NATO-RUSSIA's 'CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIP': 'INSTABILITY' AS A DEFINING FACTOR IN THE POLITICAL INTERACTION BETWEEN MOSCOW AND THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

Valdir DA SILVA BEZERRA[1]

[1] University of Sao Paulo, 05508-220 Sao Paulo, Brazil; sb1.valdir@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0000-0001-6488-478X

ABSTRACT

NATO-Russia's conflictual relationship represents one of the main elements of the international system, at least since the end of the Cold War, having a significant impact in the rivalry involving Great Powers, such as: the United States, Russia, Germany, Great Britain, France and others. In fact, this intricate relationship between the Atlantic Alliance and Moscow has been tainted by mistrust, mutual accusations and 'security dilemma' situations, that has brought a constant state of tension in NATO-Russia interactions over the years. This paper aims to summarize, starting from the Cold War era, the main political events that led to the establishment of mistrust between these two actors, bringing forth both NATO's and Russia's views about how each other's actions prompted long-standing perceptions of enmity that culminated in the current scenario of an almost 'impending war' due to the situation in Ukraine.

Keywords: NATO, Security regimes, Russian foreign policy, Geopolitics.

INTRODUCTION

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)-Russia relations present itself as a compelling issue for academic analysis once it represents one of the main influencing factors of the international system since the Cold War, having a significant effect in the overall relationship between Great Powers such as the United States, Great Britain, France, the European Union (as a whole) and Russia. NATO[2]-Russia's first interactions were established within the tense period of the Cold War, prompted by the rivalry between the United States (leader of the Capitalist world) and the Soviet Union, with Moscow as its main decision-making center.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a substantial debate about the necessity of NATO's enlargement in the post-Cold War context. The reasons for expanding NATO are considered by some to be weak since it drew new dividing and antagonistic lines in Europe, alienating Russia and reducing hopes for future comprehensive disarmament (Waltz, 2000; Lukyanov, 2016). Oldberg (2010), for instance, points out that NATO is seen by Russia as the main military threat to its security while dominated by American strategic interests, with Washington using the Organization as an 'aggressive military alliance' that has caused an 'unwanted militarization of the Russian borders' (Freire, 2008). In International Relations Theory (and especially for Neorealists, a school of thought that emerged during the 1970s), the anarchical context of inter-State relations provides an environment in which actors are constantly concerned about their security and self-survival (Waltz, 2000), which can only be assured by the acquisition of material power. Therefore, although international cooperation is sometimes possible through the establishment of security regimes, it is nevertheless difficult to maintain stability among Great Powers in the long term[3].

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, this paper intends to scrutinize NATO's inception and evolution as well as its relationship with Russia throughout the Cold War as well as recently, in order to identify the principal elements that caused NATO-Moscow's interaction to be represented by a constant aura of 'instability'. By means of methodology, the research will be mostly based on a descriptive analysis of NATO and Russia's political exchanges in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, highlighting its critical points of tension, which, by its turn, allow us to put forward the argument that: relations between NATO and Russia are highly likely to continue its conflictual nature in the foreseeable future, based on a historically fragile balance of power and antagonistic interpretations of each other.

---

2 NATO's main principles are: the defense of peace, territorial integrity, political independence (as evidenced in its Article 4º), as well as democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law (as present in the preamble of NATO's Charter).

3 One factor that helps explain it is that: in Neorealism, States are concerned mostly with *relative gains*, which is based on a comparison between two (or more) different actors. In this context, if States A and B decided to cooperate and if A wins (relatively) more than B in this given cooperative arrangement, the imbalance of gains between the two participants will undermine the cooperative effort in the long-run. Cooperation is thus seen as a *zero-sum game*.

