

Deference or Deterrence

Crafting New Russian Policy Responses Through a NATO Perspective

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Abstract

American-Russian relations since the end of the Cold War have been hampered by three factors: lack of clarity as to security, overlapping interests in the former Soviet sphere primarily in Eastern Europe, and a lack of peer respect between the two parties. Being the current major influencer for the existence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as it was in its former Soviet existence, Russian relations with the Atlantic alliance is the main conduit concerning its often-parallel relations with the United States. This work seeks to find new approaches to American-Russian policy responses through a NATO perspective and an alternative to the dual track policy NATO is currently applying regarding Russia's activity in Ukraine and the rest of the former Soviet space, which greatly affects overall American foreign policy concerning U.S.-Russian relations. The work will focus on two draft agreements prepared in December 2011 by the Russian Federation, the *Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees* and the *Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to NATO concerning security on the European Continent*, delivered to the American government and NATO, respectively. Additionally, the work contains a historical backgrounder between the U.S./NATO and Russia, U.S./NATO reactions to the draft agreements, a Russian perspective of the roadblocks it is encountering in relation to West (U.S. & NATO), and recommendations that starts with the draft agreements tabled by Russia in December 2021.

Keywords: NATO, Security, Status, Dual Track Policy

Introduction and History Up to the Delivery of the December 2021 Draft Treaties

For Russia, border and regional security concerns could arguably be one of the most salient issues for Russian foreign policy. Fraught with a history of invasions, Russia encountered invading Mongols, Napoleon's French Empire, and Nazi Germany, intermixed with numerous other wars with kingdoms and states bordering Russia that appeared to threaten its very existence. At the same time, Russia has also been an expansionist, imperial empire, claiming and conquering lands that stretch from north of the Arctic Circle, South into Central Asia; from the shores of the Pacific Ocean and Bearing Sea to Eastern Europe and the Baltic and Black Seas. Protecting such a vast landmass that today still is the largest country on Earth will result in border and security dilemmas that require a protectionist attitude to not only apparent threats but also to perceived threats based on the historical record of Russia. Russia's last major international conflict was one that never directly played out on the battlefield with its opponent (other than proxy conflicts), but rather was a political and ideological battle with the United States and an alliance comprised of North American and European states known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) where the United States assumed the role of the leader of the alliance.

The demise of the Soviet Union in 1990 brought with it great uncertainty for a new Russia; former Russian republics sought independence from the former Soviet yoke of oppressive rule and turned West for new alliances with Europe (EU), the United States and NATO, leaving Russia without many allies and with a dangerously exposed borderland that could be easily exploited by its Cold War rival. As a result, the new Russian Federation's security concerns were very real. Seeking to engage with the West geopolitically was a gamble starting with the first post-Soviet Russian leaders, as such engagement would possibly harm Russia's distinctive identity and status as a once feared and formidable superpower only years removed. Adrift and rudderless in the geopolitical sea, Russia had to find stability domestically, redefine what it meant to be Russian, and scrambled to maintain border and regional stability in its near-abroad if it sought to regain any status of its former self.

Having to concede time and again over the next decade in international circles to prove its worthiness to be a reliable member of the Western establishment, Russia, it seemed, hastily gave the U.S. and NATO what they wanted with no objection at the expense of their security. It wasn't until Vladimir Putin, the Russian president who was the architect of a new Russian National Idea, that enabled Russia to right the ship, and chart a course to global prominence; but the U.S. and NATO had a head start that spanned a decade and was methodically inching east toward Russia gaining former Russian republics and Warsaw Pact states as members, some of which allowed the Atlantic Alliance to abut its former rival right at its border. If there was ever a security concern in Russia's recent memory, it was now.

Despite expressing concerns of its security and objections over NATO expansion eastward that was built on "fragile" verbal assurances by the West that no such expansion would happen, Russia could only watch its western border to Europe become a border with NATO. By 2004,

Finland, Georgia, and Ukraine were the only states left that bordered Russia that were not NATO members. Throughout the Cold War up until mid-2022, Finland practiced "Finlandization," (Inboden, 2014) remaining neutral, noting that to join NATO would antagonize both Soviet and post-Soviet Russia unnecessarily along its 800+ mile long border and opted to maintain friendly relations with its eastern neighbor (though as of April 4, 2023 Finland changed course and is now a NATO member). But the situation was quite different for Georgia and Ukraine. In 2008 NATO leaders met in Bucharest, Romania where on the table was the consideration of Georgia and Ukraine to become NATO members. Despite the U.S. backing the move, other European leaders were not keen on the idea which they felt would antagonize a revitalized and more powerful Russia under the guidance of Putin. NATO placed the track for membership for the two countries on the back burner but not without stating that *both would eventually become NATO members*. This set Russia on edge. The thought of having its Eastern and Caucasus borders touching NATO states was unsettling for its security concerns.

The 2008 Georgian-Russian war served as a notice to the West, particularly NATO, that Russia had once again possessed the influence and means to determine the politics and shape of the region. After an ouster in Ukrainian leadership in 2014 where pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was replaced by pro-Western leaning Petro Poroshenko in the Maidan uprising, Russia once again felt compelled to act on its security fears due to what it believed was a Western-led coup. In annexing Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Russia made geopolitical tremors throughout the European continent where the EU and NATO accused Russia of violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and violating a number of Russian/Western agreements and protocols, among them, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, and the NATO–Russia Founding Act. In response, Russia rationalized and justified its actions based on the West's broken commitments and pledges for NATO expansion eastward toward Russia which viewed it as a security threat. Historically speaking, both have valid arguments, but under international law, both could do what it felt it had a right to do because 1) NATO assurances to not extend east toward Russia were never historically in writing and 2) agreements like the Helsinki Final Act are not treaties per se and thus are legally non-binding (van Dijk, 1989).

Since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia and her leaders always raised the concern of NATO expansion toward its borders. From Gorbachev to Putin, each leader made his concerns known to Western leaders but as evidenced by the multiple rounds of NATO expansion over the past 30 years, those concerns have fallen on the deaf ears. In 2007 Putin, in a speech made to Western leaders at the Munich Security Conference, raised those concerns once again to the chagrin of those leaders in the attendance. Putin made it known that despite Russia's desire to engage with the West, it also had security concerns of a U.S.-led order in which Russia would not inherently follow if such arrangements did not equally address security concerns for all involved. With NATO expansion at Russia's borders, this was something that was not going to be merely accepted by Russia as it may have done 20 years earlier. Russia, under Putin's Russian National Idea, was now strong enough and able to project its identity as a unique Russian civilization that could exert influence beyond its borders and in its near-abroad to include its former republics and Warsaw Pact states, and now it was ideologically challenging the U.S. and NATO on the European continent for influence.

The Draft Treaties and Content

In December 2021, Russia had drafted two proposed treaties, the ‘*Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees*’ was delivered to the United States government (the U.S. draft), while the other, an ‘*Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to NATO concerning security on the European Continent*’ (the NATO draft) was delivered to NATO for consideration and ratification.

