

NATO Eastward Enlargement: Strategic Implications for Eurasia

*"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
Who rules the World-Island commands the World."*

Sir Halford Mackinder, 1919

The Historic Prague Summit 2002

On November 21, 2002 the North Atlantic Council decided to invite seven European states – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, to join NATO. The decision has provided for the extension of the Alliance's geographic scope and has helped NATO in meeting post-Cold War realities and the need of new security arrangements for Europe.

In the global war against terror, when the previous security priorities are being subdued, the enlargement process facilitates the Alliance in shifting the spatial dimension of its engagement and in projecting Western area of democracy and stability further eastwards. It turns to be an important step towards the implementation of the officially declared overall objective of the alliance to build a stable and undivided Europe and enhance security beyond NATO borders.

The enlargement process deeply influences the impact of NATO involvement and activities in the respective areas of interest and responsibility and significantly strengthens the capacity of the organization to more effectively cope with the new security threats. Involving new members with their national interests, strategic goals and historic experience, NATO enhances its understanding of South East Europe, Black sea area, and even Russia.

NATO eastward enlargement is also a key element in the process of the Alliance's evolution and transformation. Since the 1990s NATO has consistently evolved into an organization whose main functions are crisis management, collective security, and peace and stability operations. With the enlargement towards CEE NATO has ceased to exist as a military-political block with a restricted mission to contain potential aggressors against the territory of its members. NATO has been transformed into a system of security for the Euro-Atlantic space of democratic nations.

NATO 2002 eastward enlargement has considerably provided for the implementation of the next stage of the Alliance's transformation i.e. start perceiving as its mission to be focused not only on Europe but also outside where the major security threats are coming from. It was at the Prague summit in November 2002 where the allies adopted a declaration and communiqué that essentially accepted the principle of out-of-area operations. Alliance's determination to deal with threats beyond its territory pointed the way to the

operation inside Afghanistan and opened a new era of cooperation with the former Soviet republics in the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asian regions.

Strategic Reshuffling in Eurasia

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the balance of power in Eurasia changed irreversibly. But it was not until the beginning of the new millennium that a completely new strategic environment appeared in the Eurasian space. Beyond any doubt, one of the underlying causes for these changes to take place is NATO's expansion to the east. The enlarged NATO has stretched its borders to the northern edge of the so called Greater Middle East. This expansion makes the Alliance shift the focus of its attention from Central and East Europe to the countries from the neighboring regions of the Black Sea, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Alliance's enlargement in addition to the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, formally endorsed at the NATO Prague summit, widens the lines of communications and cooperation with the countries from the Greater Middle East and helps NATO demonstrate unprecedented levels of activism in this region: NATO commands the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan; in Iraq, NATO supports the Polish-led multinational division; in the Mediterranean, NATO patrols the sea through Operation Active Endeavor, and on the Balkans, NATO continues its mission of ensuring peace and security in Bosnia and Kosovo. NATO and U.S. enhanced commitments to the developments in the Greater Middle East have provoked a process of strategic reshuffling in Eurasia as far as this is the region where major interests of the main international actors intersect.

Geopolitically, the new NATO member states add spatial depth to the Alliance but they also has brought NATO closer to new sources of instability and unrest as the Greater Middle East is the region, where the greatest threats to Euro-Atlantic security are originating from, fed up by the overwhelming poverty, unemployment and social disaster. Networks of fanaticism and terror have been generated in the region for decades. Those networks exist and develop within the environment of the global underground, which operates west-wards through the no man's land of weak institutions, disintegrating communities, inter-ethnic strife and inter-religious clashes with growing fanaticism. This "gray zone" between Vienna and Kazakhstan channels the instability of the post-Soviet space and the Middle East into the heartland of the Western Alliance. Therefore, to carry out active policies of countering the waves of instability and to restrict the effects of the "gray zone" has become an inevitable priority for NATO, as a major security provider in Europe. The enlarged NATO has to assume the responsibility for building security partnerships, bringing stability and functioning democracies to its new neighborhood.

