

Bigger is Better?

Re-evaluating NATO Enlargement in the Post-Cold War Period

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance has grown substantially from its pre-1990 boundary between the two Germanys to encompass 15 new members with its border pressing eastward toward the former Soviet states and up to Russia proper. At the same time, East-West relations have sunk from a high point in the 1990s to a new low unseen since the Cold War culminating in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Top-ranking officials on both sides of the Atlantic cautioned successive U.S. administrations against heedlessly seeking to admit new members into NATO for fear that it could, as Russian leaders repeatedly warned it would, create mistrust among Russia and its allies and consign Europe once more to a posture of conflict. NATO's history with Russia and its predecessor state, the concerns of past officials with alliance enlargement, and the consistent and open suspicion of NATO in Russia serve to illuminate the current conflict in Ukraine and lingering security issues in Europe. Consequently, it calls into question past decisions surrounding NATO, gives weight to the current debate around the Ukraine war, and lends perspective regarding the best framework of European security going forward.

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“The End of History” – that’s what State Department policy planner and RAND analyst, Francis Fukuyama, declared in 1989.¹ He was not without cause. Recent years had, after all, seen the signing of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. This, Fukuyama believed, signified the 20th century “paroxysm of violence” giving way to “an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” with the “total exhaustion of viable systemic alternatives.”² Indeed, the early Post-Cold War period saw unprecedented superpower cooperation in spite of the asymmetrical rebalancing of power. Though the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact disintegrated in the 1991, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continued to expand, beginning with a reunited Germany in 1990. Even so, the newly formed Russian Federation cooperated extensively with the alliance throughout the 1990s, including a vital role in ending the Bosnian War.³ To contemporary onlookers, it must have seemed that Fukuyama’s words were holding firm among old rivals in the realm of international security.

Fast-forward to February 24, 2022, and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine appears to have finally shattered this idyllic vision already sullied by the Chechen Wars, Georgian War, and Crimean Annexation. In a fit of irony, Vladimir Putin, the Russian president overseeing the conflict, has attributed the invasion to the very NATO expansion once trumpeted

¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Charlie Campbell, “A More Powerful NATO Is Emerging. That Might Not Be A Good Thing,” *Time Magazine*, June 29, 2022.

as liberalism's triumph.⁴ In spite of Fukuyama's claims, history goes on, and recent events have proven its lessons as vital as ever. Thus, as Sweden, Finland, and even Ukraine stand poised to enter the alliance, policymakers must look to prior NATO expansion for insight. An analysis of the arguments surrounding Post-Cold War NATO expansion, and the proceeding outcomes, sheds great light on the current crisis and the future of the European security framework.

Any analysis of the role of NATO in the current European security crisis must extend from an understanding of the alliance's origins, and how it has evolved beyond them. NATO was founded with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty by the United States, Canada, and the original ten European members on 4 April 1949.⁵ Articles 1-3 of the treaty established the purview and spirit of the organization. The "Parties undertake...to settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means," to "strengthen...their free institutions" and "encourage economic collaboration," and to "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."⁶ In short, the treaty lays the foundation of the alliance in the political, economic, and military realms upon the principles of peace, liberalism, and collective security respectively.

History sheds further light on the reasons for creating such an alliance and crystallizes its more practical purposes. Lord Hasting Lionel Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO, defined the alliance far more realistically, and more succinctly, than the North Atlantic Treaty. In his words, NATO was created to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans

⁴ "Address by the President of the Russian Federation – February 21, 2022," *President of Russia*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

⁵ "A Short History of NATO," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm.

⁶ "The North Atlantic Treaty – Official Text," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

down.”⁷ The alliance kept the United States in by adding a continuing security dimension to the economic-oriented Marshall Plan for post-WWII recovery, thus avoiding the dangerous power vacuum that would have developed if the United States withdrew again into isolationism.⁸

Germany was kept down in a twofold manner. First, the military strength of NATO accompanying the economic aid of the Marshall program assured West Germany’s (FRG) continued cooperation with its former enemies.⁹ Later, as the threat of Soviet Russia grew, the tenuous issue of German rearmament was resolved with the FRG joining NATO in 1955 under the stipulation that its military force be placed fully under alliance control.¹⁰

Thus, with the United States in and Germany controlled, the continuing purpose of NATO was indeed to “keep the Soviet Union out” by preventing its expansion further into Europe. At the time of the alliance’s founding, there was cause for concern. Soviet-backed communists stood to threaten precarious democratic governments throughout Europe. In 1948 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia overthrew the nation’s democratic government, aided by the U.S.S.R. The Soviets themselves reacted to the consolidation of the FRG by blockading West Berlin in 1948. Indeed, lessons from the Berlin airlift demonstrated the threat of privation to security, and thus highlighted the concurrent need for an economic *and* security framework to maintain a favorable peace in Europe, a fact that drove the creation of NATO that same year.¹¹

With the accession of the FRG to NATO in 1955, the rival Warsaw Pact was formed under

⁷ “NATO Leaders – Lord Ismay,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm.

⁸ “Short History of NATO.”

⁹ Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 217-218.

¹⁰ “Germany and NATO,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_185912.htm.

¹¹ “Short History of NATO.”

Soviet leadership.¹² Thus, the Iron Curtain descended in earnest over a world split in two, and the vitality of NATO was cemented.

While Articles 1-3 demonstrate the driving ideals of NATO forged by its Cold War origin, the remainder of the treaty underscores the breadth of force the alliance sanctions and its outlook toward expansion. Articles 5 and 10 specifically have proven to be points of contention in international discourse up to the present European conflict. Article 10, which pertains to expansion, reads, “The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.”¹³ From the beginning, this cast the alliance into a framework that could expand throughout Europe, which NATO’s adversaries have chafed to the present.¹⁴

Article 5 states that, “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them...shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them...will assist the Party or Parties so attacked.”¹⁵ Thus, Article 5 guarantees the security of every member by the pledge to turn the collective defense capacity of the entire alliance against any aggressor, hence “collective security.”¹⁶ Since NATO’s inception, this has guaranteed any member the theoretically limitless support of some of the most powerful militaries on earth, most notably the United States. Moreover, although this support is meant to be proportional in nature, the NATO doctrines of “Massive Retaliation” and later “Mutually

¹² “Germany and NATO.”

¹³ “The North Atlantic Treaty.”

¹⁴ “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” *President of Russia*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

¹⁵ “The North Atlantic Treaty.”

¹⁶ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 281.

Assured Destruction” have demonstrated that nuclear force is included in this potential calculus of defense.¹⁷

Strategically speaking, these measures taken together mean that NATO may admit members at will, albeit by unanimous vote, and that any new member admitted has full conventional and nuclear backing from the West. Any offense against a nation backed by such force would, consequently, precipitate an untenable (and probably unwinnable) conflict. This notion continues to have sweeping implications for the balance of security and influence in Europe and beyond. It also underscores the current conflict in Ukraine and successive membership bids of Finland and Sweden.¹⁸

Of course, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union marking the end of the Cold War, NATO initially struggled with a lack of purpose in the 1990s. Its original mission had been fulfilled, its former adversary had disintegrated, and questions of redefining security in Europe left some wondering if the alliance should even continue to exist. Indeed, even as the Cold War drew to a close, U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev discussed future collaborative security agreements to break the tense bipolarity of the preceding half-century.¹⁹ With tensions in Europe easing and former Warsaw Pact members in eastern Europe eager to join the West, U.S. Senator Richard Lugar astutely quipped that the common denominator of all the new security problems in Europe is that they all lie “beyond NATO’s current borders,” and thus that NATO must go

¹⁷ “Short History of NATO.”

¹⁸ John Henley, “Sweden and Finland make moves to join NATO,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/sweden-and-finland-make-moves-to-join-nato>.

¹⁹ Michael Beschloss & Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War*, First ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 168-172; and James Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev’s Adaptability, Reagan’s Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (New York, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 111, 199.