Both drafts contained language similar to that found in a pair of earlier drafts drawn up by Russia in 2009; the “‘*European Security Treaty*’ (EST) and the ‘*Agreement on Basic Principles Governing Relations among NATO–Russia Council Member States in [the] Security Sphere*” (Alberque, 2022). At first glance it is apparent that the drafts drawn up by Russia seek to provide the ideal solution to their security concerns given the existing factors and assumptions Russia has of the geopolitical relations between it and the West at present. This is reflected in Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov’s comments when describing Russian/Western relations that “Russia’s previously proposed security guarantees to the United States and NATO are no longer valid because the situation has changed drastically” (TASS, 2022).

As previously mentioned, while the content is similarly found in both sets of the 2009 and 2021 treaties, the tone in which it was framed was markedly different as the 2021 drafts explicitly spell out that NATO expansion would cease not only eastward toward Russia (Article 4 of the U.S. treaty draft) (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021b), but to any nation that aspires to join and explicitly named Ukraine as one of the aspiring states (Article 6 of the NATO treaty draft) (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a). In addition to blocking NATO enlargement the treaties would “compromise the sovereignty of other states, and curtail US and Allied ability to cooperate, conduct exercises, or deploy forces anywhere near Russian borders, establishing a de jure sphere of influence” (Alberque, 2022) for Russia and giving it a greater opportunity to reestablish itself as the hegemon in its former republics and challenge the U.S.-led order in Europe.

Specifically, both drafts seek to curtail actions of one party that may affect the security of the other party and prohibits them to strengthen their security individually or within the construct of a coalition or alliance at the expense of the other party’s security. The ambiguity of the language found in both drafts as it applies to actions taken by one party that “could undermine core security interests of the other Party” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021b) and/or “create conditions or situations that pose or could be perceived as a threat to the national security of other Parties” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021a) is too broad and can be arbitrarily applied in any action NATO or the U.S. does in not only NATO member states but in the whole of Europe. This was reflected in a statement made by Putin after delivering the draft to U.S. and NATO officials. He insisted that the security guarantees found in the drafts was to address “the growth of the US and NATO military forces in

direct proximity to the Russian border and major military drills, including unscheduled ones, are a cause for concern. This is a huge challenge for our security” (Yale McMillan Center, 2021). Alberque (2022) notes that if left undefined, the wording addressing security concerns is in effect “guaranteeing chaos in implementation” and could reasonably lead to endless escalations and disputes with Russia.

Both drafts also seek to prohibit the deployment of forces, armaments, strategic weapons, and short- and intermediate-range missiles beyond the country of origination meaning that the U.S. military could not establish a base in Poland, garrison troops there, nor house weapons, or missiles capable of striking Russia. It also prohibited explicitly conducting military activity or training within Ukraine or any former Soviet republic or former Warsaw Pact state. Based on the composition and language of the drafts, they are obviously one-sided and are intended to both weaken U.S. influence in Europe and to weaken NATO. In sum it affects not only NATO in its mission as a defensive alliance, but it also prohibits individual states from exercising its sovereignty and political independence in the ability to choose for itself alliances or coalitions it wishes to join and be a party to as found in such agreements and protocols as the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, or the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

Another view offered by Thomasen (2022) notes that for Russia, the treaties “reflect a longing for the status quo of 1997” (p.3) but also at the same time not seeking to gain more than what was lost to them in terms of status and influence since 1994. Russia has acknowledged the current rules-based order and seeks to operate rationally within these parameters to “maintain and provide for the European security architecture” (TASS, 2022), though Western leaders, diplomats, and observers see quite the contrary.

Additionally, the two drafts appear to mirror the other and for good reason if one takes into account Russian perceptions with bilateral and multilateral agreements with the U.S. and NATO member states. In its relations with both the West and NATO, Russia has a clouded view of who its “counterpart really is” (Thomasen, 2022). Should Russia’s views be directed to the United States, who is generally assumed to dictate NATO guidance, or should Russia deal with NATO as an organization and with its General Secretary? Historically however, Thomasen (2022) notes that “Russia has a preference for negotiating with the United States” (p. 6) even if it concerns issues that affect Europe like nuclear weapons or other military matters as Russia sees the United States as a peer even though the feeling may not reciprocate with successive U.S. leadership. In addition, Russia senses a type of “bureaucratic inertia” (Thomasen, p. 6) as it relates to dealing with NATO. Rather than waiting for a consensus decision of all thirty NATO member states which Russia sees as a “take it or leave it attitude” (Thomasen, p. 6) Russia would rather consult directly with the U.S. whom they perceive exercises more influence over other NATO members who generally follow suit with U.S. thought and decisions. In addition, dealing with an individual NATO member state bilaterally often is perceived as Russia seeking to unduly influence, bully, or wedging itself between that state and NATO or the U.S.

Response of the drafts by the West

Upon receipt of the drafts there were many views on the content and purpose of the treaties given by many politicians, diplomats, policy makers and international relations experts. Albuquerque (2022) noted that the 2021 drafts (in addition to the 2009 drafts) “reflect Moscow’s desire to discard the post-Cold War order as defined by the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the NATO–Russia Founding Act, and the Istanbul Commitments.” Senator James Risch (R-ID), a ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee blasted the drafts calling them “an insult to diplomacy” and “a list of concessions the United States and NATO must make to appease Putin” (Foreign Relations Committee, 2021). Calling out the drafts as unacceptable, he accused Russia of creating a “pretext for war” upon the dismissal of these drafts by the West and called for the U.S. to act first rather than wait for Russia’s next move of escalating the situation in Europe. This appeared to be a generally accepted view in the West as “Western political analysts suggested Russia was knowingly presenting unrealistic demands which it knew would not be met to provide a diplomatic distraction while maintaining military pressure on Ukraine” (Al Jazeera, 2021)

Other observers were more pragmatic in their view. Sam Greene, a professor in Russian politics and Director of the Russia Institute at King’s College in London, noted that Putin was “drawing a line around the post-Soviet space and planting a ‘keep out’ sign” (Al Jazeera, 2021) He went on to say the drafts were a “declaration”, but it did not mean the next step was war if the U.S. and NATO didn’t accept the draft agreement. Some on the other hand, were willing to meet with Russia at the negotiating table even if many of the articles of the agreement were not immediately agreed to by the U.S. and NATO.

Indeed, upon receipt of the NATO draft, the North Atlantic Council (the principal political decision-making body within NATO) issued the following statement, “We are gravely concerned by the substantial, unprovoked, and unjustified Russian military build-up on the borders of Ukraine in recent months and reject the false Russian claims of Ukrainian and NATO provocations. We call on Russia to immediately de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and abide by its international commitments on transparency of military activities” (Yale McMillan Center, 2021).

