

American University of Armenia



***Russia's Foreign Policy in Light of the Ukrainian Crisis:
Action or Reaction***

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List of Abbreviation

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BMD – Ballistic Missile Defense System

EU – European Union

EPAA – European Phased Adaptive Approach

MAP – Membership Action Plan

NACC – North Atlantic Cooperation Council

PJC – Permanent Joint Council

Introduction

The crisis in Ukraine grabbed the attention of many scholars, academics and media. It started with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to back out from the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement) with the EU. The aim of the agreement was to bolster economic cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, which will, eventually, integrate Ukraine into the EU. The decision to reject the DCFTA with the EU was made for preserving Ukraine's close economic and political ties with Russia. However, this decision created a political division among the Ukrainian population. Northern and Western Ukraine is pro-Western demanding closer cooperation with the EU and resignation of Yanukovich while Southern and Eastern Ukraine is more pro-Russian. This political division resulted in civil unrest mainly in the capital Kiev. The government tried to restore the order by using coercion. However, the casualties on both sides only increased the tension and the level of discontent among civilians. As a result, Yanukovich resigned and before could be arrested, fled the country.¹

Russia criticized the events in Ukraine equating them with a coup against the legitimate government and accused the West of supporting anti-governmental and nationalist movements in Ukraine. Around the same period, pro-Russian protests started in Crimea. Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized that there was a need to protect the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, especially in Crimea. In February 2014, Russian military troops crossed the border to Crimea. Russia's action in Crimea ended with the referendum on March 16th when 97% of the Crimean population voted to separate from Ukraine and to become part of Russia. At the same

¹ Dmitri Trenin, "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great Power Rivalry," *Carnegie Moscow Center, Temmuz*, 2014, 4-6

time, Russian military forces began exercising and building significant military troops along the Eastern border with Ukraine.²

Russia's action in Ukraine was heavily criticized by the West. US Secretary of State John Kerry condemned Russian aggression and accused Putin of acting "in the 19th-century fashion by invading another state on completely trumped up pre-text".³ As a result, the US and the European Union imposed sanctions on Russia. However, up to day, Russian presence in the Eastern Ukraine remains very strong. Kremlin still supports Russian-speaking separatists in the Eastern Ukrainian regions of Donbas and Lugansk, where they are engaged in a struggle with the Ukrainian forces for the control over these territories.⁴

After the seizure of Crimean peninsula, many international relations theorists and scholars started to examine Russia's action through the lens of different theories. Various grand theories, like realism, constructivism and liberalism were used to understand the reasons behind Russian foreign policy choices. There is divergence among prominent scholars and political experts about the factors that caused Russian aggression in Ukraine. The aim of this capstone project is to examine the respective theoretical paradigms of the Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine through the lens of neorealism theory and to analyze the main factors that triggered Russian seizure of Crimean peninsula.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part will examine the existing literature on the Russian foreign policy, mainly focusing on Russia's relations with NATO. The second part will discuss the neorealist theory and its main arguments that are relevant to the case. The third part will provide the historical background of Russia-NATO relations. The third chapter will be

² Ibid., 6.

³ Will Dunham, "Kerry Condemns Russia's 'Incredible Act of Aggression' in Ukraine," *Reuters*, March 2, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-usa-kerry-idUSBREA210DG20140302>.

⁴ Trenin, "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great Power Rivalry," 6.

the examination of Russian foreign policy through the lens of offensive neorealism theory. In the final, fourth part, main arguments will be summarized and concluded.

The thesis will use qualitative methodology. The research will be based on the secondary and primary data analysis. Articles by different scholars and official statements will be used in analyzing the development of Russia-NATO relations after the fall of the Soviet Union in and to identify the role that the NATO's enlargement played in influencing Russia's aggressive foreign policy towards Ukraine. Finally, the evidence will be analyzed through the framework of the neo-realist theory. The paper will try to answer the following research question:

RQ: What are the reasons behind Russia's aggressive foreign policy?

The hypothesis is derived from the theory of neorealism:

H: Russia's aggressive foreign policy is driven by its security concerns.

Due to time limitations, the paper examines only one theoretical aspect of the crisis. As the Ukrainian crisis is a complex issue, no single theory can explain it fully. Thus, for the future research, it would be better to combine different grand theories for addressing all the variations of the Crimean crisis thoroughly.

Literature Review

Russia's foreign policy at the time of Putin's presidency has gained particular interest from different scholars. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the most significant and risky step taken by Putin during his all terms of presidency. Many western officials, academics, and journalists blamed Russia for its aggressive foreign policy and identified Russia as a "provocateur" of the crisis in Ukraine that started in 2014. They stated that Russia violated international law by illegally seizing the Crimean peninsula and condemn Vladimir Putin for supporting separatist movements in Ukraine. In their opinion, Russia's policy in Ukraine is conditioned by Russia's neo-imperialist desire to restore its position in the international system as a superpower and to pursue regional hegemony.⁵⁶⁷⁸ They argue that it is a part of Putin's plan to "bring back" the former Soviet Union territories. They mainly base their argument on Putin's statement that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" and on the history of Russia's interference with the domestic affairs of the countries in its near abroad.⁹ Moreover, they claim that the seizure of the Crimean peninsula was planned by Putin months before the crisis started in Ukraine. The evidence suggests that Russian government had a memo where in the case of Yanukovych's fall Russia should annex Crimea

⁵ Michael Rühle, "NATO Enlargement and Russia: Discerning Fact from Fiction," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36, no. 4 (July 2014).

