

NATO AT THE CROSSROADS

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Abstract: NATO was formed in 1949 by two American and 10 European countries, as a barrier to the spread of the USSR and communism. NATO played its role during the Cold War, because there was no direct conflict with the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. After the Cold War, when the USSR collapsed and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, NATO survived and got completely new roles: 1) *De iure*, as a regional agreement to establish peace and security in the world and 2) *De facto*, as a lever of US power in an attempt to establish new world - unipolar order. NATO has played "both roles" in numerous US military interventions around the world. In the second half of this century, Russia is returning to the world stage, and China's influence is growing more and more. According to most analysts, a multipolar world order is being created, which the US is resisting, constantly expanding and strengthening NATO. Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has expanded into a conflict between Russia and the collective West. NATO is at a crossroads: survive, not survive or transform.

This paper aims to analyze the position of NATO in contemporary international relations and to predict its future role in them. The research focus is on the NATO Declaration from the summit marking the 75th anniversary of its existence - Washington, July 2024.

Key words: NATO, New World Order, Strategic concept, Declaration

1. INTRODUCTION

The research problem is the position of NATO in contemporary international relations and their future projection. Factors at the core of the problem are: 1) Cold War role of NATO, 2) NATO after the Cold War and 3) NATO in contemporary international relations.

The subject of the work is named as **NATO at the Crossroads**. That figurative title, in essence, denotes the position of the Alliance after Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022, where

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it is obvious that the latest world order is being created and the existence of military alliances, including NATO, is being questioned. The main goal of the research is to analyze NATO's position in contemporary international relations and predict its survival, organization and role in creating the latest world order. The basic hypothesis from which the research started is as follows: The survival and role of NATO in creating the latest world order will mostly depend on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, that is, the conflict between Russia and the collective West.

The basic methods used in the work are case study and content analysis. NATO's strategic documents, primarily - the Strategic Concept and the Declaration, were primarily subjected to content analysis.

2. COLD WAR POSITION OF NATO

The Cold War is a term for a period of international relations after the Second World War that was characterized by antagonism between the largest powers - the USA and the USSR and their blocs (NATO and the Warsaw Pact). Therefore, that period is also called bipolarism in international relations. The term "cold" arose because the mentioned world powers and their blocs did not directly engage in armed conflict during that period. (Forca, 2021). Thus, Vukadinovic defines the Cold War as follows: "The Cold War is a conflict between the East and the West primarily on the economic, political and ideological level in order to reduce the influence of the opposite side." The arms race is also one of its important determinants. The degree of hostility between the two powers changed its intensity and was sometimes so high that the outbreak of war was expected" (Vukadinovic, 2001:31).

In theory, there are different determinations of the duration of the Cold War. However, the views given by Charles Kegley and Eugene Witkoff are most often used. Kegley and Witkoff divided the duration of the Cold War into three phases:

"The first phase, the confrontation, from 1945 to 1962; the second phase, from coexistence to détente, from 1963 to 1978, and the third phase, from renewed confrontation to rapprochement, from 1979 to 1991. The phase of confrontation is essentially marked by unipolarity, that is, the dominance of the USA as the main center at the global level, with a superior ability to destroy the opponent with superiority in the application of the atomic bomb. With the production of the atomic bomb by the USSR, there was an easing of the confrontation". (Kegli, Vitkof, 2006:199-200).

NATO is not the first defense integration in Europe after World War II. Namely, in 1948 Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg formed the *Western Union* in Brussels, as a defense alliance aimed at preventing new threats from Germany (Forca, 2023). However, it was quite clear to those who knew the situation in the world that the threat to the Western European countries did not come from Germany, but from the USSR. In this sense, Western European countries and the newly formed Western Union were not enough to defend against that danger, that is, America had to be involved. The recognized Belgian politician Paul-Henri Spack warned: "In order to defend Europe, it must be tied to America" (Janjevic, 2007). There are other opinions about America's involvement in the defense of Western Europe, which refer to the intolerance of France and Great Britain within the Western Union, and the USA needed to suppress that antagonism. A very interesting view of the reasons why NATO was formed was presented by the first Secretary General of the Alliance, Lord Ismaj, with the words: "1) to bring Germany under control, 2) to drive the Russians out of Europe and 3) to bring America to Europe" (Simic, 2014).

Taking all of the above into account, on April 4, 1949, the Washington Treaty was signed in Washington, by which NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was formed. NATO was

formed by two American (Canada and the USA) and 10 European countries (Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Norway, Denmark and Iceland) as a defense alliance, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, by which every state is guaranteed the right to self-defense (See: UN Charter, 1945: Art. 51). Thus, Article 5 of the Washington Treaty refers to Art. 51 of the UN Charter.

