

NATO AND UKRAINE

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The question of NATO enlargement is now actively discussed at different levels. Numerous publications, international conferences, meetings, including official ones, are devoted to this issue. In this article, some aspects of this issue and its possible impact on the national security of Ukraine are analysed.

INTRODUCTION

From a geographical point of view, the NATO expansion question has an applied or practical character because it is part of a more general problem which is the necessity of creating a new European security system in place of the previous, bipolar one. So it is possible to consider the NATO enlargement question as a discussion of the necessity of a new security system for Europe based on NATO after its expansion. In other words: can NATO be a basic element of the new security system in Europe or are there other possibilities for it?

HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Between 1950 and 1990, the question of a special security system for Europe did not arise since the political realities and post-war structures allowed, on the whole, an acceptable degree of stability. Some of these structures could even now be a possible basis for a new system. Among these are:

The United Nations

The idea which emerged during World War II of creating a new international body (or mechanism) able to prevent international conflicts in Europe and elsewhere was realised by the creation of the UN. There are various evaluations of the UN's effectiveness; however, it is possible to evaluate it, in general, positively. The UN has failed to prevent many post-war conflicts, but it has managed to contain many crises and prevent them from becoming international. Now it is difficult to image the world without an organisation like the UN. Despite all the difficulties and the efforts of some countries to use the UN for their own political ends, the potential of this organisation is not yet exhausted. Many specialists believe that with some overdue reforms, the UN's role in maintaining international order can be strengthened. The UN Security Council, for example, could be enlarged with the addition of more permanent members (Germany and Japan), which could make it more representative and, consequently, more effective. Additionally, this could reduce the superpowers' domination of the UN as the interests of other regions would be considered more fully. The authority of the UN's military structures and bodies responsible for combating drug trafficking, international crime, human rights violations, etc. could be widened.

The Creation of Two European Military-Political Blocks: NATO (1949) and the Warsaw Pact (1955)

Despite the fact that NATO and the Warsaw Pact divided Europe into two camps and substantially contributed to the Cold War, they nevertheless helped to maintain a dynamic balance in Europe. The NATO-Warsaw Pact bipolar system, based on mutual deterrence, provided, on the whole, an acceptable degree of stability over several decades. During this period there were no military and ethnic conflicts in Europe and no disputed borders. The Helsinki Final Act fixed the existing status quo and became a very important guarantee of peace in Europe.

The bipolar system, however, was preserved by military means (deterrence, including nuclear) and not by political means. Once the military threat from the West decreased, the

military aspect lost its decisive role and the Warsaw Pact disintegrated. At that time it also became clear that NATO lacked the political power to maintain stability in Europe and other European political structures did not have the authority to fill the gap.

Helsinki Final Act as a Base for a European Security System

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Helsinki Final Act because of its significance for Europe and the world. Despite the fact that it was signed during the Cold War and under the geopolitical conditions of those times, the Act is still significant. The fundamental principle of the inviolability of the post-World War II European borders, or rather the mechanism for their possible changes, for example, aids the avoidance of territorial conflicts, especially in the former Soviet Union.

However, the Final Act could not create a security system as it comprises only a set of agreed principles on the basis of which such a system could be created. In some instances, the lack of detailed mechanisms hampers the realisation of aspects of the Act. The effectiveness of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is hampered in this way, notably in the former Yugoslavia and the USSR where some articles of the Act could not be implemented.

Initiatives in post-Soviet Europe

The appearance of some initiatives aimed at strengthening European security, such as the Visegrad and Central European Initiatives cannot, despite their certain usefulness, form the basis for a future security system. They are regional rather than continental in character and, therefore, cannot solve European-wide problems. They may be elements of a future security system or provide a springboard for some countries to enter existing structures.

PRESENT PROBLEMS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

The structures so far mentioned have failed to maintain European stability under post-Soviet conditions. None of them have managed to avert a conflict and, if that fails, provide a solution. However, all the post-Cold War European conflicts have been regional rather than international and the major European powers have not openly participated in them.

The conclusion follows that none of the existing European organisations are able in their present form to guarantee peace and, therefore, cannot provide the base for a future security system. The prevalent view in the West that NATO is able to play this role is unconvincing. Neither NATO nor the other European organisations are ready for that role and they have neither the capacity nor the authority to under take it. NATO comes closest but its political potential would need to be reinforced and, for now, it remains basically the same as it was during the Cold War.

Therefore, the suggestion that NATO takes on the role of providing a new security system in Europe, needs considerably more work to become tenable. Several arguments can be offered to support this viewpoint.

