

**“Babeş-Bolyai” University Cluj–Napoca  
Faculty of European Studies**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**NATO’s Strategic Profile and Pivot Towards the Eastern Flank After  
the Annexation of Crimea**

**Abstract**

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## **Abstract**

**Key Words: NATO, Security, Defence, US. EU, Russian Federation, East Europe**

The invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 by Russia, through its implications for Euro-Atlantic security and the Eastern Flank of NATO, triggered a major crisis with political and strategic military consequences. The Russian Federation's aggression mobilised political decision-makers and generated an academic debate and extensive scientific research literature on Alliance priorities confronting a revisionist Russia.

Like any unilateral act, Moscow's decision to change military internationally recognised borders has been perceived and defined as aggression. This intervention against a neighbouring state was also perceived as a threat to the European balance of power. For the North Atlantic Organisation (NATO), the changing military configuration at the Eastern border and the rising intensity of Russian political and military measures openly opposed by some European countries stood for the moment of a significant change.

Politically and militarily, NATO's 2014 decision to respond to Russia's threats was not an easy one. The Allies acknowledged the partnership policy's failure with the Russian Federation, reached a consensus to make military decisions and agreed on a joint security assessment. Finally, yet importantly, the Allies confronted the need for practical solutions to the problems generated by the decline of European defence budgets. Focused for years on the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq over non-state threats, the Alliance had to rediscover, after about 25 years, the significant challenges associated with territorial defence development.

The thesis aims to study the NATO rebalancing strategy on the Eastern Flank, how it was designed, analysed, and implemented in response to the need to redefine the collective defence strategy. A second contribution will be to analyse directions for developing NATO's medium-term strategic profile and implications for Europe's balance of power. The concluding chapter proposes several solutions and policies to develop the existing NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Eastern Flank.

The research chapter has an empirical model and hypotheses based on scenario models to determine the relations between the analysis levels and the most crucial factors explaining how this NATO pivot should be adapted. Working hypotheses consider the vital role of

institutional architecture in NATO, Article 5, the collective defence framework, and the maintenance of a security system that guarantees Allies to the Eastern Flank. One of the first academic contributions on "pivot to East" is Valentin Naumescu article on Black Sea NATO members, who presents the most critical aspects of the southern segment of the Eastern Flank." *Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey fully represent the three different nuances depicted in this paper: stability, ambiguity, and change. In comparison with the north of NATO's Eastern Flank, which seems more united in its strategic options and a more coherent region, articulated between Poland and the Baltic States, the south of the Eastern Flank looks weaker, heterogeneous, and increasingly divergent. This reality should be treated seriously by NATO strategists and decision-makers.*"<sup>1</sup>

The implications of the Russian Federation of Crimea's invasion on the strategic profile of the Alliance are topical from several theoretical and methodological perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

This invasion is the latest large-scale conventional military action on the Alliance's Eastern border. The invasion is a robust descriptor and indicator for the behaviour of great powers and directly targets the security of Europe.

Theoretically, this invasion is the latest conventional military action that has significantly changed borders near Europe and has chain effects in strategic areas of direct interest to NATO.<sup>3</sup>

It is essential to study how NATO reacts to an assertive power strategy that directly targets allies and partners' security in Eastern Europe.

From both a liberal and a realist perspective, the moment of invasion and the way NATO reacted were unique situations in which terrorist issues debated in international relations are directly tested.

From a liberal and institutional perspective, the Russian Federation's actions can be analysed in the international legal framework and states' relations.<sup>4</sup> The Ukraine war reveals the changes in the international community's attitude and how solutions have condemned Russia's military aggression. The forcible annexation by a region of another state and the

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<sup>1</sup> Valentin Naumescu, "Stability, Ambiguity and Change in the Discourses of NATO allies in the Black Sea region: The Cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey," *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no. 80 (2017), p. 205. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cirr-2017-0025>.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander R. Vershbow and Philip M. Breedlove, "Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the US Military Presence in North Central Europe," (Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2019), last modified 2019, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Permanent-Deterrence.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Artur Kacprzyk, "Deterring Russia after Ukraine: CEE Divided on the Future of NATO Policy," *Policy Paper*, accessed May 4, 2021, [https://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=17873](https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=17873).

<sup>4</sup> Lucian Oancea, "Romania and the New Cold War Security Challenges" (Master of Art and Science, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2017), accessed May 4, 2021.



outbreak of a hybrid war on a whole new scale raises many research questions from a liberal theoretical perspective.

