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M.A International Relations: International Studies

Master's Thesis

by

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**Q:TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE GRADUAL DETERIORATION IN NATO-RUSSIA
RELATIONS BETWEEN 1991-2014 CAUSALLY RELATED TO NATO'S
EXPANSION IN EASTERN-EUROPE?**

This thesis is submitted as part of the programme requirement for the degree of MA in International Relations: International Studies from Leiden University. I declare that it is the product of my own work beyond the supervision I have received.

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ABSTRACT

Recent challenges in the relationship between NATO and Russia have led to suspension of political and military cooperation. This thesis assesses the causal relationship between the gradual deterioration of relations and NATO's expansionism to Eastern Europe. This research uses process tracing of key events and developments to draw a historical pattern of the transformation in the relationship since the ending of the Cold War up until the Ukraine Crisis of 2014. To analyse the relation, this work uses a hybrid model of neorealist and social constructivist theories to understand power relations and motivations that underlie the developments.

Overall, NATO's eastward-enlargement to include former Soviet republics in its membership and its aspirations of creating a European-wide anti-ballistic missile defence system are identified as the main components that fuelled the deterioration in relations with Russia. Responding from a sense of insecurity, Russia has grown more assertive in regional politics to ensure its national interests. Russia has been able to project power in regional politics in aims of regaining its former power status. Russia's increasingly confrontational stance has eventually manifested in military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine. The current suspension of relations does not constitute a structural new Cold War, but nevertheless is the product of an overall deterioration of relations.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe
EU	European Union
GBI	Ground-based Interceptors
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
MAP	NATO Membership Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NRF	NATO Response Force
PAA	Phased Adaptive Approach for European Missile Defence
PFP	NATO Partnership for Peace Program
PJC	NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council
THAAD	Theatre or Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence
US/USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CHRONOLOGY

Period	Reference events
November 1990	Signing of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty
December 1991	Dissolution of the USSR and the ending of the Cold War
January 1994	NATO Brussels Summit and announcement of willingness to expand
June 1994	Russia joins NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme
May 1997	Signing of NATO-Russia Founding Act Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security
July 1997	NATO decision to formally proceed with eastward enlargement
February 1998	Kosovo War starts
March 1999	Operation Allied Force: NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland granted NATO membership
November 1999	Signing of the Adapted CFE Treaty in Istanbul
September 2001	Terrorist attacks on the US and normalisation of NATO-Russia relations
May 2002	Creation of NATO-Russia Council
June 2002	US withdrawal from ABM Treaty

November 2002	NATO Prague Summit and aggravation of tensions with Russia over invitation for former Soviet Republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia
November 2003	Rose Revolution in Georgia
December 2004	Orange Revolution in Ukraine
June 2004	NATO Istanbul Summit and granting of membership to Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia
December 2004	Russia joins NATO Operation Active Endeavour in fight against terrorism
October 2005	Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan NATO announces development of Active Layered Theatre BMD
January 2006	Russian shutdown of energy supplies to Ukraine
November 2006	Riga Summit: Adoption of a new “functional security” vision for NATO
April 2007	‘Third site’ plans: placement of BMD elements in Poland and Czech Republic Russian objection to BMD installation and cyber attacks against Estonia
July 2007	Russia declares suspension of its participation from the CFE Treaty

August 2007	Russia adopts a seven-year \$200 billion rearmament plan
September 2007	Munich Security Conference and strong opposition by Russia towards NATO expansionism
November 2008	Barack Obama elected as the 44th President of the USA
April 2008	NATO Bucharest Summit and announcement of future memberships of Georgia and Ukraine
August 2008	Russo-Georgia War
May 2009	Expulsion of Russian diplomats accused of espionage by NATO
April 2009	Albania and Croatia granted NATO membership
January 2009	Russia cuts off natural gas supplies to Ukraine
February 2010	Romania announced a deal with the US for an anti-missile defence system
September 2010	First official NRC meeting since the resetting of relations in the aftermath of Georgian War
May 2012	Vladimir Putin elected as the new Russian President
November 2013	President Yanukovich refuses to sign the Association Agreement with the EU & Eruption of 'Maidan' protests in Ukraine
February 2014	Appearance of Russian forces in Crimea

- March 2014 Russian annexation of Crimean Peninsula,
Imposing of severe international sanctions on Russia
- October 2014 Putin addresses in Valdai Club calling for Russia to replace the
US' 'power vertical' with a 'democratic multi-polarity'
- April 2014 NATO unilaterally suspends practical cooperation with Russia
- September 2014 NATO Wales Summit & Creation of Rapid Reaction Force
- March 2015 Russia completely halts participation in the CFE Treaty

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the Ukraine Crisis, the relationship between NATO and Russia has been severely damaged. Russia's bellicosity in eastern Ukraine and military intervention in Crimea has raised concerns over Russia's political and military assertiveness. Most significantly, NATO's unilateral suspension of all cooperations with Russia in the aftermath of this crisis led to an unprecedented level of distress. This rise in tension has led many scholars and pundits to define the current state of affairs in the relationship with NATO as a 'new' Cold War.

However, Russia's annexation of the Crimea does not appear to constitute the prompt genesis of a new era, or a Cold War, in relations with NATO. In fact the crisis is the culmination of prior declining relations since the end of the Cold War. Ever since, Russia and NATO have failed to develop a lasting political partnership or military cooperation. Due to historical differences and the conditions set by the new security agenda of the post-Cold War era, the relationship increasingly has become deconstructive and decaying. Periodic action-reaction case scenarios define NATO-Russia relations where behaviour is shaped in response to actions by the other side,

This thesis aims to study the motivations for this gradual deterioration in relations in the post-Cold War era. This research analyses the extent to which NATO's expansionist policies shaped Russia's assertive and confrontational stance in regional politics. NATO's eastward enlargement and its ambition to construct an Alliance-wide anti-ballistic missile defence system has raised serious concerns on

Russia's part. In fear of being geographically enclaved by NATO, Russia has grown more aggressive in ensuring its national interest and security. In response, Russia has become more assertive and coercive in regional politics. To address its worries, both in Ukraine and Georgia, Russia has demonstrated its willingness to resort to military means.

