



## Debating the consequences of the further expansion of NATO



NATO

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**Forum:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

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## Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded on April 4, 1949, as a collective defense alliance of North American and European countries. Its inception dates back to the aftermath of World War II, when the threat of Soviet expansion spurred Western governments to strengthen their security. The convention was signed by twelve founding member countries, including the United States, Canada, and numerous Western European nations. NATO's fundamental goal was to offer mutual defense against any aggression by the Soviet Union or its allies.

NATO has changed significantly since it was founded in 1949. It started as a collective defense alliance tasked with preventing Soviet (now Russian) expansionism, but it has since grown into a complex institution tackling a variety of security issues. NATO has evolved over time in response to shifting geopolitical conditions, including the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the appearance of fresh dangers like cyberattacks and terrorism.

One of the most important changes has been the expansion of NATO membership. Following the Cold War's end, many former Eastern Bloc countries sought to join the alliance to strengthen their security and integration with the West. This resulted several rounds of enlargement, with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic entering in 1999, followed by numerous others in future years.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the world has once again entered a Cold War-like state in which Russia is feared and unpredictable in its actions. This has led to several countries, including Ukraine, wanting to join NATO, and benefit from the mutual defense pact against Russian aggression. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, Finland was the last to join NATO, and the organization grew 31 nations strong.

Finland joining on the 4th of April 2023, has led to Russian frustration. Along with Norway, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, they share a border with Russia, making the country more

vulnerable to attacks in the event of a war. Russian frustration has mounted as more countries join NATO, viewing it as an encroachment on their sphere of influence. They perceive NATO enlargement as a security threat, heightening tensions in regions historically within Russia's orbit. This expansion exacerbates geopolitical rivalries and complicates efforts for cooperation and mutual understanding.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Alliance:**

A union between two or more parties for mutual benefit. Usually between countries and/or organizations. An example of an alliance is NATO which consists of mainly Western nations, or The Collective Security Treaty Organization, which consists of Russia and other post-Soviet states.

### **Mutual defense pact:**

NATO's foundation is built upon the concept of mutual defense, meaning an attack on one, is an attack on all. If a NATO member were to be attacked by a state or non-state actor, all NATO states must declare war and provide support. This is also known as 'collective security'. This is highlighted in article 5 of NATO's founding treaty which states: *'The Parties 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 consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in the exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense'*.

### **Sphere of influence:**

A sphere of influence refers to a region or area where a particular country or organization holds significant sway, influence, or control, often extending beyond its own borders. This influence can manifest through economic, political, military, or cultural means.

### **Encroachment:**

Encroachment refers to the perception by certain countries, particularly Russia, that NATO's expansion constitutes a gradual intrusion into regions historically considered within their sphere of influence. This expansion is viewed as a challenge to their security interests and geopolitical dominance.

### **Diplomacy:**

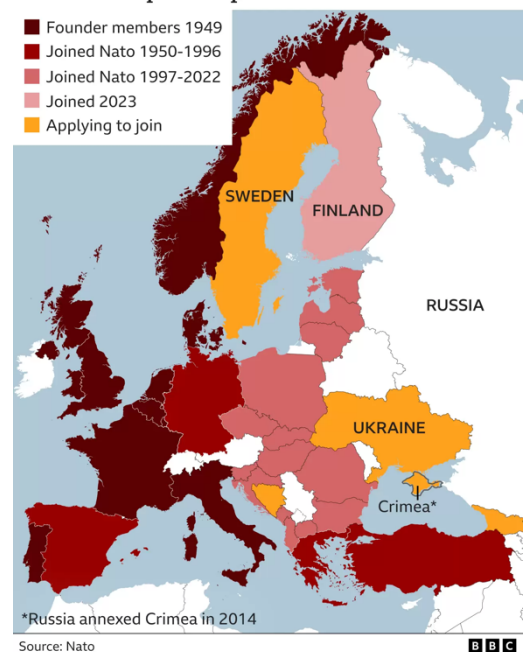
Diplomacy is the practice of conducting negotiations and managing international relations between countries or other entities through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. It involves the use of tact, persuasion, and communication to address conflicts, advance interests, and achieve mutual goals while respecting the sovereignty and interests of all parties involved.

## General Overview

### The expansion of NATO

As aforementioned, NATO was established in 1949 mainly in reaction to the threat that the Soviet Union's post-World War II expansionist ambitions were seen to represent. In order to preserve their security and deter future Soviet aggression, Western European countries, the United States, and Canada set out to form a collective defense alliance. This was prompted by the devastation caused by the war and the Soviet Union's rise to prominence in the world arena. Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States were the first members of NATO.