Yet, United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan noted the value of meeting the Russian contingent at the negotiating table but stressed that such diplomacy would have to take place in a context of de-escalation rather than escalation” (Al Jazeera, 2021). To the same effect, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has also considered discussions (Lewis, 2021) as meeting at the negotiating table rather than militarily at the borderlands would be a better place to address NATO’s concerns of Russia’s military movements that affects not only NATO but the European continent. However, NATO stressed that “any dialogue with Russia would have to proceed on the basis of reciprocity” (Yale McMillan Center, 2021) but added the carrot that, “should Russia take concrete steps to reduce tensions, we are prepared to work on strengthening confidence building measures” (Al Jazeera, 2021). In the end however, both drafts were summarily dismissed by both the U.S. and NATO. Such an outcome is predictable as Lewis (2021) notes, “for anyone to take Russia’s proposals at face value and imagine they are anything

but self-serving...is normal in negotiating with Russia given the prior experiences between the two sides.”

But why so easily and summarily dismiss the drafts presented by Russia to the two largest decision makers in both the Western and Northern Hemisphere at it relates to geopolitics and relations with Russia? Lewis (2021) notes that the tabling of a draft treaty is the first vital step in which negotiations may proceed. But the difficulty she notes that often “paralyzes” the negotiation process after a draft has been proposed is the language contained therein; one side seeks to change the language to better accommodate their position while the authoring side seeks to keep much if not all the language of the draft to get the best possible outcome, often leading to a stalemate and a premature end to negotiations. But this highlights a very important point. The political and diplomatic language has been the roadblock all along in Western/Russian relations.

Still, the question remains with the current draft agreement as it has with past draft agreements between the U.S./NATO and Russia – can a comprehensive security agreement between the United States/NATO and Russia even possible? (Willerton, 2022). Can both sides find parallel security interests and assert to not only the other but to the rest of the world that they are not adversaries and to create confidence-building measures and trust? Do security interests have to entail the application of “neutral buffer states” where these unfortunate countries in the middle must remain non-aligned to keep the peace? Will military retrenchment be the rule for the U.S. and Russia, prohibiting personnel, armaments, and missiles from being mobilized or launched from other states outside the two countries?

Willerton (2022) notes that the questions to these issues were laid out in the 2021 draft agreements to the U.S and NATO. To its credit and in the spirit of diplomacy, Russia once again expressed its security concerns and reached out with a proposal. However, it appeared that Russia was hitting the reset button back time to 1997 before multiple NATO expansion rounds and when Western military forces and capabilities were further from the Russian border and Russia was able to better maneuver in its former sphere of influence. Both sides knew that the demands laid out by Russia on these draft agreements would never be met in its entirety, but there *were* facets in the draft that could be a first step to broader agreements. Lewis (2021) identified some of these facets such as “reigniting the mechanisms for urgent bilateral or multilateral consultations such as the NATO-Russia Council and to prevent incidents in the high seas would be important areas for discussion” as well as the “proposed reinstatement of hotlines, and the regular exchange assessments of contemporary threats and security challenges to initiate meaningful discussion.” But that moment has passed, the problem is that the situation at hand, the buildup of Russian military along the Ukrainian border was too pressing of an issue to consult these smaller (though important) matters before anything else. Russia wanted to stop NATO expansion with written guarantees that Ukraine would never join NATO. The U.S. and NATO called for Russia to stand down and step back from the Ukrainian/Russian border. In the present state of affairs, Lewis (2021) provides some final sage advice on negotiations; “Despite misgivings about the purpose behind these demands and way in which they have been made, it would be a mistake – and potentially a bigger trap – to turn down the offer of negotiations. Better

to talk and watch with a clear eye for any duplicity, but also for any real opportunity to improve the security situation with Russia”

Deceptively “Repurposed” for the Same Mission in the 21st Century

Fix and Keil (2022) state that NATO’s “raison d’être is collective defense and that has always been, at least in large part, about Russia.” But at the end of the Cold war and Russia’s desire for Western engagement, NATO for a time appeared to have no purpose. There appeared to be truly no threat for which to justify a formation of allied states for collective defense on the European continent...or was there? Despite the talk of now including the once former adversary to the alliance, the U.S. decided to keep the new democratic state on the block at arm’s length. Whether one call’s it forward thinking, keen analysis, or dumb luck, the stance toward Russia, at least to NATO was the correct one. Putin’s Russian National Idea began to take root in Russia raising a new nationalism and pride amongst not only ethnic Russians but Russians in general. This included those ethnic Russians who after the revolutions of the last decade of the 20th century found themselves beyond Russia’s political borders. Thus, the Russian Idea transcended Russia’s borders and back into those former Soviet Republics that the USSR wielded influence over. A revitalized, stronger Russia was seeking to establish such an influence again. Seeing this as a threat to the new states who no longer wished to be held under Russian influence, NATO found a new purpose “to defend Europe against an aggressive and highly militarized Russian foreign policy” developed by Putin.

Nevertheless, NATO also seeks to implement its mission at the same time which is protecting the sovereignty and territorial interests of states. But does this mission extend to states outside of the alliance? NATO may have answered that cleverly in the 1997 Founding Act with Russia. In Part IV of the Act regarding “Political-Military Matters”, it is found in the text that “NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence *and other missions* (emphasis added) by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.” (NATO, 1997, p. 14). It further went on to read, “in this context, reinforcement may take place, when necessary, in the event of defence against a threat of aggression and *missions* in support of peace consistent with the United Nations Charter and the OSCE governing principles (NATO, 1997, p. 14). In the present, NATO explicitly shows concern for states in Russia’s former Soviet sphere that they perceive are now once again in danger of Russian influence that violates the political independence and sovereignty of these states. It explicitly shows concern for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, former Russian republics and all potential future candidates for NATO membership. These states comprise the political fault lines that exist between the West (NATO & the U.S.) and Russia. In truth they are not aligned with NATO but tend to look West toward the U.S.-led order rather than the Russian-aspired regional order in which they are, in truth, historically and geographically placed. In support of NATO’s view, the Biden White House also chimed in with its view that “all countries have the right to determine their future without outside interference”; similar views were voiced in Kyiv, Ukraine where the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry stated, “Kyiv had an “exclusive

sovereign right” to run its own foreign policy, and only it and NATO could determine the relationship between them” (Al Jazeera, 2021)

