



# NATO: 1949 – 1999 – 2019

THE 20 YEARS OF POLAND  
IN THE 70 YEARS OF THE ALLIANCE

edited by: Anna Kurowska

Cela & Krisafi • Heranová & Vondra • Redłowska  
Holeindre • Jensen • Tučkutė & Zdanavičius



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## Preface

**2019 is an anniversary year both for Poland and NATO as it marks 20 years of Poland's membership in NATO and the 70th birthday of the Alliance itself. This double anniversary provides an opportunity to take a closer look at NATO's past and future and at Poland's role in the Atlantic Alliance's collective defence system.**

As Kinga Redłowska notes, since the end of the Cold War, a privileged relationship with the United States had been a priority for Poland. Its difficult geopolitical situation and the many years of Russian control over its foreign policy meant that, in the years following the fall of communism, Poland aspired to join NATO and took an active part in foreign missions conducted under the banner of the Alliance.

Poland's security in Europe is also strongly connected with NATO membership of the Baltic states. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has attracted the attention of the whole world. Greta Tučkutė and Liudas Zdanavičius point out that a close military cooperation between Poland and Lithuania is not only the result of geographical proximity but also common defence challenges. The willingness to ensure the security of the Baltic states involves cooperation with the Nordics, as both sides share common interests and potential risks with.

Donald Jensen writes about the relations and growing tension between the United States and Russia. The promising cooperation between NATO and Russia back in the early 1990s did suddenly change course - Russia started to consider the Alliance as a threat to its security. Today's presence of NATO on the Russian doorstep is seen as a major impediment to the renewal of friendly relations.

Alba Cela and Ledion Kristafi draw attention to the fact that NATO enlargement - particularly to Balkan states, such as Albania, Montenegro or, very soon, North Macedonia - has on one hand increased the Alliance's defence capabilities in the region but, on the other hand, put Russia in a fragile geostrategic situation. Albania, a NATO member since 2009, has taken part in foreign missions (including Afghanistan and Iraq), and therefore confirmed its willingness to cooperate extensively within the Alliance.

Martina Heranová and Alexandr Vondra present the Central European perspective. At the end of the 1990s, only a few days after the countries of this region joined NATO, they took an active part in a military action in

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Yugoslavia and then in the peacekeeping forces in Kosovo. Due to historical and geographical factors, Central European countries are sensitive to what they perceive as a Russian threat at their eastern frontiers. It was the Central European NATO members who, even before the Russian aggression in Ukraine, warned about possible scenarios in the absence of concrete actions from the Alliance towards Russia.

Jean-Vincent Holeindre reflects on the phenomenon of NATO's longevity that he attributes to the Alliance's shared goals, ability to adapt to an evolving geographical context as well as institutional solidity, i.e. long-established military governance and civilian structures that follow normalised procedures. Perhaps more importantly, he also brings up the question of the future of NATO in light of the mounting populist and isolationist tendencies propelled by US President the Donald Trump.

NATO is one of the biggest and most manifold cooperation projects dedicated to international security. Poland has been part of the Alliance for two decades already. May this anniversary – 70 years of NATO establishment and 20 years of Poland's accession – be an opportunity to recall the purpose of NATO, to look at its current condition as well as to reflect on the future of NATO and Poland's contribution into its development.

*Anna Kurowska  
Project Manager for the Balkans  
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# 20 years of Poland in NATO.

## The History and the Future

*Kinga Redłowska*

**Since the end of the Cold War, Poland sought to enter NATO to ensure its security. The much-awaited dream came true in 1999. Two decades of Poland's membership in the Alliance have seen many geopolitical changes that seem to have stepped up over the last five years. It is difficult to find one simple answer to the question whether Poland is responding efficiently and effectively to these changes. One reason is an unprecedented diversity of visions regarding the Polish foreign and security policy in recent years. Its creators increasingly tend to speak of "Europe or the United States" as opposed to "Europe and the United States".**

The Russian aggression of Crimea was seen in Warsaw as the herald of changes that are bound to systematically and diametrically transform the geopolitical order established after World War II. In fact, Poland has always been sensitive to threat posed by Russia, having repeatedly experienced aggression on its part. The inhibition of Russia's influence and the reliance on US-driven NATO are the key premises of the Polish foreign policy.

### **History**

One cannot fully understand Poland's security policy without understanding the innate, instinctive defensive reflex towards Russia. Since the end of the 18th century, Central and Eastern Europe was dominated by the Russian power. The geopolitical situation has been the underlying reason behind Poland's problems. Polish territories have been a tidbit for its powerful neighbours who wanted to absorb them in their respective spheres of influence. It is worth recalling that also after World War II Poland was put under the yoke of the Soviet Russia. It was not until the Russian troops had left Poland in the early 1990s that it regained a sovereign right to pursue its own foreign and security policy. The axiom of the Polish foreign policy is to support the sovereignty of the other states of the region, in line with the principle of keeping the enemy away from its borders. This was the case of Georgia in 2008, and Ukraine in 2004 and 2014. Warsaw has been advocating the enlargement of NATO and the EU, and preventing the renewal of Russian domination in Central and Eastern Europe remains the imperative



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of its foreign policy.

In view of the differing military, demographic and economic potentials between Russia and Poland, the above means the need for a strong and stable Atlantic integration. In 1992, during a visit to Poland, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner said that "NATO's door is open". Poland was invited to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in 1994 and was the first CEE country to adopt an Individual Partnership Program (IPP) before joining the Alliance as a full-fledged member in 1999.

NATO membership allowed to seal Poland's cooperation with the United States. Atlanticism is indeed the strongest current of the Polish foreign policy. The Poles have trust in America, considering it to be a co-creator of Polish independence. President Wilson's "Fourteen Points", with Point 13 providing for the restoration of the independent Polish state, is a must in Polish history textbooks. Having supported Poland's efforts to get out of Russia's control during the Cold War, the US appears to be a power Poland can count on. Such a perception is favoured by the fact that America is itself claiming the role of a guarantor of security and peace in the world, a message that goes down very well in Poland. In the 1990s, the Poles enthusiastically greeted George Bush as he visited Poland. Bill Clinton, under whose presidency Poland acceded to NATO, was an ardent supporter of Polish aspirations. In recent years, Poland has sought a permanent US military presence on its soil. The idea of "Fort Trump" perfectly confirms that, 70 years after the end of World War II, Poland is still looking towards Washington.

Over the years, successive governments in Warsaw have proved to be America's faithful ally. The best example of this unswerving loyalty was the decision to join the US-led coalition during the Second Gulf War in 2003. The only other NATO member state that did the same was Great Britain. Such decisions meant that Poland was (and is again under the rule of Law and Justice party (PiS) called the Trojan horse of America in Europe.

Meanwhile, the United States has for years treated Poland as a "flank" only. The region definitely lost in significance under the presidency of Barack Obama. The breakthrough only came as a result of the Russian aggression against Crimea and the war in Donbass. Moscow's aggressive policy makes Central and Eastern Europe feel, again, the Kremlin's breath on its back. The two largest hotspots in Russia's relations with the West are Ukraine and the Baltic states -all of them share borders with Poland.

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The 2016 Warsaw NATO Summit was clearly a turning point in the Alliance's approach to the matter. For the following three years, Poland has been putting more and more emphasis on the strengthening of bilateral US-Polish relations, even at the expense of weakening its relations with EU and NATO partners.

### **European Union and the Polish Defense Policy**

At the time when the Civic Platform party (PO) was in power in Poland, the relations between Warsaw and the other EU states have reached their all-time high. The appointment of Donald Tusk as President of the European Council in 2014 was the best proof of that. Polish euro-enthusiasts saw the EU as a powerful tool that could help modernise the country. The first years of Poland in the Union was plentiful with infrastructure improvement projects that contributed to the rapid economic development.