Faced with the need to establish a new and dynamic periphery of the Euro-Atlantic security system, NATO contributes to a trend to multilateralize security in Eurasia, and help prevent any single foreign player from becoming the sole regional security manager. Despite denying that it sees the region in terms of competition vis-à-vis Russia, the United States strongly opposes any monopoly and an exclusive sphere of influence over conflict resolution, economics, politics, military agendas and energy supplies in the Caucasus and Central Asia¹.

The new NATO members provide the organization with geostrategic value with respect to advancing and protecting alliance interests in the strategically important regions of the Black Sea basin and Central Asia. These regions are the two zones where the major strategic shifts have occurred. On the one hand, they enjoy enhanced Euro-Atlantic influence. On the other hand, they still share heavy dependence (whatever the local governments' strategic orientations) on Russia as former imperial master and remain the only regions, vulnerable to Russia's imperial revisionism in short and mid-term perspective.

New Strategic Environment in the Black Sea Area

The Black Sea region is the major gateway to the Greater Middle East and is becoming increasingly important for the security in Eurasia. That is the region where three basic geopolitical realms - the realm of Europe, the realm of Middle East and the realm of post-Soviet Russia, are meeting and interacting. The region is comprised of states with varying status, level of development and standing within the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Yet, it is considered as a relatively integrated strategic entity that includes not only the nations of the Black Sea (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Turkey) but Moldova and the other two Caucasus states (Azerbaijan and Armenia), as well.

The Black Sea region was an intense zone of security challenges throughout the Cold War, but the collapse of the Soviet system has led to a decade of security vacuum in the region that has been left unattended by the major powers' interests. Until 1997, the Black Sea region has constituted a part of the large security buffer zone between NATO in the West and the troubled post-Soviet East.

The accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into NATO in 1997 has narrowed this buffer corridor between the West and the East of Europe to the "gray zone of insecurity" in South Eastern Europe and the Black Sea. Russia has lost significant part of its potential to exercise control over the Balkans, and – to a smaller extent – over its former domains in Ukraine and the Caucasus. Still, the "gray zone of insecurity" on the Balkans and the Black Sea region has territorially split the NATO infrastructure between the expanding Central European wing of the Alliance and the "frozen" southern wing. The "gray zone" spreads around the costs of the Black Sea, involving Ukraine with its difficult and controversial post-communist reforms, and reaching up to the Caucasus - a region of numerous inter-ethnic conflicts, intense nation states' institutional destruction and relative borders

¹ Stephen Blank, The United States and Central Asia in R. Allison and L. Jonson, Eds., "Central Asian Security. The New International Context" (Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

among nominal state systems. A region, where residual Russian ambitions play an adverse and conflicting role. The dramatic security dilemma of the Caucasus prevents the utilization of the Caspian oil and gas reserves. The infrastructure projects for transporting the Caspian resources to the world markets have been blocked because of the tense security environment of the region.

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania into the Alliance and NATO enhanced presence on the shores of the Black Sea substantively alter the strategic balance in the region. It closes the territorial gap between the Central European and the southern wing of NATO and ends up the strategic isolation of Turkey from the integrated European security space. The membership of the two countries allows the Alliance to exercise a full capacity strategic control over the Black Sea region and completes the framework of the Euro-Atlantic security system.

The strategic line from the Baltics to the Black Sea represents the new stable rear of security relationships of the NATO with Russia and the post-Soviet space, as well as with the Middle East. The membership of Bulgaria and Romania provides the Alliance with a strategic advantage substantively improving the security preconditions to the Caspian oil and gas infrastructure projects implementation as most of the competing options for oil and gas pipelines construction stretch across the territories of the two countries.

Alliance's expansion to the east has made stabilization and security integration of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus regions into the common Euro-Atlantic security space an explicit, non-contradictory task within the Alliance's mission. It transforms the Black Sea into the new stable frontier of the NATO vis-à-vis the new strategic priorities of the Alliance and of the anti-terrorist coalition. It provides NATO and the United States with the opportunity to step towards projecting their influence and intensifying relations with these countries, which have not become NATO members but are also considered to be part of the Black Sea region, thus further providing for the establishment of a new balance of power in the region.