From a realist perspective, the thesis's topic can significantly contribute to evaluating realist and neorealist currents dedicated to the great powers and the international order.

Such an act of power, such as military aggression, reflects major realist theoretical themes related to power sources, the balance of power and competition between the great powers.<sup>5</sup> From the last world war until now, the Russian military invasion in Ukraine remains the only moment approaching the ideal theoretical situation to describe anarchy in the international system. Therefore, the analysis of the balance of power in Europe after 30 years since the end of the Cold War is very topical.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the balance of power changes and directly influences only the democratic hegemonic superpower. After the invasion of Crimea, America, the centre of the post-Cold War unipolar world, was forced to change its strategy in Europe, and this moment is a unique research opportunity.

From the perspective of strategic and international security studies, the analysis of NATO's strategic profile after the 2014 war is very topical. The Russian invasion preceded what theorists define as entering the era of great strategic competition. NATO is entering this era of great uncertainty through a direct threat to its Eastern border. This new era is a unique situation in the 72 years of existence as a military alliance. The annexation of Crimea through military action and hybrid warfare is a specific form of strategic competition with its dominant European feature of regional confrontation.

Realist theoreticians will approach this case not as one representing a local crisis but as a powerful indicator of entering a period of re-establishing power relations and implicitly changing the balance in Europe. After 2014, NATO was assessed on how it will contribute to maintaining a post-1989 status quo. Powers such as China and Russia will draw heavily on the lessons learned from the War in Ukraine to change a US-dominated unipolar system.

By studying the invasion of Crimea and how the Alliance's strategic profile is changing, we can better understand the novelty and theoretical aspects of military alliances theory. The thesis topic will contribute to the study and understanding of a military alliance's role in the new strategic competition stage. We can understand better a great power uses a military

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<sup>5</sup> Soare, Simona, R., ed., *Turning the Tide: How to rescue transatlantic relations* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2020), accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Transatlantic%20relations%20book.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> James Goldgeier, "Policy Roundtable 12-1 on NATO Expansion in Retrospect," last modified April 5, 2021, accessed April 5, 2021, <https://issforum.org/roundtables/12-1-nato>.

alliance in global competition or how a coalition led by a great power can contribute to the management of the global order.

The thesis aims to figure out NATO's profile in the strategic competition between the great powers and the Eastern Flank's security implications.

The second aim of the thesis is to study the design, plans and implementation process of the NATO pivot on the Eastern Flank as a response to the need to redefine the strategy of deterrence and collective defence.

A third goal will be to analyse the directions for developing a new NATO strategic profile over the medium term and how it will influence this balance of power in Europe.

The fourth aim will aim at identifying the pathways that can envisage NATO members in the current context. What types of commitments, policies, and contributions might be needed for the countries to be part of the NATO pivot? <sup>7</sup>

The research highlighted the levels of analysis of the Euro-Atlantic security, which are the relevant dimensions of the balance of power in Europe and the various actors' roles in setting up a new strategic Alliance profile.

Through a scenario method, the thesis will study political and military implications, perspectives on the future Russian Federation priorities, decisions taken by allied decisions to deploy troops at NATO's Eastern border. We will assess the recent NATO history and the current deterrence model assumed by the Alliance, with its advantages and limitations. We will consider academic perspectives on balance-of-power alliance formation analysis and present study approaches to conflict analysis, mainly "new wars" - (unconventional, low intensity or a hybrid grey area operation).

The second stage of research considers working hypotheses based on interviews with experts in the field. A relevant representative group of researchers, professors, and experts on the Alliance was interviewed to find the assumed aims' pros and cons. We evaluated each goal through open-ended questions and benefited from discussion with the expert group.

By applying the analysis of strategic documents and operational analysis, we explored the solutions NATO has at its disposal to harmonise the East's regional security agenda with the global challenges and threats.

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Lanoszka et al., "Leveraging the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Two Years On," in *The Rīga Conference Papers 2019: NATO at 70 in the Baltic Sea region*, ed. Andris Sprūds, Māris Andžāns and Sandis Šrāders (Riga: Latvian Institute of international affairs, 2019), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336441983\\_Leveraging\\_the\\_NATO\\_Enhanced\\_Forward\\_Presence\\_Two\\_Years\\_On](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336441983_Leveraging_the_NATO_Enhanced_Forward_Presence_Two_Years_On).

A third contribution followed the empirical research chapter and included policy proposals for the Alliance's Eastern Flank.