Despite all this positive history, the Poles have never really seen the European Union as a mechanism ensuring security. This was largely due to historical tensions and the resulting perception of Germany as a foe (which was the case, for example during World War II). At the same time, the EU itself is also reluctant to hold the role of security guarantor for Europe and therefore offers few policies in this area. This is compounded by the fact that the majority of European nations do not spend enough on defence in order for their armed forces to be more capable of defending against modern threats to national security.

Furthermore, regardless of the technical state of European armies and defence spending quotas, the whole idea of European solidarity has some weak points from the Polish perspective. This rather surprising statement is understandable in light of the passivity of Poland's European allies who left Poland to its fate during World War II, defaulting on their commitments. Sceptics go so far as to claim that this scenario is likely to re-occur should a conflict in Europe arise again.

Another difficult issue amongst the EU member states is the Nord Stream 2 pipeline running from Russia to Germany. Poland considers it as a symbol of the break-up of European solidarity (at least as regards the energy security) and a damage to the EU's common good. The NS2, Brexit, France's standpoint on European relations with Russia and the overlooked defence issues are the main causes behind the increasing distrust towards Western Europe amongst Poles.

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## **Poland's Internal Divisions**

The rival visions as to what the EU should be like have been the source of the deep divides amongst Polish political elites for years now. Liberals and the Left wish a further, continuing integration with the EU. At the same time, Poland's right wing parties (majority) strongly oppose the idea of federalising Europe. These parties would rather see an even closer relation between Poland and the US than between Poland and the EU. Precisely because of that and because of the strong support from Washington, the Three Seas Initiative is the flagship foreign programme of Warsaw. The Initiative, created by Poland and Croatia, aims at strengthening and improving the transport and energy infrastructure in Central Europe, with a particular focus on the North-South Corridor. It is important to mention that, despite the support from the US, the EU founding states are not very keen on the idea.

Despite the many differences amongst the elites with regard to Poland's security issues, there is still a large consensus as to its key features and ideas. These include the conviction that Russia poses a constant threat to Poland and that an alliance must be built to protect the country against it. Poland is one of only few members of NATO to fulfil the defence spending quota, which shows just how real the Russian threat is for Poles. Poland's officials, whatever their political stripes, also agree on the need to support Ukraine's NATO integration efforts and to upkeep the popular acquiescence to the presence of US military bases on Polish territory.

## **The Future of NATO from the Polish Perspective**

Every military alliance is always as strong as the engagement of its members is. In line with this, NATO has recently been seen as increasingly weak, namely due to the diverging interests of its members, the equivocal approach of the United States towards it as well as the inability to respond quickly enough to the major geopolitical changes globally. These include an overt aggressiveness of Moscow and the rise of Beijing in Europe and beyond. The response of the Alliance to the Russian aggression of Crimea uncovered significant differences among the member states towards the issue of the security of NATO's Eastern Flank. The Central European allies were expecting a swift and decisive reaction from NATO, and what they obtained was a cautious and severely limited response.

The political populism, as well as the lack of strong leaders who could successfully promote democracy and solidarity, is yet another challenge NATO must face up to. Donald Trump likes to emphasise that Europe is a

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major beneficiary of the American defence budget, whereas the European states themselves are reluctant to meet the defence spending pledge of 2% of GDP. Such comments by President Trump undermine the previously obvious need for the American security involvement in Europe. Meanwhile, some EU politicians call for a “two-speed Europe”, especially in reference to some policies of Poland and Hungary.

Having all of these challenges in mind, the future of NATO remains unclear for now. It is important to remember that the key to the majority of the Alliance’s problems lies in Europe and not in the US. In the end, it will be up to European politicians to decide on the shape of the European defence structures for the years to come. Poland can play an important role in this process if it has enough political power and will to defend its standpoint. The question remains whether Poland will be able to force through its vision of European security, convincing the Alliance to prioritise the threat from Russia next to issues like terrorism, migration and the rise of China.



***Kinga Redłowska***

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# How Can New Cooperation Formats Complement NATO in the Provision of Security in the Baltic Sea Region?

*Greta Tučkutė and Liudas Zdanavičius*

**The security situation in the Baltic Sea region drew the world's attention in the aftermath of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. The danger stems from unpredictable and potentially aggressive behavior of Moscow, as evidenced by concrete actions.**

First, Russia is considerably increasing its conventional military capabilities in the Western military district and, particularly, in the Kaliningrad enclave. The stationing of the "Iskander" short-range ballistic missile and "S-400" air defence systems as well as installation of the "K-300P Bastion-P" coastal defence missile system are complemented by considerable modernisation of the Baltic fleet and conventional land military component. Second, because of the non-democratic character of the regime, Russia can very rapidly decide on the use of its forces abroad (contrary to the Western democratic countries, where such decisions take much longer). This concentrated decision-making emboldens the Kremlin to project influence and power abroad. Third, Russia has considerably modernised its armed forces, and by increasing the frequency, scope and scale of military exercises, has built up readiness. Russia's armed forces also reinstated "snap" exercises, with large numbers of troops and equipment to be reactivated at no-notice. According to a public report by the Lithuanian intelligence service, Russia is capable to start a military action within 24-48 hours<sup>1</sup>.

There is a broad consensus that in order to stabilise the situation in the Baltic region and deter Russia from possible aggressive actions, Western countries need to solve such problems as regional conventional forces' asymmetry and a mismatch in the reaction time. In other words, Russia should be made to understand that it will be impossible to achieve an easy, rapid victory before NATO allies decide on tactics and gather the necessary resources. The aim of this article is to provide a balanced assessment of various cooperation formats in the Baltic region that contribute to the strengthening of defence and deterrence.

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1 Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defence and the State Security Department, The National Threat Assessment 2019, Vilnius, 2019, [https://kam.lt/en/news\\_1098/current\\_issues/latest\\_national\\_threat\\_assessment\\_presented.html](https://kam.lt/en/news_1098/current_issues/latest_national_threat_assessment_presented.html)

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## NATO on the Rise

Since 2014, NATO has taken a number of steps to address the security challenges in the Baltic Sea region. On the basis of the decisions taken at the Wales Summit in 2014, the NATO Response Force (NRF) doubled from 20,000 to 40,000. On the readiness front, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) was created with the planned reaction time of up to five days (currently one brigade, led by Germany, consisting of 8,000 troops, representing 9 different NATO countries)<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of the Warsaw Summit in 2016, 4 Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) battalions were stationed in Poland and the Baltic states. In 2018, the NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI), tagged as “Four Thirties”, was agreed upon, aiming to ensure that by 2020 NATO can provide 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels, ready within 30 days or less.

In 2016, RAND ran a wargaming<sup>3</sup> study, which predicted that Russia could occupy the Baltic states in the very short time even if NATO tried to defend them. The result of the study could be seen as too pessimistic, but the fact remains that additional measures are needed to strengthen deterrence in the region, for example, expanding the EFP capabilities to the at least a brigade level or augmenting the current structure with enablers<sup>4</sup>. In this context, it is important to analyse additional defence cooperation formats, which are being developed in order to complement NATO in securing peace in the Baltic region.

## European Union as Defence Stakeholder

The NATO-EU cooperation is one of the most complex inter-institutional formats, namely due to its multilateral nature and a wide range of overlapping spheres and interests. A crucial question to contemplate is whether this format does work in practice or it is just a theoretical cooperation. The EU-NATO format was first institutionalised in 2001, with a greater involvement of Europe in defence matters, followed by initiatives such as the 2002 NATO-EU Declaration on a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the 2010 Strategic Concept that enabled the Alliance’s closer cooperation with other international organisations in an effort to prevent crises, manage conflicts and stabilise post-conflict situations.

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2 Germany steps up to lead NATO high readiness force [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_161796.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_161796.htm)

3 hlapak, David A. and Michael Johnson, Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defence of the Baltics. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html).

4 [https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICDS\\_Report\\_Contemporary\\_Deterrence\\_Stoicescu\\_J%C3%A4rvenp%C3%A4\\_January\\_2019.pdf](https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICDS_Report_Contemporary_Deterrence_Stoicescu_J%C3%A4rvenp%C3%A4_January_2019.pdf)

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The wars in Ukraine and in Syria as well as competition for power and influence in Europe and global arena prompted a search of new forms of cooperation. On 8 July 2016, the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation signed in Warsaw a Joint Declaration, which was supposed to give a new impulse for a more substantial cooperation.

