



**HOW THE WEST WON:
Post-Cold War negotiations on NATO enlargement in the 1990-2000s**

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Global Affairs Review, No. 1, Vol. 1

Fall/Winter 2020

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To cite this article: Boris Kyrychenko, *HOW THE WEST WON: Post-Cold War Negotiations on NATO enlargement in the 1990-2000s*, Global Affairs Review, No. 1, Vol. 1, Fall/Winter 2020.

doi: 10.51330/gar.0020114

ISSN (Online): in progress

Global Affairs Review Website: <https://www.globalaffairreview.org/>

Published online: December 15, 2020

Abstract: With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, in 1991, the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became the triumphant military alliance in Europe. Following prolonged deliberations, NATO eventually conducted a systematic enlargement of the alliance into Central and Eastern Europe. This expansion of the alliance was fiercely contested, and according to many critics was based upon a ‘broken promise’ of no-NATO expansion east of a newly-reunified Germany, an assurance given during the negotiations on German reunification by the leaders of the Western alliance. This paper will explore the enlargement of NATO in the 1990s, whether or not it was indeed based on a broken promise of non-expansionism, how this enlargement was accomplished, and how it has affected the subsequent geopolitics of Europe. In doing so, this paper shall argue that a multitude of false assurances on NATO expansion were given to Soviet officials during the negotiations on German reunification.

“The Americans promised that NATO wouldn't move beyond the boundaries of Germany after the Cold War,” stated Gorbachev, “but now half of central and eastern Europe are members, so what happened to their promises? It shows they cannot be trusted.”¹ With the disappearance of its principal rival, the Soviet Union, in 1991, the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became the triumphant military alliance in Europe. NATO leaders in the 1990s were then left in an existential crisis, which questioned the very need for their alliance, as well as the future of European power dynamics. Following prolonged deliberations, NATO eventually conducted a systematic enlargement of the alliance into Central and Eastern Europe. This expansion of the alliance was fiercely contested and debated, and according to many critics, was based upon a ‘broken promise’ of no-NATO expansion east of a newly-reunified Germany, an assurance given during the negotiations on German reunification by the leaders of the Western alliance. This paper will explore the enlargement of NATO in the 1990s, whether or not it was indeed based on a broken promise of non-expansionism, how this enlargement was accomplished, and how it has affected the subsequent geopolitics of Europe. In doing so, this paper shall argue that a multitude of false assurances on NATO expansion were given to Soviet officials during the negotiations on German reunification. This was followed by an expansion of NATO due to a variety of factors such as US domestic support and Eastern European support, and has resulted in renewed tensions between the United States and Russia.

This paper will be divided into four sections. The first will provide historical context to the events of the late 1980s and 1990s in which NATO enlargement took place. The second

¹ Adrian Blomfield and Mike Smith, “Gorbachev: US Could Start New Cold War,” The Telegraph (Telegraph Media Group, May 6, 2008), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1933223/Gorbachev-US-could-start-new-Cold-War.html>.

section will explore whether or not false assurances were given to Soviet officials during German reunification negotiations at the end of the Cold War. The third section will then examine the debate surrounding NATO's purpose in the 1990s and offer an explanation as to why NATO was expanded. The final section of the paper will analyze the impacts of the 'broken promise' and subsequent NATO enlargement on European geopolitics in the 2000s and present-day Russian relations with the West.

Historical Context

When there is significant instability, the potential for strategic geopolitical shifts is the greatest. Such was the case in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and, by extension, its military alliance, known as the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), ceased to exist. This was because, by the 1980s, the USSR's economy had begun to fall apart, affecting the USSR's ability to not only project military power beyond its borders, but also to maintain domestic unity within, as a result of a decline in living standards and GDP.² It was within this difficult situation that the relatively-young Michael Gorbachev took power in 1985. While Gorbachev attempted to alleviate the crisis through reforms of the USSR's political and economic system, known as *perestroika* and *glasnost*, these reforms could not stop the powerful international and domestic trends that were weakening the USSR.³ One of these trends was the collapse of pro-Soviet regimes across Eastern Europe, such as in Hungary.⁴ Of these European allies, East Germany (officially known as the German Democratic Republic, or GDR) was the most loyal Warsaw Pact ally of the USSR. This steadfast loyalty of the GDR,

² Robert D. Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy since 1900*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 315.

