheral country in Europe, with limited influence in international affairs. After NATO integration, Romania gained a more important role in the security policy of the Alliance and within the European Union, having the opportunity to contribute to essential decisions regarding regional and international security.

Thus, Romania's accession to NATO has brought undeniable political benefits, from the consolidation of democratic institutions and the rule of law to the consolidation of economic stability and investments, as well as the growing prestige and influence abroad. As Romania continues to play an essential role within the Alliance, these benefits will continue to accumulate, strengthening the country's position as a pillar of stability in the Black Sea region and a reliable partner within NATO.

Throughout its history, NATO has evolved and adapted to an ever-shifting international environment. From defending against the Soviet threat during the Cold War to managing regional crises and combating international terrorism, NATO has demonstrated a unique ability to adapt. Nowadays, NATO faces a new range of threats: from hybrid warfare and cyberattacks to the rise of revisionist powers and the instability generated by regional conflicts. In this context, NATO's relevance is indisputable, and our commitment to the Alliance must remain as strong as ever. Romania is ready to contribute to this collective effort, helping to ensure a safe, democratic, and prosperous future for all member nations of the Alliance. This is the legacy we wish to leave to the generations to come.

[President William J. Clinton, Bucharest, July 11, 1997](#)

America knows that Romania's destiny lies in an undivided, democratic, peaceful Europe, where every nation is free, and every free nation is the partner of the United States. To all the people of Romania who love freedom so dearly: I come to Romania because of all you have already done. I come because I know what you still can do. I come because of all that we must do together to achieve your destiny in the family of freedom.

I welcome Romania's deep desire to contribute even more fully to Europe's security and strength. I welcome your desire to join NATO. I want that, too – for Europe, for America and for you. And I say to you today: Stay the course, and Romania will cross that milestone.

To all who nations who embrace democracy and reform and wish to share the responsibilities of membership, I reaffirm from this Plaza of Freedom: The door to NATO is open. It will stay open. And we will help you to walk through it.

NATO has committed to review aspiring members in 1999 – Romania is one of the strongest candidates. And if you stay the course and manifest the love of liberty we all see here today, there can be no stronger candidate. Stay the course. Stay the course. The future is yours.

[President William J. Clinton, To the People of Detroit, October 22, 1999](#)

And in a world that is increasingly interconnected, we have to just sort of take down that artificial wall in our mind that this is completely a foreign policy issue and this is completely a domestic issue, because increasingly they impact one on the other. That is why I think, among other things, we have to resist those who believe that now that the Cold War is over the United States can completely return to focusing on problems within our borders and basically ignore those beyond our borders.

That escapism is not available to us because at the end of the Cold War, America truly is the world's indispensable nation. There are times when only America can make the difference between war and peace, between freedom and repression, between hope and fear. We cannot and should not try to be the world's policeman. But where our interests and values are clearly at stake, and where we can make a difference, we must act and lead.

[President George W. Bush, Remarks at the NATO Accession Ceremony in Washington DC, USA, March 29, 2004](#)

All member nations of NATO must be free and democratic and fully committed to defending the principles of liberty. All member nations must be willing, and able, to contribute to the common defense of our alliance. Our seven new members have built free institutions; they've increased their military capabilities in the span of a decade. They are stronger nations because of that remarkable effort – and the NATO alliance is made stronger by their presence.

Since NATO's founding, the assurance of mutual defense has been a safeguard for peace. As President Truman said, "By this treaty, we are not only seeking to establish freedom from aggression and from the use of force in the North Atlantic community, but we are also actively striving to promote and preserve peace throughout the world."

Under NATO's banner, the nations of Europe put aside rivalries that had divided the continent for centuries. NATO members stood watch on freedom's borders for two generations of the Cold War. Because of NATO's vigilance, free people lifted the Iron Curtain, and tore down the Berlin Wall and replaced dictators with democratic governments.

PRESIDENT EMIL CONSTANTINESCU (1996-2000): “RUSSIA IS BACK AS A REVISIONIST POWER PURSUING A 19TH-CENTURY AGENDA WITH 21ST-CENTURY TACTICS AND METHODS”



Emil Constantinescu was President of Romania between 1996 and 2000.

The Snagov Pact was signed in 1995. What were the main reform options regarding the achievement of the objectives of the Pact when you took office as president (1996)? How was Romania’s westernization envisioned in the 1990s?

The “Snagov Declaration” was necessary for submitting the application for EU membership. It was an agreement reached among all parliamentary political forces and expressed “Romania’s firm commitment on pursuing its development on promoting the principles of a democratic society. These principles include the rule of law, political pluralism, separation of powers, free elections, respect for human rights, including those of national minorities, and the establishment of an efficient and sustainable market economy that aligns with the principles, norms, mechanisms, institutions, and policies of the European Union.

In November 1996, when I took office as president, Romania’s economic situation was very dire. The main state commercial bank, Bancorex, went bankrupt. Private banks, established by former political police members in collaboration with the organized crime element, were actually pyramid schemes. The foreign currency reserves of the National Bank had reached a low point of 520 million dollars, and the foreign debt placed Romania in the situation of being labelled as a “failed state.” Both state industries and those privatized using the voucher method similar to that used in the Russian Federation went bankrupt. Romania was facing an energy crisis. The merchant marine had been mismanaged by its own administrators. Inflation had soared to a rate of 220%. Criminal

activity related to corruption and organized crime had increased significantly, posing serious threats to Romania's public safety and national security.

In the field of human rights, Romania was monitored by the Council of Europe because of its failure to respect the rights of the Hungarian minority, the Roma, the LGBTQIA community, and because of the situation of institutionalized children, which traced its origins back to the communist regime.

After seven years of Iliescu's administration, Romania did not meet the criteria necessary for starting accession negotiations.

The strategy defined by the European Commission for strengthening and enlarging the European Union at the beginning of the 21st century was launched on July 16, 1997. At that time, according to the Commission's Report, Romania was in a relatively acceptable situation regarding two of the accession criteria: the political criterion and the criterion of absorbing the *acquis communautaire*. However, it faced great difficulties in meeting the other two criteria, namely the economic criteria and the public administration criteria.

At the European Council in Luxembourg in December 1997, the German-French tandem opened an almost unexpected perspective for our country. This perspective was different from the tendency of the European Commission and many member states, which envisioned an enlargement of the European Union limited to the Central European states already accepted into NATO, with Romania, Bulgaria, and other Eastern European states having to wait until full convergence. The decision taken in Luxembourg officialised the "regatta" model. This defined the candidate status for the "10+1" European states, which could advance at their own pace and benefit from an overtaking lane. For Romania, this model was beneficial, avoiding discouragement and excessive delays in the accession process. We were aware, as we are today, that without the support of the major European states, led by Germany and France, we would not have had this opportunity. Chancellor Helmut Kohl recognized the exceptional and unpredictable nature of this dual enlargement process, NATO and the European Union, for the countries in the east and the south of the continent. When I met him at a small dinner in Bucharest in 2010, after Romania's integration into the EU, he said that, in his opinion, the European integration of Romania and Bulgaria is "a miracle."

The establishment of a rule of law in Romania materialized only after the arrest of Miron Cozma when the law enforcement forces blocked the coup attempt (the violent miners' revolts – "Mineriade") orchestrated by a criminal group from Valea Jiului led by him¹.

Upholding human rights and national minority rights materialized with the inclusion of the Hungarian minority party (UDMR) in the government, a first in Europe. The Hungarian community would be guaranteed, by law, the most important rights existing

¹ Miron Cozma is a former Romanian trade union leader and political figure, best known for his role in the violent "Mineriade" (Miner Riots) of the 1990s. He led groups of coal miners from the Jiu Valley in a series of protests and interventions that played a significant role in shaping Romania's post-communist political landscape. The "Mineriade" were a series of violent interventions by coal miners, primarily from the Jiu Valley, in Romanian politics during the early 1990s. These events occurred in the context of Romania's transition from communism to democracy after the 1989 revolution. The collapse of Romania's command economy led to widespread poverty, unemployment, and discontent, particularly among miners, who were deeply affected by layoffs and wage cuts. "Mineriadele" played a major role in destabilizing Romania during its early post-communist years and are remembered for their brutality and political consequences.

at the European Union level, including the use of the mother tongue in the justice system and administration and the right to education in Hungarian up to the university level.

The years between 1997 and 2000 were marked by two economic achievements: the external debts were paid off and the foreign reserves of the National Bank of Romania increased by 4.5 times. If at the end of 1996, the foreign reserves of the National Bank of Romania were 0.54 billion dollars, the lowest since the establishment of the National Bank, by the end of 2000, the foreign reserves of the National Bank of Romania had risen to 2.5 billion dollars.

At the Helsinki Summit on December 11, 1997, the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, announced that Romania was one of the six candidate states for EU integration designated to start accession negotiations. A month later, he came to Bucharest together with Günter Verheugen, the Commissioner for Enlargement, with a clear message, which both Prime Minister Mugur Isărescu and I found unacceptable. They said Romania would enter the European Union in 2010, but we insisted it would be 2007.

In December 2000, the Nice European Council reached a minimal agreement regarding the reform of the European Union institutions, in order for it to function with twenty-seven members. It established the number of votes allocated to each member country in the Council of the EU and the number of seats in various European institutions: Parliament, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors, etc. After accession, Romania has come to have 27 MEPs, more than Belgium, a decision obtained once again with the support of France. At that time, the European Council also decided to remove Romania and Bulgaria from the blacklist of countries whose citizens need visas to travel in the Union. The decision became effective in 2001, after fulfilling some technical conditions.

After the parliamentary and presidential elections in November-December 2000, I initiated and endorsed the "Snagov Declaration II" to ensure the continuity of the accession process.

What were the factors that determined you to support Romania's accession to NATO? What were the security dangers/threats Romania faced at the end of the 1990s?

The integration of the former communist dictatorships from Eastern Europe into NATO and the European Union was not imposed by the North Atlantic Alliance but represented the strong desire of these countries to have guarantees that they would not fall back under the control of the USSR and later the Russian Federation.

In this situation, NATO and the EU set firm conditions for the accession process: recognition of the borders established by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, reaffirmed in the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Helsinki in 1975; settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and promotion of good-neighborly relations; commitment to the rule of law and to upholding the human rights and national minorities rights; establishment of civil, democratic control over the armed forces; the guarantee of military interoperability with NATO and implementation of the principles of a free market economy.

At the end of 1996, the image of Central and Eastern Europe was composed of states considered democratic (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Albania), where the communist dictatorships had been replaced by

right-wing political regimes, after a turnover by social-democratic governments coming to power. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, composed of Serbia and Montenegro, was the only state where a communist party with a national-communist doctrine was in power. The status of Croatia, still led by Franjo Tuđman, was marked by its participation in the intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The status of Slovakia was marked by the nationalist tendencies of Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar, which led to its exclusion from the list of candidate states for the first wave of NATO expansion.

At the beginning of my presidential term in November 1996, Romania's integration into NATO and the European Union was explicitly presented as a priority of Romanian foreign policy. This commitment involved a set of actions meant to convince NATO and EU officials, as well as member states, that Romania is a trustworthy partner, a provider of security, and an active promoter of the democratic values upon which the Euro-Atlantic structures are based.

If, before the November 1996 elections, Romania's arguments for NATO focused on elements related to the geostrategic position, the size of the territory and population, and military potential, after November 1996, Romania articulated persuasively its adherence to the value system underlying the Euro-Atlantic community. Against the background of Romanian's vision of foreign policy, integration gained, in addition to the political, economic, or military-strategic dimension, an important politico-ideological component. Admission to NATO and accession to the European Union became crucial for Romania's integration into an institutional system consistent with the values predominantly embraced by Romanian society.

In the spirit of promoting good-neighborly relations, which constitute one of the important criteria for NATO and EU membership, I made regional cooperation a foreign policy priority, initiating new forms of cooperation with neighboring states. Relations with Hungary and Ukraine were normalized based on mutual respect for identities and minorities. In the case of Hungary, a long-term strategic partnership was established, eliminating, through our own initiatives and cooperation actions, a risk for conflict that had persisted for centuries. Relations between Romania and Central European countries experienced unprecedented development, with Romania becoming a CEFTA member and making significant contributions to the development of the Central European Initiative. Bilateral and trilateral cooperation structures were also created. These were flexible and oriented towards joint approaches to concrete cross-border issues (countering organized crime, smuggling, illegal migration, transport infrastructure, etc.). They were also oriented towards the creation of Euroregions and free economic zones. Romania became an important regional actor, with a significant contribution to ensuring stability in a high-potential conflict area.

It is necessary to establish the geopolitical context of those years, as well. After the liberation from Soviet power of the countries in Central and Southeastern Europe and the dissolution of the USSR, the only global superpower in political, military, economic, social, cultural, and ideological terms was the United States. Unlike the USSR, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which began in the same period, was not peaceful. The national-communism ideology of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević led to the tragic events, war crimes, and the crimes against humanity committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. Unable to resolve this conflict, the European Union transferred this role to

the United States. The Dayton Agreement concluded on December 14, 1995, marked the end of the ethnic war in Bosnia and Herzegovina but was also an embarrassment for the United States, forced to negotiate with a war criminal. The bloody scenes in Bosnia and Herzegovina were repeated in Kosovo, and, as a consequence, a US military intervention was beginning to take shape.

In this international context, after the first democratic alternation of power in November 1996, the United States chose Romania as a strategic partner. On July 11, 1997, in University Square in Bucharest, when I launched this partnership, President Bill Clinton declared: Your President and I have agreed to establish a strategic partnership between our nations, a partnership important to America because Romania is important to America—important in your own right and important as a model in this difficult part of the world. Romania can show the people of this region and, indeed, people throughout the world that there is a better way than fighting and division and repression. It is cooperation, freedom and peace. By honoring its commitments, during the military intervention in Yugoslavia, Romania acted as a reliable ally of the United States and as a de facto member of NATO.

In the context of the unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, it became evident that the Strategic Partnership with the U.S., which facilitated Romania's admission to NATO and integration into the European Union, represented a milestone in strengthening national security. Between 1997 and 2000, this privileged relationship with the world's only superpower generated a profound transformation of Romanian society in the political, military, security, economic, legal, civic, and cultural areas.

You asked about the security threats that Romania faced at the end of the 1990s. Defeated in the Cold War by the implosion of the USSR, Russia did not abandon its imperial ambitions. Russian military strategists continued to consider the possibility of re-establishing a sphere of dominance in the Baltic States, Moldova, Belarus, and the Caucasus, as well as in Southeast Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia), in order to gain access to the Mediterranean. In the attempt to create a Russian Federation-Belarus-Ukraine-Serbia axis, the first step was the removal of Stanislav Shushkevich, the democratic president of Belarus, through a Parliamentary coup de main that allowed Alexander Lukashenko to come to power. The result? A law on reunification with the Russian Federation was voted by the Belarus Parliament. Ukraine, which had a strong Russian-speaking representation in the Rada, was subjected to similar pressures. However, the project of uniting with the Russian Federation was rejected by a narrow margin of votes. In contrast, the Serbian Parliament voted for uniting with the Russian Federation. Despite this, President Boris Yeltsin had a delayed answer, and ratification in the State Duma did not occur. This strategy came to light in 1999, amidst the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the bloody conflict in Kosovo.

Romania was the missing link in this Russian plan. Therefore, between 1998 and 1999, through the old KGB channels, there were attempts to provoke economic and social chaos by causing banks and investment funds to go bankrupt; attempts to paralyze society through the simultaneous organisation of strikes by unions, parliamentarians, and businesspeople; and an attempted coup reflected in the 1999 "Mineriad".

After the NATO Summit in Washington in April 1999, Romania was nominated as one of the main candidates for the second wave of NATO expansion eastward, despite the existing difficulties at the political level. After the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, negotiations for accession to the European Union began.

Between 1997 and 2000, the Romanian Army participated with nearly 5,000 troops in ten peacekeeping missions in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Congo, and Kosovo. To strengthen security, trust, and good neighborliness, the army participated in several regional military cooperation initiatives, aiming at forming mixed units: the Southeast European Multinational Peace Force, the Multinational Stand-by High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG) for UN operations, the Romanian-Hungarian Peacekeeping Battalion, Central European Nations' Cooperation (CENCOOP), the Hungarian-Romanian-Slovak-Ukrainian Unit, and the Romanian-Moldovan Mixed Battalion. Strategies and programs were developed in each area of national security, with appropriate objectives and means, all based on the National Security Strategy of Romania.

At the level of the economy, we managed to implement programs for a functional market economy and to resume economic growth with the support of international financial institutions and the United States. By the year 2000, the rejoining with the family of free, democratic, and prosperous nations, to which we truly belonged, was brought to fruition.

What were the main elements of the strategy for Romania's bilateral relationship with Russia in the context of the option to join a Western military alliance?

Between 1990 and 1996, Romania's leadership undertook numerous diplomatic efforts to integrate the country into NATO. However, among Western circles, there was a lack of trust generated by the dual language of the Bucharest regime. Unfortunately, a long-standing tradition of oscillating between different centres of power, awaiting a victor, was prolonged. Romania's positioning on both sides of the First and Second World Wars, was still vivid in the historical memory and in that of military strategists.

In spite of the fact that Romania was the first among the former Warsaw Pact countries to sign, on January 26, 1994, the Partnership for Peace, initiated by the USA and seen as a stepping stone towards NATO membership, two months later, on March 31, 1994, Romania also signed a military cooperation treaty with the Russian Federation. On March 1, 1994, in an interview with CNN, when asked, "Do you want an alliance with NATO or a close security relationship with Russia?", President Ion Iliescu replied: "We are pursuing both possibilities."

In April 1996, Ion Iliescu was close to signing a treaty with the Russian Federation under the same terms as in 1991: the Kremlin reserved the right to have a say regarding Romania's alliances. On April 5, 1991, at the invitation of Mikhail Gorbachev, President Ion Iliescu conducted a friendly visit to Moscow and signed The Romanian-Soviet Treaty. The 1991 Soviet coup attempt (August 19-20, 1991) and the dissolution of the USSR (December 25, 1991) prevented its ratification in the Romanian Parliament. Had that treaty been ratified, Romania would no longer have been able to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. The Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, a former head of Russian intelligence, came to Bucharest to initial the new treaty on April 27, 1996. In my capacity as leader of the Democratic Convention of Romania and main contender in the presidential

elections, I reacted firmly at a press conference. The fear of a negative reaction from the public determined Ion Iliescu to back down. However, on May 16, 1996, Ion Iliescu signed in Belgrade the "Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Romania", ratified by the Romanian Parliament on September 19, 1996. The document, signed for a period of twenty years, contained the principles for developing and expanding Romanian-Yugoslav relations. Ion Iliescu, the president of a country whose population, according to opinion polls, wished in a proportion of over 80% to join the North Atlantic Alliance, became the ally of Slobodan Milošević, the last dictator of Europe and NATO's "number one enemy."

It is clear from the two treaties that the intention was to use Romania as a bridge between Russia and Serbia. Moreover, this bridge existed during the Bosnian War, when hundreds of trainloads of oil, weapons, and ammunition from Russia transited Romania on their way to the former Yugoslavia. The operation was organized by a network of former Romanian and Russian agents and was conducted under the direct leadership of the regional chief of the Romanian Intelligence Service, violating the embargo imposed on Yugoslavia following the decision taken by the United Nations Security Council.

Between September 1994 and November 1996, the Russian Federation and Romania negotiated an agreement for encrypted international telephone and telegraph connections, with the purpose of connecting, through special networks, the President of Romania, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Directors of the Europe and North America directorates, the Director of the "Neighboring Countries" directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, etc., with their counterparts in Moscow. I suspended these negotiations when I became President of Romania.

A report published in May 1996 by the Inter-Agency Operational Security Support Staff, based in Maryland, concluded: There are five countries which, despite substantial political changes, "continue to expend significant resources to conduct intelligence operations against the United States." The five states listed in the report are the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, North Korea, Cuba, and Romania.

Beyond bilateral relations from 1990-1996, Russia accepted NATO's eastward expansion in exchange for mutual arms reductions, economic assistance, participation in the Partnership for Peace, the establishment of a Russian-American brigade for peacekeeping in Europe, military cooperation in Bosnia, and the guarantee that nuclear weapons would not be stationed on the territories of the new NATO members.

The NATO-Russia Partnership, or the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security," concluded in Paris on May 27, 1997, stipulated that NATO and Russia would respect a set of fundamental principles of international law, such as the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, non-use of force or the threat of force, and the resolution of all disputes through peaceful means.

The same principles laid the foundation of the Romanian-Russian bilateral relations during my term. In June 1999, after the suspension of the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia and the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution, which authorized the entrance of the KFOR peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, I prohibited the overflight of Russian planes carrying troops and weapons to Kosovo in Romanian airspace. In this manner, the Russian objective of reaching Pristina before the American

troops of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and, therefore, occupying the region, was thwarted.

In her memoirs, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright reveals: *“The decision to oppose Moscow validated our NATO expansion strategy, demonstrated the important role that Central European states could play in strengthening international security, and defused a crisis that could have caused what even the Cold War had not – direct clashes between NATO and Russian troops”*. A month later, while attending the Central European Economic Forum in Salzburg, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Stepashin, requested a meeting with me, during which he apologized for the incident involving the overflight of Russian planes in Romanian airspace. Why? Because in Moscow they understood better than in Bucharest the role of the strategic partnership with the USA. The ban would not have been respected if Romania had not been considered to be under the protection of the USA.

However, I must confess that my personal relationship with the President of the Russian Federation, mediated by Petru Lucinschi, the President of the Republic of Moldova, was good. Following a meeting I had with him and Petru Lucinschi, Boris Yeltsin accepted the inclusion of the request to withdraw the weapons of the Russian troops from Transnistria in the final communiqué of the OSCE Summit held in Istanbul in November 1999.

I was invited to Boris Yeltsin’s funeral and had the opportunity to meet Vladimir Putin. My impressions from that event played a role in the decision to sign, in 2009, along with Václav Havel, Lech Wałęsa, and 20 other Eastern European leaders of our generation, an open letter addressed to President Barack Obama, from which I quote a passage: *“Our hopes that relations with Russia would improve and that Moscow would finally fully accept our complete sovereignty and independence after joining NATO and the EU have not been fulfilled. Instead, Russia is back as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods. At a global level, Russia has become, on most issues, a status-quo power. But at a regional level and vis-a-vis our nations, it increasingly acts as a revisionist one.”*

What can you tell us about the negotiations and discussions with the internal political forces that opposed the establishment of fundamental bilateral treaties with neighboring states (the existence of which was almost mandatory for NATO membership)?

You are undoubtedly referring to the signing of the Treaty with Ukraine, which has been extensively debated over the years, often in total ignorance of the facts. It is necessary, once again, to present the context. We must start from the fact that the emergence of new states in Europe in 1990-1991, at the end of the Cold War, occurred within the limits set by the borders accepted after the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947, reinforced by the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, in the context created by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the former Yugoslavia, and the USSR. Treaties with neighbouring states could only be established after the borders were officially acknowledged.

The internal political forces that demanded territorial claims were on the verge of creating an unpleasant situation for Romania at the OSCE Summit in Lisbon in December 1996. This was my first foreign trip as President of Romania. On the flight to Lisbon, I received from the Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) a briefing on the Ukrainian intention to portray Romania at the OSCE as an imperialist and revanchist state, invoking disputes

regarding two territories which are now part of Ukraine: Northern Bukovina and Snake Island, which was abusively transferred to the USSR by the communist government. The same intelligence briefing mentioned that President Leonid Kuchma had postponed, at the last minute, military maneuvers on Snake Island until after the OSCE Summit.

To counteract this intention, during the meeting with the American Vice President Al Gore, I announced that I would propose to President Kuchma the swift ratification of a state treaty between Romania and Ukraine, as stability was a critical issue for Ukraine. This was a treaty concluded under the conditions of respecting the rights of the Romanian minority in Northern Bukovina according to European standards and accepting the arbitration of the Hague Supreme Court regarding the border delimitation on the continental shelf of the Black Sea. Leonid Kuchma accepted my proposals, an important gesture for a country where, by tradition, the decision belongs to the head of state.

In his congratulatory message, President Bill Clinton wrote: *"Please accept my warm congratulations on the signing of the bilateral Treaty on Relations of Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation with Ukraine. By confirming the inviolability of the present borders between your countries, along with the protection of the rights of minorities in both countries, the treaty lays the foundation for close cooperation in the political, economic, and cultural spheres between Romania and Ukraine. The treaty also constitutes an important contribution to the construction of a unified Europe based on common democratic values, through which the security and stability enjoyed by Western Europe for decades is extending to the entire Europe. Your achievement represents a triumph of future aspirations over past challenges."*

In November 1997, **the first meeting of the Poland-Romania-Ukraine** Trilateral took place in Bucharest. Poland was the first country in the world to recognize Ukraine's statehood in 1991. The treaty of friendship and cooperation between the two states, signed in 1992, recognized the borders established after World War II, even though a significant part of historic Polish territories had become part of Ukraine. In March 1994, Poland and Ukraine adopted a Declaration of Principles (Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Poland on the Principles of Ukrainian-Polish Partnership) to underpin their bilateral relations and to recognize the strategic importance of good relations between them.

In contrast to the historical memories with Ukraine, which were not so burdensome, the relationship between Hungary and Romania was marked by conflicts over the centuries - tragic and bloody. However, President Bill Clinton warned the leaders of Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania: If the parties do not resolve their controversial issues, accession to NATO for each will remain an academic matter. Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, reiterated this message after a visit to the countries of Central Europe: For a new security architecture, for a free, democratic, and unified Europe, I know that solving the issues of the Hungarian minority is complicated, but normalizing relations and signing the Basic Treaty between Hungary and Slovakia and between Hungary and Romania have strategic importance in American policy. Later, in September 1995, during a visit to Romania whose purpose was the finalization of a report on NATO integration, Karsten Voigt, President of the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA), stated that in the NATO accession race, the pace and nature of reforms made by each candidate country are crucial, emphasizing that accession "depends on

the progress of democratic reforms, on how candidate countries manage their relations with their neighbors”, and warned about the implications of having nationalist parties in the governing coalition. The US Ambassador to Romania, Alfred Moses, emphasized on February 22, 1996: I can say without hesitation that no country with a non-functioning democracy should be a candidate for NATO membership. The absence of extremist parties in the Romanian government after the elections will, in my opinion, advance the cause of NATO accession.

Treaty on Good Neighborly Relations and Friendly Co-operation between Hungary and Slovakia was signed on March 19, 1995, in Paris. On September 16, 1996, in Timișoara, the Treaty of Understanding, Cooperation, and Good Neighborliness between Romania and Hungary was signed by President Ion Iliescu and Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Horn. Both I and Petre Roman were present at the event in our roles as leaders of the two opposition coalitions, the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) and the Social Democratic Union (USD), alongside the leaders of the parties comprising these coalitions. The Greater Romania Party (PRM), Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), and The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) refused to participate.

The inclusion of UDMR in the governing coalition formed after the November 1996 elections and the state visit of Hungarian President Árpád Göncz to Romania (May 25-27, 1997) marked the historical reconciliation between the two countries. At the summits of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Madrid (July 1997) and Washington (April 1999), President Bill Clinton declared that the Romanian-Hungarian historical reconciliation was an inspiration for the entire world, with the former being a model for other countries.

In various historical periods, the arguments for the necessity of modernizing Romania were built on the antithesis of West vs. East, with the latter often being blamed. Do you believe that the westernization of Romania should imply rejecting to interact with the East?

Certainly not. I presented my arguments publicly in 2011 when, as President of the Academy of Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, I launched the “Levant Initiative for Global Peace” and continued to develop them by establishing The Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization in Bucharest in 2017 – a Center of Excellence of the World Academy of Art and Science.

Traveling at the crossroads of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, I was struck by the common origin of several historical and architectural relics, but especially by numerous behavioral affinities derived from a common psychology rooted in the traditions of the ancient Levant. The tens of millions of people from all corners of the world, an amalgam of races, ethnicities, and nationalities, who come each year to the Levant as pilgrims or tourists, traverse routes that showcase fortifications of old fortress cities built to defend boundaries between ancient or feudal domains, palaces built to impress with wealth and power, temples or churches marking spiritual boundaries. They demonstrate that everything created to isolate us ultimately ends up uniting us.

This is the reason why the “Levant Initiative for World Peace” proposes a different reading of the history of this region, which until now has been seen mainly through the lenses of long-lasting wars and conflicts. This initiative renders a new approach that seeks to focus on what we have in common and what can unite us: the principles, values,

and skills practiced in the past that can now be leveraged to ensure not only the stability of this region as a whole but also the construction of a model of cooperation and trust for all states of the world.

This does not mean that we must deny our past, but rather we must recognize and accept its tragic dimension.

Is Romania a “gateway” between the East and the West? How open should the “gateway” be, especially for the countries in the eastern neighborhood that are not members of NATO and/or the EU... and not just for these states?

The main countries in Romania’s eastern neighborhood are the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which are not yet members of NATO and the European Union. However, I strongly believe in their Euro-Atlantic future. I find it encouraging that a logistics hub for the assistance and reconstruction of Ukraine is being established on Romanian territory.

The unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has led to the death of tens of thousands of young people and the injury of tens of thousands more. It has caused immense destruction of both material and immaterial goods, immediate and long-term consequences by provoking food and energy crises, as well as a massive involuntary migration of millions of refugees. All human rights, which the International Commission on Human Rights has pledged to protect, have been violated, an aspect which represented a threat to everything that has been built regarding a world order based on the rule of law.

Beyond the war crimes and crimes against humanity, Russia’s aggression must be understood in terms of the obligation to respect international treaties. By invading Ukraine, Russia violated the provisions of the Treaty it signed in 1994 in Budapest under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). By signing the Treaty, it committed to respect Ukraine’s independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty, and, therefore, its right to determine its own internal and external policies. The fact that this aggression is being carried out against a state that had given up its nuclear arsenal by transferring it to Russia has the effect of discouraging any state that is in possession of nuclear weapons from giving them up in the future. Likewise, it can encourage the nuclear arming of a growing number of states in order to be able to defend themselves against conventional weapon attacks.

