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Russia's evolving military strategy in response to NATO expansion: Continuity and changes

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Abstract

This article analyses the changes and continuities in the Russian Military Strategy in response to NATO's expansionist policies. The methodology used is inter-disciplinary in nature as the discourse is based and conceptualised in the historical context with social insights into the contemporary development of events. The paper is divided into two sections: the first concerns NATO's expansion, both during and after the cold war period; and the second examines the proposed Russian Military Strategy in response to NATO's increasing eastward expansion. It is concluded that Russia's national security concepts and evolving expressions of military doctrine closely follow the process of NATO's expansion. The nature of forward deployment, defence concept and military strategy that NATO adopts are decisive in formulating and influencing not only Kremlin's perception but also its reaction, especially in the military field to alliance enlargement.

Keywords: Russian military strategy, NATO, cold war, security, alliance

Introduction

Throughout its history, NATO has been a major security concern that made the rules of Moscow expand in diverse directions. From an alliance which was originally devoted to the mutual defence of its members, NATO has extended its borders to enclose and encircle the entirety of Europe and has expanded military alliances throughout the world. Russia and NATO have led a long and complicated relationship characterised by mistrust and competition. The evolution of their troubled relationship can be traced back to the beginning of cold war period. In fact, the evolution of the Soviet military strategy is intrinsically linked to the expansionist tendencies of the NATO forces. NATO with the United States has acted as the principal determinant of the Soviet military modernisation - characterised by the use of modern warfare, technologically advanced conventional arms and information warfare; rise in the use of air-space and outer space for military operations - especially in the post-cold war era.

Two distinct periods of NATO enlargement have occurred in history: the first expansion took place during the cold war phase and the other after the Soviet disintegration. Russia has opposed every round of NATO's increasing proliferation in its neighbourhood so far and is still hostile to any future eastward enlargement of NATO. The early 1990s was characterised by a short span of positive association between Russia and NATO but this emerging partnership was soon deteriorated by adversity in relations due to NATO's military action against Yugoslavia (1999) ^[45] which was accompanied by NATO's extension to encompass Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Georgia and Ukraine. The crisis of the 1990s was the upshot of two distinct perceptions of self-identity and prospect of security in Europe. With NATO's post-cold war military enlargement, its border with Russia has moved much closer to the main heartland. These fears have prompted Kremlin to launch a military reform and modernisation program combined with a significant increase in the defence spending to thwart what it perceives as a direct Western threat to Russian security.

In this context, the study seeks to shed light on NATO's expansionist tendencies and also endeavours to conduct a comprehensive appraisal of the evolving relationship between the Russian military strategy and modernisation with regard to NATO's expansion. The chapter is divided into following two sections: the first part deals with NATO enlargement, both

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during the cold war and the post-cold war period; and the second section deals with the proposed Russian military strategy in response to NATO's increasing eastward proliferations.

NATO Enlargement

NATO, a Western-led geopolitical project traces its origin to the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April 4, 1949. The treaty was signed by the foreign ministers of “Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the UK and the USA”^[1]. It was a major step towards the establishment of a counterbalance to Soviet defence troops positioned in Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. NATO was primarily a security pact, and two core components of NATO include - “Article 2, which commits the member states to work towards strengthening security by strengthening their free institutions” and “the famous Article 5, which promises security support for any member state which comes under attack”^[2]. These two fundamental articles constitute the very heart and soul of NATO's concept of collective defence. The treaty reflected “a fundamental revision in the foreign policy of U.S. It was for the first time since the 1700s, that the U.S. had officially bound its security with the European countries. In addition to focusing on the establishment of a collective defence system, NATO also sought to establish a mutually beneficial East-West relationship through dialogue and cooperation.

Cold-War Expansion

The first expansion of NATO allowed Greece and Turkey to join as new members in 1952. Their inclusion was justified mainly on security, economic and foreign policy grounds. The security reasons were connected with the distress that Greece had to encounter after the Second World War in suppressing a communist uprising and the orders by the Soviet Union for the establishment of defence bases in the Turkish Straits. The Economic reasons were connected with the US Marshall Plan, directed to help a ruined and shattered Europe to get back on its economic feet. The Foreign reasons were connected with the Truman doctrine which not only assured the safety of Turkey and Greece but also ensure that they were on the right side of the Iron Curtain. The addition of these two countries “enabled the alliance to shore up its southern flank to forestall Communist military action in Europe at the height of the Korean War”^[3]. P 16. Turkey's strategic position has been of great significance for the NATO forces, as “It serves as a vital eastern anchor, controlling the straits leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean along with sharing its border with Syria, Iraq and Iran”^[4].