There have been several theoretical and methodological challenges related to this set of objectives. It is primarily about the fact that after 1989 the Alliance was in continuous adaptation to the strategic environment in the Euro Atlantic area and globally.<sup>8</sup> This permanent adaptation comes from the most crucial feature of the strategic environment, which manifests a high uncertainty. In these circumstances, when a common enemy's prospects disappeared and the threat spectrum became wide, European countries developed security agendas with high divergence.

Because since the early 1990s, a series of tensions, crises, wars, and frozen conflicts for NATO has marked Europe, it has become vital to develop a new strategic profile.<sup>9</sup> We can highlight several stages in the post-1989 era. The first stage in which NATO expands its capacity to manage crises, including humanitarian crises, in coordination with the UN and the EU. After the terrorist attacks in the US, post 9/11, the second stage was an equally important moment with an impact on the strategic profile of the Alliance and foreshadowed that NATO would develop a strategy to fight terrorism.

The long-standing military involvement in Afghanistan has generated significant changes in the Alliance's profile and several cooperation issues. These long-range operations, also known as out-of-range operations, have led to a reduced focus on the field of collective defence to reconfigure its military strategists.

Thus, NATO has been involved in developing capabilities intended for long-range missions that respond to challenges, especially non-state nature.<sup>10</sup> A direction that was not explicitly mentioned in either the NATO Treaty or other strategic documents. Over time, the terrorist risks and threats introduced in NATO's strategic documents and concepts have reduced territorial defence and collective defence priorities in Europe. The biggest issue of not treating collective defence broadcasts and international missions outside the area of

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<sup>8</sup> Valentin Naumescu, "The Clash of Discourses Regarding Relations with Russia: New Fault Lines in the European Union?," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2017), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321889846\\_The\\_Clash\\_of\\_Discourses\\_Regarding\\_Relations\\_with\\_Russia\\_New\\_Fault\\_Lines\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321889846_The_Clash_of_Discourses_Regarding_Relations_with_Russia_New_Fault_Lines_in_the_European_Union).

<sup>9</sup> András R. Heinrich Brauß, "Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region," last modified April 5, 2021, accessed April 5, 2021, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/russias-strategic-interests-and-actions-baltic-region>.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen Hallams, "The Transatlantic Alliance renewed: the United States and NATO since 9/11," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2009), [https://doi.org/10.1080/14794010802658823https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232950738\\_The\\_Transatlantic\\_Alliance\\_renewed\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_and\\_NATO\\_since\\_911](https://doi.org/10.1080/14794010802658823https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232950738_The_Transatlantic_Alliance_renewed_the_United_States_and_NATO_since_911).

interest also led to a reduction in defence budgets at the level of NATO member states.<sup>11</sup> This reduction in defence budgets also came amid the economic crisis, which provided an additional pretext for countries to direct their spending to other budgetary areas.

That is why we have had exceedingly long periods where countries have been more concerned with nonmilitary threats, and the Alliance has tried to adapt its strategy to the operation of the global type. The Alliance' strategic profile became a hot topic after 2014- immediately after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine.<sup>12</sup>

We have highlighted that this conflict generated a pre-1989 situation return. A Cold War model in which the Alliance was constantly threatened at the international level.

The most crucial challenge to the thesis was finding the key features of NATO's strategic profile and understanding how these dimensions change after 2014.

After 1989, NATO had several strategic concepts compared to the Cold War period, which shows us that its profile has irreversibly transformed from a defensive military organisation into a political-military security organisation.

We have pointed out in the thesis that this adaptation process will continue for NATO. A significant change in the organisation will occur in existing strategic competition and require new mechanisms in the Alliance to react quickly, especially to the US and China's competitive interaction.<sup>13</sup> The clear and sped up decline of the liberal international order at the global level will affect NATO. Another conclusion is that the Alliance members should support future initiatives protecting liberal democratic values, the rule of law, and individual rights and freedoms. The Alliance will have to be actively involved, especially in East Europe and Russian Federation, to confront Vladimir Putin's dictatorial rule and the Republic of Belarus's situation. Protecting and promoting liberal values in a political-military organisation like NATO will be a challenge. The degradation of the liberal order is also a target of the Russian Federation hybrid warfare worldwide.

Confronting Russia with democratic values is related to discussing the strategic profile of the Alliance as a matter of internal military adaptation and as a political issue of resilience at the European level. Stable and well-developed democracies will resist better to hybrid warfare.

The 2014 conflict generated new national strategies at some Member States level. We have highlighted the directions and practical solutions in the theoretical and pivoting chapters.

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<sup>11</sup> Kacprzyk, "Deterring Russia after Ukraine:."