³ Schulzinger, 316.

⁴ Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01636600902773248>.

however, came to an end in the tumultuous 1989-1991 era when the Berlin Wall collapsed, and calls for the reunification between East and West Germany arose among Germans, and even the German leadership, such as West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.⁵

The growing possibility of German reunification alarmed governments on both sides of Europe, with countries such as France and especially Poland (understandably) being alarmed at the prospect of a reunified Germany, to the point of even asking for Soviet troops to remain within Polish territory.⁶ It was within this unpredictable geopolitical context that the Soviet leadership was forced to negotiate a German reunification with the Germans and the Western powers (notably the United States, France and the United Kingdom). This negotiation came to be known as the “Two-plus-Four process,” the two being a reference to the two Germanies and the four meaning the aforementioned Western powers and USSR.⁷ It was during these negotiations, which resulted in the reunification of Germany under NATO, that guarantees on no-NATO expansions were allegedly given, according to many former-Soviet officials.

What was said about NATO during Reunification Talks

This section will examine whether Western leaders during the 1990 negotiations on German reunification really did give guarantees to Soviet diplomats that NATO will not be expanded. Many individuals, including former diplomats, politicians and academics, have taken up the argument that a ‘no-NATO enlargement’ assurance was never given during the negotiations. This is the official interpretation of the Western powers, particularly of the United States. This has been supported by key American figures who took part in the talks, such as

⁵ Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy*, 314.

⁶ Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” 42.

⁷ Robert B. Zoellick, “Two Plus Four: The Lessons of German Unification.” *The National Interest*, no. 61 (2000): 20. www.jstor.org/stable/42897239.

Robert B. Zoellick of the US State Department, who served under President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. Alongside Baker and Bush, Zoellick oversaw the development and implementation of US foreign policy relating to the prospect of German reunification.⁸

When writing about it ten years later, Zoellick recalled how it was a priority for the US negotiators to create a unified, sovereign Germany within a larger unified Europe, all of which was to be linked to the Americans via security guarantees.⁹ He also explained how he put political pressure on his Soviet counterparts by responding to any grievances with the threat that the US and West Germany were willing to continue reunification talks ‘with or without’ the USSR. Most importantly, however, Zoellick defended his legacy by arguing that a no-NATO guarantee was never given officially, stating that: “I adamantly disagree [about the guarantee], in part because I recall anticipating the possibility of Poland and others joining NATO and so I wanted to avoid taking any action that would preclude that option.”¹⁰ This is where technicalities become important in understanding the Western position, as, after this quote, Zoellick continues his defence by listing several official documents which indeed provide no evidence of any guarantees. By doing so, it becomes clear that by ‘action’ Zoellick really means he avoided putting concrete guarantees in any legally-binding documents or treaties, and this distinction between an official, written-down guarantee, and a non-official, implied guarantee is crucial when trying to understand the Soviet perspective.

Additionally, the view that no official assurance was given to the Soviets has also been echoed by other US policymakers, such as former senior official on the US National Security Council, Philip Zelikow. Zelikow, who also took part in the negotiations, claims (when writing

⁸ Zoellick, "Two Plus Four: The Lessons of German Unification," 17.

⁹ Zoellick, "Two Plus Four: The Lessons of German Unification," 19.

¹⁰ Zoellick, "Two Plus Four: The Lessons of German Unification," 21-22.

about it in 1997) that in the 1990 *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany*, the resulting treaty from the negotiations, only East Germany was mentioned with any NATO exemptions. He goes on to explain that “the option of adding new members to NATO was not foreclosed by the deal actually made in 1990.”¹¹ Indubitably, the claim that no legally-binding, official assurance against NATO enlargement was ever given is one that is difficult to argue. Even Gorbachev himself has agreed with this statement, stating the following in a 2010 interview, “The topic of ‘NATO expansion’ was not discussed at all, and it wasn’t brought up in those years. I say this with full responsibility.”¹² Therefore, the argument that no legal assurances were ever given against enlargement is valid.