The international debate about the long-term consequences of the war in Ukraine should focus on a key issue: will there be preserved the international order based on respecting the treaties that have ensured, for the first time, long-lasting peace in Europe, or will there be a shift towards disregarding these treaties and replacing **the force of law** with **the law of force**, thus creating a dangerous precedent for resuming the pre-World War II history when peace treaties were, in fact, preparations for a new war?

Accepting a peace, that officializes the annexation of territories both as a result of a war of aggression and of the fear of nuclear weapons, will encourage other countries to put less effort into economic and social development, and to use existing financial resources to increase military potential for aggressive purposes.

The military, political, legal, economic, social, and ideological consequences are each so serious that, combined, outline a threshold beyond which humanity enters a new stage of its existence, a stage which can lead humanity towards collapse. I believe these are the main issues we need to focus on at the moment.

(Interviewer and editor Ileana Racheru)



MINISTER IOAN MIRCEA PAȘCU: “REFORMING THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES TO GET THEM READY FOR NATO ACCESSION REPRESENTED A PRIORITY AND A CHALLENGE”



Ioan Mircea Pașcu was Minister of National Defense of Romania between 2000 and 2004 and State Secretary at the Ministry of National Defense between 1993 and 1996. He was Minister of National Defense when Romania was invited in NATO (2002) and became a full member in 2004.

During your term as Defense Minister (2000-2004) Romania became a NATO member. When you first started work as minister what was the first priority regarding the accession process?

It was indeed the first priority once I became Minister of Defense on the 28.12.2000. But let us not forget that I began to work on NATO admission years before, in 1993, respectively, as State Secretary for Defense Planning and International Relations in the Defense Ministry, a position which permitted me to get involved in the first admission process, culminating with the first invitations addressed at the Madrid NATO summit in July 1997. When I became Defense Minister, we had less than two years to recuperate the delays produced by the hesitations to start the difficult process of reforming our Armed Forces of the previous Administration (very early in my mandate, I was asked by a high ranking NATO official if Romania was still interested in becoming a member).

So, the first priority was to initiate the reform process in earnest, which would mean the drastic reduction of our oversized Armed Forces, in parallel with increasing the fighting capacity of the remaining Forces.

What was the most difficult reform Romania had to undertake in order to become a NATO member?

The reform process of the Armed Forces, initiated in 2001, has been difficult in itself, because it required reducing drastically the personnel and conserving their armament and equipment in proper storage facilities for future use, in case of need. We managed to speed up considerably the payments under the Ordinance no 7 for those who wished to leave the Armed Forces, which permitted a rapid process of personnel reproduction.

That way we responded to those pessimistic foreign evaluations of our chances to get into NATO (National Defense University from Washington, for instance) which expressed doubts that Romania would be capable of achieving the significant downsizing of its Armed Forces required to be admitted. But we did, and consequently, the pessimistic voices have been silenced.

How complex was the process of becoming a NATO member for Romania? How did it impact Romanian civilian and military institutions?

The process of admission has been very complex, touching not only the military institutions – which, at the end of it, were able to interact functionally with their counterparts from the member states – but the Romanian society in general (there were political, economic, and juridical standards to be attained). As for the military, suffice it to say that the principle of civilian control was implemented successfully and included – along with other measures – my nomination as the first civilian Deputy Defense Minister, in March 1993.

How do you assess the role played by Romania within NATO over the last twenty years? What is the greatest contribution made by Romania to NATO security?

Romania managed to sketch out her profile within NATO as a reliable member, participating in the multinational missions in the areas of interest for NATO, like Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo or in coalitions of the willing formed within the Alliance, like in Iraq. Our military proved to be professional and reliable, sending the signal that our allies can support us in case of need, as they could equally count on our support in case of need.

Today, in the context of the war in Ukraine, Romania plays a pivotal role in the defense of NATO's Eastern Flank, exercising its missions in the very sensitive area of the Black Sea.

How do you see Romania's role within NATO evolving in the future?

I assume that NATO's role to defend its Eastern Flank from an aggressive Russia will continue for some time and, in that context, our role in that defense would continue too.

What is the greatest threat faced by NATO today?

The main threat to NATO today – and, for some time in the future – will be the aggressive Russia, whose actions are facilitated by China. But, of course, there are other threats, like climate change and others, for instance, which will require NATO's response.

How do you assess the current NATO presence in Romania? Do you think that there should be an increase in the level of deterrence in the Black Sea?

NATO's military presence in Romania, in the current difficult security context, is a reassurance that the Alliance stands firm in honoring its obligations towards us and constitutes a powerful deterrent against aggressive moves directed at us.

Do you think that the US military presence in Romania will increase in the future and become permanent?

I believe that the US presence in Romania will at least stay the same, if not increase, even after a potential change of Administration in Washington. Remember that it

happened so even during the previous Trump Administration, when Romania benefited from the necessary attention from the US Administration.

Finland and Sweden joined NATO in the wake of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. How will their membership increase NATO's capabilities? How does it impact European security?

Russia has initiated its aggression against Ukraine to stop NATO further enlargement and thus determined both Finland and Sweden to ask for membership. So, these two countries' NATO membership has at least two major consequences: first, they strengthen considerably the Northern Flank of the Alliance providing for adequate depth – for all practical purposes, the Baltic Sea has become a NATO Sea – and second, they made obsolete the idea of neutrality in general, in the face of brutal aggression, which means that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to convince Ukraine to become a neutral country in the future.

When do you think Ukraine will join NATO?

I believe that Ukraine will become a NATO member after the current war on its territory ends; this is in the interest of Ukraine's defense against further Russian aggression and it is in the interest of NATO members too, especially us, on the Eastern flank of the Alliance.

(Interviewer and editor G. Vişan)



AMBASSADOR BOGDAN MAZURU: “THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE US WAS ESSENTIAL FOR ROMANIA’S ACCESSION TO NATO”



Bogdan Mazuru served as the Ambassador of Romania to NATO (2001-2006) and was the first Permanent Representative of Romania to the North Atlantic Council (2004-2006). He currently serves as ambassador of Romania to the Swiss Confederation (since 2021).

In 1997, at the Madrid Summit, Romania was not invited to join NATO in the first wave of enlargement with former Warsaw Pact members. In 1997, US president Bill Clinton visited Romania and the same year US and Romania signed a strategic partnership. In the “political economy” of Romania’s NATO accession, what role did the strategic partnership with the US play?

President Bill Clinton’s vision of a peaceful and undivided Europe was a cornerstone of US foreign policy during his term. He made clear on April 1999, at the Washington Summit, that the door remains open to new members, and he led efforts to ensure that NATO meets the new security challenges. The strategic partnership with the US was essential for Romania’s accession to NATO.

First, it provided the *certainty* of reaching the goal by formalizing the solid political support of the United States for Romania’s candidacy, recognizing its strategic importance, its commitment to shared values, and a common interest for the regional stability.

Second, the strategic partnership has been the key framework for the consolidation of bilateral relations in strategic domains: military reforms, regional security, economy, unconventional risks (such as terrorism, drug traffic, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyber defence and energy security). The strategic partnership represented a direct contribution to our efforts and preparation for accession to NATO.

Third, and most importantly, the strategic partnership with the US encouraged other NATO member states to provide their political support for Romania’s membership.

In the negotiations process for NATO accession, what was the most challenging topic of discussion with the Alliance?

Every chapter in our Membership Action Plan (MAP) was equally important, but the most challenging was the one dedicated to our military preparation; to the defence management reforms (transparent national defence planning, resource allocation and budgeting, appropriate legislation etc.) necessary in our military planning process. Romania's progress in dealing with these issues, in line with NATO's own transformation to be better prepared to deal with the new security threats, was under continued scrutiny. It was a difficult, but successful effort achieved in a very short time, which made Romania, from day one of its membership, a reliable and strong ally, with a concrete and measurable contribution to the collective defence of NATO.

The second wave of NATO enlargement included Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states. How did Romania cooperate with these countries in order to achieve the common objective of becoming NATO members?

The preparation of the aspirant countries and the evaluation of their candidacies were individual processes, and every candidate focused on its own effort. We went through individual programmes of political, legal, military and security reforms aligned with NATO procedures. But this does not mean that we did not cooperate: for instance, we had collaboration in the military field, airspace and air defence, communications, military information exchanges, social protection of personnel, military transportation, confidence-building measures.

We participated together in peacekeeping missions, we were engaged in multiple subregional cooperative structures (IFOR/SFOR, SECI, BSEC, SEEBRIG, trilateral formats Romania-Greece-Bulgaria and Romania-Turkey-Bulgaria). All these were very helpful in accelerating our preparation and in developing mutual trust. We had a strong political cooperation with the common goal of bringing the moment of our accession as close as possible, and our solidarity in those times was highly appreciated by the Allies. Another very useful program of cooperation was the Partnership for Peace that created the possibility of joint exercises, participation in operation and consultation among us and with the NATO members.

When looking back at the late 1990s and early 2000s, historians and commentators emphasize the geopolitical context in which major decisions for European security have been taken: the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 (*Operation Allied Force*) and the terrorist attacks against the United States of America on September 11, 2001. In your opinion, how did these two major historical events impact Romania's accession to NATO?

The position and contribution of Romania in the context of Kosovo and Afghanistan were clear proofs that: a) Romania is like-minded and we have the same set of values, the same goals, and the same vision about our security and defence and b) Romania can be a solid, effective, and valuable contributor to NATO.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Romania showed its solidarity, by supporting the "Global War on Terror" and has been among the first countries to join the international coalition against terrorism led by the United States. Romania's military contribution in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq received international recognition.

Through all these efforts, along with the continuation of the economic reforms, in an international environment which was being reshaped by terrorist threats, Romania gained the Allies' support for joining NATO.

In 1999, the first wave of NATO enlargement occurred, with Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary becoming members. Five years later, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states became members of the Alliance. How did these countries from Central and Eastern Europe contribute to the security of the Alliance?

All of these countries, including Romania, have contributed significantly to NATO's profile as the strongest Alliance in history. Their added value has been essential not only regarding the military strength, but also in political and strategic weight. It is worth noting that in 25 years, NATO doubled the number of its members, and the Alliance enlargements have been crucial for the European security architecture. The European space of democracy, human rights and common security moved further eastwards. This represents in itself a great contribution to European security. NATO is today one of the most solid and reliable pillars for the security and defence of democracies on the European continent. All these countries have provided a strong basis for stability and integration for all of Europe in the post-Cold War world.

After Romania became a fully-fledged NATO in 2004, what were its main priorities concerning the Alliance?

After Romania's accession, our main priority has been the same as of the Alliance and of its member states: ensuring the collective defence by strengthening our deterrence and defence posture, and by strengthening our capabilities. In this respect, we have continued the modernisation of our military, a process fully integrated into the defence planning of the Alliance. We have been, in all this time, an advocate of a strong presence of NATO in its Eastern flank and in the Black Sea area. The developments after Russia's invasion of Ukraine have shown we were right in our assessments. Today, NATO has an enhanced forward presence in the Eastern flank with rotational multinational battlegroups and the 75th anniversary Summit of NATO, celebrated in July in Washington, focused on strengthening the Eastern flank and supporting Ukraine.

(Interviewer and editor G. Vişan)



AMBASSADOR (RET.) PHILIPPE ÉTIENNE: “THE ACCESSION OF EASTERN EUROPE COUNTRIES TO NATO STRENGTHENED THE ALLIANCE CAPACITY FOR COLLECTIVE DEFENSE”



Ambassador Philippe Étienne has held a distinguished career in the French Foreign Service, most recently serving as French Ambassador to the United States from 2019-2023. Ambassador Étienne led the French mission to Romania from 2002-2005. He is now retired and is a Senior Policy Advisor at Rock Creek Global Advisors, an international economic policy advisory firm, where he advises multinational companies on geopolitics, transatlantic relations, and European affairs, including policy developments at the EU institutions and in key member states. Ambassador

Étienne also currently chairs the French agency coordinating the commemorations of the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Liberation of France.

At the end of the Cold War, did anyone in France envision that NATO would enlarge by adding members of the former Warsaw Treaty? How did French foreign policy adapt to the question of NATO enlargement?

After the Cold War, we in Europe and in America were aware of the security needs of the new European democracies in Central Europe, in particular those countries which, like Romania, know well from their history what it means to be located in this part of Europe.

France and Romania share a certain diplomatic, cultural and historical bond. In 2008, Romania and France signed a strategic partnership. How did France aide and support Romania’s efforts to become a NATO member in the 1990s and early 2000s?

I was myself Ambassador of France in Bucarest at the time of the integration of your country into NATO and of the completion of its accession negotiations to the EU. It was a privilege to participate in these events and to see how my Romanian friends lived this evolution as a truly historical change for your country. We had our disagreement with the US administration at that time on the invasion of Iraq, which had later unfortunate consequences, but France was always a strong advocate of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Romania.

Poland, Czechia and Hungary became NATO members in 1999. Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states joined NATO in 2004. Looking back, how have the countries of Central and Eastern Europe contributed to European security and defense in the past 25 years?

On a political and strategic level, the accession of Eastern Europe countries to NATO strengthened the Alliance capacity for collective defense and contributed to a better understanding of the Alliance's immediate neighborhood, including Russia, in a post-soviet era. In particular, Romania has brought an invaluable experience and understanding of the strategic importance of the Black Sea region, which was probably not clear enough to many in Western Europe and in Northern America.

Eastern Allies brought in general their specific vision of strategic risks and threats, stemming from geographical but also historical considerations and specificities that differed from Western Allies. On a military and operational level, they enriched military culture within the Alliance by sharing best practices between what used to be extremely different military systems.

Of course the context in which they joined in the late 90's or early 2000's was very different from the situation we know today. Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have fundamentally changed the security environment in Europe. NATO has responded by significantly strengthening its readiness to protect and defend all Allies, mainly on what we now call the "Eastern flank". Many of these central and eastern European allies host today "NATO's forward presence" - multinational battlegroups deployed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Ships, planes and troops have been sent, from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. All of this has considerably strengthened European security and defense.

As Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine reminded NATO of its fundamental nature - collective security against threats on the Alliance territory - the contribution of Central and Eastern European allies to Euro-atlantic security has been and remains essential.

On February 24, 2022 the Russian Federation launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine, calling into question the basic tenets of the post-Cold War international order. Following this unfortunate development, in order to bolster Allied deterrence and security on the Eastern Flank, France was the first European NATO ally to send troops to Romania (Mission Aigle, February 28, 2022). How would you characterize the security and defense cooperation between the two countries?

French-Romanian cooperation in security and defense matters has been long-standing. A Strategic Partnership between France and Romania was concluded in 2008 and led to the strengthening of the traditional ties of friendship between our two countries, based on historical links of exceptional richness, on common values, on linguistic affinities and deep cultural traditions, as well as the desire to commit together to a shared future within the European Union.

Since 2022 and the Eastern flank reinforcement in the context of the war in Ukraine, this relation has deepened even further, both in terms of political trust and common vision, but also on the military and operational level, with regular joint actions and

defense operations between our two armed forces. The Mission Aigle was indeed very swiftly put in place in February 2022 and is a perfect illustration of the deep level of defense cooperation between France and Romania. Such an operation requires trust, close proximity, interoperability and a shared vision of the security of Europe.

France is one of the original founding members of NATO in 1949. How do we see the role of France within Alliance in the present and near future? What are the main threats and challenges to transatlantic security from a French perspective?

France, as a founding member of the Alliance, will always play a central role in the defense of the European continent and therefore within NATO. As a nuclear weapon State with a complete model of armed forces, France has kept a certain culture of military engagement which contributes, alongside other Allies, to the military culture of the Alliance.

In the context of the reemergence of the Russian threat, as well as the persistence of terrorism, the defense of the European continent has never been more tested and yet, it is more efficient today that it has ever been. France continues to play its full part in these efforts to strengthen European security and defense, as our contribution to the reinforcement of the Eastern flank and our military support to Ukraine illustrate. Romania and France can for sure be in the future two very important actors in the development of a strong European security and defense.

NATO is at a pivotal point in its history. The threats and challenges we face are constantly evolving and multidimensional, and the brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russia has been a wake-up call for Europe. The cyberthreat, hybrid actions and strategies, disinformation campaigns are all now part of the malicious actions that NATO Allies are confronted with, beyond the scope of more “traditional” warfare that NATO was established to deter and defend against. The way NATO and its Allies adapt to these emerging challenges is crucial.

European countries, with France at the forefront, have considerably stepped up their efforts in the past few years to strengthen the security and defense of their continent. The role of the EU is and will remain key in this regard in order to accompany this historical shift in the defense of the European continent. France firmly believes that a stronger, more credible and more effective European defense – what we sometimes call the “European pillar” of NATO – will only reinforce transatlantic security. This is why we are sparing no effort at the EU level to foster a common strategic culture between countries that sometimes have a different political and military history. Fostering a common understanding of our defense and security perspectives is at the very heart of the Alliance.

More than ever, the current context requires us to pursue these efforts in order to shape the future of our collective defense and ensure security in Europe.

(Interviewer and editor George Vişan)

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this interview do no represent the official position of the French government.



JAMES J. TOWNSEND JR.: “ROMANIA IS ALWAYS THE FIRST TO RAISE ITS HAND, TO SHOW THAT IT IS A PRODUCER OF SECURITY, NOT JUST A CONSUMER OF SECURITY”



James J. Townsend Jr. (Jim) is a Senior Advisor in the Scowcroft Center's Transatlantic Security Initiative, Atlantic Council. He is also an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), where he is the co-host of the podcast "Brussels Sprouts", a global fellow at the Wilson Center's Polar Institute, and a senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London. Through his work, he has helped execute US

military engagements in almost every conflict from the Gulf War to the reintroduction of US forces into Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He also played critical roles in NATO enlargement, NATO reform, and helping to build bilateral defense relations with the new European democracies coming from the breakup of the Soviet Union.

When and how did the United States of America realize that NATO should extend eastward, with the former members of the Warsaw Pact?

It was during the Clinton Administration. I was pretty junior at the time in the administration, so I wasn't involved in those early discussions. There was a lot of work that had to be done both at NATO, as well as in the US and allied capitals, to get consensus to do this, and to figure out a process, because we have never really done this before. In this manner, it wasn't an easy task - just having a meeting and making a decision. It was an open question about how many and who right up to the NATO Madrid Summit, which happened in 1997. The decision was made to go ahead with the initial three: Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. And I know Romania was very upset and I was upset because I was also working closely with Romania, but they were eventually included. Romania had to wait for the second round. But it took so many years to even pick how many countries and which countries should be the chosen ones.

How complex was the NATO enlargement process in the 1990s and early 2000s for the US foreign and security policy institutions?

Well, it was complex. But it wasn't as complex as it was in the 1990s when we hadn't had the first round. Once we had the first round it was rather easier to do a second round because, I think, the US Congress was more accepting of this, our allies were accepting

as well, so it was easier to get consensus at NATO. The MAP and that, helped shape which countries would get in the second round, because it gave us a way to measure progress in nations still wanting to be members and how they were progressing with the NATO reforms that we wanted them to take on. So, it was easier to do a second round of enlargement and so we did.

How have the countries in Central and Eastern Europe contributed to the security of the Alliance since their accession?

Well, Romania has always been in the front of helping NATO, and the United States too for that matter, but particularly helping NATO in all kinds of operations. Whether it's in Afghanistan or wherever it is, Romania is always the first to raise its hand, to show that it's a producer of security, not just a consumer of security.

Whether it was Afghanistan or Iraq, whether it is what is happening now, dealing with Russia on the march, the Central and Eastern European nations have been absolutely top. Romania leads the way in many ways in terms of doing the right thing and always working on its military capability, providing right now a home for French and other NATO forces that have deployed to Romania, including US troops. During Afghanistan, Romania was a tremendous help to the US and to NATO, with MK Air Base and all that logistical support. But today, as we deal with Russia, Romania is almost on the front line and so Romania has been stalwart in helping to deter Russian activities in the Black Sea, which has been threatening Black Sea allies. Romania is an example, it's in the front ranks of the new allies in terms of participating in NATO operations.

How would you describe the current security environment in Europe?

Well, it's very, very tense, increasingly tense as we provide assistance, as Europe provides assistance to Ukraine and risks Russian blowback from that. The security situation has caused a lot of rethinking in Allied capitals about the importance of NATO deterrence and their role in it, and therefore the importance of having a capable military. So, European nations are spending a lot of money on defense. This process is taking a long time, but the situation is tense enough that is causing a reevaluation by a lot of allies trying to fulfill NATO defense plans, to get more capable and to you carry a greater share of the burden in terms of European defense.

How could NATO support more for the countries on the Eastern Flank, especially those in the Black Sea region?

Well, I think NATO is doing a lot already. I think nations like the United States and other allies, who have the wherewithal, need to be helping Romania and Bulgaria deal with the threat that's right on their border. They can do that. The United States could provide the security assistance funding for the military forces, early warning for Romania. It could help in terms for R. Moldova, which could be an entry point into allied territory. There is an increasing focus in NATO concerning the Black Sea that could hopefully continue. There is focus on how NATO can deploy forces or capabilities into the region and how nations like the United States can provide assistance to Romania themselves, particularly for Bulgaria and others. Bulgaria needs assistance to strengthen its military.

How do you think the outcome of the US presidential elections is going to affect NATO?

A Trump Administration would disengage from Europe, it would be friendly to Vladimir Putin, an administration that is hostile towards the European Union, hostile to some of the European nations and focused elsewhere in terms of national security, like China. If it's a Harris administration, I think you will find a much more NATO friendly administration in the White House, Europe friendly. I think we would continue to play our military role in Europe, fulfilling NATO defense planning goals and the regional plans, where we have a role to play. So, we will continue to have U.S. troops in Europe continuing a strong defense posture there. So we will see that with Harris, but we won't see that with Trump.

When do you think Ukraine will be ready to join the Alliance?

Oh, I think in a lot of ways Ukraine is ready to join now. There are still problems with corruption, Ukrainians need to work on that. Of course, they're at war with Russia right now too, and so when the war ends, I think you will be able to get consensus to get them into NATO. And I think that's a critical path for NATO to take with Ukraine, if there's going to be any kind of protection of Ukraine from a second Russian attack or even a third attack. So, NATO membership has got to be part of that defensive bulwark around Ukraine to protect it from the Russians. If that's how the war ends, with some kind of deal or whatever it might be. But I think right now you will not get consensus at NATO to get Ukraine in. So while we are waiting for the war to somehow sort itself, Ukraine needs to work on its corruption and other things as well, so that membership can come quickly if there's some type of agreement to end the war.

(Interviewer and editor George Visan)



JAMIE SHEA: “NATO WAS CREATED TO PROVIDE ITS MEMBER STATES WITH SECURITY AGAINST POSSIBLE FUTURE WARS IN EUROPE”



Jamie Shea CMG is Professor at the College of Europe Natolin. He is also a Senior Fellow responsible for security and defence programmes at Friends of Europe and a Senior Advisor with the European Policy Centre. His last NATO post was Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges.

NATO has reached the venerable age of 75 years, and some historians have dubbed it the longest functioning and most successful alliance of democracies in history. What is the secret of NATO’s longevity and endurance?

NATO was created to provide its member states with security against possible future wars in Europe. It has succeeded in providing the security but, unfortunately, not in eliminating the threat of war. That came first from the hostile stance of the Soviet Union, then from the violent collapse of the former Yugoslavia and more recently from the expansionist drive of an authoritarian Russia. So at no stage has a NATO member state judged the international security environment to be so peaceful that it would be a safe bet to withdraw from the collective shield of the Atlantic Alliance.

For many of the small and medium sized NATO members, a history of foreign occupation and dismemberment has convinced them that only the collective protection of NATO will allow them to preserve their independence and identity. Yet, for the larger member states as well, the experience of NATO membership over seven decades has demonstrated that NATO, where military activity is transparent and decisions are taken by consensus, is a vastly better security arrangement than the shifting coalitions and unstable balance of power diplomacy that they relied upon in the first half of the 20th century. France no longer fears Germany, Germany no longer fears encirclement, Britain no longer has to function as the offshore balancer, and Poland does not have to worry

about being partitioned, as it was on three occasions in the 18th century. One key reason why NATO has endured is this collectivisation of security, whereby, for the first time Europeans have learned that they can achieve a much better level of security and more durably through cooperation than by competing against each other. Cooperation and the sharing of roles and responsibilities have also allowed the NATO allies to depend on mutual solidarity and support in crisis situations (for instance responding to terrorist attacks and hybrid warfare campaigns) and to receive direct military support in the form of allied bases, exercises and deployments on their territories.

But success always has many explanations. The persistence of the US political and military commitment to democratic Europe is another core element in NATO's longevity. This was far from self-evident at the time that the NATO treaty was negotiated in the late 1940s. Prior to the Second World War the US had been a neutral country with a tiny army. Many Americans were wary about taking on a permanent commitment to Europe and NATO was only the second military alliance that the US had entered into in its entire history. US administrations and politicians have repeatedly grumbled about unequal burden sharing with their European allies and long before the advent of President Trump. Yet, the US has stayed the course in linking its security to that of its European allies. If Europe is dominated by a hostile power, overnight the US will lose most of its allies and its great power status. Of late the Europeans have shown a much greater willingness to spend on defense and to share the NATO burdens more equitably. So all in all, and despite the rhetoric of some populist and isolationist politicians in the US, the majority of US Congressmen and Congresswomen, as well as the broader public recognize that NATO is not a one-way street, but enhances America's own security as well. NATO has worked well because of the willingness of the US to provide the leadership and the wisdom of the Europeans to accept it.

Finally, NATO has proved adept at transforming itself to meet new security challenges. It confounded predictions of its imminent demise after its "catastrophic success" in the Cold War by extending the hand of friendship to its former adversaries in Central and Eastern Europe. It used its military forces trained to defend West Germany against Warsaw Pact tank divisions to do peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo. It worked hard to turn its former enemy, Russia, into a strategic partner. As the security situation in Europe eased in the 1990s, the Alliance went "out of area" with interventions and crisis management operations in Afghanistan, Libya, the Gulf of Aden and Iraq. NATO has also had to tackle non-conventional threats too, such as terrorism, illegal migration, cyber-attacks, space vulnerabilities and critical infrastructure protection. In some cases, this has involved embracing a new modus operandi, for instance more cooperation with the civilian capacities of the EU and the private sector. Yet this ability to deal with more than one challenge in more than one place at any given time has increased the Alliance's ability to address in a relevant way the diverse security concerns of its 32 member countries.

Towards the end of the Cold War did anyone in NATO thought that one day the former members of the Warsaw Pact will be joining the Alliance?

As soon as the Cold War came to an end NATO enlargement was on the agenda. By necessity rather than because of a long-term strategy. This was because of the situation of Germany which in 1990 was rapidly heading towards unification and thereby raising

the question of whether the eastern provinces of Germany (formerly composing the communist DDR) would be part of NATO or stay on the outside in order to assuage Soviet concerns. Throughout 1990 there was an intense debate among allies and with the Soviet Union as to whether a united Germany would need to be a neutral state and leave NATO, whether it could be in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact simultaneously, whether NATO forces could be stationed in eastern Germany or only German national forces outside the NATO command structure and how quickly Soviet forces would withdraw from the former DDR. Ultimately, the close US-German partnership produced the best outcome: a united Germany fully integrated into NATO. Even Gorbachev accepted this at the time as being in the Soviet security interest as well. Although this view was far from being shared by the Soviet military establishment.

So German unification represented NATO's first post-Cold War move east. Yet this did not mean that NATO looked to other enlargements in the immediate future, and indeed it took 9 years, until March 1999, before the alliance took in more members, in this case Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. There was quite a debate before the allies decided that enlargement was in NATO's vital security interest. Some allies worried about the impact on Russia which could see NATO moving east as a hostile move which could undermine the prospects for a rebooted NATO-Russia partnership. Moscow repeatedly claimed that in exchange for giving its consent to German unification, Western leaders had promised that NATO would not move "one single inch" eastwards although historians have found no evidence that a formal guarantee to this effect was given. Other allies worried that it would be difficult and costly to defend large swathes of additional NATO territory or that the new members would not be able to make a significant contribution to the collective defense. There were concerns that they might bring unresolved border or ethnic disputes into the alliance or that their new democracies and market economies would be too fragile. In the early 1990s the enlargement of NATO seemed very distant.

In 1994, the alliance came up with a holding mechanism called the Partnership for Peace (PFP) which invited the countries of central and eastern Europe to conclude bilateral cooperation agreements with NATO. PFP had the advantage of being inclusive. Even Russia and the countries of Central Asia joined. It enabled NATO to help the post-communist countries with their military and political transformation and to conduct joint training and exercises without taking on the permanent commitments involved in expanding the alliance's membership. Yet many of the new political leaders in central and eastern Europe saw PFP as a transitional arrangement rather than the limit of their relationship with NATO. By the mid 1990s, figures such as Lech Walesa of Poland and Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia (subsequently the Czech Republic) had been to NATO headquarters to argue that the best way to consolidate security and democracy in the region was by granting them full NATO membership. They wanted a seat at the table where they would have an equal voice in deciding European security affairs and be actors rather than victims of their own destiny. They no longer wanted to exist in a security grey zone or be second class members in the new European order that was emerging after the Cold War. This was an understandable and wholly legitimate aspiration, particularly when we consider the turbulent history of many of these central and eastern European countries.

So in the mid 1990s the political wind in alliance capitals started to change. It was now no longer a debate about whether NATO should enlarge, but when and how and to whom.