NATO-MOSCOW RELATIONSHIP IN THE COLD WAR ERA: THE INCEPTION OF DISTRUST

In 1948, the Soviet leader Josef Stalin implemented what became known as the 'Berlin Crisis', a Soviet attempt to consolidate its hold over Berlin in defiance of the Western (American, French and British) controlled parts of Germany. This event heightened the West's perception about the threat posed by the Soviet Union at that time, prompting the creation of NATO (the acronym for North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1949, a military alliance composed by most of the Western European countries alongside the United States and Canada[4]. In accordance with its foundational Treaty, NATO's role encompassed, among other things:

- To "undertake to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered" (NATO, 1949, Article 1°).

- To "contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations" (NATO, 1949, Article 2°).

- To "consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened" (NATO, 1949, Article 4°).

NATO also included in its Charter the famous Article 5°, which states the following "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them […] shall be considered an attack against them all", enabling a mechanism of collective defense to take place in order to punish the potential aggressor, believed to be represented by the Soviet Union itself. Notwithstanding, after West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany) entered NATO in 1955, the Soviet Union moved to create the Warsaw Treaty alongside with its satellite States of Eastern Europe[5], in order to work as a 'counter-alliance' to the Atlantic Organization.

In the Prologue of the Warsaw Pact's Constitution, the danger of a new war in Europe was mentioned in the form of a Western threat to the national security of the 'peaceful European states', namely, the States kept under the control and influence of the Soviet Union. By considering itself as the 'center of the international communist movement', Moscow thus claimed the role of 'main defender' of the countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact, including the provision (in Articles 3 and 4) of its Constitutive Charter of a collective defense mechanism (with the use of military force) in the event of an armed attack in Europe (believed to come at any time from NATO) against any of its member-States[6].

---

[4] The United States, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. In 1952, Greece and Türkiye were admitted.

[5] Including beyond the Soviet Union, also the following members: Albania, Poland, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

[6] This mechanism was not only limited to the material integrity of States against an external threat by other State or bloc, but also in relation to the appropriate political behavior inside the governments pertaining to the Soviet sphere.

Figure 1. *German children observe the Berlin Airlift undertaken by the Western Powers to counter the Soviet blockade (1948)*

Source: history.com

Here, it is important to mention the concept of the *Security Dilemma*, elaborated in the 1950s by the German-American analyst John Herz. From the perspective of this concept, the initiatives of States to better meet their security needs directly or indirectly provokes the insecurity of others. John Herz pointed out that each State interprets its own security decisions as *merely defensive*, while interpreting that of others as offensive. According to this interpretation, NATO's existence, regardless of its justifications and goals, was considered by the Soviet Union (and now by Russia) as a factor for increased tension and insecurity.

Be it as it may, the Soviet Union, especially under Stalinist rule, used the existence of NATO to put forward the tactic of *externalization*[7], which, according to Snyder (2005), consists: of exacerbating to one's own population the threat of a 'looming attack' to the regime coming from 'the Outside', which then serves as a justification for domestic radicalization and political repression. The emphasis on the antagonism with the West became thus fundamental for the equipping of the Soviet State against elements and individuals considered 'subversive' within its society.

In addition, after NATO was created, the Soviet Union sought to equate its defense spending with that of the United States (the leader of the Atlantic Alliance), while at the same time trying to reach a 'nuclear parity' with the West. In fact, as pointed out by Kissinger (2014), no achievement could have increased the Soviet capacity more than the end of the American nuclear monopoly in 1949, with the development of the nuclear bomb by the USSR. This 'nuclear parity' between the Soviet Union and the United States changed the dynamics of the Cold War, initiating an arms and technological race between the two blocs[8]. With the end of the Cold War, however, the result was that NATO

7 The concept of externalization, according to the author, has four different dimensions: 1) the use of an external enemy to justify a military-type mobilization of society; 2) basic State institutions become highly centralized as a result of international conflict or an imminent threat of conflict; 3) the governing group justifies the large-scale repression of certain segments of society on the grounds of connections with the external enemy and 4) the foreign policy goals become global in scale and, therefore, extremely costly.