This debate, however, continues because while the former remains technically true, the principal argument given by former Soviet officials and other academics is that the West violated the spirit of the negotiations, specifically the spirit of the assurances given, and thus misled the Soviets during the talks.¹³ While this claim lacked evidence throughout the 90s and 2000s (aside from a few statements from former diplomats), thanks to the recent declassification of various memos and historical documents, Soviet claims have been given some substance. In 2017, dozens of these documents were declassified by the American National Security Archive.¹⁴

¹¹ Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO,” 40.

¹² Maxim Kórshunov, “Mikhail Gorbachev: I Am against All Walls,” *Russia Beyond*, October 16, 2014, https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail_gorbachev_i_am_against_all_walls_40673.html.

¹³ Steven Pifer, “Did NATO Promise Not to Enlarge? Gorbachev Says ‘No,’” *Brookings* (Brookings, July 29, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/11/06/did-nato-promise-not-to-enlarge-gorbachev-says-no/>.

¹⁴ “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard | National Security Archive,” *nsarchive* (National Security Archive, 2017), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

The first piece of evidence that supports the Soviets' claim would be a memorandum of a conversation which took place between Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow. In this conversation, the two discussed the military situation which could arise after the reunification of Germany. Specifically, Baker tried to convince Gorbachev to let Germany join NATO by illustrating a potentially less-favourable outcome with the following explanation: "Let's assume for the moment that unification is going to take place. Assuming that, would you prefer a united Germany outside of NATO that is independent and has no US forces or would you prefer a united Germany with ties to NATO and assurances that there would be no extension of NATO's current jurisdiction eastward?"¹⁵ Baker further expanded on this fear by arguing that a Germany outside of NATO could potentially decide to arm itself with its own nuclear weapons instead of relying on the US umbrella, which would spell disaster for Soviet foreign policy.¹⁶ By illustrating this unfavourable outcome to Gorbachev, he makes it seem to the Soviet leader that both of them are on the same side, wishing to avoid a resurgent militaristic Germany. This becomes the spirit in which the negotiations took place, with Baker further stating to Gorbachev that, "The President [Bush] and I have made clear that we seek no unilateral advantage in this process."¹⁷ While Gorbachev agreed with some of what Baker said, he reminded the American that a broadening of the NATO zone would not be acceptable, to which Baker replied that, "We understand the need for assurances to the countries in the East. If we maintain a presence in a Germany that is a part of NATO, there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces

¹⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow" (National Security Archive, February 9, 1990), 9.
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325679-Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

¹⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker," 6.

¹⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker," 12.

of NATO one inch to the east.”¹⁸ This, once again carefully misleading wording, is an excellent example of why the controversy exists. While technically speaking (within the context of the conversation) Baker may have been referring exclusively to East Germany, it is easy to see how Gorbachev could have interpreted such a statement as a broader guarantee against any expansion of ‘NATO’s jurisdiction’ into Eastern Europe. It is thus thanks to this statement that Gorbachev walked away from the meeting believing that he received an informal guarantee from the Americans that they were not interested in expanding NATO into Germany, let alone expanding into the still-existing WTO states.

Other documents that ought to be examined are records of conversations between Gorbachev and other Western leaders, such as the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the socialist French President François Mitterrand. In his conversation with Kohl, Gorbachev stressed the need for strategic unity alongside German reunification with the argument that: “It would not be serious if one part of the state was in NATO, and the other in the WTO. Somewhere on one side of the river you have one set of troops, and across the river, another set of troops.”¹⁹ He further explained his worry of a German reunification under NATO to Kohl, to which Kohl answered that, “We [the West German government] believe that NATO should not expand its scope. We have to find a reasonable resolution.”²⁰ As one of the leading figures pushing for rapid reunification, Kohl knew that despite popular domestic support, he also needed the support of both the Americans (which he had) and the Soviets. It is therefore unclear whether he genuinely believed in a neutral Germany, or whether he was simply agreeing with Gorbachev

¹⁸ See note 17.

¹⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl” (National Security Archive, February 10, 1990), 3.
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4325683-Document-09-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

²⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl,” 1.

to help get him on board with the talks. Regardless, this was another important western leader who assured the Soviet leader that he was unwilling to expand NATO.