The Current U.S. and NATO Approach Toward Russia

NATO’s view is that “Russia has broken the trust at the core of (NATO-Russian) cooperation and has challenged the fundamental principles of the global and Euro-Atlantic security architecture” (NATO, 2022). Currently as it relates to Russia, the U.S. and NATO has adopted a dual-track approach that exhibits deterrence and defense on the one hand and lines for dialogue on the other (NATO, 2022) (Boyle, 2021). However, the inflammatory rhetoric that comes from Western states and alliances describing Russian actions in Ukraine appears to lean more toward deterrence and defense and provides little opportunity for dialogue. Placing Russian actions in such contexts like “Russia’s *illegal and illegitimate* (emphasis added) annexation of Crimea in March 2014” (NATO, p.2) and “Russia’s *aggressive* (emphasis added) actions constitute a *threat* (emphasis added) to Euro-Atlantic security” (Boyle, 2021) will prevent dialogue to occur, while at the same time only serve to escalate the volatile situation even further. Indeed, NATO even reveals that in response to the Russian military buildup along the Russian/Ukrainian border, they increased their own presence in the region (NATO, 2022) identifying such buildup as a deterrence mechanism. According to Boyle (2021), this dual track approach is not being shelved for any other alternatives for diplomacy any time soon. But this could be a costly misstep in improving U.S./NATO and Russian relations and an even more erroneous approach to U.S. and NATO policy. As long as the West feels that it has the capabilities to deter Russia from their perceived “aggressiveness”, the more likely this approach will be used as the first option rather than dialogue. This thus justifies the long held Russian assumption in placing more confidence in another state’s capabilities rather than what a state says it will or will not do. While such an approach may appear pragmatic and loaded with realpolitik on its surface, a deterrence approach may cause the opposite desired effect. Walt (2015) points out that deterrence efforts by one side often leads to a spiral policy of escalation on the other side. He explains that “when a state’s seemingly aggressive policy is motivated primarily by fear and insecurity” (p. 2) and the other side responds with a show of force similar in nature thinking they have applied a deterrence factor, they have in fact started a spiral model of escalation. Walt explains further, saying “making threats and trying to deter or coerce them will only reinforce their fears and make them even more aggressive...(making) the situation worse” (p. 2). To reverse the escalation Walt prescribes that the side that was believing it was applying deterrence should “address the insecurities that are motivating the other side’s objectional behavior” (p. 2).

The best visual example of escalation that arose from Russia’s security fears within this long-term conflict and exemplifies Walt’s explanation of spiraling and escalation mistaken as deterrence was made in 2020 soon after the DEFENDER-Europe 21 joint exercise among NATO allies in Europe (Yale McMillan Center, 2021). In response after the exercise and fearing that NATO was going to at some point assist pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine, Russia amassed 100,000 military personnel and equipment to Russia’s border with eastern Ukraine where the separatists are based. This was then followed in September of 2021 with the joint

Russian/Belorussian Zapad-2021 military exercise (Yale McMillan Center, 2021), where upon the conclusion of the exercise, Russian forces were positioned further along the eastern Ukrainian border and in the annexed region of Crimea. While NATO questioned the buildup and speculated another invasion was in the making, Russia felt that its security was being compromised. It further felt compelled to protect the ethnic Russians in Ukraine whom they believed was in danger from the Kyiv-backed government under president Volodymyr Zelensky. Once's Russia's last-ditch effort to table a draft to both the U.S. and NATO regarding new arrangements relating to its perception of its own and broader European security was rejected by both, Putin and his team felt they had no other option but to make the first move in ensuring its security and sphere of influence. The stance of Putin and his team regarding a politically and militarily aligned Ukraine with NATO was seen as a serious threat to Russian security.

The Russian Perception of its Security Arrangements and Rationales of its Demands with the West

It's important to understand how Russia perceives the geopolitical arena around them which contributes to shaping its foreign policy. Thomasen (2022) identifies the following five assumptions of regarding this Russian perspective. First, and perhaps most importantly, Russia assumes that the 21st century will usher in a "new era of uncertainty with more challenges than opportunities" (p. 3) and more chaotic and multipolar than orderly due to the failure of the U.S. led global order to properly address challenges present in today's world. Secondly, Russia sees a realist global perspective where the struggle is between order and disorder rather than political ideologies. Third, Russia believes its actions, which it claims is defensive in nature concerning the Ukraine crisis contributes distinctively to order rather than the disorder brought on by the U.S. and NATO in their meddling of Ukrainian politics and eventual orchestration of a political coup that ousted pro-Russian president Yanukovich and installed a pro-Western leader in Poroshenko. Russia felt compelled to intervene in Ukraine to keep the order not only within Ukraine but also in its own claimed sphere of influence as Russia "sees itself as a status quo power" (Thomasen, p. 3). Fourth, Russia places more confidence in another state's capabilities rather than what a state says it will or will not do. Such rhetoric cannot be trusted and is often disguised to mean the opposite of what it will or will not do according to Russian thinking. NATO's failure to keep verbal assurances to prohibit eastward expansion toward Russia is a prime example of this assumption and as a result Putin "lacks trust in the international system" (Thomasen, p. 4) but is aware of the capabilities the U.S. and NATO possesses. This leads to the 5th assumption of the Russian perception of international politics which is the "protection of Russian sovereignty is crucial for (its) national security" (Thomasen, p. 4). What is perceived and applauded as deterrence practiced by the U.S. and NATO in dealing with Russia is seen as escalatory behavior by Russia.

A respect for international law and the respect for the authority of the United Nations reflects a legalistic approach to Russian foreign policy and diplomacy in dealing with other nations, alliances and coalitions. Years of broken assurances and gaslighting by the West because of the

lack of concrete agreements and treaties between the U.S./NATO and Russia has caused Russia to create and present written guarantees to ensure its security concerns are known, addressed, and steps taken to implement security where it feels threatened, the assumption being “that even though states can abrogate legally binding agreements, or withdraw, it is more difficult to do this compared to the abrogation of non-binding agreements between states” (Thomassen, p.4). Abrogating signed agreements and treaties would appear to call out states that made agreements with Russia to the international community as deal-breakers and would appear to lend weight to grievances brought before international mediators like the UN, giving Russia the appearance of taking the high road in international politics and policy. But Russia should also realize that for many signed international agreements outside of armed conflict, they are generally non-binding such as the Helsinki Final Act (van Dijk, 1989). As it concerned NATO expansion there was never an agreement drawn up in written form but rather provided for in verbal assurances made around the time the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany was made in 1990 when the reunification of Germany took place. In a statement made after the delivery of the drafts, Putin provided his rationale for the need of the agreements to both the U.S. and NATO:

“We need long-term legally binding guarantees. Well, we know very well that even legal guarantees cannot be completely fail-safe.... However, we need at least something, at least a legally binding agreement rather than just verbal assurances. We know the worth of such verbal assurances, fine words and promises. Take the recent past, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when we were told that our concerns about NATO’s potential expansion eastwards were absolutely groundless. And then we saw five waves of the bloc’s eastward expansion” (Yale McMillan Center, 2021).

Concerning Security and Status

In post-Cold War Russia and especially under Putin’s tenure as Russia’s leader, *security* and *status* are extremely important for Putin’s Russian National Idea to thrive. The drafts address both security and status; in the U.S. draft references to it can be found in Articles 1 and 2, and in the NATO draft mentions of security and status can be found in Articles 1,2,3, & 7.