8 By the end of the 1950s, however, NATO had adopted a strategic doctrine that became known as

considered itself victorious in helping the West cope with the Soviet (Russian) threat, while "deterring Soviet expansionism, [and] forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe" (NATO, n/d).

NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS AFTER THE SOVIET COLLAPSE: RENEWED ANTAGONISM

In the 1990s, when most thought that NATO would cease to exist due to the absence of the Soviet threat, the organization showed resilience, not only by adding new members but also encouraging democratization and political integration in Europe and beyond. In that period, according to NATO (n/d), the Alliance represented a "tool for the stabilization of Eastern Europe and Central Asia through the incorporation of new Partners and Allies". Meanwhile, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the focus of international security worldwide underwent significant changes. For Post-Soviet Russia, the possibility of a confrontation with NATO was implausible, with Moscow's attention being turned to new local and regional threats (Klein, 2009), such as terrorism[9] and domestic political instability.

Nevertheless, between 1992 and 1995, as the conflict involving the break-up of Yugoslavia started to resemble 'a war of aggression' and campaigns of ethnic cleansing were taking place in Bosnia, NATO decided to intervene against the government of Serbia. According to NATO (n/d), the intervention represented the Alliance's determination to apply "force in combination with diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to stop conflict", even if actions were to involve regions outside of NATO's sphere of influence. For NATO, moreover, the Yugoslav conflict demonstrated that: political instability in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe could represent a threat to the Alliance's stability itself[10].

Some years later, in 1998, NATO initiated a 78-day bombing campaign within Operation Allied Force against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, "meanwhile providing support for a multinational peacekeeping force to enter Kosovo in order to stop the […] ethnic cleansing" (NATO, n/d) undertaken by Milosevic's forces. The intervention was thus suspended in June 1999, after the Serbian army started to withdraw from Kosovo, *de facto* recognizing its defeat against the combined forces of the Alliance. NATO then deployed the Kosovo Force (KFOR), a contingent of troops (composed mostly by British, French, German, Italian and US soldiers), to Kosovo, in order to maintain security in the region, with Milosevic subsequently accepting a Peace Plan elaborated by the Alliance.

On the one hand, NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo was highly criticized by Russia (and other international actors as well) once it lacked a UN Security Council resolution, with claims being made that NATO had in fact broken international law (Sloboda, 2014) and bombed a sovereign State in order to achieve egoistical geopolitical interests[11]. As a result of the conflict in Kosovo, in

---

'Massive Retaliation', meaning that: in the event of a direct attack by the USSR, NATO would reply by deploying the best of its nuclear arsenal (United States of America, n/d).

9 In fact, with a military confrontation against NATO virtually ruled out, combating international terrorism became the most fundamental task of Russian foreign policy during the 1990s (Bezerra, 2018).

10 In 1998, the UN Security Council approved a resolution demanding a ceasefire between the Serbs led by Slobodan Milosevic and the Albanian Muslims in Kosovo.

11 NATO bombings in Serbia had reportedly killed more than 500 civilians.

1999 NATO released a new concept according to which the bloc now recognized a whole set of new threats to the Alliance, including ethnic conflict, economic crisis, political instability in neighboring States, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc. (NATO, n/d).

For Moscow, in its turn, NATO's intervention in Serbia was doubly problematic. First, it represented the Alliance's boldness in acting within a region that up until the end of the Cold War was considered as a 'Russian sphere of influence', and secondly because Serbia is a close ally to Russia due to its common Orthodox history. To complicate NATO-Russia's relations further, in 1999, one year after the end of the intervention in Serbia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO, manifesting, in the Alliance's own words, NATO's crucial role "in consolidating democracy and stability in Europe" (*ibidem*).