Change in the Balance of Power

When considering the possibility of NATO enlargement, the West and Russia (at least officially) pay too little attention to the changed power balance. Scant attention is also paid to the possible expansion of spheres of influence. All this, despite the fact that a changed balance of power and expansion of influence have caused two world wars in Europe this century. International experience shows that a change in the balance of power, even at a regional level, never passes calmly.

The consequence of ignoring these changes can be great, as is shown by the confusion in the West following the disintegration of the USSR, Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. The West took a long time to formulate a policy in response to the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and even now, in many instances, it is still unclear.

The West's lack of preparedness caused a loss of stability in Europe. A number of states tried in the early post-Soviet period to reinforce their positions on the continent, in some cases, at the expense of the national interests of other countries. Under the old bipolar system, for example, the conflict in former Yugoslavia would have been impossible as it would have served neither the interests of NATO nor the Warsaw Pact. Likewise, ethnic conflict in the USSR on the present scale would have been impossible because of the Soviet system of suppression.

In summary, we can say that the lack of preparedness for a change in the balance of power has considerably complicated the European situation and places the question of a new security system firmly on the agenda.

The proposed enlargement of NATO could herald the second change in the balance of power on the continent within the last decade of this century. While the first change took place in a relatively stable Europe, the second one, if it happens, will take place in the context of an unstable Europe. Therefore, the consequences of the second change could be far greater for Europe than the first one.

Alliance Enlargement will not bring Stability Quickly

There are a number of political and economic hurdles on the way to a quick and simple enlargement of NATO and these will take time to overcome. Some of them are:

1. A lack of unanimity among Western politicians and public on the necessity of an eastward move for NATO.

A significant number of people question even the existence of NATO in the post-Cold War era. NATO, they say, does not conform to the present situation where there is no threat from the East and it cannot be adapted. Persuading western taxpayers of the need to keep NATO proved difficult at times.

Another point of view is that the Western European Union (WEU) can be expanded to replace NATO in contemporary Europe. But there is no unanimity on this issue either. The Maastricht Treaty gives no clear definition of what organisation will provide the military element of the European Union. A compromise formula exists for the WEU to become the EU's principle military component and provide collective representation in NATO. It is of significance here that the United States is not a WEU member.

2. Many potential applicants to NATO are not economically ready.

Public opinion in NATO is divided over the issue of who should pay for poorer countries to join the Alliance. The cost could further shake the West's economies and put a brake on EU integration.

3. Instability in Russia.

No new European security system can be built without Russia. But, such a system cannot be stable unless Russia is itself stable. It is ridiculous to build a system for providing stability in Europe if one of its key elements is itself unstable.

Recent events in Russia show that it faces a prolonged period of internal instability. Unexpected transformations created the preconditions for social conflict. Under these

circumstances, a Western attempt to take advantage of Russia's weakness to expand NATO could reverberate badly throughout Europe because it would promote Russian forces that are hostile to the West. Therefore, discussions on the enlargement problem are likely to be protracted.

It must be born in mind that on some occasions, relations with Russia can assume greater importance for some countries than does the enlargement of NATO or even NATO's existence. One prominent German ex-politician, for example, consistently defends the view that European stability will be served by the dissolution of NATO and the signing of a Russo-German treaty to jointly assume the maintenance of peace in Europe. The realisation of such a project looks unlikely at present. However, it is true that the new Germany and the new Russia together possess the political, military and economic potential to realise such a scheme. Though it also seemed unlikely in its day, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact provides a historical precedent.

For reasons of history, Russian public opinion will certainly oppose NATO enlargement. However, the Russian public cannot object to an expansion of other, non-military European organisations. Regardless of who comes to power in the Kremlin, Russia will always oppose NATO enlargement.

The military aspect of NATO expansion is the key issue for Russia, the more so as this is the one area in which Russia can match the West. Russia would have fewer objections to an expansion of NATO's political influence and already accepts the inevitable expansion of Western economic influence.

4. NATO's main means of settling conflicts is military.

While NATO's means are mainly military, history shows that military means alone may suppress problems but cannot solve them. The situation in the former Yugoslavia is a case in point. Having failed to solve this problem by political means, the West re-sorted to military force, which can hardly be justified in the long-term. While it may blunt the conflict for a time, for example until the next US presidential elections are over, it cannot provide a resolution. The origin of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia is not military and can only be solved by non-military means. The reasons for the crisis are external rather than internal and are found in the fact that Western Europe, the USA and Russia support different sides in the conflict and cannot find a common language.

Therefore, many specialists consider the crisis in the former Yugoslavia as a crucial testing ground for NATO's ability to solve regional conflicts. NATO's performance there, outside its traditional zone of operation, will be significant in deciding whether it can provide the basis for a future European security system.