⁶ Tuomas Forsberg, "Russia's Relationship with NATO: A Qualitative Change or Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 3 (September 2005).

⁷ Samuel Charap and Cory Welt, "Making Sense of Russian Foreign Policy: Guest Editors' Introduction," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 2 (March 4, 2015).

⁸ Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50

and other parts of Ukraine. Also, Russian police and secret service teams have been noticed in Kiev before the crisis began.¹⁰¹¹

In this regard, Russia sees NATO as the primary boundary for fulfilling its imperial ambitions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia shrank in size, so did its sphere of influence. Newly independent states viewed NATO and the European Union as international "umbrella organizations" that helped Western countries to survive and prosper. Thus, membership in these institutions could bring them security and prosperity.¹² Since Russia did not accept that the reason for former Soviet countries joining NATO was "the drawback of their authoritarian regime," it concentrated on NATO as the primary threat to its imperialist aspirations. NATO's further expansion in former Soviet countries infuriated Russia. Moscow does not accept the arguments that NATO ensures security, democracy, and stability for its member states as Russia views the international system in a matter of the scope of influence and as "a zero-sum game." Russia, especially when Putin came to power, started to perceive NATO as an aggressive alliance dominated by the US, which wanted to reduce Russia's power in the international arena and surround it by the chain of its military unions and camps. This kind of allegations against NATO assisted Putin in keeping his authority and preserving the internal concord within the present-day nationalistic and authoritarian country.¹³

On the other hand, some scholars emphasized the role of the Western countries and NATO in the crisis and indicated the defensive nature of Russia's foreign policy towards

¹⁰ Alexander J. Motyl, "The Surrealism of Realism: Misreading the War in Ukraine," *World Affairs* 177, no. 5 (2015): 75–85.

¹¹ Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea."

¹² Arthur R. Rachwald, "A 'reset' of NATO–Russia Relations: Real or Imaginary?" *European Security* 20, no. 1 (March 2011): 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 119–120.

Ukraine interpreting it as a response to NATO's expansion to the East.¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ As Mearsheimer¹⁹ argues in his article published in *Foreign Affairs*, the expansion of NATO is the fundamental factor of a broader policy to withdraw Ukraine from Russia's control and incorporate it into the West. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia argued against NATO's expansion and especially during recent years, Russian officials "have made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbors turned into a western bastion."²⁰

In addition to this, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that NATO did not keep his promise of not expanding beyond the unified Germany. At the end of the 1980s, when the situation in the Soviet Union was already out of control, during negotiations between Washington and the Soviet Union both parties agreed on the point that reunited Germany will continue to be a member of NATO. This was reached by the treaty of the Final Settlement on Germany in September 1990 during the "2+4" meeting, which eliminated the deployment of NATO forces on the territory of East Germany and by providing Russia generous financial assistance. Moreover, during personal meetings the West guaranteed Gorbachev and other Soviet officials that they would not use the weakness of the Soviet Union and its readiness to withdraw its military presence from Central and Eastern Europe and expand NATO's sphere of influence to the East.²¹ However, after the fall of the Soviet Union NATO's expanded its sphere of influence, by welcoming former Warsaw Pact countries into its ranks. Many observers agree that welcoming the post-Soviet states to NATO was the most lethal mistake of the policy of the

¹⁴ Safak Oguz, "NATO'S MISTAKES THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS," *Karadeniz Arastirmalari*, no. 45 (2015).

¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014).

¹⁶ Charap and Welt, "Making Sense of Russian Foreign Policy."

¹⁷ Derek Averre, "NATO Expansion and Russian National Interests," *European Security* 7, no. 1 (March 1998).

¹⁸ Charles A. Kupchan, "NATO's Final Frontier," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (2010).

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²¹ Rühle, "NATO Enlargement and Russia," 235–236.

United States after the end of the Cold War as it would provoke Russia thus endangering the achievements and agreements that have been reached so far.²²²³

In a light of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the relations between Russia and NATO has so drastically worsened that many scholars started to discuss the idea of a new Cold War. NATO's importance is in the center of attention with scholars and politicians arguing whether or not NATO should return to its initial purpose and reestablish itself as an "instrument" for defense from Russia's aggression.²⁴ Obviously, the tension over Ukraine is so high that the risk of a conflict between Russia and NATO cannot be excluded. Thus, analyzing the reasons behind Russia's foreign policy towards its near abroad has been gaining much importance in the recent days. Many observations have been made on this topic especially after the fall of the Soviet Union; however the current events created a great necessity to analyze the relations from a new perspective.