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 2000s, NATO did try to build better relations with Russia, by working on a number of issues that ranged from combat to drug traffic, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the fight against terrorism. Speaking of which, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 in the United States prompted a NATO response by an invasion of Afghanistan, where the Al-Qaeda (the group responsible for the attack) was sheltered, under the auspices of the Taliban[12]. At that time, Russia became allied with the West in the fight against international terrorism, to the point of consenting to the deployment of NATO troops in Central Asia, a territory historically considered to be within the 'Russian sphere of influence', a concession that was unthinkable during Cold War times (Dugin, 2016; Zhebit, 2003).

In fact, Russia's inclusion in the US-led coalition against international terrorism also coincided with Moscow's strategic goals in terms of combating Islamic fundamentalism which, as the situation regarding Chechen separatists in the North Caucasus demonstrated, threatened its own security and territorial integrity[13]. Following those events, 2002 marked the creation of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), intended to organize common efforts against the threat of terrorism and to better coordinate relations between the two sides.

Nevertheless, it didn't take long for relations between NATO and Russia to go sour once more. In 2004, the Alliance underwent a new wave of expansion, this time adding: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, moving even closer to Russia's borders. Meanwhile, between 2005 and 2008, both Ukraine and Georgia were in constant dialogue with NATO in order to advance their prospects for eventual membership at the Organization. According to NATO (n/d), provided that a country meets certain criteria related to economic, military, and political conditions, any European country could become a member of the Alliance. In fact, NATO's Article 10° states that its members could "by unanimous agreement, invite any […] European State in a position to further the principles of […] [the] Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area". This situation was considered by Moscow as a 'direct threat' to its security, as evidenced by Vladimir Putin's speech to the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policies in 2007, who mentioned the following:

> I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation

---

12 After the Taliban regime fell in December 2001, a resolution by the UN Security Council authorized the creation and deployment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to stabilize Afghanistan. Soon afterwards, in 2003 ISAF's command and coordination were handed to NATO.
13 That cooperation, moreover, was instrumental for Moscow in obtaining the qualification by the United States of the Chechen separatists as 'international terrorist groups' (Zhebit, 2003).

with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? (Putin, 2007)[14]

One year after that declaration, Russia's military intervention in Georgia, under the justification of defending the populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, demonstrated Moscow's intention to maintain its military and regional preeminence (Oldberg, 2010; Klein, 2009), while thwarting NATO's plans of admitting Georgia to the Organization. 2008's short war with Tbilisi put Moscow once more in confrontation with the West, by reaffirming Russia's geopolitical stand *vis-à-vis* NATO and its members in the post-Soviet space (Mazat and Serrano, 2012; Bezerra, 2018).

Figure 2. *Images from the Russia-Georgia War (2008)*

Source: history.com

As mentioned by Ozgoker and Yılmaz (2016: 653) "admitting Georgia to the organization could draw NATO into a direct confrontation with Russia", with Moscow's intervention in South Ossetia and Abkhazia formalizing the Kremlin's "determination to defend its vital interests", while regaining its influence regionally.

In the Middle East, by its turn, following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, NATO's implementation of a 'no-fly zone' in Libya turned into a campaign of bombardment against Gaddafi's regime[15]. The justification given by NATO in relation to the intervention was that: the Alliance played "a crucial role in helping to protect civilians under attack from their own government […] [and] the violence used by the Libyan security forces against pro-democracy protestors". However, other accounts demonstrated that "NATO was [in fact] unable to quickly end [the] humanitarian suffering [in Lybia], while more people were killed during the military operations than in the months preceding the

---

14 Another telling remark by Vladimir Putin (2016) in that regard can be found in his interview to the German newspaper Bild, in which the Russian leader stated the following: "we did not overcome Europe's division: 25 years ago, the Berlin Wall fell, but Europe's division was not overcome, invisible walls simply moved to the East".

15 By that time, Libya got embroiled in a civil war with the country's dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, employing systematic violence against the protesters.

intervention" (Wijk, 2014: 124). Be it as it may, the ultimate result of NATO's intervention in Libya was the death of the dictator Muammar Gaddafi, followed by the country's entrance into a period of economic and political chaos.

