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## NATO'S EXPANSION VERSUS PUTIN'S IMPERIAL AMBITIONS: ANALYZING NATO'S ROLE IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

*The launch of a special operation by Russia in Ukraine, referred to by the West as a full-scale invasion, represents the most significant conflict to impact Europe since World War II. It is also among the biggest challenges for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The precipitating cause of the culmination of the Ukraine crisis can be attributed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's request for a full-proof action plan for the inclusion of Ukraine in NATO and his admittance that giving up Ukraine's nuclear capability was a mistake. However, NATO-Russia relations were also at their lowest point. The organization's eastward expansion and the transformation of all Warsaw Pact states into NATO member states were the first signs of the beginning of a strained relationship in the 21st century between the longtime adversaries during the Cold War. The recent admission of Finland and the imminent inclusion of Sweden into the organization during the Ukraine crisis have further contributed to the existing tensions. The Russia-US trajectory of relations in the 21st century is also important when analyzing the Ukraine crisis. Through the available literature, this paper analyzes NATO's responsibilities and opportunities in light of the Ukraine crisis, as it completes its first anniversary and the conflicting parties remain at odds with no apparent possibility for dialogue soon. The analysis has focused on the organization's historical commitment to NATO, considering the United States shifting priorities from initial interest to eventual reluctance, Russia's established red line, and Ukraine's*

*increasing impatience over the matter. Vladimir Putin's corresponding rationale for his actions has also been discussed briefly. The paper concludes by offering a viewpoint on the feasibility of establishing working NATO-Russia relations, accompanied by an examination of the fundamental prerequisites that need to be fulfilled for such a development to take place.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*NATO, Russia, Vladimir Putin, West, Ukraine, Crisis, War and US.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in its 73rd year of operation, has proved itself to be the strongest alliance formed to this date. It was created to cater to the threats of communist ideology and the large stockpile of nuclear warheads from the Soviet Union, which it proved to be a bulwark against and played an important role in the dissolution of the USSR. Furthermore, after the Cold War era, it successfully formulated new meanings for its existence (Ogunnoiki & Ekpo, 2019). The new century again showed signs of the Russian threat and a plethora of challenges for NATO, which was already engaged, and committed to its purpose in other parts of the world. The year 2022, with the Ukraine crisis, has brought forward NATO as the single most important factor in the Ukraine conflict; the role it has to play, has played, and will play is of great significance, which this paper will analyze.

'*You the people of Russia are not our enemy*' echoed at the Royal Castle in the city of Warsaw, Poland, the words of US President Joe Biden on March 26, 2022, came as a result of the Ukraine crisis, which Russia calls 'special military operation' and the West or to be more precise the allies of US and NATO as an attack. He was categorical yet cautious about mentioning and requesting the people of Russia to oust Vladimir Putin from office for the alleged war crime, careful of leaving out 'the regime change' debate to be read between the lines (Balevic, 2022). The sun of February 24, 2022, rose to change the whole discourse among the International Relations scholars who were evaluating the implications of COVID-19, to witness now the culmination of another crisis, the rumbling of which has been heard and felt all across the world. Aghast at Putin's move, NATO strongly condemned what they defined as Russia's atrocity, waging war on innocent civilians and violating international law by endangering Ukraine's territorial sovereignty (NATO,2022). NATO and its allies pledged to stand by its close partner during the difficult time, assisting the state with required support on all levels ensuring the fundamental right to self-defense. After months of ongoing Ukraine crisis, NATO stands firm on its commitment of which,

further emphasizing the NATO Secretary General, before the meeting with NATO states foreign ministers in Bucharest, reinforced that no peace shall prevail if the aggressor wins, rejecting any debate whatsoever of creating a space where autocracy shall be accepted side by side with democracy (NATO, 2022).

As NATO and Russia find themselves on opposite ends, the intersection of which may rage a full-scale nuclear war or may be able to allow to see, if not create the light of peace at the end of the tunnel, the role of NATO in Russia's action in Ukraine, Russia under Putin in 21st century and the US-Russia-NATO debates are certain to be at the core of International Relations curriculum for the years to come. This research paper aims to look into the East and West perspectives on NATO's role in the Ukraine crisis, and the Russia and US relationship in an approach to connect the possible reasons for the culmination of the Ukraine crisis and the way forward.

### ***Tipping Point - Crisis-Stricken Preface of 2023***

For anyone other than those in it for their stakes, an ideal sight to see in 2023 would be the Ukrainian Volodymyr Zelensky and the Russian Vladimir Putin shaking hands in good faith toward peaceful coexistence. However, as the events have unfolded and continue to do so, this seems not to be happening. Not any time soon, not later, maybe ever. The outlook for 2023 looks uncertain, the crisis which has worsened over time has brought low hopes and prospects for the new year. It is indeed a tipping point in the crisis-stricken majority of the world as the frozen east of Europe paves the way for the inevitable global recession, energy crisis, and an upward trend of inflation with tens of thousands of casualties, an estimated 14 million Ukrainians displaced, and as reported by the United Nations is the fastest largest displacement in the recent decades (Lederer, 2022), will something similar to Crimea 2014 Minsk Ceasefire Agreement take place or the NATO countries will survive the test of times assisting Ukraine with humanitarian aid and the military support amid the rising global crisis are the questions to be answered which will decide if there is a turning point in the global world order (Staff, 2022).

The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept has reaffirmed its primary role for which it was created, the defense of the allies, through the state-of-the-art approach for the three key tasks: deter and defend, crisis prevention and crisis management, and security, collective and cooperative. The underlined emphasis was on Article 5, a commitment to protect, defend, and ensure each other's security (Stoltenberg, 2022). In the current scenario and future outlook, what could be the decisive measure for peaceful cooperation between NATO and Russian forces? The paper will seek to evaluate if the

policy of coexistence and cooperation can exist between the two in the following year.