²² Luca Ratti, "'Resetting' NATO–Russia Relations: A Realist Appraisal Two Decades after the USSR," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 26, no. 2 (April 2013): 141–61.

²³ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault."

²⁴ Riccardo Alcaro, "A Cold Peace? Western-Russian Relations in Light of the Ukraine Crisis," IAI Documents and Working Papers (Rome, Italy: Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 2014), 2.

Theory of Neo-realism

In its modern form realism appeared after the World War I. But it experienced a revival by Hans Morgenthau during the World War II, and it was the dominant theory during the Cold War. Realism originated as a reaction to the failure of liberal methods, which was based on peaceful cooperation between democratic states, to explain the causes of war and the rise of fascism in the 1920s. The dominance of realist theory was conditioned by the fact that it could explain the causes of war, conflicts and mainly the revival between the United States and the Soviet Union. Realists emphasized that in the anarchic international system conflicts are inevitable as an outcome of bad human nature.²⁵ Kenneth Waltz in his book “Theory of International Politics” further developed the realist approach and basically set out a new realist theory which is called structural realism or neorealism. In neorealist theory, it is important to understand the way countries deal with the international system as this can affect their understanding of war as a phenomenon.²⁶

The theory of structural realism combines Waltz’s views and his belief in continuity and the regular nature of international relations and, consequently, the ability to further develop the study of rational theory. Neorealism has retained many of the provisions of classical realism. First and foremost, both theories consider the state, which acts rationally, to be the primary unit of analysis and the critical element of building international relations. As classical realism, structural realism also present the international system as anarchic, where no higher authority will subordinate or dominate over states in the framework of law, the major feature of which is

²⁵ M. Stephen Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998): 31.

²⁶ S. Telbami, “Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism, and Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies* 11, no. 3 (March 2002): 158–70.

the state's monopoly of legitimate use of force.²⁷ Anarchy does not mean chaos. According to neorealism, the anarchic international system presents an absence of central authority as well as legal and moral norms that regulate the interaction between the states, preventing, devastating for them and the world in general, conflicts and wars.²⁸ This system has not undergone significant changes since Thucydides times to the present day. Neorealism went further and established the autonomy of the international system, something that classical realists did not consider to be the realm of discussion.

The anarchic structure has two primary indications: firstly, in the international system states are in charge of their security, making the international system a "self-help" system. In this "self-help" system states' primary goal is survival. They are the only units that have the legitimate power to use force in order to provide their security.²⁹ Secondly, in an anarchic system, states constantly feel insecure and threatened by potential attacks from their neighbors: "a state cannot be sure that today's friend will not be tomorrow's enemy."³⁰

As states feel insecure all the time, they need to attain enough power in order to be able to defend themselves. Thus, power is another central concept in neorealism. Both classical realism and neorealism consider power accumulation to be an essential element of statecraft, and it is considered that rational states will be inclined to gain power.³¹ But in comparison with classical realism, where power is the ultimate objective of states, neorealism considers the power to be the necessary instrument for states to guarantee their security.³² There are five main criteria

²⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 5–41.

²⁸ Patrick James, "Structural Realism and the Causes of War," *Mershon International Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (October 1995): 181.

²⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 625.

³⁰ Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 10.

³¹ Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories."

³² Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory."

for power: economy, natural resources, demography and technological capacity. However, power accumulation will create, what Waltz³³ describes, “security dilemma”. From one perspective, the parties need to defend themselves to ensure the security of their states. From the other perspective, such defense may turn to be threatening the security of another state even in case those actions are initiated for security reasons. Ironically, a line of not intended provocative actions arises, which results in an intensification of the conflict that can, in the long run, cause open war.³⁴

National interest is another important concept in neorealism. National interest is also defined regarding security. In the struggle for security, the state increases their capabilities at the expense of rival states. Consequently, obtaining military, territorial and economic security are the primary interests of the state. Since states are rational, pursuing their national interests will be the primary objective.³⁵

The balance of power is a big part of neorealism theory. According to Mearsheimer,³⁶ the balance of power is important for states and they compete with each other for increasing power by minimizing other states' power capacity, or, at the minimum, for not reducing their power. They act in that manner as the structure of the anarchic international system does not provide any other choice if they want to survive. There are several ways to preserve the balance. One way is to increase the military capacity.³⁷ Another way of power balancing is the alliance formation: bandwagoning and buck-passing. Balances of power changes periodically due to anarchic self-help system and changes in the relative distribution of capabilities. The ways that states will use

³³ Ibid., 619.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories.”

³⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *Structural Realism*, vol. 83 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 71.

