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Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik  
und Außenpolitik

Maurice Molitor

**Two Bears Don't Live In One Lair:  
Cooperation, Competition, or Conflict?**

A Geopolitical Analysis of the Relationship  
between NATO and Russia



Lehrstuhl für Internationale Politik und Außenpolitik  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis undertakes an extensive analysis of the evolving relationship between NATO and Russia from 1999 to 2022. It uses theories of International Relations to frame and understand the geopolitical interests of both actors. Using process tracing and Goldstein's Conflict-Cooperation Scores across five observation points, the research findings highlight a shift from cooperation to conflict in NATO-Russia relations over the studies period. However, the hypothesis that clashing geopolitical interests can fully explain the level of cooperation wasn't supported in all cases. The thesis illuminates the implications of Russia's aspiration for power and disregard for international law under Putin's leadership, emphasizing potential future conflicts and necessitating the continued interest of the United States in maintaining peace in Europe. Overall, the thesis provides insights into the complexities of NATO-Russia relations and their impact on the European security structure.

**Schlagworte:** NATO, Russland, NATO-Russland Beziehung, Neorealismus, Geopolitik, Machtinteressen, Sicherheit

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# Table of Content

<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Structure of the Paper.....	3
1.2 Historical Overview of the Relationship between NATO and Russia since 1991.....	4
<b>2 Theory .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Cooperation and Conflict in Anarchy.....	7
2.2 Geopolitics and Geostrategy .....	18
2.2.1 Geopolitical Interests of NATO.....	20
2.2.2 Geopolitical Interests of Russia.....	23
2.3 Hypotheses and Causal Mechanism .....	27
<b>3 Method .....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 From Theoretical Deduction to Process Tracing .....	30
3.2 From Observation Points to Process Analysis.....	31
3.2 Recording and Operationalization of the Independent and Dependent Variable.....	35
3.2.1 Independent Variable: Geopolitical Interests (X).....	35
3.2.1 Dependent Variable: Degree of Cooperation (Y) .....	36
<b>4 Empirical Analysis.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1 Kosovo War (1999).....	38

4.2	First and Second NATO Enlargement (1999/2004)	39
4.3	Russo-Georgian War (2008)	40
4.4	Annexation of Crimea (2014)	42
4.5	Invasion of Ukraine (2022)	44
<b>5</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>49</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>52</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Causal Mechanism of Geopolitical Interests and Degree of Cooperation .....	29
Figure 2: Hypothesis Test of Causal Mechanism .....	34
Figure 3: Conflict, Competition or Cooperation? .....	37
Figure 4: Degree of Cooperation.....	47

## List of Abbreviations

<b>CFE</b>	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty
<b>CM</b>	Causal Mechanism
<b>EAPC</b>	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>G8</b>	Group of Eight
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IFOR</b>	Implementation Force
<b>IR</b>	International Relations
<b>KFOR</b>	Kosovo Force
<b>NACC</b>	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NRC</b>	NATO Russia Council
<b>OPCW-UN</b>	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of the United Nations
<b>PfP</b>	Partnership for Peace
<b>PJC</b>	Permanent Joint Council
<b>SFOR</b>	Stabilization Force
<b>SG</b>	Secretary General
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>WWII</b>	World War II





# **Two Bears Don't Live In One Lair: Cooperation, Competition, or Conflict? – A Geopolitical Analysis of the Relationship between NATO and Russia**

## **1 Introduction**

*Thus, it will always happen that he who is not your friend will demand your neutrality, whilst he who is your friend will entreat you to declare yourself with arms.*

(Niccolò Machiavelli 1513: 79).

When Niccolò Machiavelli tried to convince Lorenzo de' Medici to reinstate him as a diplomat by gifting his diplomatic knowledge in form of *The Prince*, today's Russia did not exist. Military alliances such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or even the state of the European security situation enjoyed short duration. But the above quote could have been understood as an early warning from a political philosopher and diplomat. A quote which underlying analysis became reality on February 24th, 2022. On that day, Russia, led by its autocratic president Vladimir Putin (Freedom House Index 2022), invaded the sovereign country of Ukraine. Not three months after Putin demanded Ukraine's neutrality in official draft treaties to NATO and the United States of America (USA) (ABC News 2021; MFA Russia, 2021a, 2021b; Crowley & Sanger 2022). Likewise, Putin made it clear that the idea of joining NATO, which he had once floated in an interview with the BBC in 2000, was shelved (WP 2000).

Accompanying the invasion is a development that has been ongoing for many decades. Since the end of the second World War (WWII), Europe was divided between two major powers in two blocs: A Western alliance lead by the USA and

an Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War, a unipolar world order was formed in which the US had a virtual monopoly on political and security issues worldwide (Mastanduno 1997: 54-55; Layne 2009: 147-149). And Russia, as the successor state of the Soviet Union, was declared militarily, economically, and politically too weak to influence European politics significantly (Porter 2019: 128).

The security of the West was centrally shaped in a new European order in which NATO was functioning as an instrument of political-military regulation and security (Foster & Wallace 2001:106-112). Contrary to the previous assumptions of some international relations (IR) scholars, NATO did not dissolve after the end of the Cold War but transformed. It expanded east in several rounds of enlargement, took on other tasks such as securing trade routes, counterpiracy missions, and fighting terrorism (NATO 2010: 15-18, 31-33). Russia, which once used to be decisive for the political order in Europe, reestablished itself 1) economically as a the most important energy exporter for Europe (Jaffe & Manning 2001; Siddi 2020) and 2) military by rebuilding its capabilities by constantly increasing its military spending (Cooper 2016: 130-134; Radin et al. 2019: 21). But Russia cannot be considered as politically influential as modern great powers like the USA or China. While it aims at gaining more influence in Europe, it has not achieved the rank of a global major power again (Freire & Heller 2018: 1196-1197). Given this shifted weight in power NATO-Russia relations are multi-faced and dynamic. But most importantly their relationship is a decisive factor for the European security structure. The underlying geopolitical interests of the two actors and power structure can decide between peace and war on the European continent.

Against this background, the question arises whether NATO-Russia relations can maintain a cooperative partnership. Given a (neo-)realist view of the world (Walt, Waltz, Mearsheimer, Jervis) their geopolitical interests are illuminated. As one state increases its power, the other state loses power. According to the

theory, this ultimately leads to conflict when both actors act on their geopolitical interests. A causal mechanism (CM) is derived to test this relationship.

Due to NATO and Russia's close geographic ties and potentially segregating geopolitical interests, the following research question arises:

What impact do NATO and Russia's geopolitical interests have on their bilateral degree of cooperation?

Using process tracing (Starke 2015) a qualitative analysis is conducted that assesses NATO-Russia cooperation over five observation points between 1999 and 2022. These observation points are analyzed with the independent variable being geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia (X) and the dependent variable being the degree of cooperation between them (Y). The thesis shows an overall decrease in degree of cooperation between Russia and NATO over the last two decades which can be partly explained by clashing geopolitical interests.

## 1.1 Structure of the Paper

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: The second chapter elaborates the theoretical framework of the paper. The key variables, geopolitical interests of Russia and NATO (X), are conceptualized using theories of IR by Glaser (1997), Jervis (1978, 1988, 2017), Mearsheimer (2001), Waltz (2010), Walt (1990) and Snyder (1990). In doing so, different streams of thought from (neo-)realism will be discussed, explained, and formed to build a theoretical framework. After adding geopolitical and geostrategic theories, the framework is well suited to understand and deductively derive geopolitical interests (X) of both actors. Based on this framework, hypotheses about the relationship between the two variables are formulated. These hypotheses are then translated into a CM. The predictions in the CM are tested using process analysis and explain the development of NATO-Russia relations and its effects.

In the third chapter method and procedure of this thesis are explained. For that, this study relies on process analysis and Goldstein (1992) Conflict-Cooperation

Scores. These scores are used to determine the degree of cooperation between both actors. In chapter 4 the CM is analyzed and tested over five observation points. Each point is depicted to show key moments of Russian geopolitical interest. The CM is tested with the help of speeches by representatives of both actors, strategy papers, specialized publications, and press reports. In doing so, the thesis will show that the respective exercise of Russian geopolitical interests is in competition with NATO's geopolitical interests. This will be used to examine a potentially concurrent level of bilateral cooperation between NATO and Russia. The thesis concludes with a summary and discussion.

## **1.2 Historical Overview of the Relationship between NATO and Russia since 1991**

In 1991 NATO and non-NATO countries established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). Its goal was to overcome security issues between the 50 member states by establishing a multilateral security dialogue. Among the NATO states, Russia and other members of the dissolved Warsaw pact joined. It aimed at disarmament and building trust among its members. But within one year Russia froze this cooperation after calling for a *special status* in the relationship with NATO citing its geopolitical interest in eastern Europe (Umbach 2001:427-429; Frühling & Scheerer 2010: 52).

Then, in 1994, all member states of the NACC were offered membership in the joint Partnership for Peace Program (PfP). It focused on enhancing military cooperation and peacebuilding capabilities in the Euro-Atlantic territory (Wenger et al. 1998: 3-4; Frühling & Scheerer 2010: 52-53). Despite Russia's dissatisfaction with its status in the NACC, it joined the PfP in 1994. At the same time, the PfP was NATO's answer on the ever increasing efforts by eastern European states to be offered a NATO membership (Wenger et al. 1998: 43). In Article 3e of the PfP the goal was set to be able to "better operate with those [forces] of the members of

NATO" (NATO, 1994). The PfP led to joint peacekeeping missions in Bosnia in 1995 Implementation Force (IFOR)/Stabilization Force (SFOR) and the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 1999. Russia cooperated and participated in both military missions from 1995 to 2003. Even though military cooperation was established, the underlying political differences hindered further cooperation possibilities. The PfP was designed to encourage democratic civil military reforms, which collided with the political system in Russia (Edmunds 2013: 147). Moreover, Russia wanted to be included in all European security issues and be able to veto any decision (Umbach 2001: 430-321). As a consequence, the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was established. In the PJC the member states of NATO and Russia had the ability to decide on European security issues together. They met in the NATO+1 Format after all NATO members had decided on a common position beforehand. In the PJC they discussed issues regarding peacekeeping, the situation on the western Balkan or disarmament (Malek 2003: 27-29). Further enhancement on peacekeeping issues was tried to be established with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) that was joined by Russia and NATO. It was a refinement of the NACC and functioned as a governing framework of PfP peacekeeping missions and discussions on the European security order (Blank 2006: 43; Frühling & Scheerer 2010: 53).

The PJC was a result of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. NATO and Russia agreed on four main pillars to stabilize the Euro-Atlantic security environment and enhance NATO-Russia relations. In the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security NATO agreed to 1) forgo the stationing of nuclear weapons in any new member state (Founding Act, 1998: Article IV). 2) An adaption to the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty was agreed upon that aimed at increasing its effectiveness (Founding Act 1997: Article IV). 3) NATO and Russia committed to work on preventing the "build-up of [...] forces in [...] Central and Eastern Europe" (Founding Act 1997: Article IV). This formed a groundwork for NATO-Russia relations. They decided together on how a European security environment looks like. With the signing of the NATO Russia Founding

Act, they established that 4) democracy, International Law and sovereignty “without dividing lines or spheres of influence” (Founding Act 1997: Article 1) in Europe are essential values of their relationship. Noticeably, Russia, which once froze cooperation in the NACC due to a lack of veto rights within NATO’s decision making, agreed that “consultations will not extend to internal matters of [...] NATO” (Founding Act 1997: Article 2).