The other western leader, who is often overlooked in these talks, is French President Mitterrand. By that point, France had a history of being skeptical of the American-led organization despite being a NATO member.²¹ It was therefore for this reason (alongside their shared goal of a ‘pan-European home’) that Gorbachev viewed Mitterrand as one of his closest Western allies.²² In their conversation, Gorbachev expressed that he was becoming, “aware of [secretary Baker’s] favorable attitude towards the intention expressed by a number of representatives of Eastern European countries to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and subsequently join NATO.”²³ Mitterrand attempted to then address this concern from the Soviet leader by stressing his efforts in promoting their pan-European visions for the continents’ security, stating that: “I always told my NATO partners: make a commitment not to move NATO’s military formations from their current territory in the FRG to East Germany.”²⁴ This is once again another example of a Western leader telling Gorbachev that he will discourage any commitments to enlarge NATO. In this instance, however, it is clearer that Mitterrand is likely talking only about East Germany, and not Eastern Europe as a whole. It is reasonable, however,

²¹ Edward Cody, “After 43 Years, France to Rejoin NATO as Full Member,” *Washingtonpost.com* (The Washington Post, March 12, 2009), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/11/AR2009031100547.html>.

²² See note 19 above: “*Gorbachev felt that of all the Europeans, the French president was his closest ally in the construction of a post-Cold War Europe, because the Soviet leader believed Mitterrand shared his concept of the common European home...*”

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325696-Document-19-Record-of-conversation-between>

²³ “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand (Excerpts),” *The National Security Archive*, May 25, 1990,

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325696-Document-19-Record-of-conversation-between>.

²⁴ “Record of Conversation,” 9.

to assume that if the French leader did not support NATO enlargement into the former GDR, it is unlikely he would have supported even broader enlargement.

As the negotiations continued, the domestic situation within the USSR changed, with Russian President Boris Yeltsin becoming another important political figure in the talks. The following document comes from 1991 (after German reunification) and was a memorandum for Yeltsin composed by a Russian delegation which visited NATO headquarters and spoke to the then-Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Woerner. In this document, Woerner claimed that the West, “should not allow the isolation of the USSR from the European community.”²⁵ This was in direct response to the growing desire for former WTO countries to join Western organizations such as the European Union and NATO. Woerner attempted to calm the Russian delegation by explaining that 13 out of the 16 NATO council members were against any expansion of the alliance. He also stated that he would meet with Lech Walesa (the leader of Poland) and Ion Iliescu (the leader of Romania) to oppose Poland and Romania joining NATO, which alongside Hungary and Czechoslovakia, were also looking to join the organization.²⁶ This document is another example of the supposed post-Cold war spirit of cooperation between East and West. This spirit gave many the hope that Russia would eventually transform into an important ally and partner of Europe. This optimism, however, ended with the subsequent NATO enlargement, according to Soviet and, later Russian, officials. It is therefore through the analysis of these documents, and the aforementioned American rebuttals, that the debate surrounding this controversy is clarified as an understanding that while the Americans did in fact never officially

²⁵ “Memorandum to Boris Yeltsin from Russian Supreme Soviet Delegation to NATO HQs” (National Security Archive, July 3, 1991), 2.
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325708-Document-30-Memorandum-to-Boris-Yeltsin-from>.

²⁶ “Memorandum to Boris Yeltsin from Russian Supreme Soviet Delegation to NATO HQs,” 2.

guarantee that there would not be any NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, the expansion nonetheless went against many of the informal assurances received by the Soviets during the early 1990 negotiations.

The Nature of NATO Enlargement

This section will examine the debate surrounding NATO's purpose in the 1990s and offer explanations as to why NATO was expanded. For context, within a year of German reunification and the integration of a united Germany into NATO, the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact were dissolved and replaced with dozens of new volatile states. The largest was the new Russian Federation, which at the time was going through chaotic liberal reforms under President Yeltsin.

²⁷ The regional chaos in Eastern Europe often exploded into violence, such as in the case of Yugoslavia, which collapsed into a civil war between the Serbs, Croats and the Bosnians in 1991.²⁸ The Yugoslav conflict, in particular, became the first major conflict on European soil since the Second World War, and was, therefore, a cause of alarm for both the Americans, and especially the Europeans.

