

From Ambivalence to Strategic Partnership? Ukraine-NATO Relations under Russian Pressure

Katelynn Lloyd, Research Supervised by Dr. Serhy Yekelchyk, Department of History



This project seeks to determine to what extent Western policies towards Ukraine have been implemented with Ukrainian interests at the forefront or if they have largely been proposed in response to Russia's position in the region and Russian aggression towards Ukraine – especially since 2014.

Introduction

My project emphasizes the agency of Ukrainian political elites and voters, and the role Ukrainian authorities and society have played in relations with NATO. This project focuses on pivotal events in the development of Ukraine-NATO relations. As this project is grounded in the historical development of Ukraine-NATO relations, it does not suggest a path forward but rather provides an analysis of past relations.

By deepening understanding of the historical context of Ukraine-NATO relations, this project argues that Russia has always been an informal – but recognized – mediating member in this relationship. Russia's overbearing approach has had significant consequences on the current state of the Ukraine-NATO partnership.

Historiography

Recent literature on Ukraine-NATO relations largely seeks to explain the causes and impacts of the current war with Russia. The debates presented in these sources explore NATO enlargement, a new Cold War, and Ukraine's position. Scholars agree on the significant role that historical Ukraine-NATO relations play in contemporary politics.

Key works:

- Jan Eichler, *NATO and the War in Ukraine: Geopolitical Context and Long-term Consequences* (2024)
- Leonid Polyakov, *Ukraine-NATO Relations and New Prospects for Peacekeeping* (2003)
- Andrew T. Wolff in *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond* (2017)
- Tuomas Forsberg and Heikki Patomäki, *Debating the War in Ukraine: Counterfactual Histories and Future Possibilities* (2022)
- Liana Fix, "The Future is Now: Security Guarantees for Ukraine" (2023) and "NATO and Ukraine: The Peril of Indecision" (2024)

Section 1: 1991-1997

This section focuses on the early period of independent Ukraine. The legacy of Soviet propaganda influenced public perception of NATO. Pro-Russian politicians cultivated such views in the regions of Ukraine with a large Russian minority.

During this period, Ukraine prioritized achieving international recognition and political legitimacy while developing relations with NATO and establishing new relations with Russia. The West, on the other hand, emphasized normalizing relations with Russia with little focus on Ukraine itself.

Key Events:

- 1991: Ukrainian Independence

Section 2: 1997-2014

This period saw two political revolutions demonstrating the Ukrainian population's pro-democratic and pro-Western orientation. In 2008, NATO promised both Ukraine (and Georgia) eventual NATO membership but did not provide an accession path. Ukraine declared non-alignment from 2010-2014 which lasted until Russia annexed the Crimea and initiated fighting in Eastern Ukraine.

Key Events:

- 2004-2005: The Orange Revolution
- 2008: Bucharest Summit
- 2013-2014: Euromaidan Revolution
- 2014: Russian annexation of Crimea

Section 3: 2014-Present

This section focuses on the impacts of Russian aggression in 2014 and the subsequent full-scale invasion in 2022. After 2014, Ukrainian foreign policy became fully aligned with the West.