The primary adversary of World War II - The Federal Republic of Germany - was the next to join the Western alliance in 1955, despite early opposition by France and the Soviet Union. Along with the strategic significance, the inclusion of Germany was also seen as an extension of the Westernisation policy of the United States. Membership of NATO was seen as a major step in the post-war rehabilitation of Germany, as it returned much of its sovereignty which was suspended during the post-World War II occupation and carved a new course for Germany to play a notable role in the security and surveillance of Western Europe during the cold war era. Germany's

acquisition was based on NATO's new Forward Strategy, adopted in 1950, which called for “rearmament of the German military forces and emphasised on defending Europe as far to the east as possible, and no further West than the Rhine river”^[5], P 5.

Spain joined NATO in 1982. The British, French and the United States were keen on Spain's admission to NATO but its troubled political history with its neighbours under the ruler Francisco Franco (who governed from 1936 until 1975), hindered Spain from being politically accepted by the other Western Europe countries. Both Spain and the U.S. signed the Madrid Pacts in 1953, which allowed Spain to obtain economic relief in return for authorising the US to operate its naval and air bases.

The actual process of Spanish accession to NATO was initiated soon after the democratic transition of the government which took place in the aftermath of Franco's death (1975)^[46]. After Spain's transition to a democratic country, it became very easy for the member states of NATO like the US, Britain and France to justify their entry into the organization. However, some sort of disagreement still persisted among the socialist and the communist leaders of Spain, who were of the view that Spain's entry to NATO will boost the scale of tension that existed between the two competing blocs and would make Spain a likely target of the Soviet Union in the case of a future conflict. They were also of the view that joining NATO would not assist Spain to reacquire lost Gibraltar, as the NATO members would favour Britain on this issue. In the end, “the most important domestic support for the membership of NATO came from the Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez who promised a national referendum on NATO's membership. In the public poll of 1986, the Spaniards voted to stay in NATO but Spain joined the integrated military structure of the alliance only in 1988”^[6].

Post-Cold War Expansion

The discussion around NATO's enlargement in the post-cold war was initiated by Henry Kissinger as early as 1991-92. But it was under the leadership of Bill Clinton that NATO's enlargement program ultimately took the shape of a concrete policy. NATO's expansionist tendencies have been apprehended by Kremlin as a “zero-sum game”, in which the member-states of the Euro-Atlantic region are expanding their domination at the expense of Russia. In the decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union itself, NATO has been able to reshape its ‘raison d'être’ by shifting from “an organization solely providing collective defence to an organization proactive in the area of collective security”^[7]. This strategic transformation is evident from the varied contemporary missions undertaken by NATO viz. “Operation ocean shield”, and “Operation Unified Protector in Libya” in 2011 along with the “nation-building efforts in Afghanistan”. NATO, therefore, “in the post-cold war has emerged as a major military instrument for the member-states of the Euro-Atlantic community in dealing with major international crises usually based on a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate”^[8].

Soon after “the end of the Cold War, Moscow seemed on the way to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic security community, sparking high hopes for a new peaceful order in the northern hemisphere”^[9]. P. 7. But the establishment of Partnership for Peace program, which was aimed at creating trust between NATO and the Warsaw countries deteriorated

this emerging partnership. Moscow perceived the Partnership for Peace as a tool to enhance US power in Europe and to downgrade the influence of Russia. Another major pivotal point in the US-Kremlin relationship came in 1994 due to NATO's involvement in the Bosnia crisis followed by its decision to expand its membership. NATO forces conducted their first major intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was accompanied by the implementation of the 'Dayton Peace Agreement', which pronounced the end of the 1992-1995 war in the country. The 'NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR)' was stationed in December 1995 and was accompanied by the 'NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR)', which ended in December 2004. In December 2006, both Bosnia and Herzegovina became members of NATO.

An ambitious step towards the institutionalization of the Russia- NATO partnership was taken in 1997, with 'the NATO-Russia Founding Act' which was soon accompanied by the institution of the 'NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council' in 1997. The Founding Act laid out "the mechanism to foster cooperation, coordination and joint decision-making between NATO and Russia. The Act underlined that; Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and Russia will work together to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behaviour in the interests of all states" ^[10]. But this shared goal of building a strong and powerful safeguard in the Euro-Atlantic region could not last long because of NATO's military interference in Kosovo.