Meanwhile, in the United States, a federal election replaced President Bush with President Bill Clinton, a charismatic Democrat whose administration had a different outlook on foreign policy and the future of NATO in Europe from its predecessor. With all these factors in mind, a debate began among policymakers, military generals and academics on the future of NATO, primarily whether to enlarge the alliance, at what rate, and how?

²⁷ John M. Dirks, "1991 - 2000s," Class Lecture, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, November 19, 2019.

²⁸ John M. Dirks, "Peace Dividend? New World Order, New Europe, New Crises in the 1990s," Class Lecture, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, November 12, 2019.

The primary argument against NATO enlargement questioned the very existence and relevance of the alliance in a post-Cold War Europe. With the principal threat, the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, gone, this anti-Soviet alliance no longer had an enemy with which it could justify its mission. While the Russian Federation did remain a strong regional power with nuclear capabilities, its strength in the early 1990s was nowhere near that of the former Soviet Union. Within a couple of years, the Red Army and other Soviet/ Russian paramilitary organizations experienced a near total collapse of their ability to project power beyond their borders, to the point of even having a questionable ability to maintain their own domestic security.²⁹

Furthermore, despite rapprochement between the West and the Russian political elite, the NATO alliance was still viewed by most Russians as a fundamentally anti-Russian military organization, consisting of sixteen powerful Western states, all of which could pose a serious threat to Russia's western border.³⁰ Thus, for many Russian politicians attempting liberal reforms and wishing for integration with the West, any enlargement of NATO would deeply hurt the progress they had made domestically (by strengthening the rhetoric from domestic conservative and communist voices) and would inevitably renew hostilities between Russia and the West.

While solid arguments existed for non-enlargement, and even a dissolution of NATO, there were many strong factors that put pressure on the Europeans and, specifically, the US administration to pursue expansion. The first option for the future of NATO, which was dismissed, was the possibility of integrating Russia itself into NATO, thus creating the truly pan-European organization that was desired by the likes of Gorbachev and Mitterrand. This was

²⁹ Kenneth W. Thompson, *NATO Expansion* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1998): 161.

³⁰ Jeffrey Simon and National Defense University. Institute For National Strategic Studies, *NATO Enlargement: Opinions and Options* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute For National Strategic Studies, 1995), 123.

problematic for a plethora of reasons. Firstly, this would mean Russia would become a military ally of the United States, which, aside from the conflicting geopolitical objectives of both states, would have also meant granting Russia a place in Western arms markets. Such a move by the US would have been very radical at the time, especially for a state that was its rival for decades.³¹ Furthermore, there was also a concern voiced by the likes of Henry Kissinger (former US Secretary of State) that including Russia in NATO would also allow the Russians to influence the decision-making process of the NATO council on key issues, thus rendering the alliance into a “toothless ineffective security system.”³² For these important reasons, despite its’ liberalization and democratization reforms, Russia was not accepted into the NATO alliance.

Yet while it became clear that NATO leaders were not willing to expand the organization into Russia itself, expansion into the rest of Eastern Europe became a more likely and attractive possibility to Western leaders. Firstly, it became apparent, thanks largely to the Yugoslav war in Bosnia, that conflicts could still arise in Europe despite the end of the Cold War. Secondly, came the domestic pressures on the US government, as it became increasingly evident that for the US to keep its forces in Europe, it could only do so through NATO.³³ As explained by US State Department official Stephen Flanagan, the “Germans are unlikely to host 95% of our military presence in Europe for much longer. We need other real estate.” He was also concerned that most “West European states either don't feel threatened, are disinclined to host us, or would want too high a price for new bases.”³⁴ Therefore, if not Germany and Western Europe, the future of the US army in Europe would have to be where they were wanted, which at the time was in

³¹ Simon, 127.

³² Thompson, *NATO Expansion*, 162.

³³ Thompson, *NATO Expansion*, 50.

³⁴ M.E. Sarotte, “How to Enlarge NATO: The Debate inside the Clinton Administration, 1993–95,” *International Security* 44, no. 1 (July 2019): 19. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00353.