This thesis carries out in-depth research to comprehend the recent developments and the current status quo. Rather than judging actions, a critical analysis requires the unraveling of motivations and aspirations that underlie the relations between two rivals. This research is relevant in filling a gap in existing literature for its thorough analysis that takes into consideration the origins of causal relationship between NATO and Russia. The majority of the literature on this topic either overemphasises the historical relationship between the adversaries, overlooking contemporary dynamics, or predominantly focuses on contemporary relations ignoring how history has shaped vice-versa representations all together. Consequently both perspectives fall short and share the inadequacy of being too narrow in scope. This thesis addresses that shortcoming by providing both a historical analysis of the deterioration in NATO-Russia relations and by taking into consideration more contemporary events and developments.

In answering *to what extent the deterioration in relationship between NATO and Russia is causally related to NATO's expansionist policies in Eastern Europe*, this research utilises the theoretical frameworks of realism and social constructivism. The analysis utilises both theories in a hybrid model to balance weaknesses that are idiosyncratic to both theories independently. Realism is useful in understanding

power relations between actors and organisations. Within the context of this thesis, realism provides insight into NATO-Russia relations and the behaviour that is shaped by concepts such as balance of power and threat perceptions. On the other hand, social constructivism is vital to understanding the origins of motivations underlying actions. Social constructivism is useful in revealing patterns of behaviour for actors that are related to culture, norms and identity. Combining these two theories offers a more comprehensive approach than using either one individually. This hybrid approach provides a deeper analysis of how the relationship evolved over time and as a result of a certain course of events.

In terms of methodology, process tracing based on qualitative grounds is selected to validate theoretical productions and hypothesis. Due to its adequateness of going beyond simple identification of correlations between independent variables and outcomes (Beach et al, 2013), process tracing offers the most suitable method to assess the causal relationship between NATO's expansionist policy culture and the increase in Russia's assertiveness. To complement this research method, documentary analysis is also applied to use existing literature and arguments to compare and contrast the findings of this research. This research also uses primary sources to test the validity and reliability of the findings, since these are two 'indispensable' (Silverman, 2005) notions in carrying out research of qualitative nature.

This thesis is organised in four main chapters. The first chapter assesses the contribution of theoretical perspectives of social constructivism and realism. The chapter draws both theories and addresses their usefulness in understanding the

complex relationship between NATO and Russia. Following the theoretical framework layout, subsequent paragraphs contain a literature review to demonstrate existing arguments on this topic and demonstrate their insufficiency. In the second chapter, developments that have taken place in Russia-NATO relations during the post-Cold War era are studied to assess the evolution of the relationship. NATO's expansionist policies as displayed by its eastward enlargement process and the creation of a European-wide BMD are examined against the accusation that the deterioration of relations can be attributed to these developments. Dynamics that have motivated Russia's regional expansionism between 2008 and 2014 are then critically engaged in the last chapter to seek a plausible answer to the research question.

The conclusion aspires to draw a comprehensive and descriptive pattern in the causal relationship between NATO's expansionism and Russia's increasing assertiveness. Deviating from popular discourse on Russia as an allegedly irrational and confrontational actor and on the emergence of a new Cold War, this thesis is expected to produce an alternative outcome. Most likely, mutual distrust and skepticism between NATO and Russia will prove to have caused the decay in political and military cooperation. The current relationship, although troublesome, most likely does not constitute an entirely new Cold War.

CHAPTER I

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1.1 Theoretical Framework:

Heeding to Waltz's argument that no single theory alone is capable of producing explanations to everything (Waltz, 1990:30), this thesis applies and utilises multiple theories. Specifically in accordance with Ratti's (2006, 2009, 2013) critical assessments of NATO-Russia relations, two theoretical frameworks of neorealism and social constructivism are selected for this purpose. Contrasting in their assessment of incidents and nature of looking at issues, neorealist and constructivist schools of thoughts provide us with a distinctive and complementary analysis of NATO-Russia relations.

1.1.1 Neorealism

In IR, neorealism is a much used perspective in analysing Russia-Atlantic relations in the post-Cold War era. As a revision of a fundamental International Relations theory of realism, neorealism helps us understand the power relations between agents and structures within a given system (Collins, 2013:14-26 [Waltz, 1979]). In this thesis, neorealism is selected for its concepts of balancing of power and threat alongside its overall focus on inter-state relations and alliance formation. Waltz (1990) differentiates neorealism from traditional realism in certain aspects namely the causal directions, the comprehension of power and the interacting units that they engage with. Neorealist theory bears distinction from the traditional realist way of addressing the world as one of interacting states, by focusing on the interaction

among states and alliances by distinguishing between structural and unit-level causes and effects (Waltz, 1990:30-36).

Neorealist approach is utilised in this research to comprehend the power relations between NATO and Russia. Within this context, the balance of power/threat concept helps us comprehend Russia's aspirations to rise as an assertive actor in the region. Taking into consideration the claim that where one actor increases its power, the other acts to balance that power in order to achieve equilibrium in the given system (Kegley & Wittkopf, 2005), developments and consequential countermeasures implemented by both actors can be better understood. In the end, as Waltz (1990) argues, balance of power is not formed due to states' desire for balance, since the ultimate concern of states is the sense of security, not power. This claim helps us understand Moscow's firm stance on various incidents and policies by using their national interest and security as justifications for their actions. Having the central argument that when alliances are formed, states either seek to bandwagon with the threat or ally in opposition to balance it, Walt's (1985, 1987) balance of threat theory fits in the NATO-Russia scenario in explaining the causal interactions between both sides. NATO's eastward expansion and Russia's struggle to regain the former-Soviet areas of influence can be categorised as balancing of power and threat in Eastern European.

1.1.2. Social Constructivism

Focusing mostly on the notion of power, realism disregards the broader aspects of relations such as the crucial role of notions of identity and culture. Social constructivism compensates this shortcoming by complementing the neorealist

approach by helping to analyse and comprehend deeper meanings and motivations underlying Nato-Russia interaction. Finding value in diverse materials and forging links where none usually seems possible (Onuf, 2013:3), social constructivism is quite distinctive from realism and relatively essential for carrying out this research. Constructivism explains how “the human world is not simply given” but “‘constructed’ through the actions of the actors themselves” (Kratochwil, 2001:17) by emphasising the significance of ideas, identify and interactions in the international system.