The 1999 air campaign by the NATO forces in Kosovo without the approval of the UN Security Council, is perceived by the Russians as a part of NATO's plan for unilateral security in Europe. Despite being accorded a special alliance with NATO under the Founding Act, Russia's attempt to counter NATO's intervention in Kosovo was not successful. This created a sense of mistrust and suspicion. Russia was apprehensive that this military campaign signalled not only US and European hegemony in the existing world order, but also a violation of the rule of sovereignty in the international arena. This soured the relations between NATO and Russia. Nonetheless, Moscow still proved to be a very valuable ally in solving the Kosovo conflict as both the Russian and NATO soldiers fought together in order to restore peace.

In the Washington Summit of April 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted an open-door policy for the inclusion of new members. Under this policy, the first wave of NATO's enlargement that encircled the former members of the Soviet Bloc in Eastern and Central Europe took place. "The first wave was called the 'Visegrad Three', which involved "the inclusion of Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in NATO in 1999" ^[11]. The enlargement of NATO forces under the "Open-door" policy received a major push under the Bush administration (2000-2008). The central aspect of the Bush strategy was "promotion of peace and stability in the European continent through the consolidation of the new Central and Eastern European democracies into a wider Euro-Atlantic community, in which the United States would remain deeply engaged" ^[12].

The second wave of "NATO's enlargement under the Bush administration embraced seven countries namely Bulgaria,

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia who joined NATO in 2004. These enlargements that took place in the post-cold war era (1999 and 2004) were qualitatively and quantitatively different from the previous enlargements. Quantitatively, in the space of five years, the number of NATO members rose from 16 to 26. The enlargements significantly extended the Alliance border areas adjoining Russia and increased the size of the area under the collective security umbrella in Europe by nearly 30 per cent and contributed to increasing frictions between Russia and the members of the Euro-Atlantic community" ^[13]. Moreover, the war in Iraq further pushed the NATO-Russia relations to a new low, and there were fears regarding, the return of the old Cold War suspicions and hostility. Russia, together with Germany and France, rejected and successfully limited via UN resolution, the use of military force against Saddam Hussein. This led to a tense stand-off between the forces of Russia and NATO.

Like the former Bush administration, the new Obama administration (2009) also promoted the open door policy of NATO expansion. The policy emphasised the inclusion of new European states into the US led military alliance to maintain the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. The United States strongly supported the entry of countries such as Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Georgia and Ukraine and argued that they should be invited to join the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). At the April 2-4, 2008 "NATO summit in Bucharest, both Albania and Croatia were extended the membership invitations, which culminated with their formal admission in the NATO's Strasbourg summit in April 2009" ^[14]. The invitation for Montenegro to become the 29th member of the military alliance is viewed by Russia as an open confrontational move.

Donald Trump, who succeeded President Obama as the 45th President of the United States, was a vocal critique of NATO, insisting that European countries should pay more for their collective defence and in return grant concessions to US interests in trade. This is evident in his May 2017 speech in Brussels, where he asserts, "NATO members must finally contribute their fair share. Europe must do more" ^[15]. P. 108. This was followed by Montenegro's addition as the 29th member of NATO's alliance on 5 June 2017. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the importance of NATO's role in preventing and preserving peace in the Middle East was also highlighted. This decision was made amid high tensions between the United States and Iran in the wake of the assassination of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani by an American strike in Baghdad on January 3, 2020. The action indicated that President Trump wanted to extend the NATO alliance to those countries in the region that share his cautious stance towards Iran, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By 2020, North Macedonia completed its military integration with NATO and became its 30th member.

Russian Military Strategy (Cold war period)

The period after the end of the Second World War represented an exceedingly turbulent period in the development of the Soviet military in many respects. On one hand, by 1948, "Joseph V Stalin had reduced USSR armed forces to about 2.8 million men and had given priority to the reconstruction of the domestic economy, with the objective of reaching the pre-war level by 1950" ^[16]. P.

10. On the other, the Soviet leader also emphasised the development of those military technologies in which the Soviet Union had been most deficient: nuclear weapons, radar, missiles, and jet engines. He also undertook the construction of a large, essentially conventional navy.

