

NATO DURABILITY IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the collapse of Soviet Union and the subsequent end of Cold War era superpower confrontation, the continued relevance and survivability of NATO has been put into question. While many predicted that alliance would cease to exist, it has not only weathered the storm of changing geopolitical landscapes but has also emerged stronger. Given that, this study will offer a comprehensive analysis in answering an important question: what explains NATO's resilience in the post-Cold War era, considering the complexities and challenges it has confronted? For background, this study presents a selected roots of NATO and explores the merits of its longevity before offering broader policy implications of this narrative. It then argues that NATO, far from being a historical artifact, stands as a dynamic and indispensable organization in the contemporary global security architecture. Its ability to evolve while preserving its fundamental principles underscores the alliance's enduring relevance, positioning itself as a crucial force in maintaining peace and stability in the ever-changing world.



Introduction

For over forty years after its inception, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had directed most of its attention on countering the threat posed by the Soviet Union. However, since the end of the Cold War, the ongoing relevance and survival of the organization has become a subject of considerable inquiry. Even before the collapse of Soviet Union, and especially in the aftermath, many predicted that the Atlantic alliance would cease to exist. The demise of a common enemy for its members has led to a profound challenge to the organization's *raison d'être*, the foundation of its legitimacy, and the cohesive platform that binds the allied states together, even as it continues to formally exist on paper (Mearsheimer, 1990). Contrary to this expectation, the absence of Cold War era superpower confrontation did not mark an end to the alliance.

Instead, NATO remains intact and transforms from a primarily regional organization into its present form, extending its operations beyond its transatlantic boundaries (Croft et al., 2004). It continues to be widely regarded by many as the central security organization in the Western Hemisphere.

The central question then arises: what explains NATO's resilience in the post-Cold War era, considering the complexities and challenges it has confronted? NATO's longevity as a defense alliance has traditionally been attributed to 'what NATO does' with particular emphasis on its remarkable capacity to adapt to evolving security environments. While there is undeniable merit in NATO's adaptability, concerns have emerged regarding its growing vulnerability in areas that have traditionally underpinned its strength: the preservation of its identity rooted in shared liberal democratic values ('what NATO is'). The following sections explore how and why the alliance has endured in the decades following the end of Cold War.

NATO and Roots of Democracy

States typically form alliances by joining together to pursue mutual benefits and achieve common interests, often centered around eliminating threats to their unity. Traditional alliances are, thus, said to be built around transactional relationship grounded in shared interests and tend to dissolve once these interests have been achieved or diminished (Byrne, 2013). Arguably, NATO has endured through the post-Cold War era because it represents more than just a military or defense alliance, and also embodies constructive security cooperation built on shared liberal democratic values, norms or identity among its member states.

Cold War Narratives of Transatlantic Unity

NATO's durability in the post-Cold War era was closely tied to its historical legacy from the Cold War. Its historical narratives help influence and shape the alliance's ongoing trajectory as it entered the new strategic environment. It is not to say that this study will offer a detailed accounts of NATO's history, covering chronology of each and every events and crises. Instead, it



focuses on specific issues pertinent to liberal democracy and examines how these factors have enabled the alliance to sustain and strengthen its relevance and, consequently, its survivability.

Since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO functioned more as what Paul Nitze called “a North American political commitment to the defense of Europe” rather than merely a framework for a military organization (Waterman and Zagorcheva, 2001-2002). It seeks to build a narrative of international peace and security centered on the Euro-Atlantic community, which has traditionally shared political and cultural ideas, encompassing a core set of liberal democratic norms and institutions. This view is evident in the preamble to the Washington Treaty, NATO’s foundational treaty, which states that the alliance is founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1949).