Through social constructivist approach, NATO’s and Russia’s current security perceptions can be understood by assessing historical, political and cultural factors which ‘influence the actions of agents’ with one another in the given environment (Ratti, 2006: 91). These social constructivist notions of culture, identity and norms are essential in assessing NATO and comprehending the course of actions the Alliance has taken in the vacuum of vision it experienced in the post-Cold War era. Through the constructivist lens, NATO is viewed as being more than just a military defence organisation, but a ‘security community’ with essential identity and history that can be understood as one of cultural unison and mutually shared democratic values among its members and allied states (Williams et al. 2000:367). In line with this statement, the recruitment of Eastern European states by NATO is viewed as a consequence of a socialisation and opting to integrate with the world community, rather than seeking protection against external military threats, potentially from Russia as the realist argument claims. Additionally, social constructivist theory is utilised for its explanation of developments that go beyond the conventional analysis of cause and effect scenarios between NATO and Russia. For instance, in the perspective of this theory, both sides are to blame for the unresolved matters in

addition to the overall complexity of the relationship. Additionally, state of affairs such as Russia's refusal of accepting Western values, and the West's take on Russia as a junior partner in the security field support this argument.

1.2 Literature Review

As aforementioned, the ever-complex relationship between NATO and Russia has reached a new low with the Ukrainian Crisis in early last year and the subsequent annexation of Crimea into the Russian Federation. This land grab caused a dilemma between various IR scholars on the question of the rise of Russia as a potential security threat to the North Atlantic Alliance. Myriad claims have been made on the so-called "Russian aggression" and the emergence of a 'new' Cold War. The purpose of this review is to identify and evaluate key arguments made on the developments that have taken place between NATO and Russia in the post-Cold War era to determine a gap in the literature.

In a recent article produced by Kropatcheva (2015), the Ukraine Crisis is portrayed as a European crisis unlike any other past ones. More specifically, she emphasises that the uniqueness of this crisis is due to its nature of consisting a high potential of "remaking of the European security order," (Kropatcheva, 2015:16). Bearing in mind the extensive counter-measures taken by the NATO especially in fear of experiencing a similar scenario in its eastern members and ally countries, such "remaking" can already be seen to be in motion. Alternatively, a handful of scholars (Cohen, 2014; Kroenig, 2015; Kropatcheva, 2015) seem to acknowledge that the experiences of today resemble the deterrence and containment policies of the past

century. As a result of Russia's re-emergence as a geopolitical rival to NATO, uncompromising realist scholars concur that we have entered a new Cold War. Other scholars (Sakwa, 2008; Smith, 2010; Heisbourg, 2015; Monaghan, 2015) challenge this assumption by asserting that the incidents and crises that took place in the recent past are part of a wider periodically deterioration of NATO-Russia relations as observed throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. By the same token, these scholars contend that terming the deteriorations of Russia-Atlantic relations as re-kindling of a New Cold War is not fitting and, in fact, could damage the relationship further. On this subject, realist scholars such as Ditrych (2014) and Kfir (2015) seem to reject the notion of a new Cold War and agree that the ongoing developments are more likely to end up in escalation of tensions, or a 'Cold Peace'.

When the relationship is observed from a broader, constructivist aspect, as emphasised by Antonenko (2009), Smith (2010) and Monaghan (2015), what is seen is a persistent distinction of ideas and values between NATO and Russia. Each side possesses its own definition of the causes, nature, location and scale of issues, incidents and crises, alongside their very own form of management. This absence of mutual political will and common ground, added to the historical rivalry that dominated the twentieth-century, and eventually led to an aggressive stand-off on certain occasions and policy areas creating a sequence of action-reactions. Analysis of Ditrych (2014) indicates that the fundamental gap which can be grasped as the main cause of the gradual deterioration of relations over time is rooted in the stance of the West towards Russia as a great power during the 1990s in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Additionally, he claims that Russia's resistance to

this state of affairs under a stable and decisive leader; Vladimir Putin is a direct cause of this ignorance and underestimation of its potential.

Former US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul (2014) comments in a likely manner that the West took advantage of a 'beaten' Russia in the post-Cold War era instead of integrating it into global system. On the same topic, Sakwa (2008) adds that the current international system lacks the required mechanism for integrating all rising great powers, not limited to Russia. According to Smith (2010), NATO insistence to persuade Russia into complying with Western understanding of core values and concepts, and Russia's failure to engage with Western perspectives are what prevented a substantial and enduring partnership from occurring. Taking this into consideration, Booth (et al. 2002) goes as far as to claim that this absence of normative mechanism is due to the broad disruption in world affairs that is accompanied by various other developments and incidents, and generated what they call as the most important problem of our era: integrating Russia into an expanded global consensus.

The realist argument states that Russia under Putin's leadership has grown more assertive and confrontational in the global arena as a result of its failing to integrate into the international system and aspirations of proving itself as a world power. Kroenig (2015) seems to confirm that Russia's increasing capabilities in both military and diplomacy, and consequent ambition of international power projection, have damaged the enduring stability in the Euro-Atlantic community. As analysed by Ditarych (2014), the White House regards Russia as a regional power, not a world power. Such threatening posture is not out of strength however, but due to weakness

and the ambition to prove otherwise through adopting the “deeply rooted ‘diagram’ of world politics that offence is the best defence,” (Ditrych, 2014:87).

Sakwa (2008) comments similarly that Russia’s actions are quite characteristic of a traditional power, and Kennedy (2007) points out that in a scenario where a traditional power elite suffers defeat and humiliation, it aims to recover its lost assets, authority and the capability to intimidate others. Given these points, the overall objective of Putin’s Russia has been primarily the sustaining of domestic power, followed by the re-establishment of Russia as a great power in the international arena. Apropos of these goals, Smith (2010) lays out the feature of this style of rule by Putin as the power vertical which is based on the centralisation of control with an authoritarian rule in order to sustain and maintain a stable and decisive configuration of power-projection.

As well as the implications on the Russian side of relations, Western behaviour, both unilaterally and under the umbrella of NATO, must be assessed for a comprehensive analysis. The consensus is that, there is another side of the coin to the re-emergence of the Russian aggression and consequent threat it poses: NATO and the Western allies have pushed Russia into a corner and initiated the sequences that eventually led to Russia’s confrontational and assertive posture. In addition to the active open-door policy on enlargement and recruiting former-Soviet bloc countries into its membership, the ambitions of creating an anti-ballistic missile defence (BMD) system in Eastern Europe under command and control of NATO is regarded as one of the main causes that augmented the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. In his research on the missile defence in Europe and its impact on

relations with Russia, Wilkening (2012) claims that both Bush's and Obama's common ambition to set up ballistic missile defence systems in Europe induced anxiety and concerns from Russia's side. Furthermore, as laid out by Smith (2010), NATO member states' reluctance towards a joint BMD with Kremlin was taken as an indication that the alleged BMD construction in Europe was targeting Russia. Moreover, Cohen (2014) asserts that the extensive expansion of NATO into former Warsaw Pact countries have led to geographical engulfment of Russia.

