



NATO AT 70: THE HISTORY, SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Adeleke Olumide Ogunnoiki¹ and Charles Emmanuel Ekpo²

¹Graduate, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos,
Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria

²Graduate Student, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan, Oyo State,
Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is the strongest and most successful political cum military alliance the world has ever known to date. Founded in 1949, the transatlantic alliance served as a bulwark for Western Europe countries from the expansion of the Soviet Union, its ideology – communism and, nuclear warheads during the Cold War. In the year 1991, the gigantic Soviet Union collapsed which marked the end of the Cold War. As the Soviet Union no longer posed a threat to NATO members, the Alliance took on new missions from conflict management in the Balkans and Maghreb, counterterrorism operations in South Asia and the Middle East, to anti-piracy missions off the Horn of Africa. At this juncture the question arising is this: is NATO a relic of the Cold War or an indispensable alliance in the 21st century? This paper recounts the eventful history of NATO from 1949 to 2019. It also answers the question, is NATO an obsolete or relevant alliance in the 21st century? and most importantly, it discusses at length the accomplishments and problems the Alliance faces in the post-Cold War era. These research objectives were successfully carried out using the historical approach with the qualitative method of secondary data collection. Concerning the findings in this research paper, it was discovered that NATO's achievements are being overshadowed by the plethora of challenges bedeviling it, the biggest of which is defence spending shortfall.*

KEYWORDS: Alliance, Eastern Europe, Cold War, NATO, Post-Cold War Era, Threat

INTRODUCTION

The year 2019, is a year of celebration, sober reflection and appraisal in different countries and institutions the world over. In Nigeria, 2019 makes it a decade since successive national government has been combating the Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram. Outside Africa, 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in present day Germany as well as the Tiananmen Square crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in China. It also makes it 50 years the US astronaut, Neil Armstrong, became the first man to set foot on the moon. But of them all, the year 2019 will be remembered as the year the transatlantic alliance – NATO turned 70 years.

Shortly after the overambitious Axis power – Nazi Germany, Italy and Imperial Japan were vanquished in 1945 by the victorious allies of the Second World War – United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), an ideological



and arms struggle broke out between the Western bloc led by the US and the Eastern bloc under the leadership of the USSR.

Simply called the 'Cold War' in world history, the expansion of the USSR into Eastern Europe and the spread of communism therein, posed a real security threat to Western Europe and indeed the Western Hemisphere. Hence, it became necessary for the US to commit itself to protecting Western Europe from falling into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

In the month of April 1949, the North American countries – US and Canada coalesced with 10 European countries to found the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which was to serve as a bulwark for its members from Soviet Union expansionism and ideology, and few months later, to deter the Soviet Union after its maiden atomic bomb test in August 1949. Similarly, the USSR formed the short-lived 8-Member State political and military alliance – the Warsaw Pact in May 1955 to counterweight NATO on the world stage.

In the year 1991, the massive USSR collapsed and accordingly, the Warsaw Pact disbanded. With the Cold War over and the Soviet Union no longer posing a threat to Western Europe, the future of NATO became questionable. Rather than dissolve the Alliance, NATO adapted to the changing geopolitical environment. It enlarged its membership, admitting former communist Member States of the Warsaw Pact (excluding the defunct USSR), expanded its remit to include conflict management in Southeastern Europe and North Africa, anti-piracy operations at the Gulf of Aden, counterterrorism operations in South Asia and the Middle East and recently the collective defence of Eastern Europe from Russia's aggression (the successor State of the defunct USSR).

Following the commemoration of NATO's 70th anniversary in April 2019, this research paper gives a detailed history of the Alliance, touches on the debate whether NATO is an obsolete or relevant alliance in the 21st Century and most importantly, discusses at length the accomplishments and problems NATO is faced with in the post-Cold War era.

The Historical Background of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a political cum military alliance has had an eventful 70 years which began during the Cold War: a period of geopolitical tension, ideological rivalry and arms race between the democratic and capitalist Western bloc led by the US and the authoritarian and communist Eastern bloc under the leadership of the USSR.

At the behest of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), the Soviet Union, not long after the Second World War (1939-1945) ended, began to expand its sphere of influence to include Eastern Europe territories which President Harry Truman (1884-1972) of the United States was mindful of *vis-à-vis* Western Europe's security and, hoped to put a stop to it with his 'containment' foreign policy. Taking a step further, the US represented by the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, joined its North American neighbour – Canada and, 10 European countries – Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and, the UK to sign in Washington D.C., United States, the North Atlantic Treaty (also called Washington Treaty) which established NATO "to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" according to the first Secretary-General of NATO in person of Lord Hastings Ismay (The Economist, 2019a; Weiss, 2019).