Security

Russia’s mention of security guarantees in both drafts to the U.S. and NATO has always been an issue in Russia’s relationship with the U.S. and NATO. The primary security concern is NATO expansion from which all other security concerns follow. NATO expansion and placement of alliance forces, armaments, and missiles close to Russian territory have been viewed differently by both sides. NATO and the U.S. claims that the Atlantic alliance exists as a defensive coalition while Russia sees it as a spreading menace seeking to threaten its domestic security and security in its near abroad while inserting in the former Soviet space Western philosophy influenced by the U.S. led order which Russia refuses to answer to because it feels that it has its own rules-based order in which it exists in.

Russia historically has had in place bilateral treaties with other European states, but it has always lacked legally binding, signed agreements with NATO to stop expansion of the alliance on the European continent. Generally, developed countries like those found in Europe don't expand their borders due to Westphalian principles and international agreements; thus, individual state borders are generally static over time. NATO, however, is a different entity; it is more amorphous and nebulous. Its borders are not contiguous in appearance but is defined in principle through the political borders of the member states; its limits are defined as to those members who share similar philosophies to join the alliance. NATO's borders and composition are thus a continuous work in progress. Containing NATO's borders to secure Russian security was a concern in Soviet Russia as it is today in Putin's Russia.

Status

Thomassen (2022) points out that Russia "suffers from a severe case of status dissatisfaction" (p. 8) and has a preoccupation with it concerning international relations. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was unable to hold on to much of the status and influence it wielded throughout the Cold War due to the concessions it made with the West in seeking engagement. Loss of this status also resulted in some degree a loss of respect in international circles especially in Europe. Despite holding a powerful seat within the UN Security Council since 1945, Russia for the most part has been unable to prevent NATO expansion from reaching its border. These two aspects are the drivers that compelled Russia to seek the status lost at the end of the Cold War. As a result, being denied a seat at the decision-making table regarding the current and future shape of Europe has only militarized it, a viable substitute for Russia regarding its status. Seeking a legalistic approach toward the U.S. and NATO using signed agreements, Russia is seeking to gain status by taking the moral high road if the U.S. and NATO decided to abrogate any such signed treaty that addresses Russia's security concerns. Walking away from any such promised security arrangements Russia hopes would result in a loss of status for the U.S. and NATO as not adhering to not only written agreements between the two parties but also to other international agreements and protocols they are also party to.

Status also has another important role for Russia. Having status as a nuclear power is instrumental for Russia to have its nuclear peer, the U.S., to remain a party to treaties that also serve to keep its security concerns low. Treaties like the ABM Treaty, the INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty have seen the U.S. withdraw from all three (Fix & Keil, 2022) not only raising Russian security fears but also seemingly appearing as an insult to Russia as not being seen with peer status equal to that of the U.S. despite Russia having the most nuclear warheads on the planet (Federation of American Scientists, 2022). Arms treaties that lead to arms control is vital to Russian security concerns, but if "aims (of arms control agreements and treaties) are unattainable, Russia attempts to be in a position to provide for its security by other means, primarily through continued defence developments" (Thomassen p. 4) and this is what we are witnessing in Ukraine, an alternative means to attain domestic and near-abroad security in the form of invasion and regime change of another state.

More Security? More Status? Or Both?

Thomasen (2022) points out through the drafts that Russia is seeking to gain status while at the same time seeking security arrangements. The relationship between the two however, is clouded and may beg the question what is more important to Russia, its status in the international system or its security from the West? Or one could ask, is Russia playing the status card to gain concessions and undermine NATO's mission in Europe while at the same time gaining the upper hand in strength?

Even in the post-conflict environment whether Russia is able to achieve its goals or not, Russia's concerns about its status with both the U.S. and NATO will be tenuous and the balance with which Russia seeks between status and security will have major implications. It is generally understood that status and security are complementary (Thomasen, 2022); for instance, the more status a state has, the more the state can exert influence outward and the further the projection the more security a state has from its political borders. Regardless of whether Russia is successful or not in its mission in Ukraine, the U.S. and NATO must consider allowing Russia a regional order which it is in control of to bolster its perception of both security and status. Permitting Russia to be the responsible "head-of-household" in the region may reduce tensions given that Russia abides by the greater order that it claims to adhere by through UN mandates, agreements, and protocols. Any violation identified by the UN in Russia's dealings with its neighbors such as violations of territorial integrity, state sovereignty or meddling in the domestic or foreign policy of a state can in turn, be met with severe repercussions.

Regulation of Missiles and Nuclear Weapons

Security as it relates to arms control and strategic placement of short- to intermediate-range missiles is a salient concern and is addressed in both draft agreements. Given the lack of regional and global status it feels it deserves and lack of security due to armament and missile capabilities of NATO, Russia's own nuclear and missile arsenal "plays a major role in Russia's regional deterrence" (Thomasen, p. 7). What Russia is seeking is the removal of U.S. capabilities to deploy strategic nuclear weapons from areas in Europe that can reach Russian territory in a short amount of time. The problem in addressing this issue is that as far as Russia is concerned, they have "never historically differentiated or discerned between nuclear and conventional systems" (Thomasen, p. 7) In their thinking, all deployable weapon systems are dual capable in being armed with conventional or nuclear weapon capabilities. To this point the U.S. and NATO are stuck in a no-win scenario if it were to agree to such arrangements found in the draft treaties. Any conventional weapon deployment and placement even within NATO member territory that is capable of reaching Russia can be argued as a security concern and a violation of the agreements put forth by Russia if they were in force. This would prove NATO weapon capabilities and defense impotent on the continent and leaves the door open for Russia to dangerously gain the upper hand in weapon capabilities on the continent.

The Russian government's *Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence* from 2020 provides a better look into how Russia sees the dual-capability integration regarding systems capable of delivering both conventional and nuclear weapons. Apart from stating that "the

Russian Federation considers nuclear weapons exclusively as a means of deterrence...and that “state policy on Nuclear Deterrence is defensive by nature” (Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence, 2020) the document also allows for the use of nuclear weapons by Russia if “aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons (placing) the very existence of the state in jeopardy” (Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence, 2020).

Once again, ambiguity and arbitrariness show itself in U.S./NATO-Russian relations especially as to how it relates to Russian attempts to solidify its security against U.S./NATO expansion. Since the implementation of the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation (Founding Act) NATO has repeatedly sought to convince that “they have no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, nor any need to change any aspect of NATO's nuclear posture or nuclear policy - and do not foresee any future need to do so. (NATO, 1997, p. 12). To date NATO has kept this pledge, apart from the alliance powers who do possess on their own nuclear weapons, the other five states that participate in the nuclear sharing initiative in NATO are Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Turkey: all founding members or members since the 1950s (Center for Arms Control and Nuclear Proliferation, 2021).

Friends? Enemies? Frenemies?