### ***Ukraine Attack- A Casus Belli for a Nuclear War?***

John J. Mearsheimer's long-standing viewpoint about the Ukraine crisis being the West's fault, even at the end where critics label his perspective as lopsided and given the complete absence of bearing Russia some responsibility, his view of the situation today has to be read through the times that predates the 21st century, it began ever since the day it started. One of the first and few ones, Mearsheimer advocated against Bill Clinton's and the European Union's favoring Ukraine to give up its nuclear capability. In 1991, after the USSR broke up, with 1700 Soviet nuclear weapons stationed in Ukraine, the third largest at that time, it went on to return those to Russia under an agreement of not pursuing to acquire nuclear capability signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Mearsheimer was quick to call it a mistake, '*Clinton and EU's one nuclear successor plan to the Soviet Union for a stable Europe is flawed, a nuclear weapon equipped Ukraine is the way forward for peace,*' (Mearsheimer, 1993) his words came on to become a reality when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and invaded Ukraine in 2022. As the chants of '*yet again, the country who gave up nuclear weapons for peace is attacked*' gain pace at an exponential rate, the world is glued towards the debate of '*can a nuclear war be justified at this point*'?

The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept underscored the fundamental purpose of its nuclear capabilities, which it delineated as the perseverance of peace, prevention of nuclear coercion, and deterring any form of violence and aggression. It was quite clear to be an ultra-modern nuclear weapon-equipped alliance for as long as the nuclear weapons exist, ironically while also describing its goal for the world: a safe and secure place envisioning to create a security environment, the world where there is no space for nuclear weapons (Stoltenberg, 2022). At the same time, the West has vociferously denounced Putin's Casus Belli for his actions in Ukraine, which this paper will look to find reasons for in addition to NATO's prospects of engaging in a nuclear war as it witnesses the most significant nuclear coercion from Russia, and as the foreseeable future seems uncertain and hard to predict as it swings in between the multiplicity of variables, the way at present and forward shall be deduced for the European collective force (Dreuzy & Gilli, 2022).

### ***Russia- Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery Inside an Enigma***

Somewhat 83 years ago, Winston Churchill, just before he took over as the British prime Minister, described the Soviet Union as a '*riddle wrapped in*

*a mystery inside an enigma,'* the phrase he used to define the motives, the encouraging factors behind the Soviet actions, which was complex to understand and deconstruct (Word Histories, 2019). It stays relevant today in ways as explained by Tim Marshall as 'Prisoner of Geography' The writer completes Churchill's statement that 'but perhaps there is a key, and that key is national interest.' Ever since the German unification and the Soviet breakup, the Russian leaders have been consistent in their stance that NATO promised 'not one-inch eastward' expansion, which, however, it continued to violate. As NATO inched closer to siding with the states that Russia allegedly believes were promised never to be joined as members, Russia watched as Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, followed by Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia in 2004 and 2009 Albania, it supposedly added to the Russian worry. The mostly flat land of Ukraine has to be a point of concern for Putin, whose take on eastward expansion was completely pushed aside. By 2004, all the Warsaw Pact members were now part of either NATO or the European Union; just 15 years from 1989, it put Russia into thinking of its past 500 years of history in which it had numerous attempts of invasion from the West (Marshall, 2016). This also explains a primary factor in the Russia-Georgian war of 2008 and the Crimean annexation in 2014 (Shifrinson, 2016) and may also answer some questions about the latest Ukraine crisis. Thus, the Russia of today, though still complex and difficult to comprehend for the West, can still be understood to an extent through its national interest. The Ukraine conflict may very well be explained through the Russian Riddle Wrapped in Ukraine Mystery inside a US Enigma, which the analysis shall answer to reason through the isolated yet teachable precedents in history.

### ***The NATO Role-European Geopolitical Landscape***

On June 29, 2022, in Madrid, the Secretary Heads of NATO states came together on what can be defined as the ad hoc measure to redefine the Alliance's strategic concept. European security has been under the radar of many suspicions of the future, its sustainability, strength, and defense as the 70+ years of ever-growing Alliance met its biggest challenge of the 21st century, to protect Ukraine and Eastern Europe. It addressed the threats and changes to its security environment amid the Ukraine crisis and reinforced its ability to defend, protect and deter the aggressor. It restated that the security of its 1 billion citizens is unequivocally the utmost priority (Stoltenberg, 2022). Against the ever-strengthening European security and of what was taken to be an apt example of the epitome of cooperation, the initiative and structures reduced to redundancy, NATO finds itself in a

position to be the only sole caretaker of the national security of its members and their designed international order as a whole as the questions of its role in since the end of Cold War once again gain momentum (Tymchuk, 2020). The question of NATO failing the test against Russia is thought so grave that it puts every other serious problem in the backseat. The geopolitical position of Eastern European countries will undergo reformation, an era that Europe is and will never be ready to see. A significant part of this paper focuses on the roles NATO played in the 21st century, plays, and can play in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The NATO-Russia relations post-Cold War has been of interest in the International Relations discourse. Often tumultuous, seldom tranquil, the relationship between the two is of utmost priority for stability in Eastern Europe. However, the two withstanding opposite narratives have been strongly brewed over time. While there is consistency among NATO's stand of trying all they can to build a cooperative relationship with Russia, the latter have been truculent to cater any steps moving East. As the world entered a new century and the world dynamics changed, the new century brought new challenges, a whole lot of them; the 9/11 tragedy shook the US, which went on to invoke NATO's Article 5 for the first time in the history as NATO carried out its operations in Afghanistan, a turning point in the development of the organization, its mission, and goal, an achievement unlocked for the West, which now considered that they had the power to involve in any action, anywhere in the world and the ability to survive the test of time, contemporaneously and inevitably, Russia's trepidation about the Eastward expansion grew, the reaction of which can be traced in the cyberattacks on Estonia, the Russian-Georgian in 2008 followed by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 among the few, Putin had a common goal for people to unite over, the anti-Western sentiment, a powerful motive for a resurging power, finding its ways to the military and economic strength (Francey, 2017). Today, as Ukraine sits at the receiving end of the belligerence, the role of NATO and its relationship with Russia is significant in the Ukraine crisis. There is extensive literature available about its successes and failures. A specific study underscoring its role in the 21st century vis-à-vis the Russian actions in Ukraine has been of little emphasis. There are few studies available analyzing NATO's role in the current crisis.