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Kühn, "A New Cold War - But We Can Get Out of It: Conference," Policy Briefs, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344413904\\_A\\_New\\_Cold\\_War\\_-\\_But\\_We\\_Can\\_Get\\_Out\\_of\\_It](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344413904_A_New_Cold_War_-_But_We_Can_Get_Out_of_It).

<sup>13</sup> Alexander R. Vershbow and Philip M. Breedlove, "Permanent Deterrence."

Two aspects are common to national strategies. All NATO countries on the Eastern Flank have strategic military partnerships with the US and support the permanent American and allied military presence on their territory.<sup>14</sup>

We highlighted the urgency of the permanent US military presence in Romania and the Black Sea region because of the situation in which we find ourselves.<sup>15</sup> For the past 30 years in this region, the Russian Federation has been politically and militarily involved in the influence of former Soviet countries. The Russian Federation was involved in the bloodiest wars and territorial violations and changes, military occupations, and frozen conflicts.

Countries such as Romania, Poland and the Baltic countries felt directly threatened during the 2014 Ukrainian war. The Russian invasion sped up adapting their strategy and asked for a US's security guarantee mechanism.

Another critical issue related to the strategic profile and the pivot on the Eastern Flank is transatlantic solidarity. Implementing a strategic autonomy concept at the European Union level will directly influence the Alliance profile in the coming years.<sup>16</sup> The EU initiative will influence the Eastern Flank's security and the NATO defence credibility.

We touched upon several direct and indirect effects when countries such as France tried to promote new security priorities and asked for EU military capabilities that could affect NATO's defence capability.

It is challenging to predict what solutions will harmonise the Alliance's relations and a strategic autonomous EU. Military and political structure duplication at the European Union level and parallelism at the decision-making, organisational, planning, and enterprise levels will create problems for all countries.

With two different approaches and parallel command and leadership, NATO and EU structures, countries will also have to manage potential conflicts between their agendas. There is still no definitive solution to this issue, and NATO's profile, in the absence of compromise solutions, is clear that it will remain at the level of the current Strategic concept of 2010.

This document is outdated and does not reflect the reality of NATO's Eastern border. NATO's strategic vision 2030 is still in its theoretical stage, and despite efforts made by

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<sup>14</sup> Oancea, "Romania and the New Cold War Security Challenges."

<sup>15</sup> Kramer Franklin D. and Binnendijk Hans, "Meeting the Russian conventional challenge," last modified February 27, 2018, accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/meeting-the-russian-conventional-challenge/>.

<sup>16</sup> Niklas Helwig, "New Tasks for EU-NATO Cooperation:: An Inclusive EU Defence Policy Requires Close Collaboration with NATO," *SWP Comments*, accessed February 2, 2020, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322775722\\_New\\_Tasks\\_for\\_EU-NATO\\_Cooperation\\_An\\_Inclusive\\_EU\\_Defence\\_Policy\\_Requires\\_Close\\_Collaboration\\_with\\_NATO](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322775722_New_Tasks_for_EU-NATO_Cooperation_An_Inclusive_EU_Defence_Policy_Requires_Close_Collaboration_with_NATO).

experts to generate solutions at the academic level, we are far from negotiating a final document.

Even the NATO General Secretary's initiative to trigger a debate based on a document produced by a group of independent experts has not yet produced a productive dialogue.

Against the background of this uncertainty about the direction in which the Alliance will develop, there are significant problems related to managing the transatlantic relationship at the political and military level. Our thesis's theoretical and methodological limitation was the non-inclusion of an extensive analysis of the United Kingdom's decision to exit the European Union. Brexit is a new and critical factor. Another limitation of the analysis was that of President Donald Trump's position and policy towards NATO. We have not looked at how the White House has handled specific chapters of the transatlantic relationship, nor have we insisted on the 2020 White House president election's impact. Former President Donald Trump has generated much controversy with European partners. After the presidential election, the new US president, Joe Biden, a convinced pro-Atlanticist, reaffirmed US support for NATO and his intention to revitalise the transatlantic relationship.

After President Donald Trump's four years, it is going to be extremely hard to repair a relationship that has been deeply damaged. Trump's position offered a good pretext for pro-European partisans to change positions concerning the transatlantic agenda and promote a balancing role in the US and China's strategic competition.

The EU's ambiguous role at the global level, with a divergent agenda from the US, will become an essential point of concern and confidence between Washington and Brussels.