The ex-Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, with their different orientations and fluctuating reform efforts, have become an area of NATO special concern.

Ukraine acts as an important strategic buffer between Russia and Central Europe. It is the only other country except Russia granted with special relationship with NATO. In 1997 the Alliance and Ukraine signed a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. In contrast to Russia, Ukraine officially aspires to membership. In 2002, NATO and Ukraine have agreed upon an Action Plan that if implemented successfully will ultimately bring about the integration of the country into NATO as a full member. Though Ukraine's prospects as a potential member are remote, its willingness to cooperate with the Euro-Atlantic society is already an important strategic factor. This cooperative policy has been further enhanced after the 2004 Orange revolution. The new governing elite have declared policy of forging closer ties between Ukraine and NATO and the European Union.

With Romanian membership in NATO, Moldova that is a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace Program starting 1994, has become a direct neighbor of the Alliance. The changes in Moldova's external environment have influenced the transformation of Moldovan political landscape. By mid-2004, despite Russian pressure, Communist President Vladimir Voronin initiated a Westward reorientation of Moldova's policies. In 2005 Voronin was re-elected by the parliament with a majority exactly on a pro-reform, Western-oriented platform. New format of the relations with NATO and plans for adopting an Individual Action Plan NATO-Moldova are under discussion.

After a decade of conflict in the Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan have come to view Russia with suspicion. NATO and the United States have become powerful poles of attraction. Both countries have increasingly pursued pro-Western policy and have indicated their desire to join NATO at some point and to obtain protection from threats to their territories and their energy platforms and pipelines. After the "Revolution of roses", the new government in Tbilisi more determinedly declared its aspirations to become a part of NATO. In March 2005 Georgia and NATO signed an Agreement on Provision of Host Nation Support to and Transit of NATO Forces and NATO Personnel. The agreement provides effective insurance of transit carriages via Georgia through air, road and marine transport.

In 1997 Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova formed the GUAM consultative forum. In April 1999, after the accession of Uzbekistan, the name of the grouping was changed to GUUAM. In 2002, Uzbekistan, however, de facto suspended its participation in GUUAM and on May 5, 2005 the republic finally gave an official notice of withdrawal from the organization to the Moldovan presidency.

GUUAM was seen as a way of countering the influence of Russia in the area. Associated with the competition between two proposed transportation corridors to better link Europe and Asia, GUUAM has received backing from the United States. Though from 1999 to date, the organization never managed to find a collective mission and was generally considered to have stagnated, the recent "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as a perceived pro-Western and anti-Russian shift in the political agenda of the Moldovan governing party has led many to predict possible revival of the grouping². At GUUAM last summit, held in Chisinau, Moldova in April 2005, the four countries adopted a concluding "Chisinau Declaration on Democracy, Stability, and Development". It states that member countries would exert efforts "to advance democratization of society in member countries, their integration into Europe, and their partnerships with NATO and the United States." It has been declared that the process of integration into transatlantic and European structures is seen as an instrument that could substantially reduce threats and risks to regional security. In addition, the participating countries have solicited international support for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia and Moldova.

² Axis of Evil Shaping Against Moscow, "Kommersant", March 3, 2005 at (<http://www.kommersant.com/page.asp?id=-5141>)

Russia has all along criticized GUUAM for promoting centripetal tendencies, as a counter to the CIS, and indeed the only extant group of CIS countries that does not include Russia.

Changing the balance of power in the region, NATO expansion makes more difficult for Russia to effectively influence the policy agenda and security system in Greater Middle East as well as to establish an environment of long-term privilege for its interest – commercial, military and political – on the ground.

Reconfiguration of the Strategic Equilibrium in Central Asia

Located at the center of Eurasia, on the intersection of critical transport routes, Central Asia represents a strategic component of Eurasian space. This geographic area has no access to the great oceans and its communications with world markets relate to inland transport and energy routes. However, its strategic geographic location, its status of a land corridor to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean as well as its enormous energy and mineral wealth and the profitability of the future Central Asian energy projects significantly increases its importance and attractiveness.

