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Adversarial conventional arms control in Europe: the quest for peace

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From conventional arms control to war

What role did conventional arms control (CAC) agreements, their failures, and the failure to update or replace them, play in Russia's decision to invade Ukraine? Throughout the fall and into the winter of 2021, Russian forces massed along Ukraine's borders along Crimea, separatist eastern Ukraine, and north along the Belarussian border.⁵⁶⁹ Whilst Russia denied it intended to invade Ukraine, it delivered two separate proposals to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States (US) in December 2021. While falling short of ultimata⁵⁷⁰ - namely because Russia was not threatening an invasion - they nonetheless took on the character of ultimata, especially in demanding various measures in the areas of arms control and security. It is uncertain if the proposals were serious, or their expected rejection was merely a Russian justification for the forthcoming invasion⁵⁷¹ (which they denied they intended, somewhat complicating the recipients' considerations of the demands). In any case, both the US and NATO spurned most of the proposals' central elements including rescinding NATO's open-door policy, or "the presence of nuclear weapons, troops or conventional arms in NATO countries"⁵⁷² in January 2022, although offering to continue discussions to develop "reciprocal agreements," co-operation in areas of confidence and security building measures (CSBMs), and controls on land-based missiles.⁵⁷³ On 24 February 2022, Russia launched its large-scale "special military operation."⁵⁷⁴

There were many reasons why Russia invaded Ukraine, many of which were intertwined such as Ukraine's sudden change of government in the Maidan Revolution of

⁵⁶⁸ This chapter is based on the article by Lippert, William. "How Conventional Arms Control Failures Caused the Russo-Ukraine War." *Defense & Security Analysis*, January 17, 2024, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2024.2300889>. It was published online on 17 January 2024.

⁵⁶⁹ Becky Sullivan, "Russia's at War with Ukraine. Here's How We Got Here," *NPR*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/12/1080205477/history-ukraine-russia>.

⁵⁷⁰ In contrast, for example, the US issued a clear ultimatum to Baghdad prior to its invasion of Iraq in 2003.

⁵⁷¹ Steven Pifer, "Russia's Draft Agreements with NATO and the United States: Intended for Rejection?," *Brookings* (blog), December 21, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/21/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/>.

⁵⁷² Michael Crowley and David E. Sanger, "U.S. and NATO Respond to Putin's Demands as Ukraine Tensions Mount," *New York Times*, January 27, 2022.

⁵⁷³ Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."

⁵⁷⁴ Andrew Osborn and Polina Nikolskaya, "Russia's Putin Authorises 'special Military Operation' against Ukraine," *Reuters*, February 24, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/>.

2014,⁵⁷⁵ and Ukraine's gravitation towards the European Union (EU) and NATO.⁵⁷⁶ Russian President Putin, for example, viewed Ukraine as artificially separated from Russia.⁵⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Russia's invasion of Ukraine soon after the US and NATO did not accept Moscow's proposals suggests a close linkage between the two. At the end of January 2022, Putin emphasised that the US and NATO had not addressed Russia's three principle demands, all of which concerned NATO and its military capabilities.⁵⁷⁸ In a speech days after the invasion's launch, Putin stated, "the old treaties and agreements are no longer effective. Entreaties and requests do not help."⁵⁷⁹

By using a process tracing and counterfactual mixed methodology, this chapter makes the argument that the Russo-Ukraine War is in large part a result of failures of European conventional arms control (CAC) agreement proposals - what Kühn refers to as the decay of the co-operative arms control regime in Europe.⁵⁸⁰ This degradation of agreements began with the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty's decay and culminated in the US and NATO refusing to accept Russia's December 2021 demands. From the end of the Cold War through the Russo-Ukraine War, this chapter will argue that Russia has been seeking to obtain a symmetric balance of conventional military capabilities and power⁵⁸¹ with NATO to ensure its security principally through CAC agreements. This chapter also considers the Russo-Ukraine War in the context of broader war causation international relations (IR) theories, and suggests refinements based on the war's specific causes.

Causes of war and Putin's motivations

The literature on war causation is rich and a focus of IR theory. At a systemic level, some of

⁵⁷⁵ Russia referred to the Maidan Revolution as an 'anti-constitutional coup d'état'. Vladimir Putin, "English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy," Russia Matters, December 2015, <https://www.russiamatters.org/node/21421>.

