

NATO'S HISTORICAL CHALLENGES AND ANALYSIS OF ITS CRISES

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Abstract: *This article analyses the challenges facing NATO that has led to speculation about its decline. NATO has successfully addressed a variety of challenges, risks, and threats from management and other standpoints since its foundation. However, the most recent problems it has faced in the latest years are more serious and may carry the seeds of NATO's future destruction. Given that some of them come from inside NATO and others from the shifting global order, they have exposed a lack of consistency within NATO. With a focus on the most recent problems that threatened NATO's coherence and contributed to its possible decline, this study aims to look into these issues and NATO's potential decline, using historical facts and processes. Given these challenges, NATO's future will be dependent largely on internal political cohesion, unity, and transatlantic cooperation.*

Keywords: NATO, historical challenges, crises, management problems, transatlantic decoupling, political cohesion.

Rezumat: *Provocările istorice pentru NATO și analiza crizelor sale.* Articolul analizează provocările cu care se confruntă NATO, care au generat diverse speculații relative la declinul organizației. NATO a abordat cu succes o varietate de provocări, riscuri și amenințări încă de la înființarea sa. Cu toate acestea, cele mai recente situații cu care s-a confruntat în ultimii ani sunt mai grave, putând genera chiar germenii posibilei sale distrugerii. Având în vedere că unele probleme provin chiar din interiorul NATO, iar altele din schimbarea ordinii globale, iese în evidență o anumită lipsă de coerență în cadrul alianței. Focalizându-se pe cele mai recente probleme care au amenințat coerența NATO și au contribuit la posibilul său declin, studiul își propune să le analizeze în contextul potențialului declin al organizației, folosind fapte și procese istorice concrete. Având în vedere aceste provocări, viitorul NATO va depinde în mare măsură de coeziunea politică internă, de unitatea și cooperarea transatlantică.

INTRODUCTION

Until Trump took power in the USA, NATO had been deemed the world's most important and strongest political and security organization. However, when Trump declared during the 2016 presidential campaign that NATO was 'obsolete' and de-emphasized NATO during his presidency, the perception of NATO was negatively affected. This statement has also caused "worry" in the alliance.¹ Such de-emphasizing comments from American leaders have never been mentioned in NATO history. Furthermore, French President Macron also described NATO as suffering "brain death", lamenting a lack of coordination between Europe and the United States in unilateral action.² However, this is hardly NATO's first challenge; it has faced numerous throughout its existence.

This article examines these challenges and crises by reviewing historical facts, events, and dynamics while focusing on the most recent problems confronting NATO, and it concludes that the organization's survival primarily depends on internal political coherence. Following a brief theoretical overview of international security organizations, the paper covers previous challenges that NATO faced and its responses between 1949 and 1990. It then examines challenges that are more recent and responses between 1990 and 2016, as well as current challenges and the implications for NATO's decline. NATO challenges have also been examined from theoretical perspectives for each period. The article concludes with a general discussion of its key findings.

This study used a narrative research approach to conduct these analyses, based on scientific studies and sources from academic journals, scholarly books, reports, and online publications as well as one of the author's perspectives and experiences while employed by NATO.

A BRIEF THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Given that NATO is a security-based international organization, its founda-

¹ *Trump worries NATO with 'obsolete' comment*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38635181> (Accessed on 03.08.2021).

² *NATO is suffering 'brain death', argues French president Macron*, 07 November 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20191107-macron-claims-nato-is-suffering-brain-death> (Accessed on 10.03.2022).

tion principles can be traced back to the theoretical evolution of such organizations. The concept of security has evolved because of various states' threat perceptions of their national or alliance interests, international political circumstances, and the emergence of non-military risks to humanity.

International relations theories develop security concepts based on their approaches to security perception; realist, neorealist, liberal, liberal institutionalist constructivist, and critical theories each have various perspectives on security and international security organizations. Realists view a state-centric approach that defines security as a military threat in an anarchic international structure that threatens the nation's survival.³ According to this theory, states make alliances to compete with the common threat(s) or deter any aggression. For realists, international organizations (IOs) are expressions of the interests of powerful states and reflect the current distribution of power in the international system.⁴ This theory sees the IOs as a tool for states to increase or balance their power.

The neo-realist approach differs from the realist understanding by assuming that conflict is a permanent condition of world politics⁵ whereby the international structure determines the behaviour and security of international actors. Waltz defined this well in his famous book *Theories of International Politics*.⁶ Nations may unite or establish alliances to counterbalance militarily superior states, which leads to the neo-realist balance of power approach. Most realists argue that peace and security have been achieved historically through a nation's efforts to achieve a balance of power in the international structure, in particular by establishing alliances against common hostile states.⁷ Neo-realists see IOs as tools that hegemon states with a strong influence in the international system deploy to protect their national interests and maintain their dominant position.⁸ To safeguard their national interests, the other states may rally behind the hegemon nations.⁹ Therefore, unlike liberals, neo-realists reject the view that IOs build and sustain

³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nation*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.

⁴ Michael Davies, Richard Woodward, *International Organizations*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014, p. 23.

⁵ Abdurahman Adamu, Abubakar Zakari, Aminu Idris, *Analysis of Major Theoretical Issues on National and International Security*, in "International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies", Vol. 3, 2016, no. 2, p. 48.

⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics*, Reading - Menlo Park - London - Amsterdam - Sidney, Addison-Wesley, 1979.

⁷ Michael Davies, Richard Woodward, *International Organizations*, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987.

collaborative efforts for peace, security, and economic effectiveness.

Liberalism, in contrast to the previous two approaches to international security, emphasizes intergovernmental and transnational institutions, collaboration, and shared advantages. This offers possible exits from the supposedly “permanent” conflicts and security dilemmas of the realist world.¹⁰ Liberals see IOs as tools for maintaining peace and security in the international system by creating and implementing rules through liberal institutionalism. Complex interdependence theory¹¹, which is part of liberal theory, claims that states may have fewer disputes as a result of interacting in a liberal economy. Besides, alliances can live longer in a liberal world because there is less hostility.

