

***The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of U.S-Russian Rivalry:
Obama's Policies between Threat Perception and New Containment***

**الأزمة الأوكرانية و عودة المنافسة الأمريكية-الروسية : سياسات أوباما بين إدراك التهديد و
الإحتواء الجديد**

Sabri Hafdallah ^{1,*}, Miloud Barkaoui ²

**¹ PhD Student of Anglophone Civilizations, Badji-Mokhtar University-Annaba
sabrihafdallah@yahoo.fr (Algeria)**

**² Professor and Research Laboratory Director, Badji-Mokhtar University-Annaba
(Algeria), mbarkaoui@webmails.com**

Received: 11 / 05 / 2021

Accepted: 16 / 07 / 2021

Published: 20 / 07 / 2021

Abstract:

The end of the Cold War triggered a panoply of reflections on the nature of the world, especially on the European security architecture. In early 2014, cataclysmic events in the Ukraine ushered in a period of great power rivalry between Washington and Moscow reminiscent of 19th Century European power-grab. By deploying an offensive realist approach, this article ponders the turbulent events that erupted in Kiev and the Russian intervention in the country during the Obama presidency. By using qualitative content analysis, this paper seeks to place the Ukrainian issue into an international dimension of post-Cold War power dynamics between Washington and Russia. Indeed, the inexorable eastward expansion of NATO, the U.S. missile defense installations in eastern-Europe, the unsuccessful policy of rapprochement and the Russian denial of Ukraine's occidental orientation are key factors in further fomenting the ongoing impasse.

Keywords: Neo-Realism; Threat Perception; Ukraine Crisis

الملخص:

رسمت نهاية الحرب الباردة انعكاسات جديدة لطبيعة العالم لتمس خاصة هيكلة أمن أوروبا. حيث أن الأحداث العنيفة التي شهدتها أوكرانيا بداية سنة 2014 مهدت إلى تأجيج تنافس قوى عظيم بين واشنطن وموسكو مشابه لصراع القوى الأوروبي الذي عرفه العالم في القرن التاسع عشر. يعالج هذا المقال عن طريق تطبيق نظرية الواقعية الهجومية الأحداث المضطربة التي نشبت في كييف والتي نجم عنها التدخل الروسي في المنطقة خاصة أثناء عهدة الرئيس الأمريكي براك أوباما. بالإعتماد على منهجية تحليل نوعي تعنى هذه الدراسة بإعطاء أبعاد دولية للأزمة الأوكرانية في عالم ما بعد الحرب الباردة و التي دون شك ساهمت في تأجيج مفهوم التهديد الخارجي بين واشنطن و موسكو. و بالتزامن مع ذلك أدى التوسع المهول لحلف الناتو شرقا و تنصيب صواريخ أمريكية موجهة نحو الأراضي الروسية بالإضافة إلى فشل سياسة التقارب الأمريكي-الروسي التي دعى إليها أوباما و خاصة الرفض الروسي المطلق للتوجهات الغربية لأوكرانيا إلى زيادة حدة الصراع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الواقعية الهجومية- إدراك التهديد- الأزمة الأوكرانية

* Corresponding Author.

1. INTRODUCTION

2. The end of the Cold War has generated a panoply of reflections on the nature of the world with aspirations that the salience of nuclear weapons as security guarantors was in decline. However, these hopes were quickly dismissed as nuclear deterrence persisted setting the groundwork for new policy approaches to cope with the post-Cold War security demands. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following exacerbation of the situation in Eastern Ukraine further deteriorated the relations between Moscow and Washington. According to the neorealist scholar John J. Mearsheimer, sustaining entrenched Cold War institutions like NATO and the Ballistic Missile Defence deployments towards Russia's borders guaranteed the resurgence of Cold War beliefs and the crisis in Ukraine is the culmination of those practices. The answer to the problem, according to the international and national texts, imposes the study of the following question:

To what extent has the Ukraine crisis contributed to exacerbating the multifaceted tensions between Washington and Moscow?

The aforementioned study question will be discussed through the following titles:

1- Russian Threat Perception

2- NATO Enlargement and Missile Defense.