Putting itself at the head of NATO, the US directed the Alliance's primary task towards preventing the spread of the USSR's influence in Europe, striving to strengthen the capacities and defense capabilities of Western European states and creating a strategic advantage over the USSR. Such a position of NATO, and especially the admission of West Germany in 1955, predicted the formation of a military alliance on the "adversary side" as well. Namely, in Warsaw (Poland), on May 15, 1955, the Warsaw Pact (VP) was formed, which consisted of: USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, East Germany and Albania. Like NATO, the VP was formed in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Thus, two of the strongest military alliances ever formed in Europe were created.

NATO grew from the initial 12 to 16 member states during the Cold War. The admission of new states during the Cold War happened three times: 1) 1952: Turkey and Greece, 2) 1955: West Germany and 3) 1982: Spain.

The basics of determining the organization and functioning of NATO in the changing conditions of international relations and the strategic environment are realized by a document called the Strategic Concept of the Alliance. "The strategic concept of the Alliance is a document that describes the purpose and tasks of NATO, considers strategic perspectives in the light of the changed international environment and lays the foundation for a new approach to security at the beginning of the 21st century." Also, the Strategic Concept provides guidelines for the transformation of the Alliance's strengths and capabilities" (Sta je Partnerstvo za mir?, 2010:26).

From its formation until today, NATO has adopted eight strategic principles, of which four during the Cold War (Forca, 2021): 1) Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area (DC 6/1, December 1, 1949); 2) Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area (MC 3/5, December 3, 1952); 3) Comprehensive strategic concept for the defense of the NATO area (MC14/2, May 23, 1957); 4) Comprehensive strategic concept for the defense of the NATO area (MC 14/3, January 16, 1968).

Their primarily defensive character can be seen from the very names of the adopted NATO strategic concepts. The defensive character of the strategic concepts required a strong military force, which the European states did not have. In this sense, NATO's military force, in its largest form, was maintained by the USA. That power, in relation to the USSR and VP, was initially based on America's advantage in possessing nuclear weapons. However, the USSR very soon (1953) tested its own atomic bomb, thus the advantage of the USA began to decrease. However, the economically more powerful West introduced the world, especially the USSR and the Soviet Union, into an arms race, as one of the basic characteristics of the Cold War, i.e. the period of bipolarism.

The arms race between NATO and VP kept the whole world on the edge of fear of new major conflicts, and especially of the use of nuclear weapons, which were increasingly being developed on both sides. However, the USSR and VP could not withstand the arms race with the significantly more economically powerful West (USA and NATO). Thus, at the end of the seventies (1977), according to data from the World Bank, the ratio of economic power measured by gross domestic product (GNP) was 4.45:1 in favor of the USA and its allies. (Mirkovic, 2007:28). That fact, the involvement of the USSR in the war in Afghanistan, as

well as internal conflicts within the Soviet Union and the USSR led to the fact that the West (USA and NATO) "won" the Cold War, as they say - "without firing a shot". The VP was dissolved and the USSR collapsed.

In addition to the above in relation to the key adversary (USSR and VP), NATO also played a significant role in relation to its allies. That role is multiple. First, NATO (USA) enabled the significant military and economic strengthening of its European members and their convergence into the Alliance. Second, NATO (USA) enabled the unification of Germany (1990) and the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1992. Third, NATO completely prevented the independence of the European Union in organizing its own defense, which was advocated by Germany and France. All attempts and organizational forms of the EU to establish its own defense remained in the shadow of NATO. So, if we go back to the words of Lord Ismay about the reasons for the formation of NATO, we see that during the Cold War, two things were achieved: 1) Germany was brought under the control of (USA) and 2) America came to Europe.

3. POST COLD WAR POSITION OF NATO

In fact, there are events that had great consequences on international relations, to the extent that a conclusion was established - *nothing will be the same again* (Forca, 2021). One of such events is the end of the Cold War in the last decade of the last century. The end of the Cold War brought extremely large-scale disintegration and integration processes in Europe. The key disintegrations are the dissolution of the VU and the collapse of the USSR. The basic integration processes are: the unification of Germany, the formation of the EU and the survival of NATO. We are particularly interested in the survival of NATO.

At the end of the Cold War, the bipolar international order was destroyed, and practically, only one superpower remained in the world - the USA. Using such a position, the USA began the process of creating a unipolar world order, with its own hegemony in it. From the perspective of the theory of realism, in addition to the economic one, the USA needed a strong military power. Recognized analysts, such as John Mearsheimer, who claimed "that ruling the world from one center is practically impossible" (Mirsajmer, Tragedija politike velikih sila, 2001) warned them of this. In this sense, using its own position in international relations, and above all its influence in the UN, the USA ensured that NATO survives as a "regional agreement" to preserve peace and security in the world, and in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter (See: Povelja UN, 1945). Thus, in spite of numerous oppositions, UN Security Council Resolution no. 787, NATO was accepted as a regional agreement, which, at the invitation of the UN Security Council, can engage in the establishment of peace and security in the world. NATO had its first operations in this role at the beginning of the disintegration of the former SFR Yugoslavia in 1991 (Forca, Krstic, Stankovic, 2023).

