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NATO'S PROSPECTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE UKRAINE WAR

Abstract:

The war on Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022 with the invasion of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, is an event with a potential to cause tectonic changes in the current political, security and economic international order, including the possibility of a nuclear conflict. As it is the case with the other international and regional organizations, NATO too is enforced to reconsider its position in the multipolar world. The research problem of this paper is delimiting the reality from the myth of NATO that has rested for decades. It focuses on the search for the Alliance's real power in a multipolar international system, as well as seeking answers about the future of the European security order (especially through the prism of NATO-EU relations). The key hypothesis is that the course of events (in Ukraine but also the definite rise of multipolar international system) has been predictable. The reasons for the war were deeply embedded in the foundations of the hybrid international system. The preliminary conclusion is that NATO (albeit seemingly strengthened and expanded) will likely face with its irrelevance in a multipolar order. The thesis of a "global NATO" is just a veil that covers the restricted NATO mission primarily as an instrument of the US policy in Europe. Due to the Ukraine, EU (but also OSCE) is likely to see the shattered dreams of its own security system. It means it will be economically, politically and militarily completely dependent on Washington. NATO enlargement is reaching its peak, along with its primarily European reach. Globally, the United States will rely on its own forces and on alliance of the willing, now referred to as the "Collective West."

Key words: NATO, RUSSIA, UKRAINE, WAR, ENLARGEMENT, MULTIPOLAR ORDER

1. Prologue: On an imaginary collective system of defense

The founding of the United Nations (UN), immediately after the end of World War II, was a result of the new geopolitical balance of power in the world, but also an expression of the commitment (even in an emotional sense) to never plunge the world into a similar disaster once again. It is no coincidence that the Preamble to the UN Charter underscores the desire for future generations to be spared the horrors of war. It was supposed to create an international

legal context in which not only the use of force, but also the threat of use of force would be outlawed, i.e. will become a crime and a subject of condemnation.

The right to self-defense of the states, the key actors of the international system, is guaranteed by Article 51, which lays the international legal basis for organizing not only the national defense systems, but also the collective defense through collective and/or regional security arrangements. This second dimension would later serve to legitimize both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Globally, however, the UN system of collective security was supposed to play a dominant role, starting from the Security Council as the body responsible for world peace and security up to the establishment of a common military structure which, in case of need (aggression against one or more UN members) would be activated in defensive action. Paradoxically, the UN collective security mechanism in its original conception had been seen in a similar way as today some advocate a universal "NATO": the attack on one UN member state should have been treated as an attack on all; eventually, the UN would automatically engage in protection of its member state against the aggressor.

Under the pressure of real politics, it did not take long before the imagined system of UN collective security appeared to be just a pipe-dream. The most important part of the UN Charter (the one that deals with the principle of peace by peaceful means and the mechanisms for preservation of international peace and security) proved to be an unattainable fantasy. Gradually, the UN ambitions too have been redefined if not diminished. Instead, hybrid solutions became its main *modus operandi* in times of crises. A non-existent chapter – i.e. a combination of Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 dubbed Chapter 6.5 - became the legal basis for peacekeeping operations, a phenomenon that had not initially been anticipated.

This paper has another focus, so we do not dwell on the changes that the UN has gone through. Sadly enough, the UN has been *de facto* marginalized in a moment when the world badly needs an effective universal organization that would represent conscience and common sense of humanity. The power politics is embodied in the permanent membership of the five mightiest states (at that time) with the right of veto in the Security Council – and it is hardly possible to overcome the perilous status quo and paralysis that prevents the UN's involvement into conflict resolution. Ever since, international law and morality in the conduct of relations between nations / states have been overshadowed or worse misused depending on the interpretation and interests of the most powerful actors.

The states that used to be allies in the fight against the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) at least for a short time did not waste time in the post-war demarcation. The division of the world into spheres of influence under the guise of irreconcilable ideological-political differences (between capitalism and socialism), in fact, was the foundation on which the UN functioned in the longest period of its existence, i.e. in the era of bipolarism (First Cold War). The balance of power of the two military & political blocs kept the world safe

from a nuclear clash, but their rivalry allowed for a number of wars by proxies. Nevertheless, such an international system proved to be quite stable due to the balance of power and fear. During the euphoria that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, John Mearsheimer rightly guessed that the world would soon regret deconstruction of that order.