In addition, while the Article 5 collective defense clause against armed attack is NATO’s premier attraction (The critical component of the North Atlantic Treaty is the Article 5, in which the signatories agree that “an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all,” and pledged to assist one another “by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as [each signatory] deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area”), the allies are particularly interested in Article 2, which emphasized the reinforcement of free institutions and the promotion of political stability and shared prosperity through international trade and economic cooperation (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1949). In this light, NATO emerged as an institution designed to safeguard and preserve the preexisting security community of liberal democratic states from the challenges posed by its opponents during the Cold War: the communist bloc under the leadership of the Soviet Union. This underscores a fundamental premise of the alliance, where political coherence serves as the initial defense line for collective security and defense.

Although it initially operated more as a political alliance than a military one, the outbreak of the Korean War marked a significant turning point. North Korea’s invasion of South Korea was widely interpreted by leaders on both side of the Atlantic as a Soviet test to Western democracies, reminiscent of Hitler’s provocations during the 1930s (Durhin, 2020). More alarmingly, the danger of communist subversion within the vulnerable Western European states following the World War II, and the added threat of direct military conflict with the Soviet Union, especially as it acquired atomic weapons and increased military buildup over time, has convinced the allies that the communist threat now necessitated the full-scale development of NATO’s military capabilities. The main *raison d’être* of NATO then becomes serving as a “bulwark against Soviet aggression,” where its ability to safeguard the Euro-Atlantic territory from potential military attacks by the Soviet Union lies at the heart of its existence (The Week Staff, 2022).

Accordingly, geostrategic positioning, military capabilities, and uncompromising anti-communism took precedence over democratic governance as the primary criteria for NATO membership throughout the Cold War. It has allowed states that did not strictly adhere to



liberal-democratic norms and values – the defining principles of the Western community – to join the alliance. Notably, NATO’s founding states included authoritarian states such as Portugal, Greece, and Turkey, which are ruled by authoritarian regimes after institutionally established democracies have been overthrown (Barany, 2004). Most surprisingly, Spain, a state whose political regime posed an active threat to liberal democratic values, was also a member to the alliance (Gheciu, 2005). The accession of these states into NATO, despite their lack of democratic credentials, was largely based on the shared recognition among the allies of the geostrategic importance of these nations in the face of the growing military confrontation with the Soviet Union. It is this prevailing sense of including these strategically vital but normatively non-conforming states as an acceptable compromise made in the shared interests of safeguarding the democratic community, that NATO largely tolerated the accession of these non-democratic states and acknowledge their crucial role in bolstering the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet defenses. In essence, throughout the Cold War, NATO functioned as a military alliance built on a political foundation. It brought together a community of states that, for the most part, are committed to upholding the liberal democratic principles, and are at the same time, willing to defend against potential military confrontations with the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies.

Post-Cold War: Liberal-Democratic Revitalization

After the Cold War, while collective defense remained a fundamental aspect of the transatlantic alliance, NATO’s role shifted. Instead of being a bulwark against a specific security threat – i.e., the Soviet Union – it has evolved into a guarantor of political stability within the framework of liberal democratic norms and values, and shared identity among its member states (Neumann and Williams, 2000). These shared narratives have always remained crucial to the existence of the transatlantic security alliance, but the attention paid by NATO to such norms and the actual construction of a security concept that came to be associated with such a conviction is a result of the post-Cold War transformation. It is precisely the end of bipolarism during the Cold War that the shared liberal democratic values not only become the cohesive force that bound the community together, but also re-emerged as the essential instrument ensuring its continued existence and relevance.

In the aftermath of the collapse of political and military threats to its partners, and amid growing concerns about developments within the former communist states that could jeopardize international security, the political principles that united NATO members have emerged as the cornerstone holding the Alliance together. At the threshold of the 21st century, there was a consensus that NATO needed to rejuvenate its liberal democratic identity to gain renewed legitimacy and establish security around this identity. This implies the necessity for NATO to invert its priorities: transforming into a political alliance with a strong military foundation. Its primary mission should then be to expand the community of democratic states across the Euro-Atlantic region, while equipping its existing and new members with military



capabilities to engage in joint defense of shared liberal democratic values and common territory.