There was a sense that this was a unique opportunity to build a lasting order of peace across the whole of Europe and consolidate democracy which had to be seized before political circumstances or the security environment changed in a more negative direction. It was the support of the US for enlargement and the willingness of Washington to extend security guarantees to central and eastern Europe that made the crucial difference in persuading other allies to go along. Yet the first enlargement in 1999 was a modest one with just 3 countries invited to join. This was to validate the concept of enlargement and to test NATO's capacity to absorb new members yet still take decisions by consensus and remain a functioning alliance. Countries left out in 1999, such as Romania, were inevitably disappointed. But going slowly at first and overcoming the views of the sceptics proved to be the right strategy. Three years later, at the Prague Summit in 2002, NATO was ready for its "big bang" enlargement and 7 countries were invited to join, including of course Romania.

The Cold War ended between 1989 and 1990 and the Soviet Union disappeared as a political entity in 1991. How did the idea of NATO enlargement take shape in the early 1990s?

Now that I am no longer a NATO official but an academic and think tanker, one of the questions that I constantly grapple with is: how can outside experts have an influence on governments and policy? It is all very well producing ideas and proposals but how do we persuade others to run with them and implement them? NATO enlargement is a good example of where this actually happened. The idea originated among a group of analysts in the Rand Corporation who put it into the public domain in a highly influential article in *Foreign Affairs*. This group, led by an articulate and energetic individual named Ron Asmus, found its way into the State Department, Pentagon and National Security Council during the Clinton administration. One of the features of the US political system is this interaction between permanent officials and think tanks as academics and experts rotate in and out of government. Yet ideas also need fertile ground to grow and the Clinton administration was full of people, from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright downwards, who had a deep knowledge and involvement with Europe and whose primary concern was to shape the post-Cold War order in Europe to prevent a return of the nationalisms and rivalries that had bedeviled Europe in the past. These people not only worked to find allies for the cause of NATO enlargement in Western Europe but also within the US Congress that would need to ratify each new round of enlargement. The formation of the Senate NATO Observer Group was key in broadening bipartisan support in the Congress. There were some, particularly in the Pentagon, who preferred to stick with PFP rather than enlarge NATO but those in favor gradually won the upper hand and convinced the alliance to adopt its "Open Door" policy of being in principle ready to accept new members, as provided for in Article 10 of the NATO treaty, as long as they met the alliance's political and military requirements. In 1995, NATO launched its study on enlargement and this added two further stipulations: that consensus was needed within the alliance and that enlargement should benefit European security more broadly.

In sum NATO enlargement was the combined effort of political pressure from the countries of central and eastern Europe and a US ideology that believed that giving NATO responsibility for security in the whole of Europe was the best way of locking in

the democracy gains from the fall of communism. The fact that the new member states were largely pro-American in their orientation and would help secure US leadership of the alliance certainly helped. As EU membership for the new democracies seemed a very distant prospect in the early 1990s, they knocked on NATO's door instead, knowing that political support for them was higher on one side of Brussels than the other at that particular moment.

The International context was also favorable – at least for a time. The President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, was no fan of NATO enlargement but he needed desperately US and western loans and finance to deal with Russia's dire debt situation and the country's post-Soviet economic collapse. So he was not in a position to actively (as opposed to rhetorically) oppose new members joining the alliance. Moreover, in 1997, Yeltsin agreed to a Founding Act with NATO and the formation of a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council which offered the possibility – again, at least for a time, – that NATO could square the magic circle by enlarging to Russia's neighbors in eastern Europe while also developing closer ties with Moscow based on shared interests in military stability and arms control and in combating international terrorism. The timely departure of Russian forces from Central and Eastern Europe by the mid 1990s also made it easier to enlarge NATO, a situation that Ukraine, unfortunately, does not benefit from at the present time. Indeed, the seeming disappearance of the Soviet threat made NATO enlargement more acceptable to many allies as it reduced the risks and considerably lowered the costs of needing to defend the new member states. In 1997, NATO assured Moscow that it would not station combat forces or nuclear weapons or build significant military infrastructure on the territory of the new member states if peaceful conditions prevailed. The idea was to convince Moscow that enlargement was about countries moving politically west rather than NATO moving militarily east. Some of the new member states, with their historical experience of Russia in mind, were not particularly happy to have no NATO troops on their territory, but this NATO "3 NOs" commitment seemed the best way to enable enlargement to move ahead with the least risk of creating new dividing lines at the time.

Twenty-five years have passed since the first countries in Central Eastern Europe joined NATO and twenty years have passed since the second wave of enlargement took place. What is the main contribution to Alliance security made by the former members of Warsaw Treaty?

The experience of NATO enlargement over the past quarter century has demonstrated beyond doubt that the post Cold War members have been as much providers as beneficiaries of security. Today most of the allies meeting the NATO defence spending target of 2% of GDP are in central and eastern Europe and many have gone well beyond the 2% mark. Poland has even set a target of 4% which would be the highest in the alliance. Moreover, as with Romania, these countries reached the 2% mark already some years ago, whereas many of the more traditional western European allies have only reached 2% in the last 12 months or are still setting target dates into the future.

Central and Eastern European allies are today playing host to an increasing number of NATO troops, bases, facilities and large scale exercises as part of the alliance's Enhanced Forward Presence. Yes, this naturally benefits their own security but they also incur additional costs and burdens in giving all this host nation support. For instance, Romania

has upgraded its Mihail Kogalniceanu air force base near Constanta. The military forces of NATO's eastern members are also being upgraded and modernized with several large purchases of modern fighter aircraft, tanks and infantry vehicles and missile and air defense systems. The entry of Finland and Sweden into the alliance has also added significant military capabilities to NATO's northern flank and is helping to protect Germany, the Baltic States and Poland. The new allies (if that term can still be used) have also sent forces to NATO's "out of area" missions, notably in the Western Balkans and Afghanistan. Romania and Poland house the alliance's missile defense system. Thus, in hindsight the fears of some back in the early 1990s that new NATO members would be a burden on the alliance, unwilling or unable to defend themselves and to make a fair contribution, today seem laughable. Moreover, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have contributed politically as well as militarily to NATO's evolution.

They have not blocked further rounds of NATO enlargement but, on the contrary, have used their experience and expertise acquired during their membership process to help new candidates prepare and meet the alliance's standards, particularly countries in the Western Balkans.

They have been also in the forefront of helping NATO to address non-conventional threats. Many of the most prominent and successful NATO Centers of Excellence dealing with challenges like cyber-attacks, disinformation and propaganda, energy security, intelligence and hybrid warfare and resilience are located in Central and Eastern Europe. Many (if admittedly not all) of the eastern allies have been consistent supporters of Ukraine in helping it to withstand the Russian invasion, giving Kyiv substantial amounts of military equipment, and in the case of the Czech Republic leading an international consortium to procure 155 mm ammunition for Ukraine. Instead of making NATO weaker and less functional, as some feared initially, enlargement has made NATO into a much more agile and powerful organization able to cope with a broader range of security challenges and attractive as a platform for cooperation for partners from across the globe.

In your opinion, how has Romania evolved over the past twenty years as a NATO ally?

Given the enthusiasm of Romania for NATO membership and its high degree of preparation, it was an injustice that Bucharest was not invited to join NATO in 1999 during the first round of the alliance's post-Cold War enlargement. But that injustice was repaired in 2004 when Romania took its seat at the North Atlantic Council. Since then, Romania has proven unsurprisingly to be a solid and dependable ally. Its strategic importance in the alliance has grown as the Black Sea has become a critical line of communication linking allies such as Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey to key partners requiring NATO support such as Ukraine and Georgia. The importance of the Black Sea region has also required NATO to establish an Enhanced Forward Presence along the littoral and Romania has hosted allied rotational air forces and exercises. France is now leading the alliance's multinational battalion in Romania which is natural given the close historical ties between the two countries. When NATO decided to establish a missile defence shield Romania offered to host a key interceptor battery at Deveselu. So Romania has always stepped up when NATO has requested it to take on a new mission. It was one of the first allies to reach the 2% of GDP defense spending target after this was agreed at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014.

Yet Romania has contributed in other ways too. When NATO was engaged in Afghanistan, the Centre of Excellence on human intelligence in Oradea played an important role in helping NATO forces to prepare for deployments by increasing their situational and cultural awareness of conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. As a regular visitor to this Centre, I saw at first hand the excellent work that it was doing. Bucharest was also an early contributor to increasing Ukraine's defense capabilities, and well before the Russian invasion of February 2022. When I was a NATO official, we worked closely with the Romanian Defense Ministry and intelligence service to upgrade Kyiv's cyber defenses with new equipment and specialist advice. So, all in all, Romania has been a steadfast ally willing and able to share burdens, but also to contribute to the full spectrum of NATO missions. Romanians have also left their mark on the alliance with their diplomatic skills and intellectual firepower. I could mention many names at all levels of the NATO international staffs but Mircea Geoană as Deputy Secretary General (the first from the new member states) and Sorin Ducaru, former Romanian ambassador to NATO and Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges stand out.

What are the differences between the challenges and threats of the early 1990s and 2000s and those faced by the Alliance in the present?

In the early 1990s, a mood of euphoria reigned as the Cold War ended faster and more peacefully than anyone had dared to predict. Some media outlets, such as *Der Spiegel* in Germany, even called for the abolition of the Bundeswehr, arguing that with peace breaking out everywhere there was no more need for a national defense force. As allied troops in Germany and elsewhere packed up their kitbags and departed for home, reaping the peace dividend and converting swords into ploughshares were the *Zeitgeist* of the age. The end of great power rivalries and military competition was described as "the end of history", which was obviously far too naive and simplistic. Although Europe was now at peace, deadly conflicts and endemic violence continued in Africa, the Middle East and South West Asia with heavy death tolls. But the end of the Cold War created the time and space for NATO governments to pay more attention to those regional conflicts and try to do something about them. Troops no longer needed to fight the Soviet Union could be redeployed on peacekeeping missions in the Western Balkans and air forces designed to engage Soviet MIGs could push back against authoritarian regimes abusing the human rights of their populations, as in the interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. The focus shifted to wars within states rather than between them; but this also engendered a mood of confidence that interventions could not only stop ethnic cleansing or atrocities but also help to rebuild war torn states and create new democratic institutions. There was also hope that new legal norms, such as the Responsibility to Protect, and the setting up of international criminal tribunals to bring indicted war criminals to justice, would act as a deterrent to stop dictators from mistreating their populations. Probably the high point of this post-Cold War euphoria came in 1991 when a US led coalition evicted Saddam Hussein from Kuwait and President HW Bush proclaimed the advent of a "new world order." NATO's successful air campaign in Kosovo in 1999 also marked the triumph of liberal interventionism as a force for good in advancing "human security", the protection of individuals rather than borders, territory or vital economic assets.

After every major war there is hope for a different world order and a prolonged period of peace. The end of the Cold War was no exception. The 1990s were a good period for security with NATO on the political offensive and actively shaping the environment beyond its borders, projecting stability and moving from collective defence to crisis management. Yet the turn of the century ushered in a new, much harsher security environment where the challenges became more dangerous and more difficult to overcome. In the wake of the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington on 9/11 2001, jihadist terrorism jumped to the top of the threat list for nearly all the NATO member states. Yet military forces by themselves could not impose a solution as this threat needed cooperation among police forces and intelligence services. Going to Afghanistan and attempting nation building there proved much harder for NATO than going to the Western Balkans. Thousands of soldiers were killed during NATO's 20-yearlong ISAF operation whereas the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo cost the alliance no casualties. NATO left Kabul in 2021 with the mission very much unaccomplished and only to witness the return of the Taliban regime within days. An operation in 2011 in Libya to stop the Gaddafi regime committing human rights abuses also produced mixed results. The regime fell but with no follow up peacekeeping operation on the ground, Libya descended into violence and chaos. After two decades of out of area missions, the enthusiasm of the allies for further interventions was dampened by the experience of Afghanistan and Libya. Henceforth regional conflicts would need to be managed by diplomacy, economic sanctions or military and financial aid to friendly local governments, but no longer foreign boots on the ground.

Yet the biggest change vis a vis the 1990s has undoubtedly been the return of great power competition and of wars of aggression. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought a level of destruction and human suffering to Europe that has not been seen since the Second World War. Militaristic authoritarian states are not only more risk prone but working more closely together, particularly Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. This worrying development has obliged NATO to refocus on its core mission of collective defence and to relearn the art of conventional warfare against a peer level adversary. The Alliance has needed to rethink too the notion of deterrence particularly as all four authoritarian states are building up their nuclear weapons capabilities. Allies have also had to invest to modernise their armed forces with better technology and equipment to sustain high intensity combat. Ramping up industrial production to keep pace with demand has proven to be a difficult challenge as production lines for heavy armor and ammunition were shut down after the Cold War ended.

At the same time, the former distinction between peace and war has also broken down as the authoritarian adversaries of the West have kept up a constant barrage of hybrid warfare activities to divide democratic societies and erode trust in democratic institutions. For instance, in recent years Russia has carried out assassinations, used nerve agents, sabotaged critical infrastructure, conducted major cyber-attacks and run countless disinformation campaigns against NATO member states. These hybrid activities have forced the alliance to pay as much attention to the home front and to enhancing domestic resilience as to the protection of territory and borders. Yet the techniques of combating hybrid warfare are different from those of fighting Russian tank formations. Cyber security requires cooperation with the private sector and exposing disinformation is easier in partnership with civil society groups and NGOs. Protecting

critical infrastructure has led NATO to cooperate more closely with the EU and national industry groups. In short, to adopt a new business model and to talk to a far broader spectrum of government and stakeholders than when it was essentially a military organization during the Cold War years.

In sum, the biggest change is that NATO can no longer have the luxury of handling one issue in one place at one time. Just like it has to handle today two major competitors (China and Russia), it has to develop the agility to deal with threats from 360 degrees and along a full spectrum from disinformation and cyber-attacks to all out conventional warfare.

How would you describe the role of NATO in the Black Sea region?

The Black Sea is what NATO would describe as a “strategic sea”; that is to say that it is a vital lifeline for the alliance’s security and collective defense. Three allies are Black Sea riparian states, Romania, Turkey and Bulgaria, and also two countries that have the perspective of eventual NATO membership, Ukraine and Georgia. The maritime exercises that NATO has conducted with these two partners in the Black Sea, such as the annual Sea Breeze exercise and the cooperation on maritime security and awareness, have always played a key role in developing interoperability and bringing Ukraine and Georgia closer to the alliance. So open access to the Black Sea and freedom of navigation are important for the Alliance to be able to support its member states and partners in peace time, crisis and conflict. This has become obviously much more difficult since Russia’s full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia has used its illegal occupation of Crimea and its Black Sea fleet to bombard Ukrainian cities and to impede Ukraine’s grain exports, which are essential both for the country’s economy as well as for global food supplies. However Ukraine has had considerable success in driving the Russian navy closer to Russian bases on the eastern shores of the Black Sea and in sinking a number of Russian warships, including the flagship, Moskva. These actions have enabled Ukraine, with the help of Romania and Bulgaria, to use a western corridor along the Black Sea to export its grain. Romania is also to be commended for helping Ukraine to set up an export route between the Black Sea and the Danube via the ports of Izmail and Reni. The close cooperation between Romania and Turkey in demining the Black Sea and in neutralising the large number of mines which have drifted from their original moorings has been a major contribution to facilitating the Ukrainian grain traffic and in persuading commercial shipping companies to continue to use the Black Sea, despite Russian missile and drone strikes on ports and general attempts at intimidation.

The war in Ukraine has certainly brought home to public opinion in both Europe and North America just how vital the Black Sea is to the international liberal order, not only in terms of military security, but also as a key trading route and a factor in energy supplies as it links natural gas supplies from Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Turkey and European markets. The Russian seizure of Ukraine’s gas platforms in the Black Sea during its incursion into Crimea in 2014 was an economic blow to Kyiv but it also underscored just how important the Black Sea is as both a source, as well as a transit route for energy. This will be even more the case in the future given that Turkey has discovered large gas reserves off its northern Black Sea coast.

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO has not sent its naval forces into the Black Sea. The deployment of foreign warships into the Black Sea is moreover regulated

by the Montreux Convention of 1936 of which Turkey is the custodian. But the allies have a vital interest in preventing Moscow from attempting to transform the Black Sea into a "Russian Lake" by restricting NATO's ability (and willingness) to operate there. In recent times, Russia's behavior towards the alliance in the Black Sea has become much more aggressive. It has harassed NATO aircraft and ships and even shot down a US observation drone over international waters. This situation places even more responsibility on the allied riparian states, including Romania, to uphold maritime security in the Black Sea and to consult on how NATO can support them in these efforts by providing surveillance and situational awareness as well as capabilities, for instance in demining, cyber defense, tactical air defense and secure communications. Yet, it is not simply an issue of the Black Sea but of the Black Sea region more generally which has become less secure since Russia's invasion of Ukraine next door. Missile fragments have entered NATO airspace and landed on Romanian territory. This has put the spotlight on the quality of NATO's early warning and air and ballistic missile shield on the table. The allies have stepped up with additional and more regular deployments of fighter jets to Romanian bases and more exercises on Romanian territory. A multinational brigade headquarters has been established to provide better planning and coordination. Also, NATO has enhanced its forward presence with France leading a multinational battalion in Romania and Italy one in Bulgaria. This strengthening of the alliance's posture along the Black Sea littoral is to be welcomed. It enhances NATO's deterrence and gives it more resources to respond quickly against any attempts at aggression.

It all looked different back in the 1990s when the Black Sea was a zone of cooperation rather than competition, and Russia was a partner rather than an adversary. Both Turkey and Romania came forward with proposals and visions for Black Sea economic and political cooperation. This became a favourite topic of international conferences devoted to Black Sea cooperation frameworks, of which there were many in Bucharest and Istanbul and Ankara. Much useful work was achieved on developing the Black Sea's trade and energy corridors, on studying the impact of climate change on the Black Sea's environment, combating pollution and the loss of the Sea's biodiversity, and in responding collectively to natural disasters or shipping accidents. At that time, the shared interest of the Black Sea's riparian states in maintaining a healthy and stable environment from which they all benefited seemed to promise a closer relationship and cooperation among all these states. The Black Sea could be a model for other regional cooperation frameworks. Russia's aggressive behavior has unfortunately put much of this good work on hold for now, and it may be some years before Russia can participate in these cooperative programs again. But the democratic riparian states have no less an interest in working together on these non-military issues and in preserving an international and functioning Black Sea regime even in a time of war. How they could do this with Russia continuing in the north to misuse the Black Sea by annexing Ukrainian ports like Mariupol and Berdiansk while also bombarding others like Odesa is a big question; and one which needs to be high up on the NATO agenda. When a just and sustainable peace is ultimately achieved in Ukraine, a stable and cooperative Black Sea open to all will be essential if that peace is to have any meaning and to last.

LT. GENERAL (RET.) BEN HODGES: “THE RUSSIAN FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE REPRESENTS A HUGE WAKE UP CALL FOR NATO AND A RECOGNITION THAT OUR EASTERN FLANK INCLUDES THE BLACK SEA, NOT ONLY THE BALTIC COUNTRIES AND POLAND”



Lieutenant General (Retired) Ben Hodges, the former Commanding General of US Army Europe, is now Senior Advisor to Human Rights First, a nonprofit, nonpartisan inter-national human rights organization based in New York; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles.

Romania has become a NATO member 20 years ago, in 2004. How does Romania contribute to European security? In what way the membership in NATO of former members of the Warsaw Treaty has impacted European security?

Romania is a front-line state in Europe and of NATO. It shares a border with Russia via the Black Sea and is the Center of Gravity of US/NATO presence on the Black Sea, in all domains. Romania also contributes to European security because of its quality armed forces, the investment in modernization, and the excellent host nation support it provides to the NATO Black Sea Air Policing Mission, the NATO eFP Battle Group, and the US forces who operate there on a rotational basis.

How has the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 transformed the defense posture of NATO on the Eastern Flank?

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine represents a huge woke-up call for NATO, and a recognition that our Eastern Flank includes the Black Sea, not only the Baltic Countries and Poland. No longer does NATO have ‘tiered’ forward presence, it’s now one flank.

What is the main threat faced by the Alliance today?

Russia is of course the primary threat facing NATO in the short term. But China is not sitting idly by, and Iran is supporting Russia as well as enabling proxies who threaten security and stability in Europe.

How would you describe NATO deterrence efforts in the Black Sea region?

Completely inadequate. We should be doing all we can to enforce freedom of navigation on the Black Sea and in international air space. It's a huge mistake that the US has pulled back its MQ-9 patrols over the Black Sea to a greater distance from Crimea than before. It's also a huge mistake that Black Sea Air Policing no longer actually flies out over the Black Sea. And Türkiye's unwillingness to allow NATO ships to enter the Black Sea, in accordance with the Montreux Convention, as we were doing before 2022, is a terrible signal to send to Russia. The US has got to repair its relationship with Türkiye and regain their confidence.

What should Romania do more in the Black Sea in order to deter against a potential aggression?

Romania should increase its capabilities for counter-mining, anti-submarine warfare, and protection of its energy infrastructure in the Black Sea. Use of maritime drones will be critical to this. Romania must also increase its air and missile defense capabilities, especially over Constanta and MK air base. Finally, mobility for land forces into and through Romania is very difficult. Make improving military mobility and use of the Danube a priority in terms of infrastructure for more effective deterrence.

Eventually, Ukraine will become a NATO member. How will this development transform European security?

NATO will become better the day Ukraine joins NATO, just as we got better when Finland and Sweden joined. Ukraine will bring an experienced military force, a resilient society, and a fast-growing defense industry to NATO.

In the US we are witnessing an increase in isolationist points of view regarding American involvement in Europe. Some of these points of view fault Europe for not doing enough for its own defense, others argue that US strategic focus should shift to the Indo-Pacific. How should European states, especially those on the Eastern Flank, deal with such arguments and positions?

Europe should be working hard to prepare for less US presence on the continent. The threat will only increase if the US fails to act responsibly and strategically with regard to the Russian threat in Europe and second, take the steps necessary to encourage US presence. European countries should make it clear why it's in America's interest to stay fully engaged in Europe and that means of course that Europe needs to take on more responsibility.

(Interviewer and editor George Vişan)

Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, Secretary General of NATO¹

The purpose of the NATO alliance is to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.

Churchill: "Have you forgiven me for sending you to NATO?" Ismay: "Sir, you were right, as always."

Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery, Viscount of Alamein²

NATO is the only answer to the political and military problems of the free world. But we must not be complacent and think that the organization can't be improved; there are many improvements which could be made.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Remarks in Naples at NATO Headquarters, July 2, 1963

NATO is one of the best and earliest examples of cooperation between Western Europe and the North American nations for the common good of freedom.

The NATO treaty pledges us all to the common defense—to regard an attack on one as an attack on all, and respond with all the force required—and that pledge is as strong and unshakable now as it was the day it was made.

¹ NATO, "Origins - NATO Leaders: Lord Ismay", https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm#:~:text=Lord%20Ismay.%20Lord%20Hastings%20Lionel%20Ismay

² NATO, "Origins - NATO Leaders: Bernard Law Montgomery", https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_142460.htm#:~:text=Even%20Churchill,%20who%20later%20became%20one



THE ROAD TO NATO: FROM IRON CURTAIN TO NATO SECURITY

Ambassador (Ret.) Daniel Fried

In 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched full-scale war to force Ukraine back into Russia's empire. The Kremlin might have started similar wars of imperial reconquest against the Baltics, Poland, or Romania had it not been for their earlier accession to NATO. Happily, NATO had opened the road to membership for Europe's newly self-liberated countries in the mid-1990s, seeking to extend the security that Western Europe had known since NATO's founding in 1949 to all of Europe. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, by virtue of their own democratic and free market transformations after 1989, were willing and able to take that road at a time when circumstances were relatively favorable, that is, when Russia was more benign and less powerful. Ukraine was not then prepared to do so. Ukraine and NATO now face the challenge of how to advance security for Europe, including Ukraine, under far more difficult circumstances.

Poles, Czechs, Romanians, and many others in Central and Eastern Europe had concluded early in the 1990s that their regained freedom would have been at risk without membership in the NATO Alliance. They, especially Polish President Lech Walesa and Czech President Vaclav Havel, made the case to President Bill Clinton that the West, the U.S. especially, had a window of opportunity and pressed the U.S. to advance NATO enlargement while it could. The Clinton Administration understood the concerns of the Central Europeans, but initially prioritized relations with Russia and opposed NATO enlargement. If post-Soviet Russia were to develop in a democratic and pro-Western direction, went the initial U.S. logic, European security, Central Europe's included, would follow.

U.S. government thinking, changed as a result of changing circumstances in Central Europe and Russia which made the Administration less comfortable with its initial "Russia first" approach to European security. Clinton's National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, grew uneasy with a policy that would in effect lock Central Europeans outside Western institutions, leaving them in a "gray zone." This would validate the Iron Curtain as a line of demarcation in Europe even after the Cold War and, potentially, invite future Russia aggression. Moreover, by 1993, after rough initial years, free market democracy in Central Europe, especially in Poland, was advancing, producing what would be a generation of generally rapid growth and political stability, while in Russia reforms were uneven and nationalist parties were rising.¹ Basing post-Cold War European and transatlantic security principally on hopes for Russia seemed shaky; ignoring the far more successful transformation by then underway in Central Europe seemed obtuse.

The Clinton Administration concluded that achieving a Europe whole and free, required erasing the line of the Iron Curtain in practice. That meant opening the West's

¹ In 1993, the nationalist "Liberal Democratic Party" of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy captured 23% of the vote, a result that dismayed the Clinton Administration.

key institutions, starting with NATO and hopefully the European Community (now the European Union) to the Central Europeans if they met those organizations' standards.

The U.S. did not cast aside relations with Russia. NATO enlargement was designed as part of a two-track approach, in parallel with development of a NATO-Russia relationship that could become an "alliance with the Alliance." The NATO enlargement and NATO-Russia tracks would advance independently, and at their own pace; Russia could not block NATO enlargement by stalling on NATO-Russia relations.

The Clinton Administration also addressed Russian security concerns about NATO enlargement, including through two key assurances in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act that formalized the new NATO-Russia relationship. First, the Founding Act affirmed that NATO had "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members". Second, the Alliance committed that "in the current and foreseeable security environment," NATO's defense of its members did not require the "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces."² NATO kept these pledges, even after Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. Moreover, the U.S. continued its post-Cold War draw down of its forces in Europe even as NATO took on more members and thus more responsibilities.

The Poles, Romanians, and others in Central Europe were not convinced that Russia would turn out to be the partner Washington hoped it would be. But they accepted the Clinton Administration's two-track approach and even toned down their public skepticism about Russia. Instead, they stressed with laudable conviction that their objective in seeking NATO membership was to integrate with a stable Europe rather than to deal with an impending Russian threat.

Romania had a slow start in its own democratic free market transformation after the violent overthrow of the communist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989. Communism in Romania was harsher than in Hungary and even Poland, and the democratic dissident movement there was smaller, more repressed and isolated. By 1997, when the Clinton Administration, now beginning its second term, was preparing to urge NATO to extend the first invitations for accession to countries east of the Iron Curtain, Romanis was just beginning to catch up in its reforms.

Romania's leaders, and especially its skilled ambassador to the U.S. Mircea Geoană³, could and did make a credible case for Romania to be included in the first tranche of post-1989 NATO invitees. The principal advocates within the U.S. government, myself included as then NSC Senior Director for Central and Eastern Europe, had confidence that Romania's democratic transformation was on solid ground. But we were more concerned by the challenge of Senate ratification of the Protocols of Accession for the next NATO invitees. Two thirds of the Senate had to vote in favor. Losing that vote would have been a strategic catastrophe on the level of the failure of the Senate to ratify U.S. entry into the League of Nations in 1919. That debacle ushered in the era of U.S. "isolationism" and opened the way for Hitler's rise without U.S. countervailing power and the Hitler-Stalin

² Daniel Fried, Steven Pifer and Alexander Vershbow, "NATO-Russia: It's time to suspend the Founding Act", *The Hill*, June 7, 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3514801-nato-russia-its-time-to-suspend-the-founding-act/#:~:text=The%20Founding%20Act%20contained%20two%20key%20assurances%20to,the%20territory%20of%20new%20members%20%28the%20three%20no's%29.>

³ Mircea Geoană was Romania's ambassador to the United States of America between 1996 and 2000 (editor's note).

Pact of 1939. We felt that securing that vote was essential. Soundings with the U.S. Senate in 1997 suggested that there would be greater support for a smaller initial tranche of invitees, so the Clinton Administration team made the decision to go for three: Poland, Czechia, and Hungary.

It felt to me to inform the Romanian government of this decision and Ambassador Geoană was, to put it mildly, unhappy. But Ambassador Geoană was also quick to look forward. He made a powerful case for a rapid and credible signal from the United States that the 1997 invitations to NATO accession would not be the last. That signal, he argued, had to be strong and it had to be addressed to the Romanian people, not just its government. His arguments were plausible.

In the spring of 1997, NATO advanced the NATO-Russia relationship by concluding the NATO-Russia Founding Act. That summer, at the Madrid Summit, NATO extended an invitation to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. President Clinton visited Bucharest immediately afterwards and conveyed to an enthusiastic Romanian audience, that NATO enlargement would continue, implying that Romania would be in the next group. The U.S. Senate ratified Polish, Czech, and Hungarian accession to the Alliance in 1998 (by a strong vote of 80-19) and on March 12, 1999, NATO formally brought in the first countries east of the old Cold War line.

The Bush Administration, in which I also served as NSC Senior Director for Europe, continued the two-track policy of NATO enlargement and NATO-Russia relations. President Bush gave an early signal of his support for NATO's continued enlargement during his first trip to Europe in June 2001, saying that at its 2002 Summit in Prague, NATO "should not calculate how little we can get away with but how much we can do to advance the cause of freedom."⁴

True to that policy, NATO upgraded the NATO-Russia relationship in the spring of 2002 and, at its Prague Summit in November of that year, extended invitations to seven more Central and East European countries, including Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The NATO invitation to Romania was an easy call. The invitation to the Baltic states, that had been illegally annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, was not: many in Washington and Western Europe thought it would be too provocative. President Bush himself made the decision to include the Baltics, judging, rightly as it turned out, that the window for such an ambitious enlargement might close. The invitees from the Prague Summit joined NATO in 2004.

