

THE VERTICAL EXPANSION OF NATO'S ROLE THROUGH STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

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ABSTRACT

During its 76 years of existence, NATO has gone through a specific evolutionary process. From an alliance for collective defense during the Cold War, to an alliance without a clear threat after the Cold War, NATO expanded its area of action with the defense and protection of the shared values of the peoples of the North Atlantic region, based on the principles of democracy, individual freedoms, and the rule of law. Following Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine, NATO has once again refocused on its core mission of deterrence and defense.

This paper focuses on explaining the process of transformation of NATO's identity and the elements characterizing NATO's contemporary identity. A qualitative and historical-interpretative method is used to trace the main processes in order to analyze the main research problem: the transformation of NATO's identity from a traditional collective security organization during the Cold War into a broader security community after 1991. NATO, as a case study, is analyzed across multiple historical periods.

The fundamental assumption is that NATO transformed its identity through activities aimed at defining its role and activities aimed at maintaining that role, in order to avoid discreditation.

Keywords: *NATO, identity, transformation, elements*

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INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, the Alliance) from its founding on April 4, 1949, in Washington, up until its first strategic turning point in 1991, had an unequivocally defined identity based on its role as a defensive military actor. During the Cold War, NATO was the primary instrument of its member states for defense against a potential military threat from the Eastern Bloc and the Warsaw Pact. However, the end of the Cold War brought into question NATO's role and the justification for its continued existence. In order to ensure its survival, NATO turned to a broader interpretation of the provisions of the Washington Treaty, attempting to demonstrate that the purpose of the Alliance goes beyond territorial defense and is based on the protection and defense of the shared values of the peoples in the North Atlantic area - values rooted in the principles of democracy, individual freedoms, and the rule of law. In this way, NATO expanded the scope of its operations territorially to include all geographic areas where the values and interests of the Alliance were threatened. It began to engage in a wide range of activities, adapting its capabilities and developing new procedures accordingly. The resources and technologies that had been developed over decades for military purposes found their application in peacekeeping operations, the fight against the proliferation of weapons, the fight against terrorism, and so on. After the Cold War, NATO was forced to adapt to the new circumstances in the spheres of international relations, security, and defense, while also confronting the challenge of redefining its identity. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO began its horizontal development through the process of enlargement and its vertical development by adopting new goals, missions, and activities. In this transformative phase of development, NATO sought to redefine its significance and expand its influence. Through its enlargement policy and initiatives such as the "Partnership for Peace," some of the former Soviet states became equal members of NATO. Such expansion was perceived by Russia as a direct intrusion into its sphere of influence, as a strategic provocation, and even as an existential threat. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining the Alliance was suggested, which resulted in Russian aggression against both countries. Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to the expansion of the Alliance with the traditionally militarily neutral countries of Finland and Sweden, placing NATO before yet another major test regarding its adaptability and unity.

This paper analyzes the process of transformation of NATO's identity and the elements that characterize NATO's contemporary identity. For the purposes of the research, both primary and secondary sources of information are examined. Through NATO's strategic concepts, summit declarations, and communiqués, as well as the official rhetoric of the Alliance, changes in its self-conception are analyzed. By tracking these processes, key turning points in NATO's strategic identity transformations are identified. Through the study of secondary scholarly analyses, differences and similarities in the perspectives of theorists regarding the justification for NATO's existence and its transformation are compared.

The research is based on constructivist theory, while also taking into account realist and liberal theoretical perspectives. NATO is analyzed as a case study across several historical periods that were crucial to the transformation of the Alliance's identity. Research methods are employed to uncover how NATO's identity as a defensive alliance during the Cold War evolved and transformed into a broader security community committed to liberal democratic values. The fundamental assumption is that NATO transformed its identity through role-defining activities and role-sustaining actions, in order to avoid discreditation.

The research is limited to publicly available documents and official statements, which do not fully capture the internal debates and potential disagreements within NATO.

1. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXISTENCE AND TRANSFORMATION OF NATO AFTER THE COLD WAR

During the bipolar division of the world, NATO was a defensive alliance whose main goal was to preserve peace and security among member states and to deter large-scale aggression. Although NATO had no military engagements during this period, its role was clear and justified. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the threat of conventional military conflicts and the large-scale use of heavily armed forces was reduced, which naturally raised the question of the justification for the continued existence of the Alliance.