With that in mind, Russia believed that a Libyan-like scenario could also be repeated in Syria, a long-term ally of Moscow in the Middle East, which helps explain the role of the Russian air force in the Syrian conflict from 2015 onwards. In that opportunity, Moscow renewed its antagonism towards the West, frustrating American and European designs in relation to Syria, with Russia protecting its interests not only in areas directly connected to its territorial security (Lukyanov, 2016), as in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine[16], but also in different regions of the globe[17]. Speaking about Ukraine, since 2008 Russia openly expressed its discontent towards NATO's "plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the Alliance […] bringing NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders" (Foreing Policy Concept, 2008). In effect,

> The admittance of Ukraine […] into NATO was considered by Russian leadership to be a logical limit, a kind of "red line" in the realm of NATO expansion […] the possibility of admitting two neighboring countries [Ukraine and Georgia] to the inimical military bloc looked like it could be a crushing blow to Russian strategic interests (Tsvetkov, 2017; our emphasis).

In fact, due to Russia's political pressure and frequent altercations with its Western and Ukrainian counterparts, in 2010 Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovych (who governed between 2010 and 2014) canceled Kyiv's aspirations of joining NATO[18]. According to analysts, the importance to Russia of maintaining its influence over Ukraine stems from historical, economic, and security interests (Ozgoker & Yilmaz, 2016). Nevertheless, after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, Kyiv reoriented its foreign policy toward the West, reflected by an emblematic amendment in 2019 to the preamble of the Ukrainian Constitution, which affirmed: "the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the irreversibility of the European and Euro-Atlantic course of Ukraine" (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996), solidifying the country's desire to be admitted to NATO. Notwithstanding, a new addition to the Ukrainian Constitution established that the country's president is "the guarantor for the implementation of the strategic course of the State towards the acquisition of full membership […] in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996, Article 102), setting a serious political rift between Kyiv and Moscow.

In fact, on the Russian side, Moscow wants to keep its influence over Kyiv for cultural, political, and geostrategic reasons, while Vladimir Putin believes that NATO's intentions in Ukraine have more to do with 'encircling' Russia than

16 As pointed out by Ozgoker and Yilmaz (2016, p. 663), in relation to Georgia and Ukraine "Moscow believes that if these countries are accepted as NATO members, ballistic missiles would one day be deployed there, and that is why, Russia will not be reluctant to take adequate measures" to counter such a scenario.

17 In 2015, at the height of the intervention in Syria, 68% of Russians were ('somehow' or 'very') proud of Russia's political influence in the world, while 85% were ('somehow' or 'very') proud of the country's armed forces (Levada, 2016: 42).

18 In that year, the Parliament of Ukraine (Верхóвна Рáда) decided to withdraw the country's application for NATO membership (sent some years prior for consideration), a decision motivated by the desire to keep stable relations with Russia and by the realization that a Ukrainian candidacy to the Atlantic Alliance was - by that time - premature (Mazat and Serrano, 2012).

guaranteeing the security of the bloc. Be it as it may, the path toward a future admittance of Ukraine into NATO is out on the table right now, taking into account the political challenge of reasserting full control of its territory and its current military conflict with Russian forces.

EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT LED TO THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT: PUTIN'S PERSONAL VIEWS AND NATO-RUSSIA'S LACK OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN EUROPE

On 24th February 2022 Russian forces entered Ukraine from the East and from the North (through Belarus), causing the world to witness a new armed conflict in European soil. A new geopolitical shock reverberated all over the world, as news and images from the battlefield started to reach international media, while people and countries in all continents manifested solidarity with Ukraine. For Russia, the so-called 'special military operations' had the aim of protecting the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (within Donbas) from the arbitrary violence of Ukrainian military forces against their populations, while also engaging in the 'demilitarization' of Ukraine. Meanwhile, most of the international community condemned Russia and Putin for their actions, calling those operations a straightforward 'invasion' of a sovereign country, starting a new war within Europe with imperialistic undertones.