The Prague NATO Summit may have been the last opportunity to invite the Baltics into the Alliance. In March 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq, a decision strongly opposed by France and Germany. Several years of tense relations followed. By the time the U.S. had patched things up with Berlin and Paris, the window for ambitious enlargements of NATO was narrowing.

Putin had turned to authoritarianism at home and increased his ambitions abroad trying, as later became apparent, to reassemble the Russian empire, including by war. He accepted Baltic accession to NATO, but, mistakenly, saw a U.S. hand in indigenous pro-democracy movements that backed pro-Western leaders in Georgia and Ukraine.

⁴ *Remarks by the President in Address to Faculty and Students of Warsaw University*, June 15, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010615-1.html>

By 2007, Putin had cast the West as a foe.⁵

Sensing that opportunities for extending NATO's security further East were closing, President Bush sought at the Bucharest NATO Summit in April 2008 to offer NATO Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine. NATO split on that issue, with Germany and France opposing MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine. After a heated debate in the Plenary NATO session, NATO came up with the famous formula that Ukraine and Georgia would someday become members of NATO but without a plan or timetable to get them there. In the face of evident NATO disunity, Putin, speaking the next day at the Bucharest NATO-Russia Summit, made his first public claim against Ukrainian territory, claiming that in 1954, when Crimea was transferred from the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, legal procedures had not been followed. Putin launched a war against Georgia in 2008, again following Allied disunity over Ukraine and Georgia.

What has been the balance of NATO enlargement?

NATO enlargement met its initial objectives. Central and East European countries, 100 million people, entered the Alliance and enjoyed a generation of economic development, democracy, and security that few on either side of the Iron Curtain expected when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.⁶ (Hungary later became an exception to the pattern of democratic development in Central Europe.)

The NATO-Russia track did not succeed. NATO-Russia's relations deteriorated as Putin attacked Ukraine in 2014 and launched full-scale war against it in 2022.

Nevertheless, NATO enlargement appears even better in hindsight. In the 1990s, Poles, Balts, Romanians and many others from Central and Eastern Europe cautioned the U.S. that if NATO did not bring in new members when it could, Russia would return to an imperial path, seeking to claim as much of its former empire as possible. In retrospect, it seems they were right. The war that the Central Europeans warned about then is the war that Ukraine now faces: a war of imperial reconquest.

What went wrong in relations with Russia was not NATO enlargement but Russia's own conception of itself and its needs. The U.S. sought to work with post-Soviet Russia as a country. Putin came to define Russia as an empire.⁷ Those imperial claims include Ukraine and potentially extend to the Baltic States, Poland, Finland, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and most of Central Asia. Romania would also be vulnerable to Russian pressure. As a giant billboard in Russia, including at the border with Estonia, puts it, "Russia's borders do not end."⁸ NATO enlargement did not prevent Russia from launching imperial wars. It did make sure that those wars took place further East.

NATO enlargement has not run its course. It is hard to imagine lasting security in Europe with Ukraine outside NATO, in a "grey zone" of strategic ambiguity. After intense debate, at its Vilnius and Washington Summits, NATO strengthened its commitment that

⁵ Daniel Fried and Kurt Volker, "The Speech In Which Putin Told Us Who He Was", *Politico*, February 18, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/18/putin-speech-wake-up-call-post-cold-war-order-liberal-2007-00009918>

⁶ Hungary later became an exception to the pattern of democratic development in Central Europe.

⁷ Max Fisher, "Putin's Case for War, Annotated", *New York Times*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/world/europe/putin-ukraine-speech.html>

⁸ Brendan Cole, "Putin Billboard Raises Invasion Fears: 'Russia's Borders Do Not End'", *Newsweek*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-endless-border-putin-rosenberg-bbc-threatening-comment-billboard-1861020>.

Ukraine's future is indeed in NATO, calling that process "irreversible" but, again, without a plan or timetable to bring Ukraine, a nation at war, into the Alliance. The road to NATO continues.

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NATO AT 75: WAVES OF TRANSFORMATION, GROWING RELEVANCE & CHALLENGES

Ambassador Sorin Ducaru

Introduction

As it marks this year its 75th Anniversary, the addressing NATO's continuing and, in fact, growing strategic role and relevance in a changing and more complex security environment is of paramount importance. It is based on its remarkable endurance, versatility, adaptation potential and capacity to deliver in terms of assuring the collective defense and security for its members and strengthen global stability. The Alliance had, in particular, a hugely successful deterrence role (based on political will and military strength), leading to the end of the Cold War without any hot confrontation with the Soviet adversary.

While it was created as a collective defense alliance, to assure its members' security against the Soviet threat, NATO has not only proven its endurance after the dismantlement of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but has proven to be very attractive for new members, while increasing its membership from 16 to 32, since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, it was able to evolve, adapt to a changing threat landscape and to transform strategically.

To address in more detail the strategic evolution of NATO, especially in the last three decades, along with the key role of its open-door policy in this rejuvenation and adaptation process, I propose to structure the analysis in three key transformation stages, as witnessed throughout professional experience in working with, or within NATO structures.

The 1990s Post Cold-War Dilemmas: "End of History or What?"

Francis Fukuyama's "End of History"¹ essay, written in the context of general optimism and hope, which characterized the years that marked the end of the Cold War, made quite an impact upon scholars and analysts. This came after half of century of a bipolar world system, with geopolitical, economic, and military stand-up between two confrontational ideological poles and military blocks. The collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union inspired Fukuyama, and some others, to believe that the end of the bipolar ideological and military adversity would end the history of high stakes and high-risk confrontation. It would open the way to a time of dominant cooperation.

This optimism was actually also reflected through increased initiatives of cooperation with Russia and former Soviet block countries within the UN system the IMF and World Bank, the access to the World Trade Organization, creation of the Organization for security

¹ Chris Fleming, "The End of History: Francis Fukuyama's controversial idea explained", The Conversation, November 16, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-end-of-history-francis-fukuyamas-controversial-idea-explained-193225>

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the extension of G7 to G8, through the inclusion of Russia etc. It must be said, however, that many political realists did not buy the argument that the end of bipolar ideological and military block rivalry would lead to an end of the history of confrontation of the world scene. Through his book "The Clash of Civilizations", Samuel Huntington, was just one of the most impactful scholars who pointed to the fact that there are important triggers of international conflict in our world, while highlighting the cultural, religious, and civilizational divides as sources with conflictual combustion potential. For other political realists, the main argument against Fukuyama's approach was simply the persistence of "power" as key driving force in international relations.

For NATO, this "end of history" or "strategy holiday" perceived context has generated a number of dilemmas. This first was a so-called existential dilemma. The demise of its Cold War adversary has put forward the issue of the Alliance's future "reason of being." This existential dilemma has been short lived, given the foundational focus on what NATO is for, namely the security and collective defense of its members sovereignty and integrity, and contribution to international security, not merely on what NATO was perceived to be against - the Soviet Block. In fact, the Washington Treaty is all about what NATO is for, namely, collective defense against any threat, and does not identify any particular enemy or adversary. Furthermore, the recognition of NATO as an Alliance of values and of its mission success to deter aggression, conflict and war against its members and contribute to international stability have all been compelling arguments for its viability and continuous valuable role.

The second dilemma faced by NATO was that of enlargement, it was determined by context of a strong political desire, backed by significant popular support in Central and Eastern European countries to become members of the Alliance. For Romania, as for many of the other countries in the region, this strategic objective was driven not solely by the essential collective defense guarantees, but was regarded by the public opinion also, as a matter of historic reparation and validation of "western" and democratic identity through the return to the family of democratic and free-market oriented family of European nations from which this region was hijacked by the Soviet domination after the Second World War.

The aspect of what is NATO for, as an Alliance of values, for the preservation of security, freedom, stability, and peace had a strong resonance. The NATO approach to this ardent desire of membership by former Soviet block countries has been gradual, through the launch of the so-called Partnership for Peace (PfP) opened to all. For those aiming to join NATO, this partnership could lead to membership, through a process of reforms, preparation, and conditions-based accession. But NATO's partnerships policy and structure has evolved into a genuine cooperative security instrument, with its different geographical formats and specificities, including a special partnership with Russia (the NATO-Russia Council) or partners across the globe.

The so called "out of area or out of business" dilemma of NATO was mainly determined by the hot ethnic conflicts generated in the process of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the political pressure, under the high public emotion in European countries to do something and stop the human suffering and casualties, generated by those ethnic conflicts. Any NATO intervention in this, however, meant an intervention out of Allied territory. Furthermore, it meant acting beyond its collective defense core

mission, namely assuming a conflict and a crisis management role. The drama of the wars in former Yugoslavia has pushed NATO to engage, 'de facto' in out of area crisis management. After the 9/11 terror attacks against the USA and the American military intervention to root out terrorist from Afghanistan and the subsequent UN Stabilization Mission in Afghanistan (ISAF), NATO's out of area engagement included an almost two decades-long engagement in Afghanistan.

New Millennium, New Core Missions and Emerging Security Challenges

The Lisbon Strategic Concept of 2010 formally captured the decision of NATO members to include Cooperative Security and Crisis Management, along with the original Collective Defense role, as the three core mission of the Alliance, therefore reflecting a strategic transformation of NATO in a changing security context.

At the same time, the 2010 Strategic Concept has put a strong emphasis on NATO's adaptation to what it defined as emerging, non-conventional security threats, such as terrorism, cyber- attacks, energy security concerns and more generally the impact of disruptive technologies upon security. In 2010, the threat analysis of NATO considered the potential of a conventional conflict in Europe as remote (as reflected also in the Lisbon Strategic Concept), was emphasizing the potential of cooperative security and NATO partnerships, including with Russia, while emphasizing the importance of investing in the prevention, mitigation and defense against the new emerging security challenges of the XXI century. It was in this context that the NATO international secretariat has created a new Division for Emerging Security Challenges, which I have the honor to lead between 2013-2017. NATO also adopted a Cyber Defense Policy, Action Plan and Management Board, a Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as established energy security team and a "horizon scanning" Strategic Analysis Capability, with a special focus on the new and evolving threat landscape.

"The Return of History and the end of Dreams"

The catchy title of Robert Kagan's book published in 2009² best characterizes the security landscape after the 2014 illegal annexation by Russia of Crimea and the hot conflict in Donbas (with the partial occupation of this Ukrainian region by Russia). As the former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen put it, Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and guarantor of Ukraine's territorial integrity, under the Budapest Memorandum³, decided to do something which was unconceivable since World War Two in Europe. It threw away the International Law rulebook and illegally annexed parts of the sovereign territory of its neighbor, Ukraine. Thus, a perception of return of history.

In fact, the hybrid warfare tactics used by Russia before, during and after the illegal annexation of Crimea, the cyber-attacks, information manipulation, the armed "little green men" (namely soldiers in military uniforms without national insignia) are all leading to the conclusion it is not just a simple return of old military backed illegal hard-power actions, which were considered a thing of the past. These were combined with new techniques and capabilities, such as highly effective cyber-attacks and social media

² Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2009.

³ Steven Pifer, "Why care about Ukraine and the Budapest Memorandum", December 5, 2019, *Brookings Institution*, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-care-about-ukraine-and-the-budapest-memorandum/>.

amplified information manipulation. It reflects indeed a hybrid blend of emerging and re-emerging challenges. One thing was clear, namely, that the “strategic holiday” (if it ever existed) was over.

This triggered NATO’s further adaptation and transformation. On the one hand a refocusing of collective defense, its reason of being, through the increase in defense spending, reviewing defense plans and developing new ones for new members, strengthening the military presence on the Eastern flank. On the other hand, continuing the defense adaptation against emerging threats, while linking cyber-defense to collective defense and Article 5, in 2014 and declaring cyber as domain of military operation in 2016, developing and placing the European pillar of the US missile defense system under NATO command, developing the first NATO Space Policy and declaring Outer-Space as an operational domain, strengthening NATO’s innovation potential and link with industry to stimulate defense innovation.

At the same time, NATO has not given up on strengthening its cooperative security approach with trusted partners, in line with its values and objectives. The substantive support to Ukraine in its defense against the Russian invasion, which started in 2022 is compelling. The trusted partnerships with neighboring countries in the Black Sea, Mediterranean regions, Persian Gulf or with global partners continued and were developed.

One noteworthy development is the most recent enlargement of NATO with Finland and Sweden, which has indeed an important strategic, political, military and further transformational impact for the Alliance.

Crisis management engagement has continued in the Balkans but was diminished dramatically through the termination of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and the hasty withdrawal of 2021. The complete lessons learned, from this costly and not successful engagement in Afghanistan, are yet to be concluded.

More relevant than Ever – Strengths and Challenges in a Dangerous World

To highlight the Alliance’s strengths and endurance, as well as those characteristics that make it unique, I would focus the following aspects, resulted from personal experience and analysis throughout my diplomatic career linked to NATO:

It is based not only on the shared security interest of its members, but also on shared values.

While it is presented often in the colloquial jargon as a “military alliance,” NATO is in fact a politically-military institution.

It is based on consensus, unity of purpose and the collective defense commitment under the Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty.

NATO assures a coordinated investment of Allies in national defense capabilities, through the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP), assuring coherent, complementary, and more cost-efficient investment in defense. This is in line with Art. 3 of the Washington Treaty, which provided of each ally’s obligation to invest in its own resilience, security, and defense, in coordination with the other Allies. After the Russian illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, allies committed to a gradual increase of defense spending towards 2% of GDP, over a decade. A number of Allies have increased the defense spending above this level.

The Alliance benefits from a unique and unified military command structure, defense

plans and implementation instruments, and from force generation procedures, which allow the effective and efficient engagement of national forces in the execution of politically approved military operations.

NATO has proven its flexibility, versatility, and capacity of adaptation, in a changing security environment.

The Alliance has been successful in delivering, for three quarters of a century, on its mission of assuring the security and stability of its members, developing relations with trusted partners, and strengthening stability and security world-wide.

For those who have questioned NATO's reason of being, or surviving at the end of the Cold War, its capacity to safeguard the security of its members, to adapt and transform and to attract new members is a proof of its continuous value and role, in a dangerous World. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as cyber or influence operations against Allies, have clearly reaffirmed the vital relevance and need for NATO.

There are some important challenges ahead determined by a more complex and dangerous security context. Russia's aggressive actions has determined a renewed Allied focus on collective defense and prioritization on defense investment. China's and Iran's support to Russia, as well as their regional power play have amplified the need for NATO to follow the global security ramifications and have invigorated its regional partnerships and those across the globe. This will continue to stimulate and support its cooperative security mission.

The appetite for direct engagement in crisis management is, however, at a low point, after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. In my view, the biggest challenges and tests for the immediate future are related to the need maintain and adapt the support towards Ukraine, while, at the same time, strengthening deterrence and defense on NATO's Eastern flank and continuously support its partnerships. Russia's divisive influence operations within several allied nations are questioning and eroding the public support for Ukraine and weakening the unity of the Alliance. The results of electoral processes in some European countries or the recent FBI on Russian influence operations deployed through social media vividly reflect these challenges.

Given the growing US challenges of addressing simultaneously several "hot spots" beyond the trans-Atlantic sphere, such as those in the Middle East or South China Sea and the internal political developments in the US, it is clear that the contribution of European countries within NATO will be key in the next years. Allied unity will not be easy to achieve on all occasions, and a kind of revival of the "coalition of the willing" approach among the more concerned and pro-active allies will be necessary.

Asymmetric confrontation and warfare tactics, as well as the emergence and employment of disruptive technologies with confrontational purposes adds to the complexity of the security context. External and internal security aspect are increasingly entangled. These are non-trivial challenges and concerns implying the need for continuous public outreach for a realist and converging threat perception, manifestation of unity, adaptation, innovation and coordinated investment in relevant, upgraded defence capabilities.

With all the success of NATO in its 75 years of existence, this is much more than a moment of celebration and confident reaffirmation of its vital strategic role and relevance. It is a moment of realistic evaluation of a global security context of unprecedented

complexity and volatility, requiring a vigorously focus and prioritization of long-term security investment and adaptation.

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SECURITY, RESILIENCE AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION - ROMANIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STABILITY OF NATO'S EASTERN FLANK

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Introduction

From its borderline state position, Romania's role at the eastern frontier of NATO has been relevant for the security and stability of the region ever since the country's membership in the organization. Romania has the second longest external land border of both NATO and the EU (after Finland), most of which is shared with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. As such, Romania has sought to consolidate its 'eastern vocation' as one of its main foreign policy goals ever since joining NATO, in 2004, acknowledging the fact the security of the eastern flank is salient, both for its own security interests and for the alliance's external policies. Romania's successive national defense strategies and government programs (including the most recent ones) have recurrently indicated the country's commitment to NATO and the responsibility to strengthening the security of the eastern flank. In fact, Romania's self-representation has been that of a 'provider of stability and security in the region', a phrase Bucharest persistently maintains in all its official foreign policy and security documents. Equally, with the volatility in the former Soviet space and Russia's aggressiveness in the region, Romania has been recognized by its Western allies as a bastion of stability at the eastern edge of NATO, which becomes especially critical today, in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In search of a new security role

Shortly after the end of the Cold War and the fall of communist regime Romania felt insecure about its future foreign policy and security role, which needed to be rethought and redesigned. As a non-member, Romania feared marginalization and exclusion from the emerging European security structure. Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, Romania's most important external objectives were securing the membership of the Euro-Atlantic community. The deep transformative process Romania embarked on took the shape of an intense socialization to the Euro-Atlantic norms and values at various levels – institutional, strategic and policymaking. This process had not been an easy task, since the full-fledged membership of the NATO required some substantial rearrangements both domestically and internationally. Institutionally, taking on membership requirements meant legal and organizational changes which took years to bear fruit. Strategically, important shifts in policies and orientations were required. Compared to the early 1990s, when ambiguity still dominated Romania's foreign policy doctrine, in the 2000s, the Euro-Atlantic community was considered Romania's main security linchpin. The 2004 membership of NATO and the previous 1997 strategic partnership between the US and

Romania generated a shifting dynamic also at the level of Romania's strategic thinking. Ever since joining NATO, Romania has been one of the staunchest 'Atlanticists' in Europe and perceives NATO as the main guarantor of its defense.

This new strategic thinking has also been employed in relation to the eastern neighbors, Republic Moldova and Ukraine, where Romania has committed itself to act as a trustworthy member state, willing to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic community's eastern flank and work on consolidating the ties between the neighboring countries and the Western institutions.

I have labelled Romania's role in the North Atlantic Alliance as the 'good and reliable member state'¹. This role conception is both system-affirming and displays a sense of obligation, whereby Romania has been intensively seeking both to be a reliable contributor to the stability and security of the alliance and to represent NATO's interests and policies in the wider Black Sea region and the immediate eastern neighborhood. The new role conception of a state cognizant of its geostrategic location on the eastern flank of the NATO, which neighbours an unordered and vulnerable eastern proximity, considering the security challenges that inherently come therewith (Russia's increasing assertiveness, the volatility in the Black Sea basin the hotbeds of conflict, culminating with the war in Ukraine etc.) has been a recurrent preoccupation for Romania's foreign policy and security establishment.

However, incongruencies have been identified between, on the one hand, Bucharest's official discourse, which shows constant regional ambitions and enhanced status aspirations, and, on the other, the limited visibility and follow-up actions to address challenges existing in the Black Sea region and in the eastern neighborhood². Especially in the first decade of membership in NATO, Romania has appeared to be gripped by a certain degree of restraint in the enactment of its assumed role of 'stability provider' in the region, since this role looked, in fact, narrower in geographic scope, limited to its national territory rather than a regional endeavor.

In relation to the Black Sea region, a constant priority for the Romanian foreign policy and security establishment, regional cooperation attempts have not managed to muster sufficient support from the participant states until the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine. This has been caused by a lack of sense of urgency shared by the US and the other allies, particularly the Black Sea NATO member states. While the Baltic Sea has received increasing attention and benefited from a strong level of coordination among the NATO members, the antagonistic Turkish relationship with the U.S. and European allies has undermined Romania's efforts to put the Black Sea on NATO's agenda. Since the beginning of the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Romanian policymakers have double downed on advocating the need for a stronger NATO presence in the Black Sea, which would counter Russia's moves. Ultimately, these efforts have managed to stand out and gather momentum among the Western partners. Politically, the strategic importance of the Black Sea region was for the first time recognised in the NATO new strategic concept at the 2022 Summit in Madrid. Similarly, Romania has been seeking

¹ T.L. Moga, N. Bureiko and L. Maria Simionov, "Constructing Romania's foreign policy and security role in its eastern neighbourhood: the cases of Moldova and Ukraine", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4), 2021, pp. 615–638.

² T.L. Moga and N. Bureiko, "Ambitions yet unrealized: Romania's status and perceptions from the immediate eastern neighbourhood", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 24(1), 2002, pp. 1–20.

to persuade the US to adopt a Black Sea Strategy, which would strengthen coordination between the US, NATO, and partners in the Black Sea. Such strategy is long overdue and, if finally adopted, would very likely convince the other NATO members to follow suit and generate a NATO Black Sea strategy at the level of the alliance. In the same vein, Romania has seen over the last two years an increased military presence from the NATO allies in the so-called multinational battlegroup. Currently, more than 5.000 soldiers from NATO countries such as France, Belgium, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal and the US are deployed in Romania. Moreover, Romania has begun the construction of what will eventually be the NATO's largest European military base, as the alliance seeks to bolster its capabilities in the Black Sea region, given Russia's continuous acts of aggression. The Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base will undergo transformations estimated at a cost of €2.5 billion to base advanced fighter jets and drones, while hosting up to 10,000 NATO troops.

Romania has been strengthening its military capabilities during the second decade of its membership in NATO after years of underinvestment. For 2024, Bucharest has pledged 2.5% of its GDP on military expenses and contracted the acquisition of F-35 fighter jets, additional Patriot missile-defence systems, battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and drones from different suppliers, such as the US, South Korea, and Turkey. Most recently, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey have agreed to activate a naval task force dedicated to countering mine warfare in the Black Sea, while at the 2024 NATO summit in Washington, Romania and Bulgaria signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a Regional Special Operations Command for the Black Sea (HQ R-SOCC). The new command body will integrate Romanian and Bulgarian special forces through a new Command and Control (C2) structure aimed at protecting trade routes and commercial ships.

Beyond NATO's eastern flank, in relation to the eastern neighborhood³, Romania has mostly displayed a 'Republic of Moldova first' foreign policy, with most of its financial resources available for its external assistance going for the support of Moldova. While Republic of Moldova has always ranked atop Bucharest's external interests, benefiting from various cooperation frameworks to implement political, economic and social reforms, during its first decade in NATO (2004-2014), Romania was generally reluctant to engage Ukraine. Thorny issues were still dominating the bilateral agenda (such as, the delimitation of borders and the status of the ethnic Romanian minority in Ukraine). In fact, 2014 is the watershed moment in the bilateral relationship, since the Russian aggression in Ukraine has spurred coordination between Bucharest and Kyiv, based on the security-first principle. Russia's 2022 full scale invasion of Ukraine has been instrumental for upgrading the bilateral relation. Romania provided significant humanitarian assistance and contributed to managing the refugee crisis (around 5 million Ukrainian refugees have crossed Romania, on their way out of Ukraine since the beginning of the war; of this roughly 80.000 Ukrainians have remained to date). In addition, Romania has been a transit hub for more than 60% of the Ukrainian grain exported via its terrestrial routes and the maritime port of Constanța. Romania has also been providing military help to Kyiv

³ Please consider the findings of RoSec, project supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS-UEFIS-CDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0073, within PNCDI III, available at: https://cse.uaic.ro/rosec/index_html_files/RoSecRppolicyrecs.pdf.

in the war with Russia but has refused to reveal the scale of the support, citing security concerns. It has also pledged to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 jets in a regional hub inaugurated in November 2023, at the 86th Air Base in Fetești and in May 2024 decided to contribute the Ukrainian air defense by providing the Ukrainian army a Patriot system. Most recently, Romania and Ukraine signed in Washington, on 10 July 2024, an agreement on enhanced security cooperation.

Conclusion

The Romanian case exemplifies how the membership in NATO can gradually diminish uncertainty and assign a new role for the country. I have labelled this role conception as the 'good and reliable member state' and shown how Romania employed this role in formulating its external policies beyond the eastern flank in relation to the immediate neighbours, Ukraine and Moldova, and the wider Black Sea region, an area emanating security risks for the eastern flank of NATO. Romania places a strong emphasis on its membership in NATO to consolidate its own security, which is naturally linked to the stability of the eastern flank. As such, Romania displays strong dependence on the institutional frameworks provided by NATO for coordinating the efforts to assuage the security risks in the region.

An immediate recommendation is that, in order to enhance its role and influence in the region, Romanian decision-makers should increase their security cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova. In concrete terms, Romania could provide more assistance in defence-related matters, based on its NATO experience and considering Russia's assertiveness in the wider region⁴. For the years to come, Romania's constant attention and resources to the Black Sea region could be narrowed down, with a focus shifted largely on the security of Ukraine. The emphasis on the defense and security of Ukraine is not only important for the stability of the eastern flank, but also for the security of the Republic of Moldova. So far, Romania's support for Ukraine has been unequivocal, but lacked vigor when communicating the geostrategic importance of the Ukrainian to its domestic audience. A reset at the level of the communication strategy is welcomed and could be undertaken from 2025, when Romania will have a new president and government. This is especially relevant, considering the fact that Romania is in the vicinity of a contested area for the years to come. A coherent and dynamic communication strategy would increase the visibility of Romania within the alliances and would contribute to the strengthening the eastern flank of NATO also at the informational level, in the effort to counter disinformation and hybrid threats launched by Russian Federation. Last but not least, it could stimulate interaction with the Romanian public by explaining the relevance of NATO in the regional security context. In turn, Romania would benefit more from the support at the societal level and consolidate the nexus between authorities and population, so important to the functioning of the state. It is hoped that this article provides, at least, some basis for thinking, at the policymaking level, about how to enhance Romania's contribution to the security of NATO's eastern flank and beyond.

⁴ T. L. Moga, N. Bureiko, A. Gheorghiu and B.C. Ibănescu, "Testing a Six-Factor Model on Perceived State Power and Influence: The Case of Romania", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2023 pp. 1-22.

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NATO AND THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR IN THE BLACK SEA

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History remembers some dates marking important historical developments more poignantly than others. In the twentieth century November 11, 1918, Armistice Day, marked the memory of an entire generation as it signified the end of four long years of war spent mostly in trenches; September 3, 1934, marked the beginning of the Second World War for the United Kingdom and France, though Poland had already been battling the Nazi war machine for 48 hours; December 7, 1941, was considered a date “that shall live in infamy” as US president F. D. Roosevelt described to the US Congress on December 8, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; the year 1989 is sometimes remembered as a “miracle year” for the, mostly peaceful, fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War.

It is too early to know how February 24, 2022, the day when the large-scale war against Ukraine began, will remain in the memory of the world at large. What we know today, with a high degree of certainty, is that the all-out invasion of Ukraine represents the greatest challenge to the rules-based international order and the greatest threat to European security since the end of Second World War in 1945. The significance of the illegal and illegitimate full-scale invasion of Ukraine is clear: Vladimir Putin, Russia’s strongman, has decided that it is time for Russia to contest the international world order and to redraw the map of Europe after the principle “might makes right”. In this sense Putin is not very original, he is just the latest Russian leader who thinks that can achieve a favorable world and European order through force, rather than dialogue, negotiations and respect for established rules of international conduct. Others, in the last century, were Vladimir Ilych Lenin, Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. Fortunate for European and international order, their revisionism was checked.

The aim of this article is to show the strategic significance of the Black Sea region as an arena where the rules based international order is being challenged. As such, NATO should concentrate its efforts on the Black Sea region in order to protect the European security architecture and rules based international order. The article looks at the linkages between other regions in the world where the current is being challenged, Russian revisionism and aggression in the context of the full-scale war against Ukraine, interest by other major international actors and NATO’s response over the past two years.

The Black Sea and international order

The Black Sea region has become the unlikely place where the current international order is being challenged. It is not the only region of the world where the rules based international order is being actively challenged and undermined, the other being the Middle East and the South China Sea. The Black Sea has been in general considered a region of secondary or even tertiary strategic importance, a backwater near the Mediterranean Sea. However, the Black Sea’s access to the Mediterranean Sea made the

region important for Russian strategy as it allowed Moscow to project power in the Middle East and further into the Indian Ocean. Considering Vladimir Putin's historic grievances regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union ("the greatest geopolitical tragedy in history")¹, disregard for Ukrainian statehood ("modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era")² and ambitions to restore the great power status of the Russian Federation, the best place to challenge the post-Cold War order is the Black Sea.

The Black Sea represents the perfect target for Russian revisionism for several reasons. First, it isn't a major political and economic region of the world and usually escaped US, NATO and EU scrutiny. There are few NATO or EU members in the region: Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye. It is a transit region that links Europe and Central Asia to the rest of Asian continent. Second, Western presence has been weak in general, partly as a consequence of the first point, partly as a result of the Montreux Convention of 1936, which limits the naval presence in the Black Sea of non-riparian states. This is true for both 2014, when Crimea was annexed by Russia, and in 2024 when Moscow tried to overrun Ukraine.

Third, Russia has created over the years in the former Soviet republics in the vicinity of the Black Sea a permissive security environment, by encouraging and fomenting internal conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the so-called frozen conflicts. Furthermore, Russia was allowed to take part in the conflict resolution formats, although it was either the main instigator or aggressor. Consequently, these conflicts became prolonged and negatively impacted the political development of the states on which territories occurred. In the case of Ukraine, after the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin sponsored secessionist movements in the eastern part of the country, among the Russian speaking community and caused a proxy-war by openly supporting the separatist republics against the Ukrainian authorities. The Minsk I and II agreements, which tried to freeze the fighting in Eastern Ukraine were compromised by Russia's continued belligerency.