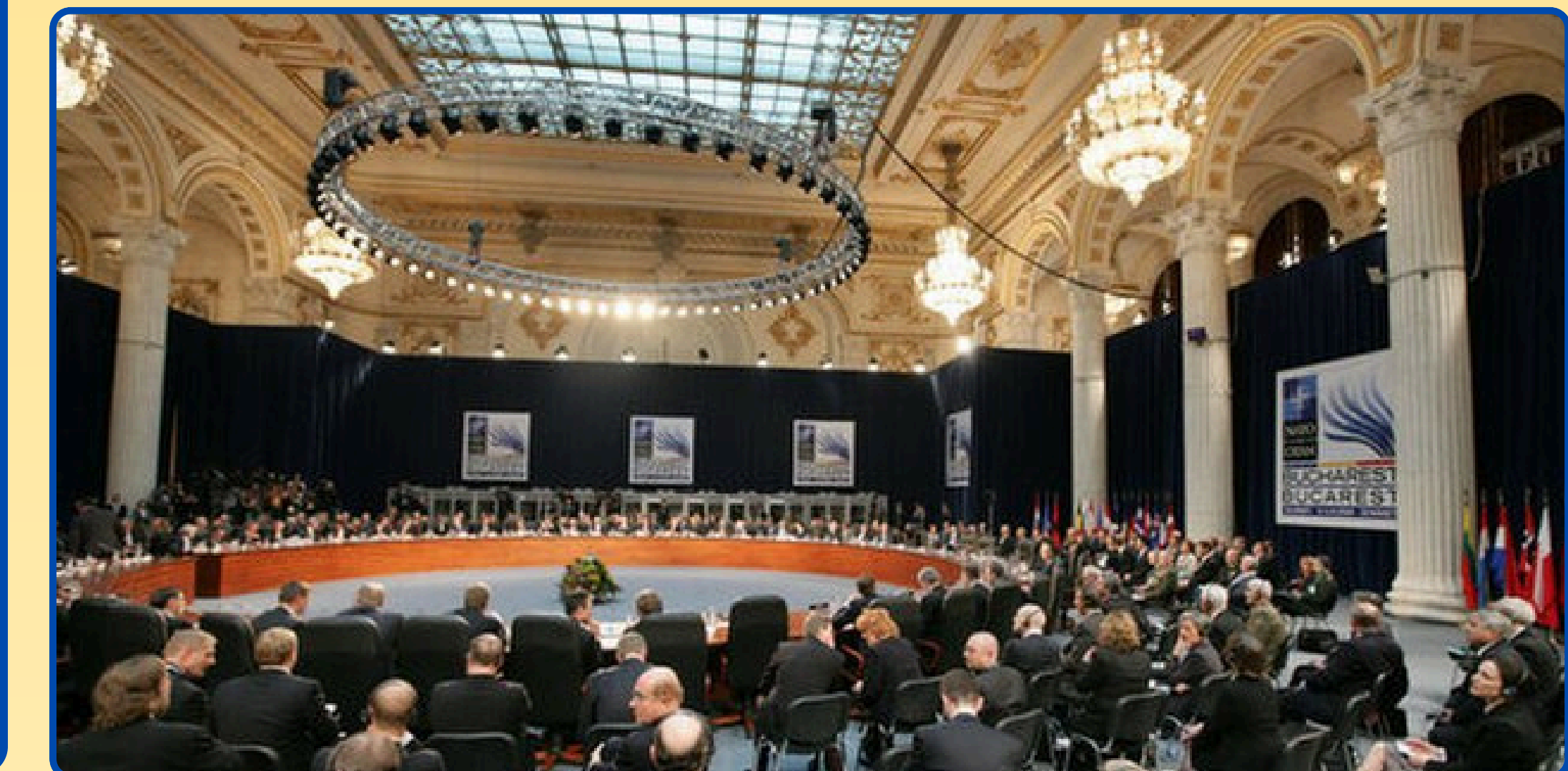
The West introduced economic sanctions against Russia. NATO launched multiple programs of economic support and military training for Ukraine. However, in the face of the full-scale war, Ukraine's membership in NATO has been put on hold indefinitely.

Key Events:

- 2019: Constitutional Amendment on NATO & EU Membership
- 2022: Full-scale invasion

Ukraine-NATO Agreements & Programs

- 1991: North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC)
- 1994: Budapest Memorandum (US, British, Russia)
- 1994: Partnership for Peace Programs (PfP)
- 1997: Charter on a Distinct Partnership
- 1997: Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership (Ukraine-Russia)
- 2002: NATO-Ukraine Action Plan
- 2016: Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP)
- 2024: Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC)
- 2024: NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU)



2008 Bucharest Summit



Map of Europe



Member flags at NATO Headquarters



2014 Euromaidan

Conclusion

Russia has always been a significant limiting force in Ukraine-NATO relations. This precedent was established in the early years of Ukrainian independence and continues to influence NATO's response to Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine. Although NATO confirmed Ukraine's future as a full member, its inability to provide an accession path has restricted Ukraine-NATO relations. Ukraine's dynamic political landscape also played a significant role in how these relations could or could not develop. It is clear that full NATO membership is currently out of reach for Ukraine; however, future relations would heavily rely on overcoming Russia's persistent and overbearing role.

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