On one hand, the EU-NATO cooperation format could be efficient and contribute to the development and strengthening of certain spheres such as cyber defence and protection, military mobility, border protection, research and development, and investment into defence modernisation and procurement, information exchange. The European Union has launched novel instruments such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) and EDF (European Defence Fund), both of which are coordinated by EU's EDA (European Defence Agency). On the other hand, resources are limited and will remain so in the foreseeable future. When it comes to the modernisation of military forces and the required investments, many European countries are already struggling to meet a defence spending target of 2% of GDP. A relatively slow economic growth in the EU in the post-financial crisis timeframe means that governments are uneasy having to justify before the public running up defence expenses. In light of this, a recently vocalised aim to create a separate pan-European armed force outside of the NATO format is at best questionable. Were it to materialise, such an endeavour – the creation of the so-called European Army – would require an enormous financial and human effort. Therefore, we assess that the EU defence and security initiatives are viable as long as they complement, not compete with, NATO.

### **The Nordic Dimension**

For the Baltic security, a closer cooperation between Sweden, Finland, both EU members, and NATO is particularly important. The Nordics are an inseparable part of the Baltic Sea security architecture and are vulnerable to Russia's potential aggression against the Baltics. For example, the Swedish Gotland island and the Danish straits can play a strategic role in case of conflict and/or an interaction with the Russian A2/AD system. Although Swedish and Finnish decision-makers are reluctant to move towards a full-fledged NATO membership (primarily because of divided domestic opinions on this issue), both countries are very close partners of the Alliance in numerous domains. For example, they take part in NATO-led operations, military drills, and the NRF. After the Wales Summit, Finland and Sweden became NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partners. Both countries actively



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participate in joint exercises with NATO forces, for which they provide the military components and make available the territory and infrastructure (for example, "Aurora 2017", "Trident juncture 2018", "Northern Wind 2019"). Finland and Sweden also signed with the Alliance the memoranda of understanding on Host Nation Support, which allow for a possibility to host allied forces on their territory. However, not being full members of NATO means that Finland and Sweden cannot fully participate in NATO's decision-making or joint planning<sup>5</sup>.

At the same time, much as Sweden's and Finland's successful cooperation with NATO and their partnership within the NORDEFCO format seem promising, it remains unclear if the improved interoperability and political documents would work in real crisis situations where their armies will be dependent on the national decision-making processes.

### **The Suwałki Corridor Conundrum**

The Polish-Lithuanian military cooperation is stimulated by the geographical proximity, common security challenges and similarities in their assessment. Defence is one of priority spheres of cooperation where Poland's leadership in the region is highly valued. Air defence, the Suwałki Corridor, NATO permanent military presence in the region are all priorities listed in the Declaration on Strengthening the Lithuanian-Polish Security Partnership signed between Poland and Lithuania on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2019. The Suwałki Corridor and Air defence are the vulnerabilities, which have to be eliminated and this can only be dealt with the aid of the Allies. Both countries have intended to support each other, either bilaterally or within the NATO format, in the following defence policy matters:

- Adaptation of NATO Defence Plans for the region
- Command structures (for instance, MND NE HQ in Elbląg)
- Strengthening of military mobility infrastructure (using EU instruments)
- Military Schengen (better military transit)
- Cyber defence
- Procurement (Lithuania's procurement of Polish GROM, man-portable air defence systems (MANPADs)) and development of defence industries

Other spheres of military-to-military cooperation include:

- Regular participation in regional military exercises, for example Saber

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5 Riina Kaljurand, The Hem and Haw of Sweden's Relationship with NATO, ICDS 2019, <https://icds.ee/the-hem-and-haw-of-swedens-relationship-with-nato/>

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## Strike or Anakonda

- Support to Ukraine - establishment of a common brigade of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine called LitPolUkrBrig,
- Air Police Mission to the Baltic States (Poland has led the mission 8 times in total)
- Exchange of sensitive information and cooperation on intelligence
- SOF cooperation

The upcoming deployment of US troops in Poland is a highly significant step towards enhancing the whole region's defence and deterrence. The project will be financed by the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP) and will serve as a logistics facility for the VJTF, matching the armoured brigade combat team with Abrams main battle tanks, Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and countless support vehicles<sup>6</sup>. This base would allow to buy some time and redeploy additional troops faster if needed, especially when the VJTF forces are still on their way or if the decision-making procedure takes longer.

## The US Dimension on the Rise

Another format, which is not formalised but provides a very substantial value added to the strengthening of defence and deterrence in the region, is a US initiative called the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). It represents one of the primary contributions of the United States to European security. Announced in June 2014, the EDI, or the European.

Reassurance Initiative (ERI) as it was known until early 2018, was designed as a rapid response to Russia's actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine<sup>7</sup>. It helps increase the presence of the US rotational forces in Europe, enhance prepositioning enabling deployment of additional forces if necessary, helps improve infrastructure, build the partnership capacity and contributes to the training and exercises<sup>8</sup>. In 2019, EDI funding reached its peak of USD 6.5 billion, compared with USD 1 billion in 2014, USD 3.4 billion in 2017, and USD 4.8 billion in 2018. This initiative encourages cooperation among the Baltic States and Poland as it urges to spend more Baltic states jointly of their US financial assistance

## JEF - Close Allies in a New Dimension

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Another important format which can greatly add to the security of the

6 <https://www.defencenews.com/global/europe/2019/04/08/as-nato-banks-on-poland-is-the-country-becoming-the-new-face-of-a-nervous-europe/>

7 [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/EDI\\_Format\\_FINAL.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/EDI_Format_FINAL.pdf)

8 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)625117\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625117/EPRS_BRI(2018)625117_EN.pdf)

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Baltics sea region is the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). It was created by the United Kingdom in 2012 as the purely national project aimed to increase capabilities to rapidly deploy forces (based on the Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and other overseas experiences). After the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, the UK decided to expand the JEF (as complimentary to NATO's Framework Nations Concept). Despite the Brexit, the UK wants to remain a key player in Europe's security architecture and its partner countries are no less willing to strengthen their defence relationship with one of the most capable European military powers.

The JEF has reached its full operational capability in 2018 and was also joined by the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia<sup>9</sup>. Currently, the JEF format can gather more than 10,000 troops with the naval, land and air force components, which could be used for crisis management and conflict resolution situations. It is important to note that this military component could be used both in the NATO format (as part of the NRF) and separately as a "coalition of willing" element.

The UK and its partners have demonstrated efficient interoperability when using naval, amphibious, land combat and other joint capabilities during the large-scale JEF exercises "Baltic Protector 2019", which were partly combined with the annual NATO exercises BALTOPS.

The JEF as the multinational defence cooperation format has both strengths and drawbacks. On the one hand, through regular multilateral exercises, it provides a great framework for the improvement of interoperability and military capabilities. It also demonstrates UK's willingness to contribute to the Baltic Sea security. Moreover, it serves as an effective instrument for military cooperation between NATO member and non-member states. The JEF provides a tangible possibility for Finland and Sweden to cooperate closely with the Alliance. It is also beneficial that the JEF does not require additional resources and, thus, perfectly contributes to and complements NATO defence.

Flexibility is another great advantage of the JEF format. The UK openly declared that it will use this mechanism even if no other partner country joins in. At the same time, it is unclear how the JEF would work in case of a potential crisis in the Baltic sea region. Participation of other countries will depend on their national decision-making processes, which means that there are no fixed obligations (contrary to NATO's Article 5) to help each other in case of aggression. It is also clear that the JEF format, as a possi-

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9 Eva Hagström Frisell, Emma Sjökvist, Military cooperation around Framework nations, FOI, 2019, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4672--SE>

ble provider of security in the Baltic Sea region, lacks an essential member state – Poland.