In fact, two aspects could be highlighted in order to provide a better understanding of why the situation in Eastern Europe reached such a complex and unwanted development. First of all, one should comprehend the worldviews and mindset of Russian President Vladimir Putin, once, as defended by Mankoff (2011), knowing the opinion and the beliefs of the people in charge of developing Russian foreign policy is of fundamental importance to understanding how Moscow acts in the international arena[19]. Excerpts from interviews with Vladimir Putin to Western media and to domestic political elites, in general, reveal that the Russian President saw Ukraine as a 'platform' used by the Western countries to undermine Moscow's security as well as territorial concerns.

In an article published in July 2021, Vladimir Putin wrote the following:

> […] the wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy. […] Hence the attempts to play on the "national question" and sow discord among people, the overarching goal being to divide and then to pit the parts of a single people against one another (Putin, 2021)

Basing his claims on historical, philosophical and religious elements, Putin made it clear that Ukraine's move towards the West (and especially towards NATO) and away from Russia is antinatural, so far as it undermines the spiritual and cultural unity that was prevalent among Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians for centuries. Additionally, Putin (2021) mentions that in recent times Kiev "was dragged into a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia [as such]", therefore the Kremlin has to ascertain itself that Ukraine is not serving someone

---

19 Mankoff (2011) also asserts that Russian foreign policy is based on the desire to be respected, on wanting the country to be treated as an 'equal among the Great Powers of an international order based exactly on power and competition.

else's geopolitical interests in the post-soviet space, being used as a tool in the to fight against Moscow. Putin thus proceeds in his closing remarks to mention that "I am confident that [the] true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia".

Figure 3. *A convoy of Russian armored vehicles moves along a highway in Crimea, on January 18, 2022*

Source: AP Photo.

Putin's views about Ukraine being used as a 'tool' in the fight against Russia have everything to do with Moscow's requirement for security guarantees from Western leaders in the weeks prior to the conflict. While holding talks with Britain, French and German Statesmen and representatives, Putin, as well as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, emphasized the Kremlin's concerns about NATO's open-door policy, mentioning that the disregard shown by the NATO leadership about Moscow's concerns involving a possible admittance of Ukraine into the Atlantic Alliance was one of the main reasons behind the crisis and the lack of confidence between Russia and NATO/the West. On this note, the Russians brought to memory the Charter for European Security signed in Istanbul in 1999 by 54 countries, a document dedicated to matters related to security in the European continent. On this Charter, the following paragraph became an important point of contention:

> Each participating State has an equal right to security. *We reaffirm the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve* (1). Each state also has the right to neutrality. [...] They [States] *will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States* (2). (Charter for European Security, 1999, II.3; our emphasis).

Whereas NATO's 'open door policy' focuses on the first segment of the paragraph (marked as 1 above) about the right of each State to choose its security arrangements, as Ukraine was inclined to when it comes to Kyiv's desire to

join NATO, Russia emphasized the second part (marked as 2 above) about the suggestion that: no State should strengthen its own security to the detriment of the security of others. For Russia, Ukraine possibly joining NATO would represent a military threat to its security, so far as the Atlantic Alliance could place in Ukrainian soil middle-range ballistic missiles (500-5500 km) capable of hitting important Russian cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg in a matter of minutes, while at the same time providing ground for the stationing of NATO's troops right at the Russian southern borders.

It is important to mention that up until 2018, a medium-range nuclear forces treaty signed between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1987 "provided a ground of stability in Europe and strategic parity between Russia and the United States […] [however] such commitments were successively abandoned […] by the Americans" (Zabolotsky, 2022; our translation), which caused Moscow to believe that NATO's move towards Ukraine and vice-versa had the intention to provoke the Kremlin, instead of providing an environment of security in Europe. In line with that view, the West in general and the United States in particular

> […] not only paved the way for creating a terrain of uncertainty in Europe, but also designed itself to exclude Russian demands from the European security architecture. In this process, Ukraine was used by the West as the platform for these policies of provocation and exclusion of Russia (Zabolotsky, 2022; our translation).