“out of area or out of business.”²⁰ Then-Senator Joseph Biden concurred, stating that “approving enlargement was essentially a referendum on the Alliance itself.”²¹

The alliance would do just that, redefining both the scope of its purpose and geographical boundaries. One key aspect of this new role for NATO harkened back to the original ideals expressed in the North Atlantic Treaty of strengthening democracy and market economies, alongside conventional security. In the United States, the Clinton administration effectively saw the security allure of NATO membership as a powerful incentive for prospective members to foster democratic institutions and free market enterprise. NATO would add a security dimension to the political and economic efforts of such institutions as the European Union and International Monetary Fund to bring former Soviet satellites into the western European community.²² There was even precedent for this new role. Democracy and market liberalization were similarly fostered in postwar Germany through the balance of economic aid via the Marshall Plan and the security of the Allies and NATO.²³

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell summarized this metamorphosis in addressing new members in 2004, saying that “for most of its existence, NATO has been concerned mainly with the defense of common territory,” but was now “concerned mainly with the defense of common

²⁰ “NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business; A Call for U.S. Leadership to Revive and Redefine the Alliance,” *The Richard G. Lugar Senatorial Papers*, <https://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/lugar/items/show/342#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-2574%2C-377%2C10221%2C7495>.

²¹ Zoltan Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion: Four Case Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11-12.

²² Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 13-14.

²³ “Germany and NATO”; and Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

values and common ideas.”²⁴ Underscoring this was the increasing engagement of NATO resources and personnel in terrorism response, humanitarian relief, and the promotion of alliance ideals through public diplomacy campaigns. Such campaigns involve NATO-disseminated media and hosting educational and entertainment opportunities such as workshops, conferences, and sporting events in coordination with affiliated nongovernmental organizations in partner countries. There are even youth-centered activities, from drawing contests to full simulations. All of these are meant to embody a “softer side” of NATO that is cosmopolitan and civil-society oriented, fostering support for democratic ideals and consequently the alliance itself.²⁵

While this new public diplomacy highlights the new *depth* of NATO influence in societies throughout its network, further discussion within the alliance belays the increasing geographic *breadth* of NATO concern. Even before the alliance admitted any new members after the Cold War, its Partnership for Peace was inaugurated in 1994 to facilitate “interaction and cooperation” with former Warsaw Pact members. The 1997 NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council further expanded outreach to include the alliance’s former Cold War rival.²⁶ In 2004, the NATO Response Force was developed, comprising 20,000 troops that can be readied within five days to deploy “anywhere on the globe.”²⁷ That same year, the alliance launched its Mediterranean Partnership with seven African partner nations, and the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative with four Middle Eastern nations represented. By 2005, NATO had ships patrolling the Mediterranean through Gibraltar, headed relief missions stretching from New Orleans to Kashmir, and provided security the Olympic Games in Athens. Secretary General George

²⁴ Merje Kuus, “Cosmopolitan Militarism? Spaces of NATO Expansion,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 41, no. 3 (March 2009): 545–62, 551.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 552-555.

²⁶ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 10.

²⁷ Kuus, “Cosmopolitan Militarism,” 551.

Robertson defined the new reach of NATO and its partnership network as “46 countries from Vancouver to Vladivostok...bound together in the world’s largest permanent coalition.”²⁸

This expansive view of NATO domain remains official policy. The NATO 2030 initiative, outlined in 2021, includes measures involving cyber security, technological research and development, and climate change alongside traditional defense considerations. It also highlights a desire to “forge new engagements including in Africa, Asia, and Latin America,” and the authoritarian threat posed by China, all of which lay far beyond the bounds of Europe.²⁹ NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept echoes these global concerns. Though the Russian Federation’s attack on Ukraine takes top priority, further threats considered include global terrorism, “instability in Africa and the Middle East,” and the “malicious” operations of the People’s Republic of China.³⁰ All of this is relevant to the understanding that, even beyond physical geographic expansion, NATO has enlarged its scope and purpose to a global scale. These developments have, in the words of detractors and hostile actors, factored into souring relations and conflicts up to the present.

None of these developments, however, have contributed so heavily to the modern contentions around NATO as the physical enlargement of the alliance by the recent addition of new members. Certainly, NATO admitted new members during the Cold War, with Greece, Turkey, the FRG, and Spain joining the founding twelve.³¹ Nonetheless, it was not until after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the end of the Cold War that further alliance expansion stood

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 554.

²⁹ “NATO 2030: United for a New Era,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf.

³⁰ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf.

³¹ “Short History of NATO.”

to substantially alter the balance of power on the continent. The first such case would be a reunified Germany, beginning NATO's eastward growth with lasting ramifications.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and relations between Moscow and Washington quickly warming, initial positions on German reunification were largely deferred, with a slow process preferred so as not to upset the tenuous détente. Similarly, hesitance and hostility surrounded any notion of a unified Germany in NATO.³² However, with tens of thousands of refugees pouring into the FRG, the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) approaching insolvency, and wide support for FRG Chancellor Kohl's 10-Point Program for reunification, the United States and U.S.S.R. quickly realized the need to move forward with the discussion or risk being left behind. Indeed, by early 1990 Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev declared unification "to be ultimately inescapable."³³ Parlay between Washington, Moscow, and Bonn soon produced the means by which this inescapable issue would be decided: the 2+4 plan involving the two Germanys and the four World War II allies: Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union.³⁴

Although the question of speedy German unification seemed increasingly and decidedly answered in the affirmative, the position of this new Germany in the European security framework grew more contested. FRG foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher cautioned against moving NATO eastward by "incorporating the part of Germany...forming the GDR in NATO's military structures."³⁵ He preferred a solution of forging a "new all-European security

³² Beschloss & Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 184.

³³ Kristina Spohr, "Precluded or Precedent-Setting?: The "NATO Enlargement Question" in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012): 4-54, 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12; and Beschloss & Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 184-185.

³⁵ Spohr, "Precluded or Precedent Setting," 14.

framework” from the Warsaw Pact and NATO beginning with a jointly affiliated Germany³⁶ In practice, this largely meant somehow maintaining the status quo with a paradoxically unified Germany hosting dual alliances. This solution, however, was politically unviable, and economically questionable on account of a desperate need on the Soviet side to scale back defense costs.³⁷ Another early proposal was a neutral Germany in the same role that Austria maintained throughout the Cold War. This notion had the advantage of allowing a unified Germany to maintain a unified security structure, albeit an isolated one. It would also safely allow for Soviet defense reallocations. Nonetheless, Bonn and Washington resoundingly rejected this position.³⁸ Moscow had its own reservations about the plan, as it would mean Germany providing for its own security without the constraint of NATO, stoking Russian fears of resurgent German nationalism and militarism.³⁹

Soon, full NATO membership for a unified Germany became the decided U.S and German position, and the question came down to assuaging Moscow’s reservations with acceding to the arrangement. When U.S. Secretary of State James Baker suggested that a unified Germany was best “tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward,” Gorbachev agreed only that “any extension of the territory of NATO would be unacceptable.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Baker and FRG foreign minister Genscher had agreed earlier to press the position on the grounds that there was “no interest in extending NATO to the east,” that is, to

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Beschloss & Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 183.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 186.

further encourage the further defection of Warsaw Pact states.⁴¹ Alongside these notions, the United States had hosted an American-Soviet summit in Washington in 1987 to secure agreements on nuclear and conventional arms reductions, pan-European cooperation, and commercial trade. These agreements would provide the political headway Gorbachev so desired as a means to “reward him for his willingness to tolerate a united Germany in NATO.”⁴² In the end, owing to domestic and international pressures, Gorbachev allowed a compromise stipulating that no non-German NATO forces would be deployed in the former GDR.⁴³ Thus, a unified Germany maintained NATO membership in 1990, the first alliance expansion since the Cold War’s end.⁴⁴

Far from setting the eastern boundary of NATO, however, this admission opened the door for further expansion before the decade’s end. Throughout his administration, U.S. President Bill Clinton attempted to balance two courses of foreign policy in Europe: Russian engagement and NATO enlargement.⁴⁵ Indeed, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright echoed this commitment to NATO’s “internal adaptation” at a North Atlantic Council meeting in Brussels in 1997, confirming that the alliance would “begin accession talks” and “accept new

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴³ Steven Pifer, “Did NATO Promise NOT to Enlarge? Gorbachev Says “No,” *Brookings*, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/11/06/did-nato-promise-not-to-enlarge-gorbachev-says-no/>.

⁴⁴ “Germany and NATO.”