The highlight of the joint cooperation was the NATO Russia Council (NRC) established by the 2002 Rome Declaration. It replaced the PJC and established a joint approach. This included cooperation in various military operations (e.g., fighting terrorism, logistical support in Afghanistan, counter-narcotic missions) as well as crisis management, non-proliferation, and arms control (Blank 2006: 35; Adomeit & Kupferschmidt 2008: 7; NATO 2020a). Further, it enhanced Russia’s position within European security issues. It supported Russia’s demand in deciding over European security by forcing a consensus in the decision making process. Moreover, Russia was able to multilaterally negotiate with all member states as it was not faced with a joint position beforehand. Nonetheless it still did not grant Russia any veto rights in any independent, internal decisions by NATO (Malek 2003: 29-30.).

History since 1990 shows that Russia and NATO can form joint institutions. They have found ways of communication and cooperation over European security issues. But as history has shown, their cooperation has decreased. The following chapters are dedicated to theoretically analyze state behavior and their geopolitical interests to explain cooperation and conflict.

## **2 Theory**

Describing how the world functions has occupied philosophers, scholars, and politicians alike. Ever since life on earth exists, objects, animal species, and humans have formed groups, established a hierarchy, and fought over it (Herz 1950). Depending on where you are in time, the order in that certain period depends on

different actors ranging from (Greek) goddesses, mystical beings, monarchical power based upon royal bloodlines, military strength, or political ideology. While mystical ideologies have mostly left modern day (IR), the will to understand how the world functions has not bygone. Nowadays, ideologies ranging from Realism, Marxism, Liberalism to Feminism dominate the school of thoughts; each being tightly connected to a certain world order, its constraints, and its possibilities (Krell 2009). All of these theories help explain interstate relations, give guidance towards foreign policy analysis, and also serve to form recommendation for political decision makers.

For the analysis of the relationship between NATO and Russia, this thesis relies on the theories of realism and neo-realism, since they anchor centrally both power and security. They describe conditions of an international system and an environment in which the security alliance NATO and the state Russia act.

## 2.1 Cooperation and Conflict in Anarchy

*Only power can balance power.*

(Neal Riemer & Douglas Simon 1997: 344).

To be able to classify the relationship between NATO and Russia as cooperative, competitive, or conflictual, we must first understand the object of analysis. For that, this study draws on the theory of (neo-) realism, distinguishes between its sub-theories, defensive and offensive realism, defines its axioms, explains the variables power, security, and (mis-)perception as well as transfers the Herz Security dilemma and the balance-of-power on interstate relations.

### *Power*

As this thesis aims to analyze geopolitical power interests of different actors, we must first define power. In realism, the analysis and understanding of power are as essential as sun light is to solar panels. Without sunlight, there will be no energy



from solar panels. Without power, a state will not play a role in defining world politics. While the definition of power varies among scholars (Weber 2019: 134-136; Nye Jr. 2011; Dahl 1957: 200-205), at its core, power revolves around the ability to influence other states behavior and shape world politics in one's favor (Flint 2017: 45). But measuring this ability empirically is extremely complicated. First, one would need to know the interests of all actors involved. Second, one would need to measure the influence of one actor on other actors on an almost infinite number of conflicts, summits, and other events that take place all over the world (Beckley 2018: 2). Power is often unobservable and depends on the context (Nye Jr. 2011: 3; Beckley 2018: 8).

The measurement of power varies among scholars (Flint 2017: 45; Beckley 2018: 44). Some studies define power as economic power (e.g., Gross Domestic Product [GDP]), others as military power (e.g., military spending or amount of equipment), availability of natural resources, or population (Walt 1990). There are also indicators that combine multiple factors like Composite Indicator of National Capability which uses additional factors like population, energy needs, or industrial capabilities as a percentage of the world's total amount of each factor (Beckley, 2018: 8-9, 17). Nye Jr. (2009: 2-4) classifies various kinds of power (military, economic, political, and cultural) in two subcategories of hard and soft power. Hard power refers to the ability to use coercion and payment (e.g., by using military force or economic sanctions), while soft power is usually associated with an ability to change an outcome through attraction and diplomatic ways (e.g., using aid, loans, investments, hosting international events). Nonetheless, most scholars use some form of a numerical measure like resource availability of a country. This measure is then used as a proxy for its power (Beckley 2018).

In (neo-)realism power is a relative measure, i.e., it is measured relative to the power of other states (Czempiel 1981; Jäger 2011: 18). The higher the relative power of a state, the more effectively it can act on its interests. Hence, a state's values, security, and prosperity are limited by the power of others (Jäger 2011: 19).

The more relative power a state has, the more influence it has on other states. Following this logic, if a state's relative power decreases, the state loses its influence over other states (e.g., the declining influence of the former Soviet Union after the Cold war) (Jäger 2011: 18). Likewise, an increase in relative power increases influence on others. A state's influence hence varies with its relative power. It is important to differentiate between objective, i.e., measurable, relative power, and perceived relative power as discussed later.

A change in relative power can affect the "balance of power" (Waltz 2010; Mearsheimer 2001: 12; Nexon 2009). Balance of power refers to a condition, in which no state or alliance has hegemonial (military) power over other states (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2021). In this situation, each state has a somewhat similar degree of power which hinders states to seek for more power and as such prevents any state from gaining enough power to create a dominating position in the world. Thus, with balance of power, there is no hegemonial state that can set the agenda in a unipolar world as no other state has the means to stand up against it. However, changes in relative power can threaten the balance of power. We have seen this in history after the end of the Cold War when the USA entered a dominating position (Lieber & Lieber, 2002; Clark 2009: 24-25).

Balancing power is key to protecting and representing a state's own interests against (potential) adversaries. For that, a state can rely on four strategies: 1) balancing is a strategy where the act of unbalancing is directly countered, i.e., through military confrontation or economic sanctions. This can either be achieved by increasing one's own military or by allying with other states to attack an adversary together (Waltz 2010; Walt 1990:17-19; Mearsheimer, 2001: 157). Alternatively, a state can take part in 2) bandwagoning, i.e., allying with the adversary state to avoid a direct confrontation (Walt 1987: 17). States can also engage in 3) buck-passing which involves allying with other states to form a coalition that counterbalances the power of a common adversary without getting directly involved (in a conflict). As such, there may be free riding on other states security

measures, as security functions as a collective good (Christensen & Snyder 1990: 141 – 147. On the contrary, 4) chain-ganging is a consequence of multiple states joining alliances which leads to an elevated probability of interstate conflicts. This is due to the basic principle of a well-functioning alliance (e.g., NATO's Article 5 mutual security pledge) that an attack of one state in an alliance, is an attack on all. Thereby creating a chain of conflict in which all countries of that alliance are chained to the conflict. Christensen and Snyder (1990: 145-147) argue that especially in a multipolar world chain-ganging is an effective measure to guarantee security.

### *Security*

Security is a second important variable in analyzing IR. Generally, it can be understood as a condition, in which a state's territorial and political integrity is stable without violence of an outside force (e.g., through an attack or invasion) (Lemke 2018: 90-92). Security can come in various forms and states guarantee their own security differently. Some try to achieve it through neutrality (e.g., Switzerland) (Wenger et al. 199: 54-56), membership in a security alliance (e.g., NATO), military and nuclear deterrent power (e.g., Russia, China) (Mearsheimer 1990: 20; Sauer 2022) or a combination of the before mentioned (e.g. US). (Schelling 1960: 142; Doyle 2007: 626-628).

But why do states seek security? Security enables citizens to live without the fear of an external state interfering with one's day-to-day life (Lemke 2018: 92). Classic realists argue states seek security because human nature drives them (Morgenthau 1963; Algosaiibi 1965); structural realists (Waltz 2010: 88) focus on the lack of system-wide authority like a binding world government or court forcing states to seek security. Unlike in a civil lawsuit, the enforcement of a court ruling from the International Court of Justice in The Hague can only be done through the cooperation of the involved states themselves. As such creating a high chance of defection if the rule of law does not go in their favor (see also Axelrod and Keohane 1985: 227-228). Neoclassical realists combine several internal and external factors

which urges states to seek security (e.g., leader's threat perceptions or strategic culture).

Given the nature of a state and its role to guarantee freedom and prosperity for its citizens (e.g., 14th Amendment of the US Constitution), a state must seek security to protect its citizens from an outside force. How does a state determine the necessary level of security? The necessary level of security is not independent of the choices of other states. If state A fears an outside attack or the need to create a deterrence, it will seek more security, i.e., increase military capabilities. State B analyzes its own security situation and concludes that the measures taken by state A causes a situation, in which B does not adequately protect its citizens anymore. Hence, B also takes measures to increase security. These measures are observed by state A, which further takes measures to increase security.

This situation is often referred to as the security dilemma (Herz 1950). It is a vicious cycle in which state A and B invest more and more resources in their military capabilities. They each try to create deterrence or prevent an outside attack which, in consequence, causes the other state to invest more in security, creating a cycle over military capabilities and power competition.

The security dilemma is an example that illustrates realists' anarchic view of the world. This anarchy is shown by the consequence that an increase in one's security, even if done out of a defensive motivation, i.e., to protect its citizens, never has a binding guarantee to be used defensively. No controlling authority can prevent a state from using its security measures offensively, i.e., to attack another state. This is due to the fact that there is no authority that can effectively sanction states<sup>1</sup> – an attributable characterization of the world by sovereign states. While in principle all states are sovereign, this does not mean that states are equal too. The

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<sup>1</sup> See also Farrell & Newman (2019: 54-62) and Peksen (2019: 636-640) who show that economic sanctions can be an effective tool, if they are targeted precisely, economic interdependencies are small, network dependency is high and substitution possibilities for the sanctioning state are low. If not, the sanctioning state risks paying a high price itself, making economic sanction ineffectively.

sovereignty of a state relies on its abilities to protect itself (Jervis 2017: 62). States are divided into major powers and minor powers, causing a hierarchy within IR (Lake 2011: 15-17, 61). The fear of insecurity in this hierarchy leads states to be “driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others” (Herz 1950: 157). Formed out of the lack of a world government that makes states fear for their security and join a “power competition” (Herz 1950: 157). Logically, this forms two key interests of a state: 1) the power of other states and 2) the understanding of intentions of other states (Rosato 2010). As states seek to retain influence, power, and security in an anarchic system, they will always have to observe and interpret how other states act, meaning they will have to find answers and measures to protect and assert their interests in survival, security, access to resources, values, and levels of wealth/prosperity.