Overall, on the topic of deterioration of NATO-Russia relations and the speculations on the emergence of a new Cold War, myriad claims and observations from both realist and social constructivist perspectives have been made. The literature demonstrates an overall consensus on the increasing assertiveness and confrontational approach of Russia in international politics. However, none of the arguments made in these literatures seem to focus on the evolution of the relationship from its early stages to the current status quo. The questions of 'how' and 'why' are often not asked, and the status quo is taken as granted in analysing developments and crises where the theoretical frameworks often falling short.

Constructivist arguments seem to focus solely on the historical aspects of the relationship, whereas the realist arguments primarily focus on power and regional influence aspirations. In order to study the evolution of a causal Russia-NATO relationship, a hybrid model consisting of neorealist and constructivist theoretical perspective is therefore required to analyse the course of events with their meanings and seek an answer to the perceived genesis of a new Cold War. This thesis will

continue by analysing developments from this hybrid framework that draws from both neorealist and constructivist perspectives to offer a more comprehensive analysis.

CHAPTER II

Evolution of NATO-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

NATO-Russia relations in the post-Cold War era can be defined as a complex cause and effect relationship with periodical crises and persistent mistrust. This chapter examines this series of interactions identifying and assessing the main reasons for the deterioration that has come to characterise the relationship. Process tracing method helps us understand the causes and repercussions of these interactions in the causal relationship between NATO and Russia. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how developments have materialised historically over the course of twenty-five years.

Primarily, the first section focuses on the overall Russia-NATO relations in the post Cold War era, marking significant milestones that effected the relations. The second section takes into account the main causes of the deterioration of relations from 2003 onwards, as identified as NATO's eastward enlargement and aspirations of creating a BMD within Eastern Europe. In the final section, linking to the developments studied in the previous sections, the Ukrainian Crisis and consequent Russian annexation of Crimea are assessed in detail to draw a historical process tracing analysis of how the relationship has evolved from open windows of opportunity, to closed doors.

2.1 Overview of post-Cold War Russia-Atlantic relations

At the end of the Cold War, a new international order had been created under the leadership of the world's only remaining superpower, the US. Comparatively, Russia had suffered greatly in geopolitical, social and economic aspects in addition to losing its superpower status. Richards (2015) argues that what Russia envisioned was to become part of an expanded Europe. After all, the fall of Soviet Union was greeted with much hope and consent throughout Russia, as well as the Western world. Consensus is that (Kennedy, 2007; Sakwa, 2008; Karagiannis, 2014; McFaul, 2014; Heisbourg, 2015) the Western states failed to integrate Russia into the global system. Instead, Russia was ridiculed as a defeated adversary and was denied integration into this new system.

By contrast, diplomacy was still sustained by NATO and short-term attempts were made to engage Moscow, as demonstrated by initiatives such as Russia's inclusion in NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme (PFP) in 1994, opening doors to signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 and subsequent formation of the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). Notwithstanding these efforts, cooperation ultimately failed to prevent temporal disputes and conflicts. Essentially, the announcement of willingness to enlarge the Alliance at the 1994 Brussels Summit was not well taken by Russia, and tensions rose to an ultimate high when the Alliance started the Kosovo-bombing campaign in Yugoslavia (1999).

The Kosovo crisis 'lies at the confluence of the key tensions in post-Cold War Russian Atlantic dealing' (Pouliot, 2010: 195), and it has been used as a precedent by Russia in its interventions in South Ossetia (2008) and Crimea (2014). An unprecedented brinkmanship had taken place between Russia and NATO on the

Kosovo intervention, which almost led to a military standoff when Russian troops took over Pristina Airport (1999) in an attempt to gain leverage to prevent NATO troops from further advancement. Arguably, the most notable significance of the Kosovo crisis was that, despite reaching a peaceful settlement, concerns over NATO's expansionist policies revealed a related Russian sense of insecurity. NATO's new ambition of carrying out out-of-area operations as witnessed in the Kosovo War caused Russia to grow sceptical and fearful over future action that would place Russia on the receiving end.

During this time of heat, terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 initiated a temporal normalisation of relations between NATO and Russia. Both sides perceived these attacks as clear signs of the transformation of rules of the international security regime. This significant improvement in relationship was crowned with the creation of NRC with aim to serve as 'a mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and action in areas of common interest' (Ratti, 2013: 143), on more equal terms than the previous PJC. This development was in line with European Union's ambition under Germany's leadership to engage with Russia to encourage the rule of law and further democratisation to support Russia's integration into the global economy (Freudenstein, 2014: 226).

Mutual substantial measures and capabilities such as a common comprehensive action plan on terrorism, military interoperability, civil emergencies, issue of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) were initiated in the area of security which complimented this temporary Russia-Atlantic cooperation. However, all efforts went astray after various events such as the US announcement of withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 2002, failure of ratification

of Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) by former Soviet bloc states, and lastly the NATO double enlargement process in 2003. These measures were not taken as signs of goodwill by Kremlin. What is more is that conspicuous Western support for colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan between 2003 and 2005 caused further humility and outrage in Moscow who perceived it as Western attempt to break the sphere of influence of Russia in the former Soviet Republics.

From 2006 onwards, NATO-Russia relations continued on the same path of occasional power struggles (Pouliot, 2010: 221). As political and economical stabilisation of the country was underway, Sakwa (2008: 251) argues that Russia transformed itself into a revisionist power with a mindset of reversing the developments of the past twenty years (Freudenstein, 2014: 227). Alternately, Russia's demonstrated its growing assertiveness and confrontational stance in regional politics on a number of occasions under Putin's leadership (cyber attacks on Estonia in 2007, cutting off of gas supplies to Ukraine, Poland and Czech Republic [2009]).