In the dominant Western narrative, NATO is a regional system of collective security created in response to the Soviet aggressive policy rather than an alliance formed by the genuine wish of its members. Hence the definition of a “defense alliance”, although its military doctrines and armaments are far from any (self) defense doctrine and range. The reason for the creation of the Western democracies’ military bloc was the alleged threat from one country, the USSR (or/and the spread of communism). The more moderate variant explains that the creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as supposedly a simultaneous process. The facts show that the North Atlantic Alliance appeared on the scene first (in April 1949), primarily to bring defeated Germany under control and then to respond to the “red threat”. One could put things other way around and say that the Warsaw Pact (established in May 1955), which embraced the countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc, was more of a reaction than a premeditated aggressive measure towards the West. Even if the prism of the two military blocs is accepted as two sides of the same coin (i.e. increased geopolitical mistrust and rivalry), the theoretical explanation comes down to the concept of a security dilemma. The two military blocs, as already said, measured their strength through proxy warfare in other parts of the world, beyond their territories, stimulating the arms race and the competition in military technology to the point of mutually assured destruction (MAD). At the same time, through the policy of fear the two hegemons (USA and USSR) guaranteed and maintained the internal cohesion in their backyard, so that their satellites either recognized the dependence of the most powerful or in case of disobedience were subject to intervention (the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968 is the most famous example of the application of the so-called Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty).

The myth of NATO dominates over the historical facts, which are not only inconvenient, but also extremely delicate. Apparently, the West used more subtle methods to curb any dissident critique of capitalism and militarism (Rockhill 2017, 2022). The exception is of course McCarthyism in the United States, but also the Operation *Gladio*, which, in addition to creating a “secret army” of guerrillas and saboteurs, also acted against left-wing forces in the Western countries (Ganser 2004). Regarding the creation of NATO, it is important to stress at least two facts. First, its creation (as a way of keeping the American presence in Europe in an institutionalized and enduring form) was not at first greeted with great enthusiasm by the American establishment, which at the time was still cultivating the doctrine of isolationism. But the European allies were more prone to keeping the American military presence on the continent. It was necessary to invest lot of efforts to convince the establishment and the public that UN national interest is still in Europe. The public acceptance of the new military

alliance in the Western European countries was the primary task of the first Secretary General, Lord Ismay (1954). However, it is not well-known, though well documented, that immediately after the end of the WWII, the US government discreetly integrated a significant number of Nazi collaborators (military and other experts and scholars), making them members of an international network to fight communism. According to John Loftus (2010), by 1952, hundreds if not thousands noteworthy Nazi collaborators from Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic and Balkan countries had been brought to the United States, while many remained as operatives in other parts of the world.

2. In Search of a Mission: NATO from the First to the Second Cold War

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is an unavoidable refrain in the elaboration of the end of the Cold War: almost every author dealing with international relations refers to this symbolic act, which allegedly tore down the Iron Curtain between East and West. The paradigm of the new age full of hope for the definitive triumph of liberal democracy was, in fact, anticipated not only in CIA offices but also in academia. Fukuyama (1992) was the first to announce this definitive victory of Western democracy in the summer of 1989 in an article and later in a book that would be one of the most cited academic sources for decades. Although a number of theorists have entered into polemic with the “end of history” thesis offering less optimistic versions of the world to come, nevertheless only the 2022 Ukraine war has exposed what until then was only shyly questioned (mainly in critical circles and those of peace studies): if bipolarism really went away in the past, and the Warsaw Pact fell apart (along with the hegemon), then what was / is the point of maintaining the firstborn military bloc, NATO?