⁴⁵ “Summary Report on One-on-One Meeting between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, May 10, 1995, 10:10 a.m.-1:19 p.m., St. Catherine's Hall, the Kremlin,” *Wilson Center Digital Archive*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/summary-report-one-one-meeting-between-presidents-clinton-and-yeltsin-may-10-1995-1010-am>; and Bill Clinton, “I Tried to Put Russia on Another Path,” *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/bill-clinton-nato-expansion-ukraine/629499/>.

members.”⁴⁶ Such commitments entailed admitting new members to the alliance for the first time since the Cold War’s end. Specifically, three new East-Central European countries would join NATO: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.⁴⁷ These nations comprised the Visegrad Group, alongside newly independent Slovakia. By 1999, less than a decade after the end of the Warsaw Pact and dissolution of the Soviet Union, these Visegrad group countries became full NATO members. The move would prove momentous, though far from garnering widespread support, rather invited great public debate concerning multiple issues on both sides of enlargement.⁴⁸

Officially, Deputy Secretary of State under Clinton, Strobe Talbott, offered three outstanding reasons for NATO’s decision to accept new members: the continuing need for collective security, the strengthening of democratic institutions through the incentive of membership, and the promotion of peaceful resolution among new and prospective members⁴⁹ Many other factors were also debated, pitting many political magnates at the time against one another along puzzling lines. For example, such disparate figures as Bill Clinton, Jesse Helms, and Henry Kissinger came out in favor of enlargement while George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and Robert McNamara rose in opposition.⁵⁰ Among the more straightforward contentions to NATO expansion was cost.

⁴⁶ “Statement by Secretary Madeleine Albright, North Atlantic Council Special Ministerial Meeting, Brussels 18 Feb. 1997,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1997/s970218a.htm>.

⁴⁷ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; and Kenneth Weisbrode, “Russia in American Eyes: Some Telling Letters Offer a Lesson for Today,” *H-Diplo Essay 424*, <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E424.pdf>, 5-6.

⁴⁹ Talbott, Strobe, “Why NATO Should Grow,” *Balkan Forum*, 3:4 (December 1995), 28-29; and Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16-17; and Michael McGwire, “NATO Expansion: ‘A Policy Error of Historic Importance,’” *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998), 23.

According to proponents of expansion within the Clinton administration, NATO enlargement seemed a financial “bargain.”⁵¹ Lower estimates from the Department of Defense pegged the cost of adding these three new members at only \$150 to \$200 million a year, which seemed a worthwhile investment in burgeoning democracies, especially factored against total alliance costs. Moreover, NATO leaders thought the U.S. portion of such costs would equal \$2 billion total, and be stretched over ten years, with the alliance fairly divvying the overall sum cost estimated at only \$27-35 billion.⁵²

Many contemporary estimates, however, theorized a vastly higher cost and far more effort needed. A 1997 CATO Institute report chided proponents of smaller estimates for making undetailed “macro” assumptions with an eye not towards realistic costs, but towards “affordability.” The same report then estimated the various necessary military improvements and came to a total figure of \$69 billion, of which the U.S. share would be \$7 billion, more than triple the DoD estimate. Moreover, this estimate assumes, as the DoD did, that the new members, fragile economies and democratic institutions notwithstanding, would shoulder most of the cost by increasing annual defense budgets by 60%, with increased military investment nearing 600%. Even then, this fails to take into account the possibility of a resumed threat requiring the large-scale NATO force deployment, a very real possibility driving total costs towards \$125-\$167 billion.⁵³ Indeed, comments behind closed doors pointed to a DoD “imperative to low-ball the figures” to “reassure Congress as well as the Russians.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² Ivan Eland, “The High Cost of NATO Expansion: Clearing the Administration’s Smoke Screen.” Cato Institute, 1997, 17; and Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 13.

⁵³ Eland, “The High Cost of NATO Expansion,” 17-18.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.

Though the question of undue costs is as important today as it was then, larger and more telling contention stemmed from disagreements over the political ramifications of NATO enlargement, echoing to the present. The glaring issue with expanding the Cold War alliance would be the reaction of the Russians. Supporters in the Clinton administration assured skeptics that the Russians were being consulted in making this move, with an eye towards mitigating ill will.⁵⁵ Many also contended that with the Cold War over, NATO could now be viewed by Moscow outside of its former adversarial stature. Rather, they argued, NATO would act to secure volatile areas of Europe formerly under Soviet supervision without the need for large Russian security expenditures. This, in turn, would promote security, assure a hesitant Russia that Germany would not resume influence in the region, and assure the hesitant Germans the same of Russia.⁵⁶ In this way, it ought to have been viewed as a friendly alliance shouldering a recovering Russia's former defense burdens. A concurrent political realist dimension argued that enlargement acted as an insurance claim against Russia reverting to imperialist ambition, and that no Cold War agreements gave NATO an obligation not to move east.⁵⁷ Indeed, heads of former Warsaw Pact nations, such as Czech president Václav Havel, eagerly supported the U.S. stance on enlargement for just this reason.⁵⁸

Invariably, many found fault with this rosy outlook and believed the Russians would as well. Yale University's John Gaddis criticized the policy early on as a major violation of critical

⁵⁵ "Statement by Secretary Madeleine Albright, North Atlantic Council Meeting, Brussels."

⁵⁶ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16; and John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 83.

⁵⁸ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 569-570.

“principles of strategy.”⁵⁹ Among these, he cites critically the “*magnanimous treatment of defeated adversaries*,” the most egregious breach of the Clinton administration’s policy of enlargement. Drawing upon history, he relates the successful settlement of the Napoleonic Wars and World War II by bringing “vanquished adversaries...back into the international system as full participants in postwar security structures.”⁶⁰ He compares the idea of expanding NATO at the expense and exclusion of the Russians rather to the historical failure of the World War I settlement to reconcile the defeated Germany and Russia, creating in both dangerous instability and lingering hostility which, he recounts, led only back to war. The Cato Institute’s Stanley Kober offers a similar critique in citing the 1925 Locarno Treaty meant as a conciliatory gesture towards Germany, only to be rebuffed by nationalists and breached by Adolf Hitler remilitarizing the French-occupied Rhineland.⁶¹

Indeed, many critics of enlargement envisioned several more magnanimous approaches to the future of Europeans security. One very likely solution was in enlarging the European Union (EU), not NATO. Gaddis himself stated that in his estimation, “sources of insecurity...lie much more in the economic than the military realm,” and that the “obvious instrument” to remedy these was the EU.⁶² Though conditions for joining the EU proved more strenuous than those for NATO, most Eastern European states were very eager to join the Union for economic reasons. Indeed, many speculated that an expanding European Union would tie former Soviet

⁵⁹ John Gaddis, “NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy?,” *H-Diplo Essay 417*, <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E417.pdf>, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Stanley Kober, “NATO Expansion and the Danger of a Second Cold War,” Cato Institute, 1996, 5.

⁶² Gaddis, “NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy,” 4.

satellites into the international community, foster market liberalization, *and* circumvent Russian security fears.⁶³

Another favored institution for conciliatory cooperation was the NATO-affiliated Partnership for Peace (PfP). The PfP was envisioned as a means for former Eastern Bloc nations to collaborate with NATO on security and defense measures in an official capacity without the need or prospect for full alliance membership.⁶⁴ Critically, as Gaddis notes, it also prominently *included* Russia.⁶⁵ He was not alone in favoring this approach. Andrew Goodpaster, former NATO Commander in Chief, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, and a major contributor to the PfP's inception, wrote to President Clinton in 1995 warning against heedless NATO expansion. Rather, he writes that the PfP "will – if made the future centerpiece of NATO – provide a much superior alternative. It responds to today's real security needs...rather than bowing to vague fears and historical enmities that would perpetuate past divisions."⁶⁶ He pegs the future success of the PfP to developing a "common forum on the basis of full unity and equality" rather than the then-present model favoring the full NATO members. This, he believed, would "allow Russia to be a full participant with a role appropriate to its situation size," a crucial factor to future European security and collaboration.⁶⁷ This prospect, after all, echoed the Russian view espoused by then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin himself that his nation's size,

⁶³ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁵ Gaddis, "NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy," 4.

⁶⁶ Weisbrode, "Russia in American Eyes," 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

military capacity, and nuclear arms made it “different from all other countries” in PfP and NATO discussions.⁶⁸

A final contemporary discussion around the prospects of NATO expansion centered on Moscow’s reaction. In the ideal world of enlargement proponents, the process would hem Europe together from the center east, including Russia as either an eventual member or at least a willing partner, for which the PfP already demonstrated precedence. Realists similarly contended that the now-weakened Russia had little alternative to compliance and cooperation with the West, and that expanding the alliance only redoubled this insurance against resurgence.⁶⁹ Gaddis, however, points to one such alternative in America’s own history. He feared that a resentful Russia might take the route of Nixon and Kissinger and “tilt toward China.”⁷⁰

He notes the hypothetical compatibility of “Russia’s capacity to export military technology and China’s ability to produce marketable consumer goods” in establishing a viable economic framework outside of that of the West.⁷¹ He even relates the historical precedence of such a move, given the Sino-Soviet alliance of the 1950s. Finally, he predicts it as the inevitable course of balance of power theory: “if country A feels itself threatened by country B, it is apt to align itself with country C.”⁷² Indeed, even in 2000, scarcely a year after the first round of

⁶⁸ “Cable, U.S. Embassy, Bonn, to the Secretaries of State and Defense, 'May 12 Kohl/Yeltsin Talks,’” *Wilson Center Digital Archives*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/cable-us-embassy-bonn-secretaries-state-and-defense-may-12-kohlyeltsin-talks>; and “One-on-One Meeting between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin.”

