Russia’s Relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Perceived Imbalance and Inequality

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also known as the North Atlantic Alliance (NAA), is the largest military alliance in the world and counts several nations amongst its current twenty-eight members, including the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany. While NATO’s political and military influence spreads across the continents of Europe and North America and is felt in almost every part of today’s globalized world, a cursory scan of its membership list brings to light a glaring omission of the largest country in the world—Russia. With geographic proximity to Europe and a long history of military and cultural involvement with the West, as well as an enormous endowment of natural resources and extensive nuclear armaments, Russia seems to be the embodiment of a desirable addition to this expanding alliance. This assumption, however, overlooks the complicated relationship between Russia and NATO which has largely been shaped by events of the last several decades.

NATO was officially formed by the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949. It originally consisted of twelve distinct nation-states. In the post-war period, Western democracies regarded communism as a real and significant security threat, and feared that the Soviet Union would attempt to spread its ideology. NATO was created in response to this perceived danger. As one scholar writes, “The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, led by the US, was the means adopted in 1949 to preserve peace in the face of the mighty Soviets.”¹ The Soviet Union responded in kind, and in 1955, concluded the Warsaw Pact, thereby establishing its own military and economic alliance in Eastern Europe. The Cold War was therefore as much

¹ Cooper, 170.
a conflict between the two nations—the United States and the Soviet Union—as it was a conflict between member states of two rival organizations—NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

The term “Cold War,” referring to the period of international tensions spanning the second half of the twentieth century, is widely recognized as a misnomer, as the United States and the Soviet Union never officially engaged in direct armed conflict with one another. Similarly, during this time, NATO was a military alliance in name only, as its fighting capabilities were never mobilized and it did not undertake any formal missions until after the fall of the Soviet Union. In December of 1991, newly elected president Boris Yeltsin signed the Belavezha Accords, creating the Commonwealth of Independent States and signifying the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of communism in Russia. In the twenty-three years that bridge the gap between that momentous event and the present day, NATO has sporadically utilized the foundation of wartime preparedness upon which it was established to initiate a total of eight military operations. Perhaps more significantly, during this period of time, NATO has nearly doubled its membership, welcoming into its ranks twelve new countries—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia—roughly half of which had previously been united under Soviet leadership by the Warsaw Pact. This dichotomy of purpose—NATO’s largely symbolic function during the Cold War period and its more aggressive expansionist activity in the quarter-century after—delineates two distinct phases of NATO history. Because a relationship between Russia and NATO effectively formed only in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this paper examines the interaction between these two entities in terms of NATO’s policies during its second phase of activity from 1991 through the present day.
The ongoing process of NATO mobilization in the post-Cold War era was spurred by the organization’s search for a new identity. Beginning in the 1990s, NATO was no longer preoccupied with the full-time responsibility of ideologically opposing the Soviet Union and its satellite states. The former Cold War characterization of NATO, as a symbolic opponent to communism and a necessary counterbalance to the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist along with that very alliance and its commander-in-chief, the Soviet Union. Soon afterward, in an attempt to establish a purpose for itself in the post-Cold War world, NATO began to pursue a new policy of enlargement and active participation in international affairs. Part of this quest for self-identity included redefining its relationship with newly democratized Russia, the heir to the Soviet legacy. NATO’s new identity and the emergence of Russia as an outsider, rather than an opposing force, have both played an important role in shaping the relationship between NATO and Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Although twenty-three years have passed since Russia was officially considered a potential threat to the collective security of Western democracies in Europe and North America, Russia still has not joined NATO and does not seem too interested in becoming a member in the near future. At one time, Russia was open to the prospect of NATO membership. Andrei Kozyrev, foreign minister during the early years of Yeltsin’s presidency, even stated, “We do not exclude the possibility that at some point Russia itself may become a member of the alliance.”