In this context, the endeavor to spread liberal democracy into the former Eastern bloc became pivotal to NATO's initiatives in reshaping its mission and reaffirming its relevance in the new era (Emanuel, 2008). With the absence of external threat posed by Soviet Union or those alike, there is no longer a need to compromise liberal democracy for security. Essentially, the post-Cold War narrative shifted to emphasize democracy and a comprehensive range of liberal democratic values, including freedom of speech and the rule of law, as prerequisites for membership. This new narrative portrayed the alliance as a community founded on liberal democratic principles.

Article 10 has been a major instrument of NATO in encouraging the democratic transformation of many post-Soviet communist states in Europe and rebuilding their societies based on liberal democratic norms and values. In Article 10, Allies agree that they "may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1949). Over the years, allies have translated the essence of Article 10 into practical terms by establishing essential democratic governance criteria that aspiring NATO members must fulfill. These requirements encompass areas such as civilian control over the military, legislative supervision, and transparency in arms procurements.

Furthermore, numerous documents and declarations from NATO in the post-Cold War period further reinforce the importance of promoting liberal democracy in the transatlantic community. First, the 1991 NATO Strategic Concept allowed NATO to take up a more active role, even beyond transatlantic borders – such as Yugoslavia, Bosnia, and Kosovo – and agreed that its security tasks included providing "one of the indispensable foundations for a stable security environment in Europe, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1991). At the same time, the allies acknowledged that while NATO is one of the crucial instruments for European security and stabilization, it was not the only one. They recognized that its primary collective defense mission had inherent constraints, limiting the Alliance's capacity to actively contribute to let alone influence, the democratic and economic transitions necessary for establishing a lasting foundation of security and stability across the Euro-Atlantic region. Second, the 1999 NATO Strategic Concept further amplified NATO membership, and embraced peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and crisis management role, while strongly emphasizing the Article 5 function of NATO protecting its members against external aggression. Third, the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept brought the alliance to address more complex contemporary security challenges such as nuclear terrorism, cybersecurity, climate change, etc., necessary to NATO's ongoing relevance.

The causative factor for NATO's increasing engagement beyond its transatlantic root is thus the shared identity of NATO: the identity of the liberal democratic transatlantic community that



stands up for democracy and human rights. This common identity of NATO members that are built on liberal democratic principles caused them to intervene in places to preserve what they saw as a challenge to such identity. In sum, the narrative reconstruction of NATO's identity in the post-Cold War era as a democratic security community rather than solely a collective defense alliance had a significant impact. It not only influences NATO's official declarations, but also shaped the expectations of new member states and, most of all, played a pivotal role in defining or redefining the boundaries of appropriateness. In other words, it delineated what could be seen as suitable and acceptable behavior and identity, both for NATO and for neighboring countries in the alliance's sphere of influence.

A Democratic Alliance Under American Leadership

Although this shared conception on 'what NATO is' is articulated and enacted by the transatlantic allies as a collective, however, the United States holds a central role as the leader and primary guardian of liberal democracy and collective security. After all, NATO served as the key organization through which European democracies closely aligned themselves with the U.S. The United States' global standing has only elevated after the Cold War, marked by the Soviet Union's collapse, the resurgence of an unpredictable Russia, and the rapid advancement of U.S. military firepower and technological superiority (Shifrinson, 2017). Given these developments, the U.S. predominantly fulfills its pivotal role as the alliance leader in line with the liberal democratic norms and values that have underpinned NATO's endurance since its creation.