⁶⁹ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 15.

⁷⁰ Gaddis, “NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy,” 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

NATO expansion, a Russian poll demonstrated a perception that China was “a more reliable partner than the United States.”⁷³ This would prove an alarming precedent.

In spite of heated contention on several fronts from various policy circles, the United States and NATO went forward with the policy of enlargement in the following decades. Since the Visegrad Group members were admitted in 1999, eleven more members have joined the alliance, with the last, North Macedonia, entering as recently as 2020.⁷⁴ However, while the alliance continued to grow in the Post-Cold War era, so too did evidence of less hopeful predictions regarding enlargement policy come to fruition. Sources as diverse as public statements and academic studies have shown that costs, liberalization, and regional peace and security have not exclusively benefitted from a larger NATO.

Even in the first round of expansion, the unpreparedness of new member militaries demonstrated the challenge of NATO’s move east. The armed forces of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were “poorly equipped, inadequately...trained... and insufficiently reformed,” on account of their embedded “ways of thinking and problem-solving inherited from the Warsaw Pact.”⁷⁵ Leaders in these countries needed constant prodding to increase defense budgets in line with NATO standards, in spite of which none met the standard 2% GDP defense expenditure standard even a decade later, though it must be said many former members also failed to do so in this period.⁷⁶

With those expenditures made, these new members often bought costly and impractical modern systems, such as western fighter jets, while lacking even rudimentary equipment. For all

⁷³ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 37.

⁷⁴ “Short History of NATO.”

⁷⁵ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 26.

⁷⁶ Jarosław Wołkonowski, “NATO Defense Expenditures in 1949-2017,” *University of Białystok – SHS Web of Conferences* (2018): 7,9.

of the western investment, with the U.S. footing the most, these countries contributed little to early post-Cold War joint NATO operations in Yugoslavia and beyond. All told, initial showings proved the worst predictions true about cost and readiness, inverting NATO General Secretary Lord Robertson's 2000 NATO desire by demonstrating members that "only consume," and do not yet "generate security."⁷⁷ Though financial readiness and combat capability did improve, the new members remain among the lowest contributors to the alliance by amount.⁷⁸

Later additions, namely the Baltic and Eastern European states admitted in 2004, would lend credence to another critique: that NATO expansion would be unnecessary for or ineffective at fostering democracy in new member states. Indeed, democratization took on a more central role in NATO considerations in the post-Cold War era, as evidenced not leastwise by twelve instances of "democracy" and similar terms in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, compared to zero instances in 1968.⁷⁹ However, NATO membership application and admission seem not to have affected democratization greatly, at least not singly. A 2020 study conducted by Paul Poast of the University of Chicago charted membership status with Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) scores to demonstrate this very fact. His conclusion was that in and of itself, there proved little correlation between the NATO membership process and positive changes in LDI standings.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, new member nations and others have demonstrated an increasing LDI score since the end of the Cold War, as the data shows. Correlation with this increase, however, was

⁷⁷ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 28.

⁷⁸ Wołkonowski, "NATO Defense Expenditures," 10.

⁷⁹ Paul Poast & Alexandra Chinchilla, "Good for Democracy? Evidence from the 2004 NATO Expansion," *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (06, 2020): 471.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 483, 486-487.

not found with NATO membership, but rather with aspirant status for the European Union.⁸¹ The EU in the same period had been “deeply involved in fostering democracy, enhancing market reforms, and supporting a plethora of projects in Eastern European states.”⁸² Indeed, many European states seemed to have gravitated towards NATO as an easy step toward EU accession, since NATO requirements are less strenuous.⁸³ Owing to this, Poast’s study correlates its findings in stipulating that NATO may thus play a secondary role in democratization, but the direct correlation between EU membership status and LDI score is much stronger.⁸⁴ Thus, with EU membership more conducive to political and economic development while less likely to aggravate security tensions, the question of NATO’s utility in the region was certainly left open by early expansion.

Security tensions, in turn, belay the greatest concern and most pressing critique of NATO expansion since the end of the Cold War: the fallout with Russia. For all attempts by the alliance to purportedly distance itself from its former Cold War posture, souring relations with its former adversary owing to several international incidents have demonstrated this critique the most prescient. The first demonstration of this new animosity was in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. When NATO entered the conflict over Russia’s misgivings and began its aerial campaign, the Russian prime minister cancelled a U.S.-trip midflight to Washington in outrage.⁸⁵ During the conflict, American General Wesley Clark nearly caused an international incident seeking to deny

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 31.

⁸³ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁴ Poast, “Good for Democracy?,” 483, 486-487.

⁸⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 123.

Russian troops an airlift into Kosovo.⁸⁶ More importantly, the aftermath of the alliance's intervention in the Balkans seemed to give light in Russia to the idea that this new NATO was far from benign. Worse, this souring opinion came not only from Russian policymakers, but also from the Russian public. When polled, Russians believed NATO's campaign a mistake and that NATO was the main aggressor by substantial margins of 90% and 65% respectively.⁸⁷ Combined with Russia's 2002 withdrawal from the START II arms agreement on account of U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, relations between the former adversaries were uneasy.⁸⁸

At the same time, Russian relations with China strengthened. A poll of Russian elites in December 2000 showed that a majority "Considered China a more reliable partner than the United States" amidst bitterness over NATO's intervention in Kosovo.⁸⁹ In July 2001, China and Russia signed the first "friendship treaty" between them in half a century.⁹⁰ At the same time, relations between China and the United States were cooling from the days of Nixon's Cold War outreach. Though the Clinton administration had largely attempted to placate the Chinese, owing to economic interests, the inadvertent bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo war fomented anger and animosity that would only increase in following years.⁹¹

To be certain, these tensions boded ill for U.S.-Russian relations but did not create the open conflict and ire of the present. These would arise in the decades after, with Vladimir Putin's

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁸⁸ "START II Treaty," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-between-united-states-america-and-union-soviet-socialist-republics-strategic-offensive-reductions-start-ii/>.

⁸⁹ Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion*, 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, 123.

ascension to power in Russia over Boris Yeltsin. Putin was, even in 2000, far less dedicated to the development of true democracy in Post-Soviet Russia than his predecessor. Rather, his nominal “managed democracy,” or thinly veiled autocracy, would hamper relations with the West, compounding over a stream of international interventions pitting NATO and Moscow at loggerheads.⁹² The first of these was Putin’s continuation of conflict against the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Russia had fought against Chechen independence from 1994-1996 during Yeltsin’s presidency, failing to retake the region though securing an uneasy peace treaty. In 1999, Russia invaded in violation of the treaty, securing decisive victory through a scorched earth strategy culminating in the destruction of the capital, Grozny.⁹³ Though the Clinton administration had tolerated Yeltsin’s incursion in the first war, not wanting to jeopardize Russian liberalization by international condemnation, the president spoke critically of the second, that “Russia would ‘pay a heavy price.’”⁹⁴ It should be said, however, that this instance had little to do with NATO prospects, but it demonstrated the new Russian president’s aggression and the rift it would create with the west.

Far worse for U.S.-Russian relations, and foreboding of future events, was the 2008 Russo-Georgia War. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the former constituent republic of Georgia had become independent and was internationally recognized as such. However, the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, comprised largely of non-ethnic Georgians, resisted joining the new state, with Russia’s support. In 2003, the Rose Revolution in Georgia brought a pro-Western president to power with an eye towards regaining the lost territories and

⁹² Ibid., 357.

⁹³ Patrick James & David Goetze, *Evolutionary Theory and Ethnic Conflict* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2001), 169.