³⁷ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” 2006.

to keep the balance depends on the relative power among great power. In bipolar system states will balance by increasing their own military capacities. In a multipolar world, states will create alliances as a counterbalance.³⁸

However, there are different approaches within neorealism regarding how much power states should gain for feeling secure. Defensive realists, like Kenneth Waltz, argue that the anarchic structure of the international system limits the degree of power states can obtain, which contributes to the improvement of the security competition. Thus states should only try to maximize their security, but not power. Even though the defensive realism does not rule out the possibility of states resorting to aggression, for keeping the security they will act cautiously.³⁹⁴⁰ On the opposite side, offensive realists state that the anarchic structure pushes states to maximize their power till they turn into the hegemon of the region, thus leading to the reinforcement of security competition. They view the anarchic structure as an opportunity for expansionist policies.⁴¹

³⁸ Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War."

³⁹ Mearsheimer, *Structural Realism*, 71.

⁴⁰ Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy," 130.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 128-129

Historical Background

1.1 A “no expansion” pledge

For understanding the role that NATO’s enlargement played in triggering Ukrainian crisis it is essential to see the evolution of the relationship between Russia and NATO, and the enlargement policy that created the circumstances to enable an enduring breach between the West and Russia.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed in 1949. Initially, the alliance was a defensive union of twenty countries, which included The United States of America, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, Iceland, France, Luxemburg, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, Portugal, Great Britain. The NATO headquarter was in Brussels, but the fundamental political decisions were made in Washington. The essence of NATO was the protection of its member countries against the aggression of the Soviet Union. In 1952, Greece and Turkey became members of NATO thus enlarging NATO to South-East Europe. In 1955, Western Germany became NATO's 15th member. In 1990, following the emergence of the united Germany, the later also became a member of NATO. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the expansion of NATO continued.⁴²

Following the establishment of NATO, Soviet Union, and seven European countries (Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria) signed a treaty in Warsaw that established the Warsaw Pact. It was a “mutual defense” organization. The Soviet Union was in the charge of the member states’ military forces. The root cause of the

⁴² Gerald B. Solomon, “Prizes and Pitfalls of NATO Enlargement,” *Orbis* 41, no. 2 (1997).

establishment of the pact was Western Germany's membership in the NATO that posed a new threat to war and security of "peace-loving states". The pact was dissolved in 1991.⁴³

During his annual press conference in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to a "broken promise" by the Western officials not to enlarge NATO to the East.⁴⁴ The argument over the non-expansion pledge lies in the mutual agreement between NATO and the USSR, which, however, has never been ratified in any treaty or written consent. The essence of the agreement was that Soviet leadership would accept German reunification only with a demand that NATO will not extend its sphere of influence to the East.⁴⁵

The debate over NATO's future role in a post-Cold War era started already during the negotiations over the reunification of East and West Germany between the USSR and Western officials in 1990. At the outset, Soviet officials strongly opposed German unification within NATO. When it became apparent that German reunification was a matter of time, and Moscow was powerless in blocking a unified Germany within NATO, Soviet officials tried to obtain guarantees from the Western officials that NATO would not enlarge to the East.^{46/47}

There is much controversy over this "promise" made by the West. Russian officials, including Gorbachev himself, and many western scholars insist that during the "2+4" meeting (two Germanys and four occupying powers) then US secretary of state James Baker and German

⁴³ Jakub Kulhánek, "Putin's Foreign Policy and the Founding of the NATO-Russia Council," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 137.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Putin, Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, April 17, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

⁴⁵ Averde, "NATO Expansion and Russian National Interests," 11.

⁴⁶ Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (April 2009): 40–44.

⁴⁷ R. Joshua Shiffrin, "Put It in Writing How the West Broke Its Promise to Moscow," *Foreign Affairs*, October 29, 2014.

Foreign Minister Genscher guaranteed Gorbachev that after Germany's reunification NATO will not expand its jurisdiction one inch to the East.⁴⁸

Before the “2+4” meeting Baker visited Moscow and during the meeting with Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze he told that NATO would be changing into a more political institution, and it would be better for Europe and the USSR if Germany was united within NATO, which could actually provide stability within the country and serve as a check on Germany’s power. He then added that in the case of Germany reunification within the NATO, the US and its allies would ensure that NATO did not extend its forces and influence to the east.⁴⁹

The US and Soviet records of conversation between Baker and Gorbachev are mostly similar. Both transcripts state that Baker told Gorbachev about keeping NATO within its current “borders” and not expanding one inch to the East, in the case of German reunification within NATO framework. Baker believed that talks and consultations during the “2+4” should provide guarantees that Germany’s reunification would not bring to the enlargement of NATO to the East.⁵⁰ At the end of the negotiations, Baker raised the issue again, by asking rather a rhetorical question: “Assuming that unification will occur, would you prefer to see a unified Germany outside of NATO, independent and with no U.S. forces or would you prefer a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position?”⁵¹ Gorbachev admitted that if NATO expanded its zone of influence, it would be unacceptable, but he abstained from a direct answer to Baker’s question.⁵²

⁴⁸ Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” 40–45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵¹ Mary Elise Sarotte, “A Broken Promise?,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 92.

⁵² Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” 49.

