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About Russia's attempts to fit into Europe

Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been attempts to fit Russia into a European security architecture and its integration into the West. The extension of NATO and the EU has been frustrating Russian pretensions in a scenario of redistribution of power. The US and its NATO allies have played a leading role in the security sphere, while the EU has played a leading role in the commercial and economic spheres. The result has been a failure; it has gone from cooperation to rupture and confrontation.

The various stages in Russian-Western relations from 1989 to 2022 are presented here. It is interesting to examine Russian attitudes and the nature of their initiatives alongside Western decisions and proposals in order to better understand the current situation.

Russia is striving to regain its great power status; its perception of insecurity interacts with an exclusionary and awkward Western posture. It has overcome mutual lack of trust and Western incomprehension. The West has adjusted to its interests within international norms, and a recovered Russia has not been able to escape its strategic culture.

Keywords

Cooperation, Integration, European Security, Enlargement, Rupture.

Cite this article:

García-Vaquero Pradal, A. (2025). "The attempts to fit Russia into Europe". Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, No.25, pp. 357-378.

I From 1989 to 1994: The window of opportunity

The deep crisis within the communist bloc –the political changes in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria– and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, led Gorbachev to renounce forcible intervention in the face of the political crises in the Warsaw Pact countries¹ in the context of the reforms undertaken since 1986².

The events of 1989³ in East Germany determined the possibility of a united Germany (Sarotte, 2021: 33). When the first contacts between the occupying powers and West Germany began, Gorbachev put forward his conditions to Kohl for German reunification: the exit from NATO –neutrality– and from the European Communities (CCEE) (Sarotte, 2021: 35-36). Conditions proposed at the time by Stalin⁴ to the Western powers, a united and neutral Germany that “would have its own national armed forces” for the defense of the country (Kershaw, 2017: 97) and free elections, afterwards.

A “German question” arose again because of Franco-British reluctance and fear of the weight of a united Germany, and the solution of anchoring Germany in Western Europe, i.e. integrating it politically and economically⁵ into the CCEE and militarily into NATO, emerged. The issue was resolved between H.W. Bush and Gorbachev⁶ at their meeting in Malta and was clarified at the Strasbourg European Council (EU, 1989), which promoted the unity of the German people in the context of East-West cooperation.

In Malta, Soviet conditions for German reunification, denuclearization, neutrality and exit from NATO were discussed. Bush’s idea of keeping Germany united in NATO and extending Article 5 to its eastern part (Sarotte, 2021: 44) under conditions that would be acceptable to the USSR prevailed. With a Warsaw Pact practically disarticulated, Gorbachev did not have the capacity to oppose and proposed at some point that “both alliances should be part of the common European security structure” (Sarotte, 2021: 51), respecting the right to free choice of alliance according to the Helsinki principles (1975).

1 In the cases of Poland and East Germany, Gorbachev communicated in June 1989 to Jaruzelski that he would not support a military crackdown against the new non-Communist Solidarity government; and later to Honecker in October 1989. (Kershaw, 2017: 491-497).

2 New Political Thought, Glasnost and Perestroika (Milosevich, 2024: 68-73).

3 The flood of East German refugees, the opening of borders between Hungary and Austria (March 1989) and the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9, 1989), among others.

4 March 10, 1952.

5 Mitterrand wanted to tie Germany to the European monetary union and Kohl was willing to sacrifice the Deutsche Mark (Kershaw, 2017: 513).

6 December 2-3, 1989.

The success of the multilateral negotiations of the “Two plus Four” Treaty⁷ for reunification had two different key elements. One was US Secretary of State Baker’s comment to Soviet Foreign Minister Schevardnadze offering as a preferable alternative a united Germany linked to NATO along with the guarantee that NATO “would not move an inch eastward from its position”⁸ (Sarotte, 2021: 55) *Not One Inch*. The other key was the German commitment to remain in NATO and to accept the permanence of U.S. troops. It is possible that Bush had earlier conveyed to Köhl⁹ his refusal to German neutrality and the alternative of linking German reunification and allied expansion –for Germany’s security–, adding his adhesion to a future NATO extended beyond the dividing line of the two Germanys (Sarotte, 2021: 71-75).

Not One Inch is considered by the Russian side as an unwritten agreement that has been breached and a first demonstration of deceit and Western duplicity in the context of subsequent NATO enlargements to the East. The U.S. side argues that, if *Not One Inch* was raised, it was as an option, one more, but it is a point that Russian leaders continue to condemn as deception. According to their approach, the negotiations guaranteed the Soviet government that NATO would not take in any former Eastern Bloc, except for the Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR).

The economic incentive strategy of the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to alleviate the disastrous Soviet economic circumstances¹⁰ and Allied statements on the future of the Atlantic Alliance at the London Summit succeeded in making German reunification more acceptable to Russia (NATO, 1990); all this took place a few months before the dissolution of the USSR.

The signing of the “Two plus Four” Treaty (USA, 1990) on September 12, 1990, signified the USSR’s renunciation of its rights in Germany as the victorious power and the beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the GDR with the subsequent entry, at the discretion of the German government, of German NATO military forces¹¹.

The USSR interpreted the treaty (Sarotte, 2021: 252)¹² as greatly simplifying the issue by extending the conditions agreed for the territory of East Germany to the entire space of Central and Eastern Europe: The Atlantic Alliance would not occupy empty spaces when the Soviet army withdrew from the Warsaw Pact

7 German reunification necessarily required some kind of agreement between the four great occupying and victorious powers in World War II.