The established position of NATO was named as "world policeman", because the USA began to apply force around the world, for which it also used the capabilities of the Alliance. The most drastic example of the use of force is the NATO aggression against FR Yugoslavia in 1999. On that occasion, NATO attacked a half-disintegrated country (FRY) without the mandate of the UN Security Council and contrary to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty on the Formation of the Alliance (Forca, 2021). It was a blatant example of a demonstration of force on the 50th anniversary of the Alliance and a precedent in international relations. On that 50th birthday, the sixth strategic concept of the Alliance was also adopted, in which two very dangerous goals for peace and security were determined: 1) the expansion of NATO to the east and 2) the engagement of the Alliance outside the North Atlantic region, with or without the mandate of the UN Security Council (The Alliances Concept, 1999).

The geopolitical picture of Europe after the Cold War, in itself, indicated that the former adversaries of the USA and now Russia would start a race to win over the numerous states of Europe that found themselves "in the windstorm" after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the USSR and (somewhat later) of the breakup of the SFR Yugoslavia.

There is disagreement in the literature on NATO's eastward expansion after the Cold War. Namely, a good number of theoreticians, including the President of Russia Vladimir Putin himself, claim that the West, led by the USA, "promised" the then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev that the Alliance "would not expand even an inch to the East" after the admission of a united Germany in 1990. Those promises lasted until 1999, when the aforementioned decision on the expansion of the Alliance was made. The first countries admitted to NATO in 1999 were Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, which increased the Alliance to 19 member states (Forca, 2022). In parallel with the expansion of NATO, the process of expansion of the newly formed EU also took place. However, using NATO for its own needs, the USA managed to impose itself on the leaders of the EU and that its expansion proceeds according to the principle - first to NATO, then to the EU. (Forca, 2021). Thus, to date, NATO has grown to 32 member states, and the EU "remained" at 27, according to the stated principle.

The situation of the status of European countries today is very interesting, regarding NATO and the EU. Thus, when it comes to only European countries, the situation is as follows: 1) both NATO and the EU are members, 2) only NATO is a member, and 3) only the EU is a member. We can see: 1) 23 countries are members of both NATO and the EU, 2) seven countries are members of NATO and 3) four countries are only members of the EU.

The expansion of NATO to the east, although it was immediately met with resistance from Russia, was relatively peaceful, even when the Baltic states were admitted (2004), until it was Georgia's turn and, especially, Ukraine. Namely, at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, Georgia and Ukraine were invited to join the Alliance. This was met with fierce resistance from Russia. Taking advantage of this situation and the strained relations in Georgia itself, in 2008 Russia militarily attacked Georgia, after which it recognized two of its parts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) as independent states. Such a sequence of events influenced NATO to prolong the admission of Georgia and Ukraine to its membership.

However, under pressure from the US, NATO continues to demand that Georgia and Ukraine become members of the Alliance. This leads to internal friction between pro-Russian and pro-Western forces in Ukraine in 2013 and the so-called color revolution, in which President Yanukovych was forcibly removed. Taking advantage of such a situation in Ukraine, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, or returned it to its composition (Crimea was part of Russia until 1954, author's note). The antagonisms of the West led by the USA and Russia are intensifying again, for which Ukraine is primarily used (proxy war).

The culmination of the antagonism between Ukraine and Russia takes place in 2022, when under the guise of protecting the pro-Russian population in south-eastern Ukraine (Dombas), Russia militarily attacks Ukraine, naming that act as a "special military operation", while the UN General Assembly condemns this action of Russia. characterized as aggression. Western countries under the leadership of the USA (the "collective West"), and especially NATO, are completely on the side of Ukraine.

Another aspect of NATO's post-Cold War positioning is military interventions around the world, at the behest of the US and ostensibly in the role of UN forces (regional agreement) to establish peace and security. We have already pointed out that the demonstration of force by NATO (without the mandate of the UN Security Council) was shown in the aggression against the FRY in 1999. "Stunned" by the UN's position, that is, without condemning that act, the US

and NATO continue military interventions around the world. The most characteristic multi-year military arrangements of the USA and NATO are: 1) conflict in Iraq, 2) conflict in Afghanistan, 3) conflicts in the Middle East and 4) conflicts in Africa.

A drastic example of the use of force by the US and NATO is Afghanistan. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, i.e. punishing Al Qaeda for the terrorist attack on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, the USA and NATO attacked Afghanistan in the same year. In his speech three days after the Al Qaeda terrorist attack in 2001, which was later included in the US National Security Strategy document (2002), US President George W. Bush (junior) pointed out:

"Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deception and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. The conflict started on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing". (National Security Strategy, 2002:5).

The involvement of the US and NATO in Afghanistan lasted for 20 years (2001-2021), during which time four US presidents (Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden) changed. To make matters worse, the US and NATO withdrew relatively shamefully from Afghanistan in 2021, leaving the problem "unsolved". The way the US and NATO left Afghanistan showed the weaknesses and vulnerability of the Alliance and America and, practically, introduced the world into the inexorable process of creating a new world order - *multipolarism*.