However, many US politicians and academics persist that such a pledge has never been made. They argue that the issue of former Warsaw Pact countries future membership in NATO has never been raised during the talks with Moscow and that the US made no pledge over the future format of NATO except some particular details that were ratified in the Treaty of the Final Settlement on Germany in September 1990.⁵³ Moreover, even if the question of NATO's enlargement was discussed during the meeting it referred only to Eastern Germany, and it was agreed that NATO will not accept Eastern Germany into its ranks under any condition. They justify this argument by saying that at that time neither Gorbachev nor any other Soviet official thought of bringing this question to the table as this was not a problem at that point. Soviet leaders were confident that the USSR will continue its existence and cooperation with Warsaw Pact countries.⁵⁴

What is apparent from these arguments is that two parties never ratified a deal about NATO's future role in the East. However, as Shifrinson⁵⁵ argues, "informal commitments count in world politics." This is a vital point to note, as it became a major argument for Russia against NATO's expansion, regardless of being true or not.⁵⁶

1.2 NATO's First Round of Enlargement and Russia's Response

During Boris Yeltsin's presidency relations between NATO and Russia were marked with ups and downs. Right after the collapse of the Soviet Union Yeltsin wasn't excluding the

⁵³ Ibid., 39–40.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Shifrinson, "Put It in Writing How the West Broke Its Promise to Moscow."

⁵⁶ Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, "The Return of the Pan-European Security Question," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2009): 3.

possibility of Russia joining NATO's ranks. However, under the pressure of Russian Duma and military officials Yeltsin with then Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev, started to carry on more aggressive policy towards NATO.⁵⁷ When NATO's enlargement became a matter of time, Russian parliament and especially military officials severely opposed to it identifying as a threat to Russia's security. Many in Russia condemned the West for violating the assurance that the Soviet Union received for accepting German reunification. Instead, Moscow offered a new security system that would be based on OSCE, and NATO would be transformed into subordination of this new organization. However, this new security system of Europe was quickly refused by NATO members.⁵⁸

In 1994 Brussels Summit, NATO announced its open door policy and launched Partnership for Peace initiative inviting all NACC partner states and CSCE countries to take part.⁵⁹ Later, in December 1994, Yeltsin accused the West of putting Europe "in danger of plunging into a cold peace".⁶⁰ The fear of Russia's isolation from Europe made Yeltsin and Kozyrev to reach an agreement with NATO over the formalization of the relationship between the two parties. In 1994, Russia agreed to join the PFP and in the spring of 1995 was granted an exclusive "16+1" status in the North Atlantic Council and Political Committee.⁶¹ In 1997, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed, which served as a base for the creation of the Permanent Joint Council where the parties could meet and discuss different security problems. The Act was quite generous towards Russia. It stressed the need for strengthening and deepening the partnership on a variety of problems of common interest. Even though the act was impressive

⁵⁷ Kulhánek, "Putin's Foreign Policy and the Founding of the NATO-Russia Council," 138.

⁵⁸ Julianne Smith, "The NATO-Russia Relationship Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?," CSIS Reports (Center for Strategic & International Studies, November 2008), 2.

⁵⁹ "The Brussels Summit Declaration," January 11, 1994, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24470.htm?mode=pressrelease.

⁶⁰ Andrew Marshal, "Russia Warns NATO of a 'Cold Peace,'" *Independent*, December 6, 1994.

⁶¹ Smith, "The NATO-Russia Relationship Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?" 3.

on the paper, it did not prove to be working in practice. It was only politically binding, and it did not provide any legal guarantees.⁶²

The signing of the act paved the way for the first round of NATO enlargement which included Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland.⁶³ Despite putting the relationship into an institutional framework, Russia remained cautious against NATO. NATO's statement about sending military forces to Yugoslavia deteriorated fragile relations with Russia. The Russian government during the first PCJ meeting expressed its disagreement over the use of force without authorization from the UN. Nevertheless, Russia's warnings were ignored and in the 1998 NATO Council authorized the use of force in Kosovo.⁶⁴ Kozyrev complained about the lack of dialogue between Russia and NATO and stressed that excluding Russia from the decision-making process on these type of issues is a big mistake. From Russia's point of view, PCJ meetings were only to inform Russia about NATO's decisions rather than for serving as a forum for collective decision-making.⁶⁵ Kozyrev's concerns highlighted Russia's worries regarding NATO's ignorance of Russian security interests. It indicated that Russia was powerless inside the alliance. It showed that even though Russia had a voice within the alliance, it does not have the power to veto issues it did not agree with NATO member states. It raised Russia's concerns over NATO's future intentions and Russia's place in constructing Europe's security.⁶⁶

⁶² Tuomas Forsberg and Graeme Herd, "Russia and NATO: From Windows of Opportunities to Closed Doors," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 46.

⁶³ Smith, "The NATO-Russia Relationship Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?"

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁵ Forsberg and Herd, "Russia and NATO," 46.

⁶⁶ Kulhánek, "Putin's Foreign Policy and the Founding of the NATO-Russia Council," 139.