All these factors taken together: 1) the United States hastening the expansion of NATO after the Cold War period; 2) the alleged support by the West of the dismemberment of the Russian territory in the beginning of the 2000s; 3) the deployment of anti-ballistic missiles in Central Europe and the active training of armies in the Post-Soviet space (Costa Junior, 2022), caused Moscow to become even more suspicious about the West's intentions in its neighborhood, which, unfortunate as it is right now, culminated in this new episode of NATO-Russia's 'conflictual relationship' evolving within the territory of Ukraine.

CONCLUSION

The political implications of the relationship involving Russia and NATO are manifold. In fact, intermittent times of peace and quietude between these two actors are frequently broken by renewed waves of tension, mistrust and palpable instability, with recent NATO-Russia's interactions having acquired contours of 'an impending war' due to the situation in Ukraine. Considered by Russia as the main military threat to its security, NATO's actions in the Post-Cold War context are perceived by authorities in Moscow as defiant moves against Russia's national and geopolitical interests, especially in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, Moscow's antagonistic attitudes are interpreted as a 'direct confrontation' in Western circles, a perception that was solidified after the events involving the Russia-Georgia War of 2008, as well as Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 and in Syria one year later.

As for now, while Russian troops are fighting against Ukrainian forces within the context of a new European conflict, and the West keeps pushing for more influence in the post-Soviet space (providing arms, equipment, and support to Kyiv), a scenario of renewed antagonism, mutual accusations and public

discussions about NATO-Russia's geopolitical confrontation once again came to the surface. Unfortunately, however, beyond the current political and military clash taking place within Ukraine, chances are that relations between Moscow and NATO will still be enveloped in a fragile balance for the foreseeable future, due to the lack of prospects in terms of reaching any mutual understanding of each other's security needs. For NATO, to discard its 'open-door policy' towards other States in the post-soviet area would seem like a concession towards Moscow, whereas for Ukraine to accept a proposal of neutrality towards NATO might culminate in the country being once again dragged deep into Russia's sphere of influence.

REFERENCES

Baldwin, David A. (Ed.) (1993). *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bezerra, Valdir da Silva (2018). "A percepção pública sobre a política externa russa nos anos 2000: a atuação de Moscou no espaço pós-soviético e além segundo o olhar dos russos" (Public perception of Russian foreign policy in the 2000s: Moscow's role in the post-Soviet space and beyond from the perspective of Russians). *Revista Defesa e Segurança (RDS)*, No. 3: 49 - 66.

Charter for European Security. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (1999). Retrieved from: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/2/17502.pdf. Accessed: 15.08.2021.

Constitution of Ukraine. Retrieved from: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text. Accessed: 07.07.2021.

Costa Junior, Pedro Donizete (2022). "A Nova Ordem internacional policêntrica" (The new polycentric international order). *Jornal da USP*. Retrieved from: https://jornal.usp.br/artigos/a-nova-ordem-internacional-policentrica/. Accessed: 07.04.2022.

de Wijk, Rob (2014). *The Art of Military Coercion: Why the West´s Military Superiority Scarcely Matters*. Amsterdam University Press.

Dugin, Alexandr (2016). *Geopolítica da Rússia Contemporânea (Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia)*. Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Studies. Lisbon.

Freire, Maria Raquel (2008). As eleições presidenciais na Rússia: Continuidade na mudança (Russian presidential elections: Continuity in change). Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Retrieved from: https://estudogeral.sib.uc.pt/jspui/bitstream/10316/9605/1/MRFreire_OccasionalPaper32_IPRI_2008.pdf. Accessed: 12.09.2021.

Kissinger, Henry (2014). *World Order*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva.

Klein, Margarete (2009). Russia´s military capabilities. Berlin: SWP Research Paper.