While some theorists argued that the four-decade success of the Alliance justified its continued existence, others believed that with the end of the Cold War, the Alliance lost its primary reason for existence and that the costs for armament could be significantly reduced. However, with the

emergence of regional conflicts in the territory of the former Soviet Union and the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the narrative emerged that the Alliance remains the best guarantee for the security of NATO member states. As a result, the debate over the justification for NATO's continued existence ended before it could fully develop. Ensuring the immediate defense and security of its member states continues to be a key task of the Alliance, but its main focus has undergone several fundamental changes in order to enable NATO to counter new threats and respond to new challenges. The socio-political changes that took place in Europe after the end of the Cold War led to the transformation of NATO and its adaptation to the newly emerged conditions. The dynamic change in the security environment imposed the need for the Alliance to establish a new balance between its traditional role and addressing global threats. In order to maintain its effectiveness, the Alliance focused on ensuring faster, more flexible, and more efficient military capabilities that could successfully counter the new threats. The geopolitical focus of the Euro-Atlantic area soon shifted beyond it, to geographically distant regions where new security dynamics unfolded, influencing NATO's interests. This shift in strategic direction led to new tasks, the transformation of forces and capabilities, and also to a transformation of the identity NATO had built during the Cold War. The foundations of the new doctrine had to evolve and adapt to a different dynamic of international relations and new security threats. The changes in the international environment that followed the disappearance of the bipolar structure required a redefinition of the strategic direction and future tasks of the Alliance. Although NATO initially emphasized its geostrategic, external dimension upon its formation, it is considered that NATO has always had a dual logic for international security, which includes the internal dimension of security, based on the protection of Western, liberal-democratic values within the Euro-Atlantic area (Gheciu, 2005: 34). After the end of the Cold War, conditions were created for the internal dimension to finally come to the forefront and expand beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. The internal dimension became part of the expanded concept of defense, which is based on the defense of all the values upon which the Euro-Atlantic community rests and which are at the core of NATO. This does not mean that NATO is no longer a military alliance, but rather that "the category of military alliance in this specific context must change to allow for a different way of conducting international politics" (Felix, 2002: 56). This suggests that NATO in the post-Cold War period is oriented towards a "values-based security order" (Moore, 2007:

55). The reference to the protection of NATO's shared values provides a sufficiently flexible framework to guarantee its legitimacy and allow it to continue to exist somewhere on the boundary between a military alliance and a security community, depending on external influences. This speaks to NATO's clear intentions to draw as close as possible to a community united by a common identity, which shares common historical experiences and a shared destiny. According to Williams and Newman (2000: 366), the North Atlantic Alliance is an international organization that persists because "its survival is a value in itself... and... its identity and cohesion are based on a shared cultural and civilization bond, rather than primarily on a common military threat that was represented by the USSR." With the changing nature of security threats, NATO has shifted its boundaries from a military to a military-political alliance. Due to such evolution and transformation of the Alliance, some theorists, especially realists such as Mearsheimer (2001: 97) and Walt (2005), argue that after the Cold War, NATO transitioned from a realist alliance aimed at a clear threat into a liberal collective security project that emphasizes liberal democratic values. According to them, the natural evolution for the Alliance would have been to dissolve once the enemy was defeated, but instead, NATO not only continued to exist but also expanded from 16 member states during the Cold War to 32 member states with Sweden's accession in 2024. Mearsheimer criticizes NATO's eastward expansion after the Cold War as misguided and overly liberal, warning of future instability, particularly concerning Russia. From a realist perspective, he believes that the view that liberal ideas of spreading democracy and market economies will create lasting peace in Europe is incorrect and argues that NATO's expansion with Eastern European countries will not bring lasting peace, but "will ultimately provoke a hostile reaction from Russia" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 360). In fact, based on the lessons learned from history, it is clear that great powers always oppose the expansion of rival powerful alliances near their borders, and in this case, it was expected that Russia would not accept NATO's expansion as a promotion of peace, but would perceive it as a direct threat. In this sense, Mearsheimer (2001: 368) states that Russia will not remain weak forever as it was in the 1990s, and once it regains its former strength, it will likely try to reclaim control over the lost territories, returning to a policy of balance of power in Europe. Walt also criticizes NATO's expansion as a liberal project, arguing that it ignores the traditional principles of balance of power politics and operates according to the liberal belief that democracy will strengthen stability. He too predicts that this ideological approach will provoke Russia and destabilize Europe, emphasizing that NATO's