Founded initially for the collective defence of its members from USSR expansionism, NATO's mandate over four months after it was established included deterring the Soviet Union that tested its first atomic bomb on August 29, 1949, thus ending the US monopoly of the Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). Seeing that the Western bloc had a political cum military alliance for its protection, the Soviet Union and its 7 satellites States – Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Romania signed in Warsaw, Poland, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance which established the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955, as a mutual defence alliance. However, the Pact was disbanded in 1991 following the breakup of the USSR.

Since the 12 founding members created NATO on April 04, 1949, the Alliance has had seven rounds of membership enlargement, in line with its 'Open Door Policy' (inked in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949)), in order to accommodate other European countries especially the former communist States in Eastern Europe. The countries that joined over the years are: Greece and Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955), Spain (1982), Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and, Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009) and, Montenegro (2017) (International Democratic Watch, 2012; Aljazeera, 2019). The Alliance is soon to have its 30th member country – the Republic of North Macedonia. NATO began formal accession talks with the Republic of North Macedonia, formerly called Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 2018. The Balkan nation which had a 27-year-old name dispute with its Southern neighbour, Greece, that feared that FYROM, by renaming itself Macedonia, had territorial ambitions over its own Northern region that is called 'Macedonia' (now settled following the signing of the landmark 'Prespa Agreement', on the banks of the Prespa Lake District in Northern Greece, on June 17, 2018), is expected to become a full member of the Alliance by the end of 2019 (BBC News, 2018; Kitsantonis, 2018; Masters, 2019; The Economist, 2019a).

As stated in Article 13 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949), a Member State of the transatlantic alliance can only withdraw 20 years after the treaty has been in force. Much as none of the Alliance members has fully pulled out, some have done so partially. In 1966, President Charles de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's integrated military command after it became clear that NATO was dominated by the US and UK. President Nicholas Sarkozy ended the farce and saw to the return of France to the fold of NATO's military structure in 2009 (Campbell, 2019). Also, to have withdrawn its force from NATO's military command structure is Greece in 1974, as a protest against the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Greece was later readmitted in 1980 (International Democratic Watch, 2012).

In the year 1994, NATO launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme to foster cooperation between NATO and non-member States in Western Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Currently, NATO has 21 partner countries – Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Moldova, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and, Uzbekistan.

Structurally, NATO, which has had its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, since 1967 (first in London and then Paris in 1952) (NATO, 2018a), is made up of three organs: i) the *North Atlantic Council* (NAC) – this is the supreme decision-making organ of the Alliance. It is composed of the representatives of the 29 Member States, ii) the *Secretariat* – the Secretariat



is the administrative organ of the Alliance. It is headed by a Secretary-General who currently is the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, for a 4-year term and lastly, iii) the *Military Command Structure* – made up of two strategic commands: the Allied Command Operations (ACO) – in charge of planning and executing NATO's military operations and, the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) – responsible for, among other things, the development of NATO's military capabilities (NATO, 2018b).

NATO at 70: An Obsolete or Relevant Alliance in the 21st Century?

NATO at 70, has for certain, gotten to its retirement age. Thus, there are concerns in some quarters over its relevance *vis-à-vis* 21st century security realities. A world leader to have voiced this concern is none other than the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump.

The Republican, Donald Trump, has been a vocal critic of NATO for some time now, calling it during his presidential campaign trail in 2016 an “obsolete” alliance. Aside Trump's diatribes, he is reported to have told his aids and officials that he would like to pullout America, the backbone of NATO, from the Alliance (Peel and Williams, 2019). To reassure NATO members that the United States remains committed to the Alliance, the Democratic-led House in January 2019 overwhelmingly approved a legislation that prohibits the expenditure of any funds on a US withdrawal from NATO (Welna, 2019). So, the question at this juncture is this: is NATO an outdated Organisation or the Alliance is still relevant and necessary today as it was in its heyday during the Cold War?