3- U.S. Foreign Policy in Ukraine: A Neorealist Approach

3.1.A Bargaining Chip

Russian Threat Perception:

The escalation of the Ukrainian conflict in 2014 to the international scheme prompted pundits and observers to argue that the U.S.- Russian bilateral relations were witnessing new historic lows since the end of the Cold War. According to John J. Mearsheimer one of the chief reasons for the current impasse in Ukraine was NATO's eastward expansion towards the Russian borders. For realists, the successive rounds of expansion provoked Moscow to counterbalance Washington's growing presence in the former Soviet Republics while simultaneously restoring the Russian hegemony in its "near-abroad" (Mearsheimer, 2015). In the same fashion, the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014 can be assessed through Stephen Walt's "balance of threat" theory which states that the primary motive of states in the international system is the securitization of their interests against a "prevailing threat" either by allaying or balancing against it (Walt, 1985). As such, contrary to the balance of power theory, Walt contends that states seek security from threat rather than power since, by itself, power is a relative neutral concept. Its applications, however, dictate whether a state is framed as adversarial or not. During the Cold War, the allies sided with the U.S. despite its massive nuclear arsenal, yet the Western European states had perceived Washington as neither hostile nor aggressive; and thus, it was not a threat.

With regard to the Crimean crisis, President Putin adopted a comprehensive approach through a skillful combination of energy diplomacy, social as well as cultural instruments to deal with the crisis in Ukraine. Putin's speech to the Duma a few weeks after the annexation of Crimea offers a remarkable historical document regarding the narratives of Moscow's decisions. Addressing the federal assembly in 2014, Putin set out his views on the situation in Ukraine and outlined his country's decisions about the unfolding events in Kiev. He said:

3.

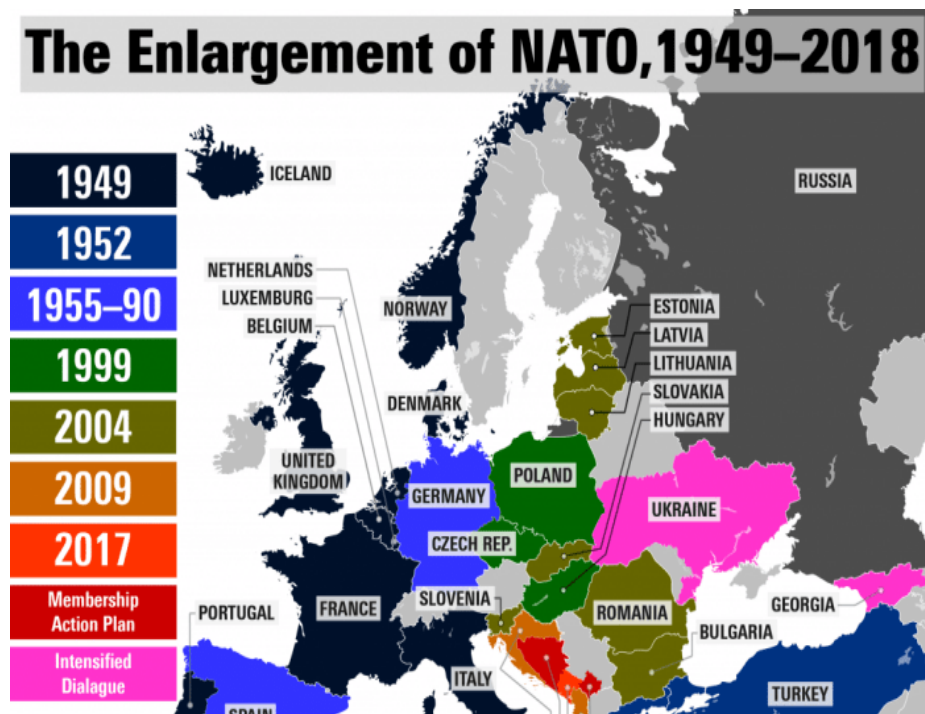
If you do not want to have a dialogue with us, we will have to protect our legitimate interests unilaterally and will not pay for what we view as erroneous policy... If for some European countries national pride is a long-forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury, true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival. (President of Russia)