expansion is "planting the seeds of future conflict" (Walt, 2005: 223-224). Realists argue that uncontrolled power is dangerous not only for those who face it but also for its possessor, who may succumb to excessive expansion. Evidently, from a realist perspective, NATO's expansion after the Cold War represents a dangerous abandonment of strategic caution in favor of liberal ideology. It is a fact that the predictions of Mearsheimer and Walt, and generally of the realists, have been confirmed on several occasions, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Mearsheimer, in his article "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War," concludes that "If the Cold War is truly behind us, therefore, the stability of the past forty-five years is not likely to be seen again in the coming decades" (Mearsheimer, 1990: 17). In fact, immediately after the end of the Cold War, in the absence of the Soviet threat, NATO member states faced a multitude of new threats, which became more complex than "the relatively simple dynamics that involved maintaining the credibility of military forces along the old Iron Curtain" (Wolff, 2009: 478). For this reason, security in NATO's new concept is based on joint action to overcome future threats and challenges. In its strategic concepts, NATO particularly emphasizes its commitment to the development and nurturing of partnerships and a comprehensive approach to security. Adler and Barnett (1998: 38-45) distinguish three levels of development of the security community. The first level includes the factors that have accelerated the shift of states toward each other such as: technological development; the desire to reduce the feeling of fear from others; new ways of interpreting social reality; changes in the environment; and economic, demographic, and migration patterns. The second level consists of those factors that are prerequisites for the development of mutual trust and the creation of a collective identity. The third level refers to the development of sincere expectations for peaceful changes instead of conflicts, which is made possible by the trust established between member states based on long-term experience and shared encounters. Strengthening cooperation and developing democracy become a goal in themselves, which takes precedence over the struggle against enemy states and alliances. Although NATO's strategic shift led to a gradual transformation from a defense actor to an actor that protects a wide range of values, military force remains the Alliance's strongest asset. Accordingly, the transition from a military alliance to a military-political security organization does not mean that NATO has abandoned the enhancement of military power, but rather that it uses its military capacities in a broader context. In fact, NATO has become a security organization dedicated to preserving

security, conducting crisis management operations, and maintaining peace and stability outside its borders. Based on this, it is logical that massive and immobile military forces would be replaced by flexible, mobile forces designed for addressing a broad range of missions and tasks (Seroka, 2007:27). Starting from 1990, NATO has adopted a series of policies and activities aimed at protecting the Euro-Atlantic community and its values. At the Prague Summit in 2002, a package of measures was adopted to address the new challenge - terrorism, including the Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism and the Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan. At the Chicago Summit in 2012, NATO's Terrorism Policy Guidelines were adopted, opening new opportunities for cooperation with partners. NATO's areas of interest also include the fight against human trafficking, support for economic development, and the protection of civilians during missions and operations. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or according to NATO's narrative, after Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine, the Alliance once again focused on its core mission of deterrence and defense. However, the strong sense of concern due to the war, especially among NATO's European member states, was further increased by statements from U.S. President Donald Trump regarding the possibility of the U.S. leaving the Alliance. The fact that NATO today is an organization that, at first glance, is very different from the time it was founded is due to its transformation and adaptation in accordance with the new developments on the global stage. The threats NATO faced after the Cold War and before the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 were potentially not as apocalyptic, but they were quite real, often unpredictable, and asymmetric. Terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ethnic conflicts required NATO to transform and adapt in order to respond to the security and stability needs of its members. Now, as Europe faces the largest war since the end of World War II, which, according to realist predictions, was provoked by NATO's expansion, the Alliance, which has shown resilience over time, is once again faced with a new challenge. It is expected, given the new escalation of events and the emergence of the old-new threat to the allies, that NATO will expand its membership and become more coherent, more powerful, and even more resilient over time. However, if the possible scenario of the United States withdrawing from the Alliance, which stems from statements made by American President Trump, becomes a reality, it could trigger a domino effect, with some of the NATO member states from the European wing potentially following the example of the USA, which could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the Alliance.

2. STRATEGIC CHANGES OF NATO AFTER 1991

The strategic changes of the Alliance are most visible in the strategic concepts, which are key documents of NATO that outline its enduring goals and nature, its primary security tasks, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in an ever-changing security environment. The concepts specify the elements of NATO's approach to security and provide guidance for its political and military adaptation. During the Cold War, the Strategic Concept of 1950 was focused on the potential defense against the Soviet military threat to the North Atlantic. It was revised twice, in 1957 and 1968. After the end of the Cold War, NATO adopted four strategic concepts. The most recent strategic concept of the Alliance was adopted on June 29, 2022.