It is no longer news that NATO was created in 1949 to protect its members from the expansion of the Soviet Union, which disintegrated in 1991. Despite the fact that the USSR no longer exist, security threats from Russia (the successor State of USSR) is still real e.g. Russia's troops in Moldova's breakaway territory – Transnistria, Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independence republics and lastly, the illegal annexation of Crimea, a territory of Ukraine in 2014. Aside the Russian threats are other security challenges some of which are outside of the European continent: terrorism, cyber attacks and hybrid threats, piracy etc which the Alliance is or has tackled in the best interest of its Member States. From all indications, NATO is an indispensable Organisation in the post-Cold War era. Its Member States should not plan on attending its funeral anytime soon as the Alliance is still capable of safeguarding Europe and North America from immediate and imminent threats.

On April 03, 2019, the current Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, was given the rare honour of addressing the joint session of the US Congress. On the 4th of April, 2019, the foreign ministers of NATO Member States met in Washington D.C., to mark on a low-key, the 70th anniversary (1949-2019) of the venerable alliance despite the internal tension between the US and its European allies. At the moment, preparations are being made for NATO's Summit which would hold from December 03 to 04, 2019, in London, United Kingdom, to celebrate modestly the Alliance's 70 years of political and military action.

The Successes and Challenges of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the Post-Cold War Era

Like any other intergovernmental organisation (IGO) on the international plane, NATO in the post-Cold War era, has recorded several achievements just as it has had its fair share of surmountable challenges.



The Successes of NATO

Deterring and containing the expansion of the Soviet Union into Western Europe remain the twin accomplishment of NATO. However, this success story of the Alliance happened during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, NATO has accomplished quite a lot within and outside Europe.

Conflict Management in the Balkans

NATO has been a major player in Southeastern Europe popularly known as the Balkans. Following the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in the early 1990s “ethnic cleansing, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and other atrocities were committed during the armed conflicts that engulfed the Balkans – Croatia (1991-1992), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and, Kosovo (1998-1999)” (Ogunnoiki, 2019:3). The Bosnian War (1992-1995) was such a horrendous war that it left about 100,000 people dead and 2.2 million others displaced (France 24, 2019).

What began as a mission to impose UN-sanctioned no-fly zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina became a bombing campaign for NATO on Bosnian Serb forces that many military analysts say was essential to ending the conflict (Masters, 2019). The three-and-a-half-years war ended with a US-brokered General Framework Agreement for Peace between the warring factions: Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and Serbian President Slobodan Milosević (Gadzo, 2015). Popularly called the Dayton Accords, the peace deal was reached on November 21, 1995, at America’s Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, which was later signed in the capital of France, Paris, on December 14, 1995.

NATO, based on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1031, was given the task of implementing the military aspects of the Dayton Accords. This task it successfully carried out through the Implementation Force (IFOR) which began on December 20, 1995, and ended on December 20, 1996. Replacing IFOR was the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was created by UNSC Resolution 1088 on December 12, 1996. The Force remained operational up to December 02, 2004 (NATO, 2007). In 1999, NATO was involved in air campaign in Kosovo to halt the humanitarian catastrophe that was then unfolding in Kosovo. Called ‘Operation Allied Force’, the 78-day aerial bombing started on March 24, 1999, and was suspended on June 10, 1999 (NATO, 2016a).

Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in Libya

Following the usage of coercive apparatuses at the behest of the leadership of some States e.g. Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and Rwanda to perpetrate genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, the Canadian government set up the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in September 2000 to define when the sovereignty of a State can be shelved for the purpose of humanitarian intervention. In 2001, the ICISS produced a Responsibility to Protect (R2P) report which was adopted in 2005 at the UN World Summit in New York, USA.

On December 17, 2010, the self-immolation of a 26-year-old street vendor in Tunisia by the name, Mohammed Bouazizi, over the confiscation of his vegetable stall by Faïda Hamdy, a council inspector, triggered protests in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia (The Telegraph, 2015; MEMO,



2018). Similar protests in a matter of some weeks erupted in the North African countries – Libya and Egypt and in the Middle East – Bahrain and Syria. Widely known as the ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Arab Awakening’, the Arab uprisings dislodged President Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Col. Muammar Gaddafi of Libya.

Prior to the downfall and controversial death of Col. Gaddafi, there was a growing anti-Gaddafi protest in Eastern Libya which the UNSC thought it wise to protect unarmed civilians therein, especially in Benghazi, from possible attacks by security forces loyal to the Gaddafi regime. On March 17, 2011, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1973, from which NATO got its mandate for military intervention in oil-rich Libya. “The alliance declared a no-fly zone over Libya and used its air power to enforce it” (Delvoie, 2019).