Constructivists adopt a different ontological and epistemological approach to social processes, emphasizing ideas, culture, norms, and identities as opposed to the materialist analyses of neo-realism and neo-liberalism.¹² They claim that these values and norms, including security, are socially constructed. Constructivist scholars view IOs as norm-makers who promote norms, rules, and principles that they promulgate to the international community to address problems.¹³

Critical theorists discuss international security in terms of people and emancipatory values rather than the state and its *raison d'état*.¹⁴ According to global Marxist perspectives, security concepts are instruments used by the capitalist world to protect and sustain its economic, social, political, cultural, and military privileges. Therefore, they regard IOs as international bourgeoisie mechanisms that facilitate proletarian exploitation in the interests of rich capitalist nations.¹⁵

Another important theory on IOs is the functionalist theory, which derives from liberalism. It argues that IOs emerge in response to the interdependence resulting from technological and economic progress. It, therefore, predicts that sustained international economic and social interactions would eventually result in cooperation and common values that will “spill over” into the political arena.¹⁶ The best example of an IO that supports this theory is the European Union (EU). While

¹⁰ Barry Buzan, *The English School: A Neglected Approach to International Security Studies*, in “Security Dialogue”, Vol. 46, 2015, No. 2, p. 128.

¹¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age*, in “Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 77, 1998, No. 5, p. 83.

¹² Barry Buzan, *The English School*, p. 128.

¹³ Michael Davies, Richard Woodward, *International Organizations*, p. 30.

¹⁴ Barry Buzan, *The English School*, p. 129.

¹⁵ Michael Davies, Richard Woodward, *International Organizations*, p. 32-34.

¹⁶ A. LeRoy Benneth, James K. Oliver, *International Organizations. principles and issues*, Upper Saddle River (New Jersey), Prentice Hall, 2002, p. 30-32.

the EU was established on economic motivations, its enlargement has transformed it from an economic union to a political structure through its spillover effects.

Among these security schools, the Copenhagen School of Security Studies has offered a new conceptualization by demonstrating that security cannot any longer be reduced to the military domain. Instead, it has broadened the scope of security analysis to include not only military issues but also economic, political, sociological, and environmental issues where necessary. This indicates that security no longer has a fixed (pre-existing) meaning; rather, it is a social and inter-subjective construction.¹⁷ According to their theoretical understanding, IOs can run in a wider range of security domains, regarding the will of member states.

After a brief overview of the literature on IOs in IR theories, the focus will shift to NATO's historical challenges and responses.

NATO CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES FROM 1949 TO 1990

NATO is an international political and security organization established in the Atlantic basin to protect its members from any aggressors. From the outset, NATO aimed to safeguard its members not only from Soviet Union aggression but also from Germany, as the latter was considered the main perpetrator of both World Wars. NATO's first Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, stated that NATO needed not just to keep the Russians out but to keep the Americans in and the Germans down.¹⁸

NATO has encountered many challenges since its creation but acted very wisely to successfully overcome them, which may have otherwise led to its dissolution. During the Cold War, NATO's coherence and the loyalty of its members were never questioned, as the threat was enormous and imminent. Despite several problems and challenges, member states maintained their commitment to the pact and never lost faith in NATO.

Initially, NATO's main security threat was the increasing Soviet threat to the Western Block, when NATO was more of a political than a military association. The growing Soviet threat and the Korean War dictated that NATO would require a military structure to ensure the military alliance's success. Accordingly, NATO

¹⁷ Rita Taureck, *Securitisation Theory and Securitisation Studies*, in "Journal of International Relations and Development", Vol. 9, 2006, No. 1, p. 54.

¹⁸ James Goldgeier, *NATO's Future Facing Old Divisions and New Threats*, in "Harvard International Review", Vol. 31, 2009, No. 1, 2009, p. 50.

devised the concept of 'massive retaliation' to deter the Soviet Union's conventional threat and created an integrated military structure to provide resilient military command and control structure.¹⁹ Thus, NATO overcame its first challenges.

During the 1950s, NATO faced three challenges. The first was West Germany's inclusion into NATO, in 1955, which mainly upset France and other Western European countries. Given that Germany had recently been a security threat, they feared that it would return to earlier expansionist policies and exploit NATO for its national interests. Therefore, NATO's first challenge was to reassure France and other Western NATO nations in the face of the Soviet threat, which it did by using their common security needs and their desire to maintain Europe's stability.

The second crisis was the 1956 Suez Canal crisis when the UK and France confronted both the United States and NATO's main rival, the Soviet Union, who both threatened to use nuclear weapons if the UK and France did not withdraw from the Suez Canal. This was the first crisis to threaten NATO's survival. US President Eisenhower was disappointed by the British secret planning without consulting America.²⁰ The United States reportedly threatened to withdraw from NATO if France and Britain pressed the issue. The attitude of the Americans discouraged France. This became one of the root causes for France to leave the military wing of NATO in the 1960s. At the end of this crisis, the function of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) expanded to discuss all members' concerns²¹ to prevent any future crisis. Nevertheless, it again maintained its coherence and unity despite this unexpected crisis.

The third challenge was the Western European Union (WEU), established by the Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, signed in Brussels on 17 March 1948. In 1954, the Brussels Treaty was strengthened to include West Germany and Italy, and end the former's occupation. The WEU came into force on May 6, 1955. Having remained overshadowed by NATO and dormant until 1990, it had the potential to become Europe's security and defence organization. Despite being transformed into the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 2001, it carried some seeds of autonomous security ideas. This caused divisions among the EU members, between those supporting

¹⁹ Gregory W. Pedlow, *The Evolution of NATO Strategy 1949-1969*, in Gregory W. Pedlow (Ed.), *NATO Strategy Documents 1949-1969*, p. XV-XIX, <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/intro.pdf> (Accessed on 12.03.2022).

²⁰ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance*, Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Publishers, 2004, p. 13; Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, in "Parameters", Vol. 37, 2007, No. 1, p. 101.

²¹ Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 101.

NATO and America and those supporting an autonomous EU security architecture, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s as the EU tried to expand the ESDP.