Under Stalin, the Soviet military adopted an expansionist strategy and successfully extended its influence to Poland, East Germany, Yugoslavia, Albania, Outer Mongolia and North Korea. In fact, the whole of Eastern Europe except Finland and Greece came under the Soviet influence. The Communist Governments in these countries pursued policies which were subservient to the Soviet Policy and soon came to be known as the Soviet Satellites. Moscow also restored the Communist International by forging an alliance with all the anti-imperialist forces. In September 1947 the Communist Information Bureau, also known as the 'Cominform' was established to co-ordinate the work of the communist parties of various countries and to publish propaganda to encourage international communist solidarity. With a view to further promoting greater economic cooperation among the communist countries, Joseph Stalin introduced the 'Molotov plan' (a counterpart of the Marshall plan). He further consolidated the relationship between the USSR and Eastern Europe through the establishment of 'Comecon' (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) in January 1949. Comecon was established to provide economic assistance to the countries of Eastern Europe under Soviet command.

After the Second World War, USSR had signed bilateral agreements with all the countries of Eastern Europe excluding East Germany. But with the admission of West Germany to NATO (May 1955), the Soviets were concerned about the repercussions of a powerful NATO and a rearmed West Germany. Moreover, the Soviets were greatly alarmed by the remarkable speed with which NATO was expanding its influence over central and Eastern Europe. Kremlin viewed these expansionist tendencies of NATO as an instrument of American intervention in Europe. As a result, the Soviet Union under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev retaliated with the creation of the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955. The "Warsaw Treaty Organization (also known as the Warsaw Pact) was a political and military alliance between the Soviet Union and seven Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War era. It acted as a counterbalance to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces" [17].

Under Nikita Khrushchev, the military thought of the Soviet Union began its adaptation to the nuclear era and a discussion on the implication of nuclear weapons for the Soviet Military Strategy was initiated. At the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev making political use of the Soviet nuclear capability declared that war between the two opposed world social systems was no longer a fatal inevitability and the formidable means for deterrence between the socialist and the capitalist blocs was the nuclear weapons. Thus, he emphasised on the theory of peaceful co-existence. During Khrushchev's initial years of ascendancy (1955-58), "the Soviet defence outlays were reduced by about one billion rubles by cutting manpower, scrapping Stalin's conventional navy plans and shifting the USSR's defence effort towards missiles, electronics and nuclear weapons" [18]. P. 21. In January 1960, speaking before the Supreme Soviet Khrushchev emphasised the adoption of a minimum deterrence strategy. In the Soviet view, deterrence

relied heavily on the military balances of forces and upon the retaliatory capacity of nuclear-armed strategic missiles as the foundation of its security rather than relying upon the powerful ground troops and their massive offensive operations.

The Cuban Missile crisis of 1962 was an important catalyst in this regard, which exposed the internal weakness of Moscow's nuclear posture. It was after this event that a major revolution in the military affairs of the Soviet Union through the formulation of a new military doctrine and strategy for the nuclear age began. The Soviets associated this revolution with the large-scale production of both fission and fusion weapons; the deployment of large-scale strategic ballistic missiles for the formation of a new branch of service known as the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) and the introduction of nuclear weapons into the arsenals of all other services of Soviet armed forces, thus forcing internal reorganisation.

The development of Soviet military policies under Brezhnev (from the mid-1960s to mid-1980) was guided by two main ideologies - "First, the notion of International system organised along the class line; Second, belief in the fundamental irreconcilability of interests of world socialism and world capitalism" [19]. P.14. under Brezhnev, "the total expenditure and the procurement of military outlays grew faster than other components. By 1970 defences accounted for about 12 to 13 per cent of GNP, as compared to about 9 per cent only one decade earlier" [20]. P. 75. This increase in expenditure can be attributed to the Soviet weapons procurement policies. In addition to this, a major qualitative up-gradation through the introduction of advanced technologies such as - Multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs), mobile missile launchers and sophisticated stellar navigational systems also took place.

By the early 1970s, USSR reached the zenith of its political and tactical strength in comparison to the United States. The signing of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) in May 1972 led to the establishment of equality with regard to the possession of nuclear weapons between the two superpowers. This was followed by further negotiations on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which culminated in 1972. During the mid-1970s, "the Soviets developed three essential Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) technologies that were completely lacking at the beginning of the SALT I: (1) a small and movable phased array radar for local defenses; (2) two new ABM missiles, including one comparable to the U.S sprint designed for atmospheric interceptors; (3) the Ryad computer, reportedly similar to the US IBM 260/370 series" [21]. P. 92. Thus, by the time, "the SALT II agreement was signed between President Carter and Brezhnev in June 1979, Moscow's arsenal of long-range silo-based missiles had grown to some 1,400 (down from a high of 1,618 in 1975), outfitted with roughly 6,000 warheads" [22]. P. 32. But, Moscow's global ambitions under Brezhnev, accompanied by its preference for guns over butter, bankrupted the whole country and left the Soviet people materially worse off in comparison to their counterparts living in neighbouring capitalist countries during the Brezhnev's tenure.