## **A Path Forward**

To sum it up, serious efforts are needed to bridge the most vulnerable security gaps in the Baltic Sea region security in order to deter Russia from possible aggressive steps. A permanent presence of allied, especially American, military forces, enhanced air defence, and a vulnerability of the Suwałki Corridor are all defence problems where small-scale cooperation formats could contribute to persuading the Alliance of the necessity to find a long-term and sustainable solution. Close cooperation between Poland, Lithuania and the US over the Suwałki Corridor has a potential to evolve into a formalised and long-term cooperation format, whose symbolic value has been outlined in a recent article by Rzeczpospolita, a leading Polish daily newspaper, titled “Projekt Kościuszko PLUS”<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, in this context, it is important to ensure that the new and innovative defence cooperation formats in this region do not compete with but complement NATO. In other words, the aim should be to attain shorter reaction times and additional capabilities and avoid a waste of limited resources.

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10 Giedrimas Jeglinskas, Ben Hodges, Projekt Kościuszko PLUS, <https://www.rp.pl/Publicystyka/306129927-Projekt-Kosciuszko-PLUS.html>



### **Greta Monika Tučkutė**

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# **Towards a Cold War 2.0?**

## **Russia-NATO Relations in Crisis**

*Donald Jensen*

Russia's military doctrine, approved by President Putin in December 2014, describes the buildup of the "power potential" of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as one of the main security risks confronting the country. This threat, it claims, is due to the Alliance's "global functions carried out in violation of the rules of international law, and the bringing of the military infrastructure of NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation, including by further expansion of the Alliance."<sup>1</sup> The Kremlin has backed up this tough rhetoric with military action. Twice in the past 11 years – in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 – Moscow has used force to try to stop the integration of its neighbors into Western security and economic structures. It also has aggressively used threats of military actions against Alliance members, and a wide variety of influence operations – disinformation, bribery of Western officials, and energy exports – to undermine the Alliance. The contrast with the Kremlin's benign view of NATO at the breakup of the Soviet Union could not be more striking. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the first post-Soviet Russian state, wrote to NATO, calling Alliance membership a "long-term political aim" of Russia.<sup>2</sup>

How did that flirtation deteriorate into almost complete alienation? This article argues that the unreasonable expectations of both sides, mutual misperceptions, the Kremlin's concern with regime preservation and, above all, incompatible strategic cultures between east and west made the current icy relationship highly probable. This is a situation that is likely to continue, whether or not Putin remains in power.

Initial steps by NATO and post-Soviet Russia towards closer cooperation in the 1990s seemed quite promising.

- In 1991 Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991), a forum for dialogue that was succeeded in 1997 by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which brought together all Allies and partner countries.
- Practical cooperation started after Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program (1994) and deployed peacekeepers in support of NA-

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TO-led peace-support operations in the Western Balkans in the late 1990s.

- The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act provided the formal basis for bilateral relations.
- Dialogue and cooperation were strengthened in 2002 with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) to serve as a forum for consultation on current security issues and to direct practical cooperation in a wide range of areas.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these steps, by the late Yeltsin years, the Kremlin began to turn away from Alliance and see NATO instead as a threat to Russia's national interests. Moscow was alarmed, above all, by NATO expansion to include Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1999 – the Alliance's first move into former communist countries. The Kremlin believed the enlargement was part of a US effort to surround and isolate Russia.<sup>4</sup> Second, even though Moscow joined Western diplomatic efforts to persuade Yugoslav President Milosevic to resign in June 1999, Russia opposed NATO's military operations against Yugoslavia in 1999. That out-of-area campaign (and later others elsewhere), Moscow feared, would establish the precedent that the Alliance could act to secure regime change against governments it disliked – including Russia. Implicit in the Kremlin's opposition to the ouster of Milosevic, moreover, was the linkage of the NATO to the promotion of democratisation, which the Alliance considered crucial to stability in Europe, and which Russian leaders increasingly thought inappropriate for their country.<sup>5</sup>

These tensions with the West triggered the reemergence within the Kremlin elite of Russia's traditional strategic culture, the body of broadly shared, influential, and enduring attitudes about national security that shape that country's behavior and policies.<sup>6</sup> Important elements of this culture, deeply rooted in the geographic and spiritual legacy of Russia's history have been the search for security through territorial expansion due to an absence of natural physical buffers and the belief that Russia is surrounded enemies. These elements have combined to solidify vision underlying Russia's claim to be recognised as a great power. These enduring elements of Russia's strategic culture have resulted in a wavering between feelings of superiority and inferiority towards the West, a strong reliance on military tools in national policy, and a continuous balancing between retrenchment and engagement in international affairs.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, Russia's neighbor, such as Poland and the Baltic states, have inevitably seen

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these behaviors as threatening.

Thus, during the period 1996-99, elite and popular hostility grew towards the West, including perceptions that Russia was under threat and that the West was responsible for Russia's loss of status. This resentment festered not only because of NATO enlargement and Western intervention against Serbia. More broadly, it was stimulated by disappointment that the United States and the West had not rescued Russia from its economic crisis and by the perception that Western leaders, advisors, and greedy businesses were significantly responsible for the "bandit privatisation and capitalism" that impoverished most Russians and created a hated class of wealthy, politically powerful "oligarchs."<sup>8</sup>

Under Vladimir Putin, the political and foreign policy elements of Russia's strategic culture – combativeness and competitiveness, perceptions of foreign threat (especially from the United States and NATO), and political assertiveness bordering on pugnacity – have been increasingly prominent.<sup>9</sup>

The "ideology" on which this reassertion is riding is Russian nationalism, centered on Russia's interests, security, and influence as an international actor, and is accompanied by assertions of a supra-national Russian mission to advance a multi-polar world that contains US power, and to establish a Eurasian geo-political identity distinct from the West. This new assertiveness was initially fueled by a dramatic economic recovery of recent years that oil and gas revenues stimulated. After oil prices declined and the economy stagnated, the Kremlin's assertive foreign policy served to increase popular support for the regime and Putin personally, most notably by the annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas.<sup>10</sup>

Today, NATO's presence on what the Kremlin regards as Russia's doorstep is the major obstacle to a rapprochement between Moscow and the West. NATO is viewed across the Russian political spectrum as primarily an instrument of US military influence. Most Russians are convinced that the Alliance's sole task is to maintain a state of confrontation with Russia.<sup>11</sup> The more Moscow sees a real prospect of former Soviet republics like Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, or Moldova drifting westward, the harder it seeks to control those states and the more determined it is in its efforts to weaken and divide the West. This struggle is all the harder to sustain because, as Russia's leadership is all too aware, the United States and the West in general have greater economic and military resources at their disposal and provide a more attractive model to the former Soviet republics, particularly in



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the economic realm.<sup>12</sup>

To further its interests, Russia's leadership has developed an asymmetrical strategy that clashes with the interests of powerful NATO members, most prominently with those of the United States. While Russia keeps the former Soviet republics from drifting westward, at the same time, it is doing everything it can below the level of open military hostilities to prevent NATO from even thinking about offering membership to those countries. Although Kremlin tries to exploit NATO's weaknesses to its advantage, it as to take into account NATO's combined economic and military strength. Thus, Moscow has, so far, shied away from using military force against the Alliance. Instead, by constantly engaging NATO member states through intimidation, threats, or propaganda, Moscow has tried to split the Alliance and to deter NATO from extending its influence into the post-Soviet space. As a result, NATO allies are now forced to focus primarily on their own security vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>13</sup>

For Poland, where the Suwałki Gap on its border with Lithuania is a potential flashpoint for a conflict with Russia, the answer to Moscow's challenge has been to position itself as a model member of NATO. The country spends 2% of its GDP on defense, participated on NATO foreign operations, such as in Afghanistan, and welcomes the presence of Alliance troops on its soil. It has focused special attention strengthening ties with the United States, which Warsaw regards as more of a security guarantor than NATO, and would potentially welcome a US base on its soil.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, tensions between Moscow and NATO are likely to continue for some time, with Poland remaining on the front line. Although Western experts and policy makers frequently blame Putin himself for the chill in relations, opposition to Alliance expansion is strong at all levels of Russian society and likely to persist after he leaves the scene. A June 2016 Levada poll found that 68% of Russians think that deploying NATO troops in the Baltic states and Poland – former Eastern bloc countries bordering Russia – is a threat to their country.<sup>15</sup>

1 The military doctrine of the Russian Federation" (Press release). London: The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. June 29, 2015.