2.1. THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT FROM 1991

After the end of the Cold War, in November 1991, NATO adopted a new Strategic Concept, in which the term "territorial defense" was replaced with an expanded concept of stability and security (NATO, 1991). This term, instead of referring to geopolitical threats, now associates with economic, social, and political challenges, ethnic and territorial segments, and points to addressing crises, dialogue, and cooperation in the fields of arms control and disarmament. NATO's development during the 1990s was based on concerns about the spillover of conflicts and insecurity from the periphery of Europe (Asmus et al., 1993: 29), as well as the thesis that NATO must protect the traditional values of the West, such as democracy and human rights, both within and beyond the borders of Europe and America. Brian Collins (2011: 96) emphasizes that in the 1991 Strategic Concept, the phrase "human rights" is highlighted to underscore the potential rationale for NATO interventions beyond the borders of its member states. It is evident that the strategic changes from 1950 to today are a response to shifts in the international community, the evolution of security issues, the rise of non-state actors, and so on. Specifically, the focus has shifted from defense and protection to a broader approach to security and to new ways in which NATO can contribute to peace and stability. The commitment to strong and dynamic cooperation between European and North American allies, which continued to be the foundation of the Alliance and a free and promising Europe, was confirmed by the Madrid Declaration of July 8, 1997. This Declaration explicitly states that NATO's fundamental goals are the maintenance of

the military effectiveness of the Alliance and its ability to respond to a wide range of unforeseen situations in order to preserve transatlantic ties, as well as building a new European security and defense identity within NATO. Thus, alongside maintaining collective security, allies aim to adapt political and military structures to increase NATO's ability to respond to new challenges, emerging hotspots, regional crises, and their management. NATO also increases cooperation with other states and international organizations, which is key to building common security. The Madrid Declaration states: "The new NATO is the development of: a new NATO for a new and undivided Europe."

2.2. THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT FROM 1999

The evolution of geopolitical events in the 1990s led to a new revision of NATO's Strategic Concept in 1999. The changes introduced by this Strategic Concept were related to NATO's growing ambitions to act beyond the Euro-Atlantic region, as crises occurring in countries surrounding this region posed a potential threat to Euro-Atlantic stability through the spillover of problems into NATO member states (NATO, 1999: paragraph 20). Accordingly, NATO saw its role in addressing crises in unstable states, with a priority placed on crisis management and peacekeeping operations to preserve and maintain peace beyond NATO's zones. This Strategic Concept focused its attention on the global context, and in paragraph 24, it emphasized that the Alliance's interests could be threatened by a wide range of risks, including terrorist activities, sabotage, organized crime, vital resource flows, and uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, especially as a result of armed conflicts (NATO, 1999). The broad and open definition of security threats provided NATO with the flexibility to adjust this concept to its strategic needs and goals. The 1999 Strategic Concept emphasizes: "NATO has successfully ensured the freedom of its members and prevented war in Europe during the 40 years of the Cold War... The Alliance has an indispensable role to play in consolidating and preserving the positive changes of the recent past, and in meeting current and future security challenges... It must safeguard common security interests in an environment of further, often unpredictable change. It must maintain collective defense and reinforce the transatlantic link and ensure a balance that allows the European Allies to assume greater responsibility. It must deepen its relations with its partners and prepare for the accession of new members. It must, above all, maintain the political will and the military means required by the entire range of its missions" (NATO, 1999).

The Strategic Concept reflects the changed Euro-Atlantic security landscape at the end of the 20th century and prepares the Alliance for the security challenges and capabilities of the 21st century, providing the key directions for its future political and military development. This document outlines the goals and tasks of the Alliance for the future and reflects the determination of the member states to maintain adequate military capability and clear preparedness for collective action in their common defense. In accordance with the strategic concepts of 1991 and 1999, in its efforts to establish peace, the Alliance played an important role in crises in numerous countries.

2.3. THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT FROM 2010

At the NATO Summit, which took place on November 19 and 20, 2010, in Lisbon, Portugal, the Alliance adopted the New Strategic Concept, titled "Active Engagement, Modern Defense" (NATO, 2010). This Strategic Concept brought the most significant changes, and from its very title, one can see its focus on NATO's proactive role, in contrast to the traditional, defensive approach. The 2010 Strategic Concept reflects the new vision of the Alliance for the upcoming decade: able to defend its members against the full range of threats; capable of managing even the most challenging crises; and better able to work with other organizations and nations to promote international stability. Strategic concept envisages continued support for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation together with the development a missile defence capable to protect all European NATO member states, enhanced computer security, the development of strategic cooperation between NATO and Russia, including the missile defense system, security cooperation between NATO and the EU, and finding solutions to current issues. Furthermore, it emphasizes that health risks, climate change, water problems, and growing energy needs will shape the security environment in areas of significance for NATO in the future, and will have the potential to impact the planning and operations of the Alliance. The strategy highlights that the Alliance must and will continue fulfilling effectively three essential core tasks: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security, all of which contribute to safeguarding Alliance members(NATO, 2010). During the Brussels Forum in 2014, NATO's then Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, stated: "We cannot effectively protect our people and our territory if we are not able to do so outside our borders, if necessary, and defend ourselves against non-

traditional threats and assist countries outside NATO in defending themselves" (NATO, 2014). With this statement, Rasmussen sought to rationalize NATO's transformation, emphasizing that defense itself has transformed and that a proactive approach is now essential.