Counterterrorism Operations in South Asia and the Middle East

On September 12, 2001, NATO for the first time invoked the *casus foederis*, i.e. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949), which states that an attack on one member would be considered as an attack on all, following the 9/11 attacks by the al-Qaeda terrorist network on the World Trade Centre in the US. However, it was not until August 2003, that NATO took military action in Afghanistan, a safe haven for al-Qaeda (Ogunnoiki, 2018a:50; Aljazeera, 2019; Masters, 2019).

Shortly after the US-led forces toppled the Taliban regime in Kabul, the UNSC authorised an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to support the new Afghan government. NATO took over the leadership of the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on August 11, 2003, which was its first operation outside Europe. Its mission initially was to secure the capital, Kabul, and the areas surrounding it. But as time went on, NATO played the combat role of securing the entire Afghanistan which they did until the Afghan forces took over in 2014. With their combat role over, NATO now plays the non-combat role of assisting the Afghan forces in dealing with the problem of insurgency in the country. This began in 2015 when NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) (NATO, 2015; NATO, 2018 cited in Ogunnoiki, 2018a:50-5; Masters, 2019).

Few years after the US, with the help of the ‘coalition of the willing’ countries (some of which were its allies in NATO) invaded Iraq in 2003, NATO as a body was in the Middle East, to combat the Sunni terrorist group, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or simply Daesh. In June 2014, the leadership of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared a caliphate i.e. the Islamic State (IS) in West Iraq and East Syria with its *de facto* capital in Raqqa, Syria. In May 2017, NATO joined the ‘Global Coalition to Defeat the ISIL’ in liberating Mosul and other Iraqi territory under the control of Daesh (NATO, 2019).

Counter-Piracy Operations

“Between 2007-2008, the rates of piracy in the Horn of Africa skyrocketed. Civilian mariners were increasingly targeted, hostages were taken, and ransoms paid. ... This phenomenon was created by the weak state of Somalia and fueled by the inherent lawlessness that combined to sow vast instability in the region” (Poulin, 2016). In 2008, at the request of the UN, NATO started supporting international efforts to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden, off the Horn of Africa and in the Indian Ocean with Operation Allied Provider and Allied Protector. From



August 2009, the Alliance led Operation Ocean Shield, which helped to deter and disrupt pirate attacks (NATO, 2016b).

Working hand-in-hand with the European Union's 'Atlanta' operation, the US-led Combined Task Force 151 and countries such as China, Japan and South Korea, NATO significantly reduced the attacks from more than 30 ships at the peak in 2010-11, to no ships captured off Somalia since May 2012. With no successful piracy attacks since 2012, NATO terminated operation Ocean Shield on the 15th of December, 2016 (Emmott, 2016, NATO 2016b).

Democratisation of Europe

Not all the current 29 Member States of NATO were initially democracies. Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey were formerly veritable military dictatorships, while those that emerged from the defunct Soviet Union were one-party Communist States (Riegert, 2019). What NATO succeeded in doing was the transformation of these countries and others in Central and Eastern Europe to democracies because, before a non-democratic State can be admitted into the Alliance as a member, it must be willing to further the principles of NATO one of which is democracy.

Unprecedented Longevity

Celebrating its 70th anniversary is an extraordinary achievement of NATO. According to a study conducted by the Washington think-tank body, Brookings Institution in 2010, we have had 63 major military alliances over the past five centuries. However, only 10 out of the said 63 military alliances lived beyond 40 years (The Economist, 2019a). NATO, as an alliance, has obviously lived beyond 40 years. It has outlived major Cold War military alliances – the Warsaw Pact (formed in 1955, disbanded in 1991), the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) also called the Middle East Treaty Organisation (METO) or the Baghdad Pact (established in 1955, dissolved in 1979) and lastly, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) (founded in 1954, became a defunct Organisation in 1977).

The secret to NATO's longevity is none other than its ability to adapt to the changing geopolitical environment. This longevity recipe of the transatlantic alliance has changed the long-standing narrative that mutual defence alliances do disband after the immediate threat is no longer there.

The Challenges of NATO

The challenges that have engulfed NATO are not operational, though improvement in that regard is still needed but, they are more political in nature. It is the collective response of NATO Member States to these pressing challenges that will define the future prospects of the Alliance (Raine, 2019).