According to Lord Ismay’s famous slogan, the organization’s initial aim was to keep “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down,” (quoted in Kirkova 2010, p. 9). With the USSR’s disintegration, the archetypal enemy disappeared. On the other hand, Germany got united (with the permission of the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev), and the United States indeed remained in Europe. In the years that followed, the armed forces of the United States and other countries that were preparing for a global frontal conflict (including nuclear war) had to transform and persuade governments not to cut their military budgets. But NATO had a different goal: it had to urgently find a reason for its existence. Logically, a military alliance needed a military enemy, or at least an enemy that could be resisted or defeated by military means. The short-lived “honeymoon” between NATO and the UN occurred during the First Gulf War in 1990: at least some NATO members got a UN mandate. It took 45 years to see collective security at work. Historical facts show that Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait caught both the UN and NATO in a geopolitically unclear situation. The UN did not have the military strength to defend a country that was subject to aggression, and NATO was in the process of redefining its own

meaning and strategy. Reservations of the US Congress about involvement in Kuwait were high, so it was unclear whether the United States would accept the leading position in the joint coalition operation. The congressional decision was adopted only after the US political elite and the public witnessed the hearing about alleged horrendous war crimes against civilians (and especially in a maternity ward) committed by the Iraqi military. The Congress was addressed by an alleged first hand witness, i.e. the young woman known as Naira. Eventually, after the decision was made, it was disclosed that the 'witness' was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington, and that the alleged crimes never occurred (*New York Times* 1992; Knightley 2001). But it no longer mattered: for the first and last time the United States and a number of NATO member states (in addition to a few non-member states) created the illusion of an international alliance and accomplished a UN-mandated mission. Russia and China have approved the intervention.

That short episode was insufficient to secure NATO's *raison d'être* in the long run. Despite the promise made to Gorbachev, NATO has at first discreetly and later on openly launched its enlargement policy as an operation to secure a new image. It argued that the ground for its relevance was the role of a factor in the spread of democracy in the former Eastern Bloc. Enlargement policy has had (un) expected global effects by changing the discourse about NATO and its mission. For example, during the NATO Summit in Prague, Timothy Garton Ash (2002) used the phrase "love, peace and NATO", arguing that linking love and peace with the military alliance best illustrates discussions about NATO - discussions that associate of human and humanitarian values, peace, freedom and democracy. He concluded: "NATO has become a European peace movement. Imagine, Europe is a place where wars do not start. As John Lennon sang 'Imagine'." Merje Kuus successfully deconstructs the practices through which NATO exempted itself from its military content and transferred to the sphere of fundamental human values. She sheds light on the practices by which military force and military solutions are linked to moral good. These practices are central to the militarization of social life (2007). In a later article, Kuus (2009) defined this phenomenon as the normalization of military institutions through the narrative of global cooperation, naming it *cosmopolitan militarism*. Namely, NATO uses global spatial imaginaries to frame military approaches to political problems by presenting them as enlightening and good (but also necessary). This cosmopolitan subjectivity, in turn, produces a teleological narrative of natural progress in which political actors gradually transcend their national contexts and start seeing NATO, but also themselves, as promoters of global peace (2009, p. 559).

But the real 'assistance' in terms of maintaining the idea of the necessity of military power and the successful quest for enemy came from Yugoslavia, the country that not only disintegrated into a series of bloody internal and interstate conflicts, but also showed that the world was entering a phase in which the biggest threats come from weak and disintegrated states that clash with