In August 2008, a few months after the Bucharest NATO Summit when the open-door policy for Ukraine and Georgia was affirmed, Russia invaded the latter country, taking advantage of the prolonged conflict in Osetia. As Georgia was neither a member, nor a candidate country, just a member of the Partnership for Peace, NATO could not intervene. Moreover, western efforts after the fighting began concentrated on attaining a ceasefire, an attitude which was interpreted in Moscow as weakness. After the fighting ended between Georgia and Russia, most Western diplomatic efforts concerning Russia, concentrated on rebuilding relations, culminating in the failed "Reset" of relation the first term of the Obama Administration. Unfortunately, Russia interpreted these effort as signaling a lack of determination and coherence in US and Western foreign policy regarding Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region. Rather than being deterred or placated by these efforts, made in good faith by the West, it felt emboldened.

Fourth, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 created a base for Russian military power to be projected in Mediterranean Sea, Middle East and North Africa. This was evident in the Russian intervention in Syria in (2015) and in Libya (2016). What was extremely useful

¹ *President of Russia*, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy", February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

² *President of Russia*, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

for Russia, was the maintenance in Syria of the Tartus anchorage, which created a direct link with military forces deployed in Crimea and served as a logistics base for Russian warships and submarines, thus allowing Moscow to challenge the West in Mediterranean basin, for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Russia's intervention in Syria created the opportunity of establishing of the Khmeimim Air Base near Latakia³ and deploying sophisticated air-power assets and long-range air-defense systems.⁴

Fifth, both in 2014 and 2024, US and NATO presence near the Black Sea was insufficient to deter Russia. In 2014, the only active US presence in Romania was the *Aegis Ashore* ballistic defense facility at Deveselu and a detachment at *Mihail Kogălniceanu* Air Base (MK) that handled the transit of American troops in and out of Afghanistan. Following the developments of 2014, US and NATO presence in Central and Eastern Europe grew. After the NATO Wales Summit in 2014, it was decided to create the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and to deploy forces in the countries on the Eastern Flank (the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria).⁵ The deployment of US and NATO forces on the Eastern Flank was however, divided between Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) for the Baltic states and Poland, while in Romania and Bulgaria, the southern tip of the flank, the deployment was described as Tailored Forward Presence (TFP).⁶ This "division of labor" between the northern tip and southern tip of the Eastern Flank created an unbalanced security situation, open to local and regional challenges. US and NATO warships entered the Black Sea until February 2022 in order to train with the Romania, Bulgarian, Turkish and Ukrainian navies as well as to signal will to enforce freedom of navigation in the Black Sea.

In 2024, when the full-scale invasion of Ukraine occurred, in Romania were deployed approximately 1,000 US troops and a company of Polish mechanized infantry, part of the Multinational Brigade South-East.⁷ US and French troops were rapidly deployed to Romania, as part of a new package of deterrence measures, after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Finally, Russia's and Vladimir Putin's historic grievances regarding the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and Kremlin's doubtful status as a great power, following this major historical development, represent a major cause of hostility against the Alliance and the "Collective West". A particular vicious type of historical grievance was directed against Ukraine, which was considered by many in the Russian political elite, as well as in the state apparatus, as being responsible for the disappearance of the USSR through its decision to proclaim its independence following a referendum in 1991.⁸ Moreover, the cultural and political role played by Ukraine in the formation of the Russian state and later empire, could not be ignored. An entire national mythology was created regarding the "unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples" as far as the eighteenth century and it was

³ Reuters, "Russia to expand its Hmeimim air base in Syria – reports", September 26, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/russia-to-expand-its-hmeimim-air-base-in-syria-reports-idUSKBN1WB1V2/>.

⁴ Justin Bronk, "Could Russian S-400s Protect Syria Against Cruise Missiles?", RUSI, April 19, 2018, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/could-russian-s-400s-protect-syria-against-cruise-missiles>.

⁵ NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration", September 5, 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

⁶ NATO, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué", July 9, 2016, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

⁷ There were also the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), but these were staff elements necessary for integrating with the host nation in case of increased deployment, as well as some pre-positioned equipment (tanks, IFVs) for follow on forces.

⁸ Serhii Plokhyy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2024), 12-17.

readily available for use by those promoting a revisionist Russian foreign policy.⁹

For Russia, the former Soviet republics, independent states after 1991, had a questionable sovereignty and Moscow tried to re-impose its will over them either through political and diplomatic means such as the Commonwealth of Independent State (CSI) and Eurasian Economic Union, or by intervening in their internal affairs and calling into question their independence and territorial integrity through frozen conflicts, political proxies¹⁰, criminal activities¹¹ and organizations as well as other means.¹²

Overall, the Black Sea offered the Russian Federation a combination of opportunity, grievances and permissive security environment that allowed its decision-makers to use military force to promote its agenda both inside and outside the region.

The Russian ultimatum against NATO in 2021

Russia's foreign policy up to and after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was one oriented against NATO. Ironically, in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and encouraged secessionist movements in the Donbas, Ukraine was getting closer to the European Union. NATO membership for Kyiv was as far in 2014 as it was in 2008. Furthermore, NATO membership before 2014 was not a popular foreign and security policy with the Ukrainian public. The Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) which overthrew the regime of president Viktor Yanukovich and signaled Russia that Ukraine was escaping its grasp, was caused by the refusal of the regime in Kyiv to ratify the Association Agreement with the EU. Then, the Ukrainian people took matters into their own hands and sent Europe as well as Russia an unmistakable message regarding the source of power and sovereignty in a democracy.

However, it was neither the Russian perceived "NATO expansion" closer to its borders nor EU's "encroaching on Russia's sphere of influence" that provoked the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine – it was Russian imperialism and revisionism, fueled by the Kremlin's skewed perception of international politics as a zero-sum game and fears regarding regime survival that drove the entire enterprise against Kyiv.¹³

A particular form of strategic paranoia haunts the halls of the Kremlin, coupled with a thinly disguised urge to get even over the outcome of the Cold War, when it comes to NATO.¹⁴ In December 2021, just two months before launching its onslaught against Ukraine and while building up its armed forces near the latter's borders, the Russian Federation published an ultimatum of sorts to the US and NATO, disguised as two treaties for the peaceful development of relations.

Russia proposed no more and no less, that NATO should give up its "open door policy", should not include into its ranks in the near future former Soviet republics, should withdraw its troops deployed on the territories of the member states admitted after 1997,

⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰ France24, "L'Autre Ukraine", la plateforme de désinformation pro-russe d'un oligarque en exil", February 28, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/fr/europe/20240228-l-autre-ukraine-la-plateforme-de-désinformation-pro-russe-d-un-oligarque-en-exil>.

¹¹ Digi24, "Furtul de 1 miliard de dolari" din Republica Moldova. O nouă condamnare după fraudă echivalentă cu 12% din PIB-ul țării", January 30, 2024, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/furtul-de-1-miliard-de-dolari-din-republica-moldova-o-noua-condamnare-dupa-frauda-echivalenta-cu-12-din-pib-ul-tarii-2668483>.

¹² Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political War: Moving beyond the Hybrid*, London: Routledge, 2019, 20.

¹³ M. Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2024, 344-353.

¹⁴ Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West*, London: Chatham House: 2019, 103-117.

dismantle its military bases, abstain from organizing large scale military exercises and carry out policies that Russia deemed threatening to its security.¹⁵ In a projected treaty, this time with the United States, Russia made such demands that if agreed upon and enacted, would have severely limited the involvement of the US in the European security architecture.¹⁶

The origins of this hostility towards NATO and what Russian foreign policy considers the “Collective West” is indelibly linked to the dissolution of the USSR and Russia’s perceived loss of power and status as a result of this historical outcome. In 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, Vladimir Putin publicly articulated for the first time Russia’s grievances regarding the post-Cold War order and the West: *“In any case, I understood that the use of force can only be legitimate when the decision is taken by NATO, the EU, or the UN. If he really does think so, then we have different points of view. Or I didn’t hear correctly. The use of force can only be considered legitimate if the decision is sanctioned by the UN. And we do not need to substitute NATO or the EU for the UN. When the UN will truly unite the forces of the international community and can really react to events in various countries, when we will leave behind this disdain for international law, then the situation will be able to change.... I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said.”*¹⁷

In a larger sense, the war against Ukraine is an articulation of Russia’s policy of revanchism and revisionism towards the “Collective West”: *“The Collective West, which is headed by a nuclear power - the United States, is at war with us. This war was declared on us quite a long time ago, after the coup d’état in Ukraine that was orchestrated by the United States and, in fact, backed by the European Union, and after the Minsk agreements that nobody was going to implement, as it now appears, and Ms. Merkel confirmed that once again.”*¹⁸

Moscow’s aggression toward Kyiv should not be viewed mainly as a war between two post-Soviet states or an attempt by a former colonial power to take over its former colony. From a Russian perspective, it is much more than that. If the correct character of this war is understood by NATO, in the US and in Europe, then it would be easier to find solution to this conflict and deter further aggression. The war against Ukraine should be understood as a general assault on the rules-based international order; that Russia aims to show that NATO and US cannot do anything of substance to stop aggression against their allies or putative allies and that a new world order based on the principle that “might

¹⁵ Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, December 17, 2021, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en.

¹⁶ Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees, December 17, 2021, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en.

¹⁷ President of Russia, Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

¹⁸ TASS, “US-led collective West has long declared war on Russia, says Lavrov”, December 28, 2022 <https://tass.com/politics/1556873>.

makes right” is over the horizon. Russian foreign minister was very clear about the stakes involved in the current war: *“This is not about Ukraine at all, but the world order. The current crisis is a fateful, epoch-making moment in modern history. It reflects the battle over what the world order would look like”*.¹⁹

Russia’s hostility towards NATO is no longer couched behind diplomatic documents or politically acceptable terms, it is in full view of the world, expressed by its propaganda onslaught on member states. Furthermore, Moscow’s hostility goes beyond the use of such “soft tools” of “hybrid warfare” such as propaganda and disinformation.²⁰ Alliance members have reported an increase in the activities of Russian intelligence services on their territories, including gathering of intelligence as well as sabotage or suspected sabotage operations directed against defense production facilities,²¹ military bases,²² ammunition dumps and critical infrastructure sites.²³ Moreover, there are increasing signals that Russia may target in the future the underwater communications and oil and gas infrastructure, that links the US with European allies or between European allies.²⁴

Black Sea region: war, deterrence and strategic outlook

The Russo-Ukrainian war of 2022 has proven that what happens in the Black Sea, doesn’t necessarily stay in the Black Sea. Russia’s war of aggression has emphasized the importance of the Black Sea as a provider of grain and foodstuffs for the most vulnerable countries in the world. Ukraine and Russia grain are the biggest suppliers of cheap grain for the UN Food Program. Ukrainian grain is important for the stability of North African and Middle Eastern states, where bread is a major food staple and its price a major political issue. As such freedom of navigation and of trade in the Black Sea not only affects economies of the region but also impact the world economy.

Beyond the economic relevance of the Black Sea, the strategic importance is self-evident at present. The Black Sea region is the area on map of the world where the first major inter-state war of the twenty-first century occurred. A post-imperial declining power has invaded a minor European (though Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe in terms of surface) which was once part of its empire in a bid to rebuild its sphere of influence and impact the international order. The post-imperial power aims more than to change the local security architecture, it aims to produce a major development within the international system itself. For the reasons cited above, the Black Sea region

¹⁹ Anne Applebaum, “Ukraine Must Win”, *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/how-democracy-can-win-ukraine/627125/>.

²⁰ Jussi Rossendahl and Tuomas Forsell, “Finland sees propaganda attack from former master Russia”, *The Economist*, October 19, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21709028-how-contain-vladimir-putins-deadly-dysfunctional-empire-threat-russia?fsrc=scn/li/te/pe/ed/thethreatfromrussia>.

²¹ Dan De Luce and Jean-Nicholas Fievet, “Russia’s ‘brazen’ and intensifying sabotage campaign across Europe”, *NBC News*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/russias-brazen-intensifying-sabotage-campaign-europe-rcna147178>. Sebastian Seibt, “Suspected Russian sabotage: The great return of Kremlin agents to Europe?”, *France 24*, May 10, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240510-suspected-russian-sabotage-campaigns-great-return-russian-agents-europe>.

²² Sam Jones, “German Nato base on high alert over Russian sabotage threat”, *Financial Times*, August 23, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/4a3cba7d-1377-479e-8a09-4ef1d0f989a3>.

²³ Julian E. Barnes, “Russia Steps Up a Covert Sabotage Campaign Aimed at Europe”, *New York Times*, May 26, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/26/us/politics/russia-sabotage-campaign-ukraine.html>.

²⁴ Miranda Briant, “Undersea ‘hybrid warfare’ threatens security of 1bn, NATO commander warns”, *Guardian*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/16/undersea-hybrid-warfare-threatens-security-of-1bn-nato-commander-warns>.

is strategically relevant for the future of the international order and requires special scrutiny.

From a naval point of view, the Black Sea offers access to Russia to the Mediterranean Sea, both in terms of international trade and in military terms via the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The ports and military bases of Crimea and the port and naval base of Novorossiysk are the only ports open for Russian maritime traffic year-long. By far, the best anchorages and bases in the Black Sea are those situated in Crimea, as Novorossiysk is affected by sudden gusts of wind that can affect the superstructures of military vessels, damaging the antennas of their electronic systems.

In maritime terms, the Black Sea region should include also the rivers that flow into it, especially those that are navigable. The Danube, the second most important river in economic terms for the EU, flows into the Black Sea. As such, during the current hostilities it was a lifeline for the Ukrainian economy as its grain and foodstuffs could reach the international market when Ukraine's coastline and economic zone were blockaded by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. More than 45 million tons of Ukrainian grain and foodstuffs transited Romania since February 2022, through its ports and waterways,²⁵ in order to avoid the Russian blockade and keep the Ukrainian economy functioning.

Despite losing the bulk of its navy in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine managed through ingenuity and daring to beat back the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the 2022 war. Although Moscow ordered into the Black Sea an amphibious surface group before February 24 to reinforce the amphibious capability of the Black Sea Fleet and capturing Snake Island on the first day of hostilities, Kremlin failed to impose an overall effective sea control. It indeed managed to impose a blockade of Ukraine's coasts and took over its economic exclusion zone, but as soon as April 2022, Russia's control over the North-Western sector of the Black Sea was put into question by Ukrainian armed forces. The missile cruiser *Moskva*, the flag ship of the Black Sea Fleet, was sunk by Ukrainian R-360 *Neptune* coastal defense missile systems²⁶ because Russian intelligence was unable to find out that the missile system was fully operational while the ship itself was not upgraded in time and its crew properly trained. The predictive pattern of patrol to which *Moskva* adhered to off the Ukrainian coast, made it easier for the defenders to target the cruiser.

Any sort of Russian amphibious assault was out of the question because of minefields deployed by Ukrainian forces along their coastline. Despite the Black Sea Fleet having a significant mine warfare capability, Russian minehunters and minesweepers could not approach the Ukrainian coast because the defenders' surveillance assets could not be suppressed and after the sinking of the cruiser *Moskva* in April 2022, such endeavors became exceedingly risky.

Russia did indeed fortify Crimea after annexation, but it didn't have enough time to modernize the Black Sea Fleet and put it into an operational footing. Of the six multirole *Admiral Grigorovich* frigates planned to equip the Black Sea Fleet after 2014, only three

²⁵ Teodor Șerban, "45 de milioane de tone de cereale din Ucraina, exportate prin România. Secretar de stat: „Avem resurse pentru a procesa o parte în țară”, *Ziare.com*, February 20, 2024, <https://ziare.com/cereale-ucraina/cereala-ucraina-romania-investitii-1853929>.

²⁶ *BBC*, "Russian Warship: Moskva sinks in the Black Sea", April 15, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61114843>

were delivered, the other three could not be finished because the main supplier of marine gas turbines for the Russian Navy was a Ukrainian company. No deliveries of new marine gas turbines therefore could be made after 2014, and Russia had to start a crash program to develop their own propulsion systems. Only the six planned *Kilo* class submarines were delivered before the full-scale invasion of 2022.

However, on February 24, 2022, only two out of three *Admiral Grigorovich* frigates were present in the Black Sea and just four out of six *Kilo* class submarines were active. The rest of these modern naval assets were either deployed in the Mediterranean Sea or in transit. Even with a last-minute reinforcement from the Baltic Sea Fleet, the Black Sea Fleet was not able to mount an amphibious assault against the Ukrainian coast, because it didn't have enough men or ships. Moreover, the timing of the all-out invasion, towards the end of winter 2021-2022, impeded amphibious operations due to the storms of the Black Sea. However, as it turned out, maintaining the occupation of Snake Island proved impossible, due to Ukrainian attacks with western provided anti-shiping missiles against Russian transports supporting the Russian troops deployed there, long range artillery strikes and air raids on the island itself.

Fortunately for Ukraine, the Black Sea Fleet high command underestimated Ukrainian military capabilities and failed to concentrate properly its forces in Black Sea, either to impose a reliable sea control and blockade, or to properly support Russian armed forces on land. Previously, before the 2022 invasion, Russia had been trying to interdict the access of US and NATO warships in the Black Sea with long range air defense systems (S-400 *Triumf*) and sophisticated coastal defense systems equipped with supersonic anti-ship missiles (*Bastion-P*). However, the anti-access and area denial systems (A2/AD) deployed to protect naval and air bases in Crimea proved insufficient when tested by Ukraine with sophisticated Western provided ballistic (ATACMS)²⁷ and air-launched cruise missiles (*Storm Shadow/SCALP*).²⁸

Ukraine's approach to the naval war in the Black Sea has been from the very beginning asymmetric and systematic. It involves a strategy of protecting the country's littoral while at the same time hitting the Black Sea Fleet whenever the opportunity arises, in order to re-gain access to the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs). Equally important for Ukraine is to show to the world that Russia can be challenged in Crimea and for that reason a major part of Kyiv's campaign in the Black Sea is to target the Russian military installations in the peninsula and its connections to the Russian territory. Furthermore, the liberation of Crimea is both a political and strategic aim in this war for Kyiv. Without the possession of Crimea, the entire full-scale invasion of Ukraine would not have been possible in the first place. By challenging Russia in Crimea and make it untenable for the Kremlin, Ukraine is making a serious contribution to European security and world order. Without Crimea, Russia cannot project power effectively in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

The use of unmanned sea vehicle (USVs), naval mines, air power and tactical ballistic missiles against Russian naval assets has chased away the Black Sea Fleet from Crimea,

²⁷ David Axe, "Ukraine's ATACMS Rockets Are Severing Russian Supply Lines Into Crimea. But The Last Line Is The Toughest.", *Forbes*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2024/05/30/ukraines-atacms-rockets-are-severing-russian-supply-lines-into-crimea-but-the-last-line-is-the-toughest/>.

²⁸ David L. Stern, "Ukraine hits headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol", *Washington Post*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/22/ukraine-missiles-fleet-headquarters-sevastopol/>.

towards Novorossiysk and to a new naval base built on territory of Georgia, in the breakaway region of Abkhazia, at Ochamchire.²⁹ Shifting the main base of the Black Sea Fleet from Crimea to the Eastern shore of the Black Sea is the direct result of Ukraine's asymmetric naval campaign and signals that Russia is not able to impose its will on the rest of the riparian states. However, Russia still has the ability to create mischief in the region. The Black Sea Fleet still operates four *Kilo* class submarines, which can attack cargo vessels and pose a relevant threat to military vessels with their arsenal of missiles and torpedoes. Furthermore, they can continue to attack military and civilian targets in Ukraine with 3M14K *Kalibr* tactical land attack missiles. The two *Admiral Grigorovich* class frigates are still active, despite Ukrainian efforts to sink or cripple them and pose a threat with their arsenal of land attack cruise missiles. These are capable platforms which can launch *Kalibr* tactical land attack missile and the "hypersonic" 3M22 *Zircon*³⁰ long range anti-ship missile.³¹ As such, the Black Sea has become an operational testing ground for competing cutting edge technologies which emphasizes further its strategic relevance in international system.

A key to Ukraine's breaking of the blockade in the Black Sea is the use of USVs to attack Russian ships either under way or in the naval bases in Crimea. Infiltrating and attacking Russian ships within the safety of their naval bases severely impacted the already shaken morale of the Black Sea Fleet sailors. Supported by US intelligence as well from other friendly nations, Ukraine managed to marry innovation with daring and technical skill. The Russian response to Ukrainian naval drones has generally been ineffective, which underlines the lack of preparedness and modern capabilities of the Black Sea Fleet. The most effective way in which the Russian navy in the Black Sea has supported the all-out invasion of Ukraine has been through the launch of cruise missiles against Ukrainian civilian and military targets, as well as through the employment of naval aviation assets.

Freedom of navigation remains one of the most important issues raised by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Russian blockade and the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) gave the Kremlin the power to regulate and interdict maritime traffic in the Black Sea. The Turkish mediated BSGI was a necessary step in order to ensure that Ukrainian grain reaches the countries that needed it most. However, a more permanent solution was needed and the best way to lift the Russian blockade was by challenging with the aid of USVs as well as the use of air power against Russian naval assets in Crimea. Despite forcing the Black Sea Fleet to lift its blockade of the Ukrainian coast to shift its bases of operation eastwards from Crimea, Russia continues to pose a threat to the sea lanes of communication, through its submarines, remaining surface vessels as well as aircraft.³²

²⁹ Rayhan Demytrie, Paul Brown and Joshua Cheetham, "Russia's new Black Sea naval base alarms Georgia", *BBC*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67625450>.

³⁰ *Reuters*, "Ukraine says Russia has fired five Zircon missiles at Kyiv this year", April 1, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-russia-has-fired-five-zircon-missiles-kyiv-this-year-2024-04-01/>. See also: Brad Lendon, "Russia used an advanced hypersonic missile for the first time in recent strike, Ukraine claims", *CNN*, February 13, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/13/europe/ukraine-russia-zircon-hypersonic-missile-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>.

³¹ *Naval News*, "Russia Orders Additional Tsirkon Hypersonic Missiles", November 22, 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/11/russia-orders-additional-tsirkon-hypersonic-missiles/>.

³² Pavel Polityuk, Yuliia Dysa and Tom Balmforth, "Ukraine says Russia hit grain vessel near NATO member Romania", *Reuters*, September 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-missile-hits-civilian-ship-with-ukrainian-grain-black-sea-zelenskiy-says-2024-09-12/>.

Naval mines play a decisive role in this conflict. Both Ukraine and Russia mined and counter-mined in the Black Sea in order to protect their maritime interests or to support their offensive operations.³³ Around 500 naval mines have been deployed by both combatants in the Black Sea since the start of hostilities in 2022.³⁴ Unfortunately, moored mines tend to be taken away by currents, especially after storms and end up on the shores or in the waters of neighboring riparian countries. As such they pose a threat to commercial shipping and drilling activities in the neighboring countries' economic exclusive zones. Romanian, Turkish and Bulgarian naval forces have been dealing, with support from NATO allies, with the threat of drifting naval mines for the past two years. In September 2022, a Romanian minesweeper was damaged by a drifting mine while trying to neutralize it.³⁵ In December 2023, a cargo ship headed for the Ukrainian Danube ports hit a mine close to the mouths of the Danube.³⁶

Drifting mines are just part one facet of the mine warfare in the Black Sea. Influence mines, which are laid on the sea bottom are the other facet of mine warfare and are far more dangerous. These mines can be triggered magnetically or acoustically by ships passing over them, while some can even be programmed to count the passing ships before detonating. This type of mines can be laid by ships, submarines and aircraft, are very hard to neutralize and it is unknown how many have been laid since the start of the full-scale invasion. The only "good news" about influence mines is that in case of storms they can't end up in another country's territorial waters or exclusive economic zone. Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye formed in early 2024 the MCM Black to counter the danger of mines in the Black Sea and promote freedom of navigation. MCM Black is the only active NATO naval mission in the Black Sea at present and it became operational in July 2024.³⁷

An important step in recognizing the strategic importance of the Black Sea and in acknowledging its future potential has been the adoption of the United States Congress of the Black Sea Security Act in late 2022. The adoption by the Congress of this seminal act is the direct result of the Russo-Ukrainian war and connects the security of the Black Sea to the wider European security architecture:

"(1) it is in the interest of the United States to support efforts to prevent the spread of further armed conflict in Europe by recognizing the Black Sea region as an arena of Russian aggression;

(2) littoral states of the Black Sea are critical in countering aggression by the Government of the Russian Federation and contributing to the collective security of NATO;

³³ *The Maritime Executive*, "Russia Drops Mines as It Renews Efforts to Disrupt Ukrainian Shipping", October 25, 2023, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/russia-drops-mines-as-it-renews-efforts-to-disrupt-ukrainian-shipping>.

³⁴ Tony Wesolowsky and Georgi A. Angelov, "The Battle To Clear The Black Sea Of Mines", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, January 14, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/black-sea-mines-ukraine-russia-ukrainian-shiping-turkey-bulgaria-romania/32773644.html>.

³⁵ *TVRInfo*, "Dragorul maritim 'Locotenent Dimitrie Nicolescu' a fost avariat în timp ce distrugea o mină de război care plutea în derivă în largul portului Constanța", September 8, 2022, https://tvrinfo.ro/dragorul-maritim-locotenent-dimitrie-nicolescu-a-fost-avariat-in-timp-ce-distrugea-o-mina-de-razboi-care-plutea-in-deriv-a-in-largul-portului-constanta_913694/.

³⁶ Hanna Arhirova, "A cargo ship picking up Ukrainian grain hits a Russian floating mine in the Black Sea, officials say", *Associated Press*, December 28, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-black-sea-mine-a93fd333b-da04269980b0231e88155a8>.

³⁷ Oana Ghiță, "MAPN: Comanda grupării operative MCM Black Sea - asigurată pentru șase luni de Turcia", *Agerpres*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.agerpres.ro/social/2024/07/01/mapn-comanda-gruparii-operative-mcm-black-sea-asigurata-pentru-sase-luni-de-turcia-1321251>.

(3) the repeated, illegal, unprovoked, and violent attempts of the Russian Federation to expand its territory and control access to the Mediterranean Sea through the Black Sea constitutes a threat to the national security of the United States and NATO;³⁸

Congress, through this legislation, directs the National Security, the State Department and the Pentagon, plus any other relevant US government to formulate a strategy that strengthens the security of the Black Sea region, help develops its economy and improve democratic resilience. In July 2023, the US Senate passed the *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) which includes the Black Sea Security Act, paving the way for the American government to formulate an integrated and multi-agency regarding this region.

Black Sea's strategic relevance and potential for development has also been recognized by the European Union. In 2007 the Black Sea Sinergy was launched, which aimed at the economic and political development of the region, while fostering dialogue.³⁹ One of Brussels' most ambitious projects is the Global Gateway which aims to create secure links (transport, digital and energy).⁴⁰ The gas recent gas discoveries in Romanian and Turkish EEZs can help Europe wean off from Russian energy imports. The Black Sea could act as a major link between Europe and Asia and Central Asia, provided that the security climate is stabilized.

Following the Russian large-scale aggression against, NATO has recognized the strategic importance of the Black Sea for the security and defense of Europe. NATO's Strategic Concept of 2022 adopted at the Madrid Summit, highlights the fact that the Russian military build-up in the Baltic, Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea runs contrary to the Alliance security and interests.⁴¹ Moreover, the document recognizes the strategic importance for NATO of the Western Balkans and the Black Sea regions and the Alliance faces challenges in these places: *"The Western Balkans and the Black Sea region are of strategic importance for the Alliance. We will continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries in these regions. We will enhance efforts to bolster their capabilities to address the distinct threats and challenges they face and boost their resilience against malign third-party interference and coercion."*⁴²

At the Vilnius Summit in 2023, NATO countries identified the Black Sea as: *"(A) region is of strategic importance for the Alliance. This is further highlighted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We underline our continued support to Allied regional efforts aimed at upholding security, safety, stability and freedom of navigation in the Black Sea region including, as appropriate, through the 1936 Montreux Convention. We will further monitor and assess developments in the region and enhance our situational awareness, with a particular focus on the threats to our security and potential opportunities for closer cooperation with our partners in the region, as appropriate."*⁴³ In Vilnius, the allies noted the similarity between the Russian military built-up in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

³⁸ US Congress, S.4509 - Black Sea Security Act of 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4509/text>.

³⁹ European Union - EEAS, "Black Sea Sinergy", https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/black-sea-synergy_en.

⁴⁰ European Commission, "Global Gateway", https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

⁴¹ NATO, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept", July 10, 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf, p. 4.

⁴² Ibid., p. 11.

⁴³ NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué", July 11, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm.

At the 2024 Washington DC Summit, the strategic focus has become more specific, as the threats in the Black Sea region have evolved: *“The Western Balkans and the Black Sea regions are of strategic importance for the Alliance. We remain strongly committed to their security and stability.... We reaffirm our continued support to Allied regional efforts aimed at upholding security, safety, stability and freedom of navigation in the Black Sea region including, as appropriate, through the 1936 Montreux Convention. We welcome the activation by the three littoral Allies of the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Group. We will further monitor and assess developments in the region and enhance our situational awareness, with a particular focus on the threats to our security and potential opportunities for closer cooperation with our partners in the region, as appropriate. NATO supports the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries in this region.”*⁴⁴

Deterrence remains the mainstay of NATO activities in the Black Sea region after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and support for Ukraine through various initiatives and means. Immediately after the beginning of large-scale Russian operations against Ukraine, US and NATO allies began deploying forces on the Eastern Flank. The aim of these deployments has been to deter further potential aggression and to secure to countries on Eastern Flank: the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. A secondary objective of allied deployments has been to keep member states informed about the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. US and allied intelligence gathering aircraft (AWACS⁴⁵, Rivet Joint⁴⁶), UAVs and maritime patrol aircraft (P-8 Poseidon,⁴⁷ Atlantic 2⁴⁸) have kept a watchful eye on Russian forces in the Black Sea.