⁵⁷⁶ Steven Pifer, "Ukraine: Looking Forward, Five Years after the Maidan Revolution," *Brookings* (blog), February 22, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/02/22/ukraine-looking-forward-five-years-after-the-maidan-revolution/>.

⁵⁷⁷ Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

⁵⁷⁸ Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."

⁵⁷⁹ Vladimir Putin, "Transcript of Vladimir Putin's Televised Address on Ukraine," *Bloomberg.Com*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>.

⁵⁸⁰ Kühn, *The Rise and Fall of Cooperative Arms Control in Europe*, 2020.

⁵⁸¹ This is distinct from the strategic nuclear balance, which still holds due to bilateral agreements between the US and Russia. For brevity, conventional military power and capabilities balance will be shortened to military balance. The strategic nuclear balance and tactical nuclear weapons are outside the scope of this chapter as they do not normally fall under CAC agreements and assessments of the conventional military balance. Moreover, up until November 2022, New START was still in effect.

these include the nature of the anarchic system⁵⁸² or misperception.⁵⁸³ Refining the causes further, scholars have noted standing, security, revenge, and interest;⁵⁸⁴ territory, dominance, hostile nationalisms and other ideologies;⁵⁸⁵ or commitment problems, uncertainty and incentives to misrepresent, and divisibility problems.⁵⁸⁶ Other contributors to war, especially when an adversarial relationship exists, include offensive dominance;⁵⁸⁷ territorial proximity;⁵⁸⁸ optimism in victory, first move advantage; state's belief that its relative power is declining, compelling it to attack others to halt the trend;⁵⁸⁹ arms racing;⁵⁹⁰ and arms control failure.⁵⁹¹ This chapter proposes that arms racing and arms control failure are the Russo-Ukraine War's main causes.

While these general causes for war are valid and insightful, they are largely too broad to determine which specific policies compelled Russia to invade Ukraine - which because of the system of governance in Russia fundamentally means: why did Putin decide to invade Ukraine? Understanding the main policy motivations for the invasion is important for preventing a future conflict with Russia. There are many challenges to identifying all of Putin's motivations, and then determining which weighed the most in his decision. The challenges are due to two main factors: first, in the course of over twenty years; and especially in the last five, Putin has bombarded the public and diplomatic space with many complaints and concerns which can be assessed as invasion motivations. Second, especially given the contemporaneity of the invasion, objective insights from Putin and his leadership and archival information is unavailable. This leaves public documentation as the primary source to determine motivations, complemented by scholarly and expert analysis.

Putin's motivations for invading Ukraine fall into three general categories: responding to the adversarial relationship with the US and NATO; resolving Ukraine-specific issues; and threats to Putin's rule in Russia. These three categories, however, are intertwined. For example, a

⁵⁸² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979).

⁵⁸³ Jervis, "Arms Control, Stability, and Causes of War," Winter 1991.

⁵⁸⁴ Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*.

⁵⁸⁵ Jervis, "Arms Control, Stability, and Causes of War," Winter 1991.

⁵⁸⁶ Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War."

⁵⁸⁷ Blagden, "When Does Competition Become Conflict?"

⁵⁸⁸ Vasquez, "Distinguishing Rivals That Go to War from Those That Do Not."

⁵⁸⁹ Van Evera, *Causes of War*.

⁵⁹⁰ Gibler, Rider, and Hutchison, "Taking Arms Against a Sea of Troubles: Conventional Arms Races During Periods of Rivalry"; Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous? Rational versus Suboptimal Arming"; Rider, Findley, and Diehl, "Just Part of the Game?"

⁵⁹¹ Jervis, "Arms Control, Stability, and Causes of War," Winter 1991.

strong US/NATO could threaten Putin's rule by facilitating regime change, as it did in Libya.⁵⁹² Specific Ukrainian issues, such as the maintenance of a pro-West government in Kyiv which brought the country closer to NATO and its prosperity might have encouraged anti-Putin elements in Russia. Thus, changing Kyiv's government, or annexing the country in entirety, would (in Putin's view) address many of his concerns. Nonetheless, questions might be more specifically posed about what exactly in the rivalry with US/NATO did Putin find unacceptable? What issues within Ukraine did Putin wish to change? What specific policies did Putin feel might have undermined his rule? Table 16 below suggests a list of motivations with selected sources and suggests the broader category of issues that they fall into.

⁵⁹² "Russia Military Power Report: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations" (US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), 2017).