Defence Spending Shortfall

NATO's biggest worry today is the defence spending shortfall on the part of majorly its European members. In 2014, at NATO's Summit in Wales, Member States of the Alliance committed themselves to spending at least 2% of their GDP on defence by 2024. In 2018, only seven NATO members met or exceeded the 2% of GDP minimum – the United States



(3.4 percent), Greece (2.2 percent), the United Kingdom (2.2 percent), Estonia (2.1 percent), Poland (2.1 percent), Latvia (2 percent), and Lithuania (2 percent) (Masters, 2019).

US president, Donald Trump has repeatedly bemoaned that America is being short-changed by its NATO allies in Europe, who leave the US to foot most, if not all the bill of the Alliance with its taxpayers' money (The Economist, 2019a; Wadhams and Stearns, 2019; Weiss, 2019). Hence, the mercurial president has called out the US "delinquent" allies in Europe (which his predecessor, President Barack Obama, called "free-riders") to "pay up" their fair share of NATO's defence spending. Presently, Trump's browbeating of European countries happens to have worked as NATO defence spending is expected to rise to \$100 billion by 2020. But still, this amount is not enough for mutual defence purposes.

Of all the laggards in Europe, the economic heavyweight, Germany, is a major concern of the US. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, had earlier pledged to spend 1.5% of GDP on defence instead of the agreed 2% by 2024. But in March 2019, Berlin, announced its defence spending is expected to drop from 1.37% in 2020 to 1.25% in 2023 (Aljazeera, 2019; Smith, 2019).

Russia's Aggression

The second major challenge of NATO is resurgent Russia's aggression. In 2005, President Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the USSR in 1991 "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" (Associated Press in NBC News, 2005). To regain the lost glory of its predecessor, Russia's behaviour on the world stage has been nothing short of an offensive realist State trying to revise the international order in its favour.

Over the years, revanchist Russia has disregarded the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of some States surrounding the Black Sea. In the Republic of Moldova, Russia has refused to bow to international pressure to withdraw its troops stationed in Transnistria, an unrecognised State that not only broke away from Moldova but went to war with it in 1992 which ended with a ceasefire in July, 1992. In 2008, Russia invaded the Caucasus country, Georgia, and recognised parts of the country – Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics. On March 11, 2014, Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a territory of Ukraine, under the pretext of protecting ethnic minorities. As a result, "NATO suspended all civilian and military cooperation with Moscow" (Masters, 2019). In order to end the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine that has claimed the lives of over 10,000 people, the representatives of Ukraine and the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) signed a ceasefire agreement in Minsk, Belarus, on September 05, 2014. Present at the signing of the Minsk Protocol were the representatives of Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (The Guardian, 2014). On February 12, 2015, Minsk II agreement was signed in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. Nevertheless, the ceasefire deal like the former did not end the fighting between the Ukrainian army and the pro-Russian rebels in the region. To date, Eastern Ukraine is still a flashpoint.

European Union 'Strategic Autonomy'

The European Union (EU) is a strategic partner of NATO in tackling the security challenges of Europe. Much as this is a fact, the Member States of the supranational body, can no longer depend on the US commitment to protect them from real threats, especially after listening to



President Donald Trump's remarks in that regard which suggests that America is no longer a credible guarantor of Europe's security. Hence, EU members have been working closely towards their 'strategic autonomy' which, to NATO, may duplicate or undermine the longstanding transatlantic relations between the US and Europe.

In line with the EU's controversial vision of 'strategic autonomy' as laid out in its 2016 Global Strategy, the past few years have seen the EU roll out a series of initiatives designed to stimulate European defence cooperation and build defence capabilities (Raine, 2019). In 2017, the EU launched the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the Commission's European Defence Fund (EDF) (Zandee, 2018). PESCO, for example, will integrate the common defence of 25 out of the 28 EU Member States (Campbell, 2019; Patrick, 2019).

Russia-Turkey Arms Deal

Turkey is a strategic NATO member that geographically connects two continents – Europe and Asia. It also has the second largest armed forces in NATO after the US which makes it an asset especially in NATO's operations in the Mediterranean Sea, Aegean Sea, Black Sea, Asia and the Middle East. Recently, Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reiterated his country's plans to purchase a Russian missile defence system despite opposition from the US and NATO. The S-400 air defence system which Russia delivered the first shipment to Turkey in July, 2019, is not interoperable with NATO's missile defence system. Aside that, the S-400 would compromise the F-35 fighter jets which Turkey and another NATO allies fly. At the moment, the US has halted delivery of equipment related to its F-35 fighter jets to Turkey. Nevertheless, President Erdoğan is unperturbed. As Ankara has gone ahead to purchase the said S-400 batteries from Russia, it only means that the transcontinental country is willing to jeopardise its defence relationship with Washington and its NATO allies for a deeper relationship with Moscow (Aljazeera, 2019; Smith, 2019).