8 Both quotations are a translation of the author.

9 At the Bush-Köhl meeting at Camp David, February 24-25, 1990.

10 The USSR needed the Western lines of credit to solve its serious economic crisis and avoid disaster; “bribes” according to Robert Gates. The FRG committed itself at that time to pay DM 12 billion in “stationing costs” for Soviet troops, plus DM 3 billion in interest-free credits.

11 Final addendum to the treaty.

12 The U.S. countered that the treaty referred exclusively to Germany.

countries¹³. This was a point that, while it may have emerged from high-level talks, was not reflected in writing in a treaty that was really limited to Germany. In any case, this misinterpretation justified Gorbachev internally.

Shortly afterwards, in December 1991, NATO's first gesture of rapprochement, the result of the 1990 London summit, was accepted by the USSR and consisted in the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NATO, 2022) as a forum for dialogue and cooperation with all the former adversaries of the Warsaw Pact, which had just been dissolved in March 1991. Interestingly, the first session, on December 20, served for the surprising announcement of the dissolution of the USSR by its ambassador who went on to represent Russia. Such was the pace and scope of change in Europe at that time.

After Gorbachev's resignation, Yeltsin, elected president of Russia in June, maintained a good and very open relationship with H.W. Bush (Sarotte, 2021: 130-131) and strove to consolidate an equal treatment between the two powers. In his confidence –and naivety–, Yeltsin went so far as to show himself willing to share the procedures for the use of nuclear weapons, besides suggesting Russia's entry into NATO (Sarotte, 2021: 132-133). The meeting of the two leaders at Camp David (February 1, 1992) sealed the end of the Cold War and 1992 can be considered as the year of the opportunity for fruitful cooperation between the two powers. In fact, Russia needed all the Western support to get out of a very bad economic situation (Sarotte, 2021: 140).¹⁴

Clinton and Yeltsin also developed a good personal rapport in their first presidencies; Clinton sought to push for control of the former USSR's nuclear weapons, to calm the security anxieties of the Visegrad Group countries¹⁵ and their rush to join NATO, and of course, to secure Russia's cooperation (Sarotte, 2021: 154)¹⁶.

Between 1993 and 1994, Russia was in a multiform crisis; it was simultaneously facing three transitions, a political one from communist authoritarianism to democracy, an economic one from a command economy to a market economy, and a structural one from a multi-ethnic empire to “something” much smaller. Russia was also beginning to feel disappointed with the economic and social results¹⁷ after

13 The withdrawal affected some 590,000 troops and their families; 388,000 in the GDR alone, according to estimates.

14 Russia received in 1992 substantial bilateral economic aid from Germany and the US (US\$ 1 billion) and from the IMF (US\$ 12 billion from the IMF).

15 Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland (1991).

16 Yeltsin had by then stressed that the “Two Plus Four Treaty” was a ban on NATO extension.

17 The policy imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the US, a brutal and disorderly shock therapy, led to economic collapse and social catastrophe (Teurtrie, 2024: 193).

implementing radical reforms (Gonzalez Marquez *et al.*, 2023: 44) following the advice of American experts (USA, 2009).¹⁸

In this context, Yeltsin dissolved a contested Duma and staged a *coup d'état* (the “Black October” of 1993) in a conflictive and complex scenario: the withdrawal of ex-Soviet forces from Western Europe, tensions with Ukraine over nuclear weapons and over control of the ex-Soviet fleet in the Black Sea¹⁹, and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

In the US, the idea of replacing the doctrine of containment with a strategy of enlargement (Lake, 1993) is beginning to be considered in the face of some contrary opinions such as that of Kennan (1997), who stated that it would be a fatal mistake because of its costs for the relationship with Russia, since it would trigger its nationalist and anti-Western sentiment by affecting its prestige and its security interests²⁰. American policy circles had been appreciating that NATO enlargement would prevent the emergence of new regional security instruments detrimental to the transatlantic link and that it would consolidate European stability and the credibility of the Alliance. Despite its geopolitical costs, enlargement was a tool of influence, indispensable to further economic globalization²¹ in Europe and the development of the American economy (Horowitz and Götz, 2020). The opinion of some analysts²² linked the US political and economic aims in Europe, security and prosperity.

Meanwhile, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) were looking for their place in the European security architecture and advanced their own initiatives (Sarotte, 2021: 164)²³. It is then that NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), presented on October 22 to Yeltsin, was arbitrated as a temporary and flexible solution (Sarotte, 2021: 178). The PfP sought to create habits of interoperability and military cooperation for all the countries of the former Soviet sphere, on equal terms and without the intention for the moment of adding new members. Yeltsin accepted

18 In September 1990, an American economic mission traveled to Moscow, and in July 1993, the G7 agreed to set up a *Support Implementation Group*.

19 Issues resolved later: the surrender of nuclear weapons in the *Trilateral Process* (January 14, 1994) and the Budapest Memorandum (December 5, 1994), and the sharing of the Black Sea Fleet and the use of the Sevastopol base by a bilateral treaty (May 31, 1997).

20 In Sarotte's opinion, the US had two possibilities at that time, either to facilitate the countries of the former Soviet orbit to freely decide their future or to promote cooperation with the new and recent Russian democracy, and the former was chosen, when the correct answer would have been to develop both. The geopolitical dilemma was to choose between the former satellites of the USSR and Russia.

