

Russia – NATO Uneasy Ties: Transformation, Cooperation to NATO Accession

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Russian Federation re-emerged on the global map in December 1991. It was one of the Soviet Republics since the communist party took over in 1922, and after about two decades, it became one of the two superpowers. The Soviet communist ideology was a deterrent to the United States-- the capitalist superpower. The US established a collective security organization for Western European countries called NATO to contain the expansion of communism. The fall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union ended the cold war; however, the Alliance was not dissolved. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, Russia and NATO have transformed and sought ways to cooperate. However, the accession policy of NATO became a threat to Russia. The article contributes to understanding deep-rooted issues between Russia and NATO. It examines their transformation and cooperation phases. It deals with the post-cold war accession policy of NATO and Russian concerns over it. The paper analysis various forums of their cooperation and inquiries why NATO's membership was not extended to Russia. It further delves into the significance of Ukraine for Russia. Diverse research methodologies are adopted in this research work .

Keywords: Russia, NATO, security, Ukraine, accession

Russia and NATO remained a threat to each other even after the fall of communism. In the 1990s, Russia, the legal successor of the Soviet Union, passed through political and economic turmoil. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had to redefine its role and relevance to sustain itself into the future. It adopted an open-door policy for all European countries contrary to the unwritten agreement over the non-expansion of NATO towards Eastern Europe. The Russian presidents were also inclined to NATO membership which the West ignored.

The former Soviet allies turned towards NATO; however, the inclination of former Soviet republics to NATO membership was disturbing for Russia. It could enable NATO forces to approach Russian borders due to the collective defence policy. A critical situation emerged in Europe when two former Soviet republics, Georgia and Ukraine, tended for NATO membership. Russia launched a five-day war against Georgia in 2008 to prevent Georgia from NATO membership. After six years, Russia annexed Crimea, a part of Ukraine that further deteriorated Russia-NATO relations. Over time, Russia became assertive toward NATO campaigns. At the 70th anniversary of NATO, a renewed agenda was presented that included combating global terrorism, arms control, containing Russia, and curbing the rise of China. It revived the camp-based politics of the cold war. The NATO accession became a security risk to Russia, and the

resurgence of Russia in global politics threatened NATO. The consistent accession and massive military exercises of NATO increased Russian security concerns, and it demanded security guarantees from the West. When it was not given, and Russia felt that the balance of power was going in favour of NATO, it moved forces in her survival.

Theoretical Framework

The research paper fits in the theory of realism and neo-realism. According to realism survival and security of a state derive international politics (Moorthy & Naidu 2022) and balance of power is a main concept in neo-realism theory. The realist theorists believe that the use of force and war is an irrefutable right of the state. The end of the cold war created great imbalance in international system. It transformed the role of Russia and NATO in global politics. Russia focused on economic uplift and re-establishment of armed forces to recover its position as a great or at least regional power. The weakness of Russia forced her to cooperate with NATO but the accession policy of the latter becoming a threat for the former. When Russia failed to maintain balance adequately against the accession of NATO it used force for her survival.

Method

This is a descriptive, quantitative, and deductive nature of research based on historical, analytical, and critical methods. The historical method is used to find answers to current questions through an intensive study of the past. The deductive method infers the research work to a logical conclusion. Data has been collected from primary sources, i.e., government documents, newspapers, historical interviews, etc. To collect secondary data, various books, journals, and archives have been studied to bring the research in a theoretical framework.

Russia and NATO in the 1990s: Transformation, cooperation, and NATO accession

The attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991 was failed but resulted in the imminent collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the disintegration of the USSR on December 25, of that year. The Belovezha Accord ended the existence of the USSR and established democratic, independent republics based on mutual recognition and respect for national sovereignty (Bhattacharyya, 2020). The Soviet collapse resulted in the formation of 15 autonomous states; among them was the Russian Federation, the world's largest country by area.

Russia inherited the seat of the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council and underwent a course of transformation. The democratic forces led the Russian economy in a future direction, and capitalism became the preferred economic transition destination. The Russian economy faced a deep slump for a long time. According to official Russian financial data, Russian GDP fell by about 50% between 1990 and 1995, significantly more than the United States endured during the Great Depression. The Russian armed forces also lost self-esteem (Baev, 2004). In an entirely new geographical condition, Russia had to counter 14 new neighbours; previously, military allies were bound to the Soviet Union through the Warsaw Pact (Pallin, 2008).