In light of Walt's threat perception theory, the Russian behavior in the Crimean Peninsula could be considered as an indicator that Moscow felt, and still feels, cornered; first, by Western political and military institutions, especially NATO's unceasing eastward expansion to its geopolitical buffer-zone, and second by the U.S. missile deployments in Russia's "near-abroad". The 2014 Ukraine crisis, besides bearing strong similarities to past accounts of threat balancing, exacerbated, even more, the already poisoned U.S.-Russian bilateral relations. The 1962 Cuban missile crisis and the current Iranian nuclear proliferation program can be framed under Walt's theoretical framework. In the former, Washington, in 1959 provocatively deployed nuclear warheads in several NATO member-states aimed at Soviet Territory in order to bar, and consequently, mitigate communist expansionist tendencies in Central and Eastern Europe. Moscow perceived the move as a vital threat to its national security, and immediately balanced against the deployments by installing nuclear missiles in Cuba able to strike Washington. As for Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. and Israel perceive the Islamic Republic as a threatening power both regionally and globally; and thus, both states are currently balancing against it, despite the fact that Iran, measured in terms of military capabilities and economic capacities, is an "aggregate power" . The above examples illustrate the fact that state's A reactions to threats does not hinge on whether state B possesses power or not, but rather on how state A perceives and evaluates the intentions of state B (Waltz 48). Therefore, the perceptions of intentions foster the image they paint on each other regardless of their power levels, and thus the image of a state as hostile and perception of its intentions as aggressive are two correlating factors. John J. Mearsheimer notes, the U.S. and its Western/ allies cannot justify their intentions to Moscow, being a super power in decline, already feels ignored, dominated and eclipsed by the Western hemisphere. That said, it is, then, up to "the Russians, not the West, who ultimately decide what accounts as a threat to them" (23).

2. NATO Enlargement and Missile Defense:

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the concept of an "all European home" was introduced as a means to permanently weld the schism between Russia and the entire Western hemisphere. However, from a Russian standpoint, the concept was metamorphosized into a complete antithesis with the U.S. betraying its pledges to the Kremlin in 1989 of not moving NATO "one inch eastward"; by appointing pro-western governments in Central and Eastern Europe; sponsoring and extending the role of Cold War entrenched institutions such as NATO that has lost its *raison d'être* (Mearsheimer); leading to the Ukraine crisis which is the culmination of all those practices. The North Atlantic Alliance had undergone three rounds of enlargement after the Cold War up until 2015 (Figure 1), accepting twelve new members from Central and Eastern Europe. The first round of enlargement took place in 1999 and included three Central European States, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland. The second round of enlargement was announced in NATO's Prague Summit in November 2002 and included Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The third round was in 2009, and under the auspices of the Obama Administration, NATO incorporated Albania and Croatia.

Figure 1: The Enlargement of NATO 1949-2018



Source : <https://mronline.org/2019/01/02/is-russia-imperialist/>

In accordance with Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, NATO reiterated on multiple occasions its commitment to upholding its open-door policy; pledging that the door to membership will remain open for the partners willing to join (Strasbourg-Kehl Summit, 2009) with Georgia; Ukraine; Macedonia; Kosovo Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro being on the hot list. Expanding the North Atlantic Alliance was presented by Western powers as a policy based on the collective fundamental values of NATO member-states aimed at preventing Russia from "establishing a military buffer zone" because if it did it, would logically follow with demands for a political corollary that would imply a veto over foreign policy. Ever since the reunification of Germany in 1990, Moscow consistently harbored reservations about the expansion of a hostile nuclear military alliance along its geopolitical back-yard. In an interview with a Russian TV, president Putin stressed the fact that his country is willing to respond to what it perceives as a threat from the U.S. and its western allies noting that Moscow is willing to undertake serious countermeasures to ensure its security. "Why are we reacting to NATO expansion so emotionally? We are concerned by NATO's decision making. We have, therefore, to take countermeasures, which means to target with our missile systems the facilities, that, in our opinion, start posing a threat to us," President Putin reaffirmed (Reuters, 2016).

As shown in (Figure 2) below, NATO witnessed three successive rounds of enlargement that increased its territorial area by over a million square kilometers, and, simultaneously, grew its population by over 104 million. Poland and Romania, the two largest states, are responsible for over 55% of NATO's population and approximately over 60% of its territory giving the Alliance a far-flung apparatus compared to its 1990 boundaries. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were the first members to join the Alliance for many reasons. First, historically speaking, those particular states were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In addition to being part and parcel of the Central European cultural heritage, those states are Catholics who were under Russian Orthodox

rule. Second, those states were the front-runners in the admission process because of geostrategic reasons. Poland and the Czech Republic border Germany; therefore, expanding NATO's border eastward centered Germany in the Alliance rather than leaving it in the flank. Furthermore, Hungary shared borders with the former Soviet Union, and today, it borders Ukraine, one of the most volatile regions in Eastern Europe. This geographic proximity forms a bridge or a gateway between Central and Eastern parts of the continent; hence, the first round of expansion was, according to Western officials and spokesmen, the only guarantee against possible rekindled Russian revanchism. Senator Jesse Helms acknowledged that NATO enlargement would make "fire walls" closing any future desires for Russia restoring its powers since it will no longer have the option of restoring its hegemony in former Soviet territories; and therefore, Russia will be obliged to seek constructive avenues in its relations with the West.