### **OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

Roles and responsibilities of organizations evolve given the changing situations and circumstances, but the sole foundation laid for the

establishment of the organization influences the more significant part of the comprehension of its actions; NATO was formed to counter the Soviet Union and after the latter's dissolution required to redefine its purpose of existence, which has only added fuel to the existing bitter relations with Russia. The paper shall analyze the dynamics of NATO expansion versus Putin's imperial ambitions entering the 21st century to understand what led to the Ukraine crisis and what may also be an antidote for it, redesigning a new pragmatic approach towards effective problem-solving measures. The paper's objective is to emphasize the current Ukrainian crisis in particular by assessing the historical events that reasoned for the predictability of what is happening in Ukraine and why NATO stays at the center of playing a decisive role.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The global implications of the Ukraine crisis are unprecedented to the 21st century. The new world order, in crisis, has sent a swirl of headlines reporting the war looming situation, the worst Europe has witnessed since 1939, and as the editor in chief of Russia on global affairs, Fyodor Lukyanov describes it as the groundbreaking moment for the state's history ever since 1991 (Davison, 2022), it becomes an absolute necessity to assess the genesis of what led to a progressively of what the West describes as hostile Russia towards the actions it took and the justifications it offers in the form of NATO's movement to the east, deception, and betrayal. The literature available often elaborates on either two extreme sides of the Ukraine crisis. A comprehensive study is required, which incorporates the West, and Russian perspectives, which keeps Putin's imperialism and NATO enlargement forward, respectively, coupled with facts and a balanced analysis of the situation, is required for which the paper shall prove to be a significant source of literature.

### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Seldom does a discussion begin with a question, but when the ultimate role of an organization depends on the very one decision it has to make, the exception becomes acceptable. When sometime during March 2023, two Russian fighter jets took down an American surveillance drone in the jurisdiction of international waters, the American reaction was exasperated but not surprising when they once again indirectly hinted at the consequences of such reckless moves between the two nuclear powers (Liebermann et al., 2023). Now to the question, *what would NATO's immediate reaction and strategic response to any such Russian action, either accidentally or intentionally, towards any close NATO partner state*

*not yet included in the alliance?* Though an instant answer would be a yes without hindrance, one may want the alliance to think if the world can or if it as a collective force can afford to risk the security of Europe over the Ukraine crisis. The role of NATO stays imperative to how the Ukraine crisis will shape the present and future outlook for the region. As the Ukraine crisis clocked its first anniversary, the scholars of the international relations discourse have managed to double down on the strategic responses of NATO and EU to the conflict. First, the obvious one was to isolate Russia from the rest of the world, bringing the states together to condemn the Russian actions and call for an immediate withdrawal of forces from Ukraine. Second, another no surprise came in the form of economic sanctions to dry out the adversary of its economic capabilities of sustaining war and, last, to aid and supply Ukraine with all it needed to put a sturdy defense. The claims were made in international arenas, and despite all its glory and harmony, the West and the United States of America could not convince the world to join hands as one mighty collective force against the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin (Nettle, 2022).

### ***NATO Strengthens Amid Ukraine Crisis***

The Ukraine crisis has brought a geopolitical shift to the European landscape, the immediate recipient of which is NATO. The conflict has for time bolstered NATO, primarily reinstating its legitimacy and significance in contemporary times, which have been subject to intense scrutiny since 2010. Prior to the culmination of the Ukraine crisis, NATO faced severe criticism from various quarters. A prominent aspect of Donald Trump's electoral campaign was his pledge to address the perceived shortcomings of NATO on a global scale, which were believed to have had a significant and detrimental impact on the country. He referred to the organization as *obsolete* and possessing *anarchist* characteristics. The organization was subject to intense criticism by the Head of France, Emmanuel Macron, in 2019, following Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria. The individual characterized NATO as being in a state of *brain dead* due to its member state engaging in unilateral action without proper consultation with others. On the other end, the resolution to augment NATO expenditure by 2% by 2024 was only fulfilled by 10 out of the 30 member states in 2021. This resulted in a division among the contributors regarding the rationale behind certain countries being required to contribute more than others. This dispute was exacerbated by the unprecedented crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. The NATO 2030 objective generated controversy due to its focus on countering the authoritarian regimes of China and Russia. European nations identified the United States as a potentially interested party, given

that several European countries perceived Russia and China as valuable trade allies. After the Covid-19 pandemic, NATO faced a series of novel challenges, subsequently undermined by the Ukraine crisis (Benjamin & Davies, 2022).

It all changed in February 2022; all the reservations were relegated to secondary importance, and the Russian actions in Ukraine brought it out as the sole aggressor in the region, an adversary against whom the defense was necessary at all costs. Finland and Sweden expedited their actions to join the alliance, which had previously held a point of neutrality over the matter, specifically in the case of Sweden. Unquestionably, the ability of NATO to maintain its defense effectively thus far is contingent upon the collective support of Europe, which will continue to be of equal significance as long as the conflict persists. It has also further solidified NATO's expansion plans, which are now viewed as inevitable by the organization that has sensed that its Eastern part is not as strong as it should be to cater to Russian aggression. How it responds to it will be of utmost importance in the coming time. Bulgaria, Hungary, Turkey, and Romania had initially avoided siding with the West bloc over the crisis; the only exception was made by Greece, which, despite being called for having a soft corner for pro-Russian sentiments, was vocal in calling against the Russian actions. NATO soon convinced Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania to bring more troops to the eastern center. So yes, it is a clear indicator of how NATO has, at least for the time being, come out as a stronger alliance to combat Russia. However, in the test of time, the organization has to make some decisive, tough decisions that, in any way possible, except if they drop the idea of Ukraine as a NATO member state, will only fire the Russian perspective, which means challenging times ahead, necessitating preparation for even more challenging times. (Jenkins, 2023).

Also of note is that the heading of this specific section adopts a celebratory tone towards NATO, which is appropriate for any international organization that experiences expansion. An increased number of member states can lead to a more unified organization that prioritizes the collective interests of the alliance. However, this may only sometimes be the case in situations where a consensus can be reached. In 2023, regarding NATO solely as a military alliance would be an inadequate characterization. An understatement that eventually undermines the complexities of work ethics that the organization has to undergo to serve the interests of its, as of today, thirty-one member states. As Finland joins NATO, it proposes why Sweden has not. For the record, one without the other was never part of the discussion. For a state to gain membership in the organization, a unanimous vote is necessary. However, in the specific case of Sweden, this was not achieved due to

tensions with Turkey stemming from the country's ongoing anti-Islamic discourse. Turkey's reservation was not limited to Sweden; it had raised some of its concerns about hosting Kurdish militants in Finland too last year and had asked to meet all the demands to join the alliance. A case in point explains how a difference in decision-making between 1 and 29 can have the capacity to change fate (Geybullayeva, 2023).