Unlike many other alliances, NATO stands out as a unique democratic alliance, distinguished by its foundation and governance based on the consent of its member states. From this perspective, NATO has for years operated on the principles of consensus, wherein decisions are made through collaborative negotiations among its member states. Central to this cooperative framework is the pivotal position held by the U.S., epitomized by the principle of *primus inter pares* – first among equals – and the practical leadership role in forging unity (Shifrinson 2017). Not only is the U.S. leadership fully recognized by fellow member states, but it is also widely agreed that NATO's existence has been contingent upon the unwavering support and leadership provided by the U.S. since the end of World War II. As a result, the practical manifestation of the alliance's shared values is intrinsically tied to a power structure wherein the United States assumes an undisputed leadership role within NATO, and this constitutes a cornerstone in bolstering the alliance's longevity and effectiveness.

Taken together, NATO's enduring strength is intricately linked to its ability to preserve its politico-military identity, a narrative firmly established through a robust alliance framework and reinforced by deeply ingrained practices such as consensus-based decision-making, skillfully negotiated under U.S. leadership. Throughout its history, NATO has experienced distinct phases: the Cold War era emphasized its military pillar supported by its political pillar, while the post-Cold War period witnessed a shift toward its political pillar backed by its military pillar. The coexistence of these dual pillars not only forms the bedrock of NATO's longevity but also gives



the alliance a powerful *raison d'être*. Thus, the enduring success of NATO stems from the careful balance struck between its military and political pillars, all underpinned by a commitment to democratic values and human rights. Although these principles have certainly always been controversial, they remain indispensable in ensuring internal cohesion within NATO and in cementing its durability and relevance in an ever-evolving security landscape.

Counterarguments: Democratic Decline Within NATO

A closer analysis underscores the growing complexity of the question of allied unity in the post-Cold War era. In particular, NATO is now confronted with substantial challenges, with issues extending beyond conventional external security threats or adversaries. The alliance now also grapples with intricate internal dynamics, notably the emergence of radical conservative ideologies and political forces within several member states and similarly alarming “absence of strong, principled American presidential leadership for the first time in history” (Burns and Lute, 2019). These internal challenges, marked by ideological shifts and a shift in leadership norms, pose unprecedented hurdles to NATO's cohesion and effectiveness. Although NATO has been durable due to its ongoing politico-military identity, the crisis of democracy within NATO's member states and the crisis of American leadership together undermines NATO's durability built on such identity.

Crisis of Democracy

One of the most significant challenges to NATO's durability arises from the current ascent of authoritarian governments that directly contradicts the core liberal democratic principles that define the alliance. This challenge is primarily the consequence of self-proclaimed illiberal regimes within certain NATO member states, who continue to undermine their democracies in varying degrees by consolidating executive power, stifling free speech and press freedom, curtailing civil society activities, suppressing political opposition, and encroaching upon judicial independence (Corke, 2019). While most analyses of the alliance traditionally bypass domestic issues, given this rising trend, the internal politics of NATO member states have taken a newfound significance. The erosion of democratic norms within these states may have a significant impact on the salience and acceptance of NATO's politico-military identity that underpins NATO's durability. The internal challenges faced by member states pose a substantial risk to the cohesion and purpose of NATO, emphasizing the critical importance of addressing these domestic issues to safeguard the alliance's shared values and collective strength.

Since its inclusion in the alliance, although Turkey has never really been a government that is explicitly critical of liberal democratic values, it appeared to be moving in a Western direction through its political and economic reforms. Despite these promising reforms, President Erdoğan has increasingly inhibited growing authoritative tendencies, cracking down on opposition groups especially Kurdish activists, civil society, and independent media (Elsen et al., 2019). In this atmosphere of repression, he has also pushed through institutional changes that transformed the state from a parliamentary democracy to a hyper-concentrated system



consolidating power in the presidency with no effective check on the executive power (Elsen et al., 2019). At the same time, Turkey has also pursued a set of concerning foreign policies, which seems to indicate a shift away from its NATO allies toward potential adversaries. First, it has intensified its military engagement with China following its strong objection to the support provided by the U.S.-led to Kurdish forces, which Turkey views as an existential threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty in both Syria and Iraq (Kirisçi, 2001). Second, despite explicit warnings from NATO, Turkey has proceeded with the acquisition of a Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile defense system, and the potential integration with the current F-35 aircraft would pose an unacceptable security risk for the NATO allies (Schultz, 2018). In the longer term, both the authoritative dynamics in Turkey's domestic politics and its turn away from its NATO allies by deepening its military cooperation with NATO's adversaries – China and Russia – will make sustaining cooperation increasingly difficult.