During the 1960s, NATO's major challenge was the decision of France to remove NATO headquarters and military installations from France in 1966 and France's withdrawal from NATO's military structure. The relocation of NATO bases, command sites from Paris to Belgium cities,²² Brussels and Mons, and abandoning the military wing were a severe blow to transatlantic cooperation and shared values. De Gaulle, the French President, was against the USA's increasingly influential role in European security and favoured an independent Europe. The détente between the Western and Eastern Blocs was partially involved in this discussion, which led to the development of France's independent nuclear deterrent and its withdrawal from NATO's military structure in 1966. This represented the first breaking point for NATO when its members revealed disparities in security views and approaches to addressing security threats. NATO established the Defence Planning Committee as France did not want to work within NATO's integrated military command.²³ France did not return to NATO's military structure until 2009.

Disputes between NATO members hindered NATO by decreasing its organizational efficiency and cohesion. In particular, Greece withdrew from its military structure in protest against the alliance's lack of serious response to Turkey's peace operation in Cyprus in 1974. However, Greece's withdrawal reduced its role in NATO's command chain, particularly regarding military issues. Realizing its error, Greece attempted to return to the military structure. However, Turkey (being a NATO member) prevented this until the military coup in 1980 in Turkey, when it consented to Greece's return.

After the East-West détente ended in 1980, with severe struggles between the two blocks, America deployed short-range Pershing II and Cruise missiles targeting Soviet conventional forces in Europe. This decision caused serious controversy, a widespread West European popular movement opposed to the new deployments, and increasingly divergent feelings and perceptions between the US and some other NATO members.²⁴ Although most European nations were against this deployment, they were unable to prevent it because of the economic interdependence among NATO members and the dependence of European members on America for their security.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Stanley Hoffmann, *NATO and Nuclear Weapons: Reasons and Unreason*, in "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 60, 1981, No. 2, p. 327.

Additionally, the air attack on Kaddafi and Libya in 1986 by the US and England for the role of Libya's involvement in the nightclub bombing in Berlin in 1986 created serious tension among Alliances. For example, France did not allow US and British warplanes to use its airspace.²⁵

The history of NATO is filled with issues and disputes. The Vietnam War, the American military invasions of Grenada and Panama, the 'Star Wars' (Strategic Defence Initiative) plans in the 1980s, Germany's Ostpolitik, burden-sharing of defence spending in the 1970s, and many other crises that occurred during the Cold War sparked discussions or divergent viewpoints among members.²⁶ While some of these were not specifically related to NATO, they had an impact on the organization. In brief, the Cold War era saved NATO from a serious fracture because shared risks outweighed member differences.

Because of the growing totalitarian threat that Soviet Russia was posing in Eastern Europe and trying to spread to Western Europe during the NATO founding period, there were many confrontations between national interests. The Western European countries sought to maintain their national interests, peace and security through the Brussel Treaty in 1949 and then founded NATO in 1949 to safeguard their strategic interests. Given these facts, realist²⁷ and neo-realist viewpoints offer the most insightful analysis of the NATO challenges that arose up to 1990, when allies perceived a common threat from the Soviet Union and a threat to their shared interests.

Indeed, as the common threat intensified, NATO strengthened both its military power and internal cohesion to consolidate the alliance, which directly corresponds to neo-realist perspectives. This means, that, as Walt²⁸ noted, NATO was conceived as a reflection of national interests and power balance among nations. Although there were some disagreements and challenges until 1990, the perceived threats preceded other national concerns and inter-allies disagreements.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES BETWEEN 1990 AND 2016

NATO experienced a historic change in 1990, when the Cold War ended and

²⁵ Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; Andrew Cottey, *NATO: Globalization or Redundancy?*, in "Contemporary Security Policy", Vol. 25, 2003, No. 3, p. 392.

²⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Brief Edition, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1993, p. 5.

²⁸ Stephen M. Walt, *Why Alliances Endure or Collapse*, in "Survival", Vol. 39, 1997, No. 1, pp. 156–179; Andrew Cottey, *NATO: Globalization or Redundancy?*, p. 393.

the Soviet Union collapsed, with NATO defeating its enemy without spilling any blood, and Europe's communist regimes collapsing in a "white revolution" without any serious uprisings. As the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was unable to invade any allied country, NATO was deemed one of the most successful security alliances in history.²⁹ Given that NATO emerged in response to Soviet aggression against Europe after the Second World War, there was scholarly discussion about the dissolution of NATO since it was no longer needed as the rival block had disintegrated.³⁰ Likewise, neo-realist thinkers Mearsheimer and Waltz³¹ thought that without a serious common threat the US would probably abandon NATO. Similarly, Rupp also claimed that NATO would probably dissolve due to a lack of a shared threat to the essential interests of the Alliance, and the main differences in transatlantic coasts after the 1990s.³²

Indeed, a distinctive feature of NATO is its ability to adapt to varying conditions, and new political and military environments. After the 1990s, new challenges and crises in Eastern Europe led NATO to intervene in various conflicts in a peacekeeping context, using its unique multinational military capabilities to maintain a safe and secure environment.

In 1991-92, the United States, Germany, France, and England faced the first crisis regarding how to end conflicts in the Balkans and recognize the independence of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia.³³ Germany recognized Slovenian and Croatian independence, which created a breakage among allied members. Due to increasing civil society criticism of the US administration for atrocities against Bosnian Muslims, the Clinton Administration conducted military operations against Serbia, compelling them to accept peace terms. The Dayton agreement in 1995 among warring parties (Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia) created a period lasting until today. Given the historical facts, the US acted as a superpower and took most decisions of conducting air attacks on Bosnian Serbs in 1992-1995 and Kosovo in 1999, without consulting with allied members, notably other big powers. Due to this power imbalance, England and France signed an autonomous common

²⁹ Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 101.

³⁰ Andrew Cottey, *NATO: Globalization or Redundancy?* p. 393.

³¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War*, "International Security", Vol, 15, 1990, No. 1, p. 52; Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Emerging Structure of International Politics*, in "International Security", Vol. 8, 1993, No. 2, p. 75-76; Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 100.

³² Richard Rupp, *NATO After 9/11: An Alliance in Continuing Decline*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 113-115.

³³ Andrew Cottey, *NATO: Globalization or Redundancy?*, p. 393.