Levada Analytical Center (2016). Russian public opinion 2013-2015. Retrieved from: http://www.levada.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2013-2015-Eng1.pdf. Accessed: 17.09.2021.

Lukyanov, Fyodor (2016). "Putin's foreign policy: The quest to restore Russia's rightful place". *Foreign Affairs*, 95(3): 30-37.

Mankoff, Jeffrey (2011). Russian foreign policy: The return of great power politics. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gggdw1CEJGU. Accessed: 27.09.2021.

Mazat, Numa and Franklin Serrano (2012). A Geopolítica da Federação Russa em Relação aos Estados Unidos e à Europa: Vulnerabilidade, Cooperação e Conflito (The Geopolitics of the Russian Federation in Relation to the United States and Europe: Vulnerability, Cooperation and Conflict). In: Alves, Andre Augusto De Miranda Pinelli (org.) Rússia no Século XXI: O Renascimento de uma Potência? Brasília (Russia in the 21st Century: The Revival of a Power? Brasilia).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A Short History of NATO. Operations and missions: Past and present. Retrieved from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm. Accessed: 15.08.2021.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A short history of NATO. Retrieved from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm#top. Accessed: 25.08.2021.

Oldberg, Ingmar (2010). Russia´s great power strategy under Putin and Medvedev. Swedish Institute of International Affairs: 2010. Retrieved from: http://www.ui.se/upl/files/44240.pdf. Accessed: 12.04.2021.

Ozgoker, Ugur and Serdar Yilmaz (2016). "NATO and Russia's security dilemma within the European Union's far neighbors". *International Relations and Diplomacy,* 4(10): 650-665.

Putin, Vladimir (2007). Putin's prepared remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy. The Washington Post. Retrieved from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html. Accessed: 22.02.2021.

Putin, Vladimir (2016). Interview to German newspaper Bild. Retrieved from: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154. Accessed: 18.05.2021.

Putin, Vladimir (2021). Article by Vladimir Putin "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians". Kremlin. Retrieved from: http://en.kremlin.ru/misc/66182. Accessed: 20.08.2021.

Sloboda, Pedro Muniz (2014). "A anexação da Crimeia pela Rússia: Uma análise jurídica" (Russia's annexation of Crimea: A legal analysis). *Revista Eletrônica de Direito Internacional,* No. 13: 1-22.

Snyder, Robert S. (2005). Bridging the realist/constructivist divide: The case of the counterrevolution in Soviet foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. In: Foreign Policy. Analysis. USA: International Studies Association, pp. 55–71 The Warsaw Security Pact. Yale Law School. Retrieved from: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/warsaw.asp. Accessed: 13.03.2021.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008). Kremlin. Retrieved from: http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116. Accessed: 18.07.2021.

The United States of America. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949). Department of State: Office of the Historian. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/nato. Accessed: 18.02.2021.

Tsvetkov, Ivan (2017). US-Russian relations. In: Tsvetkova, N (Ed.). *Russia and the World: Understanding International Relations*. Lexington Books, 2017, pp. 377-398.

Waltz, Kenneth N. (2000). International Security, Estados Unidos (International Security, United States). In: *Structural Realism after the Cold War*.

Zabolotsky, Boris Perius (2022). Ocidente tentou impor visão unidimensional da história para enfraquecer a Rússia (West tried to impose one-dimensional view of history to weaken Russia). Folha de São Paulo: 2022. Retrieved from: https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/03/ocidente-tentou-impor-visao-unidimensional-da-historia-para-enfraquecer-a-russia.shtml?utm_

source=whatsapp&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=compwa.
Accessed: 18.05.2022.

Zhebit, Alexander (2003). A Rússia na Ordem Mundial: Com o Ocidente, com o
Oriente ou um polo autônomo em um Mundo Multipolar? (Russia in the World
Order: With the West, with the East or an autonomous pole in a Multipolar
World?), *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 2003.