2.4. THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT FROM 2022

The latest and current NATO Strategic Concept was adopted at the Alliance's summit in Madrid on June 29, 2022, at a critical moment for international peace and stability. It clearly outlines NATO's goals and principles, its core tasks and values, as well as the strategic objectives of the Alliance in a drastically deteriorated security environment following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The new Strategic Concept confirms that NATO's key objective and greatest responsibility is to ensure the collective defense of its members against all threats and from all directions, outlining the three essential core tasks: deterrence and defense; prevention and crisis management; and cooperative security. The Strategic Concept particularly emphasizes the need to further strengthen deterrence and defense as the cornerstone of the Alliance's collective defense commitment. It also highlights that resilience is crucial to NATO's core tasks, as well as cross-sectoral issues such as technological innovations, climate change, human security, and the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. The 2022 Strategic Concept provides a realistic assessment of NATO's deteriorated strategic environment. "Strategic competition, pervasive instability, and recurring shocks define our broader security environment" (NATO, 2022: 3). The preface of the Strategic Concept highlights that the threats facing the world are global and interconnected. Russia is identified as the most direct and significant threat to the security of the Allies and to peace and stability in the North Atlantic area, which is why NATO Allies are determined to respond in unity and responsibility, strengthen deterrence and defense, enhance resilience against Russian pressure, and support partners in countering malicious interference and aggression. Although, in such circumstances, NATO cannot regard Russia as a partner, the Alliance still seeks to maintain open channels of communication with Moscow to manage risks, prevent escalation, and increase transparency. Other identified threats and challenges in the 2022 Strategic Concept include: terrorism; conflicts and instability in the Middle East and Africa; pervasive instability and its impact on civilians, cultural heritage, and the environment; China's ambitions and coercive policies; cyberspace; new

technologies; the erosion of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation of weapons; and the security implications of climate change.

The latest Strategic Concept reaffirms the defensive nature of the Alliance and its commitment to unity, cohesion, and solidarity, for a lasting transatlantic bond, for shared democratic values, and for a common vision of a "world where sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights, and international law are respected, and where every state can choose its own path" (NATO, 2022: 2). It states that Allies will maintain a global perspective on peace and security and will cooperate closely with partners, other states, and international organizations.

Finally, the Strategic Concept confirms NATO's necessity for Euro-Atlantic security, as a guarantor of peace, freedom, and prosperity, which is why Allies will continue to stand together in defense of their security, values, and democratic way of life.

For the effective implementation of the 2022 Strategic Concept, new defense plans were agreed upon at the Vilnius Summit in 2023, aimed at making the Alliance more capable of deterrence and defense than in recent decades. As a result of the war in Ukraine, a new NATO force model was agreed, which will strengthen the Alliance by providing up to 300,000 troops on high readiness and forming new Allied reaction forces capable of responding quickly to threats. In order for NATO to face a more complex and challenging global environment, the Vilnius Summit highlighted the need for: increased defense spending and capabilities; modernization of forces and capabilities; strengthening supply chains and the defense industry in Europe (NATO, 2023).

At the foreign ministers' meeting on April 5, 2023, General Secretary Stoltenberg said, "At the Vilnius Summit, expect Allies to agree on an ambitious new defense investment pledge, with 2% of GDP as a floor, not a ceiling" (Stoltenberg, 2023). In fact, NATO increased defense spending to 2% of GDP for its member states after Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014, but most member states still do not meet this target. In March 2024, Polish President Andrzej Duda called on NATO member states to increase defense spending to 3% of their GDP while Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine. He emphasized that Poland already allocates 4% of its GDP to defense, making it the country with the highest percentage spent, as it modernizes its military (The Washington Post, 2024). The Polish leadership has set itself the task of transforming its own army into one of the strongest armies in Europe. In 2022, NATO

states' defense spending amounted to \$1.189 trillion, of which Poland allocated \$17.8 billion (Baranovskyi, et.al., 2024:288).

The declaration from the NATO Summit in Washington in 2024 reaffirms the tasks and objectives of the Alliance set out in the 2022 Strategic Concept and once again highlights Russia as the most significant and direct threat to the security of the Allies (NATO, 2024). At the Washington Summit, an agreement was reached to expand NATO's industrial capabilities and maintain technological superiority by adopting new technologies and digital transformation, as well as implementing the revised Artificial Intelligence Strategy and new quantum and biotechnology strategies, promoting the principles of responsible use. The general conclusion from the NATO Summit in Washington is that NATO has withstood the test of time and remains a guarantor of the security of its Allies.