1.3 NATO's Second Round of Enlargement and Russia's response

When Vladimir Putin became the president in 2000, his preliminary foreign policy initiative was to better relations with the West. The 9/11 terrorist attacks serve as an impetus for improvement of Russia-NATO relations. The 9/11 attacks showed that security environment had transformed, and it posed a common threat for both Russia and NATO member states. On September 13, 2001, during the PCJ meeting the parties made a joint announcement criticizing attacks and encouraged to fight against terrorism collectively.⁶⁷

Putin announced that Russia would change its position towards NATO enlargement policies if the organization transformed itself into a political institution. "If NATO takes on a different shade and will become a political organization, of course, we would reconsider our position with regard to such expansion, if we are to feel involved in such processes."⁶⁸ He went on, saying: "They keep saying that NATO is becoming more political than military. We are looking at this and watching this process. If this is to be so, it will change things considerably."⁶⁹ This change in the relationship was also marked by the institutional adjustments in the form of NATO-Russia Council as a replacement to PCJ. With changing attitude towards NATO, Russia wanted to place this relationship on an equal term where NATO will acknowledge Russia's great power status.⁷⁰ The prospects of Russia joining NATO once again became actual.

Despite the temporary improvement in the relationship, Russia continued to express its concerns over the NATO's enlargement policy. The deterioration of Russia's relations with NATO was caused by the second round of enlargement in 2004, which included seven more

⁶⁷ Forsberg and Herd, "Russia and NATO," 47.

⁶⁸ William Drozdiak, "Putin Eases Stance On NATO Expansion," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/10/04/putin-eases-stance-on-nato-expansion/05fbea0d-7048-4ff5-b790-3bc53808c9fc/>.

⁶⁹ William Drozdiak, "Putin Eases Stance on NATO Expansion," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2001.

⁷⁰ Forsberg and Herd, "Russia and NATO," 47.

states: Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Aside from the geostrategic concerns regarding the approximation of NATO's infrastructures to Russia's borders, many in Russia were anxious about the possibility of being excluded from the European security construction. Meanwhile, there was also noncompliance among NATO member states concerning the degree of Russia's involvement in the alliance's decision-making process. NATO's new member states along with Central European candidate countries were skeptical about the Russian integration into the alliance and were concerned that it would undermine NATO's defensive role.⁷¹

The rhetoric of Russian officials became more aggressive. In a 2006 statement in Russian Duma, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed that Georgia's and Ukraine's membership in NATO would "lead to a colossal shift in global geopolitics.... and Russia will try to foresee the consequences of this move from the viewpoint of Russia's national security interests"⁷². In 2007, during Munich security conference Putin gave a speech where he once again criticized NATO's expansionism and blamed it for "imposing new dividing lines" in Europe. "I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?"⁷³

⁷¹ Kulhánek, "Putin's Foreign Policy and the Founding of the NATO-Russia Council," 149–150.

⁷² "Georgia, Ukraine NATO Accession May Cause Geopolitical Shift - FM," *Sputnik*, June 7, 2006, http://sputniknews.com/russia/20060607/49156909.html?utm_source=short_direct&utm_medium=short_url&utm_content=bj5D&utm_campaign=URL_shortening.

⁷³ Vladimir Putin, Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007, <http://www.usrccne.org/news2.phtml?m=306>.

However, Putin's speech was not taken as a warning to the West nor did they take it into consideration before it proceeded with the future enlargement.⁷⁴ In 2008 NATO Bucharest summit the alliance gave a green light to Ukraine's and Georgia's ambitions for membership in NATO. The MAP was the further step for Ukraine and Georgia for becoming NATO members.⁷⁵ The offering of the membership to Ukraine and Georgia made Russia's opposition to the enlargement policy more vigorous. In a press statement after the meeting of NRC, Vladimir Putin once again stressed that the approximation of a powerful military block on Russia's borders poses an immediate threat to Russia's security. He continued "The claims that this process is not directed against Russia is not suffice. National security is not based on promises."⁷⁶ The alliance decided to postpone the MAP to Georgia and Ukraine whereas affirming that the two states will become members of NATO during coming years. After six months from the summit, the Russia-Georgian war started. The war indicated that Russia is willing to do anything in order to ensure its security interests.⁷⁷

The anti-NATO enlargement moods were becoming more severe. It was reflected in 2010 Russian military doctrine where NATO enlargement was identified as a primary threat. In the same manner, the Russian security strategy to 2020, which was adopted in 2009 and the recently adopted Security Strategy in 2015 indicated the unacceptability of NATO's approximation to Russian borders and stressed the need for the development of equal and shared interests.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Andreas M. Bock, Ingo Henneberg, and Friedrich Plank, "If You Compress the Spring, It Will Snap Back Hard": The Ukrainian Crisis and the Balance of Threat Theory," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 2014, 5.

⁷⁵ North Atlantic Council, "Bucharest Summit Declaration," April 3, 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

⁷⁶ Vladimir Putin, Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council, April 4, 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24903>.