Traditionally, Central Asia is a crossing point of diverse interests of regional and non-regional powers such as Russia, China, Great Britain, Turkey, Iran, among others. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 created five independent states in Central Asia, which fundamentally changed the strategic configuration of the wider Central Asian zone. Two of the interested countries – namely, Russia and China, succeeded in institutionalizing and, in some way, fitting their competing interests in the region through the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) including the four of the Central Asian republics (except Turkmenistan). Based on the recognition of the common threat (Islamic fundamentalism) on behalf of the member states, the SCO was designed as a regional security framework among nations, between which there hardly was any interaction for a long period of time.

The vast gas and oil resources of the region as well as the global war against terrorism have brought new powers into the play – the United States, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, among others. Shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, NATO member states invoked Article V, the alliance's collective defense clause, to come to the aid of the United States in the conflict against terrorism. At a NATO ministerial meeting in Reykjavik in May 2002, NATO members agreed that they must be able to carry out the full range of missions and to field forces wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives³. This was followed by an out-of-area action against terrorism – that in Afghanistan.

The Alliance's involvement in Afghanistan is one of the most significant examples of the way NATO has evolved in the recent years. NATO has been leading the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since August 2003, which aims

³ Communiqué NATO Ministerial, May 14, 2002.

at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and ensures that the country is never again used as a base for terrorists. The five Central Asian republics - neighboring Afghanistan, the Caucasus and the Middle East, have come to play an essential strategic role in Operation Enduring Freedom as well as in the implementation of NATO's mission. They have been important partners in ensuring the logistic supply of ISAF forces and in supporting the overall ISAF objectives.

The new dynamics have caused significant changes in the geo-strategic situation and have radically altered the equations of power in the region⁴. Over the course of the antiterrorist campaign, the United States have gained foothold in Central Asia. Coalition forces set up bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to launch operations in neighboring Afghanistan. Thus, once being on the periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area, now the region has regained its strategic importance of the "geopolitical pivot" of Eurasia⁵ and has turned to be an important neighboring area of the Alliance – a staging post for combating extremist networks based in South Asia, as well.

The expansion of NATO's missions to include the peace and stability operation inside Afghanistan must be seen as signifying a dramatic and even qualitative change in the Alliance that brings about long-term strategic consequences. One of the immediate results of extended U.S. and Western presence in wider Central Asia and the subsequent war in Iraq has been the intensification of the Russian government and military pressure upon Central Asian regimes to subordinate their armed forces to a Russian-led collective security treaty organization. The organization is supposed to act as a counterbalance to NATO in the area and as a place where Moscow would represent local governments while also effectively abridging their sovereign capabilities with regard to defense.

Russia's ' Unexpected' Concessions

Throughout the post-Soviet era, the majority of the Russian political elite believes that Russia has been unjustly deprived from its "spheres of influence" and reduced to governing solely its own territory and small sections of its former empire, named as "near abroad". Therefore, the common belief has been that the failure of Russia to defend its "natural" – that is "legitimate" – "spheres of influence" gave the incentive to the US as a sole super power and NATO leading member to extend its spheres of influence over the previous Russian domains. This has been the model of perception of the NATO enlargement process.

This Russian geo-strategic mindset as well as the geopolitical location of Russia in the heart of Eurasia has dictated the need of attracting Moscow as NATO partner for achieving stability in the Greater Middle East. As far as Russia remains a key player in the region and has an important role in the race to control the

⁴ Sean L. Yom, Geopolitics in Central Asia: the SCO and its Future, *The Journal of World Affairs and New Technologies*, Vol. 5, Number 4 Quarterly, NY: October 2002.

⁵ Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinking and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), p. 32.

production and transportation of energy resources, the Alliance has maintained the dialogue with Moscow as an important element in its post-enlargement strategy.