#### *Perception and Misperception*

Given the earlier described situation, in which state A seeks more security, the concept of perception and misperception becomes crucial to understand how state B acts. The security dilemma can describe a situation, in which both states were well intended in increasing its security but misperceived the intentions of the other state (Jervis 1978, 1988: 676-678). The ever increasing demand for security created a situation, where one state may preemptively attack, i.e., attacking first out of the fear of an attack, or preventively attack, i.e., out of a fear that it will not be able to keep up the ever increasing security investments. Hence, the state starts an attack before it becomes too weak to withstand an attack by the other state. Jervis called this the “spiral model of conflict” (2017: 62-67). Walt added to this by classifying some states having “aggressive intentions” (Walt 1985: 39). Given that there are states that have aggressive intentions, one rational way is balancing by forming alliances (Snyder 2013: 12).

Knowing of states with aggressive intentions leads to a division in realism. This division is between defensive realism, i.e., states try to achieve security by

preventing any single power of having total hegemony, and offensive realism, i.e., states seek hegemony to be able to achieve security at all. Given the offensive view, states live in a constant fear of the aggressive intentions of other states. Once a state is able to conquer another one, it will do so (Mearsheimer 2001). Therefore, all major powers are alike, as they all seek security.

Defensive realists argue for the contrary. If no other state believes that any given state has the intentions of becoming a hegemonial power, they do not feel threatened. In consequence, they do not seek hegemony themselves. This distinction can be important when trying to interpret states behavior and alliance formation. Given both perspectives of the defensive and offensive realism the same actions leading to increasing security are interpreted differently, depending on the (mis-) perception of the intentions and capabilities of a state's security measures (Jervis 1978: 187; Glaser 1997: 181-184).

The situation described in the security dilemma forms out of a situation of uncertainty and asymmetric information between states, as the true intentions of a state's increased security measures are hidden, purposely miscommunicated, or simply misinterpreted (Jervis 1978, 1988, 2017; Glaser 1997: 181-184). This is due to the facts that it might not be possible to distinguish if a state is investing in defensive or offensive weapons<sup>2</sup> (Jervis 1978: 185-188). Mearsheimer also points out the possibility that intentions can form out of a miscalculation of another state's security measures due to private information (Mearsheimer 1990: 34-37). If a state finds itself in this dilemma, it might interpret the expansion of an alliance formed out of a defensive motivation as an aggressive action against oneself. Therefore, this state now fears for its own security, increases its spending on security, and potentially causing the former security increasing state to follow the same pattern.

Walt added to this by arguing that a state's decision is "driven and not chosen" (Walt 1990: 276). He argues that a balance-of-threat forces a state - out of fear of an especially dangerous adversary - towards balancing. The threat is

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<sup>2</sup> Assuming that it is possible to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons at all.

determined by factors that will be important later in this thesis. Walt defines these sources of threat as geographic proximity, offensive capability, and perceived aggressiveness/intentions (Walt 1990: 23-32; Grygiel 2006: 16-18)<sup>3</sup>, pointing out – like Jervis (1978, 1988, 2017), Wendt (1999), Christensen & Snyder (1990), Mearsheimer (1990, 2001) and Kydd (2007) - the importance of perception when interpreting actions of an (opposing) state. An argument that is also evaluated and found in behavioral experiments, where weaker players form an alliance out of fear. If a stronger player is too aggressive and unreliable, weaker players defect from an alliance with an aggressive player and form a counter alliance (Ke et al. 2022).

#### *Cooperation Under Anarchy*

At this point, the chapter has explained why states seek power and security. Also, it became clear that, most often, power comes either through economic, military resources, or a combination of both. Realists like Mearsheimer (2001) argue that cooperation between states is rather unlikely because of the world's anarchy. However, why do we observe cooperation between states?

Looking through history, we find many forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between states, i.e., through trade agreements, military alliances, humanitarian missions, or through political and economic unions like the European Union.

Defensive realists argue that cooperation counterbalances anarchy, misperception, and distrust by reducing uncertainties. Glaser (1997) argued that two defensive seeking states should be able to cooperate given that they acknowledge each states security-seeking. As such predicting that uncertainty itself does not lead to offensive realism. In addition to that, a recent paper put forward another differentiation to explain how and if, why major powers would cooperate. The paper is built on game theory and the security dilemma (Herz 1950; Jervis 1978) to

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<sup>3</sup> Walt mainly uses the conflict between the major powers United States and the former Soviet Union as an example of which side weaker states chose.

test their hypothesis. Acharya and Ramsay (2013) find that, under specific conditions offensive realism can explain state actions reasonably. But they argue that anarchy does not stop security seeking states from cooperation. If trust can be built reliably, cooperation is possible. But if trust is not stable, the chances of cooperation go to zero even if both states are recognized as security-seeking (Acharya & Ramsay 2013: 3).

Likewise, Keohane and Axelrod (1995) explain how international organizations can help reduce uncertainties in anarchy by defining rules, merging sets of beliefs and values in form of an institution. They assessed that the formation of institutions helps to reduce the risks of an anarchic system. Keohane (1990) argues that institutions can help overcome the Zero-sum-game condition in the fight for power and resources in realism. In anarchy, cooperation is not feasible. As one state loses power, the other state gains power. But if states are looking to cooperate, both parties have to gain in some form. For that, both actors have to adapt their behavior towards the preferences of the other actor (Keohane & Axelrod 1995: 227-239). Thus, leading to states that are willing to dampen their sovereignty for more power in form of cooperation with other states. This cooperation can come in form of military alliances (e.g., NATO, the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the USA [AUKUS], Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition) or economic alliances (e.g., G7, EU, Central American Integration System) to generate surpluses or benefits.

Keohane claims that in a situation where states “follow the rules and standards of international institutions” (Keohane 1990: 193), they are signaling an interest in ongoing cooperation. Keohane explicitly disregarded anarchic assumptions by Mearsheimer (1990: 45) as European countries have shown a willingness to cooperate after WWII. For that, Keohane argued, Europe needs to be stable and peaceful to give states confidence that the intentions of all states are peaceful (Keohane 1990: 194). Mearsheimer and Keohane both agreed that institutions like NATO are important for a situation like that. But they differed in



the way that Keohane (1990) believes that institutions are needed for stability in Europe, while Mearsheimer (1990) believes that they matter as a special purpose vehicle for major power interests (here the interests of the USA). As such institutions like NATO only reflect the distribution of power and work as a tool for powerful states (Mearsheimer 1995: 7, 13-14).

Snyder (1990) looks at cooperation in alliances like NATO differently. He describes alliances as a special form of alignment in which states have a mutual agreement on values and/or expectation of specific issues. It is formed “for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement (power, wealth, and importance) of their members, against specific other states” (Snyder 1990: 104). They do so by removing economics barriers (e.g. tariffs), building up a common trade market, or by combining military capabilities. Further, major powers also gain an additional access point to exert their influence over minor powers as alliances can build a lock-in effect that lacks alternatives. This can then be used to pressure minor powers into agreements (Henke 2019: 27-29). This effect increases the more powerful the major power is in the international hierarchy. The minor powers internal formation of will is even more affected the less powerful it is in comparison (Jäger 2011: 19; Henke 2019: 39-40). Further minor powers conflicts are often shaped and effects by major powers interests and conflicts (Beckley 2018: 19-20; Henke 2019: 38-39).

Given there is a cooperation between states, how reliable is this cooperation?

### *Reliability*

In interstate relations there is no third party that can reliably guarantee the uphold of agreements between two countries (Jervis 1978: 168). Each state is sovereign. As state cooperations (e.g. the establishment of mutual institutions) are usually a long costly and complicated process, the reliability of the partnering state(s) is important. A major factor attributing to a state's reliability comes in form of intrastate

institutions (Henisz 2002a, 2002b; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson 2005; Busse & Hefeker 2007; Acemoglu & Robinson 2012) Risk of breach of contract is especially high in countries with weak institutions and little amount of veto players stabilizing policy decision (Tsebelis 1995, 2011; Kaiser 2007). Neoliberals argue that institutions, commonly defined as “humanely devised constraints that structure interaction” (North 1990: 3), are formally coded in the law and guarantee protection of rights and contracts under the law. The quality of institutions matters for IR in regard to policy stability. Generally, it is shown that states cooperate more likely when they share the same set of beliefs and political system, but even this does not reliably guarantee the non-defection of a state under cooperation. While the United Nations and its six organs are the closest to that authority, it still falls short of it. Slaughter (2017) argues that even within institutions like the UN, great powers play a defining role in aligning interests and building up agreements. She concluded that without the willingness and reliability of a major power, cooperation is not feasible. An example is the US single handed left of the Paris Climate Agreement two years after it was brokered (NYT 2017). Reliability is simply not a guarantee in an anarchic world. As such leading back to Luttwak's assumption of a realistic world in which interstate relations are characterized as “adversarial, zero-sum, and paradoxical” (Luttwak 1990: 19).

Schweller (1994) advanced this argument. He stated that as long as there are *revisionist states*, security and cooperation are not a guarantee in an anarchic world. Revisionist states will always seek more power as they cannot be satisfied if other states simply remain as relatively powerful as them (Schweller 1994: 87). Concluding that states cannot be trusted and are unreliable. Even if they are unwilling to act at the moment, as long as these states are dissatisfied, they will be eager to challenge and change the status quo. Fearon (1995: 381-383) went even further and added that 1) states have *incentives to misrepresent* information that may lead to hinder a mutually preferable cooperation as they are withholding private information. 2) Fearon identifies another form of unreliability in form of *commitment*

*problems* as one or more states involved in cooperative behavior have incentives to defect. He concludes that a state will choose to renegotiate once the state becomes relatively more powerful (Fearon 1995: 406-409).

This subchapter has shown that realism offers a useful framework to understand conflict and cooperation in IR. Examples are events such as the Russo-Georgian war, the Annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing war in Ukraine to some degree. This realist framework sets a baseline to understand power seeking and why the international system functions the way it does, why it might not change, and why the world is full of disputes. Realism depicts that security and power seeking explain different phenomena of state behavior. Lastly, it sets the groundwork for the analysis of conflict and cooperation. States 1) seek for relative (power) gains, 2) try to achieve security in a dynamic environment, and 3) rather secure their relative position than cooperating with (most likely) unreliable partners in mutual institutions.

## 2.2 Geopolitics and Geostrategy

*[Geography is] the mother of strategy.*

(Colin S. Gray & Geoffrey Sloan 1999: 3)

In his book *Introduction to Geopolitics* Flint defines geopolitics as the “struggle over the control of geographical entities with an international [...] dimension, and the use of such [...] for political advantage” (Flint 2017: 16). These entities can be states which are, as in the theory of realism, defined by their sovereignty, meaning that there is an authority that has total power over a specific region or territory (Flint 2017: 34, 142).

The possession of territory and power are mutually dependent, meaning that 1) to have territory, you need political control over a specific area and 2) to exercise power, you need territory. The Crimean Peninsula is legally part of Ukraine but

politically and military controlled by Russia. Therefore, Ukraine cannot exercise power given by international law (see also Weber 2019: 136-138, 343).