In addition to these early demonstrations of power projection, an adoption of a two-hundred-billion-dollar rearmament plan in 2007 over a course of seven years indicated a new self-confidence in the suit of arms-building (Sakwa, 2008: 251). In the meantime, no solid measures were taken by the Alliance to address Russia's new revisionist status, instead it was responded by a total neglecting and underestimation. Notwithstanding, NATO continued its open door policy and announced the future memberships of Georgia and Ukraine at its 2008 Bucharest Summit (Forsberg et al. 2015: 49). Kremlin perceived further eastward expansion of

NATO as intent to geographically enclave Russia. Calling this engulfment by NATO member states as a 'direct threat' to Russia, Putin responded in a confrontational way and declared that 'necessary measures would be taken' in the event of granting membership to either of these former Soviet Republics (Forsberg et al. 2015: 49-50). Six months later, Russia mobilised troops invading South Ossetia and the Russia-Georgian War took place.

2.2 NATO enlargement policy and Russia

The Russo-Georgia War in the summer of 2008 was proof that NATO's eastward enlargement had caused serious implications in Russia-Atlantic relations. Essentially, the relationship in its early years back in 90s was set upon an assurance by NATO not to extend its reach into former Soviet Union Republics. Russia brought this up a number of times, each time being reassured by the Alliance. By a surprising move, a decision to expand the Alliance towards Eastern Europe was taken at the organisation's Madrid Summit in 1997. Outcome of the summit declared that new states including former Soviet Republics were to be included in the Alliance. In the following years after this decision, countries in Eastern Europe, including former Eastern-bloc states in the Baltic region were granted NATO memberships. NATO's ambition of further eastward expansion into regions including countries bordering Russia was not taken well by the Kremlin.

Aspiring future NATO-membership of Ukraine and Georgia, albeit not providing them with a Membership Action Plan (MAP), was a key milestone in the Russia-NATO

relations. This expansionist policy of NATO made Moscow concerned since the recruitment of countries in the Caucasus region meant the geographical enclaving of Russia by NATO with serious repercussions on the state's national security interests and potentially threatening Moscow's access to open seas. Russian policy-makers were convinced of a direct correlation between NATO's expansion and the retreat of Russia's influence in the region (Braun, 2008:1 [Pouliot, 2010: 218]). Furthermore, NATO military build-up on its doorsteps was also branded as an offensive military threat towards Russia.

In addition to concerns over NATO's actions, Baltic states' unconcerned attitudes towards Russia's insistence on them to sign and ratify the CFE treaty as a notion of reassurance increased the fears of being targeted. Russia's response to these developments and the overall NATO advancement in the region was firm. Since their announcement of future memberships, both Georgia and Ukraine experienced a Russian retribution in form of military interventions, one of which has been depicted as a 'war'. Therefore it can be argued that there is a link between NATO's further expansion into the former Soviet sphere of influence, and Russian military intervention in these countries. These developments demonstrate, that a new, revisionist Russia was decisive in preventing national humiliation and opposing regional Western primacy when facing threats to Russia's national interest and security.

2.3 Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence system

Alongside the double enlargement policy of NATO, initially unilateral US attempts at establishing a BMD on the European soil as part of its own missile defence system has long caused division between Russia and the West (Weitz, 2010: 101). As an idea originally dating back to 1970s, plans to create a BMD were initiated in 2002 following the Bush Administration's decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty to pave way towards developing hit-to-kill interceptors (Patriot missiles), THAADs, and large, three-stage GBIs. This ambition is accounted for being one of early causes that made Moscow sceptic of Western actions (Wilkening, 2012: 32). Along with the 2007 decision by the US to install a third site of its ground-based missile defence elements in Poland and Czech Republic, Moscow's concerns were verified and relations further damaged. This serious downturn in NATO-Russia relations took a brief relief when the newly elected Obama Administration cancelled the third site deployments in early 2009 only to be risen again when a new European Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA) was announced in 2011.

On various occasions, NATO officials have declared that neither the previous nor the current planned missile defence system, European PAA, are built against Russia. Instead, repeated claims were made on the original rationale behind these ambitions as being precautionary measures being taken against a future nuclear-armed Iran and North Korea. Regardless of these assurances and in light of past disappointments, Russia's worries were not subsided. What Russia suspected was possible neutralisation of its strategic nuclear deterrence. In 2008, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, stated that in terms of evaluating threats from abroad, 'what matters to Moscow in such cases is potential, not intentions,' (Lavrov, 2008),

illustrating Russia's concern over the survival of its strategic deterrence. Putin personally declared that operationalisation of a BMD system in Central Europe meant the neutralisation of the Russian nuclear force (Speech at Munich Conference, 10 Feb., 2007).

The failure of a proposal made by Moscow to create a joint BMD system with shared command and control among NATO and Russia was taken as a further sign of malevolence. Additionally, possible conversion of originally defensive ground-based interceptors into offensive missiles posed a direct and great threat to Russian cities within close vicinity (Wilkening, 2012:32). In sum, NATO's ambitions of creating a BMD system within Europe crucially effected the already problematic relations with Russia. Furthermore, together with NATO's double enlargement policy towards Eastern Europe, the issue of BMD system supplemented gradual deteriorations of relations between NATO and Russia. Eventually, growing mutual mistrust and scepticism may have instigated Russia to take more radical and assertive actions, ultimately escalating to degree of resorting to military force as experienced first in Georgia in 2008 and more recently in Ukraine in 2014.

2.4 Ukraine Crisis and Annexation of Crimea

As a result of gradual deterioration in relations and growing mistrust and scepticism, Russia sought a more assertive and confrontational stance in regional politics in the new decade of the twenty-first century. Assuming NATO intentions as offensive and targeted against their national interest and security, Russia started taking increasingly aggressive measures to not only maintain their regional status but also regain influence over former Soviet spheres of influence. Russia's role in

destabilisation of Ukraine and military invasion in Crimea which ultimately resulted in annexation of the peninsula can be understood within this context. This swift, non-violent land-grab, as Karagiannis emphasises (2014: 408), was an unprecedented event in the history of post-Cold War Europe for revealing the unconventional and unrestricted 'hybrid' warfare that the Russian military was prepared to carry out. This situation raised concerns among other countries, particularly within NATO member states located within the close proximity of Russia.

Equally significant was the diplomatic handling of situation by the Kremlin. Initial denial by Moscow of any association with the 'little green men,' — masked unmarked militia carrying Russian arms — only to admit their identity of belonging to Russia's Black Sea fleet was a crucially strategic move. Unexpectedly appearing, these Russian militias seized control of strategic locations throughout Crimea. This nonviolent operation in Crimea indicated that Russia's recent military modernisations were starting to bear fruit. In addition to overall efficacy of the operation, Russian armed forces' ability to carry out a nonconventional warfare was also demonstrated. As for the legitimate basis of the operation, Russia used the same justification as NATO did in Kosovo and declared that presence of armed Russian troops were to 'prevent violence against the Russian population by pro-Western nationalists and radicals,' (Kropatcheva, 2015: 16).