3. THE NEW TASKS AND OBJECTIVES OF NATO AND THE MODERN NATO MISSION

The transformation of NATO after the end of the Cold War, as seen from the analysis of the strategic concepts, is the result of adapting to the new needs of the environment and the emerging threats. Precisely because of this, the changes brought by the strategic concepts are more evolutionary than revolutionary, as they focus on generalizing the development of NATO's transformation and the changes in the strategic environment over the past decades. Although the strategic changes have led to significant innovations regarding NATO's role, it has been clear since the Alliance's very formation that NATO, explicitly or implicitly, can have multiple roles that go beyond its original mission to "keep the Russians out." Therefore, NATO's adaptation to the new security environment, the definition of new tasks, and the expansion of partnerships merely reflects its maturity and development (Flockhart, 2011: 111). In fact, the founding treaty of the Alliance does not specify any particular threat, but only NATO's purpose, while its roles and tasks have been defined and developed in accordance with the environment in order to achieve the set goal of preserving peace and security and protecting the values upon which the Alliance is founded. The primary goal of NATO "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage, and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law" (NATO, 1949) defined in the founding treaty, remains unchanged. The strategic changes that began after the Cold War have only led to a shift in

focus regarding the area of operations. The traditional task of collective defense of the member states, as outlined in Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty, has been expanded with so-called "out-of-area operations," thereby creating conditions for NATO to overcome its geographical limitations and direct its promotion of stability and prosperity toward areas beyond the Euro-Atlantic region.

NATO's evolution in the 1990s was driven by three important issues: preventing Russia from becoming a new antagonist on the European and global stage; supporting the post-communist transformation in the democratic states of Eastern and Central Europe; and addressing the civil wars and ethnic conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and preventing their spillover into other parts of Europe. Unlike the 1990s, the beginning of the 21st century shifted NATO's focus toward terrorist threats, cyber defense, humanitarian assistance, and the fight against certain forms of crime. At the same time, the Alliance has worked to strengthen its military capabilities in order to adequately support its political dimension. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has once again placed deterrence and defense at the top of NATO's priorities. With the return of war to Europe and the Middle East, as well as the global competition among great powers, NATO's vision and scope need to be broader. Security today involves a comprehensive set of tools, including economic sanctions and industrial policy, and should incorporate relevant actors within the Alliance.

In fact, NATO's new tasks arise from new security threats, most of which are global in nature. In this way, the new tasks themselves create the basic precondition for expanding the Alliance's influence beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. The adoption of new tasks forms the foundation for NATO's global influence and, at the same time, ensures its continued existence. Alongside the adoption of these new tasks, after the end of the Cold War, NATO also worked on transforming its forces and capabilities, as well as adapting its organizational structure to modern security challenges and threats—most notably seen in the transformation of its strategic commands.

Investments in new initiatives, transformation, and modernization indicate that NATO is far from accepting a withdrawal from the international stage. On the contrary, through adaptability and the development of its forces, capacities, and procedures, there is growing confidence that NATO is capable of securing its role in the modern global security architecture.

This is one of the fundamental prerequisites for establishing NATO's contemporary identity as an actor whose presence in crisis situations is often not only desirable but necessary.

3.1. ELEMENTS OF NATO'S CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY

NATO's contemporary identity indicates that it is not a "monolithic and unchanging social construct, but one that must be constantly articulated and rearticulated" (Kitchen M. Veronica, 2009, 111). Since NATO faced an identity crisis after the Cold War, the redefinition of its identity was one of the most important processes that took place alongside the transformation of NATO's role, forces, and capabilities.

During the Cold War period, NATO was identified primarily based on its dominant role as a military-defense actor. After the Cold War, NATO's identity continued to be built on the Alliance's core role, but the elements of that identity became more complex or usefully ambiguous. According to some authors, this is considered an advantage because the concepts included in this identity—such as shared democratic values, justice, and the rule of law—cannot be defined in a simple and concrete way. As such, they can be invoked whenever there is a need to expand the identity framework, legitimize disagreements, generate new strategies, or even shift discourses and identity itself (Kitchen M. Veronica, 2009, 111). The very fact that identity is both ambiguous and actively constructed by actors means that it is often used strategically.