European defence and security declaration at St. Malo in 1998.³⁴ This deceleration has given the EU the capacity for autonomous decision-making and action to respond to international crises when NATO is not involved. To avoid duplication, the EU has agreed to consider WEU's assets.³⁵

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US were a turning point for NATO in overcoming new security challenges resulting from terrorism, ethnic separatism, nationalism, migration, failed states, and extremism. Following the attacks, NATO invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which enshrines the principle of collective defence, for the first time in its history. All transatlantic allies agreed with the US-led operation in Afghanistan as it targeted terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, the Bush Government's decision to restrict NATO involvement in Afghanistan was considered a serious blow to the alliance.³⁶ Later, to free the US from Afghanistan for the Iraqi Operation, NATO began out-of-area operations against the Taliban in the area around Kabul in 2003. It expanded operations and assumed all operational responsibility throughout Afghanistan in 2006. However, despite a 20-year campaign and its supposed military supremacy, NATO was unable to defeat the Taliban. Finally, the US and NATO accepted defeat and completed their withdrawal by August 31, 2021.

Finally, the withdrawal of the US and NATO from Afghanistan has led to another challenge in NATO's credibility.³⁷ Apart from factors related to the military theatre itself, there are various reasons for this, including the unwillingness of some NATO members to actively engage with Taliban forces, restrictions imposed by force-providing member states regarding the use of their forces, and a fear of engaging in attrition warfare.³⁸ Overall, NATO failed to overcome the challenges it faced in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, although most scholars predicted that this defeat would cause NATO's collapse, the alliance has maintained its unity because its

³⁴ *Franco-British St. Malo Declaration (4 December 1998)*, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable_en.pdf (Accessed on 12.03. 2022)

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Stanley R. Sloan, *NATO, The European Union, and the Atlantic Community. The Transatlantic Bargain Reconsidered*, 2nd ed., Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005; Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 104.

³⁷ Graeme Herd, *The Causes and the Consequences of Strategic Failure in Afghanistan?*, in "Security Insights", No 068, August 2021, The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/causes-and-consequences-strategic-failure-afghanistan-0> (Accessed on 15.03.2022).

³⁸ Mats Berdal, David Ucko, *NATO at 60*, in "Survival", Vol. 51, 2009, No. 2, p. 56.

member states continue to support it until a better organization is created.³⁹ However, American withdrawal, without consulting the European allies, has led to frustration among Europeans⁴⁰ and might even lead to the creation of an autonomous European Army.⁴¹

In response to evolving instabilities, risks, and threats to its members, NATO developed new strategic concepts and procedures in 1991, 1999, and 2010.⁴² First, it expanded its definition of security to include new sources of instability, threats, and risks, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, sabotage, and organized crime. Second, it addressed the disruption of vital resources and cyber threats. Third, it noted the increasing number of refugees attempting to enter European states.

During this period, NATO also faced a challenging situation during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was opposed by key NATO European members like Germany and particularly France. The European Allies were not against the war on terror, they supported it. However, they strongly opposed the US expanding the war on terror to rogue states seeking to create weapons of mass destruction.⁴³ There was also a huge discussion about the allies protecting Turkey with air defence. Because of the big difference among members regarding the US-led operation in Iraq, the silence procedure was mostly broken.

Besides, Turkey and the US also disagreed over the Iraq War, which turned into a historic breaking point in relations in conjunction with other issues owing

³⁹ For detailed information about NATO's failure in Afghanistan, see Sertif Demir, *The War in Afghanistan: Toward which Direction? Vietnam, Soviet's Afghanistan Occupation, or Iraq*, in "Bilim Dergisi", Vol. 20, 2010, No. 1, pp. 165-194; Idem, *Afganistan'daki Yirmi Yıllık İşgalin Analizi: ABD/ NATO ve Barış çabaları* [Analysis of Twenty Years of Occupation in Afghanistan: US/ NATO and Peace efforts], in "Uluslararası Kriz Ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi", Vol. 5, 2021, No. 1, pp. 114-153.

⁴⁰ Matthew Karnitschnig, *Disbelief and betrayal: Europe reacts to Biden's Afghanistan 'miscalculation'*, 17 August 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-reacts-bidens-afghanistan-withdrawal/> (Accessed on 15.03.2022).

⁴¹ Daniel Boffey, *US withdrawal from Afghanistan will lead to EU army, says top diplomat*, 2 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/02/us-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-will-lead-to-eu-army-says-top-diplomat> (Accessed on 15.03.2022).

⁴² For detail about NATO's strategic concept, see Sertif Demir, *Stratejik Konseptler ve NATO'nun Dönüşümü* [Strategic Concepts and Transformation of NATO], in M. Seyfettin Erol (Ed.), *Sıcak Barışın Soğuk Örgütü: Yeni NATO* [The Cold Organization of Warm Peace: The New NATO], Ankara, Barış, 2012, pp. 57-114.

⁴³ Richard Rupp, *NATO After 9/11*, p. 94; Ryan C. Hendrickson, *The Miscalculation of NATO's Death*, p. 99.

to the crisis in Syria, the Arab uprising, the Libya crisis, the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, and Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 anti-missile defence systems. Western scholars have also criticized Turkey for its foreign policies since 2013, which have focused more on the Middle East, moving away from Western values, establishing close relations with Russia and China, and trying to purchase weapons from them. Some scholars have proposed that Turkey be excluded from NATO because its axis has supposedly shifted from a Western to an Eastern orientation.⁴⁴ This discussion has further exacerbated as Turkey initially opposed NATO enlargement to include Sweden and Finland as new members, citing their support for terrorism.⁴⁵ Rather than this supposed shift, however, Turkey's foreign policies have simply become more assertive and autonomous since 2009. Inevitably, they have hardly coincided with those of America, NATO, and the EU. For example, Turkey resisted Israel's participation in NATO exercises for a long time. Turkey has also prevented Southern Cypress from becoming a NATO member. However, these differences hardly justify Turkey's exclusion from NATO.