Russia-Germany Gas Pipeline

Located in Central Europe, Germany is the largest economy on the European continent. In the EU, it wields immense influence which is bound to increase after 'Brexit' (i.e. Britain's exit) with or without a withdrawal deal, hopefully by the new deadline on October 31, 2019. However, Germany as an energy consuming economy has had a few NATO members worried over the controversial offshore laying of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline that will run from Russia across the Baltic Sea to Germany.

The Nord Stream 2 is a 1,200km-long pipeline that would transport natural gas from Ust-Luga, Russia to Greifswald, Germany. The €11 billion energy project which began in the third quarter of 2018 is expected to be commissioned before the close of 2019 (Gazprom, 2019). Following the completion of this megaproject that would make available 55 billion cubic metre of gas annually, Germany and other energy consuming countries in Europe would in the shortest possible time, be supplied natural gas at a cheaper rate because, Nord Stream 2 circumvents the transit countries – Poland and Ukraine that generate revenue from collecting transit fee on the pipelines Russian gas passes through to get to the European energy market which jacks up gas price. Much as European countries stand to benefit from this project, they risk becoming dependent on Russia's natural gas. As Russia demonstrated in 2006 and 2009 when it restricted the flow of gas through Ukraine, it can in the nearest



future use the supply of gas to Europe through Nord Stream 2 as a political weapon (The Economist, 2019b). President Trump has already called Germany a “captive” of Moscow because of his perceived German reliance on Russian energy (Zengerle, 2019).

US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

On December 08, 1987, US president, Ronald Reagan and President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in Washington D.C., USA. “This treaty, whose origins can be traced all the way back to internal NATO consultations, not only eliminated an entire class of missiles that threatened Europe and decreased East-West tensions, but also hastened the end of the Cold War” (Trakimavičius, 2019).

On October 20, 2018, President Trump announced his intention to withdraw the US from the bilateral treaty in response to the years of alleged treaty violations by Russia (Patrick, 2019; Raine, 2019). The US claims that Russia has been testing and deploying the 9M729 cruise missile in material breach of the INF Treaty since 2014. Again, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announced on February 01, 2019, that America, effective from February 02, 2019, will suspend its obligations under the 31-year-old INF Treaty which bans land-based ballistic and cruise missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500km (Radio Farda, 2019). Russia likewise announced it will suspend its obligations under the said treaty on February 02, 2019.

Unconventional Cyber Attacks

Cyber security happens to be an Achilles heel of NATO which its adversaries are already exploiting against its members in recent years. Since the coming of the digital age, speed trains, hydropower plants, airports, hospitals, democratic institutions etc have been operated and managed by mankind with the help of computer systems. However, these computer systems are vulnerable to cyber attacks by hackers who do so to steal trade secrets or mar periodic elections in democracies.

During the Obama administration, the US Department of Justice on May 19, 2014, indicted five Chinese officers of Unit 61398, the Shanghai-based cyber unit of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), for hacking into the networks of Westinghouse Electric, the United States Steel Corporation and other companies (Schmidt and Sanger, 2014). Still in 2014, the fourth quarter precisely, Sony Pictures Entertainment computers were hacked by a group called the “Guardians of Peace” (GOP). The GOP stole confidential data from Sony’s computer systems and, posted them online. The country believed to have backed the GOP is North Korea which Sony irked over the action-comedy film “The Interview” that centred on a plot to assassinate North Korea leader, Kim Jong Un (Peterson, 2014). In 2016, Russia meddled in America’s presidential election which was keenly contested by the Democrat presidential candidate, Mrs. Hilary Clinton and the Republican presidential candidate, Mr. Donald Trump. Thus, on July 13, 2018, the US Department of Justice indicted 12 intelligence officials of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GU), popularly known with its former abbreviation ‘GRU’, for hacking into the computer systems of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign (Mcardle, 2018).