Turkey's struggle to balance between the West and Russia is also a critical point to be monitored. Suppose Russia manages to break the tip of the iceberg with any other NATO member state like or with Turkey. In that case, the inclusion of Ukraine, which is perceived to be inevitable presently by the US and West, may serve as a deciding point for the conflict. The persistent insinuations made by the Turkish government regarding the possibility of withdrawing from the alliance are a source of apprehension. However, for NATO to establish a more effective oversight system, Turkey's involvement is of paramount significance. The organization's challenge will be to achieve favorable outcomes with Turkey over the interests of Russia (Wilks, 2022).

#### ***NATO's Ukraine Commitment***

When NATO invoked Article 5 with its actions in Afghanistan, it came out as what it described as a *collective force against a global threat* that posed a danger to the world. Since then, there has been an ushering of self-engulfed congratulatory messages about what it has been able to achieve, also allowing its way through its actions in other parts of the world. In all its glory and praise, it forgot to deal with the on-growing Russia problem, the problem that had given episodic warnings in the form of the Russo-Georgian war and later the Crimea annexation, but no needful heed was paid. Instead, provocative measures were taken in the aliases of ensuring defense and deterrence, nuclear weapons currently deployed in five NATO member states, namely Germany, Italy, Belgium, Turkey, and the Netherlands. France, the UK, and the US also possess their nuclear arsenals. The deployment of missile defense in Romania and a base in Poland, situated close to the Russian border, renders it unsound to assert that NATO has not contributed to the instigation of Russian actions, and this remains the case presently. To precisely date back to the inception of the Ukraine problem, one may go back to 2008, when, had it not been for Germany, France, and the US intelligentsia, the then US President George W. Bush was keen on incorporating Georgia and Ukraine in the alliance. As the US ambassador to Moscow of that time has mentioned in his book *The Back Channel* about his extensive observations among the Russian elites about Ukraine joining NATO, he writes, quote unquote *Ukraine's admission to NATO is the brightest, most red line for the Russians, and it is not only about*

*Putin; even the liberal bloc sees it that way. It is a direct threat to Russian interests as a whole, and none seems to be settling with it* (Burns, 2019). However, what was noted by the first-hand experiences of the ambassador was not taken as such, as during the administration of President Barack Obama, Ukraine and the United States cooperated through NATO's provision of military training and weaponry to Ukrainian forces. The sole action taken by President Obama was to prohibit the transfer of offensive weapons, which was lifted by his successor, Donald Trump, in 2017, creating an even more alarming situation (Farkas, 2019). However, Donald Trump's policy was a protective one; he was more pragmatic and protectionist in his approach and wanted to let the sale of weapons go by and was against the aid of Ukraine, which was evident by his holdup of the \$250 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. He firmly believed that the postponement was imperative to guarantee that the financial resources were utilized most advantageously to benefit American interests (Emma & O'Brien, 2019). All of this happened without any calculation of a response from the Russian side, which has been known for its aggressive actions against anything they deem dangerous for as long as history has been recorded.

While that was a recap of the events that took place before Russia attacked Ukraine, nothing significant changed after that; as much as Russia does not seem interested in pulling back its forces from Ukraine, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, on his first visit to Kyiv in April 2023 since the invasion, he expressed that Ukraine rightly belonged to the Euro-Atlantic region and that is the number one priority once the conflict settles, as he extended the official invitation of NATO 2023 summit in July to the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (Cook & Kullab, 2023) but the question is, will it? Russia's whole perspective of its operations in Ukraine rests heavily on the implications made for Ukraine's inclusion in the alliance, as the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, was quick to pick up the message sent and reaffirmed that stopping Ukraine from joining NATO was still of the utmost priority of Moscow (Eruygur, 2023) and if the same opinion is held up, it puts the scholars of discourse into a highly perplexed position to predict where this all goes. However, as of now, NATO's Ukraine commitment is only looking as rock solid as it was before the invasion. This is also evident through the visit to Kyiv in the first place, that the organization stands behind Ukraine with as much determination and support as it was on the very first day. Despite all that NATO presently and for the foreseeable future has to cater to, it has so far managed to pull off what it stood for; where this strategic plan leads is still a question, but from the looks of it, it is a far cry away from coming to the negotiating table where

it caters the question of giving up Ukraine commitment soon. It is also imperative to view it in light that this is only the limited help that NATO can provide to its close partner that has not become a member. Had this been successfully achieved, Russia would have done much rethinking, besides the usual actions (Haynes, 2023).

While that is true, it is one thing to commit and another to make it obvious through the actions taken. For the record, NATO wants Ukraine to join in and calls it inevitable, but does it look like it will happen soon, and do the actions suggest so? Another perspective on why the NATO Secretary General made his way to Kyiv could be the increasing pressure from Ukraine and other European member states that have been urging NATO for a while to lay the path for Ukraine's entry into the alliance. The disagreement is from the US side, Germany, and Hungary, who have been countering Poland and the Baltic states from expediting Ukraine's process to joining the alliance. There have been reports that the Ukrainian President has expressed his concern in the meeting with the secretary general that he will only attend the NATO 2023 Summit if the organization provides him with a set of guidelines the state needs to follow to successfully become a member (Foy & Schwartz, 2023). As mentioned earlier, the disagreement was previously documented in January of the current year, during which Ukraine conveyed its discontent regarding equivocal pledges. Following his meeting with the Presidents of Poland and Lithuania, who have also expressed their support for Ukraine, the President of Ukraine emphasized the need for more than mere assurances of NATO's open doors (Polityuk & Heritage, 2023). According to Davis (2023), the United States have emphasized the importance of Ukraine's focus on defeating the Russians while characterizing this objective as a potential distraction from the state's current needs and a susceptibility to Russian propaganda. The argument that the US may have for Ukraine does not provide a compelling reason why Ukraine should refrain from pursuing NATO membership unless it desires to resolve its issues with Russia. The significance of NATO's involvement in maintaining stability until July 2023 cannot be overstated due to the ongoing conflict.