Yuri Andropov who took over from Brezhnev on 12 November 1982 initially promised to attend to the considerable needs of the Soviet armed forces. But by late 1983, he began to hedge a bit on his support for the military. Konstantin Cherenkov who acceded Andropov on 13

February 1984 represented a return to the policies of the late Brezhnev period.

The new leadership that came to power in 1985 under Mikhail Gorbachev criticised the heavy Soviet dependence on the military as an instrument of policy. Gorbachev alleged that rather than facilitating and securing Soviet interests, the previous regime's excessive dependence on the military as an instrument of policy had done irretrievable harm to the country, by aggravating tensions with the opponents, straining ties with allies and intimidating virtually everyone else. Therefore the political leadership sought to redefine security in terms of emphasising defensive themes and war prevention. Gorbachev's ideology enshrined in the twenty-seventh congress of the communist party, reflected his pragmatic thinking as he emphasised the philosophy of ensuring security in the nuclear age with an overall agenda for action aimed at creating a peaceful world order. This new security thinking was also reflected under the 'Perestroika' policy of Gorbachev which stressed the establishment of a new world economic order, guaranteeing economic security to all.

The main contribution of Mikhail Gorbachev in the security policy was the three arms control negotiations that the Soviet Union concluded with the United States between 1987 and 1991: 'The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty)' of December 1987; 'The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty)' of November 1990 and 'the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START Treaty)' of July 1991. These agreements revolutionised the security relations between the two superpowers and emphasised the reduction of hundreds of missiles and thousands of warheads on both sides.

At the London Summit of July 1990, NATO invited "Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union to establish regular diplomatic relations with the alliance. This led to the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991"^[23]. The Council was seen as a major step toward the evolution of the relationship between the NATO countries and the former Soviet bloc. But Gorbachev's further endeavours like the de-Sovietisation and de-communisation of Eastern Europe accompanied by the unification of Germany in 1990 yielded major shifts in the geopolitics and were marked by an end of the Warsaw pact, failure of the NACC council and dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Russian Military Strategy (Post-Cold war period)

The discussion around NATO's enlargement in the post-cold era was initiated by Henry Kissinger as early as 1991-92. But it was under the leadership of Bill Clinton that NATO's enlargement program ultimately took the shape of a concrete policy. NATO's expansionist tendencies have been apprehended by Kremlin as a "zero-sum game", in which the member-states of the Euro-Atlantic region are expanding their domination at the expense of Russia.

NATO as an alliance has pursued to evolve throughout its existence. The identity and principles of NATO had undergone a great transformation in accordance with the newly emerging security threats and the changing balance of power. "The decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union itself, NATO has been able to reshape its 'raison d'être' by shifting from an organization solely providing a collective defence to an organization proactive in the area of collective security"^[24]. This

strategic transformation is evident from the varied contemporary missions undertaken by NATO viz. 'Operation Ocean Shield', 'Operation Unified Protector in Libya' in 2011 along with the 'nation-building efforts in Afghanistan'. Thus, in the post-cold war era, NATO has become a major military tool for member states of the Euro-Atlantic community in dealing with major international crises, following a UNSC directive.

The "end of the Cold War redefined the relationship between NATO and Russia. NATO, which was initially established to protect the Euro-Atlantic region from Soviet attack, gradually evolved into an alliance promoting security not only in Europe but also beyond. On the other hand, Russia has been seeking a new identity since 1991"^[25]. The distinct phases in NATO-Russia relations during the 1990s have been, "First, a fragile honeymoon which lasted from the end of 1991 to the late summer of 1993. This was accompanied by deterioration over 1994 and 1995 and then attempts to construct a new 'special relationship'. These efforts were again seriously challenged, but not permanently ruptured, during the Kosovo crisis of 1998-99"^[3]. P. 2. The "fragile honeymoon period began following the 1991 declaration of Russian President Yeltsin in which he emphasised on the creation of good relations with NATO and its members as a key foreign policy priority. This did not mean "Russian leaders were ready to accept everything that NATO might consider doing. Enlargement was a potential bone of contention from an early stage, even for supposed liberals in the Russian leadership"^[27]. P. 3. However, this period of peaceful negotiations did not last long and the question of NATO enlargement to Central Europe states became a critical issue. Under the fear of an expanding NATO, in May 1992, the RF General Staff published the first draft of the Russian Military Doctrine. This draft seemed to be "the beginning of a movement towards a more assertive confrontational Russian security policy, different from the defensive and peaceful tone of the last Soviet doctrine. In March 1993, the draft Doctrine of 1992 was submitted to the Supreme Soviet and after approval by the Parliament, the doctrine was finally ratified by a Presidential decree on November 2, 1993"^[28]. P. 4.