4. NATO CROSSROADS

Immediately after the Cold War, the question was asked - why did NATO survive, if the Warsaw Pact was dissolved? We gave an answer to that question in the previous text. However, in the new conditions in international relations after Russia attacked Ukraine, the question now arises - where is NATO going? We call this issue the "NATO Crossroads" drop and try to anticipate them.

4.1. First NATO Crossroads - War against Russia

After the arrival of Putin at the head of Russia, that country is returning as one of the rivals of the USA on the world stage. Since Trump and officially in the US national security strategy, Russia and China are named as revisionist countries and key threats to the US and its allies. (National Security Strategy, 2017).

America and NATO shamefully left Afghanistan in 2021. However, after winning the US presidential election (2020), Joseph Biden says - "America is back". Where did it go, or where would it return to America, was the question. In order to partially "wash away the shame" of leaving Afghanistan, the USA is lighting a fuse on the "lines of fire" with Russia - Ukraine. Namely, back in 2015, US Secretary of State Jim Kerry named the disputed points of the US (NATO) and Russia in Europe as a "line of fire", implying a move from the Baltic states, through Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, the Caucasus to the Western Balkans (Serbia). (Forca, 2020). Russia attacked Ukraine, partly "playing" on the card of division of the West because of the way out of Afghanistan. However, it turned out that it was a successful US "trick", because the West completely united and submitted to America. Europe was unprepared for the war in its "backyard", so the initiative was left to the USA and NATO. Therefore, John Mearsheimer, speaking about the conflict in Ukraine, says: "When we say the West, we mean America." This is because Washington is ordering how Europe will march when it comes to Ukraine". (Mearsheimer, 2023). US President Biden says in the Introduction to the 2022 US

National Security Strategy: "There is no time to waste. We need to restrain Russia and overcome China". (National Security Strategy, 2022). This position of Biden has become a task for NATO.

America creates NATO Europe. A new iron curtain is coming down from the Atlantic to the Baltic and the Black Sea. The United West drove Russia out of Europe. This fulfilled the third reason for the formation of NATO, as described by Lord Ismay. And what next?

The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than two and a half years and there is no end in sight. Hundreds of thousands killed, millions displaced, enormous material destruction and other horrors brought about by the war, do not subside. No one gives up on their goals. The USA and NATO constantly encourage and support Ukraine, promising and providing all kinds of support, especially financial and military. For NATO leaders, the goal is clear - Russia must not win! In the last Strategic Concept of the Alliance, from 2022, it is said about Russia:

"The Russian Federation violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. The possibility of an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Allies cannot be ruled out. The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to the security of allies and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. It uses conventional, cyber and hybrid means against us and our partners. Its coercive military posture, rhetoric and proven willingness to use force to pursue its political goals undermine the rules-based international order. The Russian Federation is modernizing its nuclear forces and expanding its new and disruptive dual-capable delivery systems, using coercive nuclear signaling. It aims to destabilize the country in our east and south. In the far north, her ability to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic is a strategic challenge to the Alliance. Military strengthening of Moscow, including the Baltic, Black Sea and Mediterranean region, along with military integration with Belarus, are a challenge to our security and interests". (NATO Strategic Concept, 2022:3-4). In accordance with the above, the USA and NATO members, as well as the EU, continued to strengthen sanctions against Russia, on the one hand, and to arm Ukraine, on the other. Ukraine was asked to prepare and carry out a counter-offensive in 2023, in accordance with the received Western military assistance. However, nothing came of the counteroffensive, except for Russia's strong response, new human victims, emigration, material destruction...

In such a situation, and as part of psychological/informational warfare, information is constantly appearing from the West that Russia will not stop at Ukraine and will expand its offensive activities to other European countries, including NATO members. This "disinformation" is reinforced by the views that Russia is very close to using nuclear weapons, because it cannot achieve its goals in Ukraine, and its conventional weapons and equipment capacities have been exhausted. Disinformation moves from the media into official NATO documents. Thus, in the Declaration from the NATO summit in Washington (July 9-11, 2024), on the occasion of marking the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Alliance, it was explicitly written:

"Russia bears full responsibility for the aggressive war in Ukraine. We will never cut off the annexed parts of the territory of Ukraine, including Crimea. The cross-domain threat posed by Russia to NATO will remain long-term. Russia is rebuilding and expanding its military capabilities and continuing its airspace violations and provocative activities. We condemn Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and coercive nuclear signalling, including its announced deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus, which demonstrates an attitude of strategic intimidation. Russia has also intensified its aggressive hybrid actions against allies, including

through proxies, in a campaign across the Euro-Atlantic area. These include sabotage, acts of violence, provocations at allied borders, instrumentalization of irregular migration, malicious cyber activities, electronic interference, disinformation campaigns and malicious political influence, as well as economic coercion....We are determined to limit and challenge Russia's aggressive actions and to counter its the ability to conduct destabilizing activities towards NATO and its allies..." (NATO Summit Declaration, 12.07.2024).