There have also been arguments for encouraging Russia to join NATO. According to official bylaws, any country that is located within the specified geographic region and willing to comply with the organization’s rules and regulations can become a member of NATO. The fact remains,

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2 Andrei Kozyrev, “Partnership or Cold Peace?,” *Foreign Policy* 3 (Summer 1995): 11-12 as quoted in Dutkiewicz, 101.
3 Kupchan, 103.
4 Charter of the United Nations, Chapter II.
however, that the Russian Federation is not a member of NATO. Many scholars have attempted to explain why Russia has opted out of membership while the majority of its former allies in Eastern Europe have been welcomed into NATO. As with any matter of geopolitics, opinions vary. Some scholars maintain that Russia’s obstinacy is a product of its animosity toward the West, while others blame the United States for repulsing Russia. It has been suggested, for example, that NATO’s enlargement through the assimilation of Eastern European countries continues to provoke antagonism between NATO and Russia. In the West, Russian resentment toward NATO is often cited as a key factor in its exclusion from the organization. In Russia, on the other hand, Andrei Tsygankov’s assertion that widespread “Russophobia” informs NATO’s policy toward Russia is still generally accepted as a reasonable explanation for ongoing tensions between NATO and the Russian Federation.

These theories certainly have some merit, but, taken individually, they are one-dimensional and cannot fully explain the nature of the disconnect that continues to impede cooperation between NATO and Russia. For many of these theories, the fault lies in their attempt to determine an active, conscious effort by each side to make a villain of the other. However, by analyzing the most significant international events since the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, in which both Russia and NATO have played pivotal roles, a more comprehensive and nuanced conclusion can be drawn. Through the evaluation of four critical incidents involving NATO and the Russian Federation—1) the survival and continuation of NATO in the post-Cold War era; 2) the first phase of NATO enlargement; 3) NATO’s military intervention in the autonomous region of Kosovo; and 4) the second wave of NATO’s

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5 Forsberg, 333.
6 Dittmer, 49.
7 Tsygankov, 187.
expansion—this paper demonstrates that the relationship between these two entities is marked by a strong tendency by NATO to disregard Russian policy preferences in international matters. This behavior has led to the perceived marginalization of Russia on the international stage and, consequently, continues to be the reason why Russia is not a member of NATO.

**Continuation of NATO**

The first significant action that NATO undertook after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the breakdown of the Soviet Union was its decision to continue to exist. NATO’s original purpose as a military buffer and counterbalance to the power and influence of the Soviet Union and its satellites during the Cold War came into question in the summer of 1991 when Czechoslovakian president Václav Havel formally disbanded the 1955 Warsaw Pact. For the first time in thirty-six years, there was a void in the East, instead of the Soviet Bloc standing in opposition to NATO. In the following months, “some observers...doubted whether NATO could continue as an effective organisation without a Warsaw Pact threat as its *raison d’être*.”

Reasons for doubt were merited because, until that time, NATO had served essentially as a military deterrent to westward Soviet expansion, providing the infrastructure for collective security in Europe. After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, the “Red Threat” or the looming fear of a communist attack on free, democratic nations ceased to exist and, as a result, it appeared that NATO, the main defense against it, would be rendered obsolete.

While Western leaders ultimately chose not to disband NATO after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the decision was controversial. When it became clear that neither the Soviet Union nor the Warsaw Pact would survive into the twenty-first century, in the spirit of balance, Russian leaders began to advocate for the dissolution of NATO as well. However, NATO’s fate remained

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8 Cooper, 152.
purely speculative until Russia voiced its concerns on February 9, 1990 during a bilateral meeting in Moscow between then-president of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev and the American secretary of state under President George H. Bush, James A. Baker. During negotiations, “Gorbachev...advocat[ed] an idealistic but vague vision of a Europe without either the Warsaw Pact or NATO.” Most likely, “he sought some kind of pan-European structure or confederation that would replace both alliances.” Gorbachev’s Minster of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze reiterated this vision of a new European order sans NATO and the Warsaw Pact on multiple occasions both to the Supreme Soviet and to an assembly of delegates representing the Warsaw Treaty Organization in Poland’s capital. Despite the desire of top Russian officials to dissolve both military alliances simultaneously in the interest of international equality and to establish a new, pan-European security organization that would include Russian participation, NATO remained intact after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. It has only grown in strength and membership since.

Considering the events leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political and economic challenges faced by Russian authorities, and the fallout from the rush toward independence by former Soviet territories in the early 1990s, it is not surprising that ensuring the creation of the new European social order proved difficult for Russian leaders. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the perceived state of disarray in the Soviet Union, by 1991, it was understood that Western European nations no longer faced a looming security threat from the East. In fact, it was not until 1992 and the outbreak of civil war in Yugoslavia that security concerns once again began to trouble the West. There was thus no immediate justification for

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9 Ibid., 124.
10 Ibid.
11 Falkenrath, 92.
NATO’s continued existence without the ever-present threat of a united Eastern front against the West. In other words, in 1991 NATO’s original purpose of balancing Soviet influence had unequivocally been served. Reasons for NATO’s continuation after this time are, therefore, still the topic of debate.