Table 16: Putin's war motivations

Motivation	Category	Sources
Changing Kyiv government	Internal Ukrainian issues, US/NATO Competition, Strengthening Putin's Rule	• Putin's February 2022 Televised Address on Ukraine⁵⁹³ • Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁵⁹⁴ • Myerson and Borer, "Perspectives on Ukraine and the Russian Invasion"⁵⁹⁵
Respond to NATO Expansion, and prevent further expansion (including Ukraine)	US/NATO Competition	• Putin's February 2022 Televised Address on Ukraine⁵⁹⁶ • Russian December 2021 proposals to the US and NATO • Mearsheimer, "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War." • Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."⁵⁹⁷
Russia-NATO Balance of forces	US/NATO Competition	• Putin's February 2022 Televised Address on Ukraine⁵⁹⁸ • Russian December 2021 proposals to the US and NATO • Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."⁵⁹⁹
Maintenance of Russia as a Great Power (Indivisible security)	US/NATO Competition	• Malmlöf et al., <i>Russia's War Against Ukraine and the West: The First Year</i>.⁶⁰⁰ • Likhotal, "The Root Causes of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine."⁶⁰¹ • Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁶⁰² • Russian December 2021 proposals to the US and NATO • Lebow, "International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War."⁶⁰³
Prevent NATO from attacking Russia	US/NATO Competition	• Mearsheimer, "The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War."

⁵⁹³ Vladimir Putin, "Transcript of Vladimir Putin's Televised Address on Ukraine," *Bloomberg.Com*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>.

⁵⁹⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Putin Gives Annual Address to Russia Transcript," *Rev* (blog), February 21, 2023, <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/putin-gives-annual-address-to-russia-transcript>.

⁵⁹⁵ Roger B. Myerson and Douglas Borer, "Perspectives on Ukraine and the Russian Invasion - Global ECCO - Naval Postgraduate School," Global ECCO, January 7, 2023, <https://nps.edu/web/ecco/w/perspectives-on-ukraine-and-the-russian-invasion>.

⁵⁹⁶ Putin, "Transcript."

⁵⁹⁷ Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."

⁵⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Transcript of Vladimir Putin's Televised Address on Ukraine," *Bloomberg.Com*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>.

⁵⁹⁹ Cameron, "After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia's Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis."

⁶⁰⁰ Tomas Malmlöf et al., *Russia's War Against Ukraine and the West: The First Year* (FOI, 2023).

⁶⁰¹ Alexander Likhotal, "The Root Causes of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," *Cadmus Journal* Report on War in Ukraine (July 2022): 1–10.

⁶⁰² Putin, "Putin Gives Annual Address to Russia Transcript."

⁶⁰³ Richard Ned Lebow, "International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War," *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 1 (2022): 111–35, <https://doi.org/10.1515/aug-2022-2021>.

Motivation	Category	Sources
		• Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁶⁰⁴ • Cameron, “After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia’s Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis.”⁶⁰⁵
Protect Putin’s rule in Russia (Domino theory)	US/NATO Competition	• Malmlöf et al., <i>Russia’s War Against Ukraine and the West: The First Year</i>.⁶⁰⁶ • Lebow, “International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War.”⁶⁰⁷
Pre-emption of an attack against Russia (including Crimea and eastern Ukraine) by Ukrainian armed forces	Ukraine-specific Issues	• Putin’s February 2022 Televised Address on Ukraine⁶⁰⁸ • Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁶⁰⁹
Protect Russians in Ukraine (Donbass, Luhansk, and Crimea)	Ukraine-specific Issues	• Putin’s February 2022 Televised Address on Ukraine⁶¹⁰ • Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁶¹¹
Combat Ukrainian “fascism”	Ukraine-specific Issues	• Putin February 2023 Annual Address to Russia⁶¹²
Fear of democratization	Ukraine-specific Issues	• Dickinson, “How Putin’s fear of democracy convinced him to invade Ukraine”⁶¹³ • Lebow, “International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War.”⁶¹⁴
Territorial expansion	Strengthening Putin’s Rule	• Bostock, “Putin Undermined His Own Rationale for Invading Ukraine, Saying That the War Is to Expand Russian Territory.”⁶¹⁵
Rallying around the flag / shoring up domestic support	Strengthening Putin’s Rule	• Greene and Robertson, “Putin’s Rule Depends on Creating Foreign Enemies — and Domestic ‘Traitors.’”⁶¹⁶
Illegitimacy of Ukrainian Statehood	Strengthening Putin’s Rule	• Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”⁶¹⁷

⁶⁰⁴ Putin, “Putin Gives Annual Address to Russia Transcript.”