For NATO, the 1990s was a challenging decade. The Alliance struggled to justify existence after losing its principal adversary "expansion of communism." Two years before Soviet disintegration on February 9, 1990, the US Secretary of State James Baker had pledged to Gorbachev that there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction to Eastern Europe (Howorth, 2017). However, the "London Declaration" reflected a changed North Atlantic Alliance environment, signed on July 5-6, 1990. It stated that as the Alliance would enter a new century, it must continue to provide for the collective defence (Rimanelli, 2009). It was ambiguous against whom collective security would be delivered since the Soviet Union was a waning power. A new body of "North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC)" was established on December 20, 1991 for dialogue and cooperation with former Warsaw Pact countries (Gerosa, 1992).

Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president, intended to participate in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and indicated that Russia might join NATO in the future. In the Visegrád Triangle of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, the former Soviet-aligned states were the first who pledged to join NATO on May 6, 1992. Yeltsin visited these states in 1993 to approve their accession to NATO, although he confronted fierce opposition from the Russian parliament and military officers. It was perceived as a direct threat to Russian security (Smith, 2008).

Within the framework of “NACC, another cooperative mechanism “Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme” was launched in January 1994 (The Europa World Yearbook 2003), Russia joined it in the sixth month of the same year to build a long-term constructive relationship with NATO. An uneasy situation emerged for Russia in August and September 1995 when NATO launched first combat operation against Bosnian Serbs (Collins, 2011). Russian policymakers opposed the use of force by NATO. However, Russia participated in the Dayton peace agreement and dispatched soldiers to Bosnia in 1996 to join the implementation force. Russia, a significant non-NATO contributor, proved to be a beneficial partner (Smith, 2008).

Another forum was established for confidence building and information exchange between NATO-Russia named the “Founding Act, signed on May 27, 1997.” The Act established a “Permanent Joint Council (PJC)” for NATO-Russia consultations (Forsberg, 2005). The developments articulated Russia's unique relationship with NATO. The PJC enabled NATO members and Russian officials to discuss various security issues regularly.

However, before the inaugural of PJC conference tensions grew between Russia and NATO over the violence in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Russia raised apprehensions about NATO's bypassing UN Security Council (UNSC) in Kosovo and requested the latter's approval. The UNSC was a legal forum to maintain global peace and security. The North Atlantic Council (NAC), the main political decision-making body of NATO (Russia was not its member), authorized limited bombing and a phased air campaign in Kosovo in October 1998. The NATO action was a violation of the UN Charter that binds states to take approval from the UN Security Council on the non-defensive use of force. The Western states were certain that Russia and China would oppose such a resolution in the UNSC. The NAC's endorsement of using force in Kosovo exposed Russia's impotence in NATO (J. Smith, 2008). In Kosovo War, NATO launched Operation Ally Force against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on March 24, 1999. The bombing campaign of NATO against Serbia, a Russian ally, was a proof of aggression. In response Russia cut ties with NATO and withdrew delegate from its headquarters on the same day but avoided entirely severing relations with NATO (J. Smith, 2008).

The Visegrád Triangle of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia became NATO members on March 12, 1999. It completed the first phase of NATO's post-cold war enlargement owing to Russian political instability. The accession of Poland brought NATO closer to the Russian border (Behnke, 2012). NATO celebrated its 50th anniversary in April 1999 with 19 members. It was decided to host another summit in 2002 to consider the request for membership made by nine more countries (Daalder & Goldgeier, 2001). Meanwhile, Russia rejoined NATO in July 1999 and sent peacekeepers to Kosovo to assist NATO, while in Bosnia, Russia was signalled to play a positive role in the Balkans' stabilization (Smith, 2008).

Boris Yeltsin resigned on the last day of 1999, and Vladimir Putin was named acting President of Russia, committed to mending fences with NATO. In an interview with the British

Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on March 5, 2000, Putin was asked about NATO as a possible partner, a competitor, or an enemy. He said, "We embrace equitable collaboration and partnership. We believe deeper integration with NATO can be discussed, but only if Russia is treated as an equal partner. We have consistently expressed opposition to NATO's eastward expansion (BBC Breakfast with Frost, 2000)." Though NATO was careful to not send any sign of Russian joining to NATO in the future (Smith, 2008).

