

# NATO and the enlargement debate: enhancing Euro-Atlantic security or inciting confrontation?

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With Russia taking an increasingly assertive stance on the global stage,<sup>1</sup> and uncertainty surrounding the direction of US foreign policy under the presidency of Donald Trump, the issue of NATO enlargement is unlikely to be a priority for the alliance over the next few years. Trump has declared that, in his opinion, NATO is obsolete, and has expressed his desire for a renewed partnership with Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Moscow has consistently voiced its opposition to NATO's global reach and enlargement, particularly into what it considers Russia's 'zone of privileged interest'.<sup>3</sup> This is bad news for Georgia and Ukraine, which are likely to see their bids for membership of the Euro-Atlantic alliance 'parked', and raises the question of what is to become of those states within the post-Soviet space that have so far failed to join NATO.<sup>4</sup>

NATO's deepening engagement with countries to the east, once former adversaries, and its continued enlargement are the most obvious aspects of the alliance's post-Cold War transformation, and among the most controversial. Since its establishment in 1949, it has more than doubled its membership from 12 to 28 states, and the majority of the new entrants have joined since the end of the Cold War. The accession of Montenegro, expected to be completed in 2017, will take the total membership to 29. These enlargements have, to some extent, undermined NATO's stated objectives in incorporating new members, and have exposed tensions within the alliance over deterrence and dialogue, the twin pillars of the 1967 Harmel Report on 'the future security policy of the alliance'. These outcomes are the direct result of the enlargements of the post-Cold War

<sup>1</sup> David S. Yost, 'The Budapest memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine', *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 505–38.

<sup>2</sup> There is considerable uncertainty about what direction the Trump administration will take in terms of foreign policy: the new President's views of NATO contrast with those of some of his team.

<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of the 2008 war with Georgia, President Dmitry Medvedev identified five principles of Russian foreign policy, including the notion that there are areas where Russia has 'privileged interests' as a result of 'special historical relations'. He stated that these regions are home to countries which are bound together with Russia 'as friends and good neighbours. We will pay particular attention to our work in these regions and build friendly ties with these countries, our close neighbours.' While he did not name any specific area, he is thought to have been referring to the post-Soviet space: Dmitry Medvedev, interview with Russian TV Channel One, Rossiya, NTV, 31 Aug. 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/48301>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 22 Jan. 2017.)

<sup>4</sup> Andrew T. Wolff, 'The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis', *International Affairs* 91: 5, Sept. 2015, pp. 1103–22.

era being motivated by political, rather than—as the enlargements of 1952 and 1955 had been—military considerations. Enlargement has become a symbolic act rather than one of defensive necessity, as the recent incorporation of members from the Balkans demonstrates. Montenegro's accession, which has little strategic importance, is a vital demonstration of the alliance's continuing commitment to its promises regarding its 'open door' policy, indicating the primacy of the political, rather than military, aspects of enlargement.

Despite there being many differences between the post-Soviet states currently seeking membership of NATO and the Balkan states that are pursuing accession, some of their motivations are similar: chiefly, the desire to move away from the past and diminish the influence of a powerful regional hegemon, which was also the centre of power during communist rule.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Montenegro is likely to be the last new member state for some time to come, alliance consensus regarding further expansion proving elusive in the face of a combination of 'enlargement fatigue' among western allies (many of which are focused on internal challenges), concern about the apparent threat from Moscow and a lack of non-contentious candidate states.<sup>6</sup>

The post-Cold War policy of enlargement has brought the alliance into competition, and in some cases direct confrontation, with Moscow: the very opposite effect to that intended. NATO's own 1995 study on the topic maintained that enlargement was only one 'element of a broad European security architecture that transcends and renders obsolete the idea of "dividing lines" in Europe'.<sup>7</sup> The 1995 study went on to stress the alliance's conviction that there could be 'no question of "spheres of influence" in contemporary Europe'. NATO's approach to the question of enlargement has not only undermined Euro-Atlantic security and triggered new divisions between East and West, it has also exposed aspirant states, particularly those in the post-Soviet space, to sustained pressure and coercion.

It is worth noting that the issue of possible future enlargement was not dealt with at all in the 1967 Harmel Report, despite the fact that the alliance had accepted new members in 1952 (Greece and Turkey) and 1955 (West Germany). Among the key themes of the report were the USSR's place in the European security order and NATO's quest to define a political role for itself, rather than a purely military one focused on collective defence: a state of affairs that resonates today. While there are similarities between the challenges facing the alliance in 1967 and the contemporary strategic environment, not least the disparity between the power of the United States and that of the European pillar, as well as the ongoing debate about Russia's role in the European security order, the report's key concern was the perceived continuing expansion of Soviet influence around the world, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. This stands in stark contrast with the situation today. Now it is Russia that has expressed its grave concerns about the perceived continuing expansion of NATO's influence (and that of the West more generally)

<sup>5</sup> Tracey German, 'Heading west? Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path', *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 601–14.

<sup>6</sup> Once Montenegro joins, Serbia, which has retained close links with Russia, will be the only Balkan state remaining outside the alliance.

<sup>7</sup> *Study on NATO enlargement*, 3 Sept. 1995, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_24733.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm).

around the world, and more particularly within its 'zone of privileged interest'. In the context of the Soviet challenge, the Harmel Report stated that the security of member states rested upon two pillars:

[First,] the maintenance of adequate military strength and political solidarity to deter aggression and other forms of pressure and to defend the territory of the NATO countries if aggression should occur. Second, realistic measures to reduce tensions and the risk of conflict, including arms control and disarmament measures.<sup>8</sup>

While the tables have been turned in the twenty-first century, Harmel's twin pillars of deterrence and dialogue remain central to Euro-Atlantic security, particularly for the alliance's newer members. This was underlined by the focus of the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw on the continuing threat to Euro-Atlantic security from Russia, leading to an emphasis on deterrence and a strengthening of the alliance's defence posture.<sup>9</sup> However, against a backdrop of continuing tensions between NATO and Russia, and futile attempts at dialogue, the deterrence pillar appears to be by far the more resilient of the two.