NATO's efforts to sustain a unified stance towards Turkey backsliding are hindered by broader political shifts across the Euro-Atlantic regions. The influence of radical conservative political forces has spilled over into multiple member states, and some have even expressed support for Turkey's illiberal policies and practices. For instance, since 2010, Hungary continues to witness the aggressive consolidation of power by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party which has resulted in dramatic changes to the media environment, civil society, judicial independence, and equal opportunities for election. (Wallander, 2018). More alarmingly, it has not only allowed Russia to open a development bank in the country despite concerns that it could serve as a hub for espionage activities but has also raised obstacles to deepen NATO cooperation with Ukraine by instrumentalizing the issue of the Hungarian minority in that country (Corke, 2019). Hence, as in Turkey, threats in terms of divergence from the alliance's shared interests are apparent as Hungary continues to criticize NATO's and EU's tough stance against Russia on the invasion of Ukraine.

Similarly, although Poland is long regarded as a principal success story of democratization, the Law and Justice (PiS) have frequently made de facto reforms to the constitution without a constitutional majority (Elsen et al., 2019). The result is a slew of unconstitutional maneuvers that undermined judicial independence as these reforms leave one party firmly in charge of all institutions and remove carefully constructed checks and balances designed to preserve democracy. These have been accompanied by the oppression of independent media (Elsen et al., 2019). Without the mediating influence of democratic institutions in the country, polarization and a non-democratic turn seem inevitable.

It is no doubt that the growing tendencies towards authoritarianism in NATO member states represents a significant crisis of democracy on both side of the Atlantic, profoundly undermining the alliance's durability. What is unfolding appears to be the formation of a community of illiberal nationalism within NATO, a development that, once solidified, might prioritize the interests of a specific political party or individual over national interests. In essence, these illiberal states are part of this community, articulating conflicting visions of



Western identity founded on liberal democracy. This dichotomy influences their perception of NATO membership, their roles within the alliance, and thus stands in the way of NATO continued relevance and durability.

Crisis of Leadership

A greater threat to NATO's enduring strength and its identity as a liberal-democratic security community arises from the diminishing U.S. leadership. The rise of illiberal nationalist politics is not limited to specific member states, but is notably evident in the alliance's leader, particularly during the tenure of former President Donald Trump. This development further weakens the discourse of allied solidarity centered around liberal democratic norms and values.

Multiple evidence indicates that the U.S. seems to be failing to fulfil its pivotal role as the leader of the alliance in alignment with the practices that have underpinned NATO's durability. Firstly, the administration consistently devalues the transatlantic relationship, widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of liberal democracy, and disparages NATO, with former President Trump branding it as "obsolete" or "very bad" and at times expressing intent to withdraw the U.S. from the alliance (Barnes and Cooper, 2019). This position is further reinforced by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in his Brussels speech, where he praised nationalism, critiqued multilateralism, and called for the reform or elimination of international bodies, claiming they impede national sovereignty (Stelzenmüller, 2019).

Secondly, there has been a conspicuous lack of interest from the Trump administration regarding the functioning of the alliance, with a disproportionate focus on the costs borne by the U.S. while disregarding the significant benefits derived from NATO. In stark contrast to the consistent American support for the European integration project over seven decades, Donald Trump viewed the EU primarily as, at best, a strategic competitor, and, at worst, an actual 'foe.' Accordingly, he distanced the U.S. from vital multilateral agreements cherished by Europeans, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the INF Treaty, without prior consultation with European allies. This approach contradicts the delicate process of negotiated order within NATO, undermining alliance cohesion and, consequently, its long-term durability.