The acknowledgement of Russia's special stand vis-a-vis NATO came in 1997, when the two sides signed a Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security and established a body called Permanent Joint Council that was expected to provide a mechanism for consultation, coordination and, to the maximum extent possible, where appropriate, for joint decisions and joint action with respect to security issues of common concern. However, the PJC lasted only about two years, when Russia walked out of it because of her objections to the Kosovo campaign.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and Moscow's decision to support the United States in the war on terrorism has opened up new opportunities for changing the nature of NATO-Russian relations. Russia has softened its initially strong opposition and has accepted Alliance's enlargement as a *fait accompli*, viewing a unified front against terrorism, primarily due to the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, as more important than potential disputes with NATO countries over enlargement.

Putin's more pragmatic approach to the Alliance and the new cooperative spirit manifested by Moscow resulted in the establishment of the new NATO-Russia Council in May 2002. The Council provides the necessary framework for engaging Russian foreign policy and military establishments, conducting a dialogue on some of the key issues and building a cooperative security structure in the Euro-Atlantic region. Russia has started to be viewed as an essential ally in the war against international terrorism and the formula NATO at 20 was offered, suggesting a more equal standing of Russia among the NATO members and real partnership.

It is not at all clear, however, that this convergence of interests will form a foundation for a more robust NATO-Russia cooperation. It is obvious that NATO and Russia still have deep strategic and philosophical divides related to key issues such as Chechnya, the Middle East, Iraq, Iran. Russia has too many other pressing problems to pay much attention to East Europe but it still pursues a pro-active policy in the "near abroad" under the banner of the war on terrorism. Perceptions of Eurasian political frontiers still remain important components of the Russian definition of itself⁶ and coping with its internal crisis and disorder, Russia tries to exert stronger control predominantly over its immediate neighborhood. In 2004 Russian leaders have sent signals indicating a less cooperative stance in the CIS. The Russian politico-military elite have demonstrated a deep unease with the growing Western presence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia has deployed elements of the air force in the new base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. Russian energy monopolies increase their influence while Russia's President Vladimir Putin has even declared in a nationally televised speech that the demise of the Soviet Union is a "national tragedy on an enormous scale".

⁶ Zevelev, Igor NATO's Enlargement and Russian Perceptions of Eurasian Political Frontiers, George Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 1998.

Hence, one of the major NATO challenges will be to incorporate Russia into a broader Euro-Atlantic security framework as a prerequisite for Eurasian stability. As it would be imprudent to discount Russia's role as a factor in Eurasian politics, the only possible approach on behalf of NATO and the West is to create series of facts on the ground in Greater Middle East, aimed at attracting Russia to common endeavors, and targeted at restricting Russia in its traditional instincts and activities of a Great power. If successful, the partnership between the West and Russia may prove an invaluable tool to the larger aim of integrating fully Moscow into the common security system of the Euro-Atlantic space.

As far as NATO's ambition is to become a factor in the provision of security throughout the Muslim world and to be conceivably called upon to do so in the event of conflict in the CIS, the issue of Russia's boundaries, potential allies and partners has to be reexamined. Russian leadership is aware that a confrontation with NATO is something Russia cannot afford and should never attempt. Against the background of the rise of local nationalism and Islamic radicalism, the growth of ethnic divisions, the acceleration of economic expectations, the involvement of various outside powers, and the impact of disintegrative trends within the Russian federation, it would be useful for Russia to have NATO as a partner both in analysis and preventive diplomacy rather than viewing the Alliance as a threat and a challenge to regional stability.

Assuring that Russia is cooperative with international institution and maintaining constructive NATO-Russia cooperation could have significant positive effect on the Eurasian security architecture. Unlike the case of the CEE countries' NATO membership, the mission of NATO in the ex-Soviet Black Sea and Central Asian countries is highly problematic without strategic partnership with Russia. Russia's engagement could help the Alliance more effectively address emerging challenges to European and Asia-Pacific security. It could be a valued partner of the United States and its allies if they choose to play a balance of power game against a resurgent China⁷.

Resurgent China

China, which is also an important element of the strategic equation in Eurasia, additionally influences NATO-Russia relations. Both Russia and China are divided between the need to have access to Western capital and technology and the ambition to regain their great power status. Both of them could seek to build a new regional security architecture that reinforces each other's territorial integrity, while retrenching Western influence.