This article explores the controversial issue of NATO enlargement, which has exposed tensions within the alliance with regard to the twin pillars of the Harmel Report. The political (dialogue), rather than military (deterrence), aspect of the alliance has always been the more controversial, particularly when connected to the question of enlargement. The article examines the rationale for enlargement, focusing on the two post-Soviet aspirant states, Georgia and Ukraine, both of which lie within Moscow's self-proclaimed 'zone of privileged interest' and are thus the most contentious. It demonstrates the basic friction between the motivations of those who have sought to join NATO since the end of the Cold War and the alliance's declared logic for enlarging, most notably its desire to expand the 'zone of peace and stability' that surrounds it. This article argues that, in the light of the fundamental tension between its current 'open door' policy and Moscow's desire to preserve its 'zone of privileged interest', NATO needs to revisit the purpose of enlargement and the balance between the two core pillars of the Harmel Report. Only then can it address fundamental questions of why (and if) it should continue to enlarge.

The article considers whether, in view of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, the alliance can continue to ensure the security of its member states while simultaneously developing partnerships with states within the post-Soviet space. It argues that NATO's stance on enlargement in the post-Cold War era has not only undermined Euro-Atlantic security and triggered new divisions between East and West, but has also exposed aspirant states, particularly those in the post-Soviet space, to sustained pressure and indeed coercion from Moscow. Enhanced cooperation and partnership with these states, combined with vague promises about membership at

<sup>8</sup> *The future security policy of the alliance*, report of rapporteur subgroup 3, Foy D. Kahler, United States, 6 Oct. 1967, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8–9 July 2016, press release (2016) 100, 9 July 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

'some point in the future', ultimately undermine the alliance's objective of fostering stability on its periphery. Furthermore, while these states continue to make an important contribution to the alliance's efforts to advance cooperative security (for example, by deploying troops on NATO operations and missions), ultimately the issue of their prospective membership threatens to undermine alliance security and cohesion. Because decisions on enlargement are made on the basis of consensus, the question of potential membership for post-Soviet states risks undermining alliance cohesion and unity. Thus, the alliance's open door policy appears to be detrimental to its own security and to that of aspirant states, a state of affairs that runs counter to the original objectives of enlargement and signals an inherent tension between Article 5 (collective defence) and Article 10 (the 'open door' policy) of NATO's Washington Treaty.

In setting out this analysis, the article has been divided into four parts. First, it revisits the debates on enlargement of the 1990s and examines whether any progress has been made with regard to the specific controversies of that era. It explores the principal arguments put forward for enlargement in the post-Cold War era and argues that NATO failed to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the possible negative consequences of enlargement for European security. Second, it examines NATO's enlargement into the post-Soviet space. Third, it analyses the Russian response to the alliance's enlargement and demonstrates that Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 revealed NATO's limits of influence within Russia's 'zone of privileged interest', as well as its lack of internal unity *vis-à-vis* relations with Moscow and future engagement with the area. Finally, it draws some conclusions about the future direction of enlargement in the post-Soviet space.

## Intentions and objectives of enlargement

The debates of the 1990s on enlargement are of enduring relevance, despite one scholar's insistence in 1999 that 'everything has been said' about enlargement and that there was little more to explore—a statement that draws attention to the sense of enlargement 'fatigue' that had developed by the end of the decade.<sup>10</sup> There was considerable scholarly debate on the issues surrounding NATO enlargement in the mid-1990s and then again prior to the 2004 round.<sup>11</sup> Much of the analysis regarding the potential enlargement of NATO in the immediate post-Cold War years centred on the risk of prompting a new East–West confrontation. Gaddis described the enlargement project as 'ill-conceived, ill-timed and ... ill-suited

<sup>10</sup> David G. Haglund, 'NATO's expansion and European security after the Washington summit—what next?', *European Security* 8: 1, Spring 1999, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the publications cited in subsequent footnotes 12, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 20, see David G. Haglund, ed., *Will NATO go east? The debate over enlarging the Atlantic alliance* (Kingston, Ont.: Centre for International Relations, 1996); Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO enlargement debate, 1990–1997: blessings of liberty* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Yaroslav Bilinsky, *Endgame in NATO's enlargement: the Baltic states and Ukraine* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Gale A. Mattox and Arthur R. Rachwald, eds, *Enlarging NATO: the national debates* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Zoltan Barany, *The future of NATO expansion: four case studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Very little has been written since the 2004 wave of enlargement.

to the realities of the post-Cold War world', comparing it to events in 1918–19 in its intention to expand a 'security structure left over from a conflict that has now ended, while excluding the former adversary from it'.<sup>12</sup> He criticized the alliance for its short-sightedness, particularly *vis-à-vis* Russia, and the belief, seemingly prevalent in the 1990s, that Russia had no choice but to accept what NATO decided. Brown also denounced the 'flawed logic of NATO expansion', noting that enlargement could well prompt Moscow to adopt policies that would diminish, rather than enhance, European and US security—which is exactly what has transpired.<sup>13</sup> He went on to assert that regardless of how NATO 'packaged' the issue of enlargement, it would still be perceived in Moscow as a change in the balance of power and an extension of Washington's sphere of influence.<sup>14</sup>

In a 1995 article examining the prospects for enlargement, Asmus, Kugler and Larrabee warned that much depended on how the process was handled and contended that 'expansion could stabilise a new European security order or contribute to either the unravelling of the Alliance or a new Cold War with Russia ... Failure could be disastrous, both for the Alliance's future and for European stability.'<sup>15</sup> In 1999 Haglund examined the perceived motives for enlargement and argued that, unlike the enlargements of 1952 and 1955, which were driven by a desire to contain and deter a Great Power adversary, post-Cold War enlargement was stimulated more by a determination to expand the European and transatlantic 'zone of peace', mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> He also maintained that enlargement of the alliance would yield some benefits, but cautioned that these would be 'modest'.<sup>17</sup> Rauchhaus reasoned that in order to understand NATO's motivations for enlargement, it was vital to understand why the United States wanted it to enlarge.<sup>18</sup> Terriff and colleagues warned of the problems of enlarging 'by default' and urged the alliance to 'consider how to manage the enlargement of its membership ... , lest the process engender serious repercussions for the alliance and for European security'.<sup>19</sup> Their analysis reflected the position of Kamp who, in 1998, argued that without a clear framework for enlargement, NATO would become 'entrapped' in a continual series of incoherent enlargements. He was very critical of the 'open door' policy which, in his opinion, left NATO 'trapped' and failed to answer crucial questions about relations with Russia and the fundamental purpose of the alliance.<sup>20</sup> These debates are echoed today both in the discussion about any possible future enlargement of the alliance and in assessments of the consequences of the 1999 and 2004 waves.