The adversary claim is once again a salient topic of discussion though it had been affirmed in the Russia-NATO Founding Act in 1997. Twenty-four years later Russia still seeks assurances from the U.S. and NATO on this. At present, relations between Russia and the West “are bleak at best” (Boyle, 2021, p. ii) The Founding Act of 1997 between NATO and Russia was to have been the foundation from which to foster a “lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security.” (NATO, 1997, p. 3) and where “NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries. They share the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation.” (NATO, 1997, p. 3). The Act further declares that “NATO and Russia...intend to develop, on the basis of common interest, reciprocity and transparency a strong, stable and enduring partnership.” (p. 3)

Engagement with Russia through international constructs in the form of organizations or bilateral diplomacy have occurred throughout the post-Cold War era. Russia has been a party to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991, the Partnership for Peace in 1994, and was a signatory to the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997 (Boyle, 2021) (Fix & Keil, 2022). Bilaterally, Russia was the first nation to reach out to a distraught U.S. government hours after the 9/11 attacks and Putin offered then President George W. Bush unprecedented intelligence access and cooperation as both shared the same security concerns regarding international terrorism. While Russia sought to be a distinct member of the “Western Club” it also sought its own distinctive identity orchestrated by Putin through his Russian National Idea. The purpose of Putin’s plan was to reestablish Russia once again as a global power and influencer with a strong central state, economy, and social state that was distinctively Russian and apart from the West. This could arguably be the point in time where friendly relations began to be adversarial. From

the Russian perspective, it needed to protect its own interests domestically and its near-abroad, but NATO expansion was threatening not only those interests but Putin's National Idea. While NATO continued to argue that enlargement was driven by the independent aspirant state's desire to join the alliance, Russia felt that these states were heavily influenced by the United States which Russia sought to keep out of its newly perceived sphere of influence in the former republics and Warsaw Pact states of Eurasia and Eastern Europe. In addition, NATO's unilateral move in the Balkans without UN blessing to intervene caused Putin to stop and assess Russia's own security situation even further toward an alliance led by the U.S. that felt that it could act in other state's affairs with impunity.

Indeed, all throughout the former Soviet republics, Putin observed color revolution after color revolution which was "applauded" by the United States (Fix & Keil, 2022). Putin's suspicions of the United States infiltrating the former Soviet space that Russia sought to keep as a security fixture was seen as a new Western containment strategy where NATO was the vehicle which to achieve this with. Over time, practical cooperation began to deteriorate once misunderstandings on ideology began to occur (Boyle, 2021). While NATO still sought to keep open lines of communication, they also developed the second prong of their dual track approach that being a deterrence approach toward Russia which ultimately was misperceived as escalatory by Russia. Thus, the game board and pieces were set for the current crisis the world is witnessing today and Russia still wonders if the U.S. and NATO still looks at them as an adversary.

The Impassible Impasse

Given the history of the Cold War, U.S./NATO-Russian relations have been at best cautious. No one side is to blame exclusively, in the one brief moment in history, Russia sought to engage the West to in the hopes to begin a new relationship of peace and prosperity. The United States however chose to keep Russia at arm's length resulting in a lost opportunity to acquire a valuable partner. For its part, as a result of being slighted, shunned, and insulted, Russia stewed over its embarrassment of courting the West only to be jilted and on its own under Putin recaptured its identity and purpose but still was not able to recapture its status nor firmly establish its security in the former Soviet sphere it felt they still had rights to. In Russia's defense, in abandoning its former communist past, Russia never intended to abandon its security and status; but in the desire to engage with the West, it gave much away without even realizing what it had done. The U.S. and NATO took advantage of a desperate, crumbling state in offering half-hearted promises or concessions in an unfair exchange for Russia's full compliance of NATO and American influence on the European continent. It was only when Russia was strong enough to push back and when NATO started seeking to include the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine in the alliance that potentially could have effectively contained Russia's vital southwest border to Europe was when a seemingly impassible impasse occurred. Russia has not been without effort to address its security concerns and what it appears lack of respect in its own sphere to an American-led order and NATO; Putin's 2007 Munich Security Conference speech to Western leaders made it clear that Russia was not going to be insulted in its own neighborhood, this was the first opportunity for the West to take notice. Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 showed that Putin and Russia were not merely airing grievances followed by saber-

rattling rhetoric. It acted upon its security concerns without scruples. The 2021 drafts revealed nothing new; Thomasen (2022) notes that the content of the drafts have largely remained the same as the drafts prepared in 2009. The U.S. and NATO should recognize that each proposal brought forth by Russia should “be seen as an attempt to renew the dialogue on security issues in Europe (and) a serious wake-up call” (Thomasen, p. 5).

The U.S. and NATO are now at a critical crossroads as it relates to its dual track policy toward a Russia that staunchly refuses to back down at this point. Keep practicing “deterrence” and forward defense or revisit the December 2021 draft agreements tabled by Russia and find a first step to peace. The U.S. and NATO don’t have to concede to every arrangement proposed but it can’t refuse them all either because another potential partner for Russia is waiting in the East – China. Not even two months after the U.S. and NATO dismissed the drafts as unacceptable to even meet at the negotiating table with, and a mere twenty days before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Putin met with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China and issued a communique titled *Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development* (China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2022) that identified the current geopolitical landscape and the headwinds that both Russia and China is facing in the U.S.-led world order. The statement easily identifies commonalities that both feel they can join forces and overcome through engagement. Both sides also support the rationales and endeavors the other has done to address their concerns and dilemmas in a Western-led order. Nearly thirty years of failure in constructing a viable relationship between nuclear peers resulted in a two-month tête-à-tête which developed into now two of America’s largest rivals that it must contend with in Europe, Eurasia, and Asia and an 11-page plan on how Russia and China plan to overcome the U.S.-led global order. Given this scenario, the short- to medium-term outlook does not look too bright for the U.S. and NATO. But there potentially is a way that the U.S. can reverse this, and it involves the 2021 draft agreements to it and NATO that serves as the launching point. Boyle (2021) notes that Russia and China have not “formed a hard alliance”, their parallel views look good on paper but behind the scenes there are several differences that remain such as Russia’s relationship with China’s border rival India and the conflicting views of who will influence Central Asia moving forward. The region was under Soviet Russia’s influence just thirty years ago and with Russia’s desire for status it seeks to reestablish its influence in the region. For China, it seeks to heavily invest in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through Central Asia. Such an endeavor requires that China remain an influence in the region to ensure the logistics and operation of the initiative is not disrupted, thus China needs to call the shots or at the minimum influence Central Asian leaders to get what it wants out of the (BRI). Energy security is also a salient issue for both China and Russia as it relates to Central Asia as vast reserves of oil and gas are found in the region and the one who can exert the most influence here can also control the direction of flow of energy. Thus, reengaging with Russia potentially provides for a long-term ally against an ever-greater U.S. threat in China who is seeking to upend the global order in its own drive to hegemony.