2 T. Friedman, "SOVIET DISARRAY; Yeltsin Says Russia Seeks to Join NATO," New York Times, December 21, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/21/world/soviet-disarray-yeltsin-says-russia-seeks-to-join-nato.html>.

3 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "Relations with Russia," February 4, 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50090.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50090.htm).

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- 4 Russia also saw expansion as inconsistent with informal understandings between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and European and US negotiators that allowed for a peaceful German reunification.
  - 5 M. Roach, "Breaking Down the Complicated Relationship Between Russia and NATO," *Time Magazine*, April 4, 2019, <https://time.com/5564207/russia-nato-relationship/>.
  - 6 F.W. Ermarth, "Russia's Strategic Culture: Past, Present, and ... in Transition?" Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, October 31, 2006, 3.  
<https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/russia.pdf>.  
Strategic culture is very much influenced by political culture, how political power is defined, acquired, legitimized, and used; by foreign policy culture, how the outside world is regarded and addressed; and by economic culture—although the latter is, in the Russian case, more a product of the other influences than itself a source of influence. In other words, strategic culture arises from the intersection of political, foreign policy, military, and economic culture—and influences can flow in both directions.
  - 7 I. Facon, "Russian Strategic Culture in the 21st Century: Redefining the West-East Balance," M. Wills, A.J. Tellis, and A. Szalwinski, eds. *Strategic Asia 2016-17*, (November 8, 2016), <https://www.nbr.org/publication/russian-strategic-culture-in-the-21st-century-redefining-the-west-east-balance/>.
  - 8 Ermarth, 14.
  - 9 Ermarth, 14.
  - 10 Ermarth, 15.
  - 11 R. Pukhov, "NATO is the Obstacle to Improving Russian-Western Relations, *Defense News*, March 28 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/03/28/nato-is-the-obstacle-to-improving-russian-western-relations/>.
  - 12 U. Kuen, "Preventing Escalation in the Baltics," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 28, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/28/russian-interests-and-strategy-pub-75880>.
  - 13 Kuen.
  - 14 "After 20 years in NATO, Poland still eager to please," *Deutsche Welle*, <https://www.dw.com/en/after-20-years-in-nato-poland-still-eager-to-please/a-47862839-0>.
  - 15 Levada-Center and Chicago Council on Global Affairs about Russian-American relations, Levada-Center. 4 November 2016. [www.levada.ru/en/2016/11/04/levada-center\\_chicago\\_council/](http://www.levada.ru/en/2016/11/04/levada-center_chicago_council/)



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# NATO Security from the Central European Perspective

*Martina Heranová and Alexandr Vondra*

**The 1999 NATO enlargement, which occurred ten years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, was a historical moment not only for the three acceding countries – the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary – but also for the Alliance itself.**

In 1949, NATO was established as a military alliance to protect democracies of Western Europe against Stalin's Soviet Union and the communist threat. In fact, it was a direct political response to the communist coup d'état in Prague and the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948. At the same time, the US continuing engagement in Europe through NATO was also intended as a shield against any possible resurrection of a dominant power in Europe. The first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, explained the purpose of the organisation as follows: "To keep Russians out, Americans in, and Germans down". In this regard, NATO was the most successful military alliance of modern era, as confirmed by the victory of the West in the Cold War.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the question of NATO's purpose re-emerged. In 1993, US Senator Richard Lugar gave this dilemma a very accurate wording: "NATO either will go out of area, or out of business". Following the subsequent decision on enlargement, NATO finally got rid of the sticker of being a relic of the past and fully accomplished its transformation into a new role of guarantor of stability and security in the whole Euro-Atlantic area. The acceptance of former adversaries from the Eastern bloc closed the era of bipolarity and started a new chapter for Europe.

NATO membership had the same, crucial importance for post-communist countries. The newly regained freedom of decision and choice of political orientation resulted in a clear goal to become an integral part of the democratic Euro-Atlantic community and to get secured from the military point of view. Although the political and military situation in Europe has changed substantially since the end of the Cold War, the US permanent engagement in Europe as a rampart against any possibly renewed imperial ambitions of Russia was perceived by the countries from Central and Eastern Europe as a cornerstone of security and lasting peace in Europe. Therefore, they strongly supported the further enlargement of the Alliance to

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include other involuntary members of the former Soviet bloc. Their efforts and dreams became a reality at the 2002 Prague NATO Summit when the biggest number of countries ever were invited into the Alliance. The process was continued with the accession of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004, the same year when most of the Central and Eastern European countries accomplished their integration into the European Union as well. Thus, NATO enlargement under the US leadership provided an important strategic guidance in securing Europe's Eastern flank.

### **New Century, New Challenges**

The resolve of the new Central European members of the Alliance to be an integral part of the democratic Euro-Atlantic community and actively contribute to ensuring security and stability in Europe was seriously tested just a few days after their accession, when NATO launched a military intervention in Yugoslavia. Although they did not directly participate in the allied air campaign, they supported its goals and took an active part in the subsequent NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo.

But the biggest challenge ever, for the whole Alliance, came in 2001, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. NATO invoked its collective defence clause (Article 5 of the Washington Treaty) for the first time in its history and launched several operations to deter, defend and protect the allied space against terrorism. The new situation required a reformed approach and a reassessment of the existing NATO's operation area. Given the global scope of terrorism, the Allies agreed that the organisation will operate when and where necessary to protect populations and territories of its members from any armed attack from abroad. This decision paved the way for NATO's military engagement in Afghanistan, through the International Security Assistance Force, with the aim to prevent the country from relapsing into jihadism. The ISAF mission constitutes the most significant operational commitment of the Alliance to date, and all the new members from Central and Eastern Europe contributed substantially to international stabilisation efforts in this territory. Apart from combat units, they sent to Afghanistan civilian experts and led Provincial Reconstruction Teams. This long-lasting engagement cost many casualties, a painful price for keeping threats out of the Euro-Atlantic area.

Moreover, Central and Eastern European countries heavily supported also the US military operation in Iraq as part of the war against international terrorism. Participating in both the Multi-National Force – Iraq and

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the NATO Training Mission – Iraq, they again demonstrated their will and resolve to contribute to the elimination of threats and the promotion of stability in fragile regions.

### **Old Enemy, Old Threats**

Focused on new “out-of-area” operations combatting international terrorism, NATO was unprepared for the return of old threats of a geopolitical nature. The general conviction that they disappeared with the end of the Cold War proved to be a wishful thinking. Rather than changing into a peaceful and cooperating partner, NATO’s former biggest adversary returned to its aggressive politics, not refraining from using force against other nations in its neighbourhood. The trigger moment became the decision adopted at the 2008 Bucharest Summit to deepen relations with Georgia and Ukraine, offering them a membership perspective once they meet the necessary requirements.

The prospect of NATO’s further eastward enlargement, even in the distant future, clashed hard with the interests of Russia. Territories of Georgia and Ukraine have for centuries been perceived by Russia as its sphere of influence, and threatening it from any side was not acceptable. Therefore, to stop the undesirable Western interference, Russian troops invaded Georgia, supporting the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. By later recognising them as independent states, Russia achieved its goal and prevented once for all any closer Georgia’s integration into Western political and security structures.

The lack of a stout and unified response of NATO to this act of aggression aggravated tensions among the Allies and laid bare the explicit divergence of attitudes between the post-communist countries having a direct experience of the Russian rule and the rest of the Alliance. While the top state representatives of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine personally supported Georgia during the crisis and, by their presence in Tbilisi, very likely prevented the occupation of the capital city, some other Allies were not able to take a clear position because maintaining good relations with Russia was a priority for them. In the wake of the US “reset” policy under President Obama, NATO reconnected with Russia, with an imminent interest in continued cooperation, especially in Afghanistan.