The second theme of the thesis is related to pivoting on the Eastern Flank. From the literature and empirical research analysis, it has emerged that this pivoting is the last attempt of the Alliance to manage the Russian Federation's threat in the usual standard style of a political-military alliance.

Pivoting was the last significant adaptation process to the increasingly threatening environment to protect the transatlantic values and Euroatlantic strategic culture. The pivot respected both the principle of consensus and treating the entire area of responsibility equally non-discriminatory.

This approach, also known as the 360-degree approach, was a big step forward by the Alliance after a protracted disagreement between the United States and the European Allies over Iraq and Afghanistan interventions. However, responding to the Russian Federation's hybrid threat, the Alliance's pivot has created several challenges beyond consensus at the NATO level.

The first and most crucial challenge was the Allies' acceptance of a territorial defence strategy's rapid development. This concept was not developed since 1989, and this has generated more discussion about practical solutions. Before 1989, during the Cold War, the Alliance went through several stages of territorial defence development. The classical military posture was a static and robust territorial defence strongly supported by the American military presence in Central Europe, especially Germany. Because of the reprioritisation, the Alliance developed a second type of territorial defence that relied more on flexible response and provided support forces that would come quickly to the area to be defended.

This type of territorial defence involves using a few forces capable of responding to aggression until the Alliance sends a significant force to the conflict zone. These two models were debated after 2014, and research shows that the Eastern Allies wanted a significantly more significant military presence than the one that exists now.

European Allies in the west have different interests. They refer to the Eastern border of the Alliance that there is a NATO military force symbolically supported by a command and leadership structure to manage aggression. Simultaneously, the Alliance needs a rapid intervention force that is not permanently stationed on the Eastern Flank.<sup>17</sup>

We have pointed out that NATO countries on the Eastern Flank insist on NATO forces' permanence in the Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.

From a military perspective, the land's presence is the most important, but strengthening air and naval defences is also urgent, especially in the Baltic and Black Seas.<sup>18</sup>

An important aspect that we developed within the thesis was the Black Sea region's security status assessment. We have identified some scenarios for this region relevant to the NATO military posture and future missions. In at least two scenarios, NATO must consider ensuring and protecting access to strategic energy resources should become a permanent mission in our region.

Russian Federation's aggressive maritime strategy in the Black Sea region directly affects Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and security in the Eastern Mediterranean and Syria regions.<sup>19</sup> The southern flank of the Alliance relates to the NATO strategy towards the

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<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Brauß, "NATO Beyond 70:: Renewing a Culture of Readiness," ICDS - Analysis, accessed May 4, 2021, [https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ICDS-Analysis\\_NATO-Beyond-70\\_Heinrich-Brauss\\_November-2018-1.pdf](https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ICDS-Analysis_NATO-Beyond-70_Heinrich-Brauss_November-2018-1.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, "Now for the Hard Part: NATO's Strategic Adaptation to Russia," *Survival* 59, no. 3 (2017), [https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1325603https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316945715\\_Now\\_for\\_the\\_Hard\\_Part\\_NATO's\\_Strategic\\_Adaptation\\_to\\_Russia](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1325603https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316945715_Now_for_the_Hard_Part_NATO's_Strategic_Adaptation_to_Russia).

<sup>19</sup> Anika Binnendijk, *Understanding Russian Black Sea Power Dynamics Through National Security Gaming* (RAND Corporation, 2020), accessed May 4, 2021,

Eastern Flank of the Alliance. In both cases, the Russian Federation will maintain its military strategy of intervention and influence in areas of interest to NATO.

Finally, the thesis assessed the chances to maintain this Eastern NATO pivot. It should be said that the literature analysis shows that there is little chance that the pivot on the Eastern Flank will be developed than at present. The only possible direction for the current Eastern pivot to develop is for the US and its strategic partners, Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, to develop new defence capabilities integrated regionally. NATO could support this regional model by providing military programmes for Eastern countries to develop their capabilities (modern weapon systems, procurement, and acquisition) that integrate with stationed US military forces. However, a regional division of labour between the Eastern and southern flanks must consider the risk of triggering a race for resources within the Alliance and a potential decision-making bottleneck adopting priorities.

As part of the thesis, we set out to analyse the following objectives related to the Strategic Profile of the North Atlantic Alliance and how the Alliance and developed military presence on the Eastern Flank.

- Primary aim: The thesis aims to figure out NATO's profile in the strategic competition between the great powers and the Eastern Flank's security implications.

- The second aim of the thesis aims is to study the design, plans and implementation process of the NATO pivot on the Eastern Flank as a response to the need to redefine the strategy of deterrence and collective defence.