21 Economic globalization understood as the integration of national markets through increased trade, investment and capital movements.

22 Shifrinson, Horowitz and Götz.

23 Lech Walesa convinced Yeltsin to accept Poland's NATO membership on September 1, 1993.

and then considered it a great idea²⁴, defined by being slow and by the equality of conditions for the candidates.

The Pfp, launched at the Brussels summit in 1994 (Yaniz, 2009), revitalized NATO, avoided the confrontation with Russia and calmed the concerns and fears of the CCEE with sufficient ambiguity. It represented a waiting room to join NATO in the perspective of a possible enlargement, through an incremental and gradual security partnership strategy to be negotiated with Russia and of course assumed by it.

But Pfp did not take off as a solution for European security, nor as a formula for a NATO-based security architecture in Europe, nor as a way to calm membership aspirations without angering some or arousing the suspicions of others. For some it brought little to the table and for others the solution was too much and misguided.

Although the presence of Russian troops ended in Germany and the Baltic countries²⁵, Ukraine was denuclearized and Yeltsin and Clinton made progress in nuclear arms control and reduction with the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), the bonanza of relations with Russia was spoiled at the end of 1994. Thus, the great opportunity began to be lost.

2 From 1994 to 1999: From the window of opportunity to stagnation of relations

The cooling of relations began with Yeltsin's *coup d'état* in August 1993 and continued with the first Chechen war²⁶. For the West,²⁷ they were proof of Russia's persistence in the use of force and its relapse into violent and anti-democratic actions²⁸. On the other hand, Russian suspicions towards NATO²⁹ awoke with the tensions produced by the allied air interventions in support of the UN against the Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia.³⁰

24 Conditions presented to him on the ApP: no admission of new members to NATO, no set criteria, no calendar dates.

25 Milestones of the end of the Soviet troop presence: 21 June 1991 (Czechoslovakia), 1 December 1991 (Hungary), 16 September 1993 (Poland), 31 September 1993 (Lithuania), 31 April 1994 (Latvia), 26 July 1994 (Estonia), 31 July 1994 (Germany),

26 The war lasted from December 11, 1994 to August 31, 1996.

27 The generic term "West" in this paper encompasses the bloc of Atlantic Alliance allies and partners with liberal democratic regimes.

28 Yeltsin transferred to the West the image of a dangerous, unreliable and unpredictable character.

29 NATO's character changes from a defensive alliance to an offensive organization (Teurtrie, 2024: 195).

30 Operation NATO *Deny Flight* (1993-1995).

The final trigger will be the communiqué of the NATO ministerial meeting³¹ of December 1, 1994, on the future expansion of NATO. A clear statement of intent in favor of enlargement, despite the three “noes” pronounced by Clinton at the US-Russia summit on 27 September: no surprises, no haste, no exclusion of any state in an enlarged Alliance³². Yeltsin angrily accused Clinton of deceiving him and of starting a “cold peace” (Sarotte, 2021: 204).³³

The mode of NATO enlargement changed from being a gradual and progressive process for many to the rapid entry of a small bloc of states (Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary): a border between NATO and non-NATO Europe, a dividing line and a gray zone where the rest remained (Sarotte, 2021: 4). In this context, the atmosphere of cooperation disappeared.

Yeltsin's decision to intervene in Chechnya in December 1994 was a new obstacle to Russia's possible accession to NATO with particular conditions³⁴. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the fear of the Russian threat reappeared because of the sharp turnaround in the Russian attitude.

In the 1995-1999 period, Russian mistrust grew, reaping the results of the previous stage and adding various contradictions that increased frictions between Russia and the West, always with the US as the main interlocutor. Clinton decided to promote the enlargement of NATO, focusing it on Central and Eastern Europe, without renouncing to rebuild a relationship with Russia, but without taking it into account too much, as in the Bosnian conflict.

Russia was not in a position to prevent the extension of NATO, protested loudly and continuously and stopped advancing initiatives for rapprochement; it confined itself to solving its internal political and economic problems and the war in Chechnya, and reiterated the feeling of having been deceived and rejected, disregarded and underestimated, forced to finally accept the conditions of the West. A European space contrary to its interests was being reconfigured. This period corresponded to a “cold peace” or rather to a process of sedimentation of the previous (negative) vicissitudes.

Yeltsin's arguments, redundant since then on the Russian side, will be that a common vision of pan-European security and the role of NATO is inescapable and necessary: a security system of Europe as a whole and the existence of NATO are antonymous realities. It made no sense for one defensive bloc to continue when the

31 It was no longer a question of “how” but of “how far”: “[...] *We expect and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to our East, [...]*” (NATO, 1994).

32 Testimony of Andrei Kozyrev, in his memoir, Kozyrev, Andrei. *The Firebird, a Memoir* 2019, p.269. (Sarotte, 2021).

33 At the Budapest summit of the Conference on Security in Europe (CSCE) on December 5, 1994, Clinton stated in his speech that NATO remained the basis for security in Europe and that no non-allied country could veto its expansion. In response, Yeltsin accused him of risking a “cold peace”.