<sup>12</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, 'History, grand strategy and NATO enlargement', *Survival* 40: 1, Spring 1998, pp. 145–6.

<sup>13</sup> Michael E. Brown, 'The flawed logic of NATO expansion', *Survival* 37: 1, Spring 1995, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, 'The flawed logic of NATO expansion', p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler and F. Stephen Larrabee, 'NATO expansion: the next steps', *Survival* 37: 1, Spring 1995, pp. 7–8.

<sup>16</sup> Haglund, 'NATO's expansion and European security after the Washington summit', p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Haglund, 'NATO's expansion and European security after the Washington summit', p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Robert W. Rauchhaus, 'Explaining NATO enlargement', *Contemporary Security Policy* 21: 2, 2000, p. 176.

<sup>19</sup> T. Terriff, S. Croft, E. Krahmann, M. Webber and J. Howorth, 'One in, all in? NATO's next enlargement', *International Affairs* 78: 4, October 2002, p. 714.

<sup>20</sup> Karl-Heinz Kamp, 'NATO entrapped: debating the next enlargement round', *Survival* 40: 3, Autumn 1998, p. 173.

Article 10 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty articulates the alliance's so-called open door policy, declaring that: 'The parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede.'<sup>21</sup> The communiqué from NATO's 2016 Warsaw Summit reiterates the alliance's commitment to this policy, which it describes as one of its great successes:

We remain fully committed to the integration of those countries that aspire to join the Alliance, judging each on its own merits. We encourage those partners who aspire to join the Alliance—Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina—to continue to implement the necessary reforms and decisions to prepare for membership.<sup>22</sup>

Stressing that decisions on enlargement are for NATO itself, the declaration, repeating a line heard often since 2008, argues that: 'Successive rounds of NATO enlargement have enhanced the security and stability of the entire Euro-Atlantic area', an assertion that is debatable when considered within the context of current tensions between Russia and the West.<sup>23</sup> The declaration (and those from previous summits) highlights ongoing tensions within the alliance between upholding its autonomy in decision-making and maintaining a positive relationship with Moscow. NATO's decision not to grant Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2014 Newport summit confirmed that alliance relations with Russia remained the priority, a decision that threatened to undermine reformers in Georgia and across the wider region, while simultaneously encouraging Moscow to continue a strategy of coercion towards its neighbours. The decision has not led to any improvement in NATO–Russia relations; in fact, by 2016 the situation had deteriorated sufficiently for NATO to augment its deterrence and defence posture, establishing an enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, all member states that joined the alliance in the post-Cold War era.<sup>24</sup> This underlines NATO's failure to grasp the depth of Russian concern regarding enlargement and the growing political role of the alliance.<sup>25</sup> One scholar argued in 2002 that the potential accession of the three Baltic states would symbolize a 'true end to the Cold War';<sup>26</sup> in fact, with the benefit of hindsight, it could be argued that the accession of these three former Soviet states merely emphasized the alliance's lack of understanding of Moscow's hardening attitude towards NATO and its growing sense of exclusion.

NATO's 1995 study stated that the overall purpose of enlarging the alliance was to build an improved security architecture across the whole Euro-Atlantic area 'to provide increased stability and security for all ... without recreating dividing

<sup>21</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington DC, 4 April 1949, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué.

<sup>23</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué.

<sup>24</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Sakwa, 'The death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 553–80.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Kramer, 'NATO, the Baltic states and Russia: a framework for sustainable enlargement', *International Affairs* 78: 4, Oct. 2002, p. 753.

lines'.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, this intention has been fundamentally undermined by the process and consequences of enlargement, which have contributed to instability, conflict and a return to Cold War era dividing lines across Europe and the wider transatlantic area. As discussed below, the enlargement of NATO has fostered a belief in Russia that it is being excluded from the European security order. Although the report stressed that the enlargement process, including associated military arrangements, would threaten no one and was intended to enhance security and stability throughout Europe, the reality has been very different: Russia has consistently stated its opposition to any enlargement of the alliance, arguing that NATO is a relic of the Cold War, and perceives it as a threat to Russian national interests.<sup>28</sup> The study paid significant attention to the issue of Russia and NATO–Russia relations, devoting an entire section to the topic. This recognizes both the importance of Russia itself and the influence it is able to exert over a wide area. Thus it stated that NATO decisions 'cannot be subject to any veto or *droit de regard* by a non-member state', implicitly recognizing Russia's potential to act as a spoiler. The study also noted the anticipated potential impact of enlargement on the Euro-Atlantic security environment:

The Alliance should underline that there can be no question of 'spheres of influence' in the contemporary Europe. NATO's relations with other European states, whether cooperation partners or not, are important factors to consider in taking any decision to proceed with the enlargement process as is building security for states which may not be prospective NATO members. Any such decision will have a significant impact on the European security environment and its timing, therefore, will require careful consideration.<sup>29</sup>

NATO has continued to stress that its ongoing enlargement process poses no threat to any country; that it is intended to promote stability and cooperation, and to build a Europe 'whole and free, united in peace, democracy and common values'. The intention was the creation of a European security community in which war and the threat of war between member states disappeared, a community where security was not defined exclusively as the protection of national borders from military threat, but was achieved through benefits accrued from participating in 'zones of peace, prosperity and stability' and a vision of a common future.<sup>30</sup> A key condition for the establishment of a security community, as defined by Deutsch,

<sup>27</sup> *Study on NATO enlargement*.