Recommendations

Thomasen (2022) identifies two recommendations to employ in the post-conflict environment of the Ukraine war. Each have been elaborated on by this author in the context of the December 2021 draft agreements. While these recommendations will not address every area of contention between the United States and the West nor will it see results overnight, it does provide for a solid foundation from which to build a new paradigm of U.S.(through a NATO lens)–Russian relations. The two recommendations are as follows:

- “NATO should identify in dialogue how status ranks in Russian foreign and defence policy. In understanding how important status is in the Kremlin’s thinking, the post-conflict NATO-Russia relationship may rest on a far more sustainable premise that allows NATO to explore different and tailored routes to solve the security dilemma (Thomasen, p. 11).

As stated previously in this work, when Russia dismantled the Soviet Union, it only sought to shed itself of its ideological past not its status, its sphere of influence, or its security. It did not capitulate to the United States nor NATO for them to dictate how order should be decided within Russia or its near-abroad. Losing that type of status in influencing the immediate border region around Russia also leads to security dilemmas which Russia has historically had to deal with throughout its thousand-year history. Understanding that status loss leads to greater security concerns which are not addressed by former rivals and a response of deterrence by that other rival due to the misperception of the loss of status will only appear like Russia is militarizing for the sake of nostalgic land-grabbing when in fact it is merely compensating for its security fears because the other does not recognize its need for status. The evolution of the Russian National Idea has become a reality and has provided for the capabilities for Russia to achieve that status; if not given due consideration by its Western peers, particularly the U.S. and NATO, then it will forcefully seek to attain that status and security which is what is being witnessed in Ukraine and will potentially continue. Despite the vitriol toward Vladimir Putin in that he is an illogical, aggressive, revanchist, and authoritarian leader with a nostalgic yearning to revive the Soviet Union, many in the West must have forgotten that he too was seeking engagement with the West but at the same time also reviving the notion of what it means to be a Russian and to not forget their place, contributions, and accomplishments in history. Although they sought to identify with the West at the end of the Cold War, at the same time they also did not want to be subordinate to the West either because under Putin’s guidance, a Russian identity was reestablished that also developed a Russian “civilization.” To have such a treasure taken away is to take Russia back to the last decade of the 20th century when it was vulnerable, when the vultures of the West were circling over what appeared to be a carcass of a once proud beast, when Russia had briefly lost its identity and thus its status. The U.S. has applied the Monroe Doctrine for

nearly 200 years. Other powerful states have, according to the Realist theory in international relations, also used its status to exert a sphere of influence among its neighboring states. To maintain a more secure Europe and Eurasia, the U.S. should recognize Russia's capabilities as a global power and give due consideration to the status that naturally comes with such capabilities and ensuring it is a responsible partner that adheres to Westphalian principles of territorial integrity, state sovereignty and political independence of states that are within its sphere of influence provided that these satellite states do not disrupt the security of Russia or its sphere.

- Next, Thomasen points out that the U.S. should begin to recognize "that a new multi-order may be on the horizon and for this multi-order to be stable it requires that NATO support and safeguard the rules-based order, in particular the principle of sovereignty" (p. 11). The U.S. should accept the notion that the world is now in the twilight of a unipolar world that only lasted for a brief moment in history. The start of the 21st century has seen the formation of two superpowers that have begun to challenge the U.S.-led order, Russia and China. Despite the notion that a coalition of nations (like NATO) are more powerful than one on its own (Russia) the U.S. and NATO must understand that Russia today is much more homogenous than it was 30 years ago due to the implementation of the Russian National Idea and what it means to be Russian which arguably extends beyond its political borders and into its former sphere of influence which has historically been Eastern Europe and Central Asia. American (under the guise of NATO) influence has challenged that same space Russia is seeking to reestablish its influence over. U.S. foreign policy moving forward in the post-conflict Ukraine setting should consider that a multipolar world will emerge and that instead of fighting it with deterrence and forward defense to those who seek spheres of influence, they should find ways to adapt to it and exploit it to enhance their own security in the Western Hemisphere and as it pertains to operating under the NATO construct in Europe. Russia accepts that the U.S. does possess its own sphere in its immediate region of the Western Hemisphere and does not seek to disrupt the U.S.-influenced order there. The issue with influence is the fault line that once defined the former Soviet space from Eastern Europe, and this is where Russia's security and status concerns lie with the U.S. and NATO. In addition, Russia also has time and again identified with the higher international order and law consistent with the principles found in the UN charter (China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2022), it seeks to show that it can responsibly occupy a sphere of influence in the former Soviet landscape without violating territorial integrity, sovereignty, and right to free association; it is when an aggressive posture such as NATO and the U.S. is taking in this claimed Russian sphere that causes the current geopolitical situation in that part of the world to be volatile.

In addition to the broad recommendations offered by Thomasen on the course U.S. policy toward Russia should take, the author of this work has also offered recommendations that complement Thomasen's view but in a smaller scope as it relates to the December 2021 draft treaties drawn up by Russia. Not every article mentioned in the drafts will be touched on in detail but should

provide for a viable approach from which to put the wheels in motion towards establishing better relations and understanding the U.S./NATO and Russia.

1) *Reexamining the viability and nature of troop deployments, armaments, and weapons systems within NATO member states and in close proximity to Russia, as well as reconsidering the assistance the coalition provides to states outside of the alliance that in Russia's view amounts to exploring another round of expansion for the alliance.* The content and structure of the drafts proposed by Russia makes it apparent that Putin is seeking to find the “reset button” back to 1997 to roll back troop activity, armament placement and ability of NATO to effectively limit its ability to perform its mission and fulfill its obligations. This does not have to be a take-it-or-leave-it scenario. Russia has made the first move of identifying an acceptable limit of military personnel that it does not consider a threat to its security (currently set at the brigade level, equaling about 3,000 to 5,000 troops). Obviously, troop deployments and presence in the form of military exercises that number in the corps category or higher near another's borders would concern any neighboring state not party to a military exercise or able to enjoy the security of that force for itself. But the U.S. can barter with Russia on a *concentric zone application* from which to deploy its troops, armaments and to perform exercises with those NATO member states that are near Russia. Zones can be established from Russia's political borders in an incremental fashion that would also correlate with an agreed upon limit of troops able to be in that zone. This begins the process of cautiously considering troop placement and armaments so near the Russian border that it could be seen as an escalatory act of troop buildup while at the same time allow NATO forces to operate within their zones but stage quickly and effectively if the need arises which will allow NATO to fulfill its mission and duty to its member states.