Lastly, this persistent disregard for the alliance and its democratic leaders has often coincided with warming relations with autocratic leaders. For instance, echoing Trump's sentiments, the Polish government has consistently advocated for increased defense spending by European allies, bolstered its defense budget, welcomed NATO troops onto its territory, and forged bilateral military cooperation agreements with Washington (Burns and Lute, 2019). They have also aligned themselves against EU initiatives aimed at fostering deeper European military and defense integration. Consequently, the U.S.'s role as the leader of NATO and the guardian of liberal democratic values, vital to the alliance's durability, is increasingly questioned by numerous member states, especially European governments. The U.S. now appears to be more closely aligned with emerging illiberal leaders such as Turkey, Hungary, and Poland, rather than



its traditional allies like Britain, France, and Germany, raising serious concerns about the future cohesion and resilience of the NATO alliance.

Taken together, the concurrent crises of 'democracy' and 'leadership' present a profound challenge that strikes at the very core of NATO's identity, constituting perhaps the gravest crisis threatening its durability. This challenge is not merely a situational problem but goes to the heart of 'what NATO is.' The potential emergence of a division between liberal democracy principles and illiberal nationalism within NATO is increasingly likely, creating vulnerability to exploitation by external powers aiming to destabilize the alliance. This clash is escalating, with some prominent observers and policymakers, including President Macron of France, suggesting that the upcoming years might witness a 'civil war' between liberal and illiberal forces within NATO (Wallander, 2018). While the precise outcome remains uncertain, it is evident that these trends fundamentally erode NATO's remarkable resilience since the end of the Cold War, signifying a pivotal moment in the alliance's history.

However, although the rise of illiberal states and the declining U.S. leadership that aligns more with these states together threaten NATO's durability built on liberal democratic ideals, such an argument largely misses the point. Although the significance of these ideals cannot be overstated and is crucial for the political cohesion and enduring relevance of NATO, it is essential to recognize that the military pillar of the alliance did not fade away with the end of the Cold War. Instead, it became a foundational purpose of NATO rather than the main purpose. In this sense, the illiberal or autocratic turn adopted by NATO members, including the U.S., may undermine the political cohesion, but may not necessarily affect the military commitment and capabilities of the member states, and NATO as a whole.

In addition, states within NATO are primarily driven by their security concerns rather than specific political differences, as the alliance's collective external security challenges outweigh the individual norms and values of each member state. Recognizing their vulnerability as individual entities, states find strength in joining or forming alliances to share the burden of protecting against external security threats. Along this line, states such as Turkey, Poland, and Hungary joined NATO primarily out of security concerns, only consolidating their democracies after becoming members (Barany, 2004). For these nations, ensuring their state security takes precedence over political ideologies. In practical terms, states prioritize security over democracy within an alliance, valuing the protection it provides against external threats. Both liberal and illiberal states collaborate within these security frameworks to achieve common goals, preventing internal differences from weakening the alliance and making it susceptible to security risks. Given the shared threats faced, NATO allies are unlikely to jeopardize the alliance's durability by conflicting over non-security issues. Each member state can maintain its unique identity while benefiting collectively from the overarching security umbrella offered by NATO.

Policy Relevance: Future of NATO



NATO has endured through the post-Cold War period, even in the face of challenges posed by illiberal states and fluctuations in effective American leadership. While the primary argument supporting NATO's durability revolves around its ability to preserve its politico-military identity, specifically emphasizing the importance of adhering to liberal democratic values, it is equally important to account for the broader debate that surrounds this narrative. Particularly, if this argument advanced is true, what are the implications on NATO enlargement and the idea of 'Global NATO'?

NATO Enlargement?