#### ***NATO Since February 24, 2022***

A clear discrepancy exists among the member states of NATO regarding the equitable distribution of the budget, as has also been noted about the state's inability to allocate 2% of its GDP to NATO. The release of the NATO budget for 2023 revealed that the United States emerged as the primary contributor, on par with Germany, with the United Kingdom following. This outcome was not unexpected, as has been the case over the years. According

to NATO (2022), there was a notable rise of 25.8% in military expenditure from the preceding year, amounting to \$2.10 billion. This distinguishes itself from other financial, military, and technological aid specifically allocated to assist Ukraine. According to the report statistics provided by the Kiel Institute for World Economy, Ukraine received a total of \$80.5 billion in the period spanning from January 2022 to November 2022 in the form of humanitarian aid, financial assistance, and military assistance. The United States has contributed over \$50 billion to the matter, the highest amount among all the countries. The United Kingdom and Germany have also made contributions, albeit significantly lower, resulting in the United States having the most influential role in the matter. The attacked state has been equipped with both traditional and modern weapons. According to Duggal (2023), NATO has been providing extensive training to a significant number of Ukrainian military personnel in the event of an escalation of the potential conflict with Russian forces. The statistical data for May 2023 show a significant increase in the amount of financial assistance the United States has given to Ukraine, with a total expenditure exceeding \$75 billion. Estonia and Latvia have made noteworthy contributions that surpass their economic capacities, though they are relatively small compared to the capabilities of the United States. Assistance in various forms has played a crucial role in Ukraine's defense against the formidable military power of Russia. The counteroffensive strategies employed by NATO have demonstrated how they view any signs of Russian domination as a direct threat to their interests, which has received mixed opinions from the Ukrainian populace. At the same time, NATO's hesitation in providing comprehensive assistance to Ukraine in terms of providing the weapons Ukraine requested, such as battle tanks and fighter jets, or directly involving itself in the conflict by invoking Article 5 again remains a debate (Masters & Merrow, 2023).

While there are some pertinent questions about the willingness of NATO member states over the Ukraine crisis, the organization that stands at probably the biggest test incurred to date has, in one year, played two roles: assisting Ukraine in putting up a decent defense, strengthening its presence and maintaining deterrence, and also comprehensively understanding the catastrophic consequences of the war in Ukraine. Realizing a bigger European conflict will certainly change the dynamics of the world. These two roles are intertwined with each other; without one, the other would be at risk. There are also questions about whether NATO's efforts to ensure Ukraine's defense will undermine its own (Monaghan & Bolstad, 2023). The first time this was discussed goes back to the Madrid summit last year. When NATO allies met at the Madrid summit last year and the Brussels summit

the year before the last, they faced a common theme of concern. At the alliance's lowest point in its relationship with Russia, except at Madrid, the alliance met to decide how they would meet the challenge of Russia not going anywhere anytime soon while 40,000 troops deployed under direct NATO command at the eastern flank. The alliance's primary goal was to reassure its deterrence and defense in the long term as European security was questioned like never before since the formation of the alliance. The summit was centered around two focal points to be effective immediately: first, continuing its immediate measures against Russia, and second, perhaps most importantly, devising a strategic plan for the alliance for the next decade. As NATO looks forward to this year's summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, in July, the case of Ukraine, Eastern Europe's security, the member states' commitment, the US challenge, the Russia problem, and its regional alliance will be among the notable challenges that the alliance will have to take considerable plan about (Monaghan et al., 2022).

#### ***Understanding the Russian Actions in Ukraine***

This paper has, at least on more than one occasion, analyzed how Russia's launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine may be unforeseen for the West. Ukraine seemed well prepared for what was coming its way and expected to go in with a different outcome in mind had the case of their NATO membership been given considerable thought. The aforementioned assertion is supported by a roughly fifteen-minute interview featuring Oleksiy Arestovych, the former Advisor to the Office of the President of Ukraine, which remains accessible on YouTube. During the interview, Arestovych confidently and fluently predicted an impending conflict between Russia and Ukraine without hesitation or indication of doubt. Notably, he specified 2022 as the timeframe for this potential conflict. The present argument posits that the actions undertaken by Russia in the Donbas region were part of its aim to restore the pre-1991 antebellum, which includes Ukraine in its ambit. This belief, though seemingly implausible, has elicited a response from Ukraine, which, upon gaining NATO membership, intended to exert pressure on Russia to relinquish control over the regions it currently holds. The individual proceeded to make a prognostication regarding Russia's potential intentions for an assault, with the capture of Kyiv being the central objective. One of his most noteworthy responses pertained to the unavoidable occurrence of a comprehensive conflict between the two nations in the event of Ukraine's accession into the NATO alliance, a prediction that subsequent events have substantiated. The Russian government has explicitly stated its red line, a well-known fact that does not require extensive knowledge of international relations. The

Ukrainian official provided an eerie probability statistic of 99.9% for the occurrence of war, with the remaining 0.01% contingent upon Ukraine relinquishing its aspiration to join NATO (Jones, 2022).

According to John J. Mearsheimer's thorough assessment of the Ukraine situation, he has consistently attributed fault to the West and maintains a similar perspective on the 2022 crisis. The individual observes that the West bears sole responsibility for their ignorance of the Russian perspective. This is due to the significant impact of the US's implicit assumption that it can convert Ukraine into an ally of the West positioned on the border with Russia. A similar opinion is held by the Nobel Peace Prize winner and perhaps the most famous and infamous American diplomat to this date, Henry Kissinger, who has pointed out the West's tacit assumption that Russia treats Ukraine as a foreign country. He, however, differs in his take on the recent situation from that of Mearsheimer and his own previously held opinion and views Russian actions as validating Ukraine's aspiration to join NATO (Billot, 2023). As per Mearsheimer, he maintains that NATO's expansion towards the East is also miscalculated (The Economist, 2022). Nevertheless, his viewpoint is a rarity among individuals from the Western sphere, as it diverges from the prevailing narratives.