At the NATO summit in Washington, 9-11 July 2024. In 2008, the Alliance remained unwavering in its support for the defense of Ukraine until victory over Russia, as well as reiterated NATO's openness to admitting Ukraine when the conditions are met. NATO's immediate close support to the defense of Ukraine in the near future will be: "Provision of critical air defense systems and other capacities; Decision to establish NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), which will operate in member states; Through proportional contributions, the allies intend to provide a minimum basic financing of 40 billion euros in the next year; Undertaking the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Center (JATEC), A senior representative of NATO in Ukraine will be appointed" (NATO Summit Declaration, 12.07.2024).

In addition to the above-mentioned open support for Ukraine, NATO undertook extensive own preparations in all domains for dealing with the newly created situation, including for a possible conflict with Russia, from which the Declaration from Washington stands out: Provision of forces, capabilities, resources and infrastructure for low-intensity conflict; Conducting "Steadfast Defender 24", the largest military exercise in a generation; Increasing the ability of emergency actions in accordance with the NATO planning process (NDPP), especially in the field of ammunition production and airspace control; Strengthening our ability to move, strengthen, supply and sustain our forces to respond to threats across the Alliance, including efficient and resilient logistics and the development of mobility corridors; Taking full advantage of the accession of Finland and Sweden and the capabilities they bring to the Alliance by fully integrating them into our plans, forces and command structures, including the development of NATO's presence in Finland; Accelerating the integration of space into our multi-domain planning, exercises and operations, particularly by strengthening the capacity of NATO's Space Operations Centre; Establishing a NATO integrated center for cyber defense to improve network protection; Strengthening the protection of critical submarine infrastructure (CUI); Investing in our chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense capabilities. (NATO Summit Declaration, 12.07.2024).

Therefore, NATO, when it comes to Russia, continues with the implementation of the "Defense in 3600" project, which began in 2016, after the summit in Warsaw. That project, in essence, involves surrounding Russia with military forces and realizing the messages of Brzezinski and Dick Cheney from the end of the last century - "Russia should be pushed into a corner" (<https://kossev.info/prof-saks-ako-ukrajinu-uzmu-u-then-we'll-end-up-in-a-nuclear-war/>). The USA is extremely satisfied that the request of former President Trump has been fulfilled, and more than two-thirds of the members of the Alliance are allocating 2 percent or more for defense. In this regard, Poland leads the way, whose defense expenditures reach over 5% of GDP.

On the other hand, when it comes to NATO, the position of the Russian side (President Putin) is that "there is no place for the Alliance in the latest world order". Namely, during President Putin's stay in China this year, a document on the new world order was signed with Chinese President Xi Jinping, in which it was emphasized that there is no place for military alliances, and that he will advocate for the reform of international organizations, such as the G20 and

others.(<https://www.euronews.rs/svet/planeta/123765/si-i-putin-potpisali-dokument-o-novom-svetskom-poretku-dva-lidera-iznela-stavove-o-najvecim-krizama-u-world/news>).

Considering that neither Russia nor NATO (USA) are giving up their goals regarding the war in Ukraine, which are diametrically opposed, and in accordance with the activities carried out by both the Alliance and Russia, it is not impossible that their direct armed conflict will occur. This conflict can be provoked by certain countries neighboring Ukraine, and above all by Poland and the Baltic countries. A conflict between NATO and Russia would certainly lead the world to a new world war, with unfathomable consequences. This is especially so if you take into account the possession of nuclear weapons on both sides. *A possible war between NATO and Russia is the "most difficult crossroads" for the Alliance.*

4.2. Second NATO Crossroads – Conflict with China

China started the Soviet economic expansion in the second decade of this century with its "Belt and Road" initiative and, according to some analysts, became the first power in the economy. This fact is not at all in favor of the USA, which uses all mechanisms to block China. During the time of President Trump, a real economic war broke out between China and the USA. Of course, the USA tried to portray China in the worst light to its allies, especially NATO members, and, practically, as the main threat to the Alliance and its allies. Thus, in "Trump's" US national security strategy (2017), China is rated as a revisionist country, and in the document from 2022, it is claimed that only China is capable of creating a new world order, as America does. (National Security Strategy, 2022). In this sense, the mentioned document contains very harsh messages that America sends to China, such as:

"We will act in common purpose to address a range of issues - from untrusted digital infrastructure and forced labor in supply chains and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. We will hold Beijing accountable for abuses - genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, human rights violations in Tibet, and the dismantling of Hong Kong's autonomy and freedoms - even as it seeks to pressure countries and communities into silence. We will continue prioritizing investments in a combat credible military that deters aggression against our allies and partners in the region, and can help those allies and partners defend themselves" (National Security Strategy, 2022:24).