Table (1): Territory and Population of 12 New NATO Member States

NATO member state	Population (2019 estimated)	Area in (km2)
Albania	2,880,917	27,400
Croatia	4,130,304	53,910
Czech Republic	10,689,209	77,250
Estonia	1,325,648	42,390
Hungary	9,684,679	89,610
Latvia	1,906,743	62,250
Lithuania	2,759,627	62,680
Poland	37,887,768	304,250
Slovakia	5,457,013	48,100
Slovenia	2,078,654	20,140
Bulgaria	7,000,119	108,610
Romania	19,364,557	229,890

Source:<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nato-countries/>

<https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/groups/NATO-countries>

The unceasing eastward advancement of NATO and the redeployment of its forces in Russia's sphere of influence is reminiscent of Cold War military standoffs. Both NATO and Moscow aim to integrate Ukraine politically, economically and strategically in order to achieve their own geopolitical projects. Eventually, Ukraine was caught in the fray of a zero-sum game that both Moscow and Brussels strived to win. In this regard, an ever-growing NATO enlargement policy is one of the key reasons that instigated Russia to protect its "underbelly", and sustain a sphere of influence in former Soviet territory, and this debunking Western rhetoric of Moscow seeking to rebuild the "Greater Russia."

According to the neo-realists, the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of Crimea were a direct repercussion of the West undermining policies towards Russia. Washington's unwavering sponsorship for NATO eastward expansion to former Soviet Republics coupled with the EU attempts of enlarging the community of liberal democracies through democracy promotion and regime change in eastern Europe instigated the Kremlin to undertake firm countermeasures to secure its territorial integrity. In other words, with NATO increasing grip over Kiev and the Baltics with the inclusion of former Soviet satellites prompted Moscow to counterbalance against an

increasing U.S. hegemony in its soft underbelly, especially after its weakened international position after the end of the Cold War. For Mearsheimer, Western provocations fostered a retaliatory behavior from Moscow, and its actions in the Ukraine are the culmination of those reflections. Russia has continued to oppose the expansion, depicting the inclusion of former Communist countries as detrimental to Russia's legitimate interests, and as an unacceptable continuation of the Cold War logic of geo-strategic confrontation. Responding to NATO's expansion policy, Putin said that the process of enlargement does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe, but:

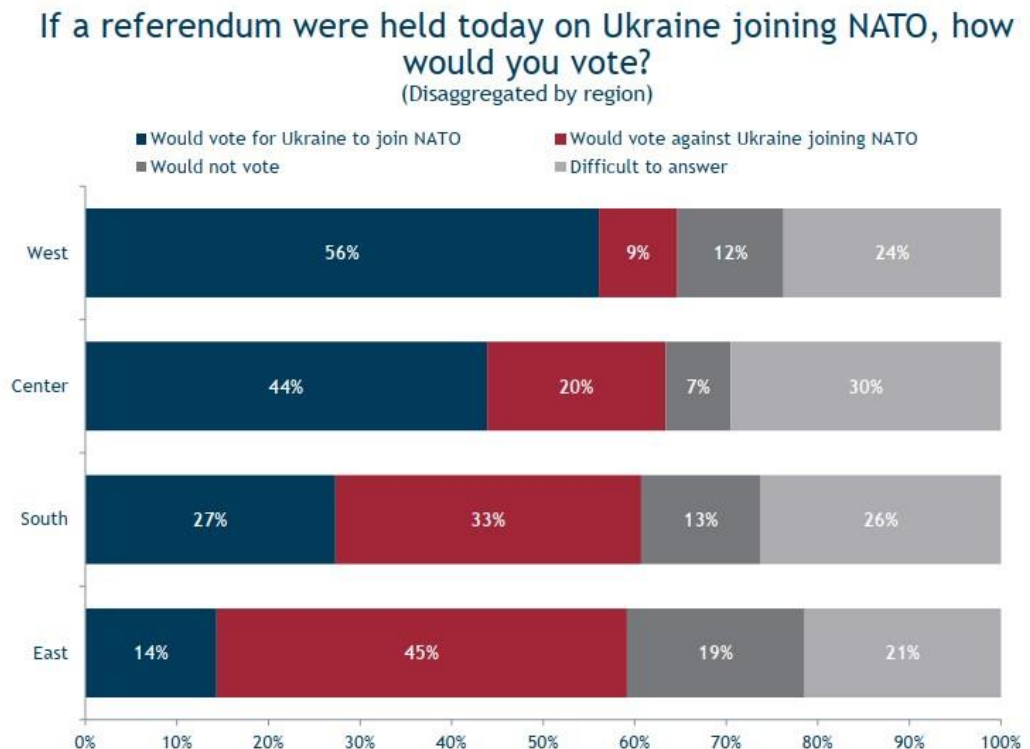
On the contrary, it represents a senior provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion indeed? And what happened to assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? [NATO allies] are trying to impose new lines and walls on us. (President of Russia)