In his analysis, Elan Journo (2022) counters Mearsheimer's argument regarding the character of Vladimir Putin's regime. Journo observes that the Putin regime is increasingly authoritarian and aggressive and that this behavior reinforces its assertion of Russian exceptionalism. Furthermore, he contends that the Putin regime has positioned the West as its adversary while simultaneously neutralizing other US competitors. He references the Russian President's seven-thousand-word essay that views *Ukraine as an artificially constructed nation with a predetermined destiny to reunite with Russia*. This perspective disregards Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity while promoting Russian nationalism (Putin, 2021). The author views this as a crucial element of the President's imperialist aspirations, evident since he assumed power. The assertion that Russia has effectively neutralized all of the United States adversaries is accurate, as evident from the voting conducted in the United Nations pertaining to the conclusion of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. China, India, Iran, and Pakistan abstained from voting. This abstention was notable as an Eastern bloc is indeed emerging as a counterforce to the dominance of the United States (Al Jazeera, 2022). The author astutely notes that the impetus for the Russian invasion can be attributed to a desire for conquest. This pattern has been observed in previous instances of unprovoked aggression by Russia towards Ukraine. Finally, the author observed that Vladimir Putin's feelings of disappointment and profound sadness regarding the dissolution of the

USSR serve as evidence of his imperialistic aspirations. The Ukraine crisis has been subject to divergent interpretations, which are not necessarily incompatible. While some argue that the imperialistic aspirations of a dictator precipitated the crisis, others contend that the expansion of NATO contributed to Russia's concerns and played a role in the crisis.

John J. Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism to explain the actions of Russia has also been subject to critique. Specifically, his view of states as identical entities engaged in a competition to establish regional dominance and actively seeking to eliminate any perceived threats has been questioned. Jonathan Kirshner, a Professor of Political Science and International Studies at Boston College, challenges Mearsheimer's failure to distinguish between a Germany led by Adolf Hitler and one led by Angela Merkel in his 2022 book publication, *An Unwritten Future*. Kirshner also notes Mearsheimer's limited comprehension of the differences between a Russia governed by Mikhail Gorbachev versus that of Joseph Stalin or Vladimir Putin. In addition to Kirshner's observation, Mearsheimer's analysis highlights the conspicuous absence of morality and international law in attributing responsibility for atrocities and inhumane actions, which can only be questioned to the perpetrator. The previous argument gains additional support when considering that defensive measures are frequently deemed more justifiable. However, in light of Ukraine's current circumstances in 2022, it needs both the capability and inclination to initiate any offensive actions against Russia. This prospect remains remote until such time as Ukraine becomes a member of NATO. Russia's position has become increasingly vulnerable in terms of justifying its decision to carry out a military operation in Ukraine, which it refers to as a special operation. Consequently, Mearsheimer's analysis needs to be revised to attribute an equitable amount of responsibility to Russia (Rachman, 2023).

### ***The Denazification Claim of Russia***

Out of all, without a second thought, the most obvious to be discarded as an excuse is Vladimir Putin's denazification claim against Ukraine. This does not mean there is not a rise in Ukraine of far-right fascist ideology, but because of the varying definitions of both contradicting parties as to what Nazism is. For the Russian President, anything that supports the anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine is a Nazi propagandist, while in Ukraine, they take it with pride as a rise of nationalism to celebrate their free country. Nevertheless, something went wrong with Ukraine, and as false as the claim may be, Ukraine has a Nazification problem. The term may be inappropriate, so it is to be substituted for far-right extremist groups. Ukraine did not prosper like it was expected to. The biggest country in

Europe by land size and fifth in population in 1991, and today the seventh, Ukraine struggled for the greater part of its revival (Sutela, 2012). As Allan Ripp (2022) noted, any state that suffers domestically is prone to creating such extremist groups, which is also the case for Ukraine, given that historical events shape perspectives. Ukraine has had its fair share of being on the wrong side during World War II. The assertions made by Vladimir Putin are merely serving as propaganda instruments, lacking substantial evidence. Notably, the Ukrainian President is of Jewish descent and has publicly acknowledged that his family members were victims of World War II. Despite its potential future implications, the denazification claim was deemed irrelevant to the current situation based on the factors that were evaluated.

### ***Russia-US in the 21st Century***

Not long after the beginning of the 21st century, the world underwent an irreversible transformational change, debatable if for good or bad, but the initial cooperation between Russia and the United States of America post-9/11 was a welcome sight. Nevertheless, as evident through the timeline of history, it was short-lived. The decision by President Putin to engage in collaboration with the then-American President, George W. Bush, was a shrewd diplomatic move that effectively communicated Russia's position on the Chechen conflict to the global community. During that period, numerous scholars perceived the fight against terrorism as a potent catalyst for fostering a collaborative association. However, this perception still needs to materialize. The failure of what appeared to be the start of a promising relationship between long-standing adversaries can be attributed solely to President Bush's unilateral approach. When the greatest threat of the 21st century could not bring the two states together, it became easier to predict that nothing ever would, and the events that followed are a testimonial to the fact that the relationship between Russia and the United States of America stands at a crossroad where anything and everything no longer seems impossible. Currently, the two states are situated in opposed positions in a state of conflict, wherein the involvement of NATO has emerged as a matter of considerable importance. As the Russia-Ukraine crisis clocked in on its first anniversary, the uncertainty of where this goes remains as fresh as day one (Toal, 2017).

### ***Narrative of Suspicion: Overly Pessimistic***

The predilection often influences the interpretation of facts that best fit a predisposed narrative and, in the case of a potential opponent, fuels an overly pessimistic attitude, which is inevitably apparent through behaviors.