⁷⁷ Andrey Makarychev, "Inside Russia's Foreign Policy Theorizing: A Conceptual Conundrum," *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 21, no. 2-3 (December 2013): 44-45.

⁷⁸ Kupchan, "NATO's Final Frontier," 101.

Along with NATO's enlargement policy, development of Ballistic Missile Defense system in European continent as part of the US missile defense system also contributed to the worsening of the relationship between Russia and NATO. The tension rose when in 2002 Bush administration left the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. After this step, in 2007 USA adopted a nuclear first strike doctrine which intended to deploy third site BMD systems in Poland and Czech Republic. Russia's reaction was harsh. Moscow was worried that these interceptors would minimize Russia's nuclear deterrence capacity.⁷⁹

However, cancellation of the third site deployments in 2009 by Obama administration decreased the tension for some time. But the issue rose again when Obama announced European Phase Adaptive Approach in 2009. The purpose of the PAA was to provide the security of NATO member states from the possible missile attacks from Iran and North Korea. Russia's concerns were connected with the fourth phase that had the capability to intercept Russian ballistic missiles, which was going to be implemented around 2020. Russian President Medvedev's plan for a sector-based missile defense system was rejected by NATO. The objective of the project was to divide the provision of Europe's security between Russia and NATO. By this plan Russia was supposed to defend Europe from the missiles flying over its zone of responsibility and NATO would protect Russia from the attacks over the territories of NATO countries. However, the US made clear that it would not trust the protection of the NATO member states to a non-NATO member country.⁸⁰ Russian criticism of the BMD system intensified. Regardless of NATO's assurance that the PAA is not directed against Russia, Moscow's distrust continued to grow. Russia started to demand legal assurance that the BMD

⁷⁹ Mikhail Tsyarkin, "Russia, America and Missile Defense," *Defense & Security Analysis* 28, no. 1 (March 2012): 55.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

would not be used against Russia, which the US rejected justifying that it will never put limits on its military forces.⁸¹

To sum up, NATO's plans for developing BMD system, along with the enlargement policy towards Eastern Europe, enhanced gradual worsening of Russia-NATO relations. At the end of the day, this mutual distrust and misperceptions provoked Russia to be more aggressive in its foreign policy, which resulted in a war with Georgia in 2008 and annexation of Crimea in 2014.

⁸¹ Ekaterina Chirkova, "Key Aspects of Russia's Current Foreign and Security Policy" (European Union: Directorate-General for External Policies, 2012), 20–21.

Theory Application

According to neo-realism theory, anarchy creates a situation in the international system, where mutual distrust and security concerns shape state behavior. Since there is no world government or central authority that will protect states, states are not sure about the intentions of other states. And as Mearsheimer⁸² argues, great powers are more responsive to threats, particularly if those threats are near their borders and they more often take ruthless actions to eliminate the possible danger. Throughout the history of cooperation, the relationship between Russia and NATO were marked by mutual distrust and misperceptions. Despite temporal improvements in the relations, Russia continued to perceive the alliance as anti-Russian and saw the further enlarging of the alliance as a threat to its national interests.

Power maximization for security provision will create, as Waltz⁸³ argues, security dilemma, where the attempt of one side to solidify itself is preserved from the other part as offensive, which is worth of response. NATO's expansion can also be viewed from this perspective. NATO's open door policy for providing collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area creates a security dilemma. Each time NATO included one more member, it became closer to the Russian border and essentially reduced Russia's security. As we can see from the previous section, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia strongly opposed to the construction of missile defense system in the Eastern Europe and NATO's expansion, identifying it as a "broken promise" made by the West in exchange for German reunification within NATO. Even though there is no written commitment about this "promise," Russia believes that the promise has been made. Despite Russia's opposition, NATO ignored Russian interests and concerns, and

⁸² Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault."

⁸³ Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory."

continued with the enlargement, thus provoking Russia to take bolder steps for ensuring its interests. The construction of European security by NATO, which left Russia out of it, increased Kremlin's sense of insecurity. Also, maintaining a strong military presence in Europe, Kosovo bombing in 1999 without Russia's agreement and the desire to establish the Ballistic Missile Defense system in Europe contributed to the Russian mistrust towards NATO. To Russia, the BMD system could reduce its nuclear deterrence capacity, thus putting Russia's security under danger.

Even though Russia did not like the enlargement of NATO, it was somehow tolerant regarding the inclusion of the Baltic States and Poland. However, the offering of the membership to Georgia and Ukraine that are in the backyard of Russia crossed the red line set by Moscow. The 2008 war with Georgia perfectly illustrates that Russia will do anything, even will go to war if it will prevent its strategically important neighbors from joining NATO.⁸⁴ Even though the direct cause of the crisis was not Ukraine's immediate acceptance to NATO, it started after Yanukovich refused to sign the DCFTA with the EU, but the fact is that the offer has never been taken off the table. The prospect that the new government of the Ukraine will be anti-Russian and pursue pro-western policies increased the chances of Ukraine joining NATO. All these events led to Russian paranoia about its security and to distrust among Russia and NATO. Thus, Russia's action can be considered entirely rational.