The concept of “basic inertia” is sometimes cited as one reason for NATO’s continued existence.\(^\text{12}\) It suggests that, rather than searching for a need to maintain NATO, there was simply no reason not to and no significant objections to its preservation. However, taking into account the position of the two most influential officials in the Soviet Union at the time—President Gorbachev and Minister of Foreign Affairs Shevardnadze, who advocated terminating NATO altogether—it is evident that there were indeed substantial objections. Even today, Russian officials continue to advance a similar position, arguing that “the Kremlin never accepted a junior partner status, making it clear that its preferred option remains the alliance’s dissolution and the creation of a different, new pan-European organization that would incorporate the Russian Federation.”\(^\text{13}\) The continuation of NATO after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact represents the first instance of NATO’s complete disregard for Russia as an international presence. It demonstrates the alliance’s lack of consideration for Russian interests and concerns in formulating and enacting its policy decisions. The fact that NATO was not disbanded, despite Russian objections and the lack of any tangible security threat to necessitate its continued existence, shows that Russian opinion carried little, if any, weight in post-Cold War negotiations. This dismissal of Russian interests laid the foundation for future interaction between NATO and Russia, most notably during the next two phases of its expansion and intervention in the Kosovo War.

\(^{13}\) Ratti, 145.
Enlargement Phase I

Since its inception in 1949, NATO has steadily expanded, granting membership to Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955, Spain in 1982, and finally the whole of Germany in 1990. Considering these four separate instances of NATO enlargement during the Cold War era, it is not surprising that NATO continued to expand in membership and influence during the 1990s. Furthermore, after the assimilation of East Germany, NATO looked further eastward toward other former Soviet satellites and even territories. Russia was understandably anxious and began to publicly oppose the alliance’s expansion, especially as it moved closer to Russian borders. Open discussion about the incorporation of former Eastern bloc countries began in 1994 and continued until the end of the first phase of expansion in 1999.14 Russia opposed NATO’s expansion into Eastern Europe not only based on security concerns, but deemed the whole operation offensive, recalling that NATO had promised to cease eastward expansion during behind-the-scenes talks after the alliance’s addition of reunified Germany in 1990.

Russia’s anxiety and resistance to NATO’s eastward gaze was neither a revelation nor completely unfounded. In the early 1990s, further aggressive expansion seemed very much a possibility, especially after NATO’s admittance of a reunified Germany as the Soviet Union was falling apart. The internal political situation in Russia at the time of Germany’s accession into NATO was very different from the situation in 1994 when discussions began about admitting Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, Yeltsin’s stance on NATO was identical to the one expressed by Gorbachev four years earlier. Gorbachev fiercely opposed German membership in NATO. Among the Soviet leadership, the common opinion was that “the

14 Plekhanov, 168.
process of German reunification must be *organically linked and synchronized* with the European process and the creation of an essentially new security structure in Europe, a structure which will [gradually] replace the alliances.”¹⁵ For Gorbachev the issue of NATO’s future after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was inextricably linked to the fate of reunified Germany. He made two separate proposals concerning Germany, knowing that the acceptance of either would necessitate the dissolution of NATO: 1) to include Germany in NATO, but only as a political member without military capabilities; and 2) to require German membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.¹⁶ The first proposal was designed to bring about the dissolution of NATO. If the West wished to secure German military collaboration (which it did), then a new military alliance would have to be created. The second proposal was intended to prolong the Warsaw Pact until the mutual abrogation of both alliances and the creation of a new pan-European alliance. Despite its protests and threats, however, Russia was largely ignored and merely stood by as a united Germany joined NATO. At the same time, the Warsaw Pact was disbanded, leaving Russia at the head of a defunct military alliance. Russia’s sole consolation was NATO’s supposed promise that it would not look any farther East in the future.¹⁷

Russian policymakers were frustrated for many reasons. One of the more significant points of contention was the alleged promise that had been made to Gorbachev and other Russian officials during debates over Germany’s membership in NATO. It was agreed that once Germany was officially part of NATO, the organization would cease eastward expansion. Although this decision was hotly contested by the Americans, President Bush nevertheless purportedly agreed to Gorbachev’s stipulations. Later, United States officials who had