⁹⁴ “‘Russia will pay for Chechnya,’ December 7, 1999,” *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/553304.stm>.

joining NATO. By 2008, Georgia had applied for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for NATO accession, and though no plan was extended, a statement was released confirming their eventual membership.⁹⁵ Russia vehemently opposed the move, not keen on having another direct border with the alliance.⁹⁶ When Georgian troops entered South Ossetia in 2008, Russian troops met and defeated them, and then moved into the rest of Georgia.⁹⁷ The war ended that same year, with a treaty guaranteeing the breakaway regions' independences, with Russia acting as protector.⁹⁸ For the first time since the Cold War, Russia had made good on their "opposition to post-Cold War political arrangements" by sending troops across an "internationally recognized border without permission. Then-president George W. Bush and his administration protested strongly, but offered little real response.⁹⁹ It was Post-Soviet Russia's first instance of "international aggression" in the legal sense, and it would not be the last.¹⁰⁰

The greatest display of international aggression yet by Putin's Russia, and the direct precursor to the events of 2022, began in Ukraine in 2014. In 2005, the former Soviet Republic of Ukraine had witnessed the Orange Revolution that overturned the presidency of pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich, and by 2010 the country was leaning toward democratization and EU candidacy.¹⁰¹ Ukraine had even applied for a NATO MAP alongside Georgia in 2008, though

⁹⁵ George H.W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 2010), 430-431, 433-436.

⁹⁶ "Georgia's NATO Bid Irks Russia," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6190858.stm>.

⁹⁷ Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, 359-360.

⁹⁸ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Frugal Superpower: America's Global Leadership in a Cash-Strapped Era* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 127.

⁹⁹ Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, 360; and "Bush Condemns Russia's Attack on Georgia," *CBS News*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bush-condemns-russias-attack-on-georgia/>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 362.

also failed to receive the requisite votes.¹⁰² That same year, however, Yanukovich won a legitimate electoral victory. Though nominally keeping up EU talks, by 2013 he had begun discussing the possibility of joining Russia's alternate economic bloc with Vladimir Putin in return for a substantial payout. Much of the Ukrainian public was appalled by this change of tack and by Yanukovich's autocratic and oligarchic rule modeled on that of the Russian president. Soon, mass demonstrations broke out. A potential compromise fell through when Yanukovich fled the country, and his government collapsed, with the opposition coming to power.¹⁰³ Fearing Ukrainian instability and wary of Ukraine allying itself closer to the EU and NATO, Russia sent military and paramilitary forces into Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, which already hosted a Russian naval base, in 2014. Practically "at gunpoint," a referendum on Russian accession was held in the conquered territory that, according to Russian sources, widely passed.¹⁰⁴ Russian forces, largely ununiformed, also moved into Ukraine's largely Russian-speaking Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which thereafter proclaimed independence.¹⁰⁵

The Western response was policy continuation over modification or moderation. The European Union pushed forward with its Eastern Partnership with Ukraine, signing the agreement Yanukovich had rejected on June 27, 2014. U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden visited with members of the Ukrainian government in April to express sympathy and solidarity.¹⁰⁶ The Director of the CIA, John Brennan, also visited Kyiv that month to improve security cooperation

¹⁰² Bush, *Decision Points*, 430.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 363.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 364; and Mearsheimer, "Why Ukraine Is the West's Fault," 81.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 82; and Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, 364.

¹⁰⁶ "Remarks to the Press by Vice President Joe Biden and Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk," *The White House*, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/22/remarks-press-vice-president-joe-biden-and-ukrainian-prime-minister-arse>.

with Ukraine. On top of these meetings, the United States and European Union unleashed a wave of sanctions on Russia targeting high-level government individuals and strategic banks and companies within the country. Finally, NATO declared defiantly that it remained open to new members, with Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen declaring, “No third country has a veto over NATO enlargement.”¹⁰⁷ Concurrently, NATO member foreign ministers agreed to partner with Ukraine in developing defense capabilities.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the battle lines of 2022 were already in place by the end of 2014, with each side growing increasingly wary of the other.

Constant throughout the succeeding decades of Post-Cold War deterioration has been steady Russian criticism of NATO expansion, with more recent acts of aggression citing this in justification. Even in 1990, Gorbachev predicated his acquiescence to German reunification and full NATO membership upon the idea that this would cement the alliance’s border.¹⁰⁹ In 1994, even as the Clinton Administration solidified expansion in the American policy agenda, Boris Yeltsin asked incredulously of NATO members, “why are you sowing seeds of mistrust?”¹¹⁰ Indeed, even then it was clear to observers that NATO was “certainly not building a structure different from what existed before,” but rather assuring that a “new confrontation becomes institutionalized.”¹¹¹ The momentum regained by the Russian Communist party after the fall of the Soviet Union, due in part to its anti-western stance, certainly demonstrated this. Nonetheless, the most fervent critique of NATO enlargement, and the most direct actions against it, came not from resurgent communists, but rather from a new party: United Russia led by Vladimir Putin.

¹⁰⁷ Mearsheimer, “Why Ukraine Is the West’s Fault,” 86-87.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Beschloss & Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 186.

¹¹⁰ Kober, “NATO Expansion,” 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Early in the first presidency of Vladimir Putin, it seemed that this new and capable leader of Russia might change tack on the NATO question. Though not without reservations about the alliance, Putin asked Secretary General Robertson directly in 2000, “when are you going to invite us to join...?” Indeed, before his inauguration, Putin told a BBC interviewer that it was “hard for him to visualize NATO as an enemy,” and that he sought cooperation rather than “isolation from Europe and...the civilized world.” Robertson later recounted how at the time it seemed the Russians “wanted to be part of that secure, stable prosperous west that Russia was out of at the time.” Nonetheless, even then Putin made it clear that Russia would not be “standing in line with a lot of countries that don’t matter,” but would rather consider joining “if and when Russia’s views are taken into account as those of an equal partner.”¹¹² His comment echoed Yeltsin’s prior stipulation to Clinton for continued Russia-NATO engagement. As before, the Russian president was not calling simply for the end of expansion or Russian membership, but in effect for a total recalculation of European Security offering Russia a footing equal, in his eyes, to its status.

Like the desires of Gorbachev and Yeltsin for similar restructuring, Putin’s were ignored, and further statements belayed increasing hostility. Speaking before the 2007 Munich Conference, Putin criticized the failure of NATO members to ratify the 1999 adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty, and the recent authorizations of force by NATO and the EU outside of the United Nations. Most critically, he contended, “I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust.” He then astutely asks, “Against whom is this expansion

¹¹² Jennifer Rankin, “Ex-NATO head says Putin wanted to join alliance early on in his rule,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/04/ex-nato-head-says-putin-wanted-to-join-alliance-early-on-in-his-rule>.

intended?” Putin went on to deride the wanton use of unipolar authority by the west, lackluster reciprocal commitments to arms limitations, and new walls, “virtual but...nevertheless dividing,” that were once more cutting through Europe and the world.¹¹³

Putin even linked the annexation of Crimea to NATO enlargement concerns, saying in April of 2014, “our decision in Crimea was partly due to...considerations that if we do nothing, then at some point...NATO will drag Ukraine in and they will say: ‘It doesn't have anything to do with you.’” He also expressed concern that western missile defenses positioned in the region would negate Russia’s “strategic land-based missile systems,” and was outraged at the thought that “NATO ships would have ended up in the city of Russian navy glory, Sevastopol.” Faced with this reality, Putin’s given justification for annexing part of a foreign nation was simply that Russia would “have to do something in response” to this hypothetical encroachment.¹¹⁴

One theme of particular interest for its continuity across decades of Moscow’s critique of NATO expansion is one of alleged ‘betrayal’ by the West. The underlying notion is that Russian policymakers believed that the end of the Cold War was predicated on an agreement, explicit or implied, that NATO would not expand past a reunified Germany. It was most dramatically raised by Putin at the Munich Conference, where he said, “And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact?” He went on to quote then-NATO General Secretary Woerner in a 1990 speech in which he said, “the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee.”¹¹⁵ In 2014, he echoed the same in response to actions in Crimea, saying, “they (the

¹¹³ “Speech at the Munich Conference.”

¹¹⁴ Alexei Anishchuk & Maria Kiselyova, “Putin says annexation of Crimea partly a response to NATO enlargement,” *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nato/putin-says-annexation-of-crimea-partly-a-response-to-nato-enlargement-idUSBREA3G22A20140417>.

¹¹⁵ “Speech at the Munich Conference.”

West) have lied to us many times...this happened with NATO's expansion to the East."¹¹⁶

Naturally, if the Russian President's accusation is true, it would certainly cast a sore spot on NATO enlargement, and perhaps lend credence leastwise to Russian outrage, if not to recent Russian actions. The reality, however, is complicated.