⁶⁰⁵ Cameron, “After U.S. & NATO Reject Russia’s Proposals, Outlook for Ukraine Is Grim. But Normandy Format Talks Still Offer a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis.”

⁶⁰⁶ Malmlöf et al., *Russia’s War Against Ukraine and the West: The First Year*.

⁶⁰⁷ Lebow, “International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War.”

⁶⁰⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Transcript of Vladimir Putin’s Televised Address on Ukraine,” *Bloomberg.Com*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>.

⁶⁰⁹ Putin, “Putin Gives Annual Address to Russia Transcript.”

⁶¹⁰ Vladimir Putin, “Transcript of Vladimir Putin’s Televised Address on Ukraine,” *Bloomberg.Com*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>.

⁶¹¹ Putin, “Putin Gives Annual Address to Russia Transcript.”

⁶¹² Putin.

⁶¹³ Peter Dickinson, “How Putin’s Fear of Democracy Convinced Him to Invade Ukraine,” *Atlantic Council* (blog), March 6, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-putins-fear-of-democracy-convinced-him-to-invade-ukraine/>.

⁶¹⁴ Lebow, “International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War.”

⁶¹⁵ Bill Bostock, “Putin Undermined His Own Rationale for Invading Ukraine, Saying That the War Is to Expand Russian Territory,” *Business Insider*, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-says-ukraine-war-seize-land-russia-undermines-rationale-2022-6>.

⁶¹⁶ Samuel A. Greene and Graeme B. Robertson, “Putin’s Rule Depends on Creating Foreign Enemies — and Domestic ‘Traitors,’” *Washington Post*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/02/24/putin-ukraine-invasion-domestic-support-strategy/>.

⁶¹⁷ Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

Motivation	Category	Sources
		• Knispel, “Fact-Checking Putin’s Claims That Ukraine and Russia Are ‘One People.’”⁶¹⁸

Source: Author’s research and analysis

Process tracing and counterfactual methodology

According to Collier,⁶¹⁹ ‘process tracing is “a fundamental tool of qualitative analysis” based on qualitative data for within-case analysis. The data is composed of events “over time” to establish a “causal inference.”’⁶²⁰ Four tests can be applied to each possible causal inference to ascertain the likelihood that the cause is properly identified. The methodology and this case, however, cannot decisively eliminate any cause, nor unequivocally establish each cause’s weight. It does not consider, though does not discount, other reasons which remain unknown due to Russian document secrecy, or that their only proof lies primarily within Putin’s own mind and private discussions.

Counterfactual methodology is imprecise at best given the impossibility of knowing with any certainty how events would alternatively play out in different circumstances. Nonetheless as Levy⁶²¹ states, “Counterfactuals play an essential role in common historiographical debates about whether a particular outcome was inevitable, or contingent. The most effective way of supporting an argument that an outcome was contingent is to demonstrate that a slight change could easily have led to a different outcome.” Or, in this case study, that CAC failure caused the Russo-Ukraine War, and that the war would not have occurred in the absence of CAC failures (in other words, if a comprehensive Europe-wide CAC agreement between Russia and NATO that met Moscow’s demands had been signed and entered into force, Russia would not have invaded Ukraine).

Military balance and indivisible security

There are two interconnected concepts which drove Russia’s quest for a satisfactory European CAC architecture: a stable or favourable military balance and indivisible security. The military balance is roughly and subjectively determined by assessing factors such as the quality,

⁶¹⁸ Sandra Knispel, “Fact-Checking Putin’s Claims That Ukraine and Russia Are ‘One People,’” *University of Rochester News Center* (blog), March 3, 2022, <https://www.rochester.edu/newscenter/ukraine-history-fact-checking-putin-513812/>.

⁶¹⁹ Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” 823–30.

⁶²⁰ Collier, 824.

⁶²¹ Levy, “Counterfactuals and Case Studies,” 630.

quantity, disposition, firepower, and mobility of military forces between Russia and NATO. Assessing and comparing military forces to include their quantity, quality, command and control, deployability, and mobilisation times, which is at the heart of assessing the military balance, is at best an estimative process due to unknowns especially related to combat performance,⁶²² yet nations such as Russia must still assess the military balance, especially with NATO, to determine their strengths and weaknesses⁶²³ in order to prioritise defence acquisition, strategy, and other defence and national security policies.