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¹⁵ Lévesque, “NATO’s Eastward Expansion,” 159.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Kramer, 39.
participated in talks with Russia acknowledged that “Moscow firmly believed that it had received assurances from the United States, France, and the United Kingdom that NATO enlargement would go no further than eastern Germany.”\(^{18}\) This arrangement, however, was not upheld because, in 1997, NATO welcomed Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as member states. Moreover, investigating the supposed promise made to Gorbachev, Mark Kramer has concluded that “declassified materials show unmistakably that no such pledge was made.”\(^{19}\) Today, much of the speculation that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s over alleged verbal commitments made by Western leaders to Russian heads of state regarding the halt of NATO’s eastward expansion has been laid to rest.

While Kramer’s study may appear to negate the significance of NATO’s incorporation of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic because, as he demonstrated, no promise to Russia was broken in doing so, it actually serves to strengthen the argument that NATO generally disregards Russia and its policy preferences. He wrote the article refuting the promise in 2009, after the declassification of documents pertaining to NATO-Russian talks. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the belief in a pledge of future non-enlargement by NATO was widely prevalent until that time. When NATO initiated Phase One of its expansion into Eastern Europe, it did so despite a perception that it was reneging on a deal struck with Russia six years prior. NATO’s actions imply an evident lack of attention to Russian interests. The revelation that no offer was ever proposed to Russia by any NATO representative or the United States reinforces this notion. The fact that Russia had some manner of influence over the proceedings (i.e., Gorbachev assented to German membership in NATO) and could make demands, such as the alleged non-enlargement agreement, suggests that Russia and NATO negotiated as equals.

\(^{18}\) Sarotte, 120.

\(^{19}\) Kramer, 55.
However, the verification that no official or unofficial promise was ever made to Gorbachev and his ministers removes any pretense of American or NATO consideration of the Russian position on issues crucial to European security.

The foundation of the Partnership for Peace program (PfP) in 1994 and the creation of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) following the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security have often been cited as counterarguments to the claim that NATO did not take Russia’s position into account. The first of these two overtures, the PfP, was proposed by President Bill Clinton in January of 1994 “in order to overcome Russia’s opposition to NATO’s expansion.”20 There was, however, little faith in this institution, as “Russia believed that PfP was a subterfuge to paper over the dividing line between East and West.”21 This attempt by the West to reconcile with Russia was largely unsuccessful and ultimately led to the Founding Act and PJC. The creation of the PJC directly coincided with the formalization of phase one of NATO’s enlargement in 1999.

At the time, the PJC was described as the single most important step in Russian-NATO relations since the fall of the Soviet Union that could effectively bury lingering rivalries.22 In May of 1997, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright referred to the Founding Act as an arrangement that “embodies our solemn and lasting commitment, at the highest level, to undertake a fundamentally different relationship with Russia.”23 On the surface it would appear that with the creation of the PJC, the United States and other Western nations were prepared to begin taking Russia more seriously and considering its opinion on matters directly pertaining to its relationship with NATO. However, one of the main clauses of the Founding Act reads:

20 Cooper, 160.
21 Ibid.
22 Forsberg, 332.
23 Madeleine Albright, speech, Moscow, May 2, 1997 as quoted in Lévesque, “NATO’s Eastward Expansion,” 166.
“Provisions of this Act do not provide NATO or Russia in any way the right of veto over the actions of the other side, and do not infringe upon or restrict the rights of NATO or Russia to make decisions and act independently.”\textsuperscript{24} Thus, despite all the positive buildup and promotion of the Founding Act and the PJC, this article gave both sides the explicit right to engage in military activity without approval from the other. As a result, NATO retained the right to continue its policy of ignoring Russian interests, including on matters pertaining to its eastward enlargement. Rather than providing a forum for NATO-Russian collaboration, the PJC proved to be “a forum where Russia was informed about NATO’s decisions but there was no chance for Russia to influence them.”\textsuperscript{25} Although it initially seemed that NATO’s policy of ignoring Russian concerns would change with the signing of the Founding Act and the establishment of the PJC, the situation remained unaltered.