Two security aspects of the US-NATO conflict are particularly characteristic. First, it is accusing China of supporting Russia in the war in Ukraine. Second, is the support that the US provides to Taiwan in its conflict with China, up to arming.

As expected, most NATO members support the US in the conflict with China. Thus, in the Strategic Concept of NATO from 2022, it is stated:

"The ambitions and coercive policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC uses a wide range of political, economic and military tools to increase its global influence and power project, while remaining vague about its strategy, intentions and military buildup. The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target allies and damage the security of the Alliance. The PRC seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructures and strategic materials as well as supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and strengthen its influence. It seeks to undermine the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains. The deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undermine the rules-based international order are contrary to our values and interests". (NATO Strategic Concept, 2022: art.13).

Considering the fact that China and Russia have strengthened their partnership even after the stated positions and moves of the USA and NATO, in the Declaration from the Summit of the Alliance in Washington (July 9-11, 2024), it is stated for China:

"The PRC has become the decisive driver of Russia's war against Ukraine through its so-called no-holds-barred partnership and its heavy support of Russia's defense industrial base. This increases the threat Russia poses to its neighbors and to Euro-Atlantic security. We call on the PRC, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with a special responsibility to support the goals and principles of the UN Charter, to end all material and political support for the Russian war effort. This includes the transfer of dual-use materials, such as weapons components, equipment and raw materials that serve as inputs to the Russian defense sector. The PRC cannot facilitate the largest war in Europe in recent history without negatively affecting its interests and reputation... The PRC continues to pose systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security. We have seen continued malicious cyber and hybrid activity, including disinformation, originating from the PRC. We call on the PRC to maintain its commitment to responsible behavior in cyberspace. We are concerned about the development of the PRC's space capabilities and activities. We call on the PRC to support international efforts to promote responsible behavior in space. The PRC continues to rapidly expand and diversify its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and more sophisticated delivery systems. We urge the PRC to engage in strategic risk reduction discussions and promote stability through transparency. We remain open to constructive engagement with the People's Republic of China, including building reciprocal transparency to protect the Alliance's security interests. At the same time, we are increasing our collective awareness, increasing resilience and readiness, and protecting ourselves from the PRC's coercive tactics and efforts to divide the Alliance". (NATO Summit Declaration, 2024: art. 26-27).

In addition to NATO as an alliance, the US is also developing other integrations in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically aimed at countering China's expansion. Characteristic in this sense is the AUKUS alliance (Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA), which is expanding with the inclusion of South Korea and Japan. Some analysts call that alliance "Eastern NATO".

China is the USA's biggest rival on a global scale. In this sense, numerous analysts are of the opinion that America should leave the war in Ukraine to the European Union, and orient itself for the conflict with China, which is imminent. Whether such a projection of the conflict with China will come true will certainly depend on the further course of the war in Ukraine. The conflict with China is, of course, primarily a matter for the US, but also one of NATO's crossroads. A very dangerous situation would arise if NATO were to engage in a direct conflict between America and China, because it would mean a world war, just like Russia, for example.

4.3. Third NATO Crossroads – Conflict with Allies in Europe

From its formation until today, NATO has been and remains a key subject in the defense of Europe (the European Union). All attempts by the EU to establish a system of its own defense, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, have failed. All the initiatives and organizational forms of the EU members, in this sense, have either died out or have drowned in an undefined EU. It is about the attempt to create the Western Union (1948), then the Western European Union (1954), then the formation of the European Defense Community - EDC (1954) and others. Simply, the power of the USA, supported by the views of Great Britain, prevailed in the security and defense projections of the EU. However, under the influence of Germany (former chancellor Angela Merkel) and France, a clause on "common defense" of the Union was introduced for the first time in the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). (See: The Lisbon Treaty, 2009: art. 42). In addition, similar to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the "Solidarity Clause" was introduced into the Lisbon Treaty, which implies the obligation of

the member states of the Union to provide assistance to a member country that may be attacked. Finally, the "clause on permanent structural cooperation" was introduced in the Lisbon Treaty, as an opportunity for countries that have the ambitions and capacities to organize themselves for joint tasks (The Lisbon Treaty, 2009: art.42 and 46). Some analysts saw in the clause "permanent structural cooperation - PESCO" the beginning of the creation of the EU Army. In particular, the leaders of Germany and France insisted on PESCO after Great Britain voted "NO to the Union" in a referendum in 2016 (exiting the EU, in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon).

However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine (2022) showed the complete impotence of the European Union and the weaknesses of its Common Foreign and Security Policy - CFSP and Common Security and Defense Policy - CSDP, as part of it. Practically, CSDP and CSDP of the EU are as if they do not exist. In such a situation, America sided with Ukraine and took NATO with it, which means the majority of EU member states. The Union fell under the full influence of the USA. This, among other things, led to the fact that Finland and Sweden, as members of the EU, changed their neutral policy and became members of the Alliance.