However, his warning had not been taken into account as the West issued further rounds of enlargement, including Albania and Croatia in 2009.

In 2014, Moscow's incursions in the Crimean Peninsula left expert observers and diplomats dumbfounded. Despite of talks and summits to solve the impasse, Moscow was still perceived as a hostile pole of power eager to perpetuate the injustice of the Soviet Union on the newly liberated peoples of Central Europe, especially the Balkans. For president Putin, the root cause of the degraded relations with the U.S was the fact that Cold War thinking never disappeared from Western interpretations of international affairs which negatively affected its perceptions of the Russian Federation. Thus, deepening Russia's insecurities by alienating it from its historic stomping ground in the Balkans and Black Sea regions, mainly the Tsarist-era city of Sevastopol which is home to a Russian military naval base. Responding to NATO's enlargement of his country's 'sphere of interest', Putin said that his country will take the necessary steps to respond. Simply put, regardless on the theoretical motives of the Russian intervention in Ukraine and whether the crisis was perceived as an ideological competition to expand the community of liberal democracies or a struggle for power between former Cold War antagonists, the Ukraine crisis left U.S.-Russian relations hanging in tatters. Putin argued that his country would not tolerate any further rounds of enlargement and clearly denounced any future plans to incorporate Ukraine. "Our decision on Crimea was partly due to considerations that if we do nothing, then at some point, guided by the same principles, NATO will drag Ukraine in," Putin said in a televised speech (Reuters, 2014).

2.1. Countrywide Public Poll on NATO membership:

A public opinion survey by GfK Ukraine on behalf of the Center for Insights in Survey Research between November 15-December 14, 2017 found some glaring disparities between eastern and western Ukraine over possible future NATO membership (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Ukraine

23

Source: Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Ukraine, November 15-December 14, 2017 Center for Insights in Survey Research

In Western Ukraine, a majority of 56 percent, supports NATO membership. This includes the ultra-nationalist hotbed of Lviv (Lvov), where over 70 percent support it. In central Ukraine, 44 percent are supportive of NATO membership; this includes the capitol Kiev, where only 30 percent support NATO membership resides. In southern Ukraine, however, only 27 percent support inclusion within NATO. In eastern Ukraine, only 14 percent, including the major industrial center of Kharkov, only 16 percent support NATO membership. Therefore, the poll concluded that the issue of NATO membership sharply divides western Ukraine from the rest of the country, where huge portions of the population are against Ukraine incorporation within the military bloc. From the statistics above, it can be asserted that the issue of NATO enlargement has polarized Ukraine internally between the west and Donbass, south and east. The latter is home to a substantial majority of Russophone ethnic population.

Another reason why the Russian-U.S. relations are still hanging in tatters ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall, is the national missile defense project initiated by the Clinton Administration in January, 1999. In addition to his hopes of "taking a plunge and expand[ing]" NATO eastward by enlarging the community of liberal democracies towards former Soviet territory, president Clinton sought to establish an effective worldwide "National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack" (Congress of the United States). Fragments of the program were already set-in place in parts of Europe and on Aegis destroyers in the Pacific and the Mediterranean.