Russia under Putin: relations with NATO

On March 26, 2000, the presidential election was held in Russia; Putin became Russian President on May 7. From December 31, 1999, to May 6, 2000, Putin served as acting President. He firmly believed in restoring Russian authority, and national honour in international affairs. Putin views Russia's destiny as a European nation. During a visit to Russia in June 2000, US President Bill Clinton urged western European countries to accept Russia into NATO and the European Union (Tyler, 2000).

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, were a watershed moment in world politics. Terrorism evolved as a global threat. The first foreign leader who communicated directly with President Bush was the Russian President. He stated unequivocally to support every action the American President would decide to take. The Next day of the terrorist attacks, NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its fifty-two-year history, pledging support to the U.S (D'Souza, 2015). The strategic cooperation between Moscow and Washington was reaffirmed. Russia cooperated with the US to construct military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for rapid military moves in Afghanistan (Cooley, 2012).

At the NATO Rome Summit on May 28, 2002, the "NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC)" was replaced with the "NATO–Russia Council (NRC)." It established an official diplomatic route for resolving security issues and collaborative initiatives between NATO and Russia. In November same year, at the Prague Summit, NATO invited seven new members to begin accession talks, including three former Soviet republics: "Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania" (the USSR's "security belt"), Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Prague Summit Declaration, 2002). The addition of Estonia to NATO reduced the distance between Putin's hometown St. Petersburg and the NATO boundary to less than a hundred miles. The distance was around 1,200 kilometers in 1989 (Sarotte, 2021).

Following the invasion of Afghanistan, the US invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003 (Ullah, 2020). The US president passed orders for the 200,000 American troops stationed on Iraq's southern border to launch a long-awaited invasion to disarm and overthrow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (Burns & Sanger, 2003). Putin opposed the war (Pincus, 2004); Russia described the conflict as "unjustifiable and unnecessary" and the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, also criticized the US-led war on Iraq and declared it illegal (MacAskill & Borger, 2004).

The US military focused on Iraq, and the command of the multinational peacekeeping force of Afghanistan was transferred to NATO on August 11, 2003 (Shah & Ayaz, 2015). It was the first mission of NATO beyond European borders, reflecting constant transformation and resolve to meet the security challenges of the twenty-first century (Waldman, 2003).

In the meantime, street protests broke out in two former Soviet republics, Georgia and Ukraine, in 2003 and 2004, prompting new presidential elections. Western observers called these demonstrations "colour revolutions" and were perceived as democratic breakthroughs capable of bringing about political change in these countries. Parliamentary elections were held in both countries, but the results were challenged. It led to massive protests known as the Rose and Orange Revolution. It culminated in the re-election of pro-Soviet Presidents who faced defeat. The new presidents of Georgia and Ukraine followed a pro-Western foreign policy, declaring

European and Euro-Atlantic integration to be their top priority; this shift contributed to tensions between Georgia-Ukraine and Russia. The "rose and orange revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine (Way, 2008), respectively, were regarded by Moscow as additional evidence of the Western intention to marginalize Russia and render it militarily powerless in the face of the US and NATO. Russia could not allow these ex-Soviet republics to join NATO (Wolff, 2015).

The 19th NATO summit was held in Riga, Latvia, on November 28-29, 2006, the first summit on former Soviet territory. The United States indicated in January 2007 that it would negotiate with Poland and the Czech Republic about the possibility of deploying a missile defence system in these countries. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. Russia expressed firm opposition and backed Serbian protests that the West ignored. Many of the NATO members acknowledged Kosovo's independence (NATO Summit, 2006, 2006).

The NATO 20th summit was held in Bucharest, Romania's capital city, on April 2-4, 2008, when US President Bush campaigned for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO. It was an antagonistic move. The Russian President warned the West that any attempt to expand NATO to Russian borders would be viewed as a "direct threat" to Moscow (Dawar, 2004). Despite strong US support and extensive debate in NATO, it was decided not to offer the "Membership Action Plans (MAPs)" to Georgia and Ukraine. These developments again brought Russian-NATO ties to the lowest ebb.