The field of geopolitics studies the effects of power that are implicated by the earth's geography. A state's access and control of regions is constrained by natural borders (e.g., mountain ranges, rivers, oceans, deserts) and history (Stilz 2011: 575-589). Flint describes this spatial organization of human society as a "continuing geopolitical process" in which geopolitical agents<sup>4</sup> win and lose "within a structure of geographic scales [...] given their fortune [...] and goals" (Flint 2017: 44-46). As such he implies the same ever changing dynamics, hierarchy, and power assumptions as in IR (Waltz 2010, Jäger 2011; Flint 2017: 140). Further, it also shows the connection of both concepts: If power and territorial control go hand in hand, geopolitics has implications for the hierarchy in IR and vice versa.

Territorial control also matters in regard to states' security. The physically closer two states are to another, the higher is their threat perception. This results from the assumption that power declines with distance (Walt 1990: 23). While Walt focused on absolute distance, Grygiel (2006: 17-18) introduces a refined understanding of distance. First, he explained that absolute distance is not sufficient to understand threat perception and power. Natural barriers like channels, mountain ranges, oceans, or access to ports affect distance as a determining variable. Second, territorial threats and geographic power go beyond state borders. As states are not self-sufficient, they rely on access to resources, raw materials, and trade routes (Grygiel 2006: 11, 17-18, 21). Jervis made a similar analysis in regard to the security dilemma and the offensive-defense balance. Both are inevitable affected by geography. Jervis argued that the flat central European plains have increased the chance of war in Europe, ultimately leading Jervis to conclude that "if all states were self-sufficient islands, anarchy would be much less of a problem" (Jervis 1978: 195).

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplification geopolitical agents will also be referred to as actors.

For today's anarchy, scholars such as Luttwak (1990) have predicted that military conflict will be more and more substituted by "methods of commerce" (Luttwak 1990: 17). However, Russia's geopolitical activities on the European continent have shown that this predication has not come true for all geopolitical conflicts. Russia is an example showing that *weapons of commerce* are still not the only method for a state to enforce its interests (Luttwak 1990: 17-21). Countries will break international law to enhance their geopolitical agenda. While economic interests are important - and to some form interdependent with military power - geopolitical interests will be the focus going forward. Therefore, economic power will be mostly ignored and the focus lays relatively higher on military and geopolitical power.

In accordance with realists' theory, Flint (2017) describes how geopolitical power is defined by having total authority, i.e., control over a region, leading to the conclusion that geopolitical interest follows a Zero-Sum game assumption. In this, competing interests cannot be solved by cooperation, as this contradicts the inner logic of geopolitics. Therefore, the following subchapters are dedicated to the geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia. Elaborating the geopolitical interest of NATO and Russia allows to study similarities and differences between the two powers. This will be the baseline for the analysis of the relationship between cooperation and conflict.

### **2.2.1 Geopolitical Interests of NATO**

NATO is a military alliance formed in 1949 that is made up of 30 states in Europe and North America. Its main goal was originally to secure stability and freedom in Europa after WWII. The western allies were concerned that former eastern satellite states could destabilize Europe. Therefore, NATO was formed with a binding agreement that under article 5 of its charter "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" (NATO 1949). This commitment clause, the so called *casus foederis* or Article 5, is NATO's deterrence power. If the perception of adversaries hold that NATO

members will defend *any inch of any member* in case of an attack, NATO members can feel secure from potential adversaries, given the number of members and their combined military power and nuclear deterrence capabilities.

After the fall of the Soviet Union many scholars predicted, in accord with a neorealist view on alliances, the collapse of NATO. Its main adversary ceased to exist after all (Mearsheimer 1990). However, NATO is still existing as part of a broad multilevel and multi-issue institution (McCalla 1996). NATO transformed itself and found new targets, including fighting global terrorism, securing energy resources, cyber warfare, and promoting the globalization among its members. It evolved to a security instead of a collective defense organization (Wenger et al. 1998: 3-5). This interconnectedness also led to increasing efforts to collaborate with the EU. Further, NATO expanded over multiple “rounds of enlargement”, from 19 to now 30 members (not including Sweden and Finland that have recently started the process of joining NATO). In doing so, NATO created strong ties between Europe and North America (McCalla 1996).

NATO underscores the sovereignty of all countries in Europe. Its geopolitical interest can be summarized as follows.

1) *Maintaining peace in Europe*: This is declared through a “NATO-Russia relationship [...] upon the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states in the Euro-Atlantic area” (NATO 2010: 30). Maintaining peace has been on NATO’s agenda since its foundation but has started to go beyond the deterrence power of Article 5 over time. Beginning in the 1990s NATO established multiple council and partnerships programs (NACC, PfP, EAPC, see chapter 1.2). Besides that, NATO stresses the importance of partners like the EU to enhance cooperation on the European continent (NATO, 2022d: 10). NATO, its partners and allies have the ultimate goal of preventing war in Europe (Wenger et al. 1998: 3). NATO is therefore open to admit new members under its open door policy of Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO 2022d: 10).

2) NATO's geopolitical interest is anchored in *guaranteeing freedom and security for its members*. This is accomplished by ensuring NATO's ability to defend and secure its allies (NATO 2022d: 5, 11). For that, NATO is particularly dependent on its nuclear deterrence power. While it recognizes France's and United Kingdom's nuclear capabilities, the nuclear forces of the USA function as the "supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance" (NATO 2022d: 8). NATO plans on strengthening its combat forces on land, at sea, and in the air with the goal to "deny any potential adversary any [...] aggression" (NATO 2022d: 6). In addition to that, NATO stresses the importance of regions of strategic interest, which include the Western Balkans, the Black Sea, the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel Region, and the Indo-Pacific Region (NATO 2022d: 11). However, NATO does not reveal how they are planning on tackling threats or enhance security in these regions.

3) NATO is *promoting democratic values* in Europe and abroad. This interest is justified by the assumption that through the promotion of democracy, the military of a country will be controlled through democratic institutions (Edmunds 2013). Given higher institutional constraints through veto players in a democracy, military conflicts are less likely in democracies than in other regimes (Epstein 2005: 65; Thies et al. 2006: 202). Further, Epstein et al. (2007) argue that security is only attainable within democratic institutions and processes. NATO was founded as an alliance with *shared values* that has always consisted of mostly democratic members (NATO 2022d: 9). NATO further tries to enhance democracy by making participation in programs such as PfP dependent on a democratic structure of a country (Epstein et al. 2007: 29-30; Edmunds 2013: 147). Additionally, Edmunds (2013) argues that the former Soviet countries that joined NATO through multiple rounds of enlargement became more democratic, as NATO supports democratic control of military forces across all new members of the first two enlargements. Lastly, NATO partly functions as an institution for US interests, promoting democracy is therefore a logical consequence of US foreign policy (Epstein et al. 2007: 18-20).

To sum up this subchapter, NATO's geostrategic interests cover 1) maintaining peace in Europe, 2) guaranteeing security for its member states, and 3) promoting democratic values.

### **2.2.2 Geopolitical Interests of Russia**

Russia is the largest country on earth with a size of over 17 million square kilometers. It borders sixteen sovereign states and is the ninth-most populated state with 145.5m citizens. Russia's economy is the world's eleventh largest by GDP but its GDP per capita of \$ 12,172 is only slightly higher than those of countries like Bulgaria or Malaysia (World Bank Group, 2022). Russia's GDP is heavily dependent on its mineral and energy resources which are the largest in the world (Paul & Swistek 2022: 8). Russian military expenditures are the fourth highest in the world. Russia possesses the world's largest number of nuclear weapons that function as a nuclear deterrence protecting it from any outside attack (Arbatov 2017: 34-36; Putin 2012, 2014, 2018). In addition to that, Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security council and is capable of hybrid warfare. Politically, it is the leading member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as the military alliance Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Both are made up of mostly post-Soviet states. Even though by its constitution Russia is governed by a federal semi presidential republic, its political system is dominated by a modern autocratic kleptocracy lead by Vladimir Putin (Kotkin 2015: 147). Russia's ambitions of becoming a major power are in accord with its geopolitical interests that can be summarized as follows.

1) *Expanding Influence* (in Europe). Since the 1990s Russia has increased its presence in the Arctics (Putin 2012; Astrasheuskaya 2019), in the North Atlantic (Hollings 2020), in Syria (Reuters 2020), Turkey (Troianovski & Kingsley 2019) and Africa (Demirjian 2022). On the European continent, it tries to increasingly influence single countries with the goal of creating spheres of influence. In 1993, under president Jelzin, Russia declared all of Eastern Europe to be "spheres of influences



based on historical grounds" (Umbach 2001: 427-429). Countries like Belarus are under considerable influence by Russia while Russia is fighting for more control in the Caucasus region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and Central Asia (Pototskaya 2014: 301-302; Newnham 2020). In parts of these regions lie important pipelines and uranium reserves that are of Russian geoeconomic and geopolitical interest. Further, Russia has economic interests in the Caspian Sea blocking a direct gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Europe (Pototskaya 2014: 304-305). Russia declares the regions to be objects of Russian federation calling them "near abroad" (Puheloinen 1999: 106). Moreover, Russia is trying to profit from territorial conflicts by, e.g., supporting rebels in Abkhazia and separatist groups in Luhansk or Donbas (Pototskaya 2014; Halbach 2021).

While Russia acknowledges the NATO Enlargements, it drew a red line in regard to Ukraine and Georgia. Russia called a potential membership of them in NATO a violation of Russian sphere of influence. In the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the goal is also to preclude a drift in the Baltic States to the West. Russia tries to question NATO's security pledge that countries like the US or Germany would be prepared to risk a war over a small country (Dimitrakopoulou & Liaropoulos 2010: 36-37; Plokhly 2021). The clearest form of Russia's ambitions on the European continent have been published by the Kremlin itself, when Putin denied the existence of Ukraine as a sovereign independent nation. Further, he stated that Ukraine occupies Russian territory. Putin states that the Ukraine functions as an "anti-Russia project" that is an artificial structure illegitimately formed under Lenin (Putin 2021, 2022).

In addition to that, Russia also intensified its intentions outside of the European continent, for instance by using resources like private military companies (e.g., Wagner Group in Mali or Syria) or weapon exports to conflict driven countries. In exchange, Russia gains beneficial access to valuable resources like diamonds and gold. Since 2019 Russia has signed twenty military cooperation agreements in Africa and became the biggest African arms supplier, manifesting its influence on the

continent (Paczyńska 2020; DW 2022; Euractiv 2022). Hence, Russia's geopolitical expansions go beyond the European continent and are of global nature. Ultimately following Putin's desires since day one that "Russia was and will remain a great power" (Putin 1999; Demirjian 2022).

2) *Weaken or Dissolve NATO and EU.* Following Russia's desire for power, one has to understand how Russia can influence other European states. While Russia is economically important for many European countries as their largest energy supplier (Statista 2022), this dependency is not a one way street. In the medium to long term, Russia needs to use other measures. But Russia's industry and economy is not powerful enough to pressure other countries. Russia is economically and demographically too weak compared to US, China, or EU to effectively use economic soft power. This can also be seen in the data, as the US and China outnumber Russian use of soft power between 1995 and 2015 (Trunkos 2021: 403-404, 410). Therefore, a more effective way to assert influence is through Russian military power. This understanding is deeply rooted in Russia's understanding of power itself (Hudson 2015: 330-334, 343). After Russia unveiled its new supposedly hypersonic weapon *Kinshal*, Putin made it clear how this is to be understood: "[...] nobody wanted to listen to us. So, listen now" (Putin 2018).