The EU, united on the issue of common defense, after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, is trying to revitalize its CSDP and CSDP by adopting the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense of the EU (A Strategic Compass, 2022). In that document, it is frankly admitted that the EU was unprepared for the war in Ukraine, but that it will make every effort to strengthen its CSDP and CSDP. Therefore, the Strategic Compass envisages extraordinary efforts and huge investments in the reconfiguration of the EU CSDP. Certainly, the EU is not able to renounce its alliance with NATO, because most of its countries are in that alliance. However, the intention is to rely more on the capacities of the Union.

NATO supports strengthening the CSDP and CSDP of the EU, but sees the EU as an ally, not a rival. In this sense, the Alliance (USA) is of the opinion that NATO is still the key to the defense of the EU. For the sake of any eventuality, the Berlin-Paris alliance opposes reliance on NATO's eastern wing, in which the center of power - the "American Wall" towards Russia should become the "B9" Group, with Poland as the leader. Group "B9" consists of nine member states of the Alliance (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria). The group was formed in 2015 in Bucharest (Romania), after Russia annexed Crimea, and as a mechanism for projecting security and defense in those conditions. America is a strong supporter of the B9, which is gaining particular importance with the entry of Finland and Sweden into the Alliance. There are practically no more visible conflicts between "allies" NATO and the EU. Those conflicts are "simmering" in the attitudes of individual member states of NATO and the EU regarding some solutions in relation to the war in Ukraine. Hungary, partly Slovakia, and covertly also Germany and France are leading in these attitudes.

In 2023, Germany adopted its first ever National Security Strategy (See: Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie, 2023). In that strategy, the fact that Germany has neglected its defense is presented, which is partly due to the force of circumstances, that is, the experience of the Second World War. But it is emphasized that Germany will make extraordinary efforts to strengthen its "integral security", by investing as much as 100 billion euros in strengthening the armed forces, primarily starting from itself and relying on the Strategic Compass of the EU. Of course, it is not time to break with NATO, and the Alliance is also mentioned as a partner (Glisovic, 2024).

France "waited" for the EU, NATO and the USA to adopt their strategic documents in 2022 (after Russia's aggression against Ukraine), and then adopted its National Strategic Review (See: National Strategic Review, 2022). For France, since the time of De Gaulle, it has been

said that it is not exactly on the best of terms with the USA and Great Britain. On the other hand, the centuries-old enmity with Germany is gradually being erased. In this sense, in the latest strategy of France, its role in the revitalization of CSDP and CSDP of the EU is particularly emphasized, by fulfilling the tasks from the latest Strategic Compass for the Security and Defense of the Union. Certainly, France, like Germany, does not foresee the possibility of breaking the alliance with NATO. In the negotiations between the EU and NATO, President Macron even proposed the entry of NATO troops into Ukraine, for which he sent a contingent of his country's military forces. (Dostic, Stankvoic, 2024). Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Hungary has been one of the EU and NATO members that does not accept all the decisions of those integrations. In this sense, some analysts have even named Hungary as a "mouthpiece for Putin". From July 1, 2024, Hungary holds the presidency of the EU. Everyone caught the eye of Prime Minister Orbán's trip, which included a visit to Moscow (Putin), Kiev (Zelensky), China (Xi Jinping), and ended at the NATO Summit in Washington. There is even information that Hungary has a "proposal plan" for solving the Uraj crisis, which mentions the return of EU relations with Russia. Also, according to some information, the EU rejected Orban's proposal. (<https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/svet/5487497/eu-rat-u-ukrajini-madarska-rat-u-ukrajini-mirovna-misija-vikotr-orban.html>).

Poland becomes the "weight of America" in Europe, and thus the most important military power on the old continent. Poland is one of the biggest proponents of strengthening NATO and confronting Russia. This has its deep historical reasons in the relations between Russia and Poland throughout the centuries. Poland was the first to respond to the request that NATO member countries allocate 26% of GDP for defense, whose expenditures exceed 5% of GDP. The information that Poland will double the number of its armed forces in the next 10 years, and an incredible 113 billion euros will be allocated for defense, sounds almost unbelievable. (<https://mondo.me/info/Svijet/a1164684/Poljska-izzdvaja-oko-113-milijardi-eura-kako-bi-okupila-najvecu-evropsku-vojsku.html>).

So, for the time being, there is a conflict in Europe between the perspective of European common security and defense and the role of NATO. Like all other geopolitical processes in Europe and the relationship between the EU and NATO in the future, it will depend on the outcome of the war in Ukraine.

5. CONCLUSION

NATO was formed in 1949, as a defense alliance, and a reaction to the spread of the influence of communism and the USSR, that is, a barrier to the North Atlantic hemisphere from that influence. Certainly, in the official documents - the Washington Treaty, that goal is defined differently. However, the reasons for the formation of NATO were pragmatically stated by the first Secretary General - Lord Ismay, with the words: 1) to bring Germany under control, 2) to drive the Russians out of Europe and 3) to bring America to Europe.