5. NATO remains essentially a military rather than a political organisation.

Given NATO's military nature, its enlargement could have a role in European security in the instance of a military threat from the East. But, given the dire consequences of military means and Russia's internal conditions, it is unlikely to seek any kind of military conflict with the West.

Insufficient Study of German Influence on the

Future of Europe and European Security

At present, Germany plays a secondary role in Europe, while the primary role goes to the USA. The USA pays the greatest portion of NATO's expenses and, therefore, has great sway over NATO policy. However, at some future time (after the full integration of former East Germany, the strengthening of the EU, and attaining permanent member status on the UN

Security Council) Germany could become Europe's undisputed leader, ousting the USA from its primary role. The emergence of a new great power will change the balance of power on the continent.

The Mechanism for NATO Enlargement

has yet to be Worked Out

So far, NATO enlargement is only formulated as a set of intentions of the interested parties. But the technical details of putting this intention into practice could create serious difficulties that may threaten the stability of NATO itself. For example:

1. Differences in the level of economic development between member countries and NATO applicants.

The expenses of joining will be considerable and will be paid by the West.

2. Incompatibility of equipment.

The West will have to pay for NATO-standard equipment for new members.

3. There is no procedure for accepting new members.

It is unlikely that new members will be accepted en bloc as the level of readiness varies from one country to another. But, accepting new members individually is undesirable because it will require dividing countries into groups according to their suitability. There are also fears that some new members may use their membership in dealing with problems with non-member countries.

4. Other problems.

Territorial, religious, legal and other problems exist in a number of Central and East European states and these will take time to resolve.

UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Taking all the above into consideration, the author maintains that the new security system in Europe is actually at the level of a "protocol of intentions". For Ukraine in this situation, the question of the formation of its external policy in relation to European security becomes very important. The geopolitical position of Ukraine is such that it is central to this question.

An objective analysis shows the present NATO enlargement proposal holds both pluses and minuses. Looking at the situation realistically, we have the following pluses:

1. Expansion of the stability zone in Europe.

The NATO area is now the most stable region in Europe. Its expansion could mean the enlargement of this region of stability.

2. Possibility of NATO guarantees.

If NATO does enlarge it will come closer to Ukraine and this could mean additional guarantees for Ukrainian security and perhaps the development of a special relationship.

3. NATO enlargement can lead to closer relations between Ukraine and Western Europe.

The development of such relations in the political and economic spheres could allow Ukraine to develop a broader range of relations and not continue to be so strongly orientated to the CIS.

From Ukraine's point of view, to realise these pluses, it is necessary to overcome the main shortcoming which is as follows:

NATO enlargement in the proposed form and present conditions would not raise the level of security in Ukraine, a pivotal country in Europe.

Until relations between NATO and Russia are normalised or other variants are found, Ukraine will find itself virtually surrounded by two confronting powers: NATO from the south and west, Russia from the north and east. Experience shows that such a situation is always dangerous, even for a stable country. For Ukraine, which is in the early stages of state-building, to say nothing of its economic crisis, this position between hammer and anvil is extremely dangerous. In such a situation, each side could try to play the 'Ukrainian card' against the other.

For Ukraine, the consequences of NATO enlargement could be compared to those of the creation a collective defence for the CIS. In both cases, a military block would appear on Ukraine's borders and hardly contribute to its security.

At present, Ukraine, according to its Declaration of Sovereignty, is independent of all blocks and is neutral. Many types of neutrality are in evidence around the world. For Ukraine, neutrality is not a problem about whether to enter NATO or not. It is more complex than that.

Many traditionally neutral countries (Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland) are now studying the possibility of ending their neutrality, regarding it as a remnant of the Cold War. After the Second World War, these little countries' neutrality had considerable military and political significance because it allowed them to stand aside from military confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. With the disintegration of the USSR and the reduction in military confrontation in Europe, the politicians of these countries now understand that their neutrality can keep them outside the processes of world integration and could lead to significant economic and political losses. Integration in the world is no longer necessarily on military lines, but can be based on economic, political, religious, ethnic, geographic or some other factors. So, while these countries want to preserve military neutrality, they do not want to observe economic and political neutrality.

CONCLUSIONS

At present, neither the West nor Russia has a conception of the new security system for Europe that can satisfy both sides. In fact, they have defined positions that exclude each other. Where Ukraine fits into such a system and in what way its national interest would be taken into consideration is also unknown.

None of the existing European organisations are prepared to become a base for a new Europe-wide security system.

Until the details of a new system are worked out, Ukraine should refrain from official decisions in favour of or against NATO enlargement.

Meanwhile, Ukraine, together with other European countries, should continue searching for alternative possibilities for the creation of a new security system (on the basis of NATO, the UN, OSCE, European Union, WEU, etc.).