Considering the worsening situation, Russia launched a five-day high-intensity war against Georgia four months after the NATO 20th summit. It was the first European conflict of the twenty-first century (Allison, 2013). Russia accused Georgia of "aggression against South Ossetia." South Ossetian forces, backed by Russia, began shelling Georgian settlements (Hanhimaki, 2021) On August 1, 2008. The war put Georgia, and Ukraine's accession hopes on hold for the time being. The Georgian war caused severe disagreements between Russia and NATO over several matters; however, Russia gained a strategic victory in the Georgian conflict (Weitz, 2010a).

Two tiny states, Albania and Croatia, joined NATO on the 60th anniversary of NATO (Fact Sheet On NATO Summit. 4/04/2009, 2009). The accession brought all former Warsaw Pact countries into NATO. The admission met with little opposition from Moscow (Albania, Croatia Become NATO Members, 2009).

The third "NATO-Russia Council (NRC)" conference was held in Lisbon on November 19-20, 2010. In closing remarks, the Secretary General of NATO declared that NATO members and Russia agreed, in writing, that while we face many security issues, we represent no threat to each other (Weitz, 2010b). However, in the following months, NATO became a threat to Russian interests in Libya and Syria when the self-immolation of a Tunisian citizen on December 17, 2010, brought the Arab Spring to the forefront of world politics.

Assertive Moscow towards NATO: 2011-2020

Moscow sided with the West in recognizing the democratic change in Tunisia and Egypt. But in response to the uprising in Libya and Syria, serious divisions arose between NATO and Russia. In a UN Security Council vote Russia remained silent on a resolution authorizing NATO intervention in Libya. Russia condemned the NATO air campaign in Libya and argued that the latter had broken international law by intentionally targeting a state's leader for assassination. That was a flagrant breach of the sovereignty of a state (Flint, 2012). Following the assassination of Muammar Qaddafi, President of Libya, on October 20, 2011, Russia began backing Syrian

President Bashar al-Assad and warned NATO that something similar should not happen in Syria (Bryansk, 2012).

Contrary to popular belief, NATO and Russia collaborated in the years afterwards to equip the Afghan army's helicopter fleet, conduct joint counter-piracy and submarine-rescue exercises, and discuss a common mission to help Syria dispose-off chemical weapons (NATO-Russia Relations: The Background, 2020).

In November 2013, Russia encountered another issue owing to the Ukraine President's rejection of signing an association agreement with the European Union (History of Crimea's Reunification with Russia, 2022). Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian president, was deposed, and fears grew in Moscow about the new government that could evict Russia's Black Sea fleet from its base in Sevastopol, Crimea's central city and a major Black Sea port. Putin was motivated to reclaim Sevastopol because he feared it might fall into NATO's hands. Russia organized a referendum that overwhelmingly approved the territories' membership in the Russian Federation. In response to NATO's eastward expansion, Russia annexed Crimea, a part of Ukraine's sovereign territory, in March 2014. By intervening in Ukraine, Russia created a situation where Ukraine could not join either NATO or the EU shortly (Loftus, 2019).

The Russian moves threatened the West, and both accused each other for these developments. The Foreign Ministers of NATO retorted by suspending all practical cooperation with Russia on April 1, 2014 (Freedman, 2014). The hostile operations of Russia against Ukraine continued since then, notably destabilizing eastern Ukraine. In response, NATO increased its deterrence and defence posture. The bloodless integration of Crimea into Russia sent shockwaves in NATO countries, particularly among Russian neighbours. Concerning this, "assimilation" might one day be used against them.

NATO launched another "Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) at the Wales Summit in September 2014" to deepen connections with partner forces. It extended the partnership with six more countries Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, Sweden, and Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia responded positively to an official request by the Syrian government for military assistance in September 2015. This move shifted the war's tide in favour of pro-Russian Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. By eliminating a substantial part of the armed opposition and reasserting regime control over much of Syria, Russian airpower with Iranian-backed militias on the ground played a decisive role in protecting the Assad regime (Jones, 2020).

At the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, NATO leaders heeded that Russia had to abide by international law and obligations. NATO-Russia did not return to routine until then. Before leaving for Europe on his final trip as President in November 2016, Obama conveyed to world leaders that his successor may not abandon the decades-old partnership with NATO (Smith, 2016).