That is the power of propaganda, the most effective tool currently present in the international system. In order to construct an argument in favor of either Russia or the US, or the broader Western bloc, it is necessary to examine the meticulously crafted narratives that each has developed about the other. It is worth noting that the West has been particularly adept at this practice. When Russian actions are overtly and overly seen as suspicious, when their potential actions are foreseen with an extremely cynical mindset, it exaggerates the very danger that it sets out to mitigate. Likewise, otherwise. The former United States Director of Policy Planning, George F. Kennan, popularly known for the *Long Telegram*, is often cited to explain how the US and Russia view each other in the loop of the *Security Dilemma*. In the case of NATO and Russia, World War I can be juxtaposed with today's reasons why Russia and NATO extensively work on their military buildup to strengthen their capacity against their supposed violent opponent. The question of the most significant concern that has been at the table for a few years, eventually becoming of utmost importance, is where this all goes. President Putin has been vociferous and categorical that he does not view a world without Russia. Suppose the United States of America does not come out of its tacit assumption of being the global peacemaker despite the disastrous decisions it has been taking. In that case, Ukraine will get wrecked, as the expert in this study area, John J. Mearsheimer, aptly put it. It leaves NATO member states with a lot to ponder; the long-standing opinion over the Russian expansion and offensive realism is not of vital importance to the United States of America, as it is not the direct recipient of the actions of Ukraine, nor is it at the forefront of Ukrainian forces, nor does it wish to do so.

The American involvement in the decision-making of the recent crisis is a testament to the observation offered. In March of 2022, a month before the release of the new US policy, the former Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs, Chas Freeman, expressed his confusion over the US actions and stated, quote-unquote, that everything that has been done so far from our end seems to prolong the fight. His statement drew the interest of many as it highlighted the dual objectives pursued by the United States during the conflict, namely to avoid both de-escalation and resolution, instead opting for a policy of intervention. Their committed condemnation of Russian actions, rigid stance, and a clear indication of fighting for Ukraine until the very last Ukrainian through this lens is ironic. It explains why they are not interested in reaching an amicable end to the conflict or opting for full-scale war. The Ukraine crisis spillover has been felt in Europe, and the complete negligence of any hope of optimism among the two conflicting parties, mainly driven by the third party, leads to more

complexities and conflicts, which are already discounted from a civilized discussion (Abelow, 2022).

### ***The Future of NATO-Russia Relations***

For this paper's literature level, the heading of this section is ironically optimistic in its approach to imagining or creating a space where NATO and Russia may have a relationship, to begin with. Since the inception of the organization, it has found itself at the opposite end of any expected crossroads with Russia, mainly because of its very foundation and the way it came out superior after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Over the seven-plus decades of operations, Russia has been right, left, center, and sometimes not on the main radar of the organization's strategic objectives. However, for the swing of the pendulum of history, the NATO of 1949 can be juxtaposed with what it is today to view no significant difference in its main objective. It has to return to the main mission of containing Russia once again, whose militarized foreign policy has shown no signs of flexibility (Fix & Keil, 2022). Russia has, in fact, come out as much more sensible in its approach to dealing with NATO and rebutting the narrative of its militaristic foreign policy. It is important to revisit the high-tension environment between the two just before Russia attacked Ukraine to look out for the future. The Russian stipulations directed towards NATO and the US were straightforward: cease the eastward expansion of NATO and the incorporation of former Soviet states into the alliance, and refrain from deploying armaments and nuclear weaponry beyond their borders to safeguard national security. The resolution of the Ukraine conflict will hold significant importance for any future relationship between the parties involved, as noted by Masters (2022).

### ***Russia Minus Vladimir Putin***

There has been nuanced debate around the role of NATO and the US in the ongoing Ukraine crisis; one of the most contrasting narratives to the popular ones is the fabrication of this all for the regime change in Russia. Washington's immediate response was evidence of this, as Joe Biden was quick to point out *that this man (Russian Head) could not remain in power*. As has been in the news from 2013 onwards, orchestrating their well-sought regime change plan, which always suffered a setback given the increasing popularity of the Kremlin; the US as of now, has observed a void in leadership after Vladimir Putin in Russia as there has not been anyone in the frame the Russian President has been training, if so, it has been kept incredibly well under the carpets. The Ukraine war can be seen as a catalyst to this planning of the US and NATO to expedite Russia's economic

vulnerability and give a setback to its military capabilities as it pictures Russia without Putin. This noteworthy observation of the whole conflict explains the US's determination to prolong the war. However, for NATO-Russia relations to stabilize soon, the condition of Vladimir Putin not being the representative of Russia is based on the assumption that there is no acceptable way of measuring the discourse (Wade, 2022).

The aforementioned argument is corroborated by Joe Lauria (2022), who asserts that the Ukraine conflict could have been averted if the United States had adopted a more earnest stance in its negotiations with Russia. Furthermore, Lauria suggests that resolving the conflict is still feasible, albeit not a priority for the United States. When the current United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, adamantly showed no interest in having a dialogue with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in March of last year and instead urged increased aid for Ukraine, many scholars of the discourse did not let it go unnoticed. The US had the opportunity and the willingness of the aggressive party, as they put it, yet they refused. This was further questioned when \$800 million was announced in aid to Ukraine right on the day when there were news reports regarding Russia and Ukraine planning out a similar 15-point peace plan to that of the Minsk Agreement, the same agreement that the US could have renewed to avoid the crisis, yet it did not. To evaluate this with the possibility of regime change in Moscow or the assumption to weaken Russia before, if not the regime change, anything else comes upon Russia, the US-NATO would want someone of the likes of Mikhail Gorbachev to take over fostering the NATO-Russia relationship. The only problem is that history has had one Mikhail Gorbachev and one Boris Yeltsin, yet Russia of today has managed to challenge NATO. Perhaps NATO has much to consider, including legitimizing its eastward expansion to foster any relationship with Russia. In the process, what happens to the Ukraine question is also to be looked out for. The prospect of a stable relationship between NATO and Russia appears unlikely at present, given Russia's current involvement in Ukraine. The resolution of the Ukraine conflict will likely be a necessary precondition for the establishment of such a relationship.