The question of NATO's identity transformation is often linked to the question of its survival. The main reasons for NATO's continued existence can be highlighted as: the asymmetry of power within the Alliance; the shared political values of the member states; the high level of institutionalization within NATO; and the developed sense of common identity and a well-established security community (Walt, 1997, 164–170). A security community is maintained by shared identities, not just common interests, which allows member states to perceive themselves as participants in a collective endeavor, rather than as separate entities merely interacting in anarchy (Thaddeus, 2003, 228). In this sense, in the post-Cold War period, NATO elevated the alliance based on shared interests to a level of an alliance based on shared identity. After the end of the Cold War, NATO transitioned from a military-defense organization into a security community, which brought with it the necessary change in identity, so that NATO could adapt to the needs and functions of a security community. NATO brings about this change by creating its own security

narrative, which simultaneously keeps NATO's practices open while fixing the definition of its activities as "security" (Felix, 2002, 51). Therefore, NATO's new identity is based on the old foundations of the Alliance, with the past and present being connected through the transformation of the environment. The member states of the Alliance, their mutual relations, and the various forms of interaction have a significant impact on the creation of NATO's identity. However, NATO's identity is also influenced by external actors who are not part of the Alliance. On one hand, identity depends on NATO's self-identification, but on the other hand, it also depends on whether external actors equally understand that self-identification. Given that NATO has never abandoned its Cold War-era identity, but rather has only upgraded it, NATO today can be perceived as an actor identified by two dominant and mutually complementary identities. These are based on the role NATO independently builds, but also through the necessary interaction with others: one is a defensive identity and the other is an identity of an offensive actor in various crisis situations, which can negatively impact the security of member states. These two types of identities are based on the dominant role NATO plays today, i.e., on the tasks emphasized in the latest strategic concept, which are: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperation in the field of security.

3.1.1. COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

Collective defense has been one of NATO's most important tasks since its formation. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty emphasizes that an armed attack against one of the member states is considered an attack against all of them, and that each party will take such actions as are necessary to restore and maintain security in the North Atlantic area. However, when it comes to collective defense in the context of NATO's transformation, it must be highlighted that, after the Cold War, it also underwent some changes in its conceptualization. During the Cold War, NATO focused on strengthening its military conventional and unconventional capabilities, such as deterrence policy and rhetorical actions of intimidation, as well as the geographical limitation of the Euro-Atlantic area of member states. After the Cold War, the geographical scope of collective defense significantly expanded, and the possibility of conducting NATO operations beyond the North Atlantic area was opened. Article 5 of the NATO Treaty was first activated on September 12, 2001, one day after the terrorist attacks in the United States, which also led to the expansion

of the collective defense concept to include a concept for defense against terrorism. In 2002, the Military Concept for Defense Against Terrorism was adopted at the Prague Summit, and in 2008, the first Cyber Defense Policy was adopted. However, it must be emphasized that even in NATO's strategic concepts after the Cold War, particularly in the most recent strategic concept of the Alliance, which was adopted after Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine, collective defense is cited as the primary task of the Alliance. This confirms the fact that collective defense is deeply embedded in NATO's identity. Still, after the Cold War, NATO's complex identity was further supplemented with crisis management, which in functional terms serves as the foundation for the Alliance's survival.

3.1.2. CRISES MENAGEMENT

Among the most important tasks and priorities of NATO after the Cold War is the successful prevention and management of crises that threaten the security and other interests of the member states of the Alliance. Crisis management tasks have been developed in strategic concepts from 1991 onward. Although NATO typically addresses military crisis situations, NATO's crisis management also has a civilian component, which is of exceptional importance because modern security threats are complex and often involve a combination of military and non-military issues. Due to the complexity of contemporary security threats, NATO has developed what is called a comprehensive approach, as the official doctrine for all missions not covered by Article 5 of the Treaty, which NATO implements (Webber et al., 2012, 54). As a leading principle for crisis management, the comprehensive approach involves joint action by different actors who, in accordance with their strength, mandate, and role, contribute to resolving complex crises. Crisis management is a significant element of NATO's identity after the Cold War, as it provides NATO the opportunity to gain a global reputation and build a higher level of public trust with each new crisis resolved anywhere in the world. Within NATO, crisis management is a collective term for a series of activities: crisis prevention; peacekeeping; peacemaking; peacebuilding; peace enforcement; and humanitarian operations, as the most significant innovation after the Cold War and an area to which NATO traditionally did not belong.

3.1.3 SECURITY COOPERATION

After the Cold War, the need arose to develop the concept of security cooperation and to build a network of partnerships with numerous actors

in order to more effectively carry out NATO's new roles and tasks. For NATO, security cooperation represents "an alternative to the traditional policy of balancing power among allies" (Adler, 2008, 213), as well as "a unique tool for crisis management" (NATO, May 14, 2014). The concept of security cooperation within NATO consists of three components: strengthening partnerships; contributing to arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament; and assisting potential member states in preparing for NATO membership. Within security cooperation, NATO plays the role of a coordinator, linking states and international organizations with common interests, which collaborate on a wide range of security issues.