In summary, Russia initially denied any affiliation with resurged armed militias in Crimea and later used Kosovo War as precedent to justify the legitimacy of their presence, congeneric to their actions in South Ossetia. By taking these steps, Russia aspired to create confusion in the Western world, buying enough time to take

necessary measures to secure the long-term possession of Crimea by annexing the peninsula into Russian Federation.

In many aspects, the seizure of Crimea can be regarded as a success story for Russia due to its “efficiently non-violent” (Karagiannis, 2014: 408) nature during the course of events. In addition to taking Kosovo intervention as precedent, Russia blamed NATO and the EU altogether for the destabilisation and emergence of civil war in Ukraine. The Western support for the Ukrainian opposition against the former President Yanukovich was declared by Kremlin as a ‘fascist coup’ that overthrew Ukraine’s legitimately elected leader (Karagiannis, 2014: 411), portraying the Western world as responsible for the course of events occurring within Ukraine. In other words, Moscow demonstrated an example of an opportunistic behaviour in the civil war in Ukraine; not only by managing to perform a swift land grab for the benefit of its national interest, but also laying the blame for the entire set of events on the Western world.

Strategically, Russia’s gains from the Ukrainian crisis were invaluable. Primarily, Russian military actions in Ukraine proved to be an extremely effective means of power projection: a clear message was sent to the world that Russia is back in the game and that the American geopolitical primacy would no longer go unchallenged (Karagiannis, 2014: 411). This statement alone could be taken as an open declaration of challenging the US and its allies; however, acquisition of Crimea meant a lot more in many perspectives. With the Peninsula now a part of Russia, contiguous Azov Sea has officially become a Russian lake, extending the Russian coastlines on Black Sea hundreds of miles (Karagiannis, 2014: 412). Over and above that, Moscow also gained access to an extremely important and geopolitically

strategically land which grants Russia the ability to monitor all military developments of NATO in the Black Sea region.

Deeply concerning the Alliance due to the geographical and political reasons, these developments from Russia caused anxiety on NATO's part and led to a series of consequential counter-measurements. Having taken early notice of the Russian presence in Crimea, NATO's response was swift, yet arguably insufficient in efficacy. In the immediate aftermath of Russian military forces' resurgence in Crimean peninsula, NATO's initial reaction was to engage with Moscow diplomatically. However, expressing 'deep concerns' and urging Russia to respect the 'sovereignty and territorial integrity' of Ukraine failed to produce any resolution to the crisis (Ditrych, 2014: 83).

Changing course, NATO attempted to take more substantial counter-measures by first suspending all political and military cooperation with Russia in addition to increasing military presence in the easternmost member states. Fighter jets were deployed to Poland and Lithuania, continuous high-altitude surveillance flights were conducted, and new command centres were established in strategically locations, all in hopes of deterring possible further Russian aggression (Forsberg et al. 2015: 52). The Ukraine Crisis and Russia's allegedly illegitimate *fait accompli* could not be handled immediately and effectively by NATO due to the unprecedented nature of the events. The distinction of this crisis was even more visible in the aftermath of the Alliance's Wales Summit in September 2014. Formation of a 5,000 strong rapid reaction force as an addition to the already existing NRF with capacity to be deployed in as little as 48-hours is a downright indication of the level of seriousness

and the desperate need to act immediately in the face of potential similar crises in the future.

Alongside NATO's military counter-measurements and suspension of all civilian cooperation in April 2014, firm economic sanctions have also been imposed on the Russian Federation. The US imposed harsh sanctions against Russia, on its senior officials, Bank Rossiya and various other business enterprises that had close connections with the Russian government (Ditrych, 2014: 83). As a matter of fact, the most damaging sanction against Russia was its exclusion from the Group of 8 major advanced economic countries with support from Japan, which can be regarded as an international downgrading of Russia's prestige and overall international outlook. Furthermore, in addition to asset freezes and visa bans, EU's restrictive measures and common stance in boycotting of energy supplies also perpetrated damage on the staggering Russian economy. As a result of these international economic sanctions, both consumers and companies were directly effected. The collapse of Russian currency and large decline in stock market (that dropped by 30 percent), ultimately led to remarkable shrinkage of the country's economy and drove it into a financial crisis.

Despite being severe in nature, effectiveness of these counter-measures on Russia taken by NATO and the Western world are debated. Especially in the economic sphere, Putin has demonstrated firm determination of defiance and disdain towards the West. Regardless of the on-going economic crisis at home, Putin continued 'flexing Russia's military muscles' by further pushing the military modernisation and procurement programme (Heritage, 2015). As a matter of fact, Kremlin has declared the intentions of these international sanctions as a direct attack against Russia,

which boosted the public support for the government. According to opinion polls carried out by Levada, Putin's approval rate has reached a record level of ninety percent during 2014 (Heisbourg, 2015: 39). On a side note, the sanctions imposed on individual persons also bear no imminent effect due to a law in effect in Russia, which compensates the frozen assets of oligarchs from the state budget.

In sum, despite the economic burdens of the Ukraine crisis, Russia doesn't shy away from confronting the West; on the contrary, Moscow has sought to benefit from this scathe. Similarly, the Russian military activities endure: NATO has failed to deter Russia from actively probing air and sea space of the European continent. As a matter of fact, in accordance to Heisbourg's report, around 40 separate incidents have been recorded between March and October 2014 (Heisbourg, 2015: 38), some of which included abusing of air space of the UK with heavy bomber aircrafts and sea-space with nuclear submarines. In spite of all the counter-measures taken by NATO, and the economic repercussions of the Ukraine Crisis, Russia has shown no compromise in stepping back and instead continued its confronting stance to fact the Western world. As a result of this uncompromising stance by Moscow, NATO-Russia relations remain hampered at the time of the writing of this thesis.