NATO established four battle groups in 2017, in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia that complemented the existing four battle groups in the Baltic states and Poland.⁴⁹ At the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid it was agreed to scale up these battlegroups to brigade size, to further enhance the Alliance position on the Eastern Flank.⁵⁰ In Romania, France is framework nation for the battlegroup and in Bulgaria, Italy plays this role. The US has a presence in Romania concentrated in the Southwest of the country, near Craiova, as part of the Multinational Brigade Southeast, near the Black Sea at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base (57th Air Base “Captain Constantin Cantacuzino”)⁵¹ as well as in Transylvania, at Câmpia Turzii Air Base (71st Air Base “General Emanoil Ionescu”)⁵². Most of the US military presence in Romania is on rotational basis. France has also deployed on a bilateral

⁴⁴ NATO, “Washington Summit Declaration”, July 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm.

⁴⁵ France24, “France says Russia threatened to down spy plane in ‘particularly aggressive’ Black Sea exchange”, February 22, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240222-france-says-russia-threatened-to-down-spy-plane-in-particularly-aggressive-black-sea-exchange>.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Beale, “Rogue Russian pilot tried to shoot down RAF aircraft in 2022”, BBC, September 23, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-66798508>.

⁴⁷ Daria Shekina, “NATO reconnaissance aircraft spotted over Black Sea”, RBC-Ukraine, December 22, 2023, <https://news-ukraine.rbc.ua/news/nato-reconnaissance-aircraft-spotted-over-1703255501.html>.

⁴⁸ Ministère des Armées, “Mer Noire – Un Atlantique 2 engagé dans des missions de surveillance maritime”, July 18, 2022, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites/mer-noire-atlantique-2-engage-missions-surveillance-maritime>.

⁴⁹ NATO, “NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance”, July 8, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/top-ics_136388.htm.

⁵⁰ NATO, “Madrid Summit Declaration”, July 22, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm.

⁵¹ MAPN, “Transfer of authority ceremony of the US forces deployed to Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base”, March 27, 2023, https://english.mapn.ro/cpresa/5931_Transfer-of-authority-ceremony-of-the-US-forces-deployed-to-Mihail-Kogalniceanu-Air-Base.

⁵² Savannah L. Waters, “M0-9s execute new mission in Romania”, US Air Force, February 5, 2021, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2495031/>.

agreement a SAMP/T integrated air and missile defense system close to MK Air Base, at Capu Midia.⁵³ The NATO Air Policing Mission has been strengthened and the US rotates air force detachments for training and deterrence purposes.⁵⁴

Türkiye played a key role in preventing the Russo-Ukrainian war from escalating by invoking the provisions of the Montreux Convention (1936) and closing off the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to military traffic. Consequently, the Russian Navy could not reinforce the Black Sea Fleet with units from other fleets, as it did before the invasion. However, this decision has had also the effect of closing off the Black Sea for the naval forces of NATO countries that are not riparian states.

The Russian onslaught against Ukraine has deterred neither NATO to maintain its policy of “Open Doors” nor other countries from joining the alliance. In this sense, the Kremlin’s illegitimate war against his neighbor has failed. In 2022, Finland and Sweden jointly decided to become members of the Alliance, because of Kremlin’s aggressive actions.⁵⁵ Finland formally joined the Alliance in 2023, while Sweden became a NATO member in 2024. Thus, the Alliance has secured the Baltic Sea and the line of contact between Russian and NATO stretches now from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea in the South of the continent to the Arctic Ocean and High North. Both Finland and Sweden have particular historical experiences concerning Russia and have developed their armed forces accordingly as well as their security cultures. Furthermore, the two Scandinavian nations NATO membership, known for their neutrality in international affairs, signals the degradation of the European security environment due to Kremlin’s naked aggression against Ukraine. Neutrality is not necessarily a viable option anymore when faced with an aggressive revisionist power.

Finally, the strategic relevance of the Black Sea is also determined by the interest shown for this region by the People’s Republic of China. Beijing considers the region as an arena of confrontation between the great powers and as such this region relevant for its foreign and security policy. From a geostrategic point of view the Black Sea region is a transit region between Asia and Europe, and as such it carries a certain economic significance, especially that some of the countries in the region are open to Chinese investments, while the Caucasus and Central Asia are prime targets for Beijing’s investments as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China and Russia have a “no limits partnership”⁵⁶, though they haven’t formed a formal alliance. China and Russia are founding members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and routinely carry out military exercises. One of those exercises took place in the Black Sea 2015 when three Chinese military vessels took part in Joint Seas 2015 exercise.⁵⁷ Beijing is currently

⁵³ *Defense Romania*, “Apărarea României: Sistemul antiaerian de ultimă generație MAMBA dislocat de Franța în România - evaluat și certificat”, July 3, 2022, https://www.defenseromania.ro/apararea-romaniei-sistemul-antiaerian-de-ultima-generatie-mamba-dislocat-de-franta-in-romania-evaluat-si-certificat_617075.html.

⁵⁴ *Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office*, “US Air Force F-16 jets arrive in Romania for NATO air policing”, September 24, 2023.

⁵⁵ NATO, “Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO”, May 18, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm.

⁵⁶ Emily Wang Fujiyama and Huizhong Wu, “China and Russia reaffirm their close ties as Moscow presses its offensive in Ukraine”, *Associated Press*, May 16, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-russia-putin-beijing-xi-3212ef85d-8318cf853f956173f3a682a>.

⁵⁷ Sam La Grone, “Two Chinese Warships Enter Black Sea, Reports Link Visit to Possible Chinese Frigate Sale to Russia”, *USNI News*, May 5, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/05/two-chinese-warships-enter-black-sea-reports-link-visit-to-possible-chinese-frigate-sale-to-russia>.

supporting Kremlin diplomatically⁵⁸, politically⁵⁹ and logistically⁶⁰ in its war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Chinese peace plan for resolution of the Russo-Ukrainian war is ambiguous regarding the territorial integrity of Kyiv and tries to lay the blame for the origins of the hostilities at the West's door.⁶¹ By 2024, Beijing's position concerning the resolution of the conflict seems to have evolved, as the joint Chinese-Brazilian peace plan/proposition⁶² shows, however it remains vague and doesn't address the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

However, Chinese diplomatic intervention and multiple warnings have deterred Russia from using nuclear weapons in Ukraine in order to discourage US and its allies from further military supporting Kyiv and to break the deadlock on the battlefield.⁶³

In many respects, the Russo-Ukrainian war is a "master course in strategy" for Chinese foreign policy and strategic planning. It allows Beijing to evaluate and anticipate US and western behavior towards a putative ally or even an ally in the South China Sea, where the PRC has several territorial disputes. Given the current tensions in the South China Sea, China can draw valuable conclusions regarding US and allied reactions in conflicts in this region. Furthermore, as a bonus, Russia has increased its dependence on China exponentially since the beginning of the war.

Partial lessons learned from an ongoing war

The Black Sea has become one of the arenas where the future of the international order is being decided. This development has increased its strategic relevance on the world stage, and it will be one of the foci of international competition for the foreseeable future. This requires increased strategic bandwidth from NATO in order to deter aggression against the allies in this region. Increased bandwidth meaning in this case military presence as well as an adaptive posture.

NATO members in the region, Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye must continue to cooperate and their cooperation should be visible and substantive. Operation MCM Black is a step in the right direction and other areas of similar cooperation should be identified. Such initiatives send important signals outside the Alliance and increase deterrence. Furthermore, such regional cooperative initiatives should remain open for all NATO

⁵⁸ Jude Blanchette, "China Is in Denial About the War in Ukraine", *Foreign Affairs*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/china-denial-about-war-ukraine-jude-blanchette>.

⁵⁹ Viking Bohman, Patrik Andersson and Hugo von Essen, "Final blow to Chinese 'neutrality' on Ukraine war", *Politico*, June 19, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/xi-jinping-vladimir-putin-ukraine-war-swiss-peace-summit/>.

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Sher, "Behind the Scenes: China's Increasing Role in Russia's Defense Industry", *Carnegie Politika*, May 6, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/05/behind-the-scenes-chinas-increasing-role-in-russias-defense-industry?lang=en>. See also: Aamer Madhani, "U.S. intelligence shows China is surging equipment sales to Russia to help war effort in Ukraine, AP says", *PBS*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/u-s-intelligence-shows-china-is-surging-equipment-sales-to-russia-to-help-war-effort-in-ukraine-ap-says>.

⁶¹ *China Daily*, "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis", February 23, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/pdf/2023/20230225.pdf>.

⁶² *Federal Government of Brazil*, "Common Understandings Between China and Brazil on Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis", May 23, 2024, <https://www.gov.br/planalto/en/latest-news/2024/05/brazil-and-china-present-joint-proposal-for-peace-negotiations-with-the-participation-of-russia-and-ukraine>.

⁶³ Max Sedon, James Kynge, John Paul Rathbone and Felicia Schwartz "Xi Jinping warned Vladimir Putin against nuclear attack in Ukraine", *Financial Times*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/c5ce76df-9b1b-4dfc-a619-07da1d40cbd3>.

members willing to participate.

Freedom of navigation matters – it matters for commercial shipping, and it matters for military vessels. The adage of “diplomats make the law of the sea, but the navies enforce it” still applies. Protection of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) allows international trade to continue during peacetime while during times of war allows the free movement of supplies and reinforcements.

Alliance members in the Black Sea region should consolidate their naval capabilities as the Russian Black Sea Fleet still represents a significant challenge. Türkiye has a navy capable of carrying out complex missions in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, supported by a developed naval industry. Romania and Bulgaria have capable naval industries that can produce both civilian and military vessels. In the near and medium term, Bucharest and Sophia should modernize their naval forces with capable naval combatants. The Ukrainian example of using asymmetric means to defeat a more capable opponent should be internalized and employed. Finally, this war has emphasized the importance of internal waterways for the movement of goods. The Danube and the Mouths of the Danube should figure prominently in NATO defense planning for the protection of the Eastern Flank as access and logistic routes.

NATO and US should treat the entire Eastern Flank as a single strategic space and this development must be reflected in the way troops are deployed. Deterring Russia should start with the High North (Sweden, Norway and Finland), continue in the Baltic Sea and Poland reach down to Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye in the Black Sea and finally end-up in the Eastern Mediterranean, protecting Greek and Turkish interests. The different status of the forces allocated to the security of the Eastern Flank should be replaced by a single, uniform status. The value of NATO deterrence will increase exponentially if Allied forces will be stationed permanently on the Eastern Flank.

The security of the Eastern Flank depends on continuous support for Ukraine. In the past two years, Ukraine has demonstrated incredible resilience and fortitude against the Russian onslaught. By supporting Kyiv, NATO and the United States deter Russian aggression in Europe and underwrite the rules based international order. This support should take the form of political, military and diplomatic support for the Ukrainian cause. Any sort of peaceful solution to the current conflict should guarantee the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The borders which the Russian Federation agreed to in 1991 should be respected. Kyiv should be offered the opportunity in the future to join NATO as a full-fledged member of the Alliance.

The prolonged and unresolved conflicts in the Black Sea region have created strategic opportunities for Russia, a sort of strategic freedom of movement. There are also levers for coercive diplomacy, curtailing the sovereignty of the countries on which territories are extant “frozen conflicts”. This paradigm should end, by excluding Kremlin from adjudicating these conflicts in the current peaceful resolution formats. So long as Moscow is allowed to behave as an “honest broker” in these conflicts, it will affect the security of the Black Sea region.

Russia remains the greatest security threat for NATO in the present and near future. It is important for all allies to show resilience in the face of Russian provocation and hybrid tactics. NATO members in the Black Sea and candidate countries are continuously targeted by a stream of propaganda and disinformation about the Alliance. As such it

is important to support and underpin the democratic systems in the Black Sea region. Democratic consolidation is the best tool for defeating hybrid threats and curtailing Russian information warfare.

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NATO'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY APPROACH IN THE BLACK SEA REGION. A PROCESS IN THE MAKING?

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Introduction

NATO's public diplomacy has evolved significantly since its inception, reflecting the organization's adaptive strategies in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics and advancements in global communication. As an essential component of its strategic outreach, NATO's public diplomacy has effectively communicated the Alliance's objectives, fostered international support, and countered adversarial narratives. However, despite these successes, there remains substantial room for improvement, particularly in the context of the Black Sea region. This essay is highlighting NATO's public diplomacy achievements and its quest for strategic updates. By providing certain examples on the efficacy of NATO's engagement strategies and exploring opportunities for enhancement, this paper seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how public diplomacy can be optimized to address regional challenges and adjust the Alliance's influence in the Black Sea region.

The text outlines the evolution of public diplomacy from its origins in the early 20th century to its current, multifaceted form. Initially focused on government efforts to communicate with foreign publics during conflicts, public diplomacy has expanded to include a broader range of actors and methods. Early studies emphasized influencing public opinion as a means of achieving foreign policy goals, but contemporary approaches have shifted towards relational diplomacy, which prioritizes building long-term relationships through cultural exchanges and educational initiatives. The rise of digital platforms and non-state actors has transformed public diplomacy into a strategic, interactive practice essential for emphasizing mutual understanding and collaboration. This new paradigm is evident in the practices of international organizations like the European Union and the United Nations, which use public diplomacy to promote values, counter disinformation, and address global challenges. NATO's evolving public diplomacy efforts, particularly in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, showcase its adaptation to digital tools and collaborative strategies. Additionally, Sweden's "whole-of-society" approach highlights how integrating military and civilian sectors can enhance national security and public trust.

The road to new public diplomacy

Public diplomacy has undergone significant evolution since its initial conceptualization in the early 20th century, reflecting the changing dynamics of international relations and statecraft. Initially rooted in the efforts of governments to communicate directly with foreign publics during times of conflict, particularly during World War I and II, public diplomacy has shifted towards a more nuanced and comprehensive approach in the

post-Cold War era. Early studies of public diplomacy, such as Tuch¹, emphasize its role in influencing public opinion abroad as means of achieving foreign policy objectives. This traditional view has been expanded with the advent of global communication networks, the rise of non-state actors, and the increasing importance of soft power, as highlighted by scholars like Joseph Nye². Public diplomacy now encompasses not only state-sponsored efforts, but also the engagement of civil society, international organizations, and private enterprises in shaping perceptions and fostering dialogue across borders.

The contemporary understanding of public diplomacy is heavily influenced by the work of scholars such as Zaharna³, who argue that the practice is increasingly relational rather than informational. Rather than simply disseminating messages, states now focus on building long-term relationships with foreign publics through cultural exchanges, educational initiatives, and people-to-people connections. This relational approach is seen as critical in the digital age, where the decentralization of information and the rise of social media platforms have enabled a more participatory form of public diplomacy. Additionally, the role of digital diplomacy, as explored by Bjola and Holmes⁴, has further expanded the scope of public diplomacy, allowing for more immediate and direct engagement with global audiences. Consequently, public diplomacy is now understood as a strategic, multidimensional tool, that extends beyond mere propaganda to fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.

The concept of “new public diplomacy” has emerged in response to the increasingly interconnected and globalized nature of international relations, necessitating a shift from traditional, state-centric approaches to more dynamic, multi-actor frameworks. This new paradigm emphasizes the role of non-state actors, such as NGOs, international organizations, private companies, and even individuals, in shaping global perceptions and influencing diplomatic outcomes⁵. The new public diplomacy moves beyond the one-way transmission of state messages to foreign publics, which characterized traditional public diplomacy, and instead focuses on creating dialogue and fostering long-term relationships between various global actors⁶. Scholars like Gregory⁷ argue that this approach is critical in today’s multipolar world, where soft power and credibility are key to achieving foreign policy goals in a complex media environment.

At the heart of new public diplomacy is the shift from state-controlled communication to more collaborative and networked forms of engagement. This transformation has been driven by the rise of digital technology and social media, which enable real-time, interactive communication between diplomats, governments, and global publics⁸. Digital diplomacy, a subset of the new public diplomacy, plays a critical role in reshaping diplomatic practices by providing platforms for direct engagement with foreign

¹ H.N. Tuch, *Communicating with the world: U.S. public diplomacy overseas* (St. Martin's Press, 1990)

² J.S. Nye, *Soft power: The means to success in world politics* (PublicAffairs, 2004)

³ R.S. Zaharna, *Battle to bridge: U.S. public diplomacy across the war on terror divide* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

⁴ C. Bjola, and M. Holmes, *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice* (Routledge, 2015)

⁵ J. Melissen, *The new public diplomacy: Soft power in international relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

⁶ N.J. Cull, *Public diplomacy: Lessons from the past. CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy*, 2009

⁷ B. Gregory (2011). American public diplomacy: Enduring characteristics, elusive transformation. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6(3-4), 351-372.

⁸ R.S. Zaharna; A. Arsenault, and A. Fisher, *Relational, networked, and collaborative approaches to public diplomacy: The connective mindshift* (Routledge, 2013)

audiences. As Bjola and Holmes⁹ point out, the decentralization of communication through digital platforms has empowered a wider range of actors, including civil society and individuals, to participate in diplomatic discourse, thereby democratizing the practice of diplomacy. This shift challenges traditional notions of power and control within international relations and highlights the increasing importance of soft power and credibility in the digital age.

The relational aspect of the new public diplomacy is central to its practice, focusing on building trust, mutual understanding, and long-term partnerships rather than merely transmitting information¹⁰. This relational approach recognizes that modern diplomacy requires sustained engagement through cultural exchanges, educational initiatives, and other forms of people-to-people diplomacy¹¹. Scholars like Zaharna¹² argue that the success of new public diplomacy depends on its ability to foster two-way communication, where the audience is not merely a passive recipient but an active participant in the diplomatic process. In this context, the new public diplomacy is seen as an essential tool for addressing global challenges, as it emphasizes collaboration, dialogue, and mutual respect as the foundation for international relations in the 21st century.

Rethinking public diplomacy under the International Organization framework

Public diplomacy has become a central instrument in the repertoire of international organizations (IOs), as they seek to shape global narratives, build trust, and influence foreign publics. In recent years, the European Union (EU) has increasingly turned to public diplomacy to promote its values and policy priorities beyond its borders. Scholars note that the EU's public diplomacy is characterized by efforts to engage civil society, foster cultural exchange, and enhance multilateral cooperation, thus positioning itself as a normative power. The EU's Global Strategy of 2016 emphasized the need for more cohesive external communication to strengthen its global image and to promote peace, democracy, and sustainable development¹³. Through initiatives like the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU has also emphasized strategic communication to counter disinformation, particularly in neighboring regions affected by instability, like the Eastern Partnership countries¹⁴.

Similarly, the United Nations (UN) and its agencies are leveraging public diplomacy to address global challenges, such as climate change, peacebuilding, and human rights. The UN's approach to public diplomacy integrates both top-down communication from UN leadership and bottom-up engagement with local communities. Its focus has shifted toward promoting inclusive narratives that resonate with diverse global audiences. For example, UNESCO has pioneered efforts in cultural diplomacy, facilitating dialogue between different cultural and social groups to foster mutual understanding and peace¹⁵.

⁹ C. Bjola and M. Holmes, *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice* (Routledge, 2015)

¹⁰ N. Snow, "Public diplomacy and public relations: The convergence of influence", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 15, no. 1-2, (2020): 37-44.

¹¹ J. S. Nye, *Do morals matter? Presidents and foreign policy from FDR to Trump* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

¹² R.S. Zaharna, *Battle to bridge: U.S. public diplomacy across the war on terror divide* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

¹³ M.K.D. Cross and J. Melissen, *European public diplomacy: Soft power at work* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021)

¹⁴ J. Bátorá; A. Balčytienė; M.K.D. Cross and A. Sado, "EU external communication: Strategic narratives, disinformation, and resilience", *Journal of International Affairs* 76, no.2, (2023): 114-134.

¹⁵ N.J. Cull, *Public diplomacy: Foundations for global engagement in the digital age* (Polity Press, 2019)

Additionally, the UN's digital diplomacy initiatives have increased in importance, as social media platforms become essential tools for advocacy, awareness, and mobilization around key global issues¹⁶. These strategies reflect a broader trend in the international system, where IOs are increasingly recognizing the importance of public diplomacy as a mechanism to advance their missions in an interconnected and rapidly evolving global environment.

A recent example of an international organization effectively using public diplomacy is NATO's strategic communications in response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. NATO has employed various public diplomacy instruments, including digital diplomacy and media outreach, to build international support for Ukraine and counter Russian disinformation. Throughout the conflict, NATO has consistently used its social media platforms and official websites to disseminate timely, transparent information, emphasizing its commitment to collective security and democratic values¹⁷. NATO's public diplomacy has focused not only on communicating with political leaders, but also on engaging with broader global audiences to bolster support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This approach has helped NATO to frame the conflict in terms of democratic norms and human rights, aiming to influence public opinion in member states and beyond¹⁸. The organization has also coordinated closely with partner nations to amplify these narratives and enhance their resonance through joint communication strategies.

In addition to its digital diplomacy efforts, NATO has employed targeted initiatives to directly engage with international media, civil society, and thought leaders, reinforcing its message through traditional and new communication channels. The organization has regularly held press briefings, produced multimedia content, and released detailed fact sheets that outline its activities and policy positions regarding the conflict. This proactive approach has been crucial in countering Russian disinformation campaigns, which have aimed to distort NATO's role and intentions in the region. Furthermore, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division has intensified collaboration with independent media outlets and think tanks across Europe and North America, ensuring that credible information circulates in public discourse and fostering partnerships to enhance resilience against malign influence¹⁹. The Alliance's "NATO 2030" initiative, which emphasizes strengthening alliances with democratic partners and engaging youth and civil society, is another component of its public diplomacy strategy. By involving diverse stakeholders, NATO is not only reaffirming its relevance, but also promoting a unified narrative around democratic resilience and security in the face of authoritarian challenges.

NATO's public diplomacy approach. A history in the making

NATO's approach to public diplomacy has evolved significantly since its founding in 1949, reflecting broader shifts in global communication and geopolitical strategy. Initially,

¹⁶ B. Hocking; J. Melissen; S. Riordan and Sharp, P. "Futures for diplomacy: Integrative diplomacy in the 21st century", Diplomatic Studies Series (Brill, 2022)

¹⁷ O. Czulo, "NATO's response to disinformation in the Russia-Ukraine war: A case study in public diplomacy", *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 4, (2022): 1-15.

¹⁸ T. Aistrope and A. Parker, "NATO's strategic communications and the Russia-Ukraine war: Defending democracy through public diplomacy", *International Journal of Communication* 17, (2023): 3312-3330.

¹⁹ A. Dunn, "NATO's public diplomacy efforts: Building resilience against disinformation", *Journal of International Security Affairs* 89, no.(3), (2023): 55-72.

NATO's public diplomacy focused on garnering support for the Alliance among Western European and North American populations, emphasizing the need for collective security in the context of the Cold War. One of the earliest examples of NATO's public diplomacy efforts, was the establishment of the NATO Information Service in 1950. This agency was tasked with promoting awareness about the Alliance's objectives and countering Soviet propaganda, primarily through print media, radio broadcasts, and conferences²⁰. The focus during this period was on educating the public about the importance of military cooperation and the defense of democratic values, often highlighting the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact to maintain public and political support for NATO's military presence in Europe.

In the 1980s, NATO expanded its public diplomacy efforts to adapt to the changing geopolitical landscape, particularly with the rise of nuclear disarmament movements across Europe. The deployment of Pershing II missiles and cruise missiles in Europe, as part of NATO's deterrence strategy faced significant public opposition, particularly in West Germany and the Netherlands. To address this, NATO launched a comprehensive public diplomacy campaign that included outreach to civic organizations, opinion leaders, and media outlets to explain the rationale behind the dual-track decision, which combined arms control negotiations with missile deployment²¹. This period marked a more proactive stance in NATO's public diplomacy, as it sought not only to justify its policies, but to actively engage with critics and skeptics, facilitating public debates and information campaigns to shape public opinion.

Following the end of the Cold War, NATO's public diplomacy shifted to emphasize partnership and cooperation, particularly with Eastern European countries aspiring to join the Alliance. NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, launched in 1994, was a pivotal public diplomacy tool aimed at fostering transparency, building trust, and integrating former Eastern Bloc countries into the Euro-Atlantic security community²². Public diplomacy played a key role in this transition, as NATO sought to assure both new members and Russia that its expansion was not a threat to regional stability. During the Kosovo War in 1999, NATO's public diplomacy took on a crisis communication role, with the Alliance working to justify its military intervention to both domestic and international audiences. NATO's strategic communications, including regular press briefings and media access to its operations, were crucial in managing the narrative around its actions in the conflict²³. This historical evolution underscores how NATO has consistently adapted its public diplomacy tools to address both internal challenges and external perceptions in a changing global landscape.

And now what?

NATO's Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) continues to play a crucial role in shaping the Alliance's external communications and sheltering understanding of NATO's objectives

²⁰ M. Dufour, "The origins of NATO's public diplomacy: The Information Service, 1950-1960", *NATO Review* 67, no. 1, (2019): 45-59.

²¹ L. Watanabe, "Public diplomacy and NATO's dual-track decision in the 1980s: Engaging with critics and shaping public opinion", *Cold War History Journal* 20, no. 4, (2020): 489-506.

²² R.D. "Asmus, NATO's role in post-Cold War Europe: Public diplomacy and the Partnership for Peace", *Foreign Affairs Review* 43, no. 2, (2019): 221-240.

²³ E. Hatzivassiliou, "NATO and the Kosovo crisis: Strategic communications and public diplomacy in action", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 23, no. 3, (2021): 83-105.

among global audiences. The PDD's present activities are primarily focused on promoting transparency, countering misinformation, and building resilience among NATO member and partner states. One of its key initiatives is enhancing digital engagement, particularly through social media platforms, where NATO interacts with diverse audiences by providing real-time updates and addressing disinformation, especially regarding conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war. The PDD has also been proactive in using digital diplomacy to highlight NATO's missions, values, and defense policies, while engaging with civil society, academic institutions, and youth organizations to foster dialogue about NATO's role in global security²⁴.

In addition to digital efforts, the PDD collaborates with traditional media and conducts public outreach activities through workshops, conferences, and educational programs. NATO's annual Brussels Summit, for instance, serves as a key platform where the PDD ensures that NATO's strategic priorities, such as the "NATO 2030" agenda, are communicated effectively to international and domestic audiences²⁵. Moreover, the PDD continues to coordinate public diplomacy efforts with NATO partner nations, utilizing joint campaigns to reinforce messages on collective security, democratic values, and strategic resilience in the face of emerging threats such as cyber warfare and hybrid attacks²⁶. These ongoing activities demonstrate NATO's commitment to maintaining a robust public diplomacy presence that adapts to contemporary challenges in the international arena.

The NATO 2030 initiative has become a cornerstone of the Alliance's public diplomacy efforts, as it seeks to adapt to evolving security challenges and strengthen alliances for the future. Launched in 2020, NATO 2030 is designed to ensure that NATO remains capable of addressing both traditional and emerging threats, such as cyberattacks, climate change, and geopolitical competition. Public diplomacy plays a central role in this initiative, particularly through efforts to engage with broader, non-traditional audiences, including youth, civil society, and global partners. One of the key elements of NATO 2030 is the emphasis on reaching out to younger generations, a priority manifested through initiatives, like NATO's Youth Summit and the NATO Youth Advisory Council. These platforms allow young people to directly engage with NATO leaders, contributing to discussions on security, democracy, and global stability²⁷.

Another critical aspect of NATO 2030 is its focus on building alliances with like-minded democracies, and reinforcing the narrative that NATO is not just a military alliance, but a guardian of shared democratic values. The Public Diplomacy Division has utilized strategic communication tools to project NATO's commitment to resilience, unity, and adaptability, reinforcing these messages through conferences, digital campaigns, and media collaborations²⁸. For example, during the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, the PDD implemented

²⁴ NATO, "Public diplomacy efforts: Engaging audiences for NATO 2030. NATO Public Diplomacy Division Report", 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int>

²⁵ H. Mouritzen, "NATO's strategic communications: The role of public diplomacy in shaping alliance narratives", *European Security Journal* 28, no.1, (2022): 55-72.

²⁶ M. Smith, "Building resilience through public diplomacy: NATO's evolving strategies", *Global Security Journal* 37, no. 3, (2023): 122-134.

²⁷ NATO, "NATO 2030: Shaping the future of the Alliance", NATO Public Diplomacy Division Report, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.nato.int>

²⁸ M. Smith, "Building resilience through public diplomacy: NATO's evolving strategies", *Global Security Journal* 37, no. 3, (2023):122-134.

a global media campaign to highlight the NATO 2030 agenda's objectives, particularly NATO's stance on emerging technologies and the defense of democratic societies against authoritarian influence²⁹. These activities illustrate how NATO 2030 serves not only as a strategic framework for addressing security issues but also as a public diplomacy tool to build trust, foster dialogue, and reaffirm NATO's relevance in a rapidly changing world.

NATO's public diplomacy in the Black Sea Region

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO's public diplomacy in the Black Sea region has intensified, with a particular focus on Romania as a key strategic player. Romania, given its geographical proximity to Ukraine and its Black Sea coastline, has been at the forefront of NATO's efforts to reassure its Eastern Flank allies and deter further Russian aggression. NATO's Public Diplomacy Division has leveraged Romania's position to highlight the Alliance's commitment to collective defense and to promote stability in the Black Sea region. Public diplomacy efforts have included high-profile military exercises such as Steadfast Defender and Sea Breeze, where Romania played a prominent role in showcasing NATO's readiness and operational capabilities in the region³⁰. These exercises have been accompanied by a robust communication campaign emphasizing NATO's support for Ukraine and its Eastern European allies, while simultaneously countering Russian disinformation narratives.