Indivisible security, in Russia's view, refers to the notion that states who may have an adversarial or rival relationship should not increase their security at the cost of the other, with security primarily being defined by military capability.⁶²⁴ The concept of indivisible security has evolved over time, and was first articulated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act accepted by all members of the OSCE (which includes Russia and all NATO members). The question of indivisible security in Europe has been a recurring theme in Russia's complaints about the post-Cold War order. And while security can be interpreted to incorporate any number of areas including energy, economics, and transnational crime, Russia's own statements and CAC proposals indicate that they define security predominately in terms of the military balance. Russia stated that indivisible security is one of its main goals in the Kremlin's national security strategies of 2009,⁶²⁵ 2015,⁶²⁶ and 2021.

As the military balance has increasingly shifted in favour of NATO, especially with NATO expansion, from the mid-1990s to the present, Russia has viewed its security situation in increasingly unfavourable terms. That is, with each increase in NATO military capability, Russia perceived that its capability comparatively decreased despite increased spending and

⁶²² Bastian Giegerich and James Hackett, *Military Capabilities in Europe: A Framework for Assessing the Qualitative Dimension* (The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 2022); Peter Roberts and Sidharth Kaushal, "Strategic Net Assessment: Opportunities and Pitfalls," *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 6 (December 2018): 66–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1562025>; Thomas M Skypek, "Evaluating Military Balances Through the Lens of Net Assessment: History and Application," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 25; James A Zanella, *Combat Power Analysis Is Combat Power Density* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2012).

⁶²³ Reach, Kilambi, and Cozad, *Russian Assessments and Applications of the Correlation of Forces and Means*.

⁶²⁴ Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, "The Indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic Security" (OSCE, February 4, 2010); Alexander Graef and Ulrich Kühn, "A Letter from Moscow: (In)Divisible Security and Helsinki 2.0," War on the Rocks, February 14, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/a-letter-from-moscow-indivisible-security-and-helsinki-2-0/>; Kvartalnov, "Indivisible Security and Collective Security Concepts."

⁶²⁵ Vladimir Putin, "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020," Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Kingdom of Thailand, May 12, 2009, <https://thailand.mid.ru/en/national-security-strategy-of-the-russian-federation>.

⁶²⁶ Putin, "English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy."

other defence reforms which were another means to address the military imbalance.⁶²⁷ One of Russia's principle means of redressing the growing military imbalance was through CAC, which arguably started successfully with the 1991 CFE Treaty. However, the balance continuously shifted against Russia as NATO expanded territorially and in terms of military capabilities, and without a sufficient CAC mechanism to replace the Cold War-era agreement. With Russia's attempts to resolve the imbalance through CAC having failed, they resorted to invading Ukraine. Had Russia successfully defeated Ukraine, the military balance would have been immediately altered with the Ukrainian military's capabilities firmly in Russia's hands, and Ukrainian satellite state status, or outright annexation would have given Russia more ways to threaten NATO such as new invasion routes, the ability to hold more NATO capitals and other targets at risk of missile and air attacks, and control of more Black Sea coastline. Moscow and the West faced an indivisibility, or zero-sum, problem with Ukraine.

CAC essentials

This chapter defines adversarial CAC as an attempt to establish and fix a certain distribution (equal or unequal) of conventional military power between two or more states through a formal agreement(s). CAC agreements often commence with states' considerations of the security dilemma, deterrence, and the offense-defence balance. In brief, the security dilemma exists when a state; or group of states establish a certain military posture for defence, but at the risk of making adversaries or potential adversaries feel threatened by this military posture. If the dilemma is not resolved, an arms race can ensue in which neither side feels secure which can eventually lead to conflict.⁶²⁸ Deterrence is the maintenance of a military force and other tools of national power to disincentivise an adversary from attacking by making them determine that such an attack will either not result in obtaining the desired political-military goals, or obtaining such goals is too costly.⁶²⁹ The offense-defence balance (ODB) is a key driver of the security dilemma and deterrence, and refers to whether and which weapon systems provide an offensive or defensive advantage. This is critical because, in principle, a force posture with a strong defence advantage will deter, especially if the opponent lacks any offensive advantage, but not provoke an adversary into arms racing, or attacking.⁶³⁰ ODB theory is key to determining which

⁶²⁷ Konrad Muzyka, *Russian Forces in the Western Military District*, CNA Occasional Paper (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2021); Susanne Oxenstierna et al., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective - 2019* (FOI, 2019); Clint Reach et al., *Competing with Russia Militarily: Implications of Conventional and Nuclear Conflicts*, Perspective (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE330>.