- A third goal will be to analyse the directions for developing a new NATO strategic profile over the medium term and how it will influence this balance of power in Europe.

- The fourth aim will identify the pathways that can envisage NATO members in the current context. For example, what types of commitments, policies, and contributions might be needed for the countries to be part of the NATO pivot?

There have been several theoretical and methodological challenges related to this set of objectives. It is primarily about the fact that after 1989 the Alliance was in continuous adaptation to the strategic environment in the Euro Atlantic area and globally. This permanent adaptation comes from the most crucial feature of the strategic environment, which manifests a high uncertainty level. In these circumstances, when a common enemy's prospects



disappeared, and the threat spectrum became wide, European countries developed security agendas with high divergence.

Because since the early 1990s, a series of tensions, crises, wars, and frozen conflicts for NATO has marked Europe, it has become vital to develop a new strategic profile. We can highlight several stages in the post-1989 era. The first stage in which NATO expands its capacity to manage crises, including humanitarian crises, in coordination with the UN and the EU. After the terrorist attacks in the US, post 9/11, the second stage was an equally important moment with an impact on the strategic profile of the Alliance and foreshadowed that NATO would develop a strategy to fight terrorism.

The long-standing military involvement in Afghanistan has generated significant changes in the Alliance's profile and several cooperation issues. These long-range operations, also known as out-of-range operations, have led to a reduced focus on the field of collective defence to reconfigure its military strategists.

Thus, NATO has been involved in developing capabilities intended for long-range missions that respond to challenges, especially the non-state nature. A direction that was not explicitly mentioned in either the NATO Treaty or other strategic documents. Over time, the terrorist risks and threats introduced in NATO's strategic documents and concepts have reduced territorial defence and collective defence in Europe. The biggest issue of not treating collective defence broadcasts and international missions outside the area of interest also led to a reduction in defence budgets at the level of NATO member states. This reduction in defence budgets also came amid the economic crisis, which provided an additional pretext for countries to direct their spending to other budgetary areas.

That is why we have had exceedingly long periods where countries have been more concerned with nonmilitary threats, and the Alliance has tried to adapt its strategy to the operation of the global type. The Strategic Profile of the Alliance became a hot topic after 2014- immediately after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine.

We have highlighted that this conflict generated a return pre-1989 situation, a Cold War model that constantly threatened the Alliance at the international level.

The most crucial challenge to the thesis was finding the crucial dimensions of NATO's strategic profile and understanding how these dimensions change after 2014.

After 1989, NATO had several strategic concepts compared to the Cold War period, which shows us that its profile has irreversibly transformed from a defensive military organisation into a political-military security organisation.

We have pointed out in the thesis that this adaptation process will continue for NATO. A significant change in the organisation will occur in existing strategic competition and require new mechanisms in the Alliance to react quickly, especially to the US and China's competitive interaction. The clear and sped up decline of the liberal international order at the global level will affect NATO. Another conclusion is that the Alliance members should support future initiatives protecting liberal democratic values, the rule of law, and individual rights and freedoms. The Alliance will have to be actively involved, especially in East Europe and Russian Federation, to confront Vladimir Putin's dictatorial rule and the Republic of Belarus's situation. Protecting and promoting liberal values in a political-military organisation like NATO will be a challenge. The degradation of the liberal order is also a target of the Russian Federation hybrid warfare worldwide.

Confronting Russia with democratic values is related to discussing the strategic profile of the Alliance as a matter of internal military adaptation and as a political issue of resilience at the European level. Stable and well-developed democracies will resist better to hybrid warfare.

The 2014 conflict generated new national strategies at some Member States level. We have highlighted the directions and practical solutions in the theoretical and pivoting chapters. Two aspects are common to national strategies. All NATO countries on the Eastern Flank have strategic military partnerships with the US and support the permanent American and allied military presence on their territory.

We highlighted the urgency of the permanent US military presence in Romania and the Black Sea region because of the situation in which we find ourselves. For the past 30 years in this region, the Russian Federation has been politically and militarily involved in the influence of former Soviet countries. The Russian Federation was involved in the bloodiest wars and territorial violations and changes, military occupations, and frozen conflicts.

Countries like Romania, Poland, and the Baltic countries feel directly threatened, and the war in Ukraine in 2014. The Russian invasion sped up adapting their strategy and asked for a US's security guarantee mechanism.