Nato's European expansion since 1949



Crucially, NATO's founding members did not physically border the Soviet Union; instead, they shared borders with countries behind the Iron Curtain, which represented the symbolic division between Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc. This geographical arrangement emphasized NATO's strategic goal of establishing a defensive buffer against the perceived Soviet threat and preventing communism from spreading deeper into Western Europe. These countries formed a cohesive military alliance to deter Soviet attack, while also promoting regional peace and security.

NATO's formation marked a pivotal moment in the post-war era, cementing the commitment of its member states to collective defense and mutual assistance. The treaty emphasized the principle of collective security, wherein an attack against one member would be considered an attack against all, triggering a collective response. This deterrent effect aimed to prevent conflict and maintain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of NATO member states.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO underwent a significant expansion, reflecting the changing geopolitical landscape of Europe and the aspirations of newly independent states to integrate into Western security. This expansion marked a profound transformation in NATO's role, extending its reach further eastward and consolidating its influence in regions once dominated by Soviet power.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has welcomed numerous countries into its alliance, including former Warsaw Pact members and former Soviet republics. The countries that have joined NATO since its initial formation are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland and most notably, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which were once part of the Soviet Union.

The expansion of NATO has significantly altered the geopolitical dynamics of Europe, eroding the buffer zone that historically separated Russia from the West. With NATO members now directly bordering Russia in some cases, the alliance's sphere of influence has grown closer to Russian borders, posing a perceived existential threat to Russian security interests.

From Russia's perspective, the expansion of NATO represents an encroachment on its traditional sphere of influence and a challenge to its geopolitical dominance. The presence of NATO forces in countries that were once part of the Soviet Union or closely aligned with Russia heightens tensions and exacerbates mistrust between Russia and the West. Moreover, the absence of a buffer zone between NATO member states and Russia intensifies concerns about potential military confrontation and escalates the risk of conflict in the region.

### **The risks of expansion**

The risks of NATO's expansion, particularly its proximity to Russia's borders, cannot be understated. From Russia's perspective, having NATO directly bordering its territory heightens feelings of encirclement and vulnerability, fueling a desire to reestablish a buffer zone between itself and the alliance. This desire is evident in Russia's diplomatic efforts to maintain influence over neighboring states, such as Belarus, and its inclination to support regimes sympathetic to its interests.

Furthermore, the historical context of Russia's leadership under Vladimir Putin adds complexity to these dynamics. As a former KGB operative during the Cold War, Putin has firsthand experience with Soviet-era geopolitical strategies and has expressed a nostalgic desire to restore Russia's lost prestige and influence. His leadership has been characterized by efforts to assert Russia's power on the world stage, often through assertive foreign policies and military interventions.

Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent invasion of Ukraine in 2022 underscore its intent to reestablish a buffer zone along its borders. These actions demonstrate Russia's willingness to resort to military intervention to achieve its strategic objectives when diplomatic avenues fall short. By annexing Crimea and supporting separatist movements in eastern Ukraine, Russia seeks to assert control over territories it considers vital to its security and influence. These aggressive actions not only destabilize the region but also pose a significant challenge to the principles of international law and territorial integrity.

Countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Sweden have also applied to NATO membership, and further contribute to Russia's sense of insecurity. Ukraine and Georgia, both former Soviet republics, share direct borders with Russia, intensifying Russia's concerns about encirclement and potential Western influence in its immediate vicinity. Ukraine, in particular, has emerged as a flashpoint, with its aspirations for closer integration with the West through initiatives like seeking NATO membership and fostering ties with the European Union.

The continuance of NATO expansion increased Western influence in neighboring countries, and perceived threats to Russia's security interests are likely to provoke a more assertive response from Russia. We can perceive this based on its actions in Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These events demonstrate Russia's willingness to use military force to safeguard its perceived sphere of influence and counter perceived encroachments. As Russia perceives its strategic depth diminishing and its geopolitical position challenged, it may resort to similar actions in the future to assert its dominance in the region and push back against what it perceives as hostile Western maneuvers. This cycle of escalation poses significant risks to regional stability and international security, heightening the potential for further conflict and exacerbating tensions between Russia and Western powers. Diplomatic efforts to address underlying grievances and de-escalate tensions will be crucial in mitigating the risk of further military confrontations.

## Timeline of Key Events

**April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1949** – Founding of NATO in Washington D.C.

**1952** - Greece and Turkey join NATO

**1955** – Germany joins NATO

**May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1955** - Creation of the Warsaw Pact

**1982** – Spain joins NATO

**December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1991** – Fall of the Soviet Union

**May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1992** – CSTO formed

**1999** – Czechia, Hungary, and Poland join NATO

**2004** – Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Estonia join NATO

**2009** – Albania, Croatia, join NATO

**February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014** – Russian invasion of Crimea

**2017** – Montenegro joins NATO

**2020** – North Macedonia joins NATO

**February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022** – Russian invasion of Ukraine

**2022** – Sweden and Ukraine apply for NATO membership

**2023** – Finland joins NATO

## Major Parties Involved



## United States

The United States is a major party in NATO due to its historical role in the alliance's establishment and its strategic interests in promoting stability and security in Europe. As a leading Western power following World War II, the U.S. recognized the need for collective defense against the Soviet Union and took a proactive stance in forming NATO. Additionally, the U.S. sees NATO as a means to uphold its influence in European affairs and to foster transatlantic cooperation among its allies.