each other or within on religious, ethnic, tribal and similar grounds. After the world remained silent in the face of the horrors of the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi, the war in B&H was the right place for NATO to act for the sake of military and humanitarian purposes. NATO was mandated to establish a no-fly zone over Bosnia for Serbian aviation in 1995. In Resolution 816 (as of 31 March 1993), the UN Security Council authorized "member states to act nationally or through regional organizations to impose a no-fly zone over Bosnia. NATO has performed this function." Only four years later, at the jubilee summit in Washington, NATO adopted a new strategy for acting out of area and for the sake of the 'responsibility to protect' doctrine, thereby legitimizing air intervention over the then FR Yugoslavia. In that air-only operation, until the later establishment of the KFOR mission in Kosovo (and the construction of the US military base, Bondsteel), NATO attempted to present itself as a necessary military force for humanitarian purposes - something Noam Chomsky named "new military humanism" (2000).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States were the second milestone for the Alliance and the occasion for its revival. It was the only occasion in which the famous Article 5 of the NATO Statute, according to which an attack on one member of the alliance is an attack on all, was activated. But not only does this article remain problematic in reading and interpretation, it is even more debatable in terms of its application. Few recall that in the 9/11 aftermath, NATO was indeed activated but only symbolically and by the explicit permission of the United States. The 'response' consisted of a few symbolic flyovers by allies' warplanes over the US airspace. Yet the operation in Afghanistan was carried out independently by the country that considered that it had the right to military self-defense, or rather a retaliation. Due to global solidarity and the emotionalization of public discourse, even the UN remained silent on what was a flagrant attack on a sovereign state (Afghanistan), which was unjustly described as an aggressor. Not only Osama bin Laden had no Afghan citizenship, but he was a citizen of the US ally's, Saudi Arabia; on no grounds could one person be a legal cause of a military attack on an entire country. After the swift overthrow of the Taliban regime, the US embarked on a long-term nation-building process, with fighting on the ground carried out by the US forces, while NATO member-states were involved in maintaining the mission in various forms (mainly critical facility protection and training of the new Afghan security forces). The operation ended in a military defeat in the summer of 2021, with the chaotic and panicked NATO withdrawal. In fact, it was NATO's first military defeat (the United States already had a similar experience from Vietnam, but also from Latin America). Interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) created a pretext for NATO to intervene 'legitimately' in countries that were no worthy military rivals. The Iraq war also started with a false pretext and a violation of international law, but apart from Great Britain and the new NATO members from the former Eastern Bloc, the so-called old democracies opposed the military involvement. Iraq was the point of deep discord, especially on the Wash-

ington-Paris-Berlin axis. However, the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair revealed NATO's mission in "defending our values" from those who do not accept the Western political and civilizational matrix. Islamophobia has filled the vacuum, although it has not been explicitly incorporated into NATO strategic documents. In addition to the hegemon (USA, which in that period has no counterpart and enjoys the unipolar moment), the paradigm of the so-called global war on terrorism involved not only NATO countries, but also those who wanted to prove that they deserved full membership (like Macedonia).

NATO intervention in Libya was legitimized by the "responsibility to protect" doctrine. The true motives were to be found in geopolitics and geo-economics. The legal basis for the intervention came from UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011. Just two days later the US, British and French forces launched airstrikes on Gaddafi's positions in support of his opponents. On March 31, NATO officially took command of the operation. The disastrous results of the intervention are still visible, although apologists argue that the NATO mission was partially successful. From a time distance and based on facts from the field, it is quite clear that the intervention was an indisputable disaster (Kuperman, 2013), and that in no way NATO took part in civilian protection, but rather in an illegal regime change that ended with the complete devastation of the country (Vankovska 2020, p. 17; Kirkova 2011). The results in Afghanistan do not differ much, except that they marked a 20-year failure of both the United States and NATO allies.

3. The war in Ukraine: an electric shock to wake up NATO

Contrary to popular belief that the war in Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, the facts show that this conflict had not only been predictable, but it was indeed predicted in the 90s. In fact, it started (with low intensity) after the coloured revolution (Euromaidan) of 2014 and consequently with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. In the two outlaw provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, the conflict was running continuously for eight years with no international interest in the situation of the civilian population and the right-wing inclinations of the government in Kyiv. What attracted much more influence in high politics, but also in academia, was the phenomenon of the so-called Second Cold War, which was associated with the annexation of Crimea. In other words, the question was whether a situation of global / regional rivalry between the West and the Russian Federation was in sight again, although the latter was both economically and militarily far inferior to the United States. In the broader context, the phenomenon of the Second Cold War has been sought by some authors on the US/NATO and China axis. In fact, the latest expert study "NATO 2030" explicitly points to both major powers as a security threat to the Alliance.