Enforcing influence through the threat of military force is hindered by NATO and EU. To increase Russia's leverage, a weakening or dissolution of both institutions is needed. Ultimately this will reduce US influence in Europe which further strengthens Russia's military power. The US is the key member of NATO, holding more fire power than all other NATO members combined. If the US were to abandon its efforts in Europe, its military and nuclear deterrence is gone. The US would create the possibility of spheres of influence, in which Russia gains influence through military power. A strong resentment against the EU can also be found in Russian leadership. In 2013, prime minister Medvedev warned Ukraine of signing a free-trade pact with the EU. Nine years later Medvedev – now deputy chairman of the Security Council – threatens that the EU probably ceased to exist before

Ukraine would join it, buttressing Russia's efforts to keep Ukraine under its sphere of influence (Reuters 2013; Berliner Zeitung 2022).

Already in 2021 Russia underlined their interest in weakening NATO and EU as they published draft treaties over security guarantees regarding the relationship between the US/NATO and Russia. In the draft from December 2021 Russia demanded a reduction in NATO infrastructure in eastern Europe, no further enlargement, a withdrawal of NATO's offer to the prospect of a membership for Ukraine and Georgia as well as no further deployment of any military personnel (especially NATO Response Force). In addition to that, Russia asked any US nuclear weapons to be removed from Europe (Article 5, 7). Russia states "the Parties shall refrain from deploying their armed forces [...] perceived by the other Party as a threat to its national security, with the exception of [...] deployment within the national territories of the Parties". Russia demanded that the US was to remove its forces from the European continent. This demand cannot be interpreted differently than having the goal of dissolving NATO by losing its strongest ally (MFA Russia 2021a, 2021b) and causing a situation in which single countries have to withstand Russian influence instead of a strong alliance. In sum, Russia wants to create a new European security environment to destabilize Europe.

Destabilizing Europe and reducing US influence is one of Russia's main interests. (Larrabee et al. 2015). These efforts are further underlined by Russian interference in elections, financing of extremist parties and attempts to influence public opinion in other countries. By publishing content and comments Russian trollarmies, such as *la fabrique*, want to spread propaganda, weaken European democracy and support extremist group (Baker & Erlanger 2015; Barnes & Cooper 2019; Frenkel 2020; Trunkos 2021: 403-404).

For military and economic power, it is crucial that Russia 3) controls geostrategic important maritime access points. This access is necessary out of multiple reasons. For one, it secures Russia's nuclear deterrence capabilities. If it cannot access ports at any time, its nuclear deterrence power decreases. Therefore,

ports like Sevastopol function as a crucial naval base for Russian access to the black sea (Mearsheimer 1990: 38; Flint 2017: 67). Without warmwater ports, submarines with the capability of carrying nuclear war heads cannot be used as a strategic deterrence all year around (Puheloinen 1999: 103). Second, the Arctic follows key economic and political interests of Russia. Access and control of the arctic, following a melting of the ice, opens up the shortest trade route between European and Far Eastern ports (Northern Sea Route). In addition to new naval opportunities, resources like oil, gas, nickel, cobalt are freed up (Konyshev & Sergunin 2012: 45-47; Paul & Swistek 2022: 8, 14, 17-21). Moreover, the Arctic functions as a bastion for Russian military deterrence, leading it to open up sixteen ports, ten airports, and ten radar stations (Paul & Swistek 2022: 28). Russia's interest in controlling strategic maritime access points is further underlined by Russia's activity in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, the Balkans as well as the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (Pototskaya 2014: 304).

In conclusion, Russia follows three main geopolitical interests: 1) expanding Influence (in Europe), 2) weaken or dissolve NATO and EU as well as 3) controlling geostrategic important maritime access points.

### **2.3 Hypotheses and Causal Mechanism**

Next, the theoretical framework about cooperation, conflict and the geopolitical interests of the NATO and Russia is used to form hypotheses. For that, the relationship between geopolitical interests (X) and the degree of cooperation between NATO and Russia (Y) will be analyzed in Chapter 4. NATO and Russia have several competing interests. NATO, by definition of the alliance, wants to maintain the European security order; Russia wants to change it in its favor. NATO wants to promote democratic values (in Europe), Russia is strengthening authoritarian tendencies, NATO wants to take eastern European countries of the geopolitical chess board, while Russia wants to expand its power and build spheres of influence in the states *near abroad*.

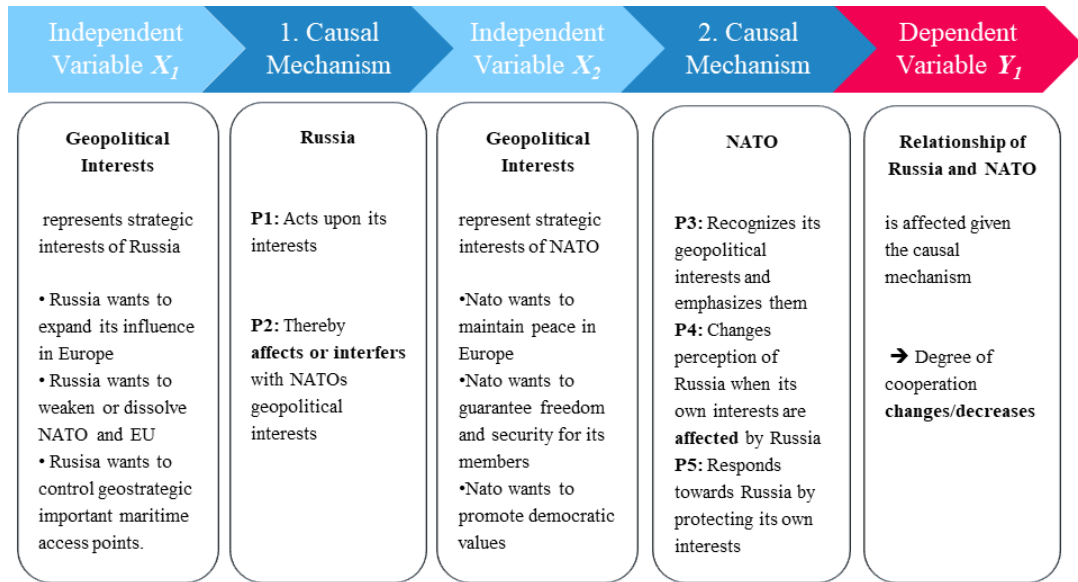
The threat to an actor's own geopolitical interests leads to a change in the perception of the other actor and thus to changing willingness to cooperate. Given this, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H1: Competing geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia, reduce the degree of bilateral cooperation.

H0: Competing geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia, do not reduce the degree of bilateral cooperation.

Hypothesis H1 is to be tested for the presence of a CM in which geopolitical interests (X) have a negative impact on the degree of cooperation (Y). The alternative hypothesis H0 is formulated as a null hypothesis that would be confirmed if the CM is not present:

**Figure 1: Causal Mechanism of Geopolitical Interests and Degree of Cooperation**



Source: Own illustration based on the works of Starke (2015). The presented CM shows how geopolitical interests of Russia (X<sub>1</sub>) and geopolitical interests of NATO (X<sub>2</sub>) affect the relationship of both actors. It predicts a decreasing degree of cooperation (Y<sub>1</sub>) through a negative effect of competing geopolitical interests.

The CM yields predictions (P), which will be tested on the basis of the empirics in chapter 4. Figure 1 depicts the CM: In the first part of the CM, Russia acts upon its interest (P1). In doing so, Russia's actions have an impact on NATO's geopolitical interests which can be seen in certain key events (observation points in chapter 4) (P2). NATO aligns its actions accordingly. First, NATO is aware of Russian geopolitical interests and, when they see the enforceability of their geopolitical interests threatened by Russia, emphasize their own geopolitical interests (P3). Second, the perception of Russia changes negatively or is characterized by a negative perception (P4). Third, NATO responds to Russia actions with measures to enforce or protect NATO's geopolitical interests (P5). From these three predictions, a deterioration in Russia-NATO relationship and their degree of cooperation emerges. The CM functions as a casual chain where X produces Y (Goertz 2017: 35).

### 3 Method

In this chapter, the applied methodology is described. The hypotheses are tested using a CM. The selection of specific observation points in which the independent variable geopolitical interests of Russia (X1) are predominant (P1-2) will therefore be explained. Subsequently, it is discussed which clues should confirm the predictions (P3-5) about NATO's geopolitical interests (X1). Thus allowing causal inferences about a change in the dependent variable NATO-Russia relations measured by their degree of cooperation (Y).

#### 3.1 From Theoretical Deduction to Process Tracing

Social sciences and IR often suffer from theories that are poorly tested. Given that international politics are highly complex, making predictions based on theory will often lead to incorrect conclusions (Mearsheimer 1990: 9-11). Sil and Katzenstein (2010) added to this, by arguing that working within one school of thought might produce results that are limited in their explanatory power. As many factors (and sometimes their interaction) affect IR a broad ontology is necessary but often unachievable. However, making predictions and testing them is essential to gain a better understanding of IR and its underlying theories (Mearsheimer 1990: 9-11).

Unlike in quantitative studies, this thesis is not trying to search for a correlation between independent and dependent variables nor its interdependent effects on one another. Instead, the focus lays on the deducted CM which suspects a relationship between the independent variable (geopolitical interests) and dependent variable (degree of cooperation). The mechanism is not trying to claim a universal relationship of how X produces Y (like a law in physics). Rather it tries to investigate if there is a causal relationship between X and Y that can be observed in selected cases (Starke 2015: 454; Goertz 2017: 30- 32).

This CM cannot be observed as a whole but has to be inferred through the analysis of empirical observations. For that, the observations have to be pre-selected. Once this selection is made, the sequence that was theoretically expected has to arise in the observations. Therefore, predictions P1 and P2 on Russia's geopolitical interests have to be found, before P3-P5 are observed and analyzed. If, and only if all parts of the CM are found where they were expected, then these predictions can be understood as an implication of the CM. Imagine the generation of electricity (Y) through solar panels were to be explained using a CM. For solar panels to generate electricity they need sunlight (P1). Then, it is necessary that they were manufactured correctly (P2), installed in a suitable spot (P3), attached to the electric grid (P4) and be able to extract sunrays to operate (P5). If one part is missing, the solar panels will not be able generate electricity. A CM functions the same way. If all parts of the mechanism are found, it suggests that the mechanism is correct. If one part is missing, the mechanism loses.

In a statistical model prediction would be tested by running out of sample data. In qualitative studies process tracing can be used. For that, observation points that were not used to derive the theory are analyzed (Bennett 2013: 469). Process tracing involves testing the predictions and observable implications of the mechanism to individual observation points (Bennett 2013: 471).