From 12 member states at the time of its formation, NATO today has 32 member states, with a tendency to increase the number of states. Three periods can be roughly defined in the development of NATO: 1) The Cold War, 2) The post-Cold War period until Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022, and 3) the current situation.

During the Cold War, NATO played its role, protecting Western countries from war. In that period, the Alliance adopted four strategic concepts and all four explicitly related to the defense of the North Atlantic area. In this period, NATO enabled the return of Germany after the Second World War and helped the integration of the countries of Western Europe, which would later form the European Union. By the end of the Cold War, NATO had expanded by four countries (Turkey, Greece, West Germany and Spain) and grown to 16 member states.

During the Cold War, two reasons for the formation of NATO, as Lord Ismay saw them, were fulfilled: 1) Germany was brought under control and 2) America came to Europe.

The end of the Cold War led to strong disintegration and integration processes in Europe. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved, the USSR disintegrated, Czechoslovakia disintegrated and the SFR Yugoslavia was broken up. On the other hand, Germany was united, the European Union was formed and NATO survived. NATO survived even though VU disintegrated, and, logically, the question was raised - why is that so? The answer is simple - there is only one superpower left in the world - the USA, which felt its chance to create a unipolar world order with its own hegemony. NATO has survived, *de iure*, as a regional agreement that can engage in the establishment of peace and security in the world, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. In accordance with the above, NATO transformed from a defense alliance into a security forum and became a "world policeman": *De facto*, NATO has survived as a lever of US power in its intention to establish a unipolar world order. In accordance with the two mentioned aspects of NATO's survival, in the post-Cold War period the key ones for the Alliance are: 1) NATO expansion and 2) Engagement/application of force in numerous parts of the world.

Although there is information about a kind of promise to the USSR that with the admission of a united Germany (1990) NATO would not expand even an inch to the east, that promise was short-lived. NATO began its expansion in 1999 and has grown to 32 member states. Therefore, NATO has been expanded by exactly 100% in terms of the number of countries compared to the end of the Cold War. A special aspect of the post-Cold War period was the use of NATO in numerous US military interventions around the world. That use began with the illegitimate aggression against FR Yugoslavia in 1999, which was carried out despite the decision (resolution) of the UN Security Council and contrary to Article 5 of the Washington Agreement. It was a precedent in international relations, which will have very significant repercussions on their further course. After NATO's aggression against FRY, armed interventions followed in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya, Syria and other parts of the world.

The return of Russia and the strong economic influence of China, and even the creation of the EU in a way, shook the US idea of a unipolar world. Russia opposed the expansion of NATO to the east, especially to the countries created on the territory of the former USSR. This was demonstrated by the example of Georgia and Urajina. At the invitation of NATO (2008) for Georgia and Ukraine to join the Alliance, Russia attacked Georgia in the same year and declared two of its parts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) as independent states. Upon repeated invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, and in 2022 armed attack on Ukraine and annexed four of its areas.

Russia's moves in Ukraine have united Western countries, which were quite shaken after the inglorious exit from Afghanistan in 2021. NATO and the USA have completely sided with Ukraine. The weak EU fell under the full influence of America. In such conditions, the third reason for the formation of NATO was realized - Russia was expelled from Europe.

The war in Ukraine is not calming down. The support and assistance provided by the US and NATO to Ukraine is not enough to stop Russia's efforts to achieve its goals. There is an increasing charge in the relations between NATO and Russia, which threatens to turn into a world war. At the celebration of 75 years of its existence in Washington in July 2024, NATO maintained a sharp course to support Ukraine until victory, offering it a place in its composition. The situation has been brought to extreme tension for world peace. Without clear perspectives on how the war in Ukraine will unfold, the polemic of finding a way out of the situation is increasingly being launched. The rest of the world outside the collective West did

not fully agree with the US and NATO initiatives, on the contrary. Even some members of the EU and NATO see that in this situation the only benefit from antagonisms and conflicts is the USA.

In the current situation, NATO is at a crossroads. The most difficult part of the NATO crossroads is to enter into an open war with Russia, which would bring the world to the brink of a greater tragedy than seen in two world wars. The second leg of the NATO crossroads, caused by US interests, is the expected conflict with China. It is difficult to predict where this would lead the world, but the fact is that NATO and the USA do not have the capacity to wage war against Russia and China at the same time. In the end, the European idea of independent defense, which NATO successfully suppressed for more than seven decades, is "smoldering".

The American elections are approaching. The recent assassination of presidential candidate Donald Trump may be the first election signal of who will win the election. At one time, when he was president of the USA, Trump "threatened" that America would leave NATO. The general conclusion is that NATO will either enter a war with unforeseeable consequences, or it will transform itself in a direction that will bring the positions of the security forum and the world policeman back into the framework of the defense alliance of what remains of it.

There are no final solutions in international relations. The question of the role and survival of NATO is obviously on the agenda.

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