The 2014 Crimean episode passed with a strong verbal condemnation of the annexation and a system of economic sanctions, which proved to have

the opposite effect: they led Russia to develop and rely on its own capabilities in many areas. It was crucial for the West to reject any analogy with the 1999 precedent and the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo (without a referendum, but with the open support of almost all Western countries, and primarily the United States). The abbreviation NATO (according to the English acronym) began to be interpreted as No Action, Talk Only. Moscow's move was clear and unequivocally directed against further NATO enlargement to Russia's borders (in addition to protecting the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine). In response, but also using the internal contradictions and divisions of Ukrainian society, NATO insisted on "the right of every country to seek membership in the Alliance," which for Ukraine (and Georgia) was explicitly contained in the conclusions of the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, despite Russia's outspoken opposition to NATO's approaching to its 'red line'. Ever since, both openly and by other more subtle methods, Ukraine has been Natoized, or as many have suggested it has become an object of the creation of a *de facto* member-state (although the chances of its formal accession were not entirely certain). But the symbolic war with Russia had already begun. For instance, the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, expressing the opinion of the American establishment, declared that "it is time to start thinking of Putin's Russia as an enemy of the United States" (2006). Only a few years later, Putin will indeed become the archetypal enemy of the West, and thus of NATO.

The Ukrainian territory has been known as a line of potential and highly probable conflict between West and East, even when such terminology of division ceased to be used. Ukraine has become a testing ground for NATO enlargement policy as a democratization and peace zone (or security community), as well as for NATO military power. Just three years before the current military invasion, NATO was facing the culmination of its long-lasting identity crisis. Its 70th anniversary at the London Summit in December 2019 was celebrated in a tedious atmosphere. Analysts agree that no matter how much we talk about NATO's birthday, the event was more like a funeral (*Defense News* 2019).

What are the benefits of NATO? This was a question that has often been posed for a long time. As early as 2011, the *New York Times* editorial asked, "Who needs NATO?" (Wheatcroft 2011). According to the author, the Americans have not hidden their dissatisfaction with the contribution of European partners in NATO since 1949. President Eisenhower then stated: "The fact that we have troops there does not mean that the Europeans have fulfilled their share. They do not want to make sacrifices and prepare their soldiers for their own defense." He added: "If the US relationship with Europe assumed ambivalent bargaining from the outset, the treaty organization has at least once shown its clear purpose. Now, if Americans ask why they should cover three-quarters of NATO spending at a time of 'politically ill budget and subsidy cuts', as Gates put it, then Europeans can answer a much more fundamental question: what is the point of the organization at all? Who needs NATO?" It echoes the thesis and criticism of Robert Kagan who concluded that the United States is from

Mars and Europe from Venus, alluding to the fact that the former invest more in military defense, while the latter more and more in the so-called soft power. Some analysts have pointed out that the Alliance is simultaneously endangering American lives and flooding the country with many strategic responsibilities as a result of its expansion (Ruger, 2019; Cancian and Cancian, 2019). The *Wall Street Journal* (25 March 2019) found that the Alliance was effectively dead. Douglas McGregor (2019) argued that saying 'dead' is not enough, because NATO is a zombie. According to Barry Posen (2019), one of the most eminent scholars in the field of international relations, President Trump had many bad ideas, but rethinking America's role in NATO is not one of them. Former US President Trump accused European allies of financial and military dependence on the US protection. French President Macron strongly condemned NATO 'brain death' (*The Economist*, 2019). The end of the summit came as a relief, and NATO nevertheless came up with a joint Declaration that defined an ambitious agenda: an international battle against terrorism, arms control, opposition to Russia, and, for the first time, the rise of China.