Russia thus remained strongly opposed to the idea of a Western military alliance moving closer to its borders. For security reasons, Russia “similarly opposed an encircling coalition of NATO and the EU/WEU linked to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.”\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, “articles in the Russian press express[ed] an almost universal agreement that the expansion of NATO [was] against Russia’s national security interests.”\textsuperscript{27} The Russian leadership reacted so seriously to NATO expansion that there was even talk of halting the nuclear armaments reduction process and “refusing to ratify other agreements on arms control (for example, START II or the treaty on Anti-Ballistic Missiles).”\textsuperscript{28} In the first half of the 1990s, Russia was divided on

\textsuperscript{24} «положения настоящего Акта не дают НАТО или России никоим образом права вето по отношению к действиям другой стороны, а также не ущемляют и не ограничивают права НАТО или России принимать решения и действовать самостоятельно.» Torkunov, 194.
\textsuperscript{25} Forsberg, 339.
\textsuperscript{26} Dutkiewicz, 55.
\textsuperscript{27} Cooper, 161.
\textsuperscript{28} «отказ в ратификации других договоров по контролю за вооружениями (например, СТАРТ II или договора по антибалистическим ракетам).» Creutzberger, 90.
every issue, from economic reforms to its system of government. However, despite domestic instability, “from 1994 on, virtually all significant political formations agreed that eastward expansion of NATO would be a bad idea.”29 A completely united and vocal front against the first phase of NATO enlargement arose in Russia. This avid opposition, however, was of no concern to NATO leaders, who extended an offer to Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to become member states in 1997 and then officially welcomed them as members two years later in 1999.

**NATO Intervention in Kosovo**

NATO undertook its first wartime military action in 1994–1995. On February 28, 1994 NATO intervened in the Bosnian civil war, and in 1995 led a bombing campaign that helped end the conflict. This military activity inevitably changed the nature of the alliance. As already discussed, NATO had never participated in armed conflict since its inception a half-century prior. Its actions in Bosnia established a precedent for its intervention four years later in the autonomous region of Kosovo, also in the former Yugoslavia. Labeled by Deputy Secretary of State under Bill Clinton Strobe Talbott “the most severe crisis in the first decade of post-Cold War U.S.-Russia relations,” the war in Kosovo stemmed from long-standing ethnic disputes over territorial claims and instability in former Yugoslavia.30 The two opposing sides consisted of Kosovar Albanians, fighting to maintain their autonomy from Serbia, and Yugoslav Serbs, led by Slobodan Milosević, who wanted to reclaim the region and cleanse it of Albanians. As the main purpose of NATO is to ensure the security of its member states and Europe as a whole, the volatile political situation in the region of former Yugoslavia and the violation of state sovereignty by Milosević demanded NATO’s attention. When peace talks held in Rambouillet, France between Kosovar and Yugoslav delegations broke down, NATO, left with no other

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29 Plekhanov, 178.
30 Strobe Talbott, forward to Norris, x.
choice but military intervention to contain Milosević, initiated its first air strike on March 24, 1999. Russia furiously objected to NATO’s involvement despite the fact that NATO presented its mission as a necessary peacekeeping initiative. Citing the fact that Yeltsin hung up the phone several times in frustration during a conversation with President Clinton concerning NATO’s insistence on military action, Talbott commented on the significant rift that NATO’s involvement in Kosovo had created with Russia. Perhaps even more vehemently opposed by Russia than the first phase of NATO enlargement, the war in Kosovo is the clearest example of NATO’s disregard for Russian objections in its decision-making.

At first, it seemed that Russia would have a say in how the conflict in Kosovo would be handled. After all, the decision for military action was to be made by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where Russia is one of the five permanent members. In April of 1999, U.S. Department of State officials declared “efforts to lay the groundwork with the Allies for a UN Security Council resolution authorizing ‘all necessary means’ to bring Milosević to terms.” According to the UNSC charter, all decisions require a unanimous vote. As a permanent member of the UNSC, Russia, therefore, retained veto power. Western officials were clearly aware of Russian opposition to Western intervention in Kosovo. The responsibility for military action was therefore effectively transferred to NATO, an organization that historically had disregarded Russian objections in order to execute policy. As a result, intervention in Kosovo was added to a growing list of instances when Russian interests had no effect on NATO’s decision-making processes.