Eastern Europe. In other words, it was thought that an American brigade would be more welcome in Poland than in Germany.³⁵ Additionally, domestic pressures also weighed on the Clinton administration, as there were significant populations of ethnic Polish, Czechs and Hungarians residing in the United States, which meant they could put significant lobbying pressure on the government in support of NATO enlargement into their former Eastern European countries.³⁶

In terms of the international pressures on the US administration for NATO enlargement, like the domestic situation, it came predominantly from the Eastern Europeans themselves, who, after the dissolution of the WTO, quickly found themselves without any security alliances. For instance, the anti-Soviet Polish President Walesa told President Clinton that: “We are all afraid of Russia ... if Russia again adopts an aggressive foreign policy, that aggression will be directed toward Ukraine and Poland...because Poland cannot be left defenseless, it need[s] to have the protection of US muscle.”³⁷ This is an important statement for the time, because while Russia at the time was trying to work towards integration with Western institutions, Polish politicians such as Walesa promoted a narrative of Russian aggression, and argued that 1990s rapprochement was simply an outlier in the history of Russia’s foreign policy. Additional pressure to integrate Poland into NATO even came from the Germans themselves, who also subscribed to the ‘Russian aggression’ narrative. The Germans understood well the realities of the northern European plains, and argued to the Americans that the defence of Berlin would require Polish

³⁵ Sarotte, “How to Enlarge NATO,” 18.

³⁶ Thompson, *NATO Expansion*, 55.

³⁷ Sarotte, “How to Enlarge NATO,” 14.

support, with German Vice-Admiral Ulrich Weisser declaring that it is: “easier to defend Germany in Poland than Germany in Germany.”³⁸

The pressure to integrate the Eastern Europeans also existed for a variety of political reasons, such as the idea that NATO integration, and the criteria required to join NATO, would help bolster the strength of the new democratic institutions of Eastern Europe.³⁹ This was an important argument being made in the 1990s because strengthening the new democracies was seen as a vital goal for maintaining European security, with the added bonus that it was also cheaper to integrate the new democracies into NATO than to give them massive amounts of economic aid, as was the case in German reunification.⁴⁰ There was also an element of paranoia from the Western leaders’ of losing their new Eastern European partners, which helped expedite the process of enlargement. This paranoia likely came from the lessons learned during the failure of democracy in Central Europe during the 1930s interwar period. For example, some European policymakers, such as Peter Nielsen of Denmark, worried that: “If their [Eastern Europeans] wish for NATO membership is not met, they might develop an angry nationalism, which in turn could make economic restructuring and democratic development difficult.”⁴¹ All of these factors placed considerable pressure on the US administration and the NATO council to enlarge. Therefore, despite the Russian desire for integration into Western institutions such as NATO, a variety of domestic and international pressures convinced the Americans to instead exclude Russia while integrating former WTO states, thus pushing the boundary of NATO closer to the Russian heartland.

³⁸ See note 37.

³⁹ See note 35.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *NATO Expansion*, 51.

⁴¹ Walter Goldstein and Standing Conference of Atlantic Organizations., *Security in Europe : The Role of NATO after the Cold War* (Riverside, Nj: Usa Orders, Macmillan, 1994), 73.

Effects of NATO enlargement on geopolitics

Finally, this section will conclude by briefly analyzing the impacts of the ‘broken promise’ and the impact of NATO expansion on European geopolitics in the 2000s, as well as on present-day Russian relations with the Western powers.

The eventual enlargement of the NATO alliance into former WTO states such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (former Czechoslovakia) had largely harmful ramifications on European geopolitics, and on future relations between the US and Russia. As mentioned earlier, the radical pro-Western democratic movement in Russian domestic politics was dealt a decisive blow, as it became clear to the Russian people that despite Russia’s attempts at rapprochement with the West, the West had instead decided to strengthen NATO.⁴² This inevitably contributed to Russian sentiments of alienation from the rest of Europe.