Another critical issue related to the strategic profile and the pivot on the Eastern Flank is transatlantic solidarity. Implementing a strategic autonomy concept at the European Union level will directly influence the Alliance profile in the coming years. The EU initiative will influence the Eastern Flank's security and the NATO defence credibility.

We touched upon several direct and indirect effects when countries such as France tried to promote new security priorities and asked for EU military capabilities that could affect NATO's defence capability.

It is challenging to predict what solutions will harmonise the complementarity between NATO and the European Union with military and political structure duplication at the European Union level. Parallelism at the decision-making, organisational, planning, and enterprise levels will create problems for all countries.

With two different approaches and parallel command and leadership, NATO and EU structures, countries will also have to manage potential conflicts between their agendas. There is still no definitive solution to this issue, and NATO's profile, in the absence of compromise solutions, is clear that it will remain at the level of the current Strategic concept of 2010.

This document is outdated and does not reflect the reality of NATO's Eastern border. NATO's strategic vision 2030 is still in its theoretical stage, and despite efforts made by experts to generate solutions at the academic level, we are far from negotiating a final document.

Even the NATO General Secretary's initiative to trigger a debate based on a document produced by a group of independent experts has not yet produced a productive dialogue.

There are significant problems related to managing the transatlantic relationship at the political and military level in the background of this uncertainty about the direction in which the Alliance will develop. Our thesis's theoretical and methodological limitation was the non-inclusion of an extensive analysis of the United Kingdom's decision to exit the European Union. Brexit is a new and critical factor. Another limitation of the analysis was that of President Donald Trump's position and policy towards NATO. We have not looked at how the White House has handled specific chapters of the transatlantic relationship, nor have we insisted on the White House president election's impact. Former President Donald Trump has generated much controversy with European partners. After the presidential election, the new US president, Joe Biden, a convinced pro-Atlanticist, reaffirmed US support for NATO and his intention to revitalise the transatlantic relationship. After President Donald Trump's four years, it is going to be extremely hard to repair a relationship that has been deeply damaged. Trump's position offered a good pretext for pro-European partisans to hurry away from the transatlantic agenda and promote a balancing role in the US and China's strategic competition.

The EU's ambiguous role at the global level, with a divergent agenda from the US, will become an essential point of concern and confidence between Washington and Brussels.

The second theme of the thesis is related to pivoting on the Eastern Flank. From the literature and empirical research analysis, it has emerged that this pivoting is the last attempt of the Alliance to manage the Russian Federation's threat in the usual standard style of a political-military alliance.

Pivoting was the last significant adaptation process to the increasingly threatening environment, transatlantic values and Euroatlantic strategic culture. The pivot respected both the principle of consensus and treating the entire area of responsibility equally non-discriminatory.

This approach, also known as the 360-degree approach, was a big step forward by the Alliance after a long heated debate between the United States and the European Allies over Iraq and Afghanistan interventions. However, responding to the Russian Federation's hybrid threat, the Alliance's pivot has created several challenges beyond consensus at the NATO level.

The first and most crucial challenge was the Allies' acceptance of a territorial defence strategy's rapid development. This concept was not developed since 1989, and this has generated more discussion about practical solutions. Before 1989, during the Cold War, the Alliance went through several stages of territorial defence development. The classical military posture was a static and robust territorial defence strongly supported by the American military presence in Central Europe, especially Germany. Because of the re-prioritisation, the Alliance developed a second type of territorial defence that relied more on flexible response and provided support forces that would come quickly to the area to be defended.

This type of territorial defence involves using a few forces capable of responding to aggression until the Alliance sends a significant force to the conflict zone. These two models were debated after 2014, and research shows that the Eastern Allies wanted a significantly more significant military presence than the one that exists now.

European Allies in the west have different interests. They refer to the Eastern border of the Alliance that there is a NATO military force symbolically supported by a command and leadership structure to manage aggression. Simultaneously, the Alliance needs a rapid intervention force that is not permanently stationed on the Eastern Flank.

We have pointed out that NATO countries on the Eastern Flank insist on NATO forces' permanence in the Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.

From a military perspective, the land's presence is the most important, but strengthening air and naval defences is also urgent, especially in the Baltic and Black Seas.

An important aspect that we developed within the thesis was assessing the Black Sea region's security status. We have identified four scenarios for this region relevant to the NATO military posture and future missions. In at least two scenarios, NATO must consider ensuring and protecting access to strategic energy resources should become a permanent mission in our region.

Russian Federation's aggressive maritime strategy in the Black Sea region directly affects Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and security in the Eastern Mediterranean and Syria regions. The southern flank of the Alliance relates to the NATO strategy towards the Eastern Flank of the Alliance. In both cases, the Russian Federation will maintain its military strategy of intervention and influence in areas of interest to NATO.