34 According to testimonies of those times, Russia would have wanted particular integration conditions similar to those of France, Spain or Norway, then (Sarotte, 2021: 154).

other, the Warsaw Pact, had already been dissolved³⁵. Clinton would respond that the US needed its own security relationship with Europe in addition to the political and economic relationship and that the question posed was how to maintain it and expand the Alliance in such a way that Russia would be integrated into Europe to develop its role as a European power³⁶. In return, Clinton pledged to support Russia's entry into various international organizations. A process that took place over time.³⁷

It is evident that the Allied and Russian visions were radically opposed and that the guarantees and the alternative offered to Russia for its relationship with NATO in the Founding Act (NATO, 1997)³⁸ were not entirely satisfactory (Laurent, 2023: 12-13); they implied only coordination, i.e. subordination to Western leadership. Russia demanded from the USA –and from the West– to be subordinated to the Western leadership –and from the West– to be treated as an equal and to have a voice in discussions on security in Europe; in short, to be recognized as a great power. It should be reiterated here that all negotiations and contacts were –and are– between Russia and the US and always linked to security; both NATO and the EU were frameworks, and some European members were secondary actors (France, Germany or the UK) but not main interlocutors in these developments.

Russia's participation in allied military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo within the ApP framework was an arena for contradictions and a source of friction. While Russia contributed to the *Implementation Force* (IFOR) and *Stabilisation Force* (SFOR) operations from late 1995 to late 2004, and to the *Kosovo Force* (KFOR) from 1999 to 2003, under particular command and control arrangements (NATO, 2001), it was never involved in the strategic political level decision-making process in such a way, for example, that allied interventions such as the air campaign on Bosnian Serb targets in August 1995 were regularly communicated to the Russian side, but never in advance.

Between the summer of 1998 and the end of 1999, a time of rapid change took shape in the European context. Several relevant developments combined and had a direct impact on the future of Russian-Western relations. There was the financial collapse of Russia in 1998 and the internal struggle for Yeltsin's succession, the dismissal of President Clinton (December 19, 1998), the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO (March 1999), the Kosovo conflict (March-June 1999), the outbreak of the second Chechen war (October 1999), the arrival of Putin

³⁵ Yeltsin laid it out in a bilateral meeting with Clinton on the 5th anniversary of the end of WWII, May 10, 1995 (Sarotte, 2021: 231).

³⁶ Clinton's approach was to enlarge NATO and develop in parallel a security relationship between the Alliance and Russia. A very difficult issue to achieve.

³⁷ Russia joined the G7 in 1998 and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012.

³⁸ Two important statements in the NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997) were; “*NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries*” and “*The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members*”.

in the Kremlin after Yeltsin's decision to resign and to appoint him as his successor (December 31, 1999). This concatenation of events and complex developments reduced the chances of reaching a new "post-Cold War order" and favored the stagnation of relations.

The Kosovo crisis confirmed to Russia the American will to intervene militarily with NATO or alone³⁹, without counting on it and without the approval of the United Nations Security Council to avoid a veto. The American determination induced dangerous actions such as the Russian intervention in the middle of the crisis to occupy by surprise from Bosnia the airport of Pristina in June 1999. Russian irritation led to its temporary abandonment⁴⁰ of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) until the end of the air campaign against Serbia on June 11, settled directly between Clinton and Yeltsin in a telephone conversation (Sarotte, 2021: 122). If Russia's weakness was evident in Kosovo, the Pristina incident generated serious doubts about its reliability, as well as further proof of its assertiveness and tendency to use force, corroborated by the outbreak of the second Chechen war in October 1999.

Negotiations on arms control and arms limitation, an area where great progress had been made, began to be stalled by the Russian side and ended in the current lack of guarantees and controls, something that can be considered a consequence of Russia's reactivated insecurity due to NATO expansion and its mistrust. In general, it can be concluded that the system of arms control and limitation began to be seriously damaged by the poor state of relations.

In this period the EU continued to develop its relationship with Russia in a completely different sphere, focused on economic, social, financial and cultural cooperation for mutual benefit, based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) of June 1994, which was renewed year after year until 2014. Russia benefited since 1991 from the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program that made the EU the largest provider of economic and technical assistance to Russia for its economic reform.

And if NATO's eastward expansion was rapid, EU enlargement followed more slowly; the EU ruled out, first privately (Laurent, 2023: 11)⁴¹, the entry of Russia and prioritized in the 1990s the entry of the "rich" countries (Austria, Finland and Sweden) over the poorer candidates from the former Soviet bloc (Sarotte, 2021: 346) with a delay based on its own political and economic criteria⁴².

39 As background, the air strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan in August 1998 in response to the attacks on their embassies, and with the United Kingdom, the air strikes in Operation *Desert Fox* (December 1998) in Iraq.

40 Russia's difficult economic situation at the time made it temporary in need of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans and US support for their granting.

41 Chirac and Rifkind in August 1995.

42 The Copenhagen accession criteria (1993).

3 Results at the end of the 20th century

One conclusion from the period between 1989 and 1999 is that a series of cumulative interactions and respective decisions, mainly by the US and Russia, were establishing in Europe a “post-Cold War order” very similar to the previous one, full of tensions, with a dividing line much further to the East and closer to Russia than tolerable. The other conclusion is that NATO reasserted itself as the dominant regional security organization to consolidate US presence and influence in Europe.