NATO has not only weathered the challenges but also flourished during the post-Cold War period, notably by deepening institutional connections with the emerging democracies from the former Soviet Bloc. As highlighted earlier, NATO transcends being merely a military alliance against external threats; it is also a political organization that has excelled in facilitating reconciliation among former Soviet and communist states by advocating for the principles of liberal democracy. Since the end of the Cold War, a fundamental mission of NATO has been to promote security and thus democracy, and NATO enlargement has been an effective instrument of this mission.

In essence, NATO enlargement has promoted democratic consolidation through security in Europe in many ways. First, it helps provide Eastern Europe with security as a basis for democratic consolidation (Barany, 2004). After Soviet Union collapses, these states regained their national sovereignty, but with a weak military incapable of providing security to themselves in a highly uncertain security environment. For them, NATO enlargement largely fills in this gap, and there seems to be no better alternative to security guarantees provided by the alliance. Related to this, second, NATO enlargement offers these states that are in bettering relations with their historical adversaries (i.e., Western Europe) an platform towards reconciliation between former enemies within the alliance by promoting liberal democracy and uniting them under such norms, values and identity. Third and most notably, NATO has been useful in helping countries make progress towards democratization by promoting good civilian control of the military as a prerequisite to NATO membership (Barany, 2004). The presence of a responsible civilian control over the military is fundamental for the existence of true democracy. In Eastern Europe, the prospect of NATO membership, which necessitates civilian supremacy, has undeniably propelled democratic governance. The pursuit of civilian control has led to significant institutional and policy reforms across Central and East European states, despite challenges in reshaping their post-communist civil-military relations to align with democratic principles. Finally, in countries where democracy consolidation progressed slowly in the 1990s, the aspiration for NATO membership proved to be a powerful catalyst for reform (Barany, 2004). The preparation for NATO membership has compelled these nations to address longstanding border disputes and other grievances, fostering a climate of cooperation and peaceful resolution. This process has not only facilitated NATO's expansion but has also



significantly contributed to the promotion of stable democracy in the region, making the alliance a driving force behind democratic reforms and conflict resolution in Eastern Europe.

In the post-Cold War era, NATO has continued its historical role of enhancing security in Europe, akin to its role during the Cold War, by incorporating new member countries and adapting its capabilities for contemporary challenges. Democratization and NATO enlargement have brought fundamental strategic advantages, fostering stability and cooperation in the region. However, a significant obstacle remains: the resurgent Russia. Despite NATO's long insistence that its expansion is not aimed at Russia, the alliance's relations with Moscow have soured, particularly due to considerations for the membership of former Soviet republics like Georgia and Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 2014). This has caused internal discord within NATO and intensified Russian resentment towards the alliance and the broader Western world. In any event, a sense of "enlargement fatigue" has gripped many Europeans, exacerbated by concerns about the political, economic, and military capabilities of recent entrants, have raised further skepticism about the wisdom of further enlargement (Turner, 2014). Therefore, to secure NATO's future durability, bridging the divide between the West and Russia is crucial. Contemporary security challenges, such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and the rise of gray zone warfare, necessitate effective multilateralism. Finding a way to unify Western countries and Russia is essential for addressing these challenges collaboratively, ensuring the alliance's relevance, unity, and long-term sustainability, while upholding its commitment to international peace and security.

Global NATO?

With the argument in favor of NATO's durability and enlargement as a beneficial part of this durability advanced here, NATO confronts several fundamental dilemmas in its pursuit of collective security and the preservation of its core values and principles. At the roots of this dilemma is the question of how to resolve its identity crisis: Should NATO become a global organization, or should it limit its focus to its core membership and geographic area?