Another crisis occurred in the NATO-EU cooperation area. The EU tried to establish and develop its own autonomous security and defence architecture outside NATO's command and control structure. This began with the 1998 Saint Malo Agreement between the UK and France, followed by the EU's initiation of the common security and defence policy (CSDP). However, after the CSDP was approved, the WEU was dissolved in 2001. The fear is that if the EU develops a common security policy, this could lead to duplication of resources among NATO and EU members, while the CSDP will likely de-emphasize NATO's importance.

Because of its weak military capability, the EU needed NATO support to conduct supposedly autonomous peace support operations (PSOs). Having developed its own security architecture, the EU had to negotiate with NATO regarding the use of NATO assets in autonomous EU operations. The relations between NATO and the EU were based on the principles agreed upon during the 1990s. In 2003, the two organizations approved the Berlin Plus provisions outlining the principles

⁴⁴ Evren Balta, *The AKP's Foreign Policy as Populist Governance*, in "Middle East Report", No. 288, Fall 2018, p. 14-18; Aurel Sari, *Can Turkey be Expelled from NATO? It's Legally Possible, Whether or Not Politically Prudent*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/66574/can-turkey-be-expelled-from-nato/> (Accessed on 14.03.2022).

⁴⁵ Joe Lieberman, Mark D. Wallace, *Does Erdogan's Turkey Belong in NATO?*, 18 May 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/does-erdogans-turkey-belong-in-nato-sweden-finland-join-veto-weapons-peace-broker-11652882743> (Accessed on 15.06.2022).

for NATO to support EU-led military involvement in which NATO does not participate as a whole.⁴⁶ However, the EU's "assured access" to NATO's military capability upset Turkey, which argued that it, had no right to participate in the EU operations as a candidate state, complaining that the agreement contradicted its WEU observer state privileges. Finally, Turkey saw a contradiction between its lack of "assured access" to the EU and the EU "assured access" to NATO assets.⁴⁷ Because it was still unable to join the EU, Turkey refused to agree to NATO allocating resources to the EU without any pre-conditions. This unexpected development created a new challenge for NATO. The crisis only ended when NATO granted the EU access to NATO capabilities on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁸

Despite certain concerns about NATO-EU relations, NATO reiterated its commitment to improving the NATO-EU strategic partnership at the 2010 Lisbon Summit. The Strategic Concept 2010 also included some concepts concerning strategic cooperation. The key point in the development of relations was the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016. Both sides agreed to face common challenges from the East (implying the Russian threat) and the South (implying radicalism, refugee flows, and migrations). NATO's foreign minister approved 42 common measures in 2016 and additional 32 measures in 2017 to promote NATO-EU cooperation.⁴⁹ Through these measures, NATO and the EU relied on finding areas of cooperation in response to new threats and risks that can destabilize member nations. Accordingly, during 2018, they expanded cooperation in areas including military mobility, counter-terrorism, flexibility to CBNR (Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological) risks, promoting women, and peace and security issues.⁵⁰

The political and security progress concerning NATO post-1990s can also be assessed from theoretical perspectives. Neo-realism, constructivism and liberal theories can account for the progress post-1990s. The neo-realist theory puts forth that when common threats or common interests dissipate the alliances also

⁴⁶ NATO, *Relations with the European Union*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49217.htm (Accessed on 02.08.2021).

⁴⁷ Hasret Çomak, *Avrupa'da Yeni Güvenlik Arayışları ve Türkiye. Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Avrupa'da Güvenlik Yapılanması Sorunları* [New Security Concepts in Europe and Turkey. Security Structuring Problems in Post-Cold War Europe], İstanbul, TASAM, 2005, p. 75.

⁴⁸ See the detail of these discussions in Sertif Demir, *Avrupa Güvenlik Mimarisinin Tarihsel gelişimi ve Türkiye'nin Bu Güvenlik Mimarisindeki Yeri* [The Historical Development of European Security Architecture and the Place of Turkey in this Security Architecture], in "Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi", Vol. 5, 2009, No. 9, pp. 9-51.

⁴⁹ NATO, *Relations with the European Union*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

disappear, causing re-emerge of divergent national interests which might result in conflicts. Given this fact, when the Soviet Union, the common threat, disintegrated, NATO should have been dissolved.⁵¹ However, this did not come to happen as anticipated by neo-realists. NATO members sustained their commitment to the alliance when new common risks and threats emerged after the 1990s. Besides, as the winner of the Cold War, NATO served as a bond for its members to sustain their superiority in the world as well as an attractive centre for newly established Eastern European countries. Finally, Russia emerged as a major successor state having all Soviet-era weapons of mass destruction.

As previously stated, after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1990, the Russian Federation emerged as the strongest successor. It suffered much from the Soviet Union's economic collapse and fragmentation until the mid-2000s. After becoming president, Putin changed Russia's fate with the increase in energy prices, notably for oil. Russia re-emerged as a major power and started to pose a threat to Western interests by occupying some part of Georgia in 2008, cutting natural gas pipelines to Europe, starting the Ukraine crisis in the middle of winter of 2007, occupying Eastern Ukraine and annexing the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Since 2008, Russia has also threatened NATO's enlargement policy, which includes Georgia and Ukraine. Additionally, Russians' cyber-attacks on American presidential elections in 2016 and 2020 are other hostile acts against NATO members. Because of these negative developments, Western Countries have regarded the resurgence of Russia as a new threat to their common security, and NATO reshaped itself to compete with new Russian threats. NATO reorganized its force and command structures, repositioned its forces at the Eastern borders, and shifted priority to conventional warfare readiness. Overall, allied members have regarded the continuation of NATO as beneficial and viewed it as serving their interests in the chaotic international structure as neo-realist theory asserted.

The constructivist theory views IOs as founders of principles, norms, rules, and principles.⁵² In this perspective, constructive scholars attempt to articulate NATO enlargement and the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) through constructive theory. Because NATO membership requires a country to have a rule of law, liberal values and democratic principles before becoming a member. The PfP initiative prepares any candidate for potential NATO membership in a variety of ways.⁵³ In this perspective, NATO identities, norms and principles, and rules are

⁵¹ Andrew Cottey, *NATO: Globalization or Redundancy?*, p. 393.

⁵² Michael Davies, Richard Woodward, *International Organizations*, p. 30.