Stephen Cohen, one of the best connoisseurs of Russian and Eastern European history and politics, wrote: "The split of the new Cold War is already happening in Europe - not in Berlin, but on the borders of Russia. The worst is yet to come. If NATO forces move to Poland's borders with Ukraine, as called for in Washington and Europe, Moscow could send troops to eastern Ukraine. The result would be the danger of war that can only be compared to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962" (2019, 29). But that the behaviour of states (and their alliances) in international relations depends on the anarchic international system and their perception of its survival would make Mearsheimer (1993) anticipate in the 1990s that relations between Ukraine and Russia were ripe for outbreak of military conflict between them. Later in 2014, as in 2022, he reiterated that the blame for Ukraine's fate should be sought in the West (2014). Despite the seemingly different prism of looking at world division lines, Huntington (2010, p. 46) would agree that "it is possible to divide Ukraine into two parts, a division which, according to cultural factors, could be more violent than the division of Czechoslovakia but less bloody than in Yugoslavia." In a 2014 article, even Kissinger would tell Ukraine that "internationally it should hold a position similar to that of Finland. Such a nation leaves no doubt about its firm independence, cooperates with the West in many fields, but carefully avoids institutional enmity with Russia" (*Financial Times* 2022).

But the opposite happened. Ukraine's determination to join the Western sphere of interest, followed by permission to use the territory not only for advanced weapons systems, but also for Western instructors and bases, has made the country a *de facto* NATO country. The resumption of hostilities and the rising cost of human lives and destruction are creating growing frustration with the Kyiv government over NATO's impotence. Brussels has a good excuse not to interfere in the conflict: first, Ukraine is not a NATO member; second, it does not want to risk a nuclear conflict with Moscow, and third, it has finally proved

to its European allies why NATO is useful (due to its security and nuclear umbrella). Even Macron has acknowledged that the war in Ukraine had acted as an 'electroshock' on NATO, giving it "the strategic clarity it lacked" (*Reuters* 2022). The best indicator of NATO's new life force and significance is the intention of traditionally neutral countries, such as Finland and Sweden, to join the alliance.

But some military analysts and strategists nevertheless see NATO's military powerlessness. First, despite all available intelligence about possible Russian intervention, Plan B did not exist. In fact, it was only later that an announcement was made for the internal restructuring and stationing of permanent troops on Russia's eastern borders (especially in the Baltic and Black Sea regions), as well as a regular consultative council. Although it sounds decisive, it is still on a level of improvisation because no one knows who will cover the costs of such permanent bases, who will provide manpower and weapons, etc. In fact, the pressure is again on the United States, from which all European countries demand to serve as a protective umbrella. Second, despite its enormous military power, in recent decades NATO has had experience only in some remote parts of the world that had no military power to respond, unlike Russia. The experience of Iraq and Afghanistan is useless (even if military failure is overlooked) for a confrontation with a large military force through conventional warfare. Third, behind declarative unity, NATO is not a monolithic bloc: individual members calculate first with their own national interests, and only then with collective solidarity (the examples of Turkey and Hungary are most evident).

NATO's growth also means a decline in the EU's political, economic and security influence, so the loser in each case is the EU. Lord Ismay's saying could now be read in a different way: even militarily ineffective, NATO aims to keep the EU/Germany down, the United States inside (in Europe), and Russia - possibly destroying it so it can focus on its main rival - China. (Therefore, inclusion of Russia into NATO structures was never an option even at the time of the greatest enthusiasm after the end of the Cold War).

4. Concluding remarks

Given the complexity of the situation in and around Ukraine, two questions logically arise: first, why does Kyiv insist on NATO membership (which is even enshrined in the country's Constitution as an obligation of all institutions)? And why does NATO not only persistently insist on Ukraine's right to become a member, but also practically equip and train it, while being aware that such a formal membership will not occur in the foreseeable future? The answers to these questions require more extensive work.

What is relevant to this paper is NATO's position in a situation when the predictable military conflict has indeed taken place. The Western allies show no intention to help mitigate the conflict but rather encourage militarily inferior Ukraine not to give in and to decline any diplomatic solution. The first conclu-

sion is that the system of collective security, even in the event of open aggression (by a permanent member of the UN Security Council) is in a collapse. It has been the case since the time of Western military adventures against weaker states were ongoing without any stronger international reaction. Now, despite the activation of the "United for Peace" mechanism and the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution condemning the aggression against Ukraine, the war is still going on (at the time of writing). Not only no diplomatic effort is being made (at least in the context of the Minsk Agreements 1 and 2), but the West is constantly importing new quantities of weapons and encouraging the Kyiv government to defeat a far superior nuclear power. Diplomacy is not an option at the moment. This is the position not only of NATO / US, but also of the EU.