4. CONCLUSION

Since NATO faced an identity crisis after the Cold War, the redefinition of its identity was one of the most important processes that took place alongside the transformation of NATO's role, forces, and capabilities. The transformation of NATO's identity and its adaptation to the newly emerged conditions following the end of the Cold War appeared as a necessary process. From a defensive alliance during the Cold War, based on the dynamic changes in the security environment after the Cold War, NATO evolved and transformed into a broader security community committed to liberal democratic values. In its attempt to establish a new balance between its traditional role and addressing global threats, NATO began its horizontal development through the process of enlargement and its vertical development through the adoption of new goals, tasks, and activities. In fact, NATO moved toward redefining its strategic direction and future tasks, emphasizing its internal dimension of security based on the protection of Western, liberal-democratic values in the Euro-Atlantic area. In this way, NATO managed to secure its legitimacy and continue to exist somewhere on the border between a military alliance and a security community united by a shared identity, common historical experiences, and a collective destiny.

However, the transition from a military alliance to a political-military security organization does not mean that NATO abandoned the enhancement of military power; rather, it began to use its military capabilities in a broader context. NATO became a security organization dedicated to preserving security, conducting crisis management operations, and maintaining peace and stability beyond its borders. The

adoption of new tasks serves as the foundation for the Alliance's global influence and ensures its continued existence. NATO's transformation after the end of the Cold War is the result of adapting to new conditions and threats in the international environment, which is most evident in the strategic concepts, as key documents of the Alliance. These documents reflect NATO's enduring purpose and nature, its core security tasks, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in a changing security environment. The changes introduced in the strategic concepts are more evolutionary than revolutionary, as they focus on generalizing the development of NATO's transformation and the changes in the strategic environment during the periods in which they were adopted.

During the Cold War, the Strategic Concept of 1950 was aimed at potential defense against the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, and it was revised in 1957 and 1968. After the end of the Cold War, NATO adopted four strategic concepts, in 1991, 1999, 2010, and 2022. Investment in new ventures, transformation, and modernization indicates that NATO is far from accepting its withdrawal from the international stage. On the contrary, through the adaptability and development of its forces, capabilities, and procedures, a conviction is formed that NATO has the ability to secure its position within the modern global security architecture—one of the fundamental prerequisites for shaping NATO's contemporary identity. NATO's evolution in the 1990s was driven by three important issues: preventing Russia from becoming a new antagonist on the European and global stage; supporting the post-communist transformation in the democratic states of Eastern and Central Europe; and addressing civil wars and ethnic conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, as well as preventing their spillover into other parts of Europe. At the beginning of the 21st century, NATO shifted its focus to terrorist threats, cyber defense, humanitarian assistance, and the fight against certain forms of crime, while simultaneously working to strengthen its military capabilities in order to adequately support its political dimension. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO once again placed deterrence and defense at the forefront of its mission.

Today, NATO can be described as an actor identified by two dominant and mutually complementary identities, based on the role it develops both independently and through interaction with others - namely, a defensive identity and an identity as an offensive actor in various types of crisis situations that may negatively impact the security of member states. These two types of identity are grounded in NATO's current dominant role, that

is, the tasks emphasized in the latest Strategic Concept: collective defense, crisis management, and security cooperation. The construction of this new, complex identity has led to the expansion of NATO's domain from a regional to a global level, in terms of the geographical scope of its operations, the broadening of its partnership network, and the inclusion of new, non-defensive activities. It is precisely this expansion of NATO's scope that can be seen as a key reason for its continued existence. The question of NATO's identity transformation is often linked to the question of its survival. However, not only has NATO continued to exist, but it has also expanded from 16 to 32 member states. This enlargement provoked a hostile reaction from Russia, which perceived NATO's expansion as a direct threat.

Now, as the world faces the largest war in Europe since the end of World War II and as liberal democratic values are in crisis, the Alliance which has proven resilient over time is once again confronted with a new challenge. The allies' expectation that the spread of liberal democratic values would bring lasting peace has not been realized. Given the recent escalation of events and the reemergence of an old-new threat to the allies, two possible scenarios exist: NATO could expand its membership and become more coherent, more powerful, and even more resilient over time. Or, if statements made by U.S. President Trump about the United States potentially leaving the Alliance become a reality, this could trigger a domino effect where some NATO member states from the European wing might follow the U.S. example ultimately resulting in the dissolution of the Alliance.

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