⁵³ Trine Flockhart, *Understanding NATO through constructivist theorizing*, in Mark Webber,

structured according to members' interpretations of perceived threats and risks as well as their liberal word order understanding. On the other hand, in the 1990s, when geopolitical thinking and the enemy concept nearly disappeared and all countries were potential members since they were no longer adversaries, NATO transformed itself into a unique embodiment of cultural and civilizational phenomena in terms of security. Their social structures, institutions, and culture made them different from each other.⁵⁴ NATO has assimilated most of them to maintain peace in Europe. Overall, the PfP initiative and the enlargement policy have led NATO to maintain a secure environment in Eastern Europe. According to constructive theory, without an enlargement policy, Eastern Europe could be destabilized and pose a serious threat to the alliance.

On the other hand, liberal ideology, which emphasizes intergovernmental and transnational institutions, collaboration, and shared advantages, can also explain the progress of NATO after the 1990s.⁵⁵ The liberal theory also asserts that an alliance based on common values can continue to exist stably in the absence of a common threat. This shows that NATO is likely to last despite a common threat as there was after the 1990s because of its foundation on common values and principles. Liberals also view IOs as tools for maintaining peace and security through forming and implementing rules in the international system through liberal institutionalism. In this context, institutionalism has been a response to the changing post-Cold War European security paradigm and the security interests of allied members.⁵⁶ After the 1990s, NATO's longevity was aided by the liberal institutionalism manifested in the outnumbered peacekeeping operations. Because peacekeeping has given the alliance worldwide credibility as representing the United Nations, it has been a source of the alliance's ability to reinvent itself and maintain its relevance.

Adrian Hyde-Price (Eds.), *Theorising NATO. New perspectives on the Atlantic alliance*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 141-142.

⁵⁴ Pedro Lopes de Castro Barbosa, *NATO Enlargement, Identity and Divergent Security Perspectives: a constructivist Approach*, November 20, 2020, <https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/nato-enlargement-identity-and-divergent-security-perspectives-a-constructivist-approach/> (Accessed on 14.08.2021); Alexander Wendt, *Anarchy is What the States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics*, in "International Organization", Vol. 46, 1992, No. 2, pp. 391-425.

⁵⁵ Barry Buzan, *The English School...*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ Frank Schimmelfennig, *NATO and institutional theories of international relations*, in Webber Mark, Hyde-Price Adrian (Eds.), *Theorising NATO. New perspectives on the Atlantic alliance*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 93-94.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FROM 2016 TO TODAY

Currently, NATO faces major security concerns, a changing global world order, and internal difficulties. These include Brexit, the militarization of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), decoupling of transatlantic relations, weakened values of the liberal order, and finally Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

The UK's position in the EU security structure remains unclear since Brexit. Certainly, the EU will lose one of its main contributors to security and defence capabilities in terms of budget, military, nuclear capacity, and technological innovation. However, rather than this impact, the issue here is how Brexit would influence NATO-EU cooperation. The UK has been the main country to achieve a balance in NATO-EU cooperation, particularly in security and defence issues. Despite helping to facilitate the formation of the CSDP as an EU member,⁵⁷ the UK disagreed with making it a counterpart of NATO and de-emphasizing NATO's role in Europe. Because it thought such policies would duplicate efforts, the UK objected to further enlargement of the CSDP's military capacity. Besides, the UK was always unenthusiastic about further militarization of the EU if it weakens NATO's key role.⁵⁸ Likewise, the UK mostly blocked the deployment of CSDP missions and operations, vetoed a permanent headquarters, and opposed an increase in the European Defence Agency (EDA)'s budget and common funding of the Athena mechanism.⁵⁹

In contrast, Germany and France have historically been against the US presence in Europe and its leading role in European security and defence issues. Therefore, they have endeavoured to advance the CSDP. When it was an EU member, the UK resisted their efforts. Following Brexit, however, Germany and France can achieve their aspiration to establish a security organization under

⁵⁷ Sarah Lain, Veerle Nouwens, *The Consequences of Brexit for European Defence and Security*, RUSI Occasional Paper, London, April 2017, updated August 2017, p. VII-VIII.

⁵⁸ Michał Oleksiejuk, *The Impacts of Brexit on the Security and the Defence Industry in the European Union and the United Kingdom*, Warsaw Institute, Special Report, 20.04.2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/impacts-brexit-security-defence-industry-european-union-united-kingdom/> (Accessed 15.04.2021).

⁵⁹ Ana Isabel Xavier, *The Impact of Brexit on Security and Defence Multilateralism: More Cooperation or Overlapping Interests?*, in "Marmara Journal of European Studies", Vol. 26, 2018, No. 1, p. 106.

their full control as there is no longer a strong voice opposing them,⁶⁰ although some other EU nations also object to further developing a military structure within the EU. Nevertheless, German-French cooperation can further enhance permanent structured cooperation (PSCO) in defence and Europe's defence industries.⁶¹ They can also expand PSC to CSDP,⁶² which the UK generally opposed.

The militarization of the CSDP, which means structuring and implementing a permanent military headquarters, can decrease the EU's reliance on the NATO-EU cooperation mechanism established through Berlin Plus in 2003 and the Warsaw Declaration in 2016, which enables EU access to NATO capabilities. The Berlin Plus agreement created a planning and conduct cell for CSDP operations within SHAPE and established NATO liaison officers in the Joint Staff of the EU in Brussels.⁶³ However, further militarization of the CSDP will eventually lead to a severe split and controversy between NATO and the EU. It will also be a challenge for non-EU NATO members like Turkey and Norway.

NATO has experienced significant challenges and crises in the last years including several disagreements over perceived common threats and interests, transatlantic decoupling, the disinterest of some allied members in NATO, the militarization efforts of the CSDP, and, finally, the loss of some liberal and democratic values in certain allied countries. Besides, America's strategic priorities have shifted from Europe to East and Pacific Asia since China emerged as a new rival hegemon and began to challenge the US. According to neo-realism, these developments might lead to a loss of confidence in NATO. This, however, did not occur. Despite facing many crises and challenges, NATO has been a successful security organization for more than 70 years preserving security and peace in the transatlantic region, as liberal, liberal institutionalism and complex dependency asserted that successful organizations are unlikely to dissolve.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Nicole Koenig, Marie Walter-Franke, *France and Germany: Spearheading a European Security and Defense Union?*, Jaques Delors Institute – Berlin, Policy Paper No. 202, Berlin, 2017, p. 1.