According to the Clinton Presidential Library, the program was designed to intercept intercontinental missiles, and shield the U.S. and its Western allies from missile threats posed by rogue states, especially Russia (National Security Council Archives). Moscow fulminated against those allegations on the premise that the "third site" deployment of 10 interceptors in Poland; a radar that sweep eastward over Russia in the Czech Republic, along with a missile capability capable of reaching Moscow in four minutes, heavily affects Russia's nuclear capabilities. According to the Kremlin the hostile nature of the deployments coupled with the expansion of NATO were Cold War tactics that undermined Russian second-strike strength. "The deployment of these systems near our borders cancels out our strategic land-based missile positions ... We have to do something in response. It is fueling an arms race," (Reuters) Putin said. He went further warning that Moscow will respond in case Washington moves ahead with further plans to establish elements of a missile defense shield in eastern Europe. Putin reaffirmed in a televised call-in with the nation that his country would undertake assertive measures against the Western military presence in the Russian 'soft-underbelly'. His contended that: "when the infrastructure of a military bloc is moving toward our borders, it causes us some concerns and questions. We need to take some steps in response," (Reuters, 2014).

Although the Obama Administration decided to revamp the European missile defense shortly after taking office in 2008, the program was, according to General Vladimir Belous, Russia's leading expert on anti-ballistic weaponry, still ill-perceived by Russia on the premise that U.S. bases represent a real threat to Russian core strategic interests. "The geography of the deployment doesn't give any doubt the main targets are Russian and Chinese nuclear forces. The US bases represent a real threat to our strategic nuclear forces," (The Guardian) General Belous told the Guardian. Concurrently, the National Defense Authorization Act was introduced as a part of the policy provision in the fiscal year 2017. The final compromise version of that bill established limitations and guidelines on the total expenditures of Pentagon programs as well as the Energy Department's semi-autonomous National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). President Barack Obama signed the legislation into law on December 23, 2017 though previously opposing the new missile defense rhetoric. The policy statement did not require the development of missile defenses against any one country stressing that the implementation is subject to amendment by Congress (United States Government).

For Washington to modernize and potentially develop its defensive nuclear arsenal in order to counter threats from bigger nuclear superpowers, Congress had to debate the removal of the word "limited" from the 1999 law with a more "robust" substitute. In the spring of 2017, Representative Trent Franks and Senator Ted Cruz successfully attached amendments to their respective chamber's versions of the defense authorization bill that removed the word "limited" from the 1999 law. Franks justified the change by arguing that China and Russia are seeking to exploit Washington's weaknesses by developing complex missile technologies including hypersonic strike systems and advanced cruise missiles. On another note, chairman of the strategic forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, stated Russia and China as motivating factors, arguing that the old policy was ratified at a time when "Russia was a peaceful partner" and China had yet to deploy long-range submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

3. U.S. Foreign Policy in Ukraine: A Neorealist Approach:

From a neorealist standpoint, the West, spearheaded by the U.S, continued meddling in Russia's "near abroad", pushed Moscow to resort to the use of force in order to secure its interests in its geopolitical buffer-zone (Brown 15). In order to protect its interests, Russia followed geopolitical imperatives aimed at preventing "neighboring countries from teaming up with outside powers" (Birnbaum 56). After NATO announced its willingness to include Ukraine and Georgia at the Bucharest Summit of 2008, Russia responded with a blitzkrieg in Georgia in 2009 and a full-scale military occupation later in the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Those actions were put in perspective to Russian retracted position after the Cold War; and thus, Moscow opted for such strategic interventions to preserve the current power constellation in the region. According to neorealists, the geostrategic relevance of the Balkans, especially Ukraine contrasts between Washington and Moscow. In 2016, President Obama acknowledged that the difference in the intensity of interest is because of geopolitical proximity. In an interview with Jeffery Goldberg, Obama noted that "Ukraine, which is a non-NATO country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do" (Goldberg). Simply put, Ukraine is a vital Russian interest, but not so much for the U.S. For realists, the crisis in Ukraine is considered as a Russian countermeasure to preempt the growing Western influence in Central and Eastern Europe. It is noteworthy, however, that neither the 2008 Georgian War nor the 2014 annexation of Crimea significantly changed Moscow's power position nor did they hamper U.S. core interests in the region.