The next American President, Donald Trump, was obsessed with repairing relations with Russia and referred to NATO as an obsolete relic. However, the accession of NATO continued, and in 2017, Montenegro, a former Yugoslavian country, joined NATO in contradiction of Russian desire. Montenegro had historical issues with Russia; the latter threatened reprisal if Montenegro continued its "hostile path" and criticized the country's "anti-Russian move (Luhn, 2017)." The US President also chastised this little country's membership in NATO (Specia Megan, 2018). NATO appeared badly divided in its mission, with officials on both sides of the Atlantic casting doubt on its prospects (Hanhimaki, 2021).

In the meantime, Ukraine became an official NATO aspiring member, which brought her closer to NATO's full-fledged membership and it appeared on NATO's website on March 10, 2018 (Khan, 2018). Ukraine's unicameral parliament, Rada, on February 7, 2019, passed a bill amending the country's constitution to gain full EU and NATO membership (Shea & Jaroszewicz, 2021). Ukraine's presidential elections were held in March of the same year and won by the pro-western candidate Zelensky (Erlanger, 2021). Kyiv had to settle its territorial issue with Moscow over Crimea before joining the Alliance. The Russia-NATO Council (RNC) had its last meeting in Brussels on July 5, 2019 (Wither, 2021).

On the 70th anniversary of NATO, its secretary general acknowledged the Alliance's external and internal constraints but argued that NATO was adaptable and powerful enough to deal with them. At this occasion, he presented a comprehensive agenda that included combating global terrorism, arms control, containing Russia, and for the first time, curbing the rise of China (Powell, 2022).

In the last year of Trump's presidency, the U.S-led multinational military exercises, including NATO, were conducted from February to mid of March 2020, known as "Exercise Defender-Europe 20 (Ploom et al., 2020)." It reinstated the US resolve to stand by its NATO Allies. Due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, the exercise duration, scale, and scope were reduced to two weeks.

Russia objected to Exercise Defender-Europe 20 and asked the West, " Who will they defend themselves from? Russia considered such exercises as provokable, which could only escalate tensions. Russia did not find any comparable opponent of NATO, whose armed forces surpassed Russia by more than half ('Russia to React to US-NATO Exercise Defender 2020 in Europe', 2020). With the military buildup, NATO's accession continued, and it accepted North Macedonia, a landlocked Balkan country, as its newest, smallest and weakest member on March 27, 2020. that boasts a strong military. With this accession, NATO became an organization of 30 countries, two from North America and twenty-eight from Europe out of forty-four. Russia stated that adding a weak country like North Macedonia to the Alliance did not strengthen it and showed its value as a member is similarly questionable (Russia Fumes at North Macedonia's NATO Accession, 2020).

Six more countries Ukraine, Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden joined another NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Program on June 12, 2020, a part of NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative, which aimed to retain and strengthen cooperation between allies and partners who have contributed significantly to NATO-led operations ('NATO Grants Ukraine Enhanced Opportunities Partner Status', 2020). The development brought Ukraine a step away from the full fledge membership of NATO.

Escalated tensions between Russia and NATO

NATO increased the scale and frequency of its military exercises in the "Baltic and Black Sea areas." The Exercise Defender Europe, first conducted in 2020, became an annual NATO exercise. The second such was conducted from March to June 2021. The development provoked Russia to show its military might, and in September 2021, Russia conducted the most significant military Exercise Zapad (West) 2021 that involved 200,000 troops from Russia, Belarus, and several other countries participating in the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Barros, 2021). In late 2021, the Russian additional military forces moved toward Ukraine (Gorenburg, 2022) and Moscow demanded security assurances from the West. In non-compliance

the former had to pursue a "military-technical" solution of its own (Gorenburg, 2022). Tensions were growing between Russia and NATO, and they intensified when NATO expelled eight Russian officials from its headquarters in Brussels on October 6, 2021, owing to the suspected activities. NATO reduced Russian staff at the organization from twenty to ten. The mission of Moscow to NATO was suspended on November 1, 2021 ('NATO Mission in Brussels Unlikely to Resume Work, Says Senior Diplomat', 2021). In response Russia closed NATO's military liaison and information offices in Moscow ('Russia Suspends NATO Mission in Response to the Expulsion of Its Staff', 2021).