All in all, NATO-Russia relations in the post-Cold War era resemble that of a bumpy road. With mutually constructive and positive initiatives taking place, diplomatic relations from 1991-1998 were running better. With the Kosovo War and subsequent NATO bombings of Yugoslavia in 1999, the relationship suffered its first substantial setback. Russia-Atlantic relations entered its second constructive phase in 2001 in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the US, only to experience problems again due to NATO's double enlargement policy and creation of a BMD in Eastern Europe

from 2003 onwards. From this point onwards the relationship was dominated by occasional power struggles, causing gradual and persistent deterioration in the relation up until the Russo-Georgia war of summer 2008. Russia's military intervention in support of liberalising South Ossetia and Abkhazia mark a new epoch in the NATO-Russia relations deriving from mutual distrust and scepticism. Despite effort to 'reset' relations, Russia's involvement in the domestic unrest in Ukraine, and military intervention in the Crimea raised NATO concerns. Eventual annexation of Crimean peninsula by Russia ultimately led to the halting of all cooperation between two sides and currently the relationship remains strained.

CHAPTER III

Critical Analysis of the Current NATO-Russia Relations

Developments and interactions between NATO and Russia in the post-Cold War era have caused a steady deterioration in relations. NATO's expansionist policies towards former Soviet sphere of influence have led to Russia's increasing stance as an assertive and confrontational actor in the international arena. This turn of events have led to an increasingly popular discourse of re-emergence a new Cold War between NATO and Russia. This chapter critically engages with the developments that have taken place, and discusses the allegations on the Cold War redux through social constructivist and neorealist theoretical perspectives to determine whether or not this depiction is correct.

3.1 Critical Assessment of the status quo

The Ukraine crisis brought along countless questions concerning its impact on the NATO-Russia relations and overall on European security. Skepticism and confusion surrounds the future of European security, and scholars such as Kropatcheva (2015) seem to be belief that the resurgence of an assertive and revisionist Russia will lead to the remaking of the European security order. This statement sounds more moderate compared to the ones who claim that a 'new' Cold War is in the making. In accordance with Monaghan's argument (2015), the use of 'Cold War' does not appear fit to define the current status quo. In spite of the similarities that exist in the

NATO-Russia relationship, which the fanatics of the 'new' Cold War phenomenon endeavour to assert, there are comparatively distinctive changes in today's world.

Principally, a vast difference in political goals by two sides are noted: During the Cold War, both the US and Russia had an overall ambition of conquering and diminishing political ideologies of one another. Presently, Russia does not act as a challenge to the global order created by the US and the Western world as a whole, since it is not a broad-based superpower yet (Heisbourg, 2015:34). In light of the assessment made in this literature, however, Russia as a new revisionist power seeks to regain its former status of being a world power by reinstating its influence in the surrounding geography by occasional and quick power-projection techniques. In Sakwa's words, Putin's ambition is to 'move Russia from the periphery to the core in the international politics,' (Sakwa, 2008:247). From a neorealist outlook, this aspiration demonstrates Russia's recognition of the current trend of distribution of power in the international system. By acknowledging what it is not, Russia is able to draw a roadmap to achieve what it desires to be.

3.2 Social constructivist approach

On the theoretical assessment of the recent set of events that occurred and shaped the current status quo of the NATO-Russia relations, there are various observations to be found when looked through neorealist and constructivist lenses. Looking at the evolution of the relationship between NATO and Russia in the past two decades, dominant traces of constructivist elements can be spotted in shaping the roadmap of the relations. As discussed in detail above, a sense of mutual mistrust and insecurity has dominated the Russian-Atlantic relationship. This continuous trend is directly

caused by the historical and cultural developments that have taken place throughout the Cold War era. As Tsygankov identifies (2013: 179), perception of 'the other' in the process of forming self-identity is highly visible as a significant notion in comprehending the ever-complex relationship of the two actors. This historically rooted conception of identity is regarded as the main reason for the existing disparities between NATO and Russia in the post-Cold War era. From each side of the spectrum, both sides still regard one another as rivals, if not adversaries. This lack of mutual trust has long prevented the construction of a strong partnership, and the absence of common political goals and ambitions have further complemented this gap in relations.

Alongside identity, the notions of norm and culture also play a dominant role both in internal configuration and motivations, as well the interactions in-between NATO and Russia. In the eyes of social constructivists, NATO is a 'democratic security community' whose essential identity and cohesion lies in its common bonds of culture and democracy (Ratti, 2013: 150). Similarly, Russian Federation has strong ties with the former Soviet Republics. Bearing in mind the role of Russian nationals whose protection was declared as the prominent reason for intervening both in South Ossetia and in Crimea, Moscow still shows a sense of responsibility towards Russian-speaking populations residing in its former space of influence.

However, in comparison to the realist opinion on this subject of matter, bids made by former Soviet-bloc states for the NATO membership are regarded in the constructivist view as outcomes of the 'process of socialisation' and ambition to be integrated into the global world, rather than seeking protection against military threats (Ratti, 2013: 150). Overall, within the framework of social constructivist

theory, both sides are at fault in the deterioration of relations and the creation of an atmosphere filled with scepticism and lack of trust in NATO-Russia relationship: Western view on Russia as a petty regional power and nothing more than a junior partner; in contrast with the Russian's solemn denial to accept democratic values and international norms very clearly justify this argument.

3.3 Neorealist approach

Neorealist findings indicate that the current state of affairs are predominantly caused by NATO's redundant aspirations of eastward-expansionism. Russia has been constantly pushed aside by NATO who sought to fill in the vacuum of power left in the former-Soviet Republics as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence. Similarly, the NATO reaction to Russia's emerging capabilities in both political and military dimensions are also explained on the same margin. There is a clear loss of NATO influence as Russia re-emerges as an alternative geopolitical option for other states in the region to bandwagon with against the Western primacy.

As seen by the creation of Eurasian Economic Union, Russia seeks to balance the threat and power of NATO by looking to create an alternative unity or alliance. As a matter of fact, the 'balance of threat' concept as coined by Stephen Walt (1987) helps us understand both of Russia and NATO's actions and reactions in accordance to each other's progress in obtaining more power. In the past decade, Russia has been seeking to balance what it perceived as a NATO threat by strengthening their hand through modernisation of their armed forces. This military build-up, added to the political and economical stabilisation has steered Russia into becoming ever more assertive. Eventually, this confrontational style caused by military, political and

economical progression led to repetitive power projections, ultimately in the form of military interventions.