Russia was very willing to cooperate between 1991 and 1992 out of necessity, but this window of opportunity was not seized⁴³. NATO confirmed its willingness to enlarge at the end of 1994 in the belief that this would stabilize Europe and calm security anxieties in Central and Eastern Europe, which had been heightened by Russia’s relapse into the use of force. Russia felt that the ApP was a ruse, another ploy, and its spirit of cooperation weakened despite its collaboration in the Yugoslav conflict; its intention to integrate into Western Europe was fading.

This led to a cooling-off period (1995-1999); the rift was accentuated in Kosovo when the firmness of the respective positions and reactions reduced mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation between the West and Russia.

Gorbachev wanted to recover the USSR, Yeltsin wanted to democratize Russia and both, in different ways, wanted to associate on an equal footing with the West. Bush spoke of Europe as a whole, free and at peace, Clinton wanted to avoid a dividing line (Sarotte, 2021: 343). Gorbachev and Yeltsin suffered three strong impositions that closed alternatives and left them defenseless in the face of internal opposition: German reunification (1990), the decision to enlarge NATO (1994) and the opening to the Baltic countries (1999). Here we should note the lack of sensitivity and respect for the Russian feeling of insecurity together with the ignorance of the Russian character and its strategic culture, i.e. the Western refusal to accept Russia as it is.

4 Putin’s first stage (2000-2010). The rise of discord

The 9/11 terrorist attack occurred at the time of the stagnation of Russian-Western relations at the end of the last century and Putin’s rise to power. 9/11 triggered a geopolitical shift as Russia aligned itself with the US in the war against terrorism, while the second Chechen war (1999-2009) was somewhat justified. Russia regained some international prominence. The improvement of bilateral relations was reflected in a joint communiqué (US, 2001) for “a new US-Russia relationship”⁴⁴.

⁴³ Russia was in a situation of ruin and great internal uncertainty and needed all Western support. An important sign of Western goodwill would have been, for example, to forgive its debt. But this did not happen.

⁴⁴ Russia allowed the establishment of US military bases in Uzbekistan (Manas) and Kyrgyzstan (K2) in support of the deployment in Afghanistan and closed its bases in Cuba and Vietnam in 2002.

In the framework of the Alliance, the Rome declaration of May 28, 2002, on NATO-Russia relations and the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) may have been an important step –the peer-to-peer relationship– for cooperation as a mechanism for consultations, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decisions and actions, although it had its artifice⁴⁵. It is also the time when Washington and Moscow signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) on May 24, although the unilateral US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty on June 13 was a setback (Acton, 2021)⁴⁶. Mistrust and suspicions were reaffirmed; Russia felt more vulnerable and began an arms race that would later culminate in the new hypersonic weapons.

From 2002 onwards, Russia started to show a more contentious attitude towards NATO and its close neighbors: it does not finish withdrawing its military forces from Georgia and Moldova, continuously interferes in Moldova and does not comply with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty; it also established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)⁴⁷ on the basis of the 1992 Collective Security Treaty, a Eurasian NATO and a counterweight to the Atlantic Alliance.

Undoubtedly, subsequent NATO enlargements (1999, 2004 and 2009) continued to provoke strong protests from Russia, which always interpreted them as a threat to its national security. Successive expansions to the East and to the Baltics, as well as EU enlargement, have challenged the status quo in Europe, supposedly agreed according to Russia, and further undermined Russian confidence in any Western guarantees. Russia was far from being recognized as a great power and as a major strategic player. In the Russian view, it was being encircled and isolated. In the Western view, Russia, a strategic actor, was unreliable and not a good partner for the Western liberal system.

In addition to the unilateralism demonstrated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Western attitude (González Márquez *et al.*, 2023: 105-106)⁴⁸ to the color revolutions, Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), caused Russian sensitivities to interpret it as a joint conspiracy between foreign forces and local anti-Russian opponents to establish pro-Western governments and marginalize Russia.

Although the West had tried to mitigate frustration and Russian sensitivities at the various bilateral summits between the US and the USSR, with the Founding Act for NATO-Russia Relations (1997), the adaptation of the CFE Treaty (1999), and the Rome declaration (2002), Russia continued to regard NATO's eastward enlargement as a defeat and entailed a withdrawal and a significant loss of influence. The

45 Allied representatives met beforehand to agree on a common position (Laurent, 2023: 13-14).

46 The US was ending a Cold War agreement citing the need for defense against terrorist and “rogue” states (North Korea), but Russia and China (a non-signatory) felt more vulnerable. The US deployed initial missile defenses in Alaska and California.

47 Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia, currently.

48 The support expressed (especially by the U.S.) through non-governmental organizations for democratic transitions.

enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007, under the auspices of NATO, confirmed the complete loss of its former sphere of influence.

In February 2007, when the US sought to deploy anti-ballistic missile system elements in the Czech Republic and Poland (Arteaga, 2007)⁴⁹ in prevention of actions by “rogue” states, Putin’s initial reaction will be to demonstrate that they are unnecessary. He will advance a proposal on June 17, which will not be accepted, for the joint use of radar facilities in Gabala (Azerbaijan) and Armavir (Russia) and to intensify information exchange. The deployment placed Russia before a new security dilemma and the following response was the –temporary– suspension of compliance with the CFE Treaty (July 15). Russia will continuously invoke and reiterate the Istanbul commitment (OSCE, 2000)⁵⁰, unfulfilled in its view by the planned anti-missile deployment. The American initiative to deploy an ABM system in Poland and the Czech Republic would also highlight the difference in strategic perceptions among European governments (Arteaga, 2007).