As a result, Central and Eastern European countries started to warn publicly against the consequences of such a behaviour. The US Obama administration received an open letter signed by 22 intellectuals and former policymakers from this region, in which they claimed that NATO must reaf-

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firm its core purpose of collective defence in the face of the Russian revisionist policy pursuing a 19th century agenda with the 21st century tactics and methods. But the warnings were not heard enough. While the US and NATO continued efforts to engage Russia in the strategic cooperation, the Kremlin launched a large structural reform of its armed forces, intensified the armament programme and boosted the military spending. Moreover, Russia came to hold large-scale military drills that met with no adequate response from NATO due to defence spending cuts imposed as a result of the global economic crisis.

And then, in 2014, the scenario repeated again. In order to check Ukraine's Western aspirations, Russia orchestrated a military operation against it. While Crimea was directly occupied and annexed, in the eastern part of Ukraine puppet regimes in Luhansk and Donetsk were established under the Russian supervision and control. Although the Russian aggressive behaviour was strongly condemned by the international community, including NATO, as an unprecedented violation of international law and territorial integrity of a sovereign state, no real military action in support of Ukraine was taken.

However, it was a final wake-up call for the Alliance to consider the Russian threat seriously. The voice of Central and Eastern European members was heard at last and their long-term calls for the strengthening of collective as well as national deterrence and defence capabilities were put into effect. After the initial boosting of the Baltic Air Policing mission and the deployment of additional ships in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Seas, the key decision on the enhanced military presence of the Alliance in its eastern part was adopted at the Warsaw NATO Summit in 2016. Following this agreement, four multinational battalions were deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, on a rotational basis, as a deterrence against Russia. Simultaneously, further measures to strengthen the allied readiness and interoperability in the south-eastern flank and the Black Sea region were endorsed.

The Russian neo-imperial ambitions and aggressiveness had also material consequences on national levels. For Central and Eastern European countries, especially for Poland, Romania and the Baltic states as Russia's closest neighbours, they gave an impulse for a rapid modernisation of their armies. The defence expenditures of these five countries significantly increased, reaching the prescribed 2% of GDP. In consideration of the Russian persistent military provocations, security has become for them an explicit priority. Their determination to defend themselves does send an important

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signal for the rest of Allies, especially for the United States, that they did their best and now rely on the support of others, if need be. The long-term efforts for the permanent US military presence on their territories are an integral part of their security strategies.

However, NATO's future remains open. Many European Allies, including big member states like Germany, Italy or Spain, keep their military spending well under the required 2% of GDP. At the same time, the EU, and Germany in particular, records a substantial surplus trade surplus with the US. The Trump administration believes that the United States is losing doubly twice on their relationship with Europe and openly questions its commitment towards NATO. It is clear that a new transatlantic burden-sharing agreement is needed to keep the Alliance coherent and strong. Therefore, Central and Eastern European countries must urge their European partners to address this challenge accordingly.



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# NATO Enlargement - Albania's Anchor to the West

*Alba Cella and Ledion Krisafi*

## Introduction

**This year, Albania celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of joining NATO with a series of events by the official institutions, think tanks and civil society. These marked the incredible symbolic value that NATO membership of the country has for all its citizens, feeding reflection on the challenges facing the Transatlantic Alliance.**

Albania is one of the cases that demonstrate the success of NATO's enlargement policy. The membership has both anchored Albania in the community of democratic countries and deeply transformed its military capacities.

Surveys show that support for the Alliance remains fairly high in all age groups. Albanians do not forget NATO's intervention, which saved Kosovo and its people from the regime of Milosevic and prevented a potential ethnic cleansing. This is a solid foundation for the future of Albania's relationship with NATO and, coupled with the recent entries of Montenegro and North Macedonia, forms a stable background for regional security.

Indeed, NATO membership carries as much, if not more, importance for Montenegro and North Macedonia at this point of time. Faced with a mounting pressure from third parties such as Russia, both Montenegro and North Macedonia find it even more difficult to stick to the path of European integration. Using the cultural and religious links as well as numerous economic investments, Russia has tried to project its power in the region via these two countries, while being a vocal opponent of their Euro-Atlantic perspective. However, with Montenegro's accession and North Macedonia's membership swift ratification by the member states, Russia will find its hands tied when it comes to their strategic positioning.

NATO should continue the open-door policy towards the other Balkan countries: Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Having established its Security Forces, Kosovo considers itself a viable candidate, even though it faces the hurdle of not being recognized as a state by several NATO members. Kosovo's NATO aspirations cannot therefore be fulfilled until the ultimate solution of its status issue.

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Despite the difficult history, NATO's relationship with Serbia has been very collaborative recently and a series of joint exercises have been conducted. At the same time, Serbia has had joint trainings with Russia and Belarus. Despite Serbia's non-aligned position, its privileged relationship with NATO will arguably benefit both sides in the long run. Serbia is steadily proceeding with its accession negotiations with the EU and may be the first country in the region to have realised the EU aspiration prior to, or even without, becoming a member of NATO.

### **Political Symbolism and the Importance of Membership**

Albania was officially invited to join NATO during the 2008 Summit in Bucharest in a move seen by many to be of historical significance. The country, which had suffered five decades of extreme isolation under one of the most repressive communist regimes, is now a member of the free and democratic family of nations.

Totally estranged from the rest of the world back in the communist era, the country had even left the Warsaw Pact, treading the waters of poverty and dictatorship with no allies and no voice in the world arena. Since 2009, Albania's security is guaranteed by the collective defense framework. The country has seen a major turnaround, which had a real impact on its economic prospects. But most importantly, the membership meant a welcomed political shift towards the West.

On the foreign policy front, NATO membership helped consolidate Albania's position and improve its relations with Greece, and aspirations of some other neighbours, such as Montenegro and North Macedonia, make for a safe and prosperous outlook for the whole region.

Last but not least, NATO membership was a milestone that went hand in hand with the expectation to move closer to the EU dream. Many of the accession criteria are common for both organisations, especially strong, viable institutions, commitment to democracy and a sense of responsibility for fellow members.

Ten years have passed since Albania embarked on its incredible NATO story. A story that, sadly, had it also make its first sacrifices for the sake of collective security: three Albanian soldiers were killed. Colonel Fethi Vogli lost his life in Afghanistan, and two other soldiers Zarife Hasanaj and Klodjan Tanushi, passed away this year after being fatally wounded in an accident during military drills in Latvia.

Albania remains committed to its membership obligations and the authorities have announced plans to keep up with the budgetary requirements. Additionally, a strategic investment forthcoming in the airbase of Kuçova, which will be renovated and used by the Alliance forces, is expect-

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ed to become another hub in the region for collective security purposes.

### **Albania 10 Years in NATO: What Has Changed for the Army**

Ten years into its NATO membership, Albania's army has seen two major changes, namely modernization and participation in foreign missions in the framework of NATO or the UN.

First, there has been a radical transformation and modernization of the Albanian armed forces. Under the communist regime, the army had a disproportionate role and size compared with the Albanian population at that time. In the 1970s and 1980s, it counted almost 100,000 active soldiers, officers and other low-ranking personnel, and including reservists the number was almost 750,000<sup>1</sup>, a mammoth figure for a population of approximately 2.5 million. The rationale for such a large headcount was the constant "Western-imperialist" and "Eastern-revisionist" threat to Albania's security, as claimed by the Albanian communist leadership of the time.