The second part of this recommendation is to reconsider limiting NATO's mission to assist states that are not part of the Atlantic alliance and may be in potential conflict with another aggressor state. While the mission of NATO is admirable in scope it does have clearly defined parameters, specifically, “NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its *members* (emphasis added) through political and military means” (NATO, n.d.). This simple statement says nothing about providing security to non-members or even aspiring states wishing to join the alliance. There is, in fact a Membership Action Plan (MAP) that NATO allows aspiring but not full-fledged members to participate in but this too, does not offer security in the form of military assistance or joint military exercises. As of 2022, the only European state in the MAP program is Bosnia and Herzegovina (NATO, 2022b), there is no mention of Ukraine or Georgia as participating. While the notion of being the “knight in shining armor” coming to the rescue of non-member states seems honorable and chivalrous and seemingly part of NATO's mission to defend, it is in truth acting unilaterally and without the consent of the UN nor its Security Council which Russia is a permanent member of. The U.S. and NATO knows its extent to which to provide assistance and under which guises to operate in this capacity as in Ukraine where it has not deployed its troops or certain weapon systems in Ukraine, but it has provided military hardware which to stave off Russia's

military operation in the country. The problem with this geopolitical tactic is that it escalates the situation that is already volatile and could spark a wider conflict in the region that may involve a nearby NATO member thus invoking an Article 5 response. As a recommendation, NATO under U.S. guidance should refrain from assisting non-member states in a way that can be seen as the non-member acting as a proxy to Russia for the United States.

- 2) *Engage in meaningful negotiations and discussion as to clearly defining a security threat or concern threshold to avoid ambiguity and the arbitrary application of applying such grievances in bilateral diplomatic relations between the U.S./NATO and Russia.* Russia's drafts from both 2009 and 2021 mention security in the context of being compromised or concerns based on U.S./NATO activity. This allows for Russia to express any action that the U.S. or NATO is doing as a security concern. While the agreements do call for mechanisms to address these security concerns in the form of councils and other diplomatic means, Russia could perceive every action taken by the U.S. and NATO even within the alliance's borders as a threat ad infinitum. This causes only more distraction to address other salient matters that could move negotiations further along, but have only tied up both sides to address unclear concerns. Using the draft agreements as a starting point and other matters mentioned here in this work, the U.S. should press Russia to clearly identify their concerns from the onset so that no misunderstandings or moves will be made by either side to unnecessarily escalate a situation.
- 3) *Clearly define nuclear and conventional weapon systems and capabilities and have both the U.S./NATO and Russia agree upon these terms so as to not create misunderstandings about the presence of such capabilities.* As noted earlier, Russia appears to have never differentiated between nuclear and conventional weapon systems and given the lethality of such systems, this is a serious concern especially if Russia can easily justify the use of nuclear weapons in response to U.S./NATO conventional system threats. To be sure this amounts to the application of applying one level of force higher than necessary and an escalation of conflict leading to zero-sum nuclear war. While the U.S. and NATO *should not* remove nuclear capabilities nor abandon its nuclear loan program to other NATO states to apply its own deterrence security, it should apply the same means of establishing defined definitions of nuclear capabilities within the same parameters of security concerns and threats as mentioned above. Clear understanding these terms is integral for future cooperation in other matters between the two sides.
- 4) *The U.S. should identify connected security interests with Russia where the other is not perceived as the threat and results in confidence building measures that will lead to a long-term, comprehensive security agreement.* No partnership is perfect. Parties to agreements and arrangements, even long-term allies, often have conflicting ideas due to the unique characteristics of each party or perspectives and experiences that they have historically encountered. Seventy years ago, the United States and Russia overcame their

ideological differences and worked together to eliminate the greatest threat to humanity at the time in Hitler's Nazi Germany. Sadly, their achievements did not forge a more lasting relationship, but Russia has to their credit sought to reengage once again, but the U.S. has yet to overcome its hubris in winning the Cold War to meet Russia halfway. There are bigger threats to both Russia and the United States than over Ukraine and Georgia. International terrorism, to which both parties are not immune to, seek to disrupt the existing status quo of global order, the COVID-19 global pandemic has taken the lives of over 6.5 million people, food and water insecurity are reaching levels that have the potential to cause global disruption and famine, mass human migration as a result of food and water insecurity can cause receiving countries to experience critical levels of further insecurity. Lastly, a rising China can challenge *both* the existing U.S.-led order and the Eurasian and Eastern European order that Russia is seeking to *establish*. This list can go on, but the point here is that certainly there is something that the U.S. and Russia can focus on as a threat other than focusing on each other as one. The little victories count: over time they have the ability to accumulate and can provide the impetus from which a U.S./NATO-Russian relationship can flourish, no longer consider each other as adversaries, and can finally rid themselves of the adversary concern in future agreements, protocols, and treaties. To start with small things often results in something big, this can be a big opportunity to establish a global partnership to improve the world better than the state it is in now. The U.S. should take the first steps to engage with a Russia that has sought to do so frequently over the past 30 years.

Conclusion

As it stands, three things greatly affect U.S./NATO-Russian relations – lack of clarity as to security, overlapping interests in Eastern Europe, and a lack of peer respect between the parties. Western leaders, diplomats, and politicians like U.S. House Representative Brendan Boyle (D-PA) and General Rapporteur to NATO seeks to maintain the status quo of American and Western sentiment toward Russia and President Vladimir Putin as aggressive, revanchist, and authoritarian with a nostalgic yearning to revive the Soviet idea. Instead of real engagement and negotiation, Boyle calls for the continued dual track approach toward Russia's activity in Eastern Europe and particularly in Ukraine. They have yet to see that this approach thus far has resulted in a stalemate at best which, not surprisingly, is the same result that can be argued for U.S./NATO-Russian relations since the end of WWII. The brief respite at the end of the Cold War did not mean that the U.S. would permanently remain the sole unipolar power for eternity. History has taught us great empires have come and gone; the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Mongols, Chinese, British, and Russian empires have had their moment in the sun but must make way for a new entity to assume power. Why not share power to strengthen each other and establish a more inclusive order where everyone can thrive? This is what a U.S.-Russian partnership can potentially achieve, and it can start with the simple recommendations noted in this work.

In the meantime, for the United States, “Russia will remain the principal source of security challenges in the short- to near-term...(and) will remain capable, in the foreseeable future, of inflicting harm to the interests of the Allies” (Boyle, p. 1). As disappointing as it may be to admit it, the U.S. may have been the engineers of the current state of the U.S./NATO relationship with Russia. Beginning with Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” to “Yeltsin’s efforts of cooperation, to Putin’s pragmatic cooperation and later, pragmatic assertiveness to eventual rivalry (Tysgankov, 2022) and isolation, one can see the decline of Russian interest of establishing relations with the U.S. But this does not have to be the status quo in U.S. relations with Russia. Putin’s Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov offered sage yet simple advice that rings clear as a bell; “We of course, if the Americans are willing, are ready to resume the dialogue and definitely are set and able to work in this direction (of negotiations and peace)...Everything depends on Washington now," (TASS, 2021). Everything *does* depend on Washington, and it begins with a new approach with U.S./NATO-Russian relations.

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