3.1. A Bargaining Chip:

The Minsk Agreement remains the sole conduit for the gradual de-escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine; however, continuous ceasefire violations and obstruction of monitoring suggest that the prospect for peace is still unlikely. Thus, for a sustainable modus-vivendi, one that benefits all belligerent parties, the West needs to take into account Moscow's security interests, and breakaway from old Cold War logics of rivalry and uncertainty. Currently, the U.S. and Russia are still dwelling in the realm of threat perception aiming to maintain the constellation of current power dynamics. To ease tensions, both sides can learn valuable lessons from a flashback of the most terrifying nuclear standoff of the last century between the Soviet bloc and the U.S._ the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Despite Washington's overwhelming nuclear preponderance, former U.S. President John Kennedy opted for a foreign policy characterized by "vigor". The Jupiter missile deployments in Italy and Turkey exceeded their Soviet counterparts in terms of numbers and quality of the deployments. Moreover, the installations were capable of reaching Moscow and Leningrad (The Atlantic). However, the crisis was de-escalated by using a bargaining chip; the removal of U.S. ballistic missiles from Turkey. The withdrawal of Jupiter missiles was a core interest for Soviet security, and an acceptable abdication to the U.S. whose intercontinental warheads were able to reach a minimum range of 2400km (CSIS Missile Defense Project). As for the Ukraine crisis, Moscow has always regarded the West as an allusive partner still lingering in the remnants of the Cold War. The American strategy fostered the narrative of ignored Russian interests, and thus the U.S. and the West were perceived extremely threatening to Russian interests, especially after the upheaval in Ukraine. President Putin firmly asserted that the West is:

Trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position . . . And with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions. You must always remember this. (World Freedom Foundation, 2015)

According to the prominent neo-realist of John Mearsheimer, the West is responsible for the outbreak in Ukraine for two main reasons. First, the open-ended nature of the expansion as a counterproductive program reinforcing Russia's image of an isolated power in decline. Second, the moribund institutions and channels of communication between Russia and the West, like the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP), had to be reinvigorated in order to break the cycle of escalation. Therefore, because an end to the crisis has proven elusive thus far, a peaceful resolution remains a viable option to, at least tacitly, eschew further exacerbation of the situation. Given the fact that great powers are usually willing to suffer when their security is jeopardized (Walt) which is likely the case with Russia, it is mandatory that both poles of power resort to diplomacy and to the implementation of the Minsk agreements. To begin with, NATO does not have the appropriate political tools to resolve the conflict. Although NATO's presence in Eastern Europe is part of its security obligations to the member-states in the region, bringing a nuclear military alliance to the table of negotiations would be counterproductive, and thus military measures are ought to be obviated. Furthermore, Ukraine should not be yoked with a choice obligation between Russia and the West. Given the historical and cultural linkages of the country with Russia and the West, incorporating Ukraine institutionally within Russia as well as the West, would assuage current threat perceptions of both sides. Also, incorporating Ukraine into the Alliance would only compound existing tensions, so the prospect for membership should be expunged, at least for now. Another point of contention between Russia and the U.S. is the open-ended nature of NATO, and the deployment of ballistic missiles able to reach Moscow under four minutes. Walt commented by saying that:

Russia has spent the last 20-plus years watching the United States and its European allies expand NATO eastward and deploy ballistic missile defenses there, to boot, with near-total disregard for Russian interests and complaints . . . But any good realist could have told you that Russia would regard these developments as a long-term security challenge. (Walt, 2014)

Easing tensions cannot be achieved in the absence of a 'shared power' approach, and therefore, theoretically, realists argues that both Russia and the U.S. need to establish solid channels of communication and address, then assess 'realistically' the vital interests of each other.

Results and discussion :

In light of the aforementioned analysis, it can be concluded that:

- The 2014 crisis in the Ukraine contributed in widening the chasm in the bilateral U.S.-Russian relations.
- The unceasing eastward expansion of NATO and the EU towards former Soviet
- satellites partially explain the behavior of the Russian state.
- The annexation of Crimea was a tacit maneuver by the Putin regime to prevent the rapprochement between Ukraine and the West, especially Kiev's

potential inclusion within the EU.

- The Putin administration has successfully delineated an enemy image of the West domestically.
- While the Obama administration response to the Russian intervention in Crimea diverged from the exertion of hard power policy choices, it relied on the multilateral cooperation with its European allies to enact certain assertive measure against the Putin regime.