With the fall of the communist regime and the economic and social difficulties of the 90s, the Armed Forces suffered from neglect and lack of investments. In this situation, the main aim was to move away from an Army of huge numbers for a small country like Albania and mainly dated Soviet equipment (MiG fighter jets, tanks), which in many cases was from the 60s, to a smaller, more mobile Army, and with modernized equipment. Compared with the communist-era Army, which emphasized heavy armament mostly produced in Albania (AK-47 rifles), the Albanian Army in the last ten years has been more focused in acquiring light armament as Beretta, machine guns MG4 and MG5, Snipers SAKO 22' and 42', M-4 assault rifles, troop transporters, Cougar and EC145 helicopters, etc.<sup>2</sup> The purpose has been not only to modernize the Army but at the same time to unify it in equipment with the other NATO member countries, to make it easier for the Albanian Army to interact quickly with the other NATO member countries. The Kuçova Air Field project continues this process of modernization, this time in the Air Force.

Albania's military expenditure has increased since the 1990s, reaching its peak value of more than USD 250 million, or 3.5% of GDP<sup>3</sup>, in 2009, the year when the country became part of NATO. Since then, the military spending has diminished to USD 201 million, or 1.25% of GDP,<sup>4</sup> in 2018. But the problem is that the bulk of Albania's military budget goes to personnel,

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1 Shifrat e plota të armatimit dhe teknikës luftarake që kishte Shqipëria përpara '90-s, Gazeta Dita, 23 korrik 2018

2 Modernizimi i forcave të armatosura, <http://www.mod.gov.al/index.php/politikat-e-sigurise/te-tjera-nga-mm/modernizimi-i-forcave-te-armatosura>

3 Brandon Burden, NATO's small states: Albania as a case study, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2016, pg. 37

4 Revista Mbrojtja, Ministria e Mbrojtjes, No. 12: 14, 2018

while only a small portion is used for new equipment (66% and 8% respectively in 2016). This severely hampers Albania's ability to renew its military equipment.<sup>5</sup>

Second, ten years since joining NATO, Albania, which had a UN peace-keeping force deployed on its territory following a bloody popular rebellion back in 1997, has turned into a country exporting security to distant countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Chad, but also to neighbouring Kosovo. In the last ten years, more than 4,000 Albanian troops participated in different NATO missions. Currently, 211 Albanian soldiers are involved in NATO missions in Afghanistan, Latvia, Kosovo, and the Aegean Sea.<sup>6</sup>

But Albania's participation in NATO missions has started way before its NATO membership. In 2002, the first contingent of Albanian Armed Forces was deployed in the framework of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), following the United States military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, supported initially by Canada, United Kingdom and Australia and, later, by all NATO member countries. Since its first participation in ISAF, Albania has contributed more than 3,000 armed forces in Kabul, Herat and Kandahar, in collaboration with Turkey, Italy and the US.<sup>7</sup> The second biggest international mission was in Iraq, following the US-led military intervention of March 2003. Albanians committed 70 personnel in a mission to Mosul, North Iraq, in April 2013, a number that soon increased to 120. The Albanian Armed Forces withdrew from Mosul and then from Baghdad in December 2008, with the end of the "Iraqi Freedom" Operation. Overall, 1,343 Albanian military personnel participated in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2008.<sup>8</sup>

Albania's most lengthy international mission was that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from 1996 to 2007, in the framework of the NATO-led ISAF and SFOR, and the EU-led ALTHEA. Albania has contributed in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1,355 military personnel.<sup>9</sup>

From the Albanian point of view, these international missions served two purposes: first, they helped bring cooperation with NATO to new levels, reaffirming Albania as a reliable partner and paving the way for NATO full-fledged membership; second, they considerably improved Albania's

5 Brandon Burden, NATO's small states: Albania as a case study, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2016, pg. 46

6 10 vjet në NATO: Koçi: Shqipëria, kontribuese për sigurinë. ATA, 26/03/2019. <http://ata.gov.al/2019/03/26/10-vjet-ne-nato-koci-shqiperia-kontribuese-per-sigurine/>

7 Afganistan, operacioni ISAF drejtuar nga NATO, <http://www.mbrojtja.gov.al/index.php/politikat-e-sigurise-2/misione-nderkombetare/misione-te-kryera/1020-afganistan-operacioni-isaf-drejtuar-nga-nato>

8 Irak, <http://www.mbrojtja.gov.al/index.php/politikat-e-sigurise-2/misione-nderkombetare/misione-te-kryera/24-irak>

9 Bosnje dhe Hercegovinë, <http://www.mbrojtja.gov.al/index.php/politikat-e-sigurise-2/misione-nderkombetare/misione-aktuale/20-bosnje-dhe-hercegovine>

military capability, which was successfully tested in some of the most difficult battlefields like Afghanistan and Iraq. Albania has been consistent in its support for NATO's stance towards Russia, and namely the Skripal case in Salisbury, England, the terrorist threat from the Middle East and the refugee crisis in the Aegean Sea.

## Conclusion

NATO membership has deeply transformed the politics and security considerations in Albania. The responsibilities arising from being part of the collective security system extend beyond the personnel numbers into the sphere of common values, democracy, solidarity and a joint vision of the future. This vision has ensured that the entire region of the Western Balkans is now one of peace and integration.

In Albania, trust in NATO and support for the Alliance are high. This feeling should be kept and preserved by the next generations. NATO membership anchored a fragile Albania into the community of the West. When the country finally attains its remaining strategic objective – that of becoming a member of the European Union – then its transition will be complete.

NATO's role in the entire region of the Western Balkans has been decisive and the admission of the Balkan countries to the Alliance is the ultimate investment for peace and stability.



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# Mission Accomplished? A Reflection on 70 years of NATO

*Jean-Vincent Holeindre*

**Created on the 6th of April 1949, at the dawn of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was supposed to achieve a precise goal: to protect its members and avoid the risk of escalation, especially with nuclear weapons. Article 5, the backbone of the Treaty, stipulates: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all [...]". In accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which establishes a framework for the legitimate use of force in self-defence, NATO pledged mutual protection for its members in case of aggression, including by means of military response if necessary.**

Due to its powerful status, the United States appeared, right from the start, as a driver of the Alliance, while Europe was vulnerable geographically and militarily and therefore required protection. The proximity of the Soviet enemy made Western Europe a target for a possible military attack, especially since till 1949 no European state had developed nuclear weapon. After the two World Wars on its territory, Europe was weakened but remained the epicenter of a bipolar confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Berlin was a symbol of this dichotomy, just as the collapse of the Berlin Wall symbolised the end of the confrontation.

## **A Deeply Rooted Organisation**

NATO is now seventy years old. It survived despite the collapse of the USSR, even though its mission seemed complete. What was the purpose of a military alliance created to counter a now defunct enemy? Four sets of factors explain NATO's longevity: strategic interests of the Allies, institutional strength of the organisation, gradual expansion of its mandate and capacities, and adaptation to the evolving geopolitical context.

First of all, NATO persists because its members have no interest in its disappearance. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States would not give up its influence and its prestige in Europe at a time when its hegemony was obvious. At the same time, the Europeans were not going to turn away from their most reliable ally and the benefits it brought. Today,

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a break-up of NATO is again conceivable since US President Donald Trump questions its relevance. However, it appears as a further sign of the “decline of the American empire” and Europe in the context of China’s and India’s rise. It could also be interpreted as Russia’s revenge, almost thirty years after the fall of the Soviet empire. That said, a dismantlement of NATO is unlikely in the short-term. European states need American protection, especially since their defence budgets have declined over the last thirty years. Moreover, the nuclear umbrella protecting the European continent is heavily dependent on Washington.

NATO also benefits from a strong institutional solidity. The Washington Treaty of 1949 was supplemented in 1952 by the establishment of a genuine multilateral organisation with permanent political and military structures. Unlike other alliances, NATO has permanent military governance and command, its own bureaucracy, and military training structures such as the NATO Defence College in Rome, research centres and centres of excellence, etc. Created in the context of the Korean War, these permanent structures strengthen the Alliance politically and encourage its members to respect the terms of the contract. They also concretise it on an institutional level. NATO has its own workings and organisational interests; it forges a common language and know-how allowing Allies to work together. This creates interdependence between NATO as an institution and its members. From this perspective, France’s return to NATO’s integrated command in 2009, often explained by President Sarkozy’s Atlanticism, can well be attributed to NATO’s normalised structure, too. For France, it is now preferable to belong to this bureaucracy rather than remain outside it. It is a way to have more influence in a decision-making process dominated by the United States.