In Romania, NATO's public diplomacy has also focused on reinforcing the message of solidarity and security among the local population and civil society. Following the invasion, NATO significantly increased its media presence in Romania, with frequent visits and speeches by high-ranking officials, including NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. These visits were crucial in underlining NATO's Article 5 commitment, reassuring Romanians and other Eastern European citizens of NATO's protection in the event of any spillover from the conflict in Ukraine. NATO's Public Diplomacy Division has also collaborated closely with Romanian media outlets to disseminate accurate information about NATO's activities and objectives, combating Russian propaganda efforts that aim to sow discord and weaken public trust in NATO's ability to defend its allies³¹.

Moreover, Romania has played a key role in NATO's broader strategic communications in the Black Sea region by hosting important diplomatic events, such as the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bucharest in November 2022. This event was a prime example of NATO's public diplomacy efforts, as it provided a platform for NATO leaders to directly engage with regional stakeholders, including Romania, Ukraine, and other Black Sea countries, reinforcing the Alliance's commitment to regional security. The meeting also saw the launch of new initiatives aimed at strengthening Black Sea resilience, including enhanced cybersecurity cooperation and military presence in the region, which were widely covered in Romanian and international media as part of NATO's ongoing public diplomacy campaign³².

²⁹ H. Mouritzen, "NATO's strategic communications: The role of public diplomacy in shaping alliance narratives", *European Security Journal* 28, no. 1, (2022): 55-72.

³⁰ C. Stan, "NATO's public diplomacy in the Black Sea after Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Romania's strategic position", *NATO Review*, 70(2), (2023): 45-60.

³¹ A. Petrescu, "Countering disinformation in NATO's Eastern Flank: The case of Romania", *Journal of Black Sea Studies* 12, no. 2, (2023): 89-105.

³² A. Brînză, "Romania's role in NATO's Black Sea strategy: Public diplomacy and strategic communications", *Eastern*

In addition to these strategic communications and public diplomacy efforts, NATO has also engaged Romania's academic and civil society sectors to bolster understanding and support for the Alliance's role in regional security. Romania has hosted a series of public diplomacy initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue on defense policy, NATO's strategic vision, and the broader implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For example, the NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Bucharest has been pivotal in organizing conferences, public seminars, and workshops with universities and think tanks to discuss NATO's evolving strategies, with a special focus on Black Sea security³³. These forums have allowed Romanian scholars, policymakers, and the public to engage directly with NATO officials, creating a deeper understanding of NATO's mission in the region. governmental actors but also supported at the societal level, further strengthening Romania's role as a key NATO ally in the Black Sea region.

"Whole-of-society" approach. An inspiration to NATO's public diplomacy?

Sweden's "whole of society" approach to defense, which emphasizes the integration of military and civilian sectors, has been central to its national security strategy. This approach is based on the Total Defense concept, which was revitalized after years of dormancy in response to growing security concerns, including increased tensions in the Baltic region and Russia's actions in Ukraine. The Swedish government has worked to ensure that the military is closely integrated with local communities and civilian infrastructure, aiming to build societal resilience to potential threats. For example, the Swedish Armed Forces collaborate extensively with local authorities, businesses, and civil society organizations to ensure that in the event of a crisis or conflict, there is a seamless transition from peacetime to a state of defense readiness³⁴. This cooperation is demonstrated through large-scale defense exercises like Aurora, where civilian actors such as healthcare services, transportation companies, and local municipalities actively participate alongside the military.

A key element of Sweden's approach is educating and involving the civilian population in national defense efforts. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) plays a crucial role in this process by engaging local communities in preparedness activities, such as emergency response drills and educational campaigns. For example, the MSB's "If Crisis or War Comes" brochure, distributed to all Swedish households in 2018, provides practical advice on how citizens should react in the event of a military or civil emergency³⁵. This document is part of a broader public diplomacy campaign aimed at fostering a culture of preparedness and strengthening the relationship between the military sector and local communities. By actively involving civilians, the Swedish government ensures that national defense is seen as a shared responsibility, thereby increasing public trust and cooperation with the military.

Another important aspect of Sweden's whole of society approach is the role of local businesses and industries in supporting national defense. The Swedish Defense

European Security Studies Journal 8, no. 1, (2023): 15-34.

³³ A., Brînză "Romania's role in NATO's Black Sea strategy: Public diplomacy and strategic communications", Eastern European Security Studies Journal 8, no. 1, (2023): 15-34.

³⁴ P. Lundberg, "Sweden's Total Defense: A model for integrating civil and military sectors", Scandinavian Security Review 45, no.3, (2023): 54-68.

³⁵ MSB, "If crisis or war comes: Important information for the Swedish population", Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.msb.se>

Procurement Agency works closely with private sector companies to secure vital supply chains and ensure the continuity of critical infrastructure during emergencies. For instance, Swedish companies in sectors like telecommunications, energy, and transportation are integrated into defense planning, with contingency measures in place to protect these services from disruption during crises³⁶. These partnerships are essential for maintaining societal functions in the face of potential threats, ensuring that Sweden's defense capabilities are not solely reliant on the military but are supported by a resilient civilian infrastructure.

Sweden's military sector also places a strong emphasis on fostering positive relations with local communities through outreach and communication initiatives. The Swedish Armed Forces regularly engage with civilians through public events, school programs, and local partnerships to raise awareness of the military's role and build mutual trust. For example, local military bases often host open days, where community members can interact with military personnel and learn about defense operations³⁷. Such initiatives help to demystify the military and reinforce the idea that defense is a collective effort involving all sectors of society. This inclusive approach, built on trust, collaboration, and preparedness, exemplifies Sweden's holistic strategy in ensuring that the military and local communities work hand-in-hand to safeguard national security.

Updating NATO's public diplomacy approach in the Black Sea Region

In the light of the evolving landscape of international relations and public diplomacy, NATO's approach in the Black Sea region would benefit from embracing a more holistic framework akin to Sweden's "whole-of-society" approach. As public diplomacy has transitioned from a one-way transmission of state messages to a more relational and collaborative practice, NATO must adapt its strategies to reflect these changes. Historically, NATO's public diplomacy has focused on military exercises and strategic communication to bolster its position in the region. To effectively implement the Swedish 'whole of society' approach, NATO's public diplomacy efforts should focus on grassroots initiatives and community-based projects. This could include establishing educational programs, joint cultural events, and collaborative research projects that address local issues and promote mutual understanding. By investing in these types of initiatives, NATO can demonstrate a genuine commitment to the well-being and development of Black Sea communities, rather than merely projecting a top-down image of military alliance. Engaging with local stakeholders in this way can help to counter misinformation, reduce regional tensions, and build trust among the population.

Additionally, adopting the Swedish approach would require NATO to enhance its strategic communication by incorporating feedback and insights from local communities into its messaging. This means developing communication strategies that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs and interests of different groups within the Black Sea region. By doing so, NATO can ensure that its messages resonate more effectively with the public and address the issues that matter most to them. This inclusive

³⁶ J. Wiklund, "Securing critical infrastructure: Sweden's approach to military-civilian cooperation", *Nordic Defense Studies* 37, no. 1, (2022): 21-35.

³⁷ A. Nyström, "Building military-civilian relationships: The role of outreach in Sweden's defense strategy", *Journal of Defense Engagement* 12, no. 2, (2023): 85-98.

and responsive approach to public diplomacy can ultimately strengthen NATO's influence and support in the Black Sea region, contributing to greater stability and cooperation.

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A POLITICAL MARKETPLACE: NATO AND THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AGREEMENTS

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Nuclear issues enjoy a renewed salience, as shown by the news or movies like *Oppenheimer* (2023) and *Dune II* (2024). In this essay, I will analyze the relationship between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the international policies and accords about nuclear proliferation. I use an eclectic approach inspired by H. Bull, which mixes realism with liberalism and constructivism, and three historical illustrations. The conclusion is that, even if it remains controversial from a proliferation point of view, NATO does indeed help to control the spread and sometimes even the growth of nuclear weapons, because it acts like a political marketplace.¹ I also treat issues like the role of small powers in the negotiations of multilateral treaties and some recent events.

Nuclear proliferation is defined as the extension of weapons and technologies based on the fission and fusion of atoms across countries and the increase in already existing arsenals.² Usually, it is considered a source of instability in international relations if left unchecked, though there is a debate among specialists about this subject.³ At the same time, NATO is a nuclear alliance, and its deterrence function has been strongly reasserted, after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Thus, a legitimate question to ask is how NATO can be a source of non-proliferation.

This is an interesting theme for Romania's decision-makers, specialists, and the public. This state is member of both Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and NATO, which means that two different sets of interests, policies and organizations must be harmonized; it has a civilian nuclear industry and a particular diplomatic tradition on non-proliferation and disarmament topics.⁴ It's not always an easy task and things become more complicated with the renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine since 24 February 2022. In this essay, I will follow an eclectic approach, inspired by the English School, especially by Hedley Bull's writings, with his emphasis on conceptual analysis and his refusal of definitive answers.⁵

¹ R. O. Keohane (1984). *After Hegemony. Cooperation and Discord After Hegemony : in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. R. Keohane established the perspective of international institutions and organizations as forums or markets, but in a rationalistic framework, as the product of interest-based choices.

² A. Miroiu & S. Soare (2007). Război și securitate nucleară. In A. Miroiu, & R.-S. Ungureanu, *Manual de relații internaționale*. Iași: Polirom, p. 299.

³ S. D. Sagan & K. N. Waltz (2012). *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*. New York : W. W. Norton & Company.

⁴ M. Malița (2007). *Între război și pace*, București: C.H. Beck, pp. 108-120. See also: (Dragomir, 2012; Gheorghe, 2014; Crump-Gabreëls, 2017).

⁵ H. Bull (1961), *The Control of The Arms Race*, London: The Institute for Strategic Studies.

First, it's useful to take a deeper look at the basic concepts. Nuclear weapons are engines of mass destruction and are considered so powerful and frightening, as to make the traditional general interstate war impossible, or very unlikely. Deterrence is the main policy based on nuclear weapons.⁶ This is true for United States and NATO policies, or for states like Russia or China, and is closely linked to the debates on nuclear proliferation.

But deterrence is often ambiguous. Usually, it is defined as a threat intended to avoid unwanted behaviors, like a major invasion or a nuclear attack.⁷ A negative form of coercive diplomacy, deterrence is contrasted with compellence, a policy intended to press behavior, and with direct use of armed force, where the other actor's goals are entirely conflictual.⁸ Deterrence is based on power and has a counterfactual character (if it succeeds, nothing happens), therefore it is morally contested and its effectiveness is difficult to prove.

Several studies have argued that deterrence may fail, or it may escalate conflict.⁹ Most scholars argued therefore that an international system where most actors obtain nuclear weapons will be more unpredictable and conflictual than the current one.¹⁰ Thus, generalized deterrence is controversial, and controlled proliferation remains a reasonable compromise since disarmament remains difficult to achieve.¹¹ This is the theoretical fundament of the historical arms control and proliferation regimes.

Technology is also ambiguous. The term covers everything from the basic knowledge, taught in high schools to the weapons themselves. In between are the industrial and engineering components.¹² The more general theories and practices are no secret, and specialists argue that most middle and upper-income or even some lower-income countries can develop this type of WMD. Like deterrence, nuclear proliferation is more an issue of beliefs, interests, incentives, and interactions, than an objective, material reality.

The third ambiguity is about the policies designed to deal with proliferation. Non-proliferation is usually defined negatively, as a normative interdiction to develop or acquire the tools. Sometimes it's contrasted to anti or counter-proliferation, ideas about a more active policy involving compellence or the use of force, ideas which were popular 20 years ago, but have receded in the background.¹³ Because the capacity to build weapons is widespread, if states decide to do so, I see nuclear proliferation as an issue of motivation and interaction, as diplomacy, even if force may be useful in some cases.¹⁴

⁶ T. C. Schelling (1966). *Arms and Influence*. New Haven : Yale University Press.

⁷ P. M. Morgan (2003). *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸ T. C. Schelling (1966). *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁹ P. M. Morgan (2003). *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ S. D. Sagan & K. N., Waltz (2012). *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*. New York : W. W Norton & Company. Neorealists who argue in favor of more proliferation don't recommend general nuclear ownership.

¹¹ H. Bull (1961). *The Control of The Arms Race*. London : The Institute for Strategic Studie. See also: (Freedman & Michaels, 2019). Any compromise on proliferation is vulnerable to the Nth country problem: my weapons are stabilizing, but the ones build by the next state are a threat.

¹² V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹³ J. Baylis (2019). The Control of Weapons of Mass Destruction. In J. Baylis, J. J. Wirtz, & C. S. Gray, *Strategy in the Contemporary World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ V. Narang, (2022), *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*. Princeton : Princeton University Press.

V. Narang argues this thesis in *Seeking the Bomb* and is now Pentagon's responsible for nuclear policies. But 20 years ago, the United States was the main promoter of anti and counter-proliferation policies, which are still evoked in specific cases, like Iran.

Nuclear weapons are wanted for a variety of reasons and can be developed by different pathways. The main motives are status, security, domestic politics, international norms, and others.¹⁵ Out of these, the first is emphasized by the traditional school of International Relations (IR), realism which argues that power is a valuable tool to prevent or counter threats and that nuclear weapons are the most powerful tool of all.¹⁶ But there are also reasons to not proliferate: nuclear taboo, development/norms, status, guarantees, fear, and domestic politics.¹⁷

NATO offers a solution to the motivations based on security, international norms, and domestic policies. Like any alliance, it mitigates the rivalries between its members, while providing an answer to the common threats identified by its decision-makers. The imbalance of capabilities between the United States and its allies led to a specific form of protection by extended nuclear deterrence, where the American strategic arsenal is the essential security assurance and tactical weapons still play operational, but more restricted roles.¹⁸ This mitigation is one of the many factors influencing national decisions, and it has some limits: two other NATO members are nuclear powers (United Kingdom and France) and a historical rivalry opposes Greece and Turkey.¹⁹

While defense is a significant motive, it's not the only driver of state action. NATO is also a source of regime and international legitimacy. As an alliance of mostly democratic states and linked to a specific set of values, the organization offers a form for validation, which was important for countries like Germany and the former Communist Countries.²⁰ Its internal arrangements offer a type of access to nuclear technology that doesn't include actual control but may satisfy curiosity and the desire to have a voice in these matters.²¹

NATO can also represent a forum for policy coordination.²² This was important in the 1950s and 1960s when most of the foundations of the current non-proliferation policies were established and still matters today. The nuclear capacity and the alliance's policies in this issue area were recognized when NPT was negotiated and the internal NATO bargaining proved to be decisive for the establishment of the current non-proliferation regime as we shall see. This function of a Western marketplace for policies was salient towards the end of the Cold War in the INF talks, and after 9/11, when counter-proliferation policies were in vogue, and may matter again in the future.²³

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ S. D. Sagan & K. N., Waltz (2012). *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*. New York : W. W. See also: (Narang, 2022).

¹⁷ N. Tannenwald (2007). *The Nuclear Taboo: the United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also: (Solingen, 2007).

¹⁸ V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁹ A. Lutsch, (2017). In favor of „effective” and „non-discriminatory” non-dissemination policy. The FRG and the NPT negotiation process (1962-1966). In R. Popp, L. Horowitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origins of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle edition: Routledge.

²⁰ T. Risse-Kappen (1996). Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO. In P. J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York : Columbia University Press .

²¹ R. Popp (2017). From superpower collusion to global compromise. In R. Popp, L. Horowitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origin of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle Edition: Routledge .

²² C. A. Wallander & R. O., Keohane (2002). Risk, threat, and security institutions. In R. O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*. London : Routledge.

²³ P. Calvo-coresssi (2013). *World Politics since 1945* (9th ed.). New York : Routledge.

Some historical illustrations

In the rest of this essay, I will look for several historical illustrations of the main argument. The first of them is about NATO's nuclear arrangements, established in the 1960s, and about the status of its states and it aims to investigate the effectiveness of these rules; therefore I will cross-check the lists of the alliance members with that of proliferators made by V. Narang and with World Bank's data on economic development. The second example is about NPT negotiations in the late 1960s, which followed NATO's internal debate on nuclear ownership and the third example is about the deployment of Euromissiles in the 1980s and the negotiation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). These cases show the utility of an eclectic approach, in which the logic based on power and security are combined with inputs from regime theory, to offer a middle-range explanation for specific research questions.²⁴

Since proliferation is an ambiguous term, many scholars conceived it as scale, a view that doesn't always coincide with the legal definition.²⁵ The most common academic perspective distinguishes between latent nuclear powers (states that have an atomic industry) and actual nuclear powers (weapon states).²⁶ V. Narang refines it in hedgers (three subtypes), searchers (three subtypes), and established nuclear states (the nine owners).²⁷ For this essay, I will focus on the legal definition, because the decision to develop nuclear weapons is essential to understand how NATO influences choices about proliferation, and latent states or hedgers haven't made up their minds or wanted just to keep the option open.

The main causal mechanism posits NATO as a sort of regime, which offers security in exchange for coordination. The extended deterrence policies solve the nuclear security challenge for most of its members, an argument proposed by realists like K. Waltz and V. Narang, but also by a few liberal institutionalists and constructivists.²⁸ During years of negotiations, NATO developed a set of procedures and institutional forms that allow its members to understand nuclear issues and to train for the eventuality of a conflict.²⁹ Out of them, salient are the strategic concept, the Nuclear Planning Group, and the dual key arrangements.³⁰

The internal NATO agreements received a lot of scholarly attention and for good reasons. They grew up out of very controversial negotiations between NATO members in the 1950s and 1960s, during which the United States attempted to control the nuclear initiatives of the alliance's members, France wanted a national program while

²⁴ R. Sil & P. J., Katzenstein (2010, June). Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(2), pp. 411-431.

²⁵ United Nations (1970). *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*. The legal definition, according to NPT treaty, stresses the attempts to build or acquire nuclear weapons, and it may miss gray zone cases.

²⁶ A. Wenger & L., Horowitz (2017). Nuclear technology and political power in the making of the nuclear order. In R. Popp, L. Horowitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origins of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle edition: Routledge.

²⁷ V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁸ S. D., Sagan & K. N., Waltz (2012). *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*. New York : W. W. See also: (Narang, 2022). See also: (Narang, 2022; Wallander & Keohane, 2002; Risse-Kappen, 1996)

²⁹ R. Popp (2017). From superpower collusion to global compromise. In R. Popp, L. Horowitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origin of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle Edition: Routledge. See also: (Lutsch, 2017; Wenger & Horowitz, 2017).

³⁰ Ibid.

the rest of the states opted for intermediary positions.³¹ The results were that France developed its arsenal under national control and left NATO's military structures, and the alliance instituted the Nuclear Planning Group and the dual-key arrangements.³² This is significant because it shows that NATO members had a degree of leverage, made conscious decisions about nuclear issues and that compromise is more important than doctrinal reasons.³³

Nuclear-sharing practices were highlighted in recent years, in the context of the renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine and the accompanied threats. Polish decision-makers and experts suggested that their country can host nuclear weapons, statements that represent a form of signaling to the United States, not only to Russia or to the public opinion (IISS, 2023; Erästö, 2024).³⁴ At the 2023 Vilnius summit, NATO leaders emphasized various nuclear topics including the participation in the sharing arrangements, the common training of forces, the importance of modernization, the value of the US tactical weapons stored in Europe and the role played by the British and French arsenal, reflecting the historical compromise, a response to the Nth country problem.³⁵ For now, according to independent experts, 5 NATO countries house American nuclear bombs (Germany, Turkey, Italy, Belgium and Netherlands), 6 own dual-use and trained air forces (Greece, alongside the previously mentioned and US) while 6 others support them with conventional means.³⁶

The arrangement held. Out of the 32 NATO members in 2024, 3 were nuclear weapon states, 5 were hedgers at one moment, and 24 were not engaged in any form of nuclear proliferation identified in the scientific literature.³⁷ Increasing the severity of the check, 25 out of the 29 were high-income countries, which means that most NATO members can start a nuclear weapons program but choose not to do so.³⁸ This remains true even for members who have identified significant security threats in their proximity.³⁹

The second historical illustration is that of the NPT negotiations. The treaty was signed in 1968 and ratified until 1970, and it is now the most important arms control and disarmament document.⁴⁰ It is the fundament of a wider security regime that distinguishes between nuclear weapons states and the other members. The first group

³¹ Ibid. The Kennedy administration proposed an integrated nuclear force at NATO level, but the critics replied that that would mean US control. It also raised objections from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact.

³² V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. See also: (Fontaine, 1994).

³³ Ibid. See also: (Narang, 2022; Wallander & Keohane, 2002; Risse-Kappen, 1996; George & Benett, 2005). Realist theories stress here the security imperative, the institutionalist explanations point out to the reduction in transaction and information costs and the constructivist approaches, to the process of learning. It's difficult to competitively test these three causal mechanisms since the facts may support all these interpretations.

³⁴ IISS. (2023). Poland's Bid to Participate in NATO Nuclear Sharing. *Strategic Comments*, 29(7). See also: (Erästö, 2024)

³⁵ NATO. (2023, July 11). Vilnius Summit Communiqué. See also: IISS, 2023)

³⁶ H. M. Kristensen, M. Korda, & M. Knight (2023). Nuclear weapons sharing, 2023. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. See also: (Graca & Gotkowska, 2024). According to some Polish experts, there are several possibilities to enlarge the dual-sharing agreements in Eastern Europe such as to give up the NATO-Russia agreement and deploy tactical weapons or to certify dual-use F-35 airplanes.

³⁷ V. Narang (2022), *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. See also: (NATO, 2024).

³⁸ The World Bank. (2024). *The World by Income and Region*.

³⁹ V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. The security threat condition is important since most countries in the world have decided to avoid nuclear weapons. NATO states have both capacity and security incentives.

⁴⁰ IAEA. (n.d.). *The IAEA and the Non-Proliferation Treaty*.

promised to negotiate nuclear disarmament, and the other group is obliged to not pursue nuclear weapons while it retains the right to pursue peaceful research and industry.⁴¹

The nuclear-sharing agreements are allowed under the treaty if control is kept by the weapons' owners.⁴² The treaty's negotiators allowed this because United States was interested in convincing as many states as possible into joining, strengthening the new regimes this way.⁴³ Several US allies, including Germany, were skeptical initially about the NPT, and France didn't join until the Cold War was over.⁴⁴ The US extended deterrence and sharing agreements were decisive for convincing them to accept the new international rules.⁴⁵

Significant here is that small and medium states have bargaining power, even if US is the elephant in the Western room. The US pushed for a version of a non-proliferation regime which allowed military alliances and nuclear sharing agreements, but it had to relinquish the preferred result of supranational control and live with two nuclear allies.⁴⁶ The French opposition to MNF helped to push the US-Soviet negotiation forward, the German evolving position was fundamental to the Treaty and several non-aligned states either cooperated or pressed the superpower into acting. Any country with industrial capacities has some degree of bargaining power in nuclear negotiations, since they are considered latent nuclear states.⁴⁷

The third historical illustration is about the Euromissiles. During the late phase of the Cold War, the Soviet Union placed SS-20 intermediate range, land-based missiles which could hit targets inside Western Europe, but not US. In theory, these tools were destabilizing and lack credibility, because a similar move by NATO would have left the Soviet Union more vulnerable, for geographical reasons. But at that time, it looked like Moscow found a way to divide NATO and launched an intense propaganda campaign.⁴⁸

The obvious counter was to deploy similar missiles into Western Europe. This was one of the results, but it came about only after two major debates inside the alliance. The first one illustrated the classical doubt about the credibility of the extended deterrence threat and motivated the placement of intermediate range cruise and ballistic missiles. The other opposed the supporters of defense and arms control policies to the advocates of disarmament, it involved massive protests during the eighties and led to new security concepts like common security and non-threatening defense.⁴⁹

⁴¹ United Nations (1970). *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*.

⁴² BASIC/ORG. (2005). *NATO: Nuclear Sharing or Proliferation*. See also: (Popp, 2017)

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ A. Lutsch (2017). In favor of "effective" and "non-discriminatory" non-dissemination policy. The FRG and the NPT negotiation process (1962-1966). In R. Popp, L. Horovitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origins of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle edition: Routledge.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ R. Popp (2017). From superpower collusion to global compromise. In R. Popp, L. Horovitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origin of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle Edition: Routledge. See also: (Wenger & Horovitz, 2017). At the same time, the Chinese nuclear weapons program was designed to deter the Soviet Union, among others and became part of a rivalry with sporadic use of force.

⁴⁷ A. Wenger, & L. Horovitz (2017). Nuclear technology and political power in the making of the nuclear order. In R. Popp, L. Horovitz, & A. Wenger, *Negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Origins of the Nuclear Order*. Kindle edition: Routledge.

⁴⁸ P. Calvocoressi (2013). *World Politics since 1945* (9th ed.). New York : Routledge, pp. 47-50. See also: (Corell, 2020)

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

With the placement of intermediary missiles, the Soviet Union's decision backfired. The new team of leaders promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev decided to accept NATO's offer on parallel elimination in case of intermediary missiles. The result was the INF treaty, the second major disarmament treaty document after NPT.⁵⁰ Things are still changing, because the treaty was denounced after Russia broke it and NATO will deploy intermediate, ground based missiles from 2026.⁵¹

These three examples show that NATO was important in the negotiation of non-proliferation agreements both inside the West and outside of it. The extended deterrence guarantees, and nuclear-sharing agreements allowed several small and medium powers to prevent or mediate threats and get used to nuclear technology, while maintaining superpower control. The alliance offered a forum which allowed the convergence of several national positions, with an interesting interplay of domestic and international politics, for example, in case of Germany. It also worked as a negotiation block for intermediary missiles.

Conclusions

NATO was helpful in creating a non-proliferation policy and regime. It often acted not like an authoritarian leader imposing its views, but more like a broker or a forum. In the end, any country who thought of itself as a Great Power got nuclear weapons, but the way this result was achieved was important. The major success of the alliance was that it allowed the integration of a peaceful, non-nuclear Germany into the West, who found out that alternative identities were available to that of a war-making state.

NATO wasn't a perfect solution for non-proliferation. The United States tried to push for supranational control, but this move backfired, and nuclear modernization is still ongoing. The critique linking policies of deterrence with proliferation and wars will always be with us, since it relies on deeply held values, and on counterfactual reasoning. Nevertheless, there are enough arguments and examples to show that the glass is more than half full.

Today, nuclear issues are again important⁵². Russia's aggression against Ukraine brought forward the problems and dilemmas of nuclear deterrence and brinkmanship. Sweden and Finland recently joined NATO in part because they were interested in the extended deterrence guarantee and is good to remember that the first of them attempted some nuclear research attempts decades ago.⁵³ Moscow even tried to mimic NATO by moving weapons to Belarus's territory.

The nuclear arms control and proliferation regimes are weakening. The Budapest Agreement of the 1990s promised security to Ukraine, in exchange for nuclear non-proliferation, therefore, Russia's aggressions of 2014 and 2022 eroded the fundamentals of this regime and may tempt states to put more trust in nuclear armaments. INF is gone and the New START is contested, even if tacit and informal agreements remain. NATO's arrangements and policies can play a supporting role to maintain the principles and rules on which non-proliferation is based.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Defense (2019, August 2). *Statement From Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper on the INF Treaty*. See also: (Corell, 2020; Xiaodong, 2024).

⁵² Other contributions are the maritime patrols to interdict the illicit traffic with nuclear material and components (NATO, 2022).

⁵³ V. Narang (2022). *Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The talk about burden-sharing returned with all its ambiguities. Some US allies talked about nuclear weapons and in both themes it's easy to see hints of past behaviors and negotiations. At 75 years of its founding, NATO was proven to be more diverse than expected for an alliance defined by a certain imbalance of capacities, but also more resilient to internal debates and disagreements. For Romania, it is useful to be aware of these mazes of diplomatic features.

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THE PROTOCOL OF ROMANIA'S ACCESSION TO NATO - THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A LEGAL DOCUMENT

Dr. Doru Liciu, Head of the Diplomatic Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania

The year 2024 marks two decades since Romania's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, one of the most important foreign policy objectives after 1989.

The integration into Euro-Atlantic structures represented a pivotal moment for Romania. This journey was the result of consistent political and diplomatic efforts, to which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed substantially, against the background of the support of the political class and Romanian society.

As early as 1990, Romania set out its journey towards NATO, with the Romanian ambassador, accredited in Belgium, being designated to ensure diplomatic relations with the Alliance. This was followed by the dissolution in 1991 of the Warsaw Pact, the political-military alliance of the former communist states.

In 1993, the President of Romania visited NATO's headquarters, publicly expressing the country's willingness to engage in closer cooperation.

Thus, in 1994, Romania signed the Partnership for Peace, a cooperation framework that provided non-member states the opportunity to align their national political-military components with the requirements for NATO membership.

In April 1997, the Romanian Parliament unanimously adopted a declaration through which Romania's admission to NATO was officially requested. Despite the public disappointment generated by the exclusion from the first wave of the alliance's expansion, Romania continued the reform and modernization process, making significant progress toward meeting the accession criteria.

In this context, at the 2002 Prague summit, the most extensive expansion process took place, as seven candidate states, including Romania, were invited to join the alliance.

During the extraordinary ceremony of the North Atlantic Council, held on March 26, 2003, in Brussels, the Accession Protocol to NATO was signed for each candidate state.

The Protocol of Romania's Accession to NATO represents the legal instrument through which our country obtained membership status with equal rights within the alliance after a decade of partnership in which the strategic concept underlying the Alliance's *modus operandi* was integrated into Romania's national security strategy and military doctrine.

On March 29, 2004, Romania officially joined NATO by depositing the instruments of ratification at the U.S. Department of State, the depositary of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Romania's accession to NATO marked an important milestone in its integration into the Euro-Atlantic democratic community, followed by accession to the European Union. Romania has committed to protecting common democratic values and contributing to the promotion of security and cooperation within the North Atlantic Alliance.