### **3.2 From Observation Points to Process Analysis**

Given a functioning CM, some scholars predict that process tracing has the ability to open a black box of causality (Beach and Pedersen 2012 as cited in Starke 2015: 457). This black box allows for a theory testing approach (Starke 2015: 458-463). Similar to the TV Series *Columbo*, process tracing involves finding and interpreting clues to solve a case. At the beginning of an episode the audience is not asking: *who did it?* The results are already there as the outcome can be observed. Rather, the audience asks: *how do you find prove that the murder did it?* In movie jargon this form



of a story is called an *inverted detective story*. In *Columbo* the audience is faced with a perpetrator committing a crime (outcome) at the beginning of an episode. Then it follows Detective Columbo analyzing clues (observation points), gathering circumstantial evidence (predictions) to prove the guiltiness of the perpetrator (outcome) by connecting and finding all the predictions (CM). Trying to find a causal effect of X on Y to detect the developed mechanism. For that, the evidence has to discriminate between alternative hypothesis (Bennett 2010: 4, 12-13).

Using process tracings scholars like Van Evera (1997) developed methods that allow to discriminate between multiple hypotheses. He developed four qualitative tests (see Figure 4) that differentiate in their degree of uniqueness, i.e., the probability that if the evidence is not found, the alternative hypothesis is to be considered and certainty, i.e., the chance that the hypothesis is true given the empirics. Uniqueness and certainty are measures to differentiate between multiple hypotheses. They refer to the possibility of having more than one alternative explanation/hypothesis of an outcome (Starke 2015).

Given a confirmed 1) *straw-in-the-wind test* neither certainty nor uniqueness is proven. It simply shows that the made hypothesis is important. Implying that the hypothesis is a straw that blows in the right direction. Next, a 2) *hoop test* gives certainty that there is a logical possibility for the hypothesis to be confirmed. Columbo might know that the suspect was in the city, implying that the suspect would be able to have committed the crime. But it does not prove it yet. Would the suspect not have been in the same city his alibi was strong. This would result in a failed hoop-test implying certainty that the hypothesis has to be rejected. It is a necessary condition for the CM but not a sufficient condition (Bennett 2010: 4-5).

Following this, a confirmed 3) *smoking gun test* tells us about complimentary information. Given its low certainty but high uniqueness, it implies that a hypothesis should be chosen over other alternatives. Imagine two people holding a gun in their hand. Out of the barrel of one gun, smoke is leaving. This uniquely distinguishes both guns as fresh smoke implies that the gun has been used recently.

But it cannot be concluded that the second gun was not used to commit the crime. It only increases the probability that the person holding the smoking gun has committed the crime. The hypothesis does not have to be rejected, but it would be weakened as a result of a failed smoking gun test (Bennett 2010: 4-5; Starke 2015).

Lastly, a confirmed 4) *doubly decisive test* is the bull's-eye. It shows a high probability of the mechanism to have a causal relationship. A video tape of a crime (high certainty) on which a suspect can be identified without a doubt (high uniqueness), conclude that the suspect has committed the crime (Starke 2015: 465). Equally this means that finding someone else on the tape would prove the innocence of the suspect. Therefore, Columbo has to exonerate the suspect, while a scholar will have to reject his hypothesis. In case of a CM a confirmed doubly-decisive test means that alternative hypotheses have to be rejected, as the main hypothesis is confirmed (Van Evera 1997: 30–34). Therefore, one doubly decisive test has enough value to confirm the causal relationship of a mechanism (Bennett 2010: 5).

Figure 2: Hypothesis Test of Causal Mechanism

			Sufficient condition for causal relationship/mechanism	
			True	False
			high certainty	low certainty
Necessary condition for causal relationship/mechanism	T r u e	High uniqueness	Doubly decisive <i>Hoop test and smoking gun test</i> are passed  <b>Pass:</b> Accept Hypothesis, eliminate alternatives <b>Fail:</b> Reject Hypothesis	Smoking gun test  <b>P4:</b> Changes perception of Russia when its own interests are affected by Russia  <b>Pass:</b> Accept Hypothesis <b>Fail:</b> Hypothesis weakened but not rejected
	F a l s e	Low uniqueness	Hoop test <b>P5:</b> Responds towards Russia by protecting its own interests  <b>Pass:</b> Proves High Relevance of Hypothesis <b>Fail:</b> Reject Hypothesis	Straw in the wind  <b>P3:</b> NATO recognizes its geopolitical interests and emphasizes them  <b>Pass:</b> Proves Relevance of Hypothesis <b>Fail:</b> Hypothesis weakened but not rejected

Source: Own illustration based on the works Van Evera (1997: 31-32), Bennett (2010: 4) and Starke (2015: 469). The presented CM shows how geopolitical interests of Russia (X1) and geopolitical interests of NATO (X2) could have an effect on the relationship of both actors. It predicts a decreasing degree of cooperation (Y1) through a negative effect of geopolitical interests.

The analysis following process tracing aims at finding evidence for the four tests. In doing so, it allows for the investigation of a CM. The amount of evidence is therefore less important, than the quality. The quality depends on how well it explains the relationship between the hypothesis and the evidence (Bennett 2010: 3-5, 13). The

evidence is then summarized to prove as many tests as possible. Given positive results a generalization among specific context and comparable groups of cases can be accepted. At the same time counterfactuals have to be considered within the cases that are analyzed (Starke 2015: 469-470, 475- 477; Goertz 2017: 30).

## **3.2 Recording and Operationalization of the Independent and Dependent Variable**

### **3.2.1 Independent Variable: Geopolitical Interests (X)**

To find clues to confirm the hypothesis, the derived mechanism will be analyzed using crucial cases. These cases show Russia acting on its geopolitical interests according to P1. As explained by Starke (2015) the cases are specifically chosen in a way that the CM can be suspected. Hence the case selection is built on logical or Bayesian conclusions, which lead to a preselection with high probability of including Russia acting on its geopolitical interests (Starke, 2015). Otherwise P1 and P2 could not be found. Making an analysis pointless. Either the observation points show that the derived hypothesis can be accepted or, in the case the depicted events do not pass the four tests by Van Evera (1997), suggest rejecting the hypothesis.

In chapter 4, the following events will be analyzed: 1) Kosovo War, 2) First and Second NATO Enlargement, 3) Russo-Georgian War, 4) Crimea Annexation and lastly 5) the Invasion of Ukraine. Each observation point starts with a description of the geopolitical Interests of Russia (P1), as well as the potentially arising conflicts with NATO's geopolitical interest (P2). For this purpose, the geopolitical interests that were deducted from the theory in chapter 2.2 are taken up again and tested.

### 3.2.1 Dependent Variable: Degree of Cooperation (Y)

The dependent variable “Degree of Cooperation” will be determined by qualitative indicators based on Goldstein Conflict-Cooperation scores. They range from -10 (max. conflict) up to 8 (max. cooperation). The cooperation intensity can be displayed on a continuum and increases from bottom to top (see Figure 3). The single value of the variable is determined using Goldstein (1992) cooperation-conflict scores (see Appendix, Table 1). Goldstein scores are originally used to analyze time series data that represents conflict or cooperation between two nations given aggregated World Event/Interaction Survey Data. While Goldstein’s intentions of building this score differs to the degree that it converts event-by-event data to represent a countries behavior over time (and not that of an alliance), it is still feasible to be used for this thesis. As NATO functions under the unanimity principle. each member has a veto right. Therefore, NATO’s official position (e.g., strategy papers) demonstrates a consensus among all members.

The individual events are then classified using Goldstein’s scoring system. In this each treaty, each event and each statement gets a value. This value is classified by 61 individual codes each with a specific weight depending on its expressive power to determine cooperative or conflictual behavior. These values are grouped by year and then displayed in a timeline that will show the degree of cooperation in the period of investigation (1998-2022). Allowing to display the course of cooperation (see Figure 3) as a “stream of behavior through time” (George & McKeown 1985: 36 as cited in Starke 2015). Providing further insights about the existence of CM.

To help answer the research question, the scores will be further classified. For that, Werner Link’s (1979) reflection on the concept of conflict is used in order to define ranges that classify actors’ relationship in four categories:

**Figure 3: Conflict, Competition or Cooperation?**

$$Y = \begin{cases} \textit{conflict}, & \text{if } -10 \leq Y < -3 \\ \textit{competition}, & \text{if } -3 \leq Y < 0 \\ \textit{coexistence}, & \text{if } Y = 0 \\ \textit{competition}, & \text{if } 0 < Y < 3 \\ \textit{cooperation}, & \text{if } 3 \leq Y \leq 8,3 \end{cases}$$

Source: own illustration based on Werner Link's concept of actor' relationship (1979).

Actions that are classified as conflictual are situations in which both actors are aware of a (potential) incompatibility of their competitive positions (Boulding 1962). But to be classified conflictual, these actions must affect their structural relationship, and become a hazard of destruction or disorganization of a structured relationship (Link 1979: 37). In distinction to a competitive situation in which both actors are aware of their incompatibilities but do not take actions to endanger the structure of their relationship (Link 1979: 38). Thirdly, cooperative situations are adapting behavior to work towards a common goal.

Lastly coexisting simply refers to a state in which there is no incompatibility but also no common ground for cooperation. All 61 Goldstein events have been grouped given their affiliation with Link's reflection on conflict. To counteract high variance within a specific time frame, the yearly Goldstein scores of each event are

aggregated to a yearly measure. For that, the values of each depicted event in a year are summoned and divided by the number of events in a year. This is in accord with other scholars working with Goldstein scores (Goldstein 1992; Mattes & Rodriguez 2014).

## 4 Empirical Analysis

In the following analysis, five different observation points are examined. These observations are assumed to contain the predictions P1 and P2 as crucial cases of Russian geopolitical interests. First, the events that took place are presented while describing Russia's and NATO's interests to highlight potential cooperation, conflict or competition of their geopolitical positions. Hereinafter, statements by representatives of NATO and Russia, press releases official strategy papers and news reports are analyzed to confirm prediction P3 and P4 (see Figure 1). Followed by responses and actions that may represent indications that NATO is responding to geopolitical actions by Russia, as described by prediction P5. Finally the four tests of Van Evera (1997) are used test hypothesis and the evidence of a CM.

### 4.1 Kosovo War (1999)

*Observation:* The Kosovo War functions as the first key case after NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations in 1997. It was the first military conflict on the European continent after the fall of Soviet Union and showed key geopolitical interests of Russia. Russia was not satisfied with the way NATO has transformed. NATO's aerial interventions was not secured by a UN mandate but justified by the ongoing humanitarian situation in Kosovo (Kritsiotis 2000). Russia interpreted the actions of NATO as the possibility of NATO starting to act outside of its members territory (Antonenko 1999: 342-345). Russia resented NATO's action after Serbia lost control over the region. The historical ties between Serbia and

Russia led them to support Serbia despite their efforts of ethnic cleansing (Bilefsky 2014). Despite being close to Russian borders, NATO's decision could not be influenced by Russia (Antonenko, 1999: 2). Five days after the first air strike, Russia acted on its geopolitical interest and froze all cooperation in NATO-Russia common institutions stating that the mission is "contrary to international law" (Whitney 1999; Malek 2003: 16-18). Leading to conclude that P1-P2 of the CM are found. NATO recognizes its interest in maintaining peace in Europe (P3) by intervening in Kosovo and leading the KFOR under the UN mandate 1244. Passing the *straw-in-the-wind test*. No evidence is found for P4 and P5. Both parties ultimately agreed to cooperate issuing a joint statement (NATO 1999b).