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31 Norris, 5.
32 Forsberg, 337.
33 Norris, 4.
34 Ibid., 39.
Russia’s aversion to NATO intervention in Kosovo was so poignant because it was informed by very specific concerns and contentions. First, intervention in Kosovo validated Russian worries regarding the new strategic doctrine that NATO had adopted at the Washington Summit earlier in 1999. While NATO officials pledged that they would rely on diplomatic rather than military means to guarantee European security and uphold democratic values, the decision to launch Operation Allied Force in Kosovo gave Russia grounds to claim that NATO’s unitary goal was to “maintain military superiority in Europe” and that the alliance had “an obvious bias to use force.” Russia had “hoped to participate in the formulation of the doctrine within the PJC,” but, true to the tradition of the PJC, Russia did not receive a copy of the documents until immediately before the Washington Summit, when the strategy had already been finalized. Considering the exclusion of Russia from the process of creating the new doctrine and NATO’s subsequent involvement in Kosovo, it seems highly likely that NATO leadership never intended to change the plans for military intervention, protests from Russia notwithstanding.

Russian leaders also opposed NATO involvement in Kosovo for yet another reason. While NATO maintained that an effort to negotiate had been made at Rambouillet and claimed that the breakdown of talks and continued violence in the region necessitated military action in Kosovo, Russian diplomat and rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Anatoly Torkunov, took a different view. Claiming that NATO’s actions were unwarranted and essentially unlawful, he stated, “Eventually NATO took unilateral and unprecedented in post-war history action: On March 24, 1999, Alliance Air Force began the bombing of the Federal

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35 Kazantsev, 24.
36 Forsberg, 337.
37 Norris, 17.
Republic of Yugoslavia.”\(^{38}\) His use of such emotionally charged adjectives as “unilateral” and “unprecedented” implies that NATO acted completely of its own accord without the consent of other involved parties. He went on to say, “who, when, and at what level should decide that all political means to resolve the situation have been exhausted, and it is necessary to use military force.”\(^{39}\) Torkunov thus accused NATO of disregarding proper diplomatic procedures by interceding in Kosovo. There was obviously dissatisfaction in Russia with the outcome of the talks. It was generally believed that NATO had neither the jurisdiction nor the right to intervene in Kosovo.

The third and final concern that Russia had regarding NATO’s decision to intervene in Kosovo was based on questions of national security and sovereignty. Kosovo’s geographic location in the territory of former Yugoslavia meant that it lay within the Eastern bloc where Russia intended to maintain its influence. John Norris goes so far as to say that “all of Russia’s worst strategic fears converged in Kosovo.”\(^{40}\) Not only had NATO very recently expanded closer to Russia’s borders, but the alliance also had access to cutting edge weapons and technology, and was now using them in “an area that Russia had once firmly dominated.”\(^{41}\) Russia’s anxieties were not only political in nature, but also cultural. “Russians affiliated themselves with the Orthodox Serbs and saw the NATO war as a general assault on the Slavic people.”\(^{42}\) This identification added a sense of personal stake to the conflict. A comparison could be drawn between the situation in Kosovo, an autonomous region within a larger state with an ethnically

\(^{38}\) «в конечном счёте НАТО предприняла одностороннюю и беспрецедентную в послевоенной истории акцию: 24 марта 1999 г. ВВС Альянса приступили к бомбардировкам Союзной Республики Югославии.» Torkunov, 198.

\(^{39}\) «кто когда, на каком уровне должен принимать решение о том, что все политические методы урегулирования ситуации исчерпаны, и необходимо применить военную силу.» Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Norris, 15.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Forsberg, 337.
diverse demography and a history of conflict amongst its population, to racially diverse and unstable regions within Russia itself. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov voiced this very concern during negotiations by pointing out that “there are many Kosovos in Russia.” Ivanov was probably referring specifically to the Chechen Republic, which had gained de facto independence from the Russian Federation after a two-year war from 1994–1996. The conflict in Chechnya demonstrated Russian failure to quell separatist rebellions in its ethnic republics and bring them under federal control. If NATO had no qualms about initiating military activity in a region such as Kosovo where ethnic tensions had led to conflict, then it seemed fully possible that NATO could similarly intervene in a region such as Chechnya within Russian borders.

The reasons for strong Russian opposition against direct military involvement by NATO in Kosovo were many and multifaceted, but, in the end, they all proved to be inconsequential as NATO approved a preliminary airstrike and later deployed ground troops.