Russia's aggressive foreign policy is a clear illustration of the offensive realism, which states that in the anarchic system states are regularly exposed to danger from other states. This forces them to refine their relative power via arms buildups and opportunistic expansionism.⁸⁵ Due to high oil prices, Russia's economy stabilized by the 2000s. This allowed Russia to

⁸⁴ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault."

⁸⁵ Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy," 129.

increase its defense capabilities. Since 2008, Russia has multiplied its defense expenses substantially. This increase in the defense spendings aims to upgrade weaponry through 2025, which would enable Russia to have the military capacity for deterring and intimidating NATO.⁸⁶ The second argument, “the opportunistic expansionism” can also be ascribed to Russia’s actions. The instability in Ukraine provided an opportunity for Russia to seize Crimea, justifying it as a necessary step for protecting Russian-speaking population there.

As Walz⁸⁷ and Mearsheimer⁸⁸ argue, shifting the balance of power between states will make them reinforce their position at the expense of other states, even if there is no direct threat. NATO’s enlargement to the East changed the balance of power in its favor. Thus, by annexing Crimea, Russia wanted to balance against NATO and in the case of Ukraine becoming part of NATO, exclude the possibility of stationing NATO troops in the Black Sea Fleet, home of the Russian navy.

Ukraine is kind of a “buffer zone” between NATO and Russia. Thus, it has a strategic importance to Russia. NATO would totally and efficiently box Russia, which would lead to the efficient reduction of the remained strategic military impact that Russia has in the East of Europe. Moreover, Russia considers this kind of course of events to threaten its existence significantly, because it would give NATO an opportunity to deploy its military infrastructure and construct bases of strategic importance just near the border with Russia. If Ukraine joins NATO, it will mean that NATO will be right next to Russian borders. By supporting separatist movements in Ukraine and contributing to the destabilization of the country, Russia wanted to make Ukraine unattractive for the West.

⁸⁶ Stephen J. Blank, “Imperial Ambitions Russia’s Military Buildup,” *World Affairs* 178, no. 1 (2015): 67–75.

⁸⁷ Telbami, “Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism, and Foreign Policy.”

⁸⁸ Mearsheimer, *Structural Realism*.

Moreover, the military bases in the Black Sea fleet are important for Moscow's military and geopolitical capabilities. The Black Sea Fleet still has the capability to address naval dangers imposed by other countries of the region threatening Russia's priorities in the Black Sea. The fleet and its Sevastopol base are strategic lighthouses for ensuring Russia's influence in the Black Sea and from there into the Mediterranean Sea. As the new government of Ukraine desires to have closer ties with NATO and EU, Moscow fears that it will have to leave the fleet.⁸⁹ Thus, as the neo-realist argument goes, state's rational calculations will include insurance of its security interests. By this move, Russia wanted to ensure its security and prevent NATO from further expanding its zone of influence.

⁸⁹ Paul N. Schwartz, "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 18, 2014.

Conclusion

The thesis examined the factors causing Russia's aggressive foreign policy in the framework of neorealism theory. NATO's expansion policies towards the Eastern European countries and ambitions to develop the BMD system in these countries are identified as major factors that initiated Russia's growing assertive stance in global politics.

Membership invitation to Ukraine in the 2008 Bucharest Summit was not received well by Russia. To Russia, this move by NATO meant an intentional weakening of Russia. Even though the direct cause of the crisis was Yanukovich's decision not to sign the DCFTA with the EU, the prospect that any step taken by the Ukrainian new pro-Western government that will bring Ukraine closer to the EU will also create the favorable conditions for Ukraine's membership in the NATO. Moreover, the ambitions to develop BMD system in the European soil fueled the tension between Russia and NATO. The inability of finding common ground on the establishment of joint control over the BMD system and US's refusal to provide legal security guarantees against the use of the missile weapons against Russia further angered Moscow. Seizure of the Crimean peninsula and modernization of the military capabilities were driven by Russia's sense of insecurity and for stopping further humiliation by the West. As Simens⁹⁰ argues, after the fall of the Soviet Union West treated weakened Russia as a defeated enemy and became used to having a "free ride." Thus, Russia risked losing its prestige in the international arena for guaranteeing its own security interests.

In the framework of the neorealism theory, annexation of Crimea was done for balancing against NATO. Russia's ambitions to regain power and influence in the area of former Soviet

⁹⁰ Dimitri K. Simes, "Losing Russia," *FOREIGN AFFAIRS-NEW YORK*- 86, no. 6 (2007): 36.

countries was for the insurance of its security. As offensive realists argue, states will try to become the hegemon of the region until they feel secure. Acting offensively, Russia's intentions were rather defensive for stopping NATO's further expansion. The claims that Russia had planned the seizure of Crimean peninsula months before the crisis in Ukraine is unfounded. This step was rather a reaction than an action by Russia. Thus, the hypothesis that Russia's actions are driven by its security concerns is accepted.

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