The Russian Military Doctrine of 1993 thus constitutes, "a document of the transitional period - the period of establishing Russian statehood, implementing democratic reforms and shaping a new system of international relations. The document defines the major sources of military dangers ranging from territorial claims of other states on the Russian Federation and its allies, the suppression of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens of the Russian Federation in foreign states and the deployment of foreign troops on the territory of states adjacent to the Russian Federation"^[3].

Since 1993, Russian attitudes toward NATO became more apprehensive. The major reason was "Russia had been duped about the true nature and aims of the Partnership for Peace (PFP) scheme, which NATO members had unveiled at a January 1994 summit meeting". Russia believed - the PFP's motive force was made up primarily of the anti-Russia sentiments; the PFP was a subterfuge designed to ensure a US military presence in Poland and Hungary and since the emphasis within PFP is on bringing former Soviet and Central European armed forces up to NATO standards, the programme would work to the detriment of Russian arms manufacturers who had traditionally dominated the

market in these regions”^[30], P. 5. The other prominent reasons that contributed to the increasing Russian suspicion were - NATO's use of force in the Balkans, the bombing of Bosnia in 1994 and 1995, and attempts to diminish Russia's influence in the Caucasus.

Despite the misperceptions of both sides, a summit meeting between NATO members and President Yeltsin was held in Paris in May 1997 in order to sign the Russian Federation - NATO Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security. Initially, Russia mistook it as a fair deal as NATO stated that it has no intention, no plan, and no reason to establish nuclear weapon storage sites on the territory of new members. A new ‘NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC)’ was also created to build increasing levels of trust, the unity of purpose and habits of consultation and cooperation between NATO and Russia. But the council did not succeed in placing NATO-Russia relations on a significantly more cooperative and institutionalised footing. The final blow in the NATO-Russia relations was the Kosovo crisis. Many viewed, the Kosovo conflict as the major turning point in NATO-Russia relations post-Soviet disintegration. Following the Kosovo crisis, Russia's hypothetical security concerns of the past decade became real as NATO came close to Russian borders and bombed non-NATO states. Thus, the Kosovo crisis, followed by the expansion of NATO to incorporate Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic had a major impact on the drafting of the military doctrine of 2000. It was regarded as the last straw in uniting major military and political elements of threat.

The presidential election of March 2000 triggered a major revision in the ‘National Security Concept (January 2000)’ and ‘Military Doctrine (April 2000)’. With the rise to power of President Vladimir Putin in 1999–2000, reshaping the military structures became the top political priority of the Russian government. The Military Doctrine of 2000, “outlines the role of the country's authorities in ensuring defence and, if necessary, preparing for and waging war. The document emphasises Russia's readiness to wage war and take part in armed conflicts exclusively with a view to preventing and repulsing aggression, protecting the integrity and inviolability of its territory and safeguarding its military security as well as that of its allies in accordance with international treaties”^[31]. Putin therefore, prioritised from the very outset the necessity to reform the military, both for operational and social reasons, taking into consideration the obsolete nature of military equipment, shortage of qualified officers, ill-discipline, low morale, high levels of corruption and the traditional large size of the conscription army. To initiate the reform agenda, Vladimir Putin in 2001 appointed the former KGB general Sergei Ivanov as defence minister. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a reset in Russia – US relations was witnessed under the leadership of Putin. Soon after the attacks, the president of both the countries met and Russia under Putin agreed to assist the USA in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is considered to be “NATO's first out of area operation and its biggest in terms of military capabilities and force deployment. Some major points of Russia's contribution in this mission were: allowing the US to operate in the Central Asian air space which Russia considered to be in its territory of influence, supporting the Afghan Armed Forces, co-training of Afghan counter-narcotics forces etc. Putin used this opportunity to further upgrade Russia's relations with the West, counter the threat

of terrorism, and for branding the rebels in Chechnya as terrorists. This thaw in the Russia-NATO relationship was further enhanced with the establishment in 2002 of ‘the NATO-Russia Council (NRC)’ at the Rome Summit. NRC replaced NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC), which served to improve coordination between NATO and Russian Federation and to address international security issues and joint projects between the two organisations.