### **END OF WAR**

There is no question that winners always write history; in the case under discussion, the possible calculation of the NATO-Russia relationship rests heavily on how the war may end. The predictions made by notable scholars are of no hope; as reported, the German research analyst Yohann Michel at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank viewed the current situation as *prolonging for many months*. A similar viewpoint was posited

from the US, where the research programme director of the Russia Studies Programme in Washington commented *on years of fighting* (Gould et al., 2023). While there is no question that Russia has faced a formidable opponent, much to its surprise, it is also true that the post-war world will define the new order; to expect any antebellum will not be the case. The endurance of Russia's economic prowess relative to the unity of the Western nations remains to be seen, and it is uncertain which direction NATO will take in response. Russia's strategy to undermine Ukraine's NATO membership prospects by infiltrating the country appears to be effective and will continue to be so as long as the conflict persists. If the Ukrainian military's ability to engage in combat is surpassed, Ukraine will probably experience significant destruction, as it has previously. According to Pazzanese's (2023) report in the *Harvard Gazette*, Ukraine has experienced a significant deterioration in its infrastructure, with 40% now in disrepair. Additionally, the country's GDP has decreased by 33%. It is worth noting that Russia has also faced similar challenges. This raises concerns regarding NATO's role, particularly its long-standing open-door policy, which may now be scrutinized as it hasn't managed to include NATO despite the requirement today. Therefore, regardless of the war's outcome, NATO's expansion to the East and its policy of open doors will be among the discussion topics in the coming time. The establishment of a stable relationship between NATO and Russia is contingent upon one party exerting greater influence over the other. This necessitates that for both conflicting parties to achieve a harmonious future, one must endure significant hardship in this conflict. Specifically, either Russia must relinquish its status as a Great Power or NATO must forfeit the trust of its allied member states. However, it is unequivocal that Ukraine will not fare any better amidst this turmoil.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Russia's actions in Ukraine could have been avoided through serious diplomatic efforts. A similar could have been initiated right after Russia attacked Ukraine.
- NATO has effectively served as a unifying force in response to the aggressive actions of Russia, thereby eliminating prior criticisms of the organization.
- As proven through historical events, NATO's expansion has always met unfriendly responses from Russia that, at times, explain the cause for Russian actions besides Vladimir Putin's alleged imperialist ambitions.
- Russia's denazification claims of Ukraine are not backed by any

evidence, though there are rising nationalist groups in Ukraine.

- The implementation of sanctions by the US and Western nations has not resulted in the isolation of Russia. The latter has received backing from major countries, including China and India.
- The US stands apart from most NATO member states in its position regarding negotiations with Russia.
- Russia will not tolerate any progress over the matter of Ukraine joining NATO.
- Any indication of direct intervention by NATO in the ongoing conflict may incite the potential for a full-scale war between Russia and the West.
- NATO has been identified as the primary and most significant participant in the ongoing Ukraine crisis. The inclusion of Finland and Sweden into the alliance is evidence of its stability following the Ukraine crisis.
- To the surprise of Russia, Ukraine has come out as a formidable force against aggression, and the West, despite facing the worst crisis, has come out stronger against Russia.
- NATO's 2023 Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, is important to see where NATO's Ukraine commitment is headed. NATO's assurance of the growing impatience of Ukraine and to avoid aggression from Russia will be a key deciding point in the war this year.
- The possibility of achieving significant stability in the NATO-Russia relationship appears unlikely.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Engaging in dialogue with the Kremlin, led by Germany, France, and Turkey, may yield some progress toward achieving a swift end to the fighting. The trio can potentially exert significant influence in facilitating a mutually agreeable resolution between Ukraine and Russia, wherein both parties must make concessions and compromises (Burrows & Manning, 2023).
- China's diplomatic ties with Europe and Russia may prove beneficial, as China has already offered assistance in resolving the conflict through its comprehensive 12-point plan (Al Jazeera, 2023).
- NATO may enable Ukraine to negotiate with Russia regarding the latter's insistence on establishing demilitarized buffer zones in exchange for Russia withdrawing its forces and restoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Reuters, 2023).
- The country of Ukraine is the aggrieved party in this particular

instance, and it is recommended that any decisions regarding negotiations be made autonomously by the government of Kyiv (Pifer, 2022).

- Russia's categorical warning of the US and NATO's increasing support of Ukraine stands between the hope for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. NATO's temporary withdrawal of assistance can be attributed to a gesture of goodwill (Teslova & Kenny, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Evidence suggests that during the initial NATO expansion towards the East in 1999, which saw the inclusion of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic as member states, numerous scholars within the field of international relations perceived this as a potentially hostile action towards Russia. The Russia of that particular period did not demonstrate favorable economic circumstances nor an ideal state of affairs; however, it was not predetermined to remain in such a condition, and that turned out to be true in the time that followed. Russia has never regarded Ukraine as a foreign country, and it is unlikely to do so in the future. Fast forward to the current crisis, if Ukraine stops fighting today, there will be no Ukraine, but the US and Russia will be. In the name of collateral damage, we have seen the 21st century deem many countries as fit for the role. Without discounting Ukraine's role in the crisis, it can be said that it is merely in the conflict due to its strategic location that is of interest to Russia and the West. Ukraine's efforts to align itself with the Western bloc have yet to make substantial headway, and any progress made has been met with swift and effective responses from Russia. NATO's celebration of its successes in the 21st century was short-lived due to a growing number of challenges the organization had to address. The ongoing Ukraine conflict represents one of the biggest challenges, if not the biggest, that NATO has faced since its establishment. The expansion of NATO towards the East has caused concern for Russia, as evidenced by the events of the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the current full-scale invasion of the country. The strategy of the West and the US to establish Ukraine as a Western bulwark situated at the borders of Russia has yet to yield the desired outcome. However, it appears sufficient to persuade Vladimir Putin to initiate an attack on Ukraine. Despite assertions to the contrary, the Western nations, particularly the United States, reacted in a manner that suggests they had anticipated the situation. The consistent provision of aid has served as evidence of the commitment to reducing Russia's economic capacity to sustain a prolonged conflict. It has been

effectively administered in Ukraine to maintain a sturdy defense. Nevertheless, the United States reluctance to implement a comprehensive strategy for integrating Ukraine into NATO is evident. As Ukraine's tolerance wanes, the forthcoming NATO 2023 Summit assumes critical significance for the organization to articulate a new strategic framework reflecting its fundamental interests in the face of the most significant crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The integral role of NATO in the culmination of the crisis, the ongoing situation, and future developments remain a subject of academic interest. The NATO discourse remains a prominent topic of inquiry in the ongoing Ukraine conflict.

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