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Is Brain-Dead NATO Near Euthanasia?



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ABSTRACT

Since its establishment in 1949, NATO has been a political and military international organization that constitutes one of the most important actors in the international system. Although the prestige and advantages of being a NATO member in a bipolar world have been questioned from time to time after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the Alliance has continued to sustain itself and, especially in the 2000s, has tended to expand. The acceleration of NATO's development and change after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) suggests that the focus of this international organization is not only on the Eastern Bloc but also on the need to organize for other current and future focal points. Those who argue to the contrary suggest that in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, which was the focal point of NATO, and in an international system moving between unipolarity and multipolarity, the existence and purpose of the organization has become meaningless. The structure of NATO has been criticised due to factors such as the criticism of NATO's mission to protect Europe within the European Union (EU), especially in France, and the desire of the member states of the Union to take part in the mission to protect Europe themselves. Within the scope of this analysis, NATO's actions and its position in the face of crises, especially in the 2000s, will be examined, and how the reflections of its actions in the face of these political and military crises shed light on the future of the organization will be discussed. In this context, issues such as what the Alliance countries, especially in Europe, expect from NATO in the face of the recent crises will be analysed.

Keywords: Defence, deterrence, NATO, power, war

Introduction

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM THAT emerged after the Second World War caused the world to be stuck between two poles, and in these two poles, the dominant powers directed or influenced the other powers. Historian A.J.P. Taylor said, "The purpose of great power is to be able to make great wars. But the way to remain a great power is not to enter such a war." This reminds us that the post-war order is an important issue (Heilbrunn, 2018: 9). The bipolar world order led by the Soviet Union and the United States of America (US) as the

East and West Blocs reveals the capacity of these two superpowers. In this respect, NATO, as a military organization tool of the Western Bloc, has acted in this direction and become an important instrument to continue its deterrence instead of an open challenge. However, despite all this time, it has become questionable whether NATO will continue to exist as a deterrent power instead of a fighting force as in the first days of its establishment. The potential loss of power in the current situation, especially with war and regional conflicts, has raised the issue of whether the Alliance is in a phase of disintegration and division.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, first, the unipolar world dominated by the US and then the multipolar new world order, which has gradually become more prominent in the current period, perhaps gave NATO back its lost reason for existence. We have seen a NATO that enlarges, transforms into an independent structure from thirty-one member states, and becomes rivals to Russia and China in different dimensions instead of the Soviets. And at the moment, sustainability is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed for NATO and the states that comprise the organization.

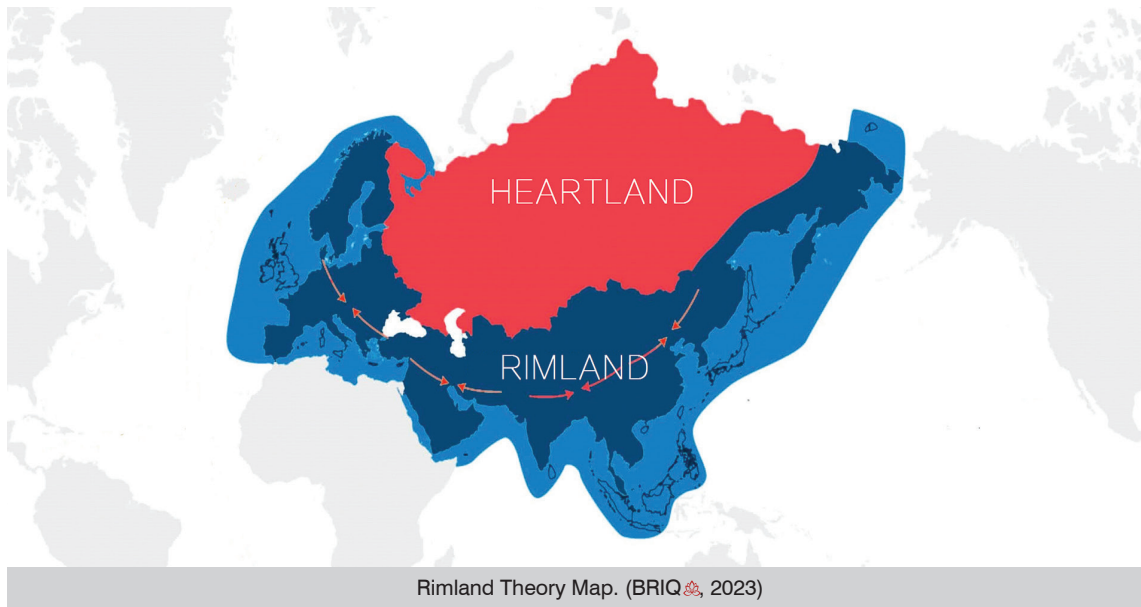
With the impact of the Russia-Ukraine tension that emerged in the first months of 2022, a war environment is being experienced in a part of the international system. For NATO, the former “enemy” superpower is at war, which is being waged against a country that has expressed its desire to join NATO. This situation, similar to the Cold War years, caused the US, the leader of the other pole, NATO under its leadership, and indirectly European countries to position on the other side of the war. As a defense organization, will NATO protect its allies against war and conflict, as discussed in the 2022 concept? Or will this organization, which has expanded its field of interest and activity with a global approach and whose goal is to expand, be dragged into new wars?

In other words, will NATO take a positive role in ensuring world peace and continue its development, as it did in the Cold War era, or will it begin the process of disintegration as a growing and expanding organization? In this analysis, first of all, the establishment of NATO and the position of the US in the organization will be briefly discussed, and then the decision-making mechanisms of the organization and its blockage points will be examined. Finally, the question of the future of NATO will be discussed.

The Foundation of NATO and the Position of the US

After World War II, the US signed the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949 for the “protection of Europe” and to balance the Soviet military presence. The treaty entered into force on 24 August 1949. Although the purpose of the Alliance is collective defense in the text of the treaty, it is designed as a complement to the Marshall Plan, which is a product of the US’s effort to revive Europe against the Soviet Union (Hobsbawm, 2006:322). In this context, NATO took its place on the stage as an actor in the play, whose script was written by the US.

The US, which took the place of England after World War II, has taken the strategic idea of the former hegemonic power, which is pushing the Soviet Union back, preventing its access to the sea, and keeping it fragmented for the continuation of the hegemonic order. Therefore, after the war, it was decided to accept Spykman’s Rimland theory first and implement Kennan’s strategy to contain the USSR, and communism was chosen as the ideological enemy. NATO was designed as a tool for the implementation of such hegemonic thinking (Gürdeniz, 2022). In Spykman’s Rimland Theory, the region extending from the east of Europe, which we can define as Eurasia, to Siberia and China is also defined as the Heartland, and it is stated that coastal regions are the key to controlling the World-Island (Foster, 2006). The edge region, namely Eurasia, includes the Heartland, and whoever controls this region will eventually control the World-Island, Spykman says. Whoever controls the World-Island, will soon control the world. Therefore, NATO’s enlargement policy can be interpreted as controlling the Heartland (Erenel, 2021: 11).



The US has always been the most important member of NATO compared to other member states. In the words of Lord Ismay, NATO's founding secretary general and military adviser to Churchill during the war, "NATO was established to keep the Americans inside, the Russians outside, and the Germans under control". Later, the purpose of its existence was lost and became questionable (Maunder, 2016; Guérot, 2016: 55). However, this ontological wavering was short-lived. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO tried to transform itself rapidly, especially in the 1990s, in the face of various threats. With the historic decisions taken at the 1999 Washington Summit, the Alliance could carry out "out-of-area" military operations. In this direction, NATO became usable for solving crimes and problems such as weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, the drug trade, racism, and human trafficking. Thus, after the 1999 Summit, the organization's job description and operation area changed, and the mission undertaken was designed in accordance with the new conditions of the period. Defined as a defense and military

international organization, NATO has gradually turned into a general security organization (Irondele and Lachmann, 2011; Polat, 2020:335-336).

The fact that the US determines policies and strategies on problems and issues concerning the entire Alliance without adequate dialogue shows the organization's founding purpose. At the NATO Summit held in London in 2019, the "plan to designate the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization" presented by Türkiye was not accepted, and only a general statement was used in the summit's final declaration, such as "the alliance will continue to fight all forms of terrorism". Although there is discussion among its members, in the final declaration, in line with the desire of the US, the statements of "acting together as an alliance against China" and "safe and flexible systems should be trusted in the transition to 5G technology", again against China, indicate that decision-making mechanisms are not functioning in coordination, and rhetoric and actions that do not take into account the interests of the US cannot find a place in the alliance (Alpar, 2021).

This shows that NATO's concerns and interests regarding other European states are kept in the background behind the interests of the US. In other words, it can be concluded that security concerns may be valid for other states within limits set by the US. In these examples, it's clear that NATO's decision-making mechanism differs in formality and operation.

NATO's Decision-Making Mechanism

Although NATO's decision-making mechanism has remained stable in its basic lines since its establishment, it has undergone partial changes in the face of some unexpected situations. NATO's highest decision-making body is the North Atlantic Council, where every member of the Alliance has one vote. Decisions in the North Atlantic Council are taken unanimously, not by a majority (NATO, 2022). Therefore, the approval and vote of all the member states are required. This situation changed due to the tension between NATO and France during the Charles de Gaulle period of France, which was called the Fifth Republic and switched to a semi-presidential system. Charles de Gaulle, who did not want to be a symbolic president, proposed a new foreign policy doctrine for France with the new French regime. In this direction, he tried to put France in a prime position in the bipolar world in a way that would not be too close to or engaged with any pole. This has worked. Therefore, France under Charles de Gaulle left the military wing of NATO in 1966 (Vasse, 2009). The Defense Planning Committee was established to handle military issues while the North Atlantic Council remained. After the return of France to the military wing of NATO in 2009, this situation was no longer concerning (Chevènement, 2009).

It is considered that NATO, as an organization,

has grown excessively while trying to adapt to environmental conditions on the one hand, grows old on the other, and is experiencing the Behemot Syndrome, which means that the speed of reaction to events decreases as a result of the overgrowth of the organizational structure, becoming unwieldy (Fasola and Lucarelli, 2008). 2020; Keçecioglu, 2008:192). The most effective example of a low reaction rate is the necessity of taking decisions unanimously. At its establishment, the ninth article of the North Atlantic Council officially states that decisions are to be taken unanimously and that it meets regularly twice a year with the participation of the member states' foreign ministers. While unanimity is emphasized in the decision-making process, open voting is not carried out. An agreement is reached on whether there is an objection through negotiations with the members. Negotiation and dialogue methods are used to overcome objections (Özsoy, 2022: 105).

If one of the member states uses its veto right only for political or legal reasons, NATO's decision-making mechanism and process may be interrupted and blocked. For example, North Macedonia has been waiting years to become a member due to the Greek veto. Suppose a country vetoes any NATO decision for political or private reasons. In that case, that country can be questioned (Tarakçı, 2016:1). Because all the decisions to be taken in the North Atlantic Council must be accepted by the member states, the council cannot pass the decision. Again, as a good example, Sweden and Finland quickly applied for NATO membership after the Ukraine War, but Türkiye's attitude due to Sweden's supportive position towards terrorism interrupted the membership process and, indirectly, the decision-making process.



Finland accession ceremony to NATO, Brussels, Belgium. (Estonian Foreign Ministry, 2023)

Similarly, Türkiye declared that it did not want Rasmussen, the former NATO Secretary General, to be involved but had to accept it when it was alone in its request (Kool et al., 2021). After NATO's Bucharest 2008 Summit, Albania and Croatia joined the alliance, and rhetoric that Ukraine and Georgia could become NATO members began to emerge. However, after Russia's harsh reaction to the participation of Georgia and Ukraine in NATO, the attitude towards the membership of these two countries has changed in the alliance's member states. Even though the Cold War is over, the danger that is insisting on an issue that will disturb Russia and even seeing it as a national security problem that may cause new crises in the international system has been one of the most important obstacles in opening the path to membership for Ukraine and Georgia.

At the same time, NATO has the appearance of a multinational company due to its structural features. The problems these companies experience

continue to be experienced to a large extent. In other words, NATO, when viewed as a whole, has a multinational structure that includes military and civilian personnel from many nations. Because different cultures' human resources work in the same channel, countries have different perspectives on security problems, their geopolitical importance, proximity to the forces identified as threats, and tensions between countries can seriously delay joint decision-making.

As the number of member states increases, NATO's decision-making mechanism becomes more debatable. The fact that the alliance, which started with twelve founding members, continues to exist with twenty-eight member states today and the expectation of an increase in the number of members in the near future may make it increasingly difficult to take a unanimous decision. The veto rights of each member slowed down the decision-making process regarding some crises and conflicts, especially in the post-Cold War period. US political

scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski proposes that decisions in NATO should be taken by a majority instead of a unanimous vote (Brzezinski, 2009: 15; Tarakçı, 2016:1).

With the end of the Cold War, the bipolar international system ended, and the USA remained the only superpower in the world.

Changes in environmental conditions, organizational corrosion caused by aging, and expansion that is difficult to manage have caused NATO's effectiveness to decrease and become unwieldy. In the unipolar world order after the Cold War, the US's strategies to create a New World Order were reflected in the organization's existence. Aiming to take precautions against the threats it has identified with seven concepts since its establishment, NATO is about to prepare the eighth one with the vision of NATO-2030. It will probably revise this concept with the start of the Ukraine-Russia War.¹ Frequent concept changes delay the war preparation and adaptation process, making testing and developing the concept with joint training and exercises difficult.

The Future of NATO

NATO's new roadmap is clearly included in the 2022 Strategic Concept. In this concept, NATO is presented as a kind of combined military power of the US and the European Union (EU), where the US and the EU focus on maintaining the global leadership of the Atlantic system in an integrated manner, despite the declining military, economic, and political powers, and put

their ideological powers to new heights. It is seen that they rely on the rule-based international order they have determined. However, the extent to which this system is complied with when it comes to Atlantic interests has also been seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, and in Türkiye in the 15 July Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) coup attempt and the conspiracy cases before it (Gürdeniz, 2022).

With the end of the Cold War, the bipolar international system ended, and the US remained the only superpower in the world. As stated by John O'Sullivan, one of the intellectual supporters of the seventh President of the US, Andrew Jackson, a "vigorous and fresh country presented by God" had a "sacred duty on behalf of the nations of the world" (Wilsey, 2017; Gomez, 2012). With the disintegration of the USSR, a group calling themselves the neoconservatives put forward the New American Century Project (Al-Kassimi, 2017). In a study they presented to the Pentagon in 1992, Vice President Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz argued that in the post-Cold War period, the US needed to lead in a way that would realize its interests by establishing a unipolar order (Gaddis, 2002: 50-57; Gözen, 2014:120).

It is seen that the emphasis on the unanimous decision-making mechanism and presenting NATO as a defense organization where the members have the right of veto is to cover up the US's aim of using the organization as an attack and occupation device. Throughout the seventy-three-year history of NATO, despite many demands, the question of why Article 5 of the treaty has not been applied to other members other than the US clearly shows that NATO is a US-based organization and that the interests of other member countries remain insignificant.

In the post-Cold War era, in which US hegemony indisputably dominated world politics, conflicts or wars were not absent; on the contrary, many military operations were carried out under the name of combating terrorism. From the end of World War II to the period of the 11 September attacks, the data of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London reveal that 22,456,000 people lost their lives, and there were 188 military conflicts in ninety countries during this fifty-five-year so-called peace process after World War II (Degirmencioglu, 2007:85).

Another important issue is the perception of security and the perceptions of the member states towards any phenomenon or event. The security perception of each country differs according to its geographical, political, and cultural conditions. Although security threats are often general, this issue can become subjective when national interests come into play. The changing and differing perceptions of the members on security also cause collective difficulties in producing solutions against security threats. In other words, it is impossible for terrorism and acts of terrorism in a region to be perceived or accepted as a threat or a problem for all members of the organization.

According to classical realism, states inevitably use or manage non-state actors for their national interests in a system where chaos is dominant. So, if turmoil in one region is necessary for one state's interests, it may threaten the interests of another state. It has not been possible to create and implement a common security policy not only for NATO but also for the EU, despite all the integration efforts of the union. Here, too, similar reasons lie in the change of security policy according

to states and regions. For example, it is quite natural that the level of security attributed to France, which attaches great importance to the Mediterranean politically, economically, and socially, is not the same as that of Germany. NATO has serious problems reaching a consensus on any certain threat, which causes NATO to become dysfunctional and only habitually survive (Erenel & Gedik, 2022).

NATO tends to be an increasingly globalized organization under the influence of the US. On the other hand, for France, NATO's mission for European defense is inadequate and American-centered (Casin & Gedik, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary either to "Europeanize" NATO or to have Europe be defended by the European states themselves. Macron's discourse on NATO in 2019—which also inspired the title of this work—points to exactly this. Regarding Gaullism, which constitutes French foreign policy, the defense of Europe should be left to Europeans, not Americans. This foreign policy strategy of France, which we can define as exceptional, continued throughout the Cold War period (Bozo, 2008). Being "friend, ally, and disconnected" from the US created an area of action for the French in the bipolar world (Védrine et al., 2018). For this reason, US hegemony in NATO is not something that member states accept unconditionally.

The US's intervention in the Middle East after 9/11 under the umbrella of NATO, benefiting from the organization's facilities and military capacity and reflecting its national interest as the general interest of the organization, caused the reaction of France and the then President Jacques Chirac (Lequesne, 2007). It has led to harsh criticism not only from Chirac but also from other EU countries.

The US is also looking for a legitimate basis for its hard power by using NATO military support in operations such as the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions. In short, the US does not hesitate to instrumentalize NATO in line with its national interests. For example, the NATO member states provided all kinds of support, especially military and medical aid, to the Afghanistan Operation. However, the process of initiating operations by the US has developed somewhat within the framework of the *fait accompli* method. A similar phenomenon was experienced in the Libyan Intervention. Here, not the US, but France, under the leadership of Nicolas Sarkozy, who returned to the military wing of NATO in 2009, started the intervention in Libya on 19 March 2011, with the support of the US and England, and NATO officially took over the operation on 30 March 2011. Therefore, the legal procedure came from behind the actions to legitimize them.

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NATO accepts members with an open door policy. That is, it has a positive approach towards countries that want to become members and wants the alliance to expand until it holds the Heartland. NATO is not just a military organization. Under current circumstances, NATO offers its members an ecosystem. This ecosystem includes arms trade, technology transfer, credit, and economic aid and support (Akdeniz, 2022: 13). While NATO aims to continue its expansion and growth with its open door policy, it also tries to avoid being an introverted ecosystem. The military technology and weapons used are transferred to the member countries. In fact, it is desired to provide sustainability so that

the military ecosystem is the same in all member countries. However, as a natural result of growth and expansion, its mobility decreases and the decision-making mechanism is exposed to entropy. To avoid this, the organization seeks areas to use its unused energy and, so to speak, opens up problem areas. It also needs conflicts and tensions to keep itself more dynamic and active. As the Russia-Ukraine War shows, there is also the issue of creating more tension than usual and increasing the size of the threat (Akdeniz, 2022: 13).

In an interview he gave in 2019, Macron made a remarkable description of NATO's impasse by saying, "What we are experiencing right now is NATO's brain death," referring to the Trump administration's decision to withdraw its forces from Syria without consulting NATO. In addition, the subject of the 56th Munich Conference held in 2020 was determined to be "Westlessness" (Courmont and Deportes, 2022; Baverez, 2020; Tokatl, 2022: 75).

Members of the organization are reluctant to implement the choices they support due to different security perceptions. An example of this behavior is the decision of NATO member countries at the 2014 summit to allocate 2% of their GDP to defense spending over ten years until 2024 (NATO, 2014). In theory, the target was approved as a resolution, but there were no legally binding provisions to impose sanctions on countries that did not comply with their obligations. Consequently, failure to bear these costs reflects the reluctance of the majority of members to fulfill their obligations to NATO.

It is known that the former president of the US, Donald Trump, who has undertaken almost all the costs of the Atlantic Alliance alone, has expressed his desire to leave NATO many times throughout 2018 (Ucler and Bulut, 2021: 44; Béraud-Dureau and Giegerich, 2018). The fact that the US has brought this idea to the table for the first time since



France's President Emmanuel Macron meets with visiting NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg at Elysee Palace in Paris, France, Nov. 28, 2019. (Xinhua/Gao Jing)

the establishment of NATO can be seen as the beginning of an important paradigm shift in terms of questioning the alliance's future. However, it is not yet clear to what extent the US, which withdrew from many agreements in 2018, will be able to implement this idea.

Today's world is too complex for a single nation to rule. Although the US has won the wars it entered militarily, it has not reached the desired end state. This shows that the US lags behind the colonial British Empire in dealing with various ethnic groups. Despite successful colonial administrations in places like India, the British Empire only survived for a little more than a century (1815-1918). The US Empire, on the other hand, started to show signs of collapse

in its sixtieth year (1944-2004) (Değirmencioğlu, 2007:87).

According to the American economist Herbert Stein, "If something cannot continue, it will stop." It is clear that the US cannot continue with its current policies and economic structure (Perry, 2018: 52-54). Unrivaled power has begun to prepare its own end. The US's economic, military, technological, and political superiority may continue in the next twenty to twenty-five years. Still, with the increasing power of its rivals (EU, the People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, India) and with the effect of anti-US sentiment in world public opinion, it is considered that the powers will be more balanced over time (Değirmencioğlu, 2007: 91).

The hegemonic entity, which can be defined as the Western or Euro-Atlantic structure, makes move after move to delay the decline and collapse in the inevitable global leadership war. In a press conference with the NATO Secretary General, Biden's use of the words "NATO instead of Finnization of Europe", making a scathing reference to the Finnish model, which means neutrality policy in European security jargon, summarizes the situation. Now the Third World (Hybrid) War has officially begun. States are taking positions; the ranks are becoming clearer. The situation is not much different from the polarization of the First and Second World Wars (Gürdeniz, 2022).

Today's world is too complex for a single nation to rule. Although the US has won the wars it entered militarily, it has not reached the desired end state.

To increase its dominance on the Asian continent in the face of rising powers, the US has begun to participate more in the alternative formations it has built outside of NATO. While the US guarantees its national security with the new formations QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and AUKUS, which it tries to establish by collaborating with its allies in the Asia Pacific region in the face of the rising Chinese threat, it tries to limit the movement area of the rising or rival powers (Tokatlı, 2022: 80). New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam later joined QUAD, which consisted of Australia, India, Japan, and the US. AUKUS, on the other hand, consists of Australia, the US, and England (Martynova,

2023; Upadhyaya, 2022). Although AUKUS is a tripartite military agreement between these three states, it has not yet become an alliance. This agreement complements ANZUS, the military alliance between Australia and the United States in force since 1951, while excluding New Zealand, which has denied nuclear ships access to its territorial waters under the nuclear-free zone policy implemented in 1984 (Cheng, 2022).

Concerning NATO's survival, forecasts are primarily influenced by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War and a potential Asia-Pacific war involving China. Given this new strategic vision of NATO, two major events are likely to significantly impact how the organization will evolve in the future. The first is that NATO will continue to function due to the US alliance with the EU and NATO during the Russia-Ukraine War. The fact that Sweden and Finland started the process of joining the organization as soon as the conflict started is an indicator of this (Akdeniz, 2022: 16). This process is envisaged to equip fourteen members with USSR weapons (many of which were once part of the USSR), to equip potential new members with Western/NATO weapons, and to be completed in fifty years, given the life-span of these weapons. This growth will undoubtedly depend on the US maintaining its place as the dominant power in the world. Although it seems unlikely, the EU is far from achieving the goals set out in its strategic orientation and the creation of a European Army. Although China, its biggest global rival, is very close, it has not yet been able to prevent the US desire to rule the world militarily. The second potential development concerns the problems that all major organizations may experience due to disorder. In this context, the division or disintegration of NATO is the most important question (Akdeniz, 2022:16).



Conclusion

The US's distrustful behavior towards NATO's EU member states has accelerated the efforts to create a new European Security Architecture autonomous from the US. The Strategic Compass, issued to direct the activities, continues the efforts to create an autonomous military force. While discussing the future of NATO after the Ukraine-Russian War, it is considered that the shaping of the EU security architecture will gain momentum. NATO will not have much importance for the United States after the problems with Russia are somehow resolved. Both its financial resources and the difficulties it faces as a global power can pull the US out of the hegemonic seat of power. Western countries are also aware of the approaching reality, and it can be said that

they can gradually increase their efforts to return to a Europe without the US. Due to the administrative difficulties brought about by the seventy-three years of NATO's life, it can now be predicted that such organizations with broad participation, especially those for security purposes, may be replaced by regional and smaller organizations.

If England is considered the master of diplomacy in the West, then China is the master of diplomacy in the East. In the last hundred and ninety-five years, the country that has participated in or started the most wars and conflicts in the world is England, the symbol of Western civilization. China ranks tenth in initiating conflicts and fifth in participating in any of them (White, 2017; Henrich, 2020). In general war tendency, England ranks first, the US fifth, and China tenth (Akgül, 2015: 503-510).

As a temporary solution, it is reasonable to assume that China will refrain from engaging in such a war until it reaches a certain level of naval and air competency. The United States can put pressure on NATO, even if it is inappropriate for NATO to take any action that provokes China. A closer relationship between China and Russia could emerge due to political pressure from the United States and potentially NATO. This could lead to a return to bipolarity in the world. 🌸

Notes

¹ NATO's Seven Strategic Concepts define the Alliance's strategy and outline NATO's enduring purpose and nature, its key security tasks, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in a changing security environment. It also identifies elements of the organization's approach to security and provides guidelines for its political and military adaptation. The first Strategic Concept was published in 1949, the second in 1950, during the Korean War, the third in 1954, the fourth in 1966, the fifth in 1991, the sixth in 1999, and the seventh in 2010. Finally, another document was published in 2022, called the New Strategic Concept.

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