Conclusion:

Indeed, post-Cold War NATO expansion was heavily opposed by many reputable academics and diplomats for substantive reasons. George Kennan, who is regarded as the father of the USA's containment policy, wrote in the New York Times that expanding NATO to former Soviet Republics would be "a fateful error" that could "restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations." The 1997 Act reasserted that NATO and Russia considered each other as partners not adversaries. They shared the goal of overcoming the remnants of Cold War thinking, mutual rivalry and distrust by consolidating cooperation. Nonetheless, the unceasing eastward expansion of the Alliance coupled with U.S. missile deployments in Poland and in the Czech Republic further exacerbated mutual rivalry and distrust between Washington and Moscow during the Obama administration. In his first visit to Moscow in 2009, President Obama said of his policy towards Russia that great powers do not seek power aggrandizement by dominating or demonizing weaker sovereign states noting that the days when one sovereign state annexes the territory of another sovereign state were cast in the dustbin of history. After the Crimean crisis, the 'reset policy' took a turn back towards Cold War hostility. Now, Moscow is no longer considered as a reliable partner in "War against Terror", but rather as an adversary. Under the backdrop of the Crimean crisis, the Russian leadership is desperately seeking to restore its dominant role and reconstruct the Russian state's glory in the CIS. In sum, the Ukrainian crisis brought decisive change in the post-Cold War era. Moscow has openly challenged a U.S.-dominated world order based on 'sponsored democracy'. The unanticipated Crimean crisis brought about a radical transformation in the balance of power between Russia and the U.S. Putin's effort to re-integrate the post-Soviet space through the CIS has elicited concern in the West. This is why Putin has strongly voiced his concerns regarding NATO expansionist policy towards the CIS.

References:

1. n.d. 08 January 2020. <<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/national-nuclear-security-administration>>.
2. Andreas M Bock, Ingo Henneberg and Friedrich Plank. "If you compress the spring, it will snap back hard": The Ukrainian crisis and the balance of threat theory." *International Journal* 70.1 (2015): 101-109.
3. Birnbaum, Michael. Near Russia's border with the Baltics, soldiers on both sides are practicing for war. 3 July 2016. 19 May 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/near-russias-border-with-the-baltics-soldiers-on-both-sides-are-practicing-for-war/2016/07/01/5a1ea29c-2775-11e6-98ad-1e25d68f2760_story.html>.
4. Brown, Michel. "The Flawed Logic of Expansion." *Survival* 37.1 (1995): 34-52.

5. Congress Re-writes Missile Defense Policy. February 2017. 23 October 2019. <<https://www.armscontrol.org/aca/1100>>.
6. Council, National Security. "PDD-17 - U.S. Policy on Ballistic Missile Defenses and the Future of the ABM Treaty." 1993. 12 December 2020. <<https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36555>>.
7. Foundation, World Freedom. Vladimir Putin - Direct Speech Without Cuts - Russian Strategy for Winning the Geopolitical Game. lulu.com; null edition, 2015.
8. Goldberg, Jeffery. Obama Sees Ukraine as Putin's Client State. 10 March 2016. 13 October 2019. <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/obama-sees-ukraine-as-putin-s-client-state/>>.
9. Harding, Luke. The Guardian. 11 April 2007. 05 January 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/11/usa.topstories3>>.
10. Ivanov, Igor S. Russia-U.S. Relations: Is There Any Light at the End of the Tunnel? Washington DC, 05 December 2015.
11. Kissinger, Henry. The Washington Post. 14 January 1997. 13 October 2018. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1997/01/14/nato-make-it-stronger-make-it-larger/f7d47f9d-792b-4601-91d2-34f952793899/>>.
12. Mearsheimer, John. "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War." *International Security* 15.1 (1990): 5-56.
13. Putin, Vladimir. Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly. 4 December 2014. 12 October 2019. <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>>.
14. Reuters. Putin says annexation of Crimea partly a response to NATO enlargement. 14 April 2014. 17 September 2019. <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nato-idUSBREA3G22A20140417>>.
15. Russia, President of. Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. Munich, 10 February 2007. 15 September 2019. <<http://www.president.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/10/0138>>.
16. SM-78 Jupiter. n.d. 2 December 2019. <<https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/jupiter/>>.
17. Strasbourg and Kehl Summit Declaration. 4 April 2009. 02 November 2017. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease>.
18. Walt, Stephen M. *Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
19. Waltz, Kenneth. "NATO's Expansion: A Realist's View." Rauchhaus, Robert W. *Explaining NATO Enlargement*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001. 28-4