*Consequences:* The PJC did not dissolve the contrasting interests of both actors. While formed to build joint decision and cooperation, it failed to do so (Antonenko 1999:3). Overall, there is not enough evidence to support the predictions of the CM. Therefore no causal relationship between geopolitical interests and NATO-Russia relations can be found in the observation point as only the straw-in-the-wind test was passed, but none other.

## **4.2 First and Second NATO Enlargement (1999/2004)**

*Observation:* Starting in 1991, the Visegrád states (Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary) officially declared their interest in joining NATO. The alliance hesitated with this decision and Russia declared in 1992 that all eastern Europe is part of their "history based sphere of influence" (Umbach 2001: 428). In the following year, Russia warned NATO of an eastern enlargement (Umbach 2001: 429). So, they are stating their interests clearly in demanding a veto right in the decisions of sovereign eastern European states (P1). Thereby Russia interfered with NATO's interest in making sovereign decisions regarding their geopolitical interest. Putin declared that "change the quality of Russia-NATO relations, the issues of NATO expansion will cease to matter" (see Appendix, Table 2, row 7), so he emphasizes Russian



geopolitical interest of increased influence in Europe through a cooperation with increased right of codetermination (P2). NATO recognized Russia interest in the decision-making process, passing the *straw-in-the wind test* (P3). NATO Secretary General (SG) Lord Robertson promised “equal status” for Russia, which was later reversed by the following NATO SG stating that Russia “cannot get a veto about enlargement” (see Appendix, Table 2, row 8-10). In the time between the first and second enlargement NATO and Russia increased their peacekeeping efforts, joined the fight against terrorism (NYT 2001) and stabilized cooperative decision in the NRC (NATO 2022b). Despite the signing of the Rome Declaration, NATO did not change its perception of Russia. Russia remained a participant but not a full-fledged member of the organization.

*Consequences:* In the years between the enlargements, the tone between both actors became harsher (see Appendix, Table 2, row 14-18). While Putin still stated that “each country has the right to choose the form of security it considers most effective” (Mydans 2004), Russia condemned the enlargement process of NATO. Nonetheless, the surrounding time period did not lead to conclude an overall conflictual behavior. NATO’s position stayed clear that neither Russia or NATO can do it alone, which is implying a need for cooperation of both actors to solve security issues.

Overall, not enough evidence supports the predictions P4 and P5 of the CM. Therefore, no causal relationship between geopolitical interests and NATO-Russia relations can be found in the observation point.

### **4.3 Russo-Georgian War (2008)**

*Observation:* The Russo-Georgian War marks a turning point in Russia’s enforcement of its geopolitical interests. The previous years already showed a decline in cooperation over disputes, military drills, buildup of weapons and over Russia’s suspension of the CFE Treaty (see Appendix, Table 3, 2006-2007). Russia

demanded that the Treaty is to be ratified by the Baltic states that recently joined NATO. This request was declined until Russia fulfilled to its commitments of the Istanbul Summit to remove its troops from Georgia and Moldova (Admoeit & Kupferschmidt 2008: 20-23). Russia pushed the Baltics to sign the treaty as it provides for transparency in troop position and limits to conventional weapons.

P1-P2 are found in Russia's statement that "any attempt to expand NATO to its borders is a direct threat", marking the first time that Russia's denounces NATO enlargement as a security issue (see Appendix, Table 2, row 21-26). A clear switch from Russia's earlier position that states can make sovereign decision on whose alliance they choose (Dempsey 2007). When NATO recognized its interest by giving Georgia and Ukraine a clear prospect that these countries will become members of NATO, there can be no misunderstanding about that. While the *straw-in-the-wind test* accepts P3, NATO hardly changed its perception of Russia. Following NATO's decision of giving out a prospect of the former Soviet states to join NATO, Russia trapped Georgia into an attack (MPIL 2009: 23-24).

Following "years of provocations, mutual accusations, military and political threats and acts of violence" (NYT 2009), Russia argued that they are protecting Russian minorities under direct threat by Georgia (Shane 2010), marking the first time Russia used force to assert their geopolitical interests.

*Consequences:* NATO cut ties with Russia after questioning their motives in the Russo-Georgian War. Nonetheless this did not result in a change of perception failing the smoking-gun test of P4. NATO stated that there was no *business as usual* but ultimately recognizing that their "desire for a cooperative relationship" remains strong (see Appendix, Table 2, row 27- 32). Six months later NATO announced that they were willing to talk to Russia again, stating that there are still situations in which both parties would profit from cooperation. This decision was led by the US whose interest was to cooperate with Russia in Afghanistan (Landler 2009; Levy 2009b). Overall, not enough evidence supports the predictions of the CM. Therefore,

no causal relationship between clashing geopolitical interests and NATO-Russia relations is not found in the observation point.

#### **4.4 Annexation of Crimea (2014)**

*Observation:* The years preceding the Annexation of Crimea remark both the period of intense cooperation and an upbuild of conflict. Between 2009-2012 both parties agreed to the nuclear disarmament treaty (START), cooperated in Afghanistan, Syria and over disputes with Iran. Beginning in 2012, Russia starts threatening NATO with a “pre-emptive strike in eastern Europe” (Makarov, as cited in Kramer 2012) over a planned missile defense system in Europe, despite efforts by NATO officials to underline having no intension of using the missile system against Russia (see Appendix, Table 2, row 41).

Beginning in 2013 Russia stated its geopolitical interest of a higher influence in Europe by underscoring efforts of Ukraine to converge towards stronger ties with EU. Russian Prime Minister Medvedev denounced efforts of Ukraine in signing a Customs Union with the EU (Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU) (Reuters 2013). The following Russian military buildup was not stopped by NATO efforts to calm the situation and to urge Russia to respect international law. Russia invaded and later annexed the Ukrainian peninsula Crimea. NATO urged Russia to stop, demanding that Ukraine is a sovereign state. On the 1st of April 2014, NATO foreign ministers published a statement denouncing Russia's action while simultaneously suspending all further civilian and military cooperation (NATO 2022b; see Appendix, Table 2, row 49-51).

While Russia stated that they are protecting Russian minorities in Crimea questioning the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government (Myers 2014), their geopolitical interests were different. Russia's interests are in destabilizing Europe (Larrabee et al. 2015), controlling the Sea of Arov (Kramer 2018b) and regaining its sphere of influence in Europe. Russia states its dispute over the Ukrainian

government calling them “illegitimate”, “radical nationalists” who “seized power in a coup” (Lavrov, as cited in Erlanger & Meyers 2014). Following a Ukrainian revolution that leaned towards the EU and reduced influence by Russia (WP 2013). Putin (2015) stated that “forced to face a false choice” by NATO’s enlargements that lead “spark off a major geopolitical crisis. [...] exactly what happened in Ukraine [...] was used for instigating a coup d’état from abroad” (see also Appendix, Table 2, row 56-62).

NATO recognized its geopolitical interest right before and right after Russia began the occupation of Crimea by stating that they “support Ukrainian sovereignty and independence” warning Russia of greater political and economic isolation (see Appendix, Table 2, row 49-54); passing the straw-in-the-wind test. In the following years NATO’s perception of Russia became vague. NATO officials stated that it “is not possible now” to have a strategic partnership with Russia, while also recognizing that there is a “future [...] in respect, trust and cooperation” (see Appendix, Table 2, row 63-66). Tensions in the Arctic, North Atlantic and other regions in Europe rose and Russia kept on denouncing NATO’s activities and enlargement (see Appendix, Table 2, row 67-75; Appendix, Table 3, 2015-2017). NATO kept the dialogue with Russia open in the NRC with prominent head of states like Macron implying the rightfulness of Russia’s claims. Macron argued that “if guarantees of no further advances” into Russia’s “safe zone” are given, then this would conclude Russia to become a cooperative partner in Europe (Macron, as cited in Aron & Kokonos 2019). This leads to conclude that the smoking gun test that NATO changed its perception on Russia cannot be accepted.

*Consequences:* NATO enhanced its Response Force in Eastern Europe consisting of up to 30.000 troops (Stoltenberg 2015), not out of its own will to threaten Russia but as a consequence of Russia’s security threatening actions in Europa. While mostly symbolic, Russia was removed from the Group of eight (G8) and punished with economic sanctions, Russia kept supporting separatists in Donbas and Luhansk and violated the INF Treaty. Overall it shows that Russia has distanced

itself from the basis of the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Nonetheless, not enough evidence supports the predictions of the CM. Therefore, no causal relationship between geopolitical interests and NATO-Russia relations is found in the observation point.

#### 4.5 Invasion of Ukraine (2022)

*Observation:* The years after the Annexation of Crimea are mostly considered conflictual. Putin (2018) threatened the West on multiple occasions stating that Russia's new military capabilities will lead to "unfriendly steps against Russia such as deploying missile defenses and bringing NATO infrastructure closer to the Russian border become ineffective". Putin demanded that Russia has to be listened to as their ever increasing military capabilities have made them more powerful (see Appendix, Table 2, row 79-81). Up until 2021, military saber rattling increased despite NATO's efforts to "strive for a better relationship with Russia" (Stoltenberg 2019a).

Beginning in 2021, when Putin published his infamous essay on *The Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, Russia's geopolitical interest over asserting more influence in Europe were based not just on protecting Russian minorities but on the *fact* that Ukraine was not a legitimate state, claiming it was an "anti-Russia project" (see Appendix, Table 2, row 85- 88). Following Russia's increasing military buildup of over one hundred thousand troops on the Ukrainian border (Schwirt & Reinhard 2022), Putin send draft treaties to the US. As discussed in chapter 2.2.2, Putin pressured for a decrease in US influence, nuclear deterrence and demanded the general withdrawal of the US military on the European continent. Leaving European NATO members to uphold Russia's military pressure by themselves with little nuclear deterrence power by France and the United Kingdom, leading Russia to build spheres of influence in Europe.

Putin's demands were not fulfilled. Following that, on the 24th of February Russia started the Invasion of Ukraine, stating that it was "a special military operation" to hold off NATO enlargement that are threatening Russian security. He said that it is a matter of "life and death" for Russia as diplomacy has failed. Russia has "no other choice" but to save Russia from NATO by invading Ukraine as NATO threatens the "very existence of our state [Russia]" (Putin, as cited in Fisher 2022). Russia started a full scale invasion attacking Ukraine from multiple fronts with the goal of overthrowing Kyiv and its government to gain total control of Ukraine, breaking international law, disregarding human rights and norms (UN Resolution A/RES/ES-11/2).

NATO changed its previous official position to not considering "Russia to be a partner". NATO went as far as stating that "The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace". Further NATO claims that it "cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity [by Russia]." Clearly indicating a change in perception (P4) from Russia being a "strategic partner" and as such confirming *smoking gun test* (see also Appendix, Table 2, row 1-2, 9, 32, 35, 63).