The Russian attitude turned 180° in the period 2007-2009 with two important warnings, Putin’s forceful speech at the 2007 Munich security conference (March 10) and the rapid Russian intervention in Georgia (August 2008) which induced the suspension of the NATO-Russia Council⁵¹ as the only weak allied reaction.

The breaking point for Putin (Sarotte, 2021: 348) and which prompted this radical change, with the background of the invasion of Iraq (2003), the color revolutions⁵² and the attempted US ABM deployment, probably came about as a consequence of the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008 (the *Open Door Policy*), where Ukraine and Georgia were promised NATO membership, although without specifying either date or plans⁵³, and which was preceded by the recognition of Kosovo’s independence (February 17).

The offer to Ukraine and Georgia of NATO accession, a red line for Russia (Zargckyj, 2018)⁵⁴, roundly clarified the allied position to Putin. Of course, the Allied decision did not take into account the nature of Ukraine’s and Georgia’s geographical, historical, cultural, political and economic ties with Russia, nothing

49 According to official US statements, the ABM deployment in Eastern Europe would prevent missile attacks from “rogue states” such as Iran and North Korea and was not directed against the Russian Federation. The real US reason may be related to the anticipation of Russian development in hypersonic means.

50 Charter on European Security adopted at the Istanbul Summit (1999).

51 It took place between August 2008 and April 2009. For its part, the EU showed total passivity and did not even impose economic sanctions, for example.

52 Georgia, Rose Revolution (November 2003), Ukraine, Orange Revolution (November 2004 to January 2005) and Kyrgyzstan, Tulip Revolution (March 2005).

53 Germany, the UK and France, among other European allies, were against further engagement, such as a partnership action plan (MAP), to avoid a more serious confrontation with Russia.

54 Putin’s words about Ukraine were: “Ukraine was not even a real nation-state”.

to do with the character of Russia's relationship with Poland –a state recreated after World War I–, with the countries of Central Europe –once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire– or with the Baltic countries –much closer historically to the German sphere than to the Russian one (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2019: 16). It is very likely that Putin then made the decision to “show muscle” as he effectively did in Georgia and then in Ukraine.

On June 5, 2008, prior to the invasion of Georgia, Russian President Medvedev proposed the development of a new pan-European security treaty, as a necessity –in Russia's view– to end the Cold War legacy⁵⁵ and to create a distinct European security system into which Russia could fit. The initiative, which could respond to the Bucharest summit (2008), was based on two very similar speeches of Medvedev delivered during his visit to Berlin in June 2008 (Medvedev, 2008a) and his participation in the Evian World Policy Conference in October 2008 (Medvedev, 2008b) where he formulated four conditions⁵⁶ for security in Europe. The development of the Russian proposal led to a series of meetings within the OSCE framework known as the Corfu process (OSCE, 2010) which took place between June 2009 and December 2010 in an attempt by Russia to strengthen the OSCE itself as a security organization after the Georgian crisis and to restore confidence.

To general surprise, two days before a planned OSCE meeting and four days before a ministerial meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (on 29 November 2009), Russia went ahead and made public (Russian Federation, 2009)⁵⁷ its final proposal for a Treaty on Security in Europe (TSE) together with an Agreement for relations between Russia and NATO members.

The Russian proposal posited, as a legal obligation, that no nation or international organization in the Euro-Atlantic region would be entitled or empowered to bolster its own security at the expense of that of other nations or organizations. The TSE treaty can be interpreted along two lines of thought (Hull, 2019: 5-6), as an attempt to create a legal basis subject only to UN Security Council arbitration and whereby Russia, with a say in the Euro-Atlantic area, would regain its role as a great power and a sphere of influence, or as an effort by Russia to return to a legality, in a time of transition to some multipolarity, that would safeguard sovereignty against outside interventions and to create a bloc-free collective security space in place of the existing collective defense alliances (NATO and CSTO).

55 Russia felt the need to take stock of the post-Cold War security arrangements and called for a new European security dialogue to arrive at a legally binding treaty.

56 “No to guaranteeing one's own security at the expense of others; No to actions (of military alliances or coalitions) that undermine the unity of the common security space; No to the development of military alliances that threaten the security of other parties to the Treaty; No that any State or international organization can have exclusive rights to maintain peace and stability in Europe.”

57 It was posted on the Kremlin's website and sent days later to members of the NATO-Russia Council.

In any case, the documents, clearly contrary to Allied security interests, were rejected. It was certainly a clear revisionist endeavor directly opposed to Allied open-door policy and would have continually blocked the NATO decision-making process.

The Russian view insisted that the OSCE principle of indivisible security in Europe and from Vancouver to Vladivostok was not in line with the presence of a collective security organization in the same space, NATO, which offers security guarantees exclusively to its members (Kühn, 2010: 3-7). The very existence of NATO was, in the oft-repeated Russian view, a contradiction in terms, leading inevitably to a collision between a pan-European (Russian) and a bloc (allied) approach, and thus to a fragmentation of the common European space.

After the Russian intervention in Georgia, there was a time of readjustment of Russian-Western relations brought about by President Obama (USA, 2010a). The NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 favored again some détente; Obama spoke of Russia as “a partner, not an adversary” (USA, 2010b) and Medvedev agreed to engage with the Alliance “on an equal footing” (Goebel, 2010) and in a genuine strategic partnership⁵⁸; Moscow was not vetoed the establishment of an anti-ballistic missile system and joined in the study of the project (NATO, 2010: 38). It was perhaps time to work out with Russia its fit with NATO according to its strong particularities (Kupchan, 2010: 112).