The contention around such hypothetical limitations on NATO stem from talks between the Cold War superpowers in 1989 and 1990. As stated earlier, the Russians had largely come around to the political notion of a single German state, if only by its apparent inevitability. What they had not accepted was an eastward projection of western military power, especially with the CFE treaty in the making. Indeed, this was when Secretary of State Baker claimed the west had "no interest in extending NATO to the east," to assuage these very fears. Putin's statement from Woerner also stems from this time. For this reason, former Soviet President Gorbachev is quoted as late as 2000 saying, "now half of central and eastern Europe are members, so what happened to their promises? It shows they cannot be trusted."¹¹⁷ Several Western analysts agreed, and the evidence thus mounts for a rather damning case.

Nonetheless, two nuances are lost in any blanket accusation, as many scholars have noted. The first is that all of these discussions centered principally or exclusively on Germany proper and not on NATO at large. Moreover, though these statements were floated, often to high-level Russian officials in the negotiation process, they were never codified in any officially binding agreements, nor did the Russians ask for such guarantees.¹¹⁸ Indeed, it even seems that Russian political opinion, much like that of the United States, was torn on NATO expansion for a time. In 1993, even as Deputy Secretary of State Talbott and Russian diplomat Georgiy

¹¹⁶ Pifer, "Did NATO Promise NOT to Enlarge?"

¹¹⁷ Spohr, "Precluded or Precedent Setting," 5.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Mamedov argued over NATO, Russian President Yeltsin “announced at a press conference in Warsaw that Russia had no objection to Poland joining NATO.” Though Yeltsin’s colleagues would eventually get him to backpedal, the word was out.¹¹⁹ Even Gorbachev moderated his position on German reunification talks, saying in 2014, “the topic of ‘NATO expansion’ was not discussed at all...the agreement on a final settlement with Germany said that no new military structures would be created in the eastern part of the country...It has been obeyed all these years.”¹²⁰

Why, then, has the issue remained a bitter point in east-west relations? Largely because although no *formal* agreement was reached regarding expansion, several *informal* agreements were accepted and indeed played a large part in the end of the Cold War that saw Russia voluntarily cede much. In the same 2014 interview, though admitting that no formal agreement had been breached, Gorbachev still “criticized NATO enlargement and called it a violation of the *spirit* of the assurances given Moscow in 1990.”¹²¹ Indeed, experts touting only written agreements to justify NATO expansion tend to miss several critical points. A study by Joshua Shifrinson of Texas A&M University belabors these oversights. He contends that prevailing studies focus too exclusively on developments in February 1990 and exclude the role informal agreements played in facilitating signed pledges. As such, his study contends that the U.S. explicitly discussed NATO limitation with the Soviets, offered informal guarantees of the same to assuage Soviet fears of a unified Germany in NATO, and implied such limitation in formal

¹¹⁹ Kimberly Marten, "Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 2 (06, 2018): 135-161.

¹²⁰ Pifer, “Did NATO Promise NOT to Enlarge?”

¹²¹ Ibid. (Emphasis Added).

policy regarding armed force deployment in former East Germany.¹²² Other studies have noted likewise that, whether or not formal guarantees were given, or even if NATO was the cause for Russian aggression, its expansion plays a role in the belligerent revisionism in contemporary Russian politics.¹²³

All of these elements synthesize to underscore the current crisis in relations between Russia and the west, specifically NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Alliance was founded expressly as a military counter to Soviet Russia and its allies. With the end of the Cold War, the alliance neither dissolved nor merged with its counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, but rather continued to exist unilaterally and independently. Though the dialogue that ended the Cold War saw the Soviet Union endure great territorial and military contraction culminating in its destruction, high-minded proposals of a new *bilateral* or *unified* economic and security framework for Europe never materialized. Moreover, while Russia's economy languished and democracy fizzled in the post-Soviet era, American administrations utilized NATO force over Russian objections in the Balkans and elsewhere. Simultaneously, President Clinton laid the seeds to expand NATO eastward while *excluding* Russia in violation of the spirit, if not the treaties, that ended the standoff of the past half-century. Thus, the former superpower was diminished militarily, marginalized diplomatically, witnessed the failure of liberalization, and endured economic decline. This combination of factors saw Russia pull away from the West in favor of nationalism marked by the rise of autocracy and several acts of international aggression.

¹²² Joshua Shiffrin, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016), 41-42.

¹²³ Marten, "Reconsidering NATO Expansion."

On February 24, 2022, Russian forces invaded Ukraine, beginning a strike deep into the country's territory aimed at the capital of Kyiv¹²⁴ Over 100,000 Russian troops had been assembling at the border for a purported training exercise in the month prior as Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on NATO to allow Ukraine a membership bid.¹²⁵ In response, Vladimir Putin demanded NATO pull back forces in Eastern Europe and bar Ukrainian membership outright.¹²⁶ In response, however, NATO placed its forces on standby and reinforced key countries neighboring Ukraine with additional troops, ships, and aircraft. In conjunction, Washington reiterated a continued adherence to NATO's "open door" policy; Ukraine could join if it wished. In a subsequent address, Putin declared Ukraine a critical part of Russian history under an illegitimate regime propped up by western interests¹²⁷ So, answering calls for aid from pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's Donbas region, he declared a "Special Military Operation" aimed at "demilitarization" and "liberation." Overnight, explosions rocked Kyiv, signaling the start of a war that has since escalated significantly and still drags on to the present.¹²⁸ Even so, the western alliance maintains its commitment to an open policy toward Ukraine, with the latter signing a formal membership bid that September.¹²⁹

From the beginning, questions surrounding NATO membership, at least in the public eye, have framed the current conflict. Aspirations of enlargement, however, do not end with Ukraine.

¹²⁴ "Ukraine in maps: Tracking the war with Russia," *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>.

¹²⁵ "Timeline: The events leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/events-leading-up-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-02-28/>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ "Russian forces invade Ukraine," *CNBC News*, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/24/russian-forces-invade-ukraine.html>.

¹²⁹ Camille Gijs & Lili Bayer, "Ukraine formally applies for fast-track NATO membership," *Politico*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-formal-application-join-nato/>.

On May 18, in response to Russia's invasion, Finland and Sweden "simultaneously handed their official letters of application to join NATO over to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg." The two nations were formally invited to join at the Madrid Summit on June 29, and the accession protocols were completed on July 5. Only ratification by each NATO member state is standing between Finland and Sweden and full membership. This groundbreaking development in two countries that had remained unaffiliated throughout the entire Cold War came only three months after Putin's invasion.¹³⁰

NATO, and consequently the United States as a key member, thus stand to welcome three new nations into their strategic framework. Two of these members may be admitted within a year, and current rhetoric points only to active conflict delaying the third. Nonetheless, the question scarcely addressed in current political discourse is whether or not they should be admitted. Indeed, if the current conflict arose at least partly from Russian concern about an external strategic framework creeping eastward and encroaching on its periphery, then why should continuing that same policy unmodified bear different, more beneficial results? To grapple with this policy conundrum is complicated, as it will require the United States and its allies to effectively answer three questions. First, what strategic perspective should guide international policymaking with regard to Russia and its allies? Second, what outcomes should be pursued with regards to Finland and Sweden's membership bids and the Ukraine conflict proper? Finally, what path forward, if any, could finally ameliorate security tensions in Europe lingering from the Cold War?

The issue of perspective is the requisite guide for any further policy decisions, and so must be addressed first. Perspectives on approaching the current crisis with Russia may follow

¹³⁰ "Ratification of Finland And Sweden's Accession to NATO," *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*, <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/finland-sweden-accession>; and Henley, "Sweden and Finland make moves to join NATO."

two paths, each with distinct policy rationales and objectives. History defines two existing perspectives: NATO may either continue to engage Russia cooperatively as an equal nation in an overtly non-hostile manner as it has since the end of the Cold War, or it may formalize the new divisions arising from the Ukraine crisis and resume its overtly anti-Russian bloc Cold War stance. The former would facilitate diplomacy in the hopes that the current conflict may be contained and addressed without recourse to dividing Europe into competing blocs like those of the 20th century. The latter, however, would mean resuming a long-term standoff against a perennially maligned adversary with potentially elevated risk of conventional and nuclear standoffs. The end goal of the former is cooperation and conciliation; that of the latter is strategic containment.