The severity of the conflict in Ukraine shows that the First Cold War was never over, and historically - the imperial system that preceded bipolarism was only temporarily hidden due to the disturbed power balance between the great powers. Mearsheimer and Huntington are right: the division between the collective West and the "West and the Rest" is strengthening in the long run, both militarily and politically. From this point of view, the term Cold War is just a label for warfare in which there is no use of nuclear arsenal.

The world is already in the phase of an unstable multipolar system in which three great powers stand out: primarily, the United States (with its European and other Western satellites) and China, and then regional powers such as Russia, India, Brazil, etc. In a multipolar system, NATO does not and cannot have (one) defined enemy, and for more of one it has no sufficient military force and capability (due to the complete dependence of over 75% of the US military potential). In this context, NATO remains useful as long as the United States benefits from it, and secondly - only in terms of maintaining the balance of power in Europe. Global NATO is impossible but also an useless option. The United States is already operating through *ad hoc* coalitions in other parts of the world without consulting the other NATO allies. But NATO's future is guaranteed for two reasons: first, under the "iron law of the oligarchy" (known from Max Weber's institutional sociology), NATO does and will do everything to prove that it is useful and even necessary to preserve its subsistence and regular financing (Vankovska 2020); second, it is still attractive as a "security umbrella" for smaller European countries that see it as entity who protects and disciplines them (especially in situations of internal conflict, such as the one between Greece and Turkey).

The effects of the global redistribution of power in Europe are visible in the aspects of general militarization, such as: the strengthening of the military-industrial complex, the incredible growth of the profits of military corporations; growing NATO member states' military budgets (Biden succeeds in failing to blackmail Trump's blackmailing allies into raising military spending to 2% of gross national income); Germany is tripling its military budget - which in the long run does not live up to expectations that NATO will keep it 'down' (to avoid a repeat of World War I and World War II), but it certainly precludes the

option of a strong Europe in which Germany and Russia cooperate peacefully; Switzerland openly goes beyond the rules of conduct of neutral countries, and Finland and Sweden are considering a quick NATO membership. Many analysts believe that with the military invasion, Putin has fulfilled NATO's greatest wish - not only to revive it, but to encourage its expansion. The United States is not only 'inside' the European continent, but has strengthened its dominance over the allies who are now both militarily and energy-dependent on them. According to some opinions, Brexit may have had a military impact on the EU security: the idea of a European army is falling apart now that the EU is becoming an economic sector of NATO, and with no naval forces the EU is not able to provide for its own protection. Cooperation with the United Kingdom and the United States is therefore even more necessary, and Britain, although outside the EU, is returning to a small door in the European security policy.

This does not mean, however, that NATO is becoming a harmonious organization. First, the alliance is still an issue that strongly affects the (instability) of some governments (Germany), but also impacts regional divisions (the Greek-Turkish dispute). At a glance, it seems that NATO is experiencing a renaissance after the expected 'clinical death'. But that symbolic victory can be a Pyrrhic victory for both the West and the world. If NATO has long built the image of a security community (an area where war is impossible), its enlargement seems to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it leads to the opposite result - an area of constant fear, insecurity and preparedness for military conflict. Europe's dependence will be a serious problem for the European countries in the moment when the United States will enter a conflict with China: either they will stay on the periphery, or will have to engage in a conflict of enormous proportions.

The transformation of NATO and the redefinition of transatlantic relations depend on the changes in the system of international relations (Kirkova 2010), but the final outcome of this transformation under conditions of a definitive collapse of the current international order (no matter how it is defined) is a creation of a multipolar system with uncertain course. Currently, with the deliberate continuation of the war in Ukraine at any cost, the United States (with the help of NATO) is trying to exhaust and weaken its Russian rival, so that it can then deal with China, which forecasts say will become equivalent to the American power until 2030. However, the US establishment and its European allies seem to be unaware of the boomerang effects of the sanctions imposed on Russia. At the end of the day, military power may prove a factor with insufficient weight on their international position and internal security and stability.

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