But the prospects of this emerging partnership again crumbled when NATO adopted the Open-door policy under the Bush administration (2000 to 2008). The colour revolutions (2003-2005) in ‘Central Eastern Europe’, the ‘Caucasus’ and ‘Central Asia’ led NATO to expand its membership to include Ukraine and Georgia within the alliance, despite Moscow's strong disapproval. These events were further accompanied by the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia. Although the real conflict lasted only about five days, the political consequences were fatal and long-lasting. The Georgian conflict was initiated by the Ossetian separatists, who initially revolted by bombing Georgian villages. Russia's role in this conflict was confined to sending army and air troops to support Ossetia rebels. All sides - Russia, Georgia and South Ossetia were held accountable for war crimes by the Human Rights Watch. Russia was accused of conquering a sovereign state and threatening democracy. This negatively impacted the Russia - NATO relationship. In response, the Western countries suspended cooperation with Russia and imposed sanctions and both sides started accusing each other of returning to the Cold War tactics.

In the aftermath of the military shortcomings that were exposed by the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, president Medvedev and Defence minister Anatoly Serdyukov initiated a radical Russian military reform program in October 2008. The “reforms were intended to switch from a mass mobilisation army for vast land, sea, and air wars to a performance-capable, mobile, and maximally armed army and navy ready to participate in three regional and local conflicts, at a minimum”^[32]. These reforms were further strengthened by the adoption of a new military doctrine on February 5, 2010. The doctrine “adopted the 2009 National security strategy which highlights NATO as a danger because of its gradual and continuous enlargement to states bordering Russia and its assumption of out of area missions”^[33].

Towards the end of 2010, president Medvedev adopted the new State Armament Program or Gosudarstvennaya Programma razvitiya Vooruzheniy (GPRV), which expounded the military priorities of the Kremlin for the year 2007-2015. Under this program - “the armed forces were allocated about 3,000 new weapons and components and more than 5,000 modernised weapons units; Air Force and Air Defence Forces received over 1,000 new aircraft, for the most part, modernised Sukhoi Su-34 bombers; land and airborne forces were allocated 300 battalions and several missile brigades were rearmed. The Navy received several dozen surface ships and submarines, including five Project 955 Borey nuclear-powered strategic ballistic missile submarines equipped with new Bulava-30 ballistic missiles, two Project 885 Yasen nuclear-powered multipurpose submarines, six Project 677 Lada diesel-electric submarines, three Project 22350 multipurpose frigates and five Project 20380 corvettes”^[34].

With the return of Vladimir Putin (2012), preserving

Russia's great power stature and eminence in the post-Soviet space became a major priority. In "strategic terms, this contemplates Russia's entrenched desire to surround itself with buffer zones as a protection from invasions and external instabilities" [35]. Under the leadership of Putin, the State rearmament program and the defence industry received strong support. SIPRI has traced the unsustainable increase in Russian military expenditure since 2012. Defence Expenditure as a percentage of GDP rose from "4% in 2012 to above 4.5% in 2014" [36]. In 2014, amid a new economic crisis in Russia, "defence expenditures exploded to \$91.6 billion, placing Russia ahead of any European power. The World Bank assesses "these defense expenditures amount to 4.2% of Russia's GDP" [37]. P. 1-18. Russian rearmament and competitive military strategy under Putin, allowed it to execute the swift occupation of Crimea (March 2014). Russian military operation in Crimea marked the emergence of 'Hybrid warfare'. The introductory phase of the hybrid warfare does not differ much from the conventional tools of Russian diplomacy. In line with contemporary Russian military thinking on 'new generation warfare', hybrid war is built on "the combined use of military and non-military means, including diplomatic, economic, political, social, information and also military means. It is aimed at "defeating the target country by breaking its ability to resist without actually launching a full-scale military attack" [38]. P. 86.

Russia's successful hybrid war against Ukraine was bounded to a number of important pre-requisites - To begin with, the target country must be weak and divided, with corrupt officials; As a second requirement, the attacker must be militarily stronger than the target country in order to limit the effectiveness of the defence; Third, for a hybrid offensive to be successful it must have a large presence of ethnic minorities of the attacking state in the target country who do not fully trust the central government's treatment of them; Fourth, hybrid warfare is also dependent upon a strong media presence, both within the target country as well as overseas and Fifth, the attacked area must share a long, uncontrolled border with the attacker, allowing uninterrupted supplies to pass, as in Ukraine. As a result, the Kyiv government and Western nations were anxious about the speedy and effective Russian intervention in Ukraine.