At present, it seems the United States and its allies are *nominally* committed to continuing the spirit of cooperation engendered by the post-Cold War legacy. None, after all, are heralding the advent of a second Cold War of long-term *existential* conflict with Russia. Public opinion still treats the Ukraine war as an anomaly, though a telling one, rather than the strategic constant such actions were in the Cold War.¹³¹ Nonetheless, certain policies belabor more hardline tendencies.

Current sentiment, political and public, seems to affirm Ukrainian President Zelensky's stance that negotiations are off the table with Russian President Putin while Russia occupies any Ukrainian territory.¹³² The mere mention of a negotiated compromise, even by such public figures as Elon Musk, whose Starlink System has vastly aided Ukrainian forces, has been widely

¹³¹ Francis Fukuyama, "Still the End of History," *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/10/francis-fukuyama-still-end-history/671761/>.

¹³² Gijss & Bayer, "Ukraine applies for NATO membership."

and vehemently condemned.¹³³ Indeed, with NATO holding fast to its open door policy and Ukraine insisting that no land will be parleyed for peace, the only recourse left is to inflict military defeat on Russia.¹³⁴ Consequently, diplomatic avenues have fallen largely silent even as military actions have intensified, leading to fears of escalation.¹³⁵ Indeed, former State Department senior arms control official Lynn Rusten lamented how the United States has begun to “treat diplomacy like it’s a reward for good behavior, instead of a tool that you use with your adversaries and enemies.”¹³⁶ That the former comment arose amidst concerns of nuclear escalation is all the more alarming. Diplomacy may prove, as it did in the Cold War, a necessary and mutually desirable off-ramp.

Thus, a reckoning is in order going forward. Presently, it seems very unlikely that Putin will accept any peace that does not address Russian concerns in some capacity, especially without prior escalation to potentially nuclear threats. Ergo, if NATO and the United States would prefer a peaceful approach that maintains the current security framework, diplomacy will have to be pursued and a compromise in either territory or alliance guarantees may have to be entertained. On the other hand, if Ukrainian territory is to be maintained and NATO’s open door policy actualized without compromise, then Russia will have to be defeated in the current conflict and held militarily in check thereafter, likely resulting in continued east-west animosity. In the long term, this would be tantamount to commencing a second Cold War.

¹³³ “Zelenskiy hits back as Elon Musk sets up Twitter poll on annexed areas of Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/04/zelenskiy-hits-back-as-elon-musk-sets-up-twitter-poll-on-annexed-areas>.

¹³⁴ Derek Saul, “Zelensky Says Ukraine Won’t Cede Territory To Russia – But Offers Limited Hope For Negotiations,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2022/04/17/zelensky-says-ukraine-wont-cede-territory-to-russia-but-offers-limited-hope-for-negotiations/?sh=223477735f03>.

¹³⁵ Jonathan Guyer, “Just how worried should you be about nuclear war? Biden says very.,” *Vox*, <https://www.vox.com/world/2022/10/7/23393019/how-worried-should-you-be-about-nuclear-war-biden-says-very>.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Beyond this perspective, the Ukraine war, Finland and Sweden's NATO bids, and their consequent strategic questions must be addressed from a policy perspective. Russia, supported by Belarus and armed by Iran, stands against Ukraine as they, along with Sweden and Finland, seek to join NATO. Russia has demanded in separate instances both land and security guarantees, while Ukraine has vowed to give up no territory and NATO refuses to renege on its open door policy regarding Sweden, Finland, or Ukraine. Meanwhile, the United States and a coalition of allies have poured resources into the Ukrainian cause. The military situation on the ground seems mired in stalemate at present, but the war and its consequences remain nonetheless in the air. If the objective remains to simply blunt the Russians on the field in Ukraine, call their bluff on threatening Finland and Sweden, and bring them to terms with the international community thereafter, then the current tactics of public support and armament packages are working well. Nonetheless, states tend to grow less stable in the face of desperation, and Russia's nuclear arsenal makes desperation an unsavory potentiality.¹³⁷

A diplomatic approach would also be rife with issues. Any attempt to end the conflict through the cession of territory would bring condemnation harkening to the Munich agreements with Adolf Hitler preceding World War II. Ukraine would be incensed, and many NATO members, especially those bordering Russia, would likely be as well. It may call into question just how credible NATO's guarantees would be if Russia sought to repeat this pattern, which this compromise may also encourage. It would also create problems for Ukraine's bid to join NATO. Col. Mike Samarov, a former political and military advisor to the Joint Chiefs on Europe, NATO, and Russia shed light on the territorial dilemma, especially regarding Crimea, in a recent interview. He said, "Crimea...is legally a part of Ukraine, full stop. So, Ukraine will still be

¹³⁷ Andrea Kendall-Taylor & Erica Frantz, "How Autocracies Fall," *Columbia University*, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/twq/v37i1/f_0030502_24672.pdf.

frozen in conflict and I think it will be very hard for NATO member states to take a vote [on admitting Ukraine] that has been counter to NATO policy and U.S. policy.”¹³⁸ Thus, he argues, “as long as Putin retains a significant piece of [Ukrainian territory], he effectively blocks Ukraine’s membership for that reason.”¹³⁹ He also believes that Ukraine would never agree to such a solution, as “no foreseeable Ukrainian government could survive politically by giving away Crimea.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, a better compromise would probably involve some manner of guarantee regarding the future alliance status of Ukraine, Sweden, and Finland.

The latter two are already in the process of being admitted pending ratification, and it is unlikely that they would be turned away at present in any case. Sweden and Finland are, after all, presently eligible candidates. Nonetheless, perhaps Russia’s original aim of keeping Ukraine out of NATO could be met on mutual exclusionary grounds stipulating that Ukraine could not enter or be brought into Russia’s security framework either. This would make Ukraine into a mutually enforced neutral buffer state not unlike Austria in the Cold War.¹⁴¹ Alternatively, Ukraine could continue its NATO bid pursuant to necessary qualifications, which would still take Ukraine some time to meet, under the stipulation that U.S. or foreign forces or missile systems would not be stationed there. Thus, the open door policy could nominally be fulfilled while affording Ukraine the defense guarantee of NATO Article 5. Indeed, if security guarantees are of paramount concern, then Ukraine could also pursue bilateral or multilateral guarantees with regional partners without joining NATO proper. The United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France have all discussed measures to ensure any peace agreement between Moscow and Kyiv,

¹³⁸ Former Assistant Deputy Director for the Deputy Directorate, Europe, NATO, Russia on the Joint Staff Mike Samarov, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, February 17, 2023.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Mearsheimer, “Why Ukraine Is the West’s Fault,” 87.

and there is no reason these guarantees, if effective, could not continue as an alternative to NATO that balances Russian concerns.¹⁴² Of course, any of these policies rely on agreement between the warring parties, which is often tenuous. Nonetheless, with Russia continuing to lose and potentially seeking an off-ramp from the conflict, and Ukraine beholden to western support for continued success, it may yet be possible for NATO pressure to bring both toward a measure of understanding.

Nonetheless, the larger issue at stake is creating a security framework that will succeed in preventing resurgent east-west conflict where the Post-Cold War settlements failed. This would mean reevaluating two concurrent decisions that contributed to the current crisis: seeking continued NATO expansion as an implicit good and excluding Russia from the European security framework. The last three decades have proven the first decision flawed, owing to repeated conflicts arising from concerns about NATO enlargement. The second has proven equally defective, though addressing it is paramount to guaranteeing future security in Europe. Regardless of how soon and by what means the Ukraine conflict is settled, securing post-war Europe in a more permanent manner should be a matter of much discussion and major concern for all parties.

To address this concern, the most logical place to look for guidance is in the last post-war reckoning between east and west: the end of the Cold War itself. Though NATO would fatefully pursue unilateral expansion eastward, other political routes were proposed and addressed. Within the framework of NATO, the Partnership for Peace proved an excellent medium by which NATO and former Eastern Bloc members could cooperate over security measure in a somewhat equitable manner. Indeed, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),

¹⁴² Hans Von Der Burchard, "Ukraine can't have NATO-style security guarantees from the West, Germany says," *Politico*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-cant-have-nato-style-security-guarantees-scholz/>.

founded as the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe by the rival Cold War blocs in the 1970s, would also serve as an apt forum through which to expand collaboration between East and West.¹⁴³ A refresh of the current PfP, expansion of the OSCE, or the initiation of a similar program renewing efforts towards bilateral security cooperation between NATO and Russia's Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could prove a useful forum for preventing future conflict through combined action and decision-making. Nations not included in these alliances, such as Ukraine at present, could join at will or, as may suit both parties, be included in separate arrangements. This would coincide with current bilateral efforts between western nations and Ukraine and could evolve in the spirit of the NATO-Ukraine charter of 1997, which promoted collaboration outside of membership.¹⁴⁴ The detriments of this strategy would be the effective curtailment or end of NATO enlargement and the open door policy and the formal return to a divided Europe.