PROTOCOL
TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY
ON THE ACCESSION OF
ROMANIA

* * *

PROTOCOLE
AU TRAITE DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD
SUR L'ACCESSION DE
LA ROUMANIE

The Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty, signed at Washington on April 4, 1949,

Being satisfied that the security of the North Atlantic area will be enhanced by the accession of Romania to that Treaty,

Agree as follows:

Article I

Upon the entry into force of this Protocol, the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation shall, on behalf of all the Parties, communicate to the Government of Romania an invitation to accede to the North Atlantic Treaty. In accordance with Article 10 of the Treaty, Romania shall become a Party on the date when it deposits its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America.

Article II

The present Protocol shall enter into force when each of the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty has notified the Government of the United States of America of its acceptance thereof. The Government of the United States of America shall inform all the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty of the date of receipt of each such notification and of the date of the entry into force of the present Protocol.

Article III

The present Protocol, of which the English and French texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the Archives of the Government of the United States of America. Duly certified copies thereof shall be transmitted by that Government to the Governments of all the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty.

Les Parties au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord, signé le 4 avril 1949
à Washington,

Assurées que l'accession de la Roumanie au Traité de l'Atlantique
Nord permettra d'augmenter la sécurité de la région de l'Atlantique
Nord,

Conviennent ce qui suit :

Article I

Dès l'entrée en vigueur de ce Protocole, le Secrétaire Général de l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord enverra, au nom de toutes les Parties, au Gouvernement de la Roumanie une invitation à adhérer au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord. Conformément à l'Article 10 du Traité, la Roumanie deviendra Partie à ce Traité à la date du dépôt de son instrument d'accession auprès du Gouvernement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique.

Article II

Le présent Protocole entrera en vigueur lorsque toutes les Parties au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord auront notifié leur approbation au Gouvernement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique. Le Gouvernement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique informera toutes les Parties au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord de la date de réception de chacune de ces notifications et de la date d'entrée en vigueur du présent Protocole.

Article III

Le présent Protocole, dont les textes en français et anglais font également foi, sera déposé dans les archives du Gouvernement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique. Des copies certifiées conformes seront transmises par celui-ci aux Gouvernements de toutes les autres Parties au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord.

In witness whereof,
the undersigned plenipotentiaries have signed
the present Protocol.

Signed at Brussels
on the 26th day of March 2003.

En foi de quoi,
les plénipotentiaires désignés ci-dessous
ont signé le présent Protocole.

Signé à Bruxelles
le 26 mars 2003.

For the Kingdom of Belgium :
Pour le Royaume de Belgique :

Dominique Stuyve

For Canada :
Pour le Canada :

Daniel S. Wajid

For the Czech Republic :
Pour la République tchèque :

Michal Kováč

For the Kingdom of Denmark :
Pour le Royaume de Danemark :

Lise Engelund

For the French Republic :
Pour la République française :

Jean-Pierre Godeaux

For the Federal Republic of Germany :
Pour la République fédérale d'Allemagne :

Frank-Walter Steinmeier

For the Hellenic Republic :
Pour la République hellénique :

Stavros Niarchos

For the Republic of Hungary :
Pour la République de Hongrie :

Imre Gyöngyösi

For the Republic of Iceland :
Pour la République d'Islande :

Guðmundur Guðmundsson

For the Italian Republic :
Pour la République italienne :

Mario Monti

For the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg :
Pour le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg :

Jean-Claude Juncker

For the Kingdom of the Netherlands :
Pour le Royaume des Pays-Bas :

Wim Kok

For the Kingdom of Norway :
Pour le Royaume de Norvège :

Carl B. Lunde

For the Republic of Poland :
Pour la République de Pologne :

Janusz Onyszkiewicz

For the Portuguese Republic :
Pour la République portugaise :

António Guterres

For the Kingdom of Spain :
Pour le Royaume d'Espagne :

Juan Carlos Rodríguez Cordero

For the Republic of Turkey :
Pour la République de la Turquie :

A. İlçin

For the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland :
Pour le Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord :

Emyr Jones Parry

For the United States of America :
Pour les Etats-Unis d'Amérique :

R. Nicholas Burns

Certified copy of the original of the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of Romania.

Brussels, 27 March 2003



Baldwin De Vidts
Legal Adviser of NATO



Copie certifiée conforme à l'original du Protocole au Traité de l'Atlantique Nord sur l'accession de la Roumanie.

Bruxelles, 27 mars 2003



Baldwin De Vidts
Conseiller juridique de l'OTAN



PETER APPS (2024) DETERRING ARMAGEDDON: A BIOGRAPHY OF NATO, LONDON, WILDFIRE – HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP

Dr. Dragoş C. Mateescu, RDI Expert

Peter Apps, the British author of *Deterring Armageddon*, is a professional journalist, Reuters columnist and correspondent. He is specialised in global economics, global political and security risks, having reported from more than 20 countries in Southern Asia and Africa, in Europe and the Americas. His life changed dramatically in 2006. While covering the civil war in Sri Lanka, a minibus he was travelling with hit a tractor. This left him totally paralysed from neck down and entirely dependent on other people and on a wheelchair. However, that did not stop Peter from living his life. Only 13 months later, he was back to work. Ever since, he has been travelling and writing for Reuters and other outlets, or volunteering for various organisations and think-tanks, including the Labour Party in the UK. Peter has even served as British Army reservist and did some stand-up comedy occasionally. His work already included two books: *Before Ebola: Dispatches from a deadly outbreak* (2014, Project for Study of the 21st Century, PS21), on the dramatic developments in Angola in 2005 during the Ebola pandemic, and *Churchill in the Trenches* (2015, Kindle Single) on Winston Churchill's experience in World War I.

Deterring Armageddon is the first work by Peter Apps that is published by an established house, i.e. the Wildfire division of Headline Publishing Group. The Headline Group in turn is part of the UK branch of the prestigious Hachette Livre, the third largest publisher on the global book market. Hence, the review here, while offering some critical viewpoints, is also honouring the success of an author that had the power to leave behind many serious difficulties in life, and become what he is today.

As the title suggests, *Deterring Armageddon* is a 600-pages-plus "biography of NATO", celebrating the 75th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in 2024. Not accidentally, the very introduction of the volume builds on a quote from Field Marshall Bernard V. Montgomery, the legendary leader of the British and Commonwealth forces in Second World War. The quote, from a speech given by Montgomery at the NATO's Defence College in 1953, is quite telling: "It is my very firm belief that if NATO had come into being earlier, there would have been no Second World War... It is also my belief that in the strengthening of NATO lies the best hope of preventing a Third."

In retrospective, Montgomery was right. The Alliance is a defensive construction meant for "deterring Armageddon." Had it been in place in the first half of the twentieth century, together with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the Great Depression may had been averted, together with the horrors of fascism and World War II. Later, NATO held off the communist block and in particular the imperialist instincts of the Russians/Soviets during the Cold War, and continues to be good at that. After 75 years of fight against this permanent danger, the old and especially the new members,

from the Baltic to the Black Sea, perceive NATO membership as the only strong guarantee of security against Moscow. And, while Putin confirmed since the war in Georgia (2008) that Russia is an unrelenting and never-repenting imperialist aggressor, NATO has remained *the* reliable force opposing it.

The first part of *Deterring Armageddon* explains the current context marked by the war in Ukraine since 2014 and situates NATO in it. One perspective gradually emerges, with plenty of official declarations and other accounts supporting it: although the international system agreed upon after World War II included the Soviet Union/Russia, and although Russia was welcomed in the global market after the Cold War as a major exporter of energy, agricultural products and raw materials, Moscow could not overcome its centuries-long obsession with empire. The inclusive approach was continued with the G8 and G20, with representation for Russia even at the tables of EU and NATO. Peter Apps provides interesting, often colourful evidence regarding those instances. Against Western intentions, the arrival of Vladimir Putin at the helm in Kremlin in 2000 inaugurated however the return to an aggressive stance toward neighbours, culminating with the war in Georgia and the current one in Ukraine. The generic West, including NATO, reacted late and far from decisive. That is while the eastern Europeans were fully aware of the perpetual danger represented by Russians and “Russianism” throughout history, warning repeatedly the White House and Brussels about it. And right they were. The current phase of the war in Ukraine, which started with the Russian invasion in February 2022, is a bitter reminder that Russia is not the partner perceived in the west, but the perpetual enemy perceived in the east of Europe.

NATO could avoid responsibility *ad infinitum* in this context. As Apps underlines in the first section, “the fact that war was happening at all was a sign of NATO and wider Western failure.” Left in the *grey zone* during the Alliance’s eastward enlargement, Ukraine was condemned to face Moscow’s imperialist aggressiveness one day. As Estonian PM Kallas put it, “any grey zone in Europe is a source of conflict,” with Moscow as primary threat, and NATO is the only security guarantee for countries in such situation. The author notes that President Zelensky also fully understood this situation, while the wider West and NATO took some time to grasp it and react. On the other hand, as Apps also adds, although even today NATO is not directly involved in the conflict, probably none of its members would have acted so quickly and decisively to support Ukraine had they not been protected collectively under Article 5 of the Treaty and had they not used the NATO procedures and facilities to provide aid.

In the second section of the first part, Peter Apps clarifies what diplomats involved in NATO dealings have internalised long time ago, i.e. that the Alliance is essentially a political one. Indeed, even the military decisions, though based on military inputs, are essentially political and delivered by politicians. They are the ones to bear responsibility, not the officers who are entrusted executive orders only. And, speaking of the military, not *all* the force of a NATO member country is also NATO force. Apps notes correctly that decisions on how many troops and how much military equipment to be allocated to which mission under the NATO flag and military command are always political decisions. Moreover, much of the NATO diplomacy, including in times of crises, is declarative and political in nature. One of the anecdotic descriptions of the Organisation before the war in Ukraine, based on its acronym, was ‘No Action, Talk Only’.

The war in Ukraine changed the mood and NATO is now taking up seriously its role as the only security guarantee for countries of Europe, so well understood by eastern Europeans in particular. The public positions of the political leaders of NATO and of member states are highly important in this context. *Deterring Armageddon* offers in this very sense an abundance of examples of public speeches with significant political weight for developments throughout the years and especially since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. It should not be forgotten that, at the end of the day, anything NATO does factually, any news about changes in equipment development and allocation, logistics and military manoeuvres, represents a political statement. And we all hope that NATO will never be forced to transition from political statements and deterrence to militarily confronting opponents.

That may well be the 'Armageddon.' And, at a time when the Kremlin threatens with a red line after another, we should all be aware that it, the Kremlin itself, has crossed the ultimate red line that it should have never crossed: provoking another war in Europe. Peter Apps skillfully puts together quotes from various NATO leaders, especially from the Baltic region, to sketch the perception that, for the peoples in Eastern Europe, a point of no return has been reached in relation with Moscow. Finally, Russia has showed to the world its real imperialist face, which was hidden for some decades behind polite diplomatic exchanges while responding to Western benevolent offers. Having failed to subdue Europe with the dependency on Russian exports of gas, oil, and minerals, and facing now the acceleration by the EU of programmes aiming to turn the continent green, Moscow panicked. As it happened so many other times throughout history, the nation incapable to modernise has chosen the path of war to stop others from modernising either. Nevertheless, as the book of Peter Apps brilliantly suggests, this time there is no going back. The current world is different from the one 75, or 80 years ago. It can move forward and leave Moscow behind, locked in its essentially political attachment to the long overdue, imperial logic of conflict.

The book elaborates in part 2 on the Alliance's becoming what it is today, in line with the commitment to provide 'a biography'. Peter Apps is careful to contextualise the birth of NATO in the period immediately following the end of the Second World War, pointing out the danger posed by Soviet Russia and communism at the time. Inevitably, this image is built mainly (but not only) on Winston Churchill's public discourses and letters to various leaders, including Harry Truman. In one such letter, the British leader confessed to the US President that he saw 'an iron curtain' drawing down upon Europe, an image he would then make public in the famous 1946 speech. And, once again, Churchill was right.

However, although much of the US forces were by then busy with post-war missions in South-East Asia and the Pacific, Europe was not abandoned as some of its leaders had feared. On the contrary, the US and its allies advanced the Marshall Plan and the Europeans themselves initiated plans for continental security, such as the Brussels Treaty (March 1948) and the Western Union Defence Organisation (1948-1951). The British were the leading force behind both initiatives and it was not accidental that the Benelux countries were most active in those projects. They had been run over repeatedly by the French and the Germans throughout the many wars between the two. However, the American decisive involvement in the Marshall Plan and the steps toward

the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community, plus the Berlin crisis, turned the tables in favour of broader perspectives supported by Washington. And this is how it all culminated with the establishment of NATO, in April 1949, by the founders Belgium, Netherlands, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Luxemburg, Italy, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Deterring Armageddon offers interesting and valuable details about all these episodes, with reference to relevant speeches and documents, including private letters exchanged between leaders. Peter Apps is an author with good journalistic instincts, one able to also contextualise events and evolutions in the grand picture of European and global security. Undoubtedly, NATO does belong to and influences both. A very important aspect is that Peter Apps' narrative manages to *explain* how relevant events and evolutions have served to enhance NATO's relevance throughout years and époques, even when unpredictability and contingency dominated the process. The guiding principle in his explanation is the very rationale behind the existence of the Organisation, as a defensive structure. Was war with Soviet Russia and the communist bloc possible? In other words, was there solid motivation for the establishment and for the functioning of NATO against a possible, or a probable threat? Peter Apps skilfully navigates through the chronology of events and through the evidence (public discourses, minutes of public and even secret meeting, diary entries etc.) to reach several conclusions.

Lessons learned from the Berlin crisis in the late 1940s, the Eisenhower years, the de Gaulle problem, the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 are important points in the chronology. The exploration of evidence leads Apps to conclude that although the Western leaders were most of them convinced that an attack on Allies by the Soviet Union and the communist bloc was not probable in fact, it remained possible in theory. Hence, preparation and deterrence were the keystones of the general attitude of NATO throughout the years of the Cold War. For some, as already indicated above, the impression was that NATO was about "not action, talk only." However, a lot was happening behind this impression: public and secret diplomacy to keep channels of dialogue open and manage crises; funding research and investments in military equipment and logistics; tactical, operational, and strategic training at all levels.

Of course, the arms race pushed both sides to the brink of disaster, with expenditures skyrocketing literally when Ronald Reagan's administration at the White House took détente to the space (the so-called Star Wars of the 1980s). The Soviet Union blinked first however, collapsing in the process. The end of the Cold War brought about not only the dissolution of the communist block and of the USSR, but also the end of Yugoslavia and of *Pax Communista* in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. New countries appeared on the map and new tensions. Major crises were eventually avoided in Transylvania, Slovakia, or in Serbian Vojvodina, but conflict erupted in the Republic of Moldova and former Yugoslavia, the latter affecting Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia Hercegovina, Kosovo, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now North Macedonia). NATO was instrumental in averting the danger of war spreading to other regions and eventually annihilating the Milosevic regime. Along with the European Union, which contributed with its complex but successful Stabilisation and Association Process in the Western

Balkans and the enlargement process for the rest of Eastern Europe, NATO had its own contribution to regional stability. In 1994, it advanced its own Partnership for Peace, an inclusive program that, although not accompanied by promises of membership, did help partner countries to improve their security establishments and democratic practices as to meet the membership criteria.

The “era of intervention” (Part 5 in the book) continued with NATO involved in supporting role in the first Gulf war against Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990-1991). This was followed by the campaign in Afghanistan, which is dealt with separately, in the last section of Part 5. The Afghanistan campaign was justified as a response to the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. It eventually lasted for twenty years (2001-2021), under the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The US troops started officially the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2022, after an agreement with the Taliban regime in 2021. The global security situation became even more complicated following the revolts of the Arab Spring, which triggered intervention by NATO under UN resolutions 1970 and 1973. The demise of Moammar Gaddafi regime unleashed civil war in Libya, which continues today, but NATO’s campaign (March–October 2011) there was considered responsible for the chaos. And that was the moment when Russia entered more visibly the arena. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Moscow had already tested its military and propaganda arsenal in the Republic of Georgia (2008).

Part 6 in *Deterring Armageddon*, titled “Renewed Confrontation”, brings the author to the current conflict between Russia of Vladimir Putin and the West, with NATO at the centre. Accused of having expanded to the east against promises allegedly made before (but never substantiated), NATO was forced by the Russian illegal and unjustifiable aggression against Ukraine to stand for the invaded country. The exit of Western forces from Afghanistan was a pivotal event in this context. It was seen by both Russia and China as signaling weakness and encouraged them to flex muscles in spaces they considered their geopolitical backyards: Ukraine for Moscow and Taiwan for Beijing. Peter Apps offers abundant evidence supporting the idea that Putin never considered Ukraine to be a proper country and its people a nation. For him, Ukraine and Ukrainians never existed beyond the breath of Prussianism and as part of the great Russian nation. Similarly, Beijing has never recognized the Republic of China (the official name of Taiwan) as independent from the communist republic, posing a permanent threat to Taiwanese sovereign statehood.

The author offers valuable details about how the US and NATO, although warning Kiev about the imminence of a Russian invasion, initially refused to offer emergency aid in the form of weapons and ammunition for the Ukrainian resistance effort. It took some time until Washington and its NATO allies understood that the war was not about Ukraine only, but about the future of Europe and the future of the global liberal order. Gradually, aid started coming and now the Alliance is committed to meeting its original task, i.e. protecting Europe from the threat posed by Russia, one that Russia’s neighboring peoples had to live with for centuries.

The war is ongoing. Ukraine still resists and, in doing so, it is perceived more intensely as a vanguard to Europe in its efforts to counter the Russian aggressiveness. In this context, NATO is also changing and adapting as it has always done. From the

debut in 1949, more like a British endeavour with French participation and, in any case, mostly a Western European affair, NATO became a transatlantic venture with sophisticated and exclusively defensive functions. It managed to adapt its institutions and become an international organization with functional structures, substructures, and associated procedures, able to cover an immense geography and a multitude of security tasks. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, it has also developed public communication mechanisms designed to de-bunk Russian disinformation on NATO and to communicate clearly what the Alliance is about. It is now probably the most transparent security organization in the world, a point given special attention in the book.

Part 7 and the last in *Deterring Armageddon* looks into the future, proposing an exercise of imagination that takes the reader to the year 2049 when, if still in existence, NATO would celebrate its centennial. The author explains the painstaking diplomatic efforts needed for expanding NATO, with Sweden and Finland as new Member States. Turkey's transactional opposition was eventually overcome, and Finland joined in 2022, followed by Sweden in 2023. This story is intertwined with that of Ukraine and Georgia. At the Bucharest Summit of NATO in 2008, the two countries applied for membership and the Alliance recognized their aspirations, but did not offer them Membership Action Plans. Moscow, of course, protested and made it clear that the inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia in any NATO plan was considered a threat to Russian security. Both countries abandoned the idea of joining for a while, adopting instead non-alignment policies, and continuing to collaborate with NATO under the Partnership for Peace program. However, Putin's war in Georgia (2008), the occupation of Donbas and Crimea in Ukraine (2014), and the invasion of this country in February 2020 had effects opposite to those imagined at the Kremlin. Norway and Sweden had renounced their old neutrality posture to join NATO. Georgia enhanced its cooperation with the Alliance in multiple forms, including participation to NATO exercises and even one mission, Operation Sea Guardian.

Ukraine, on the other side, is now closer than ever to the Alliance. Seven months after the start of the Russian aggression, in September 2020, Kiev included NATO membership as a fundamental objective in the national security strategy. In the conclusions of the Washington summit of 2024, Allies reiterated that Ukraine will be a NATO member in the future and confirmed their support for the country's irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration. These commitments were reiterations of decisions already taken at the 2022 Madrid Summit and 2023 Vilnius Summit. Ukraine also applied to EU membership on February 28, 2022, just days after Putin's forces invaded the country. The EU responded granting the candidate status in June 2022 and opening accession negotiations in December 2023. At the same time, despite various setbacks, NATO and EU members also continue to support Ukraine's war effort. NATO, thus, remains true to its tasks. By helping Kiev resist the Russian aggression, it defends its European member states and their democracies.

Overall, *Deterring Armageddon* is a well written book, which can serve as reference for anyone studying the history of NATO and the becoming of its institutional structure and culture 75 years after establishment. It is packed with interesting, even colorful details and testimonies that help the reader understand not only the evolution of the

institutional structure, but also of the security and political culture of the Alliance. Peter Apps is careful to also provide perspectives from outside NATO, from actors that needed its protection, or interacted in various ways with it at important historical junctures. However, there is also something missing from this “biography of NATO” and this may be understandable given that it is a text conceived as to celebrate the Alliance’s 75th birthday. There is little or no mentioning of darker episodes, which stain its reputation, such as the secret organizations that it operated especially throughout the Cold War.

One of them was the so-called “operation Gladio,” which many researchers identified as the general codename for a multitude of forces and clandestine operations undertaken initially by the Western European Union Organization and taken over by NATO and the CIA in cooperation with Western European intelligence agencies. Operation *Gladio*, whose name comes from its Italian branch, involved various propaganda and psychological warfare missions, right-wing terrorism, torture, and numerous assassinations of left-wing, communist figures in NATO countries, but also outside the Alliance. Throughout the years, authorities acknowledged the existence of such force and various researchers documented thousands of cases people tortured and assassinated. Some of the criminal, ultra-nationalist, or extreme-left organizations in Turkey, Greece, Italy, and other countries around the Mediterranean Sea, including in North Africa, are direct descendants of the Gladio era.

Nevertheless, the criticism above cannot and is not intended to shadow the undoubtful merits of Peter Apps’ book. *Deterring Armageddon: A biography of NATO* is the work of a talented journalist who manages to explain the military, diplomatic and political posturing of the Alliance throughout its 75 years of existence. It takes the reader behind the public image, into the intimacy of negotiations and crises, achievements and failures. The author also successfully draws an image about the tensions and dangers encountered by NATO representatives when walking the often very thin line between Washington’s might, or its occasional fits of isolationism, and the sometimes ambitious and stubborn European partners. The successive enlargements of the Alliance have added complexity to its structures and procedures, a process that may continue in the future. One thing is clear and Peter Apps is careful to stress this aspect throughout the book: *regardless of perceptions from outside, NATO remains a defensive organization, working for the protection of its members and thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of a vast geography, governed by international law and international rules.*

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Remarks at the Opening of the NATO meetings in Paris, December 16, 1957

By peace, I do not mean the barren concept of a world where open war for a time is put off because the competitive war machines, which humans build, tend mutually to neutralize the terrors they create.

Nor by peace do I mean an uneasy absence of strife bought at the price of cowardly surrender of principle. We cannot have peace and ignore righteous aspirations and noble heritages.

The peace we do seek is an expanding state of justice and understanding. It is a peace within which men and women can freely exercise their inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In it mankind can produce freely, trade freely, travel freely, think freely, pray freely.

The peace we seek is a creative and dynamic state of flourishing institutions, of prosperous economies, of deeper spiritual insight for all nations and all men.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Speech to the College of Europe, Bruges, September 20, 1988

Europe must continue to maintain a sure defence through NATO. There can be no question of relaxing our efforts, even though it means taking difficult decisions and meeting heavy costs. It is to NATO that we owe the peace that has been maintained over 40 years.

We must strive to maintain the United States' commitment to Europe's defence. And that means recognising the burden on their resources of the world role they undertake and their point that their allies should bear the full part of the defence of freedom, particularly as Europe grows wealthier.

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Remarks on Accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri, March 12, 1999

NATO's success has enabled generations protected by the Alliance to grow up and grow old under democratic rule. For that, we are enormously grateful.

But we must also guard against a danger. For there is a risk that to people who have never known tyranny, an Alliance forged before they were born to counter an enemy that no longer exists, to defend freedoms some believe are no longer endangered, may appear no more relevant than the fate of Central Europe did to some of our predecessors 60 years ago.

THE AUTHORS AND INTERVIEWEES

Ambassador Sorin Ducaru is a Romanian career diplomat with a longstanding experience in trans-Atlantic and International Relations and a particular expertise in the field of emerging security challenges and the impact of new technologies upon security. In 2019 he became director of SATCEN. Ambassador Ducaru held the post of NATO Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges from September 2013 to November 2017. In this capacity he was the head of the Emerging Security Challenges Division at NATO-HQ, Chair of the Cyber Defence Committee and also coordinator and manager NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme. As Chair of NATO's Cyber Defence Committee and Cyber Defence Management Board, he has been in charge of NATO's cyber policy development and implementation.

Ambassador (Retired) Philippe Étienne has held a distinguished career in the French Foreign Service, most recently serving as French Ambassador to the United States from 2019-2023. Previously, he was Diplomatic Advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron from 2017-2019. In that role, he served as Sherpa, the President's personal representative to international summits including the G7 and G20. Before joining President Macron's staff, Etienne served as Ambassador to Germany from 2014-2017. Prior to that, he served as France's Permanent Representative to the European Union from 2009-2014 and as Ambassador to Romania from 2002-2005. Etienne also served as Chief of Staff to Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner from 2007-2009. His earlier appointments include diplomatic postings in Moscow, Belgrade, Bonn, and Brussels. He currently chairs the French agency coordinating the commemorations of the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Liberation of France.

Ambassador (Retired) Daniel Fried In the course of his forty-year Foreign Service career, Ambassador Fried played a key role in designing and implementing American policy in Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. As Special Assistant and NSC Senior Director for Presidents Clinton and Bush, Ambassador to Poland, and Assistant Secretary of State for Europe (2005-09), Ambassador Fried helped craft the policy of NATO enlargement to Central European nations and, in parallel, NATO-Russia relations, thus advancing the goal of Europe whole, free, and at peace. During those years, the West's community of democracy and security grew in Europe. As Polish Desk Officer in the late 1980s, Fried was one of the first in Washington to recognize the impending collapse of Communism in Poland, and helped develop the immediate response of the George H.W. Bush Administration to these developments. Ambassador Fried is currently a Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He is also on the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for Democracy and a Visiting Professor at Warsaw University.

Lieutenant General (Retired) Frederick Benjamin "Ben" Hodges, US Army, the former Commanding General of US Army Europe, is now Senior Advisor to Human Rights First, a nonprofit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in New York; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles.

Prior to joining Human Rights First, he held the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). General Hodges serves as NATO Senior Mentor for Logistics, he consults for several companies on Europe, NATO, and the European Union, and he is co-author of the book *Future War and the Defence of Europe*, published by Oxford University Press. In addition to several other organizations, he is a member of Spirit of America's Advisory Board.

Ambassador Bogdan Mazuru currently serves as ambassador of Romania to the Swiss Confederation (since 2021). Previously, he was ambassador to Austria (2015-2021), to France (2010-2015), and to the Federal Republic of Germany (2006-2009). Between 2009 and 2010 he was the Secretary of State for European Affairs in the MFA of Romania. He served as the Ambassador of Romania to NATO (2001-2006) being the first Permanent Representative of Romania to the North Atlantic Council (2004-2006). Bogdan Mazuru joined the Romanian diplomatic service in 1991. He graduated in 1986, as a computer engineer, the Faculty of Automatic Control and Computer Science in Politehnica University of Bucharest.

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Ioan Mircea Pașcu was minister of National Defense of Romania between 2000-2004 and state secretary at the Ministry of National Defense between 1993 and 1996. He was minister of National Defense when Romania was invited in NATO (2002) and became a full member in 2004. He represented Romania in the European Parliament as part of the PES group between 2007 and 2024. Currently he is a professor at the National School of Political Science and Administration (SNSPA).

Jamie Shea, CMG is Professor at the College of Europe Natolin. He is also a Senior Fellow responsible for security and defence programmes at Friends of Europe and a Senior Advisor with the European Policy Centre. Both of these think tanks are based in Brussels. More recently, Jamie Shea has assumed the position of Senior Counsel to

the Founder and CEO of Fanack/The Chronicle and Fanack Water. Between 2018 and 2022 Jamie Shea was the Professor of Strategy and Security at the University of Exeter and prior to that, for 38 years he was an international public servant and a member of the International Staff of NATO. His last NATO post was Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges. Other positions included Director of Policy Planning in the Private Office of the Secretary General, Deputy Assistant Secretary General for External Relations, Public Diplomacy Division, Director of Information and Press and Spokesman of NATO.

James J. Townsend Jr. (Jim) is a senior advisor in the Scowcroft Center's Transatlantic Security Initiative. He is also an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), where he is the co-host of the podcast "Brussels Sprouts", a global fellow at the Wilson Center's Polar Institute, and a senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London. Jim was elected the President of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) in July, 2020. He also teaches a course on transatlantic security at SciencesPo in Paris. On January 20th 2017, Jim completed eight years as deputy assistant secretary of defense (DASD) for European and NATO Policy, capping 34 years of working in defense and foreign policy, mostly on European and NATO issues. His work spanned the last decade of the Cold War, post-Cold War political reconstruction in Europe and Europe's new challenges including Russia and the rise of China. Through his work, he has helped execute US military engagements in almost every conflict from the Gulf War to the reintroduction of US forces into Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He also played critical roles in NATO enlargement, NATO reform, and helping to build bilateral defense relations with the new European democracies coming from the breakup of the Soviet Union.

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Mihai Constantinescu is a graduate of Babeş-Bolyai University (in the field of political science - international relations) and pursued postgraduate studies at the Central European University in Vienna. He worked as a junior researcher at Babeş-Bolyai University, a project assistant at the European Diplomatic Academy of the European External Action Service and has conducted work for the International Organization for Migration, at the Support Office in Windhoek, Namibia.

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George Vişan holds both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Bucharest. He has been working at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute since 2020. From February 2022 to February 2024, he served as a cabinet advisor to the State Secretary for Strategic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (MAE). He has published extensively both abroad and in Romania.