Concurrently, NATO's inability to effectively convert itself from its Cold War mindset in the twenty-first century by redefining its *raison d'être* and adopting a new role has led to its functional uselessness. Consistent lowering of defence budgets among members, alongside internal disputes and disagreements, made NATO ineffective in countering a revisionist Russia. Undeniably, joint NATO forces and capabilities evidently dominate that of Russia's in both number and strength. On the other hand, given the unconventional/hybrid warfare which Russia has shown readiness to carry out, NATO's military might fails to prove effective due to minimal forward presence of NATO (Kroenig, 2015:54). Additionally, currently adopted defence-in-depth strategy (Grygiel et al, 2014) allows Russia massive conventional superiority since NATO's majority of its forces are stationed mostly in central and western Europe which would fail to respond swiftly to a possible Russian transgression in its easternmost member states. Surely, the existence of NATO Response Force (NRF) and the recently created rapid reaction force ought to count for something, however, when compared with the Russian active frontline personnel which count up to 766 thousand (Writer, 2015), a mere 35 thousand-men NRF are heavily outnumbered.

In sum, from a neorealist scope, the power relations between NATO and Russia resemble that of a see-saw: as the one garners more power in form of influence and alliance making, the other side suffers loss. Deriving from analysis made on recent events, Russia gained the upper hand against NATO by acquiring geographically and politically strategic land-grab of the Crimean peninsula, a move which the

Alliance was unable to deter Moscow from carrying out, in addition to failing to produce any effective strategical counter-measures in the aftermath of the events.

Overall, as it can be seen from the above layout and assessment, the persistently complicated relationship between NATO and Russia is now currently going through the most challenging test of the post-Cold War era. On the question of emergence of a 'new' Cold War, however, general assumption is that the recent set of events, irrespective of their magnitude and effect, are part of an overall set of systemic and periodic bedevilling in the relationship which have been ongoing since the Kosovo War in 1998.

What follows next can be called a stagnation of relations, or even a 'Cold Peace', however the notion of 'new' Cold War not only does not suit the definition of status quo, but also could lead to an escalation due to the psychological consequences of using such a discourse. As Smith argues, the NATO-Russia relationship is more like to continue in its former routine of remaining periodically problematic due to the conflicting perceptions of their own self-interests, however, escalation of tensions and abolishing of all diplomatic ties, especially in the nuclear age, does not seem to be plausible in this equation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the evolution of the causal relationship between NATO's eastwards expansionism and the related increase in Russia's assertiveness in the post-Cold War era. NATO's double enlargement process to include former Soviet Republics into its membership and the aspirations of creating a BMD system within Eastern-Europe are identified as the main causes for the gradual deterioration of relations in the twenty-first century. Russia's rise as a revisionist power and taking on a more confrontational stance in world politics is directly related to this set of events.

Attracting opposition from Russia since its initial consideration in 1994, NATO's enlargement ambition to include the Eastern European states under its umbrella has been the primary reason for the damaging of relations. Inclusion of former Soviet-bloc countries into the Alliance has driven Moscow anxious. Russia perceived the extension of NATO's reach as an offensive move against Russia. Potential NATO-membership by Georgia and Ukraine, as suggested in the Bucharest Summit of 2008, was interpreted by Russia as an illustration of NATO's intention to surround, enclave and dominate Russia.

Alongside NATO membership expansion, the plans to establish a BMD in the European continent was among the top issues that dominated the agenda of the NATO-Russia relationship. Despite Western claims on the role of the BMD as being precautionary against other possible future nuclear threats, Russia perceived this development as a measure aimed at neutralising their strategic deterrence acquired

by their nuclear ballistic arsenal. Moreover, the inability of both sides to produce an agreement on establishing a common BMD with joint command and control further blemished the relationship.

In this thesis, it is argued that these two developments played the most crucial role in the unfolding of events in South Ossetia in 2008 and in the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Russia's assertive and confrontational stance in global politics, added to its increasing military modernisation and capabilities, are related to their sense of insecurity and the prevention of humility by the Western world. Perceiving NATO's developments as offensive, Russia has taken measures to ensure the security of its national interest at the expense of losing international prestige and credibility. There is unambiguously a relation between NATO's expansion and the incidents that took place in Georgia and Ukraine.

By assessing this course of events through constructivist and neorealist theoretical perspectives, a more thorough and in-depth understanding of the NATO-Russia relationship becomes possible. In the neorealist perspective, Russia's assertive stance is in opposition to the US's status of being the sole superpower and its dominion over global politics. As the *balance of threat* concept, argues, when encountering a powerful state, new states either tend to bandwagon or attempt to rise against this power. Getting back on its feet and into the game, Moscow's ambition in this case is the latter: perceiving NATO's overall entity and expansionist nature in recent past as a threat to its own security, Russia is attempting to regain its former might and the dominance it held within the former Soviet sphere of influence to ensure its own security. In other words, as the neorealist argument goes, rather

being offensive, Russia is in fact defending its national interest by attempting to recover its former assets and project enough power to deter NATO from further expansion.

In the scope of social constructivism, the overall deterioration of relations between NATO and Russia is due to both sides' incompatibility with each other's accepted norms and values. In the case of Russia, the problem is their headstrong defiance in regards to complying with Western-promoted values. As for NATO, the Alliance's behaviour towards Moscow and insufficient efforts to integrate Russia into the global system proved a fundamental mistake. Additionally, the identity perception of each side in form of 'othering' one another due to long-lasting historical enmity have also formed a culture of mutual distrust and scepticism. In sum, the social constructivist approach demonstrates that the problematic relationship between NATO and Russia exceeds conjectural strains and is deep-rooted. However, spikes in tensions do not necessarily indicate an overall and permanent escalation of tensions.

Overall, as it can be seen, the relationship between NATO and Russia in contemporary times have been shaped by common wrong-doings and insufficient trust-building between two actors. What seemed to be a window of opportunity to build a long-term partnership and cooperation in the aftermath of the Cold War is turning into closed doors. In contrast with mainstream western discourse blaming Russia as the aggressor; this thesis argues both sides share the guilt of failing to reach a common ground.

In spite of recent incidents that ultimately led to suspension of all political and military cooperation for the time being, periodic crises have always defined the Russia-Atlantic relationship. Deriving from this definition, the current status quo in the relations does not indicate the ending of this trend, let alone the eruption of a new Cold War. Apart from not bearing any resemblance to the original Cold War except for the friction and high tensions between Russia and NATO, both sides are fully aware of the consequences of a possible, new Cold War in the nuclear, interdependent world.

It is almost impossible to foresee what the future holds for the NATO-Russia relationship due to myriad of variables and subsequent possible scenarios ranging from normalisation of relations to getting into a phase of Cold 'Peace', however, it is easier to foresee what it does not hold: a new Cold War.

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