<sup>28</sup> Sakwa, 'The death of Europe?.'

<sup>29</sup> *Study on NATO enlargement*.

<sup>30</sup> In defining the concept of a 'security community', Karl Deutsch and others emphasized that such a community is created when social problems are resolved without resort to large-scale physical force. See K. W. Deutsch, *Political community and the North Atlantic area: international organisation in the light of historical experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Deutsch and others concluded that while twelve conditions appeared to be essential for the success of an amalgamated security community, the pluralistic version required only three. Any additional conditions might enhance the chances of successful integration and consolidation; however, they were not considered indispensable. These essential conditions were: (1) the compatibility of major values relevant to political decision-making; (2) the capacity of the participating political units or governments to respond to each other's needs, messages and actions quickly, adequately and without resort to violence; and (3) mutual predictability of behaviour. Javier Solana expressed his belief that NATO is a security community in 'NATO: a reliable alliance for dynamism and leadership', *NATO's Sixteen Nations* 42: 1, 1997, pp. 7–10.

is the existence of shared values.<sup>31</sup> This was emphasized in the 1995 study on enlargement, which defined the alliance as an ‘existing community of values’ and stressed that one of the ways in which enlargement would contribute to enhanced stability and security across the Euro-Atlantic area was by ‘encouraging and supporting democratic reforms’.<sup>32</sup> The study went on to outline a range of criteria for future members, including adherence to democratic principles, as well as the resolution of territorial disputes by peaceful means, stating that the ‘resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join’.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the 1995 study failed to address fundamental questions such as why the alliance should continue to enlarge. Nor did it demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the possible negative consequences of enlargement for European security. The alliance has consistently overlooked (or disregarded) the declared position of the Russian leadership *vis-à-vis* further enlargement.<sup>34</sup> There seems to have been a belief among European policy-makers that enlargement of western institutions such as NATO and the EU was solely a matter for the states concerned—either existing member states or those seeking membership—and that it stood apart from the broader European security agenda. The error of this conviction has become increasingly clear. It has been suggested that membership of an alliance is chosen by an adversary, as alliances are traditionally formed ‘against’ another actor within the international system.<sup>35</sup> This is certainly the view that Moscow holds of NATO and those member states that have joined (or sought to join) after 1991: that they are joining ‘against’ Russia. The sense of exclusion has been intensified by NATO’s view of itself as a political community of democratic values and institutions, emphasized by the 2016 Warsaw summit communiqué, which stated that NATO is an alliance of ‘values’.<sup>36</sup> This emphasis highlights one of Moscow’s principal concerns regarding NATO and enlargement, in addition to the presence of NATO military structures near its borders: its suspicion of the creeping influence of western norms and values within its ‘zone of privileged interest’. The Kremlin became increasingly uneasy about growing US (and European) influence in areas traditionally perceived as Russia’s ‘strategic backyard’, that is, in states such as Georgia and Ukraine, and the so-called ‘colour revolutions’ of the 2000s were viewed as an attempt to undermine Russia. This concern is reflected in key Russian strategic documents, discussed below. Although the alliance continues to stress that its door remains open to any European country ‘in a position to undertake the commitments and obligations of membership,

<sup>31</sup> Deutsch, *Political community and the North Atlantic area*.

<sup>32</sup> *Study on NATO enlargement*.

<sup>33</sup> *Study on NATO enlargement*.

<sup>34</sup> Sakwa, ‘The death of Europe?’.

<sup>35</sup> For further details on the theory of alliances and alliance formation, see Stephen M. Walt, *The origins of alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO divided, NATO united: the evolution of an alliance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Todd Sandler, ‘Alliance formation, alliance expansion, and the core’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43: 6, 1999, pp. 727–47; Glenn H. Snyder, ‘The security dilemma in alliance politics’, *World Politics* 36: 4, 1984, pp. 461–95.

<sup>36</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué.

and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area',<sup>37</sup> there are signs that Russia may hold a de facto veto power on future members of the alliance, in particular those in the post-Soviet space. Potential membership of the alliance for states such as Georgia and Ukraine has proved to be a divisive issue, opening up rifts both between member states and between NATO and Russia.

## **Enlarging into the post-Soviet space**

The persistent lack of consensus within NATO about future enlargement was demonstrated most clearly by the question of possible future accession for Georgia and Ukraine, which drove a wedge between the European and US pillars of the alliance at the Bucharest summit in 2008. The United States was a keen advocate of Georgia's NATO membership, while certain European states were more reluctant. Speaking in Tbilisi in 2007, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried declared that not only was Georgia 'in Europe' in geographical, cultural, political and historical terms, but it was part of the Euro-Atlantic community: 'Georgians are a part of the transatlantic world, and therefore institutions of the transatlantic world should be open to Georgia as much as to any other European country.'<sup>38</sup> This belief was not shared by all European allies—a disparity of views that recalled, to some extent, the situation in the 1950s over Turkey's application for NATO membership. While Washington lobbied strongly for Georgian accession, there were doubts among some west European allies about the country's ability to contribute to security in the transatlantic area. The friction highlighted questions about the fundamental nature of the alliance and the potential limits to enlargement, in spite of Article 10 and the 'open door' policy. France and Germany led the opposition (which included Italy and Spain) to Georgia and Ukraine being offered MAPs at the summit, arguing that the alliance should be focusing its efforts on existing operations in Afghanistan rather than enlarging still further. There was also concern—raised by the 1995 study on enlargement—that the addition of new members would transform the alliance from one concerned primarily with military matters to one concerned more with political issues, akin to the EU. Ultimately, a final decision on MAPs was deferred, although the summit's final statement did stress that Georgia and Ukraine 'will become members of NATO' at some undefined point in the future.<sup>39</sup> This confused message emphasized the lack of alliance consensus and encouraged Moscow to increase its pressure on Georgia (and across the post-Soviet space): thus, western procrastination since 2008 has not just failed to deter Russia's coercive efforts, it

<sup>37</sup> NATO, 'Enlargement', [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_49212.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm). According to NATO, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been assured that it will be invited to become a member as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the issue over the country's name has been reached with Greece. Bosnia and Herzegovina was invited to conclude a MAP in April 2010, but its participation is pending the resolution of a key issue concerning immovable defence property.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Fried, 'Developing Europe's east', remarks at conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, 1 Nov. 2007, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/94553.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Bucharest summit declaration issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest, 3 April 2008, [www.summitbucharest.ro/en/doc\\_201.html](http://www.summitbucharest.ro/en/doc_201.html).

has encouraged them. Georgia's brief war with Russia in August 2008 appeared to confirm European fears about further enlargement of the alliance. It also acted as a warning shot to other post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, and to the West, that Russia would not stand by and let countries in what it considers to be its strategic sphere of influence integrate more closely with western security institutions.