⁶²⁸ Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy."

⁶²⁹ Haffa, "The Future of Conventional Deterrence"; Mazarr, Chan, et al., *What Deters and Why*.

⁶³⁰ Haffa, "The Future of Conventional Deterrence."

weapons systems might or might not be limited or prohibited in a CAC treaty.

To summarise from Russia's perspective, the military balance which is strongly in NATO's favour gives Russia a sense of insecurity, and NATO expansion and growing military capability since the mid-1990s has come at the cost of Russia's security despite legally and politically binding agreements (discussed below) that Europe would be guided by the notion of indivisible security. The military imbalance is due NATO's failure to mitigate the security dilemma (their attempts to maintain a sufficient defence is viewed by Russia as threatening), undermines Russia's ability to deter a NATO surprise attack, and is based on NATO's possession of "offensive" weapons. Eliminating the threat of a surprise attack is one of the key goals of European CAC agreements since 1990.⁶³¹ CAC is a means of addressing concerns about the military balance⁶³² and a successful CAC agreement would, Russia hoped, reduce or curtailed NATO's capabilities; a point specifically made by Putin in 2014,⁶³³ but their failure compelled Moscow to find other means to obtain security.

Russia's failed quest for security through conventional arms control

Russia's first major success in obtaining "indivisible" security was with the signing and then entry into force of the CFE Treaty.⁶³⁴ Signed in 1990 while there was still a Soviet Union and Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO, commonly referred to as the Warsaw Pact), the treaty was history's largest and most complex CAC agreement and entered into force at the start of the post-Cold War era in 1992.⁶³⁵ The treaty's purposes included reducing the likelihood of a surprise attack by significantly reducing and limiting five major areas of weapons: tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery pieces, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters (collectively referred to as Treaty Limited Equipment (TLE))⁶³⁶ to equal numbers between NATO and (former) WTO members. The treaty also included, especially in conjunction with the Open

⁶³¹ "Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe"; "Agreement On Adaptation Of The Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe" (Istanbul, November 19, 1999). Both state that signatories are committed to 'eliminating, as a matter of high priority, the capability for launching surprise attack and for initiating large-scale offensive action in Europe'. When surprise attacks may be successful for either side, the 'first move' advantage creates instability.

⁶³² Müller and Albert, "Whose Balance?" Muller and Albert argue that arms control agreements are 'associational balancing' processes, in which parties 'agree on a joint mechanism for creating and maintaining a certain distribution of power that they consider to be in balance', p. 112.

⁶³³ Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," President of Russia, October 24, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/copy/46860>.

⁶³⁴ "Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe."

⁶³⁵ "CFE Chronology: Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty," accessed April 4, 2022, <https://nuke.fas.org/control/cfe/chron.htm>.

⁶³⁶ The CFE Treaty also limits armoured vehicle launched bridges to 740 per group of state parties (bloc), though the A/CFE does not uphold these limits and only requires that their numbers within the AoA be reported.

Skies Treaty (OST), unprecedented monitoring and verification measures.

From the Soviet Union and then Russia's perspective, the treaty attempted to resolve the security dilemma by limiting surprise-attack facilitating offensive weapons, establishing a system of geographic zonal restrictions which reduced the number of opposing forces near the common NATO-WTO borders, and promoting deterrence by not limiting defensive weapons, and not controlling strategic reserves (forces far from the common border areas, including in North America and east of the Urals). Whilst there is no explicit mention of indivisible security, the text in the preamble states that the treaty's main purpose was:

... establishing a secure and stable balance of conventional armed forces in Europe at lower levels than heretofore, of eliminating disparities prejudicial to stability and security and of eliminating, as a matter of high priority, the capability for launching surprise attack and for initiating large-scale offensive action in Europe.

Thus, the CFE Treaty created the precedent of, and a model for, indivisible security through conventional military force balancing.

The CFE Treaty was amended in 1992 to limit military personnel (referred to as CFE 1-A,⁶³⁷ which is politically rather than legally binding)⁶³⁸ and shifting to a nation-based system instead of the bloc-based system originally