Another proposal from the past would be renewing the discussion of including Russia, and consequently its current defensive partners, in NATO. As outlandish as it seems now, it seemed perhaps more preposterous at the end of half a century of the Cold War in the 1990s, though it was still proposed. It would address several of Gaddis' arguments regarding European security pitfalls not only left unaddressed in the Post-Cold War years, but also exacerbated thereafter by contrasting policy. It will be argued, as it was then, that it would be imprudent to accept the perceived aggressor into a new security framework. However, such reconciliatory policy is precisely what history affords the most success after European conflicts, from the post-

¹⁴³ "Who We Are," *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, <https://www.osce.org/whatistheosce>.

¹⁴⁴ "NATO Summit: NATO-Ukraine Commission Fact Sheet," *The White House*, <https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/new/NATO/fact6.html#:~:text=At%20NATOs%20Madrid%20Summit%20in,emergency%2C%20scientific%20and%20environmental%20activities>.

Napoleonic Concert of Europe to the inclusion of Germany in NATO itself after World War II.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, much as Austria served as a diplomatic venue from the Napoleonic era through the Cold War summits, Turkey, a NATO member and close Russian partner, may prove an ideal middle ground for a new Congress on European security. Moreover, such an expanded horizon and realignment of interests is not beyond the realm of NATO's current agenda. At present, NATO is increasingly focusing on areas beyond the North Atlantic and Europe alongside new observers like Japan, South Korea, and Australia.¹⁴⁶ If China is truly a growing "systemic challenge" for the alliance, Russia would make a natural partner.¹⁴⁷ Inclusion, it may also be argued, will "totally change NATO's character" with "no precedent for such a dramatic move."¹⁴⁸ This is precisely the point NATO is trying to make even now: to remain relevant in a world of changing strategic concerns necessitates a dynamism that can solve old problems to address new ones.

Still, convincing Russia and its allies in the CSTO to join NATO after decades of mistrust, bad faith, paranoia, and outright hostility is a tall order. Though the concept of NATO as a network of strategic cooperation and mutual defense is meritorious, as evidenced by the counterpart Warsaw Pact and later CSTO, its name and Cold War legacy make the alliance itself a potential liability to inclusionary talks. Indeed, every major fractious incident between east and west since the Cold War has been framed in Russian disdain for NATO. Nor is this understanding exclusively one-sided. American *and* Russian politicians expressed that NATO expansion, according to George Kennan, squandered the "hopeful possibilities engendered by the

¹⁴⁵ Gaddis, "NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy," 2.

¹⁴⁶ "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Gaddis, "NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy," 6.

end of the Cold War” and, to Sergey Lavrov, missed “the chance to overcome the dark legacy of the previous era.”¹⁴⁹ To escape the pitfalls of the past, a more substantial change may be necessary. A new European security system may arise that includes the current NATO framework, alongside the CSTO and others, even if that new organization is not NATO. In fact, this may be most prudent.

Discussions between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in the dying days of the Cold War pointed not toward the fall of the Eastern Bloc and triumph of the west represented by a limitless NATO. Even then, the two world leaders looked beyond such Cold War constrictions. What they envisioned, especially Gorbachev in his liberalization and disarmament efforts, was a new economic and security framework for Europe. He addressed this idea directly in his 1989 address to the Council of Europe, advocating for a “common European home” that would “consign to oblivion” the notions of divided “spheres of influence” and confrontational “forward-based defenses.” Rather, this new system would realize the prophecy of the famed writer Victor Hugo that in Europe “the day would come when the only battlefield would be markets open for trade and minds open to ideas.” It would be done, Gorbachev stressed, by “seeking to transform international relations in the spirit of humanism, equality and justice and by setting an example of democracy and social achievements” that also accepted that both “the Soviet Union and United States are a natural part of the European international and political structure.” Indeed, even the Soviet president admitted that the “blueprint” for this new home remained unfinished, and his own people removed him from

¹⁴⁹ Nick Megoran, “‘Russian Troops Out! No to NATO Expansion!’ A Pacific Geopolitics for a New Europe,” *Political Geography* (2022).

power before he could actualize it.¹⁵⁰ Still, it remains an evocative example of how Russian political thought is not unflaggingly opposed to cooperation and integration, and so would prove an intriguing proposal in the event of another post-war reset between east and west.

Indeed, many of the apparent problems with such a proposal for integration present during the Cold War have been ameliorated. One main critique Gorbachev noted was the incongruity of free market and socialist countries that would hinder economic unity. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and efforts at market liberalization in former Eastern Bloc nations, this concern would be greatly diminished if the proposal were resumed. Indeed, many formerly command economy Soviet satellites are now even members of the European Union. Another concern of the time was that of differing government institutions, though this too has changed substantially throughout the former Soviet sphere, largely in favor of democracy. Even Russia, though autocratically corrupted in its “managed democracy,” maintains at least the *form* of democratic institutions, like multiparty elections, unheard of in the Soviet times. These institutions could be rectified and fortified in the future from groundwork, however small, that did not exist before.

Nonetheless, the greatest obstacle to moving toward a new and encompassing economic and security system for Europe that can incorporate former adversaries may now be leadership. The high-minded reformer Mikhail Gorbachev has given way to the paranoid, autocratic Vladimir Putin. Any agreement with Russia after repeated abuses of Putin’s administration culminating in the invasion Ukraine would be accompanied by a strong suspicion that would make such open and complete cooperation impossible. Indeed, such suspicion would be rightly held, and it seems increasingly unlikely that any diplomatic breakthrough will occur before a

¹⁵⁰ “Address given by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 6 July 1989),” CVCE, https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_mikhail_gorbachev_to_the_council_of_europe_6_july_1989-en-4c021687-98f9-4727-9e8b-836e0bc1f6fb.html.

regime change in Russia. Moreover, the heads of the various Eastern European nations aspiring to or presently members of NATO would likely be appalled at any proposal welcoming the very power they sought to escape. This apprehension is not without reason, and would justly be compounded if Putin remained in power in Russia. Even in the more established western European powers and the United States itself, support for such a bold and risky proposition, no matter how sincerely proposed, cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, even in the Post-Cold War, an epoch of cooperative international thought, it was U.S. President George H.W. Bush that defied Gorbachev's calls for a cooperative approach in Iraq and President Bill Clinton who laid the groundwork for NATO expansion over Russian objections.¹⁵¹

Nonetheless, the apparent near-term difficulties and fog of conflict should not unnecessarily limit the scope of any nation or alliance's perspective toward finding a long-term security solution in Europe. John Gaddis states:

There is...no good reason for clinging to short-sightedness...as new opportunities arise.... With luck we'll have a chance soon, with the help of our allies, of Russia's victims, and of a post-Putin Russia itself, to frame a new future. It's not too soon to begin thinking about what it might look like, and a good place to start might usefully be a reacquaintance with past paths not taken.¹⁵²

The road forward remains unclear, and the policies prescient today may be rendered obsolete tomorrow by any number of political shifts. Proposals for concluding the Ukraine war are as varied as they are contentiously debated between all parties involved, and the end results seem ever uncertain. Any consequent reckoning of Europe's security structure like that after the Cold War, then, is even more uncertain, and proposals for substantial change are wrought with uncertainty and potential risk. Even so, Post-Cold War history also provides a stark reminder of

¹⁵¹ Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation*, n.p.; and Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*, n.p.

¹⁵² Gaddis, "NATO Expansion: A Grand Strategy," 1-2.

the consequences of failing to sufficiently alter course and entertain new solutions. The current NATO issue demonstrates a poignant example. Whether today's world leaders may succeed where their predecessors failed remains an open question. The first window for realigning European security passed with the Cold War's end, and until another comes to light, it is likely that both powers will remain mired in hostility "waiting for a new Gorbachev and for a new Reagan."¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Jan Eichler, *NATO's Expansion After the Cold War: Geopolitics and Impacts for International Security* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021).

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https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_mikhail_gorbachev_to_the_council_of_eu_rope_6_july_1989-en-4c021687-98f9-4727-9e8b-836e0bc1f6fb.html

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