⁶² Ana Isabel Xavier, *The Impact of Brexit ...*, p. 110.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶⁴ Gunther Hellmann, Reinhard Wolf, *Neorealism, Neoliberal Institutionalism, and the Future of NATO*, in "Security Studies", Vol. 3, 1993, No. 1, p. 26-27; Arthur A. Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate. Circumstance and Choice in International Relations*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 26-27.

THE CHALLENGES OF NATO DECLINE

NATO has faced various challenges, which it has mainly overcome. Until now, the challenges due to internal dynamics have had little effect on NATO's organizational capacity and cohesion. However, in the last few years, there has been discussion about NATO's decline and decreased future role, mostly resulting from a lack of internal cohesion. As mentioned earlier, this discussion was particularly generated after US President Trump defined NATO as "obsolete" and French President Macron declared NATO to be suffering from "brain death".

As discussed earlier, a major recent challenge for NATO has been the weakening transatlantic link. The Trump administration accused rich European members of not allocating enough funds to develop NATO's military capabilities and leaving the entire burden on the US shoulders. This was the first time an American president had openly accused European members of not sharing the burden while calling the EU an economic rival. Transatlantic decoupling is not a new issue since it began earlier after the USSR collapsed. However, it did not lead to serious problems in NATO until 2015, following American complaints that Germany was not bearing its fair share of military spending and was establishing close relations with Russia and China for energy and technology, respectively.⁶⁵

Some scholars argue that NATO has also experienced institutional decline and reduced relevance for its members for various reasons, such as the transatlantic decoupling on security issues, the quest of European members to lead in dealing with their security issues, and the transformation of NATO into the preferred choice for regional and global security governance due to multiple security providers. They assert that institutional decline is motivated by three major factors: the loss of legitimacy, utility, and cohesiveness.⁶⁶ However, although NATO has become less cohesive in its policies and its utility in some cases, it is too early to claim that NATO lost its legitimacy.

Another dynamic that has played a role in NATO's decline is President

⁶⁵ Loren Thompson, *Germany's Policy Choices are Hastening, The Decline of NATO*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2019/03/04/germanys-policy-choices-are-hastening-the-decline-of-nato/?sh=5b403f91bba3> (Accessed on 02.08.2021).

⁶⁶ Rafael Biermann, *NATO's institutional decline in post-Cold War security governance*, in Charlotte Wagnsson, James Sperling, Jan Hallenberg (Eds.), *European Security Governance. The European Union in a Westphalian World*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p. 44.

Trump's troubling anti-NATO and anti-European bias, which made him a challenge for NATO and its survival. Because Trump viewed the EU as an economic rival and NATO as obsolete, European nations questioned the US credibility as leader of the West for the first time since the Second World War.⁶⁷ This was also the most serious transatlantic decoupling since NATO's foundation, which accelerated Germany and France's decision to militarize the CSDF. As mentioned earlier, because of Brexit, Germany and France were free to formulate their desired European security structure. Therefore, Macron defined NATO as brain dead as he wanted to advance the CSDP as a security organization. After Trump's defeat in the 2020 election, NATO's survival is more assured because the Biden administration has declared its commitment to NATO and promised to advance its role in the international arena. Biden's first visit to NATO HQ in Brussel after the invasion of Ukraine is a symbol of how important NATO has become.

Another factor contributing to NATO's decline is the failure of liberal democracy within NATO itself. NATO is a typical alliance, which has not only deterred and defended against external threats but has also advanced liberal democratic governance.⁶⁸ Thus, Eastern European nations wanted to become NATO members not just for their security but also to sustain their democratic regimes. However, over the last decade or more, populist and anti-democratic regimes have been spreading globally. Interestingly, several NATO members are increasingly autocratic regimes that are undermining liberal democracy's institutions and practices.⁶⁹ In short, the challenges facing NATO are not just exogenous but also internal due to populist political approaches.

The other main challenge since 1990 has been burden sharing because the alliance has not faced any tangible hostility, so member nations are reluctant to allocate additional resources for defence spending. However, as the USA regularly points out, member nations are supposed to increase military spending up to 2% of GDP in line with the Wales Summit declaration in 2014, which explains Trump's annoyance with European members. In addition, since the development of European defence capabilities of the EU is considered a key tool in making the Euro-

⁶⁷ Douglas Lute, Nicholas Burns, *NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis*, Report, February 2019, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2019, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Celeste A. Wallander, *How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance*, in "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 97, 2018, No. 4, p. 70-71.

⁶⁹ Douglas Lute, Nicholas Burns, *NATO at Seventy...*, p. 4-5.

Atlantic area safer and contributing to transatlantic burden-sharing, unnecessary duplication must be avoided.⁷⁰

NATO's decision-making system also threatens its resiliency and effectiveness, as critical decisions require the consent of allies. Given the growing number of members, some suggest empowering the Secretary-General (SG) regarding administrative and resource issues.⁷¹ However, while the SG's role could be increased for routine administrative tasks, other duties, such as operational power and decision-making in crisis scenarios, must be negotiated among members. Otherwise, having been excluded from decision-making, they will hesitate to participate in NATO operations.

NATO is also under pressure from the changing international order. The economic rise of Asian countries is decreasing American dominance.⁷² The distribution of global economic and military power has changed significantly since the mid-1990s, with the US and its wealthy allies' shares of global GDP and military power eroding substantially in the past two decades.⁷³ In particular, China's GDP is expected to surpass the USA's in the coming decade. As China rises and invests its economic wealth into the military, the US will shift its focus from Europe to Asia. Indeed, it has already shifted many resources to Asia to secure its national interests. Consequently, NATO and Europe will become less relevant and attract fewer resources from the US. This can be a challenging issue for NATO.