## Russian Federation

The Russian Federation, formerly the Soviet Union, holds significance in the NATO context due to its historical rivalry with the Western powers during the Cold War era. As a successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia perceives NATO expansion as an encroachment on its traditional sphere of influence and a challenge to its geopolitical interests. The proximity of NATO forces to Russian borders exacerbates tensions, prompting Russia to assert its influence in neighboring states and defend what it considers vital to its security. Consequently, Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement underscores its role as a major party in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Europe.

## North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, stands as a major party in its own right due to its pivotal role in maintaining collective security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Formed in 1949 in response to Soviet expansionism, NATO has evolved into a cornerstone of Western defense architecture. Its commitment to mutual defense, enshrined in Article 5 of its founding treaty, underscores its importance as a bulwark against aggression. Furthermore, NATO's enlargement since the end of the Cold War reflects its enduring relevance, as it continues to adapt to emerging security challenges and foster cooperation among its member states.

## Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a significant entity in the geopolitical landscape, particularly in Eurasia. Formed in 1992, it comprises several former Soviet republics, including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, among others. CSTO's primary objective is to ensure collective defense and security among its member states, similar to NATO's mutual defense pact. It serves as a counterbalance to NATO's influence in the region and reflects Russia's efforts to maintain its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. The CSTO plays a



crucial role in addressing regional security challenges and promoting cooperation among its member states.

### **United Nations (UN)**

The United Nations (UN) holds a paramount position in global affairs as the preeminent international organization tasked with promoting peace, security, and cooperation among nations. Established in 1945 following World War II, the UN serves as a forum for dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution on a wide range of issues, including human rights, development, and humanitarian aid. With nearly all countries in the world as members, the UN embodies the collective aspirations of the international community to address common challenges and uphold shared values. Its extensive network of agencies, programs, and initiatives underscores its role as a cornerstone of multilateralism and a platform for collective action on pressing global issues.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Diplomacy**

Diplomacy offers a constructive pathway to address tensions between NATO and Russia/ the CSTO by fostering dialogue, understanding, and compromise. Through diplomatic channels, stakeholders can engage in constructive dialogue to identify shared interests, address grievances, and explore avenues for cooperation. The UN would act as a crucial forum for diplomatic initiatives aimed at mitigating conflicts and promoting stability. Additionally, multilateral initiatives led by the UN, such as peace talks and diplomatic summits, provide platforms for dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties. By leveraging diplomatic mechanisms and multilateral frameworks, nations can work collaboratively to de-escalate tensions, build trust, and find mutually beneficial solutions to complex security challenges.

### **Expansion of NATO**

NATO could continue its expansion as it has over the last several decades. This will allow for the growth of their sphere of influence but will also heighten tensions with the Russian Federation. These tensions will at some point inevitably lead to armed conflict with Russia and the CSTO, as we have seen in the Ukraine over the last decade. The expansion however might be successful as Russia has not yet shown signs of aggression directly at NATO members. It is a high-risk, high-reward strategy, leading to either the peaceful expansion of NATO influence or war with Russia and its allies.

## Military intervention

Another solution could be to call for military action by NATO in Ukraine to expel Russian forces and establish a heavily militarized border between Europe and Russia, along with its satellite states. Such a course of action could escalate tensions, provoke a direct confrontation with Russia, and potentially lead to a protracted conflict with devastating consequences. In the short term, military intervention in Ukraine could exacerbate hostilities and destabilize the region. However, in the long run this could be cause for more stability as there would be a clear military divide between the two powers.

## Further Reading

These are all papers regarding NATO expansions and/ or relationships with Russia and its allies. If the delegate wishes for a deeper balanced understanding of these dynamics, it's suggested the delegates read this.

*'The Debate of NATO Expansion'* - Eunika Katarzyna Frydrych

*'NATO Enlargement and Russia: Die-Hard Myths and Real Dilemmas'* - Michael Rühle

*'The Growth of NATO- Russia Tensions'* - Kimberly Marten

*'Adapting NATO- Russia Dialogue'* – Marc Ozwa

*'The Flawed Logic of NATO Expansion'* – Michel E. Brown

*'NATO Expansion: A Realist's View'* – Kenneth H. Waltz

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