NATO longevity is also due to the gradual expansion of its skills geographically and operationally. NATO’s core strength lies in enhancing military interoperability and capabilities amongst NATO’s members and partners for cooperation. On the one hand, NATO intervenes in areas not covered by Article 5 from military operations in Afghanistan and Libya, through humanitarian missions in Indonesia and Pakistan, to anti-piracy missions in Somalia (Operation “Atalanta” with the European Union). NATO has also developed new expertise in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and international crisis management, as in Bosnia and Kosovo. Finally, by adapting to new forms of conflict, it has diversified its actions, extending them to non-proliferation, the fight against terrorism or the so-called “hybrid” threats.



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Lastly, NATO has adapted to the post-Cold War geopolitical context by espousing a new doctrine based on cooperation. The idea is to integrate NATO into the collective security logic that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War and that accompanies the rise of the UN. Thus, in 1991, considering that confrontation was no longer on the agenda, cooperation with the former enemies from the Soviet bloc was highlighted in the new strategic concept. This led to several initiatives, such as the "Partnership for Peace" in 1994, which allowed non-NATO member states to cooperate with NATO bilaterally, and above all the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in 1997 that aimed to provide a framework for relations between the two sides and to reassure Russia about the future NATO enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2010, the principle of cooperation with Russia was reaffirmed in the new Strategic Concept. This involves closer cooperation in areas of common interest, such as missile defence, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and maritime security. Among the examples of successful cooperation is logistical support by Russia and Central Asian countries for deployment and withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan. The cooperative security approach developed by NATO serves a strategy of progressive and flexible association, particularly useful during operations. Beyond the Partnership for Peace, this is valid for the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the global partnership as well as for the enhanced cooperation between the EU and NATO and the UN and NATO.

However, since 2014 and the conflict in Ukraine, relations between Russia and NATO have reached their lowest ebb since the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 and perhaps even since the Cold War. Can NATO overcome its current challenges as it was able to fulfill its past missions?

### **NATO in the Face of Power Rivalries**

One of the factors often put forward to explain the renewed tension between Russia and NATO is the integration of new members from the post-Soviet bloc into NATO. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined in 1999, followed by Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Baltic states in 2004. This continued in 2017 with the addition of Montenegro. Currently, three states (Bosnia- Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Georgia) are knocking on the door of the Alliance. Whatever the outcome, this demonstrates that NATO remains an attractive organisation with strong safety guarantees for member states.

This success may have been perceived as a threat by Russia, suddenly deprived of a part of its sphere of influence. But if former communist coun-

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tries applied for NATO membership as early as the mid-1990s, it was precisely to benefit from the political and military protection of the United States against the Russian grip they had just shaken off. NATO thus faced a paradoxical situation: created to counter the now obsolete Soviet threat, the Alliance ended up integrating countries that used to be in the Soviet sphere. One may ask if this carries the risk of reigniting the Eastern threat. At the end of his second term, in the early 1990's, the then French president François Mitterrand was concerned about NATO's enlargement, fearing that it could jeopardise relations with post-Soviet Russia. Hubert Védrine, Mitterrand's sherpa and later foreign minister, now believes that the West has failed to take adequate notice of the trauma caused in Russia by the collapse of the USSR. Would a softer approach have changed Russian ambitions? It is doubtful. When the United States showed strategic restraint under Obama, for example in Syria or in Ukraine, Russia took this opportunity to regain control and act offensively.

In any case, seventy years after the signing of the Washington Treaty, the confrontation is back on. Europe is divided on its Eastern Flank, with Ukraine being one of the hotbeds of conflict. There is a real risk of escalation, as evidenced by Russia's shows of power near the borders of NATO member states, particularly in the Baltic or Black Seas, and the aggressive statements by Russian leaders towards several European countries, whether they are NATO members or not, such as Poland or Sweden.

However, it is difficult to speak about a "new Cold War" because of the budgetary and military disparity that characterises the balance between NATO and Russia. Similarly, bipolarity, including ideologically, no longer holds the same weight. Other actors, both state and non-state, have also emerged, such as jihadists (Daesh or Al Qaeda), who disrupt relations between member states and encourage a narrow view of national strategic interests. At the same time, states such as China or India are developing their own expansion strategies, which puts into perspective the real clout of both Western powers and Russia. Within NATO itself, there are dissenting voices, including Erdogan's Turkey. NATO member since 1952, it is now getting closer to Russia, having purchased Russian S-400 anti-aircraft systems. By doing so, Turkey means to affirm its sovereignty but also sows unrest or even discord among the Alliance members.

In this uncertain context, NATO is re-embracing its underlying purpose spelled out in Article 5. The many measures taken to reassure its eastern Allies after 2014 (sky policing, maritime patrol in the Baltic and Black Seas, enhanced military presence) have demonstrated solidarity within the Alli-

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ance. But in the event of a major conflict, would NATO still be as politically and militarily robust? On the military side, there is still doubt about NATO's ability to deploy its forces quickly in case of a military attack in Europe. Post-Cold War fiscal rationalisation has had an impact on NATO's military capabilities and speed of action. On the other hand, the Ukrainian conflict may have raised doubts about American solidarity with Europe in the event of a major attack in Europe. Admittedly, Ukraine is outside Article 5, but NATO's interests are at stake. However, Obama's United States did not intervene militarily in response to the annexation of Crimea by Putin's Russia. Nor did it prevent the violence of Kremlin-backed Bashar Al-Assad. Is Russia determined to pursue the escalation process it initiated in 2014? Recent developments cast doubt on this. Neither the United States nor Russia have an interest in direct confrontation. Moscow and Washington are currently entangled elsewhere, notably in Syria and Iran. Europe is therefore not the only theatre of a conflict that has become strategically diversified and geographically dispersed.

### **European and Democratic Uncertainty**

All these controversies highlight Europe's limited weight in the Alliance, as if the original asymmetry could not be corrected. President Trump is urging Europeans to increase their defence budgets in the name of "burden sharing" within NATO. This can be interpreted as encouragement for an autonomous voice within Europe, if not a dissenting one. The European Union can play a role in this respect, provided its three pillars (France, the United Kingdom and Germany), themselves members of NATO, agree on a common plan of action. This is far from being the case today. The UK is stuck in the Brexit process, Germany is reluctant to engage in defence matters because of the antimilitarist voices among its governing coalition, and France careens between a neo-Gaullist view of the European powers and a more Atlanticist viewpoint. To further its defence project, Europe needs to avail itself of a genuine operational autonomy, including nuclear, and develop the basis for a common defence industry. A long way to go...

Finally, even if NATO fulfills the essential goals it has set for itself, uncertainty still looms on its medium and long-term future. First of all, it's about its competitors or opponents, like Russia. NATO failed to achieve the 1991 objective of cooperation with Russia over the long term. Secondly, there is an issue about its partners, such as the European Union. The EU has not clarified its relationship with NATO because it lacks a pronounced defence policy. It is not clear whether European defence is a way for the EU to distance itself from NATO or to better contribute to it. There is also un-

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certainty about its members, such as the United States, which since Obama no longer regard NATO and the relationship with European allies as an absolute priority. As for Turkey, it appears to be hardly a reliable partner under Erdogan's regime. What do these uncertainties have in common? Probably the political and ideological changes they reveal. We are facing a global redistribution of power, and the Western world is not yet the winner. Moreover, liberal democracy is challenged by other models, such as authoritarian nationalism, and, worse still, contested from inside. Within democracies themselves, mistrust in liberal and democratic values is growing. How can we strengthen the link between the EU and NATO in the context of mounting populist and isolationist tendencies that Donald Trump feeds both by words and deeds? NATO will have hard time fulfilling its mission if it fails to embrace the liberal principles that inspired its creation. In fact, NATO is not only a political and military tool but also a sounding board for democratic doubts that, unsettlingly, affect first and foremost the core of the Alliance, i.e. the United States.

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