Russia's successful campaign in Crimea was soon followed by the promulgation of a new Military Doctrine which was implemented on 25 December 2014, replacing the version of February 2010. The doctrine "addresses broader changes in both Russia's domestic and foreign policy environment. The document explicitly points out NATO and implicitly to the United States as the major external threats to Russia" [39]. The document also underlines two major domestic dangers faced by the Russian Federation that can damage the internal cohesion of this multi-ethnic state - First, is the erosion of ethnic and religious harmony in the North Caucasus, as demonstrated by the growth of Islamist movements in the region followed by the rise in Russian nationalism; and Second, the threat of constitutional change in the Russian Federation.

The Ukrainian crisis was soon followed by Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict in 2015, at the invitation of the Assad regime. The crisis provided Russia with an opportunity to showcase its new inventory of hypersonic weapons with devastating consequences to a global audience. Kramer *et al.* (2022) [47] argue that during the

Syrian intervention, Russia under Putin acquired more than 1,000 new aircraft, including the country's most advanced fighters, the SU-35S. Syria, therefore, served as a laboratory for Russian tactics and weaponry refinement, and for gaining combat experience for most of its soldiers [40]. Russia's operations in Syria strengthened its expeditionary capabilities through investment in rapidly deployable ground forces and long-range strikes. Russia also used Kalibr missiles and Kh-101 air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) to strike ground targets in Syria. Even though the strikes were intended primarily as a training exercise and demonstration of Russian capability for external signalling rather than for direct military effect in Syria, they do demonstrate how developments in these areas support Russia's expeditionary capabilities.

Under Putin's leadership, Russia's 2011–20 State Armament Programme became significantly more effective. Under this program, Russia modernised its intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), replacing older Soviet-era systems with the RS-12 M1 and M2 Topol-M (also known as SS-27 Mod 1 by NATO) and then with the RS-24 Yars (SS-27 Mod 2). A total of 102 of the latter system were in service by early 2018 [41]. The naval component of Russia's nuclear triad was further modernised under this program with the purchase of Project 955/955A Borei class vessels armed with the RSM-56 Bulava (SS-N-32) missile. The airborne component of the triad was mainly modernised by the TU-95 MS (Bear) - a large four-engine turboprop-powered strategic bomber and missile platform.

Another major milestone achieved in the defence industry was the approval of Russia's new 10-year State Armament Program (from 2018 to 2027), also known as 'GPV 2027', on 22 December 2017. It is expected that GPV 2027 will build on the progress made under GPV 2020 and further strengthen the Russian armed forces. Under this new defence procurement programme, the modernisation of Russia's strategic nuclear triad remains a priority. Therefore, attempts are being made to create a new Sarmat Multiple-Warhead Heavy ICBM, a replacement for the R-36 M2 Voevoda ICBM (called the SS-18 by NATO) deployed currently.

The Russian Federation under Putin's leadership released its latest military document in early June 2020 titled, "On Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence". It outlines the threats and circumstances that may lead to the use of nuclear weapons by Russia. The document specifically states that Russia views nuclear weapons as a solely deterrent measure. It states that Russia's nuclear deterrence policy "is defensive by nature, it is aimed at maintaining the nuclear forces potential at the level sufficient for nuclear deterrence and guarantees protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State, and deterrence of a potential adversary from aggression against the Russian Federation and/or its allies" [42]. P. 8. The document indicates that Russia could respond with nuclear weapons when it has received reliable data on a launch of ballistic missiles attacking the territory of the Russian Federation and/or its allies and in response to the use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction by an adversary against the Russian Federation and/or its allies. The threat perceptions have hardened with regard to the United States and NATO, and the Russian government appears to be in the process of updating several national security strategy documents.

Conclusion

Thus, NATO was a major component of the development of the Russian military strategy during and after the Cold War, as the Soviet Union progressed from a nuclear-armed hollow shell in the 1940s into a modern, sophisticated military force capable of rapid deployment and lethal effects in conventional warfare. The modernisation program encompassed all parts of the Russian military, including “strategic nuclear, non-strategic nuclear and conventional forces. It included precision-guided weaponry, a newly streamlined command structure, well-fed and professional soldiers”^[43]. This military and nuclear modernisation during the post-cold war period was driven by President Putin’s ambition to restore Russia’s hard power and to help regain the global relevance it lost after the Cold War. Through the years, Moscow has made it clear that NATO’S ongoing incursions into Russia’s security zone will be viewed as an act of aggression against the Russian Federation. The contemporary Ukraine crisis provides a definitive confirmation of it.

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