Onto mobile network development, NATO countries are divided *vis-à-vis* the Chinese telecommunication giant – Huawei, building their 5G (5th Generation) network. On April 23, 2019, UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, gave her approval for Huawei to build some of Britain's 5G 'non-core' parts despite a warning from the US that it would put their cooperation on security at risk (Bond, *et al.*, 2019). What the US fears is the possibility of China's intelligence agency using Huawei equipment for cyber espionage.

Libyan Civil War

What started out as a humanitarian intervention quickly became a regime change operation in resource-endowed Libya. On October 20, 2011, Col. Gaddafi was killed in his hometown, Sirte, in a controversial manner. What ensued after his death was a power vacuum at the top and the outbreak of a civil war in which politico-religious and tribal militias fought each other. Due to a lack of post-conflict planning and action by the Alliance, Libya descended into chaos, which chaos persists to this day (Delvoie, 2019).

Protracted Counterterrorism Operations in Afghanistan

After 17 years of combat and non-combat operations, NATO has neither defeated nor destroyed the Taliban in Afghanistan. The landlocked country is not what it used to be prior to the US-led invasion in 2001. Presently, Afghanistan, a shadow of its former self, is insecure and politically unstable. It is little wonder that NATO allies took advantage of the American withdrawal of combat forces in 2014 to cut their own troop involvement by some 90 per cent. The Afghanistan mission remains an enduring nightmare for NATO to this day (Delvoie, 2019).

The Rise of China

Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the mantle of leadership fell on the reformist, Deng Xiaoping, who upon assuming power in 1978, saw to the reform of China's closed economy with his 'Open Door Policy' which transformed China from a centrally planned economy to an open market economy. This transformation was the beginning of China's economic miracle and rise as a world power. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world. Though, China has already overtaken America on the basis of the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) yardstick since 2014, it has been predicted by economic cognoscenti that China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would surpass that of the United States to become the largest economy in the world by 2025-2030 (see Ogunnoiki, 2018b:49).

In 2013, Chinese president, Xi Jinping, unveiled the 'One belt, One Road' (OBOR) initiative. Being a modern version of the ancient Silk Road that was a strategic trade route linking China with the Arab world and Europe, the OBOR initiative with six economic corridors (one of which is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]), would in the nearest future bring about infrastructure connectivity between China and the countries in South East Asia, South-South Asia, North East Africa and Southern Europe (Jinchen, 2016; Ogunnoiki, 2018b). Currently, the Chinese are heavily investing in European countries infrastructure e.g. seaports in Southern Europe. This is a worrisome development for NATO as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China is fast turning Europe into a sphere of influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC). To have added to NATO's unease recently is Italy, the first G7 country to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on March 23, 2019 (Mitchell, 2019).



Unfocused American Leadership

Closely linked to the aforementioned problem, is a distracted America leading NATO at a time when the Alliance needs to return to its original mandate of collective defence, this time around, from the security threat Russia poses to its members especially those in Eastern Europe. After President George W. Bush Jr. kicked-off his Global War on Terror (GWOT) in 2001, the US and its NATO allies' attention was more on counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. But after President Barack Obama came to power in 2009, America's focus gradually shifted to Asia because of the rise of China and her growing assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea. Following the announcement of America's 'Pivot to Asia' and 'rebalancing strategy' in 2011, President Obama in 2012, set the ball rolling in that regard (Ogunnoiki, 2018c). President Donald Trump, like his predecessor, has also been preoccupied with Sino-US relations issues recently. In pursuit of US national interest and his 'America First' foreign policy, Trump has dragged America into a 'Trade War' with China. On May 10, 2019, the US raised tariffs from 10% to 25% on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods. Retaliating, China on May 13, 2019, announced it would raise the duties ranging from 5% to 25% on \$60 billion worth of American products imported into the country from June 01, 2019. In total, the US has increased tariffs on \$250 billion worth of made-in-China goods while China has done likewise on \$110 billion American products (Wong and Koty, 2019).

Democracy Principle Compromises

"Democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law" (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949) have long been the principles NATO was founded on. But of recent, a few young democracies in the Alliance are experiencing illiberal turns which are undermining the democratic values that have always sat at the heart of the Alliance. These Member States undergoing a rollback in democracy are: Hungary, Poland and Turkey (Smith, 2019).