After the Annexation of Crimea, NATO enhanced its Response Force in Eastern Europe only by a small fraction of NATO's capabilities. After the Annexation it reacted more drastically stating that NATO "will significantly strengthen deterrence and defense for all allies, enhance [...] resilience against Russian coercion and support [...] partners to counter malign interference and aggression" (NATO 2022d) to protect its geopolitical interest of maintaining peace in Europe. NATO increased its Response Force tenfold to 300,000 soldiers. Further, NATO and its partners have supported Ukraine with weapon system, military equipment, and humanitarian aid worth over 84 billion Euros (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, as of 03.08.22). This leads to conclude that the *doubly-decisive* for prediction P5 is accepted as well.

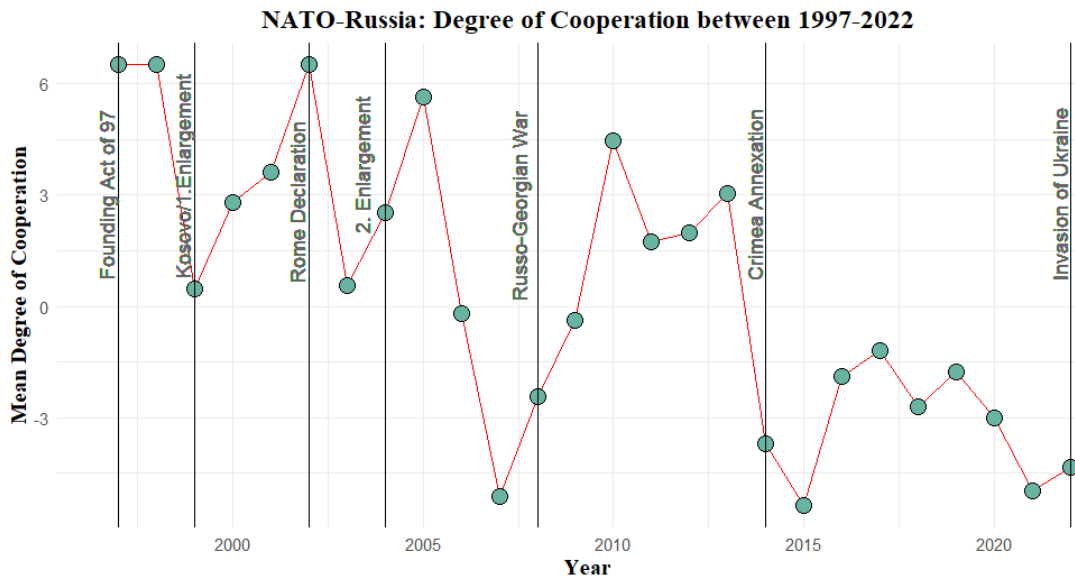
*Consequences:* NATO, the EU and the West strengthened their relationship while denouncing all of Russian activities in Ukraine. NATO and its members provide military equipment and training to Ukraine, the EU & US implemented various economic sanctions on Russia, while Russia achieved the opposite of its goals. Heavy military losses, economic sanctions and strongly damaged relationships with the West will most likely force Russia to find other partners in the long term. European countries are reducing their energy dependency from 36 Russia, while Russia tries to find new partners in Africa and Asia. NATO-Russia relations are damaged drastically as the Madrid Summit has shown (Demirjian 2022; DW 2022; NATO 2022e).

Overall, enough evidence supports the predictions of the CM. Therefore, a causal relationship between geopolitical interests and NATO-Russia relations is found in the observation point. The hypothesis *competing geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia, reduce the degree of bilateral cooperation* is confirmed.

## 5 Results

The analysis has shown an overall decrease in the degree of cooperation between Russia and NATO over the last two decades. In the first years after the Founding Act on Mutual Relations in 1997 NATO-Russia relations recovered after a geopolitical conflict. Since the signing of the Rome Declaration and the establishment of the NRC in 2002, both parties never reached a degree of cooperation that was as strong as in 2002. However, despite continuous geopolitical conflicts, we do observe some level of cooperation between Russia and NATO over time. Figure 3 depicts the mean degree of cooperation over time, from 1997 to 2022. The five cases described in chapter 4 are highlighted using vertical lines.

Figure 4: Degree of Cooperation



Source: Own illustration using data from Table 3 (see Appendix). Figure 3 shows a scatterplot of the average Goldstein Conflict-Cooperation Score by year, from 1997 to 2022 over 100 events. The Figure is created in R Studio using the packages *ggplot2*, *dplyr*, *hrbrthemes* and *tidyverse*. The codes can be found on [github.com](https://github.com).

The derived CM in chapter 2.3 is not supported in the data for the first three observation points, i.e. the Kosovo War, the First and Second NATO Enlargement, the Russo-Georgian War (compare chapters 4.1 to 4.3). During these periods there is a pattern of willingness to cooperate even after a conflict (see Appendix: Table 3). For example, just days after Russian forces entered Georgia the US signaled a “desire for a cooperative relationship with Russia (Volcker 2008, as cited in Erlanger 2008). A year later SG of NATO Rasmussen made clear that NATO will “develop a true partnership” (Levy 2009). Despite these conflicts, NATO kept on making efforts to enable a cooperative partnership. Predictions P3-P5 were not found in any of the first three observation points.

In the following period, 2009 to 2012, NATO-Russia relations focused on the cooperation on logistical support mission in Afghanistan, counter-piracy missions, and counter narcotics. Russia and the US signed the new START Treaty, focusing



on nuclear arms reduction and cooperated on a resolution on Iran. In 2011, the first and only two combined military exercises between NATO and Russia took place. Their overall relationship can be classified as cooperative in the following years up until the Annexation of Crimea when a permanent shift in the degree of cooperation is observed. Dispute over the INF Treaty<sup>5</sup>, threats of using force, and a dispute over a US backed missile defense system in Europe overshadowed their relationship (see Appendix: Table 3, rows 27-47).

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (chapter 4.2.4) lead NATO to increase their conflictual behavior. Reciprocal threats increased, territorial disagreements, military drills in Belarus and the North Atlantic and accusation of espionage led to a deterioration of their degree of cooperation. Despite the increased conflictual behavior and unsuccessful aspiration for military cooperation by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov (2017), the hypothesis H1 and the underlying CM is not supported consistently for the annexation of Crimea as no sufficient evidence for P4 is found.

However, for observation point five the invasion of Ukraine through Russia (see chapter 4.2.5), the data supports hypothesis H1 and the CM. While in the previous cases the CM had to be rejected as P4 was often not found, NATO changed its official position on Russia with their strategic concept of 2022. For the first time since the Founding Act of 1997 NATO "cannot consider Russia to be a partner" (NATO 2022d). All hypotheses' tests are confirmed, implying evidence of the predictions of the mechanism. The confirmation of the doubly decisive test allows to accept the hypothesis as the CM is present. Clashing geopolitical interests lead to declining cooperation.

### *Criticism*

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<sup>5</sup> Abandoning of INF Treaty also profits the United States. As the Treaty bans developing intermediate range nuclear missiles it is disadvantage to China. As China did not sign the Treaty in the 80s, they have intermediate range nuclear missiles among their military equipment, leading to a military disadvantage in the Pacific for the US (Erlanger & Harris, 2018)

The measurement of degree of cooperation (Y) suffered from partly inaccurate distinctions to evaluate an event. The ratification of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the NRC, the PJC, and the PfP all had to be classified the same way as *Make Substantive agreement*. More cooperation was only possible through *extended military assistance* or *extended economic aid*, narrowing the possibilities to reward cooperative behavior. Further, the results are limited as this thesis can only look at fraction of all the events that happened (five out of roughly 100). A quantitative analysis of a larger N could result in a higher significance. In addition to that, this thesis allows to test the mechanism only in one direction: a change in cooperation is driven by NATO's reaction to Russia's actions, which may be insufficient for the causal direction (Bennett 2013: 472). Explanatory factors, i.e. changes in perception of Russia (P4), might suffer from hidden information, preventing to find the true CM. Future work could reduce the problem of information asymmetry by conducting expert interviews.

## 6 Conclusions

This thesis has elaborated the relationship between NATO and Russia between 1999 and 2022. It argues how both parties established common institutions but ultimately failed to find a common ground for a long lasting and stable cooperation. One reason may be differing geopolitical interests. To test this argument, this study derived a CM for the relationship between NATO's and Russia's geopolitical interests and the degree of cooperation. Using five observation points from the period under study, the invasion of the Ukraine shows that competing geopolitical interests of NATO and Russia reduce the degree of bilateral cooperation. However, for the other four cases (Kosovo War, First and Second NATO Enlargement, Russo-Georgian War and Annexation of the Crime), the analysis did not find supporting evidence of the hypothesis. The CM raises multiple questions regarding NATO-Russia relations.

1) After the Annexation of Crimea NATO hardly changed its perception. Despite the ongoing support of separatists in the Donbass region and the illegal Annexation of Crimea, NATO remained open for cooperation with Russia until the Invasion of Ukraine in 2022. 2) The findings raises the question, if NATO and Russia relations can ever be cooperative again in the future. It became clear that the current Russian regime under leadership of Vladimir Putin will not accept sovereign European states. Russia's goal of creating spheres of influences in Europe became clear throughout this thesis. Russia's underlying geopolitical interest of the US reducing their influence in the EU and NATO remains crucial for Russia. Therefore, the question arises if Russia can lose its post-imperialistic ambitions in the near future or if it is willing to further break international law. 3) Russia serves as an example of a power seeking state that uses the misperceptions of security concepts to justify their actions. While not being threatened by NATO's security measures, given Russia nuclear deterrence, Russia used these concerns to publicly accuse NATO of aggressive behavior. Russia called the NATO enlargements a violation of international law and mutual treaties. Despite the fact that sovereign eastern European states joined NATO out of fear of a revisionist and aggressive Russia. Russia answered by using military force in Georgia and Ukraine.

To sum up, the relationship between NATO and Russia went from mostly cooperative in the late 1990s to conflictual today. As long as Russia is led by a president that disregards international law, while aspiring great power politics, conflicts between NATO and Russia will continue. In 2008, De Hoop Scheffer, SG of NATO, questioned Russia's intentions. He asked if Russia is still "playing by the rules of international law" or "what was behind Georgia" (Erlanger 2008). With the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has proven what Putin has made clear since taking office; that Putin's Russia is driven by a desire to accumulate power and create spheres of influences with the ultimate goal of becoming a great power through military threat (Putin 1999; 2007, 2018, 2021, 2022).

For the future it will remain vital that the US keeps an interest in Europe, despite the ongoing conflicts with China over predominance in the Indo-Pacific. If NATO (including its European members) is not willing to commit to their own security, Europe will be dependent on US foreign policy to guarantee future peace in Europe.

Russia and NATO seem to be bound for conflict. The Russian saying *two bears don't live in one lair* seems to be an accurate statement on the current Russian understanding of Europe.

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The tables mentioned can be found in the appendix, which can be accessed via the following link: [https://ib.uni-koeln.de/sites/jaeger/publikationen/aipa/Appendix\\_AIPA\\_2023\\_1.pdf](https://ib.uni-koeln.de/sites/jaeger/publikationen/aipa/Appendix_AIPA_2023_1.pdf).