This willingness to readjust or restart Russia-West relations that was framed by the Corfu process in the OSCE and the development of the 2010 Lisbon NATO summit began to dissipate in 2011 following NATO’s intervention in Libya⁵⁹ and Putin’s various actions after his return to the presidency in 2012.⁶⁰

5 How to arrive at the 2022 breakup

This whole process of actions on both sides, of progress and setbacks in relations between Russia and the West from 2007 to 2010, continued to seek security cooperation in Europe and to find an accommodation between the Russian and allied visions. With Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, the dynamic of actions for an improvement was significantly slowed and coincided with another, very different and unprecedented Russian effort in the previous two decades, that of an active expansion of influence beyond its immediate neighborhood (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017). Russia intervened in Syria, Libya, and the Sahel, occupying empty spaces.

⁵⁸ Collaborations were agreed on specific areas, missile defense, counter-terrorism and counter-piracy, and rescue exercises.

⁵⁹ Allowed by the Russian abstention, the intervention will be heavily criticized, Libya constitutes an argument to justify more aggressive Russian positions.

⁶⁰ The Kremlin’s rapprochement with Iran and the Syrian regime intensified the unease of the U.S. The limit was overstepped when Putin decided to grant political asylum in 2013 to Edward Snowden.

Russia's return as a major global power materialized not only its recovery⁶¹, but it also expressed its approach to a multipolar world where to play a prominent role.

Another turning point was reached in 2013 with the Maidan revolution and Ukraine's turn to the West. Russian rejection of the Western stance and its opposition started to become more evident and active. They will be sustained by Western criticism of Russia, alleged support for anti-regime demonstrations⁶² and of course by the announced expansion of NATO and the EU in its immediate neighborhood (Moldova-Ukraine-Georgia). Ukraine in NATO means allied infrastructures on the Russian border and the loss of the Sevastopol naval base.

From 2014 and onwards, relations will clearly worsen, and without going into details, this was reflected in the respective "offensive" and "counter-offensive" actions: continuous Western condemnations and economic sanctions against Russian interference in the cyber sphere and disinformation campaigns (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017). New concepts, such as gray zone or hybrid conflict, will explain the clearly offensive Russian pattern of action. The justifying narrative is that the West seeks to weaken and eliminate the Russian regime, which endorses a dynamic of retaliation and tit-for-tat. The US will later identify Russia as a major geopolitical threat in its 2017 National Security Strategy.

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014⁶³, the whole process of cooperation was interrupted along with most contacts⁶⁴ which will be confirmed after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 where the relationship has become confrontational.

Earlier, in December 2021, Russia again proposed a security treaty with the USA and an agreement on relations with NATO, unacceptable from the Western point of view⁶⁵, with conditions identical to those of the documents (TSE) proposed in 2009 (Alberque, 2022). It was a question of creating a different security architecture with the guarantees Russia needed; the feeling of insecurity of Russia vis-à-vis NATO and its geopolitical need to protect itself with an exclusive sphere of interest was confirmed.

61 The strengthening of political power with the neutralization of the oligarchs and the economic recovery thanks to the rise in the price of hydrocarbons.

62 Between 2011 and 2013, a protest movement and demonstrations developed in Russia, which some analysts called the white or snow revolution. Some of the protagonists -the opposition to Putin-, were Alexei Navalny, Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Udaltsov.

63 On April 1, 2014, NATO decided to suspend all cooperation with Russia. At the Warsaw summit (08-09 July 2016), it stated that it remained open to political dialogue but that relations would not improve until it saw a clear and constructive change in Russia's actions and attitudes.

64 The possibilities of contacts between governments (representatives and diplomats) are maintained. Communications have never been completely cut off and there is some very unique collaboration as in the International Space Station.

65 NATO's expansion was halted, its deployment and military activities in Eastern Europe and in the territories of the new allies since 1997 were limited.

Putin and Biden spoke in April, in June and twice in December 2021 about the future of Europe, and Biden maintained several lines of communication with major capitals (González Márquez *et al.*, 2023: 262). In January 2022 the failure of diplomacy was confirmed after several summits: Russia-US in Geneva⁶⁶, Russia-NATO in Brussels, OSCE meeting in Vienna⁶⁷ and Foreign Affairs meeting, Lavrov-Blinken, in Geneva again⁶⁸. The Russian invasion also confirmed the failure of deterrence.

The scenario from February 2022 is one of confrontation with a war on the eastern border of the EU. The EU is using its economic power as a weapon through sanctions and supports Ukraine economically and by providing equipment and weaponry. Although there have been no direct armed attacks against European allied countries, Russia is developing disinformation campaigns and other forms of aggression of hybrid character especially in the information and cyber domains⁶⁹ and is fomenting xenophobic and nationalist movements for the internal division of the EU and to erode the liberal political system. The Alliance has condemned Russian aggression, supports the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine without intervening directly and considers Russia to be the most important and direct threat to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area; it does not rule out the possibility of an attack against allied interests or territory (Ministry of Defense, 2022: 6).