NATO and Western countries accused Russia of massing troops near Ukraine, but the Russian government dismissed the fears as unjustified. The chief of Russia's General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, on December 9, 2021, told in a news briefing that "NATO holds about 40 major military exercises near Russian borders every year." To de-escalate tension, the Russian foreign ministry proposed an eight-point treaty on December 17, 2021, demanding that NATO rule out further expansion, including Ukraine joining the Alliance, and a limit on the deployment of troops and weapons to NATO's eastern flank. Bring back NATO forces to where they were stationed in 1997 ('Russia Issues a List of Demands It Says Must Be Met to Lower European Tensions', 2021). Russian security demands were followed by three high-level diplomatic meetings between Russia, America, and NATO-Russia Council (NRC). In these meetings, the participants remained steadfast in their positions in Ukraine. Neither NATO accepted Russian demands to stop further enlargement and withdrawal of troops from member states bordering Russia, nor was Moscow ready to allow Ukraine accession to NATO (Erlanger, 2022). On January 26, 2022, the US and NATO presented individual written responses to Russian security requests. Afterwards, in a telephonic conversation, Putin told Macron, his French counterpart, that the principal Russian concerns regarding security guarantees were not considered in the US response. It is up to him to "decide on further measures" and when to respond to the American letter on his own (Putin Says US Response on Security Guarantees Ignores Russia's Concerns, n.d.).

Ukraine-NATO ties: a security threat for Russia

NATO-Ukraine ties were strengthening with the passage of time, and Russia perceived that in the annual NATO summit in Madrid (Spain) on June 28-30, 2022, Ukraine could be fully absorbed into NATO. Ukraine, an eastern European state, is the second-largest country in Europe after Russia. It shares a 1,200-mile border with Russia. It holds a much higher place for Russia than the other former republics. Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine was the oldest and most renowned Slavic city in the Russian Empire. Kyiv was considered the mother of all Russian cities. It was one of the Russian Empire's most vibrant and rapidly expanding cities at the beginning of the 20th century (Fuller, 2006). Russia became deeply concerned over Ukraine's drift toward the West. Ukraine's internal and foreign policy always affects northeastern neighbours.

The geostrategic significance of Ukraine on the Black Sea also contributes in Russian policy. Russian natural gas had been traditionally travelled via Ukraine on its way to Europe. Ukraine accession to NATO insecure Russia due to Article 5 that binds thirty states of the organization with collective security.

Russia found evidence of Ukraine's planned attack on Donbas, the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in southeastern Ukraine. The developments in these regions were posing a direct threat to Russian security. Russia began a "Special Military Operation" on February 24, 2022, and justified it that the operation was carried out on the request of the heads of the Donbas republics to protect the civilians. ('Russia Has Not Invaded Ukraine and Will Not Invade Any Country Lavrov', 2022). It has been Europe's most extensive military action since World War II.

Conclusion

Russia-NATO ties remained uneasy, unpredictable, and uncertain. There were intense periods of cooperation and frequent periods of crisis, dramatic turns, and even cut-off relations. Being a European state, NATO ignored the Russian desire for membership. In abandoning communism and adopting democracy, the Russian economy passed through a prolonged economic depression. It survived without any substantial western support. Despite extending membership to Russia, NATO established multiple forums to develop close ties with Russia. In all such forums, Russia was not treated as an equal ally. The discriminatory western policy indicated that Russia was still considered a threat to the West owing to its rich past. Russia resisted NATO actions over the breach of international laws. Gradually Russia became critical of the US and NATO's independent and unilateral decisions in world affairs. Russia accused the US of disdain for the basic principles of the UN charter. Two decades after the fall of communism in 2011, Russia emerged as a stakeholder in global politics. In contrast to the 1990s, it refused to accept its position as the West's subordinate partner. Russia became assertive to recover its lost international position. Russia suspended ties with NATO, an organization that members were increasing and reaching Russian borders with the bondage of collective defence. Ukraine, the former Soviet republic, was also ambitious to be a member of NATO. The membership could deeply harm Russian geo-strategic, geo-political, and geo-economic interests in regional and global politics. When battling Russia became an overt part of NATO agenda, followed by unprecedented military exercises, and letting down of Russian security guarantees from the US and NATO, all contributed to provoking Russia for decisive action for her own survival. As per the theory of realism and neo-realism, states have an undisputable right to use force for their security. Russia practically did the same.

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