Finally, the thesis assessed the chances to maintain this Eastern NATO pivot. We should say that the literature analysis shows that there is little chance that the pivot on the Eastern Flank will be developed than at present. The only possible direction for the current Eastern pivot to develop is for the US and its strategic partners, Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, to develop new defence capabilities integrated with a regional basis. NATO could support this regional model by providing military programmes for Eastern countries to develop their capabilities (modern weapon systems, procurement, and acquisition) that integrate with stationed US military forces. However, a regional division of labour between the Eastern and southern flanks must consider the risk of triggering a race for resources within the Alliance and a potential decision-making bottleneck adopting priorities.

## Research Questions

1. What will be the effect of competition between the great powers on NATO's role in Eastern Europe?
2. What is the impact (achievements and problems) of NATO's adaptation and deterrence strategy to meet the challenges posed by the annexation of Crimea?
3. How will the global United States pivot affect the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence strategy?
4. What solutions does NATO have for the stability and security of the Eastern Flank in the context of strategic competition?
  - a. What are the chances that the US will maintain its role as a NATO lead nation in counterbalancing the Russian Federation?
  - b. What would be the chances of developing a strategic autonomous European model that would counterbalance the Russian Federation?
5. What factors ensure the practical implementation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in the current strategic context?
6. What impact could the new concept of European strategic autonomy have on the Alliance's solidarity?

## The Methodological Model

	<b>Theoretical dimensions</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
1	Strategic competition	What will be the effect of competition between the great powers on NATO's role in Eastern Europe?	Many scholars suggest that global strategic competition can be considered the dominant feature of the near future. What will be the effect of competition between the great powers on NATO's role in Eastern Europe?	The importance of the Eastern Flank.
2	NATO Strategic Profile	What is the impact (achievements and problems) of NATO's adaptation and deterrence strategy to meet the challenges posed by the annexation of Crimea?	The hybrid war is a new challenge to Euro-Atlantic security, especially to NATO. In recent years, the Alliance has developed a range of solutions (2% targets for defence budgets, new concepts, more capabilities, and a new command system) dedicated to NATO's strategy to defend the Eastern Flank against the hybrid war. How do you assess the impact (achievements, issues, or both) of these recent developments on the NATO effectiveness to cope with this challenge?	Effectiveness of NATO strategic profile.
3	US Global Posture	How will the global United States pivot affect the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence strategy?	The relationship between the US military presence on the Eastern Flank and its global strategy has been highlighted recently. The US military pivot in the Pacific area has led to withdrawals in Europe. How will the global United States pivot affect the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence strategy?	Impact of the US pivot.
4	Eastern Flank security	<p>What solutions does NATO have for the stability and security of the Eastern Flank in the context of strategic competition?</p> <p>a. What are the chances that the US</p>	<p>Please evaluate these solutions for the Eastern Flank's stability and security:</p> <p>a. What chance would you give to a model in which the US plays a crucial role, as a NATO lead nation, in counterbalancing threats from the Russian Federation?</p>	Perceived US's role on Eastern Flank.

	<b>Theoretical dimensions</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
		will maintain its role as a NATO lead nation in counterbalancing the Russian Federation? b. What would be the chances of developing a strategic autonomous European model that would counterbalance the Russian Federation?	b. What would be the chances of developing a strategic autonomous European model that would counterbalance the Russian Federation's strategy?	
5	Collective defence	What factors ensure the practical implementation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in the current strategic context?	The practical implementation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty's provisions is the Strategic Concept's primary objective. If you had to choose between the importance of several factors, which would ensure the collective defence? Which would be in the first place? 1. The long-term maintenance of US security guarantees to its strategic European partners and allies on the Eastern Flank. 2. The strengthening of Euro-Atlantic solidarity. 3. A new NATO burden-sharing mechanism. 4. A new European security architecture. 5. US -Russia relations reset 6. The European strategic autonomy.	Perceived causes for effective collective defence.
6	Alliance's solidarity	What impact could the new concept of European strategic autonomy have on the Alliance's solidarity?	The new concept of European strategic autonomy supported by the European countries and even more recently, the European sovereignty concept supported by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Vice President of the	Perceived transatlantic agenda.



	<b>Theoretical dimensions</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
			Allied European Commission has influenced the debate on the future of the transatlantic relationship. Do you think that this European initiative will negatively affect Alliance solidarity?	

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