There has been no effort between 2014 and 2022 to spark reflection on a new security architecture in Europe. With the priority on resolving the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the proposals⁷⁰ (Vimont, 2024) at the EU level to reach some kind of engagement with Russia have not reached the necessary consensus between those who believe that a dialogue is impossible without giving the impression of weakness and those who favor some openness and overcoming mistrust, views that reflect national interests and different historical and geographical realities (Warsaw-Tallinn axis versus Madrid-Dublin axis). However, the Strategic Compass commits to a united EU against Russian aggression.

Putin's narrative to justify confrontation with the West consists of the story of a Russia that feels deceived first and threatened later by the possible deployment of NATO military infrastructures on its borders with the lack of depth for its defense (Putin, 2022).

66 June 16, 2021.

67 July 8, 2021.

68 January 10 and 21, 2022.

69 As examples over time, the cyber attack on Estonia in 2007 or the interference in the American presidential election in 2016 and the French presidential election in 2017, the Salisbury incident in 2018...

70 A roadmap by Mogherini in 2016, reiterated by Borrell in 2021 and Merkel's summit attempt in 2021.

6 Conclusion. Rise and fall of a cooperative relationship

Between 1989 and 2022, there has been the rise and fall of a possible cooperative relationship, that of Russia with the West, with contacts and negotiations that sought collaboration and coexistence and perhaps the integration of Russia into the West. Today the narratives are at odds when it comes to determining responsibilities for this failure, responsibilities that could be shared.

In the whole dynamics of Russia's relations with the West⁷¹, much has to do with Western triumphalism since the dissolution of the USSR translated in terms of victory over the Soviet bloc, Fukuyama's end of history and the triumph of liberal democracy. This continuous display of vain optimism will justify Moscow's denunciations of the two faces of the West and criticisms of its hypocrisy. The West's behavior ultimately amounts to humiliation for Russia and that it feels cheated. Certainly, the narrative has never emphasized that the USSR did not suffer a military defeat, nor did its disintegration entail a capitulation that granted rights to the Western bloc.

Western Europe and the USA have managed to impose their version of European security, NATO and the American umbrella, and their political and economic solution, liberal democracy and market economy. It has taken shape through the successive enlargements of NATO and the EU in a process that has not had Russian consent, which has been very costly. Since Russia has not been satisfactorily accommodated in the new European concert, the revanchism of the "loser" or of the power that did not prevail, and Russian revisionism has been violently awakened.

The EU has developed neighborhood policies without geopolitical sensitivity that have been seen by Russia as policies of influence imposed for its isolation. Moreover, some of its members⁷² have maintained bilateral positions directly related to their national interests generating an evident lack of cohesion and contradictions that have weakened the potential capabilities of the EU in its relationship with Russia.

For the USSR and later for Russia, the survival of NATO after the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the inexorable process of its extension towards the East represents a serious setback involving a serious imbalance and a tremendous contradiction in terms, since it was recognized that Russia was no longer an enemy. All Russia's positions and reasoning in its contacts with the West will be focused on this direction until the time comes when Russia will cease to collaborate. The persistence of NATO ensures the American presence in the subcontinent and is a sufficient reason for dissatisfaction and a potential source of problems posing a security dilemma for Russia.

What Russia has interpreted since the end of the Cold War –and has seen embodied in the color revolutions–, has been that the West has been repeating a

⁷¹ On the Western side, the leading role has been played by the United States, either directly or through NATO, since security is the preferred area.

⁷² France and Germany, mainly.

procedure of reorientation of the post-Soviet space towards the Euro-Atlantic sphere, financing and supporting movements for the change to pro-Western democratic regimes and the promotion of the liberal model, under the protection of NATO as a security organization. Its former satellites have been asking for EU membership, as a gateway to progress and economic development, and prior entry into NATO for the protection of its deterrence. With all this, Russia has irretrievably lost its sphere of influence in Europe and is turning towards Asia.

As described above, it is evident that there have been attempts and efforts on both sides to reach some compromise solution –always without renouncing the respective interests–, but the reality has not even led to a stable cooperative relationship. The consequences of the interaction of the respective actions, linked to internal policies, accumulated over time, as well as misunderstandings, to the point of a total loss of mutual trust.

The lack of understanding and intelligence of the West has been evident together with the unfeasibility, with difficult to accept proposals, of a certain integration of Russia in the European political and economic structures and its fitting into the security architecture of Europe. Also, the firmness and lack of flexibility of the positions together with the force of events in Europe and beyond, have been making it difficult to reach a satisfactory solution.

Russia's strategic objectives vis-à-vis Western Europe continue to be to foster internal division in the EU, to subvert NATO's cohesion and its collective defense capabilities, to weaken the transatlantic link, to gain veto power for Moscow in the European security architecture and to regain its sphere of interest by dominating its immediate neighborhood. In short, the aim is to return as far as possible to the positions of the end of the Cold War, to restore Russia's lost prestige and its status as a great power.

And finally, a confrontational relationship has been precipitated whose responsibility is shared. The common thread could be the process of NATO expansion since German reunification. What is certain is that Russia has gone from being a potential partner to a serious threat to the European Union. It is impossible to find a solution to the war in Ukraine without taking into account Russian security interests and the reality of a Russia ready to use force, disengaged and blockaded, which is a nuclear power and a permanent member of the Security Council. Also, it is necessary to prevent the war in Ukraine from becoming a point of no return in relations between Russia and the USA and the EU.

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Article received: December 9, 2024

Article accepted: May 3, 2025