The diverse characteristics of these threats will threaten NATO's coherence. Some countries think Russia is a threat while others consider instability in the Middle East and North Africa as the major security concern. Thus, NATO needs to make its members' security interests converge.⁷⁴ Finally, another issue is NATO's attitude toward core values. As expressed in the NATO Summit declaration in June 2021 the allied members reiterate their commitment to territorial security, freedom, and shared values including individual liberty, human rights, democracy,

⁷⁰ NATO, *Relations with the European Union*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49217.htm

⁷¹ Douglas Lute, Nicholas Burns, *NATO at Seventy...*, p. 5.

⁷² Dick Zandee, *The Future of NATO. Fog over the Atlantic?*, in "Strategic Monitor 2018-2019", <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/strategic-monitor-2018-2019/the-future-of-nato/> (Accessed on 20.06.2021).

⁷³ Hal Brands, *Dealing with Allies in Decline. Alliance Management and U.S. Strategy in an Era of Global Power Shifts*, Washington, DC, The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017, p. I.

⁷⁴ Dick Zandee, *The Future of NATO*.

and the rule of law.⁷⁵ However, there are growing concerns about the tendency of some members to move away from those values.

However, two major facts appear to be putting an end to the discussion of NATO's internal incoherence: Biden's presidency in America in January 2021 and Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Biden, as the new president, has seen NATO as a critical link between the Euro-Atlantic area and he wanted to restore NATO's role in maintaining peace and security in Europe. He seems to be almost successful in his attempts to put a stop to the "suffering brain death" debate.

The Russian war on Ukraine, on the other hand, reshapes NATO's role and importance in European security in the eyes of all NATO members. This attack ended the established world order after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1990. It is undeniable that without NATO protection, no country in Europe can be safe and secure, since Putin wants to establish a "new Soviet-style empire. This has reaffirmed the vital role of NATO in maintaining peace and security in Europe.⁷⁶ Viewing Russia as a threat, the historically neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, applied for NATO membership because they perceived Russia as a new big threat to their survival. Moreover, NATO, under the US-led, reshapes itself in response to the new Russian threat through strategic conceptual evolution, enlargement policy, adapting new force structure and command and control system. On the other hand, this war has an enormous implication for the elimination of some of NATO's challenges or crises that it experienced in the last decade. For example, as a resurgent Russia becomes a very visible and impending threat with a big nuclear threat, NATO transatlantic decoupling, decreasing enthusiasm in the alliance, and declining liberal political principles are marginalized or ignored.

However, this war has also pointed out the historical challenges that NATO has had. For example, while Russia's minor bordering nations have wished for NATO assistance in an ongoing conflict, many major members have been hesitant to join in battle since Russia possesses a huge nuclear arsenal. Likewise, there is no full consensus among members on implementing economic, political, cultural and military sanctions on Russia. In addition, Turkey has long opposed NATO's expansion to include Sweden and Finland claiming that they protect terrorists who escaped from Turkey. These show that NATO's unity and

⁷⁵ *Brussels Summit Communiqué*, 14 June 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm (Accessed on 04.08.2021).

⁷⁶ For Russia-Ukraine war, see Sertif Demir, *The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War: Reasons and Impacts*, in "Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi", Vol 6, 2022, No. 1, pp. 13-40.

cohesion have yet to be attained. However, the Russian war on Ukraine has caused some of them to be postponed or de-emphasized, even though NATO still faces several difficulties and crises.

CONCLUSIONS

NATO provides a political-military framework for managing security challenges, that links European and North American interests, and aims to ensure security based on understanding and cooperation for the benefit of future generations. NATO has undergone several important transformations to meet different challenges and is now evolving to meet future challenges. NATO's history is full of crises and controversies. Its foundation was based on realist theory, which at that time provided the prevailing explanation for international politics. Later, its organizational structure evolved along neo-realist principles.

NATO has acted wisely to overcome these challenges, which might otherwise have destroyed NATO's coherence and effectiveness. During the Cold War, NATO coherence and member commitment were unquestioned since the threat was enormous and imminent. Although NATO faced various serious problems and challenges, its member states maintained their commitment to the pact and never lost their faith in NATO.

However, recent challenges have been more serious and could destroy NATO if it fails to maintain its coherence. The NATO's lack of coherence, burden-sharing issues, certain members' declining interest in the alliance and transatlantic decoupling⁷⁷ appear to be key challenges to overcome. Besides, the decreasing influence of liberal political values and order has also affected some NATO members, while the economic and military rise of China and other Asian countries will deflect the US's attention away from Europe toward Asia. All these developments indicate that NATO is approaching a trial phase.

NATO is a unique international organization based on voluntary membership that has provided security to its members through a consensual decision-making system. These are essential and non-negotiable features of NATO, and the diversion of US capabilities towards Asia means that the US will expect Europeans to take greater responsibility for their own security. Increased transatlantic de-

⁷⁷ Frederick Kempe, *The perils of transatlantic decoupling and how to stop it*, 14 June 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/the-perils-of-transatlantic-decoupling-and-how-to-stop-it/> (Accessed on 10.02.2022).

coupling may weaken the interest of powerful European countries in NATO, ultimately leading to NATO's demise. Therefore, as NATO's main founder, the US must be very cautious while adapting to the changing global word order. Otherwise, NATO's stance in Europe will become unclear, given France and Germany's eagerness to establish a militarized CSDP.

Indeed, certain unanticipated developments in the last two years have altered the evolution of NATO challenges. They are Biden's presidency in America in 2021 and Russia's attack on Ukraine. Biden has restored the transatlantic bond and unified all members under the NATO umbrella. For example, the declaration of NATO summits held in June 2021 in Brussel reiterated allied members' commitment to NATO's founding Washington Treaty and their eagerness to sustain transatlantic relations. This clearly emphasized the head of member states' will to maintain the coherence and unity of the organization in the future. Furthermore, NATO has united against the illegitimate and unjust Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. It is an undeniable fact that NATO still has various challenges and crises to overcome, but the Russian attack on Ukraine has caused some of them to be postponed or de-emphasized because of the resurgent Russian threat to NATO, as openly published in the new strategic concept approved at the NATO Summit held in Madrid in June 2022.

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