In 2013 the former NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh-Rasmussen insisted that the alliance stood by the decisions taken at the Bucharest summit and would 'continue to support the Georgian people in fulfilling their aspiration for NATO membership'.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, ambiguous assurances about membership at 'some point in the future' ultimately serve to undermine the alliance's aim of advancing stability on its periphery. Russia's military intervention in Georgia in August 2008 exposed the limits of NATO's influence and willingness to engage with states that Moscow considers to be within its 'zone of privileged interest', as well as its lack of internal unity *vis-à-vis* relations with Moscow and the question of future NATO engagement with states in the post-Soviet space. There is still no consensus within the alliance on whether Georgia should be offered a MAP, which works to Moscow's advantage, signalling vulnerabilities that can be (and have been) exploited. The tensions over Georgia and Ukraine have not only further damaged NATO's fragile cohesion, but also highlighted the divergence between the European and US approaches.<sup>41</sup> This division could be exacerbated by Trump's accession to the US presidency: not only has he questioned Article 5 and whether the United States should continue to support the notion of collective defence for allies that fail to meet their spending commitments, he is also keen to reset relations with Moscow. European member states are more likely to be directly affected by the negative impact of any decision to enlarge, as they are far more dependent upon Russia, particularly in terms of energy supplies. There is concern that, contrary to aims of the alliance, accession for states in the post-Soviet space will actually undermine security in the Euro-Atlantic area rather than strengthen it.

### *Georgian dreams*

While enlargement may no longer be a pressing issue for western allies, many of which are distracted by internal challenges, the pursuit of NATO membership is still a key concern for the governments of Georgia and Ukraine. For Georgia, indeed, it has been a principal (and consistent) focus of foreign and security policy thinking for nearly two decades.

The country's 2011 National Security Strategy asserts that membership would 'create solid guarantees for the nation's security and stability and play an important role in strengthening stability in the entire region'.<sup>42</sup> Georgia was the first country

<sup>40</sup> 'Information on the recent NATO–Georgia Commission meeting', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 4 Dec. 2013, [http://geneva.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=905&info\\_id=2](http://geneva.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=905&info_id=2).

<sup>41</sup> Stefan Auer, 'Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: the Ukraine crisis and the return of geopolitics', *International Affairs* 91: 5, Sept. 2015, pp. 953–68.

<sup>42</sup> National Security Concept of Georgia (NSC 11), adopted by parliament 23 Dec. 2011, <http://www.mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/NationalSecurityConcept.aspx?lang=en-US>, p. 15.

in the South Caucasus to state its desire to join the NATO alliance, expressing its membership aspirations in 2000 and registering them officially at the Prague summit held in November 2002—although it has participated in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme since 1994. The conclusion of an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in October 2004 signalled the beginning of a closer relationship with NATO, which was deepened in 2006 with the alliance's decision to commence 'intensified dialogue' with Tbilisi because of the considerable progress that had been made in the implementation of the IPAP. This move was viewed by Georgia as a 'significant step from partnership to membership candidate format'.<sup>43</sup> The IPAP was superseded by the development of an Annual National Programme in late 2008, following the establishment of the NATO–Georgia Commission in the wake of the 2008 war with Russia. A NATO liaison office was opened in Tbilisi in 2010, the same year that the Sachkhere Mountain Training School became a NATO/PfP Mountain Training and Education Centre. In addition to these formal steps to establish a framework for partnership with NATO, Georgia has also made considerable progress in the reform of its armed forces, transforming itself from a consumer of security to a provider. Two milestones were reached in 2012: Georgia was included on the list of NATO aspirant members at the Chicago summit; and it became the largest non-NATO contributor (and fifth largest contributor overall) to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan, which it had been supporting since 2004. Since deploying its first peacekeeping platoon in the Balkans in 1999, Georgia has dramatically increased the number of its troops participating in international peacekeeping and stabilization missions. The Georgian government has continued to support the development of the Afghan security forces since 2014, providing over 800 troops for Operation Resolute Support,<sup>44</sup> and has also pledged financial support for the future development of the Afghan national security forces. Georgia also supports Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's counterterrorist maritime surveillance operation in the Mediterranean, and contributed to the NATO Response Force (NRF) in 2015.

Although Georgia was not offered a MAP at the 2014 NATO summit, the alliance did endorse the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP), which includes defence capacity-building, training, exercises, strengthened liaison and enhanced interoperability opportunities. Noting Georgia's 'significant efforts to strengthen its democracy and to modernise its military forces and defence institutions', the summit declaration stated that the measures were intended to strengthen Georgia's defence and interoperability capabilities with NATO in order to help it 'advance in its preparations towards membership'.<sup>45</sup> While the intentions behind

<sup>43</sup> See *NATO–Georgia: chronology of major events*, [www.mfa.gov.ge](http://www.mfa.gov.ge).

<sup>44</sup> This is a much smaller operation aimed at training, advising and assisting the Afghan forces.