**Enlargement Phase II**

In the months after the conflict in Kosovo, Russia underwent a significant political transformation when Yeltsin resigned his post for health reasons on December 31, 1999, three months before elections, and Vladimir Putin assumed presidential power for the remainder of Yeltsin’s term. Putin officially became president of the Russian Federation after his victory in the 2000 election. In terms of foreign policy, Putin was of the opinion that “the ‘younger brother politics’ from the side of the U.S. and Europe, and also the practice of Western handouts, should be done away with.” He accused the United States and Europe of treating Russia as one would a “little brother.”

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43 Igor Ivanov as quoted in Norris, xxiv.
44 «политикой младшего брата» со стороны США и Европы, а также с практикой западных подачек должно было быть покончено.» Morozov, 32.
Putin’s first conflict of interest with NATO came in 2002 at the Prague Summit when several ex-Soviet satellite states were formally invited to join NATO. The second phase of enlargement had already begun six years before at the Madrid Summit in 1996, but was not formalized until 2002.45 There were seven candidates: Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, and, most significantly, three Baltic states—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—that had once been republics of the Soviet Union. Latvia and Estonia would become the first alliance members to immediately border Russia. NATO had pushed its way right up to the Russia’s doorstep. When consulted about his opinion on the matter of NATO’s enlargement, Putin issued the following statement: “I am sure that no country in the world would experience ‘warm feelings’ in connection with the growth of the military bloc to which it does not belong.”46 Russia again opposed the expansion of NATO (albeit this disapproval was expressed with less extreme rhetoric than in 1997) and once more its view proved inconsequential when seven new member states were officially accepted into NATO in 2004. For more than a decade, NATO had consistently ignored Russian policy preferences, and the second phase of NATO enlargement was no exception.

Conclusion

Ever since Yeltsin met in the woods with the presidents of Belarus and Ukraine on December 8, 1991, and signed the Belavezha Accords, officially dissolving the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has struggled not only to establish a new internal system of government and free market economy, but also to redefine its role in international politics. Russia’s relationship with NATO and its member states has been particularly strained. The most significant events in

45 Kirschbaum, 209.
46 «Я уверен, что ни одно государство в мире не испытывало бы 'теплых чувств' в связи с разрастанием военного блока, в котором оно не состоит.» Vladimir Putin as quoted in Morozov, 145.
the history of the twenty-five year relationship between NATO and Russia include those discussed above: the continued existence of NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the two main phases of NATO enlargement, and NATO’s military intervention during the war in Kosovo. Analysis of these events demonstrates an obvious disconnect between NATO and Russia, perhaps stemming from residual Cold War ideas about Russian and American power politics, but also because NATO ignores Russian concerns during negotiations. Russia vehemently opposed the first phase of NATO’s eastward expansion, fought bitterly against the alliance’s military operations in Kosovo, and spoke out in opposition to the second phase of enlargement which brought NATO’s political and military infrastructure right up to Russia’s western border. The outcome of each event therefore supports the argument that, although Russia’s opinion on these matters was perhaps noted and possibly even considered during NATO’s preliminary deliberations, Russian preferences ultimately had no influence on NATO’s decisions.

The fact that NATO has generally disregarded Russia in matters of international significance over the last twenty-five years explains why Russia is still not a member of NATO. Although NATO has never specifically attempted to alienate Russia, it can be argued that NATO has repeatedly marginalized Russia by refusing to factor in Russian policy preferences when making decisions. Moreover, although Russia and NATO have successfully worked together on multiple occasions, including during the second half of the war in Kosovo and the post-9/11 war on terror, this cooperation is definitively one-sided. In other words, assistance was usually unidirectional: Russia would work with NATO on issues that the alliance deemed important, but NATO would not reciprocate, especially if the two sides were in disagreement on the issue at hand. As a result, NATO established a precedent of non-assistance in matters more pertinent to
Russia, which therefore concluded that the pursuit of its own interests would be a strictly solitary endeavor. This arguably dubious treatment of Russia by NATO has laid the groundwork for several events in the recent past, including Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008 and Russia’s most recent military action in Crimea and Ukraine.

The possibility for further research in the area of NATO-Russian relations is ample and the results potentially enlightening if these studies can provide insight into how NATO’s relationship with Russia affects foreign policy. For example, it would be instructive to consider whether the nature of NATO-Russian relations has increased Russia’s sense of political and cultural alienation. Russia is still extremely relevant in the world today. It thus remains paramount for American leadership to understand what specifically informs Russian foreign policy decisions.

Works Cited