There are slight changes in Beijing's approach to NATO and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs even explores the possibility of establishing some relationship with it. At the same time, it is obvious that the American intervention and NATO presence in Afghanistan have disrupted China's regional environment. Chinese leadership has its preoccupations related to the U.S. activities in the region and it is

⁷ Cohen, Ariel A New Paradigm for U.S.-Russian Relations: Facing the Post-Cold War Reality, Backgrounder #1105, March 6, 1999, p. 5.

increasingly troubled about its security situation vis-à-vis the United States. Beijing is afraid that the growing U.S. military presence after the September 11 attacks may reverse years of Chinese diplomatic efforts to extend its influence in the region of Central Asia. As Chinese analyst Youkang Du pointed out, the U.S. and NATO penetration in Central Asia provokes unfavorable for Beijing changes that even threaten the Far West part of the country⁸. The presence of U.S. military bases close to the frontiers of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region is alarming for the Chinese leadership. The stability of the natural resource-rich Muslims-populated province is considered to be crucial to China's economic development, ethnic unity, territorial integrity and political stability⁹. The increased Western military presence in the region is seen as a factor that narrows the global strategic position of China vis-à-vis Washington.

Hence, it is clear that China is interested in Russia's staying outside of NATO, and even in opposition to it. That is why the improved NATO-Russia relations as well as Russia's speedy support for the anti-terror coalition and its low-profile reaction to the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty annoyed Beijing and stimulated Chinese leadership to look for mechanisms for balancing this new alliance of Russia.

Conclusion

The beginning of the new millennium has been marked by a series of key events. On September 11, 2001 the United States has suffered an unprecedented terrorist attack, which was followed by the declaration of the global war on terrorism and the military intervention in Afghanistan. Then it came NATO 'big bang' enlargement to the East and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

All these developments have caused a fundamental reassessment of the international system's agenda, including the policy agenda in Eurasia. Though it is difficult to define which of them has posed the major challenge to the Eurasian status quo, NATO eastward expansion is of particular importance as it has influenced Eurasian strategic environment in several dimensions.

In a time when conventional and unconventional security threats (coming mainly from beyond Europe's borders) are overlapping, there is a strong need of viable international organizations capable to deter destabilization, interstate tensions and even armed conflicts. Therefore, NATO eastward enlargement is historically important act that could prove to be critical for effective conflict prevention and for maintaining stability in the whole Eurasian space. It increases the Alliance's capacity to more effectively influence the complex ties between Eurasian states, while remaining a major forum that integrates the countries of Central and East Europe into a broader Euro-Atlantic security framework. Finally, this round of enlargement will inevitably help the Alliance look beyond Europe to

⁸ Du, Youkang, Internationalization of Afghanistan's Civil War and Its Impacts, in Zhang, X. and Gancheng Zhao, eds. *The Post Cold War World*, Shanghai: Shanghai Institute for International Studies, 2000, p. 315.

⁹ See Zhao, Yueyao *Pivot or Periphery? Xinjiang's Regional Development*, "Asian Ethnicity", Vol. 2, No2, September 2001.

meet new challenges and advance the strategic vision for the Alliance in the 21st century agreed to at NATO Prague Summit.

Though NATO is not anymore an alliance founded on coherent geopolitical interests and worldviews, its enlargement has been the defining factor in the European security landscape. To keep its role as provider of collective security and as a leader of peace and stability operations, a significantly enlarged Alliance will have to find new ways to organize its decision making and operations if it is to maintain consensus and flexibility. It will need to take concrete steps to develop a cohesive vision and strategy for managing its new relationship with Russia, address the future of the Partnership for Peace program and the relations with other non-members that share the Eurasian security space as well as for dealing with the future challenges that come from Greater Middle East.

The strategic reshuffling in Eurasia that NATO expansion has caused poses a serious challenge to the structure of the international system and to the dynamics of the processes within it. It has even made some analysts conclude that Eurasia is gradually losing its role of the center of world power. Whether this is a valid statement or not remains an open question.