<sup>45</sup> Wales summit declaration issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, press release (2014) 120, 5 Sept. 2014, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm). The SNGP comprises measures at the strategic, tactical and operational levels across 13 areas including strategic and operational planning, aviation, air defence, maritime security, strategic communications, special operations, military police, cyber defence, acquisition and procurement, and intelligence-sharing. The SNGP also includes the establishment of a Defence Institution Building School and a NATO–Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC) and Logistics Facility, and the facilitation of

these efforts to bolster cooperation are good, the SNGP is flawed as it is not supported with specific resources from the alliance, only advisers and individual voluntary contributions from member states. Thus, NATO appears to be paying lip service to deepening its engagement with Georgia, rather than taking properly supported steps towards it.

NATO's apparent ambivalence towards membership for Georgia contrasts sharply with popular support for it in the South Caucasus state itself. There is very little opposition to the government's western alignment, and referendums on the issue of NATO membership demonstrate consistently high levels of support for accession, even among opposition groups. The majority of the population support closer ties with both the United States and the Euro-Atlantic community, revealing the depth of concern there is about the Russian 'threat', although support has been eroded by the 2008 conflict, as well as the lack of progress towards alliance membership. According to a survey conducted in June 2016, support for the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations has remained stable, with 64 per cent of those questioned agreeing with the government's stated goal of joining NATO (down from 65 per cent in May 2015; support for integration into the EU is higher at 72 per cent). A majority of those polled (53 per cent) believe that the country will benefit from closer integration with western institutions such as NATO, although 29 per cent support abandoning integration to pursue closer ties with Russia.<sup>46</sup> This reflects an emerging sense of disillusionment and 'NATO fatigue', resulting from the lack of visible progress towards membership and the failure to move beyond apparently vague and empty promises, detracting from the credibility of the alliance in the country. The pursuit of membership and enhanced cooperation with NATO has left Georgia in a very uncomfortable position of partnership, including front-line contributions in Afghanistan and elsewhere, along with a visible NATO presence in the country, without the security guarantees that accompany membership, making it more susceptible to increased pressure from Moscow. Continued procrastination on the part of the western allies is seen as signalling a tacit acceptance of Russia's coercive actions across the post-Soviet space and, although Georgian officials talk of the need for 'strategic patience' *vis-à-vis* the country's desire to join the alliance, they also stress that this patience is not infinite.

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multinational and regional exercises. For further details see 'Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP)', fact sheet, 9 Dec. 2015, [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2015\\_12/20151209\\_151209-factsheet-nato-georgia-package.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_12/20151209_151209-factsheet-nato-georgia-package.pdf). In August 2015 the NATO–Georgian JTEC was opened in Krtsanisi, a 'symbol of deepening cooperation and partnership' between the two sides and a key element of the SNGP. The opening of the centre is designed to assist Georgia with the reform, modernization and strengthening of its security and defence sector, as well as to enhance the interoperability of Georgian and NATO forces and contribute to regional stability in the Black Sea and Caucasus region. See 'NATO–Georgian Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC)', fact sheet, 27 Aug. 2015, [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_topics/20150827\\_150827-jtec-georgia.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20150827_150827-jtec-georgia.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> National Democratic Institute (Ukraine), 'NDI poll: undecided voters less satisfied with country's outlook; support for NATO and EU stable', 27 July 2016, <https://www.ndi.org/NDI-poll-georgian-voters-june-2016>.

### *Ukrainian uncertainty*

Despite some similarities in their post-Soviet experience, notably the occurrence of a 'colour revolution' and continued pressure from Moscow regarding strategic orientation, Ukraine and Georgia have followed very different paths. Whereas Georgia's desire for integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has remained unchanged for over a decade, since 1991 Ukrainian foreign policy has been characterized by inconsistency, stemming from a failure to address the question of whether it should look eastwards or westwards. Despite a declared 'multivector' foreign policy, the country's strategic orientation has oscillated between pursuit of integration into NATO and the EU, non-alignment, and closer ties with Moscow, depending on the interests and inclinations of successive incumbent presidents. These swings were clearly demonstrated during the 2010 elections, which brought Viktor Yanukovich to power on a platform of rejecting Ukraine's ambitions for NATO membership and highlighted deep political divisions across the country.<sup>47</sup> Yanukovich's foreign policy priorities, which included restoring Ukraine's close ties with Russia alongside integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, were in stark contrast to his predecessor's unambiguously pro-western stance. In June 2010 the Ukrainian parliament ratified a bill that prohibited membership of any military bloc and reinforced the country's non-aligned status.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it did allow for cooperation with alliances such as NATO.

Ukraine joined the PfP programme in 1994, and three years later it agreed a Charter on Distinctive Partnership which led to the establishment of the NATO–Ukraine Commission.<sup>49</sup> It has deployed troops in NATO operations, including peace support operations in the Balkans (indeed, it continues to contribute to the force in Kosovo), ISAF, the training mission in Iraq and Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean. In addition to being the only partner country that has contributed to all current NATO-led operations and missions, it is also the first partner country to have contributed to the NRF.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, despite this cooperation, there remained a lingering suspicion of the alliance in Ukraine, particularly among senior ranks in the military. This shifted with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the continuing crisis in eastern Ukraine, which prompted a renewed push for closer relations with NATO. At the 2014 Wales summit, it was announced that five trust funds were to be established in critical areas of reform to enhance Ukrainian defence and security: these covered command,

<sup>47</sup> For further details see Inna Melnykovska, Rainer Schweickert and Tetiana Kostyuchenko, 'Balancing national uncertainty and foreign orientation: identity building and the role of political parties in post-Orange Ukraine', *Europe–Asia Studies* 63: 6, 2011, pp. 1055–72.

<sup>48</sup> 'Ukraine's parliament votes to abandon NATO ambitions', BBC News, 3 June 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10229626>.

<sup>49</sup> For further details see Lionel Ponsard, *Road map for Ukraine*, NDC research paper no. 17 (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2005); Ihor Kharchenko, 'The new Ukraine–NATO partnership', *NATO Review*, Sept. 1998, pp. 27–9; Taras Kuzio, 'Ukraine and NATO: the evolving strategic partnership', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 21: 2, June 1998, pp. 1–30.