Hungary is now ruled by the populist autocrat, Viktor Orban, who has built increasingly close ties to Vladimir Putin's Russia. Poland too has taken a concerning turn toward authoritarianism in recent years (Schiff, 2019). In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, since the 2016 abortive coup d'état (see Enor and Ekpo, 2018) has claimed ever more expansive powers for himself, while taking the unimaginable step of purchasing Russian missile defense systems, which could endanger American pilots (Schiff, 2019). No doubt, the rise of authoritarianism in NATO's few backsliding democracies threatens its very foundation and solidarity.

Uncontrolled Migration

Unlike NATO's Eastern European members that are confronted with security threats from Russia, those in Southern Europe are grappling with the influx of migrants fleeing from their war-torn/politically unstable/underdeveloped country in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East to EU territories to seek asylum or for 'greener pasture'.

Libya in North Africa is currently one of the conduit for African migrants from Eritrea, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan etc who risk their lives in crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Southern European countries e.g. Italy on rickety and overpopulated boats some of which capsize along the perilous journey, causing many of them to drown. This was what happened on October 03, 2013, when an overcrowded boat capsized off the coast of the Italian Island, Lampedusa, killing over 360 migrants (Castelfranco, 2019). On



land, African migrants have occasionally been seen scaling the barbed wire fence of Spain's North African enclaves – Melilla and Ceuta. On May 12, 2019, 52 migrants climbed a guarded fence to gain entry into Spain's North African enclave of Melilla from Morocco (VOA News, 2019).

To have compounded the flow of migrants into Europe via land and sea are migrants from the originating country, Afghanistan, in South Asia and Syria in the Middle East to mention a few who go through the transit countries – Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria etc before reaching Germany, the destination country.

CONCLUSION

NATO as a septuagenarian alliance has come a long way in the dynamic geopolitical environment. On several occasions, it has proven itself to be a durable and relevant mutual defence alliance in the post-Cold War era and not a vestige of the Cold War. However, the achievements NATO prides itself with today are being overshadowed by the myriad of challenges confronting it which, if not urgently addressed, can lead to the break-up of the transatlantic alliance in the 21st century. To ensure that NATO stays vibrant in the next 30 years and above, certain steps need to be taken urgently by NATO Member States respectively and by NATO as a body.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings in this research paper, the following are strongly recommended for consideration and implementation.

- i. NATO's European members need to pull their weight by making good the agreed 2% of GDP on defence spending by 2024 instead of ripping off the US that currently pays a large amount of money for their defence;
- ii. The transatlantic alliance should include on its agenda possible security threats from China, Iran and North Korea to its members and partner countries;
- iii. NATO should keep to the assurance the US Secretary of State, James Baker, gave on February 09, 1990, to the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, that the Alliance will move "not one inch eastward" if he accepted the reunification of Germany (Majumdar, 2017), by discontinuing the admission of Eastern European countries;
- iv. The Alliance should guard jealously the unity its members enjoy from its adversaries than plan on sowing a seed of discord among them;
- v. NATO was an accomplice in the 2011 regime change in Libya. Therefore, it should right the wrong it did by actively participating in the international efforts to stabilise the war-ravaged country. In Afghanistan, the Alliance should maintain its non-combat role and more importantly prepare for an outright pullout from the landlocked country;



- vi. The US should be more focused in leading NATO as it faces real threats from Russia;
- vii. Germany and other NATO European countries consuming Russian gas should always diversify their energy sources for their own energy security during and after political tensions between NATO and Russia;
- viii. Turkey should desist from purchasing the Russian S-400 air defence system which is not only incompatible with NATO's defence system but would compromise the U.S-made F-35 fighter jets;
- ix. NATO should exhaust all available diplomatic channels in restoring backsliding democracies in the Alliance. If diplomacy fails, sanctions and membership suspension should be resorted to;
- x. The soon to be 30 Member States of NATO should invest more in cybersecurity upgrades to prevent further cyberattacks by State and non-State actors on their companies and institutions;
- xi. The US and Russia should work closely in resuscitating the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. This can only be possible if the US and Russia can verifiably prove to each other their full compliance to the bilateral treaty;
- xii. The EU should ensure that its 'strategic autonomy' centres on the ramp-up of defence spending and military capabilities of European countries for their security which would be a welcomed development in NATO;
- xiii. On the migration crisis in Europe, the EU should assist the originating countries in Africa and the Middle East in resolving their armed conflicts, political instability and economic backwardness. It should also do more for the receiving and destination countries in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe *vis-à-vis* border control, search and rescue (SAR) of migrants at sea, and most importantly, come up with an acceptable burden sharing formula for the migrants already in Europe.

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