Furthermore, one of the biggest critics of NATO enlargement in subsequent years has been Gorbachev himself, who, understandably, has felt betrayed by his Western counterparts. Gorbachev has since criticized this move in the media, arguing that: “The Americans promised that NATO wouldn’t move beyond the boundaries of Germany after the Cold War, but now half of central and eastern Europe are members, so what happened to their promises? It shows they cannot be trusted.”⁴³ This sentiment is common among many of the Russian political elite, who have returned to a Soviet-style skepticism of the West, and especially of the United States, as an increasing number of their former allies have been absorbed into NATO.

⁴² Simon, *NATO Enlargement*, 127.

⁴³ See note 1.

NATO enlargement and the perceived ‘breaking of a promise’ by the West has also been an important factor in many 21st century events such as the resurgence of a ‘new cold war.’ Once again, for Gorbachev, enlargement was part of a pattern of Western hostilities towards Russian interests, as he has claimed that: “From NATO's expansion plans in the former Soviet Union to Washington's proposals for a bigger defence budget and a missile shield in central Europe, the US was deliberately quashing hopes for permanent peace with Russia.”⁴⁴ These actions, while not directly targeting Russia, have nonetheless eliminated any pro-West political leanings in Moscow and has pushed the Russian leadership into ‘pre-perestroika governing traditions and finding strategic allies again in the East,’ and not in the US and Western Europe.⁴⁵ This helps support the argument that Cold War-like relations have returned to Europe, and also helps explain the rise of new Russian leadership such as President Vladimir Putin, who could be considered a non-democratic and non-liberal leader.

These seemingly-hostile actions from the United States have also arguably contributed to recent Russian military buildup and resurgence, which within this geopolitical context is portrayed as a retaliation to the enlargement of the alliance. There is no better example of this than the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014.⁴⁶ This annexation was seen by the West as an illegal and aggressive foreign policy move. These accusations forced the Russian president to argue that: “... they [Western leaders] have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed before us an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO’s

⁴⁴ See note 1.

⁴⁵ Stephen F. Cohen, “Gorbachev’s Lost Legacy” (The Nation, February 24, 2005), <https://www.thenation.com/article/gorbachevs-lost-legacy/>.

⁴⁶ *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013-2014* (Fort Bragg, North Carolina: The United States Army Special Operations Command, 2015): 36.

expansion to the east, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders.”⁴⁷ In other words, from the Russian perspective, the enlargement of NATO, the deployment of NATO armies close to the Russian border and the history of misinformation from Western diplomats justifies their resurgent aggressive foreign policy, and annexation of Crimea. Thus, due to the expansion of NATO being interpreted as a hostile move, it has contributed significantly to the deterioration of present-day US-Russia relations and increased tensions between former WTO and Soviet states, such as Ukraine. For these reasons, enlargement can, therefore, be seen as a mistake. Simply put, while the Cold War may have ended in 1989-1991, the decision to maintain and expand NATO has led to a renewed, smaller-scale cold war in present-day Eastern Europe, a situation which ought to have been avoided by Western policymakers.

Conclusion

Thus, it becomes evident that a multitude of unofficial false assurances on the expansion of NATO were given to Soviet officials during German reunification negotiations, which were then seen as a betrayal during the expansion of NATO, and has resulted in renewed cold war-like US-Russia relations. In this context, NATO enlargement has had geopolitical consequences. Yet while mistakes were made, it is difficult to lay blame on any set of individuals, because administrations change, and therefore promises in international relations can be rendered null unless they have legal-backing, a lesson that was indubitably learned by the former Soviet officials who watched NATO grow. Regardless, America’s misuse of its unipolar moment in the 1990s has contributed to many of the issues occurring in Europe today.⁴⁸ Aside from contributing

⁴⁷ See note 14.

⁴⁸ Charles Krauthammer, “THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT,” The Washington Post (WP Company, July 20, 1990), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/07/20/the-unipolar-moment/62867add-2fe9-493f-a0c9-4bfba1ec23bd/>.

to the sour state of current US-Russia relations, it has also added justification to the world's distrust of an American-led world order. The repercussions of these sentiments will impact the future foreign policies of many nations around the world, not just those of Russia. With all that in mind, one can only hope that this impact will not lead to anymore violent conflict, for even a new Cold War is still better than a hot one.

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