The concept of a global military alliance certainly presents compelling arguments. NATO has already demonstrated a global footprint, providing vital support in various humanitarian and security missions worldwide, from disaster relief efforts in Darfur, Indonesia and Pakistan to antipiracy patrols off the Horn of Africa (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006). Moreover, democracies such as Australia, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, India, and South Africa have actively supported NATO operations despite not being formal members (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006). For these nations, formal membership could enhance cooperation, facilitate joint planning, and improve operational capabilities, enabling faster responses to crises across the globe. The challenges to international security have undeniably become more global in nature. It can be argued that worldwide alliance with a comprehensive reach and collective capacity can effectively meet these challenges, making the idea of a global military alliance increasingly relevant in today's complex and interconnected world.



Opponents of a global NATO raise valid concerns, suggesting that broadening the alliance's scope could dilute its foundation as a vehicle primarily serving North American and European interests. They argue that expanding the alliance globally might complicate decision-making processes, diminish contributions from European members with limited long-range operational capabilities, and increase reliance on U.S. resources (Simon, 2008). These concerns, however, overlook historical instances, such as the admission of Greece and Turkey shortly after NATO's founding, where the alliance's democratic character was already adapted and expanded. For NATO to remain a genuinely useful institution, it must engage in regions where security challenges arise and where its unique resources and capabilities can make a significant impact. However, risks persist. First, developing democracies like Australia, Brazil, Japan, and India may not always align with the policies of the U.S. and its NATO allies. The prospect of these democracies becoming part of a global NATO could lead to complexities. Second, diverse challenges might arise, necessitating cooperation even with authoritarian regimes, reminiscent of the Cold War era, to effectively address certain global issues. Striking a balance between expansion, adaptability, and maintaining democratic values will be crucial for NATO's future global engagement.

In line with the arguments advanced in this study, there are several clear implications for NATO's policy considerations. First, despite its enduring durability rooted in liberal democratic identity and shared values among member states, NATO's long-term survival is not guaranteed indefinitely. Its continued relevance depends not just on addressing the immediate security concerns of its members, who have power to either sustain or decay the alliance, but also on their recognition of this fact. There remains a risk that the alliance's contributions to stability in Europe might increasingly go unappreciated, underscoring the need for member states to actively sustain its purpose and effectiveness. Second, as a values-based organization, NATO must clearly communicate its democratic principles both internally and externally. The democratic backsliding in certain NATO member states, such as Hungary, Turkey, and Poland, raises concerns. While NATO's Treaty lacks provisions for policing members regarding political values, developing a formal mechanism to hold states accountable for undemocratic behavior could be a step in the right direction (Burns and Lute, 2019). This does not imply interference in domestic affairs, but rather necessitates firm condemnation of undemocratic practices and appropriate accountability measures for violators. Such measures would reinforce NATO's commitment to its foundational democratic values and ensure consistency in upholding these principles across member states.

It is indeed a critical juncture for NATO, facing challenges like the conclusion of missions in Afghanistan, the resurgence of Russia highlighted by the conflict in Ukraine, deteriorating security on NATO's southern flank due to the rise of ISIS, and a growing urge for an independent EU military/defense. Additionally, concerns have been raised in NATO member states regarding the U.S. presidency's stance, particularly since the Trump administration, which has added to the uncertainty about its commitment to the alliance. Therefore, reflecting on NATO's historical strengths and understanding the sources of its durability and challenges is



essential for policymakers. By leveraging these strengths and addressing weaknesses, NATO can navigate the complex international security landscape and remain strong and relevant in the face of multiple crises.

In conclusion, NATO's endurance is rooted in its identity as a community of shared values, and the current crisis facing the alliance is more about who it is than what it does. However, the alliance's approach to promoting these values has become a potential liability, exacerbated by the challenges posed by the twin crises of 'democracy' and 'leadership.' Despite recent achievements, NATO finds itself in a new and challenging position. To ensure its continued durability in the coming decades, addressing its core values is imperative. While reconsidering these values might introduce uncertainty and instability, ignoring their role jeopardizes NATO's long-term resilience. Now more than ever, values are crucial for mitigating NATO's vulnerabilities both internally and externally.



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The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.