<sup>50</sup> In 2011 Ukraine contributed to the NRF a platoon specializing in handling nuclear, biological and chemical threats, along with strategic airlift capabilities. In 2015 it contributed strategic airlift, naval and medical capabilities. For further details see NATO, *Relations with Ukraine*, 22 June 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_37750.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm).

control, communications and computers (C4); logistics and standardization; cyber defence; military career transition and medical rehabilitation. The trust fund format allowed member states and partners to provide financial support for specific areas on a voluntary basis, in much the same way as the SNGP with Georgia described above.<sup>51</sup> The alliance has been uncompromising in its description of Russia's 'aggressive actions' in and around Ukraine, including the 'ongoing illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea', 'the violation of sovereign borders by force', 'the deliberate destabilisation of eastern Ukraine', 'provocative military activities near NATO's borders' and 'irresponsible and aggressive nuclear rhetoric'.<sup>52</sup> In 2016 NATO increased its support for Ukraine with the initiation of a comprehensive package of assistance intended to assist the latter with the strengthening of its defences at a time of persistent instability in the east of the country. However, as noted above, it is this very ongoing conflict that prevents Ukraine from meeting the criteria for membership outlined in the 1995 study on enlargement and therefore hinders closer ties with the alliance.

Unlike its counterpart in Georgia, the Ukrainian public is divided on the issue of closer ties with the West, particularly NATO, reflecting the political rifts in the country. However, opinion has been shifting as the conflict in the east of the country continues, and there are signs of increasing support for closer ties with NATO. A survey conducted during April and May 2015 found that 40 per cent of those polled wanted Ukraine to become a member of NATO by 2020, but only 28 per cent believed this might happen. There was greater support for Ukraine's integration into the EU (55 per cent wanted this to happen, but only 40 per cent believed it would), while only 13 per cent believed that the country should become part of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>53</sup>

The inconsistencies in Ukraine's relationship with NATO, at both the state and the popular level, makes alliance ambivalence towards closer integration more understandable than in the case of Georgia. Nevertheless, the western aspirations of both countries have brought them into conflict with Moscow, which has repeatedly expressed its opposition to the enlargement of NATO, as well as what is perceived to be increasing western influence within the post-Soviet space. NATO's current approach towards enlargement and closer partnership with both Georgia and Ukraine has increased their exposure to Russian threats and pressure, an outcome that was anticipated by the scholarly literature of the 1990s, outlined above. The alliance has consistently overlooked (or disregarded) the declared position of the Russian leadership *vis-à-vis* further enlargement.

<sup>51</sup> For further details see NATO, *Relations with Ukraine*.

<sup>52</sup> Warsaw summit communiqué.

<sup>53</sup> National Democratic Institute (Ukraine), 'Opportunities and challenges facing Ukraine's democratic transition: nationwide survey with seven local oversamples and implicit association tests in four cities, April and May 2015', [https://www.ndi.org/files/SURVEY%20IATS%20JUNE%202015%20PUBLIC%20EVENT.pptx%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/SURVEY%20IATS%20JUNE%202015%20PUBLIC%20EVENT.pptx%20(1).pdf). A separate poll in September 2015 conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems found very similar results. For further details see *Two years after Maidan: Ukrainians committed to democracy, disappointed in unmet aspirations* (Washington DC: IFES, 2015), [http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes\\_public\\_opinion\\_in\\_ukraine\\_sept\\_2015\\_key\\_findings\\_final.pdf](http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_public_opinion_in_ukraine_sept_2015_key_findings_final.pdf).

## **Russian roadblock**

The post-Soviet Euro-Atlantic paths of Georgia and Ukraine may be dissimilar, but both countries face Russian hostility to closer ties and integration with the alliance: Moscow's antipathy towards Georgian and/or Ukrainian membership of NATO and indeed towards any further enlargement of the alliance continues to act as a roadblock to accession. Enlargement has been a persistent irritant for Moscow since the end of the Cold War, reflected in statements from Yeltsin's 1995 warning that further enlargement would mean a 'conflagration of war throughout Europe' to the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS), discussed below.<sup>54</sup> Russia's then Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov outlined the country's view in 1996 in a statement that, with hindsight, sounds a warning:

We do not want the old bloc divisions to be replaced with new ones that would divide the world into two parts. That is why Russia is against NATO expansion ... We have taken a negative position on this and we will stick to it. Of course, this does not mean that we can veto new admissions ... But we have the right to protect our national interests, and if NATO advances to our territory, we will take adequate measures in terms of military construction and will try to remedy the geo-political situation.<sup>55</sup>

Enlargement was perceived to be aimed at checking Russia's foreign and domestic ambitions and excluding it from any future European security order. NATO's global reach and enlargement have been consistently criticized by Moscow in formal policy documents since the accession of the three Baltic states in 2004, which brought the alliance into the post-Soviet space and up to the borders of Russian territory. The 2009 NSS stated that 'plans to extend the alliance's military infrastructure to Russia's borders, and attempts to endow NATO with global functions that go counter to norms of international law, are unacceptable to Russia'.<sup>56</sup> The 2013 Foreign Policy Concept echoed this antagonistic attitude towards NATO enlargement, describing the presence of the alliance's military infrastructure near Russia's borders as violating the principle of equal security and contributing to the emergence of 'new dividing lines in Europe'.<sup>57</sup> NATO's enhanced capabilities, global scope and enlargement were identified as the principal risk to Russian national security in the 2014 military doctrine, while the updated NSS, published in 2015, makes several references to NATO's global reach and interests, its 'violation' of international norms, further enlargement and the advance of its military infrastructure towards Russia's borders—all of which are considered as threats to Russian national security.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Steven Erlanger, 'In a new attack against NATO, Yeltsin talks of a "conflagration of war"', *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/09/world/in-a-new-attack-against-nato-yeltsin-talks-of-a-conflagration-of-war.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in J. L. Black, *Russia faces NATO expansion: bearing gifts or bearing arms?* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*, 12 May 2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/1/99.html>.

<sup>57</sup> *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 12 Feb. 2013, <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/in1/>.

<sup>58</sup> *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 26 Dec. 2014, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>; *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*, 31 Dec. 2015, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/18iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6YoAsHD5v.pdf>.

NATO enlargement has contributed to Russia's perception—buttressed by the alliance's action against Serbia in 1999—that the alliance is an offensive military organization that is seeking to undermine the Russian regime and its system of values, and is prepared to interfere in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state. Moscow's reaction to the 2008 Bucharest summit and its subsequent military intervention in Georgia surprised many in the international community, including NATO, and reinforced growing concerns about an increasingly assertive Russia that would take all possible steps to maintain its traditional 'sphere of influence'. Until then, there had been an assumption that Russian expressions of unease about enlargement were merely rhetorical, leading to disregard of warnings such as that uttered in March 2008 by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that there would be a 'substantial negative geopolitical shift' if either Georgia or Ukraine became a NATO member state.<sup>59</sup> Eight years later, in July 2016, this warning was echoed by Russia's permanent envoy to NATO, Alexander Grushko, who accused NATO of seeking to impose new dividing lines on Europe and cautioned that Russia would do everything to ensure its defence and that NATO's eastwards expansion would be counterproductive, as it subjected Russia to 'risks and threats'.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, the alliance has consistently overlooked (or disregarded) the declared position of the Russian leadership *vis-à-vis* further enlargement, thereby triggering the very renewed divisions between East and West that it has sought to avoid.

## Conclusions

The 1967 Harmel Report did not consider the issue of possible NATO enlargement. However, 50 years after the report was published, the question of enlargement threatens to undermine the twin pillars of deterrence and dialogue identified in the report. NATO needs a much clearer position on the issue of future enlargement, both to send a message to states on the aspirant list and to demonstrate unity of purpose in the face of Russian efforts to undermine alliance solidarity. While Article 10 does offer a clear exit for the alliance in terms of declining membership for countries such as Georgia, the alliance still needs to be thinking long-term, in view of both the future of enlargement and the future of the alliance itself. NATO's desire to keep the possibility of membership open to any state that meets the requirements of Article 10 has not only undermined Euro-Atlantic security and triggered new divisions between East and West, it has also exposed aspirant states, particularly those in the post-Soviet space, to sustained pressure and coercion from Moscow. There is an inherent tension between Article 5 and Article 10, between collective defence and the alliance's open door policy, and it has become clear that it will be very difficult for NATO to ensure the security of its member states while simultaneously developing partnerships and discussions about future membership with states on the periphery, particularly those in

<sup>59</sup> Sergei Lavrov, 'My staraemsya deideologizirovat nashi deistviya' ['We are trying to remove ideology from our affairs'], *Izvestiya*, 31 March 2008.

<sup>60</sup> 'NATO iskusstvenno pridumyivaet sebe bol'shogo vraga' [NATO invents a big enemy], *Kommersant*, 6 July 2016, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3031545>.

Russia's 'zone of privileged interest'. The alliance's open door policy appears to be undermining both its own security and the security of aspirant states, an effect that runs counter to the original objectives of enlargement. Vague promises about membership at 'some point in the future' ultimately undermine the alliance's objective of fostering stability on its periphery.

While both Georgia and Ukraine continue to contribute to Euro-Atlantic security by deploying troops on NATO operations and missions, and make an important contribution to the alliance's efforts to advance cooperative security, ultimately the issue of their prospective membership threatens to undermine alliance security and cohesion. With Russia taking an increasingly assertive stance on the global stage and uncertainty surrounding the direction of US foreign policy under President Trump, the issue of NATO enlargement is unlikely to be a priority for the alliance over the next few years. If NATO ultimately rejects any prospect of membership for states in the post-Soviet space, they could be abandoned to Russian influence, indicating that Moscow has a de facto veto over membership of the alliance and conceding a 'sphere of influence' to Russia. The alternative is that NATO offers these countries a form of intensified partnership, but no prospect of membership. Such an approach is likely to have a very negative impact on those aspirant states which find themselves 'excluded' from the alliance, left on the outside and caught between NATO and Russia. There is the risk that such an approach will exacerbate existing divisions between East and West, leaving states such as Georgia and Ukraine caught between western and Russian 'spheres of influence' and therefore vulnerable to pressure. It could also undermine reformers in these countries, as well as popular support for difficult liberal democratic and economic reforms.

NATO enlargement during the post-Cold War era has been driven, to a large extent, by those outside the alliance seeking to join. Internally, the process has been driven predominantly by the United States, which has offered strong support for the membership bids of countries across central and eastern Europe, as well as those in the post-Soviet space. This is likely to change under a Trump presidency. Not only has Trump questioned Article 5 and whether the United States should continue to support the notion of collective defence for allies that fail to meet their spending commitments, he is also keen to reset relations with Moscow. The United States has traditionally been one of the principal advocates of alliance membership for Georgia (and Ukraine), but there is unlikely now to be any appetite for enlargement into post-Soviet space, or any desire to further provoke Moscow. This will surely mean that Washington steps back from providing visible support for the accession bids of Georgia and Ukraine, which will likely find their bids for membership 'parked' by NATO. However, although enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic alliance is unlikely to be a pressing issue for the foreseeable future for the western allies, many of which are distracted by internal challenges, membership remains a central objective of both the Georgian and Ukrainian governments. This means that the issue will be kept alive and will continue to undermine both intra-alliance relations and those between NATO and Russia.

Enlargement has been a persistent irritant for Moscow since the end of the Cold War, and potential membership of the alliance for states such as Georgia and Ukraine has proved to be a persistent cause of division, both between member states and between the alliance and Moscow. Georgia and Ukraine may have taken different paths in their approach to the Euro-Atlantic area in the post-Soviet era, but both face a Russian roadblock in the form of Moscow's hostility to their forging closer ties with the alliance. Both states currently fall foul of the accession criteria regarding the resolution of territorial disputes prior to membership, and all three of the unresolved conflicts (in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and eastern Ukraine) are tacitly supported by Moscow. Consequently, while the Warsaw summit communiqué indicated the alliance's intention to focus on boosting the securing of the wider Black Sea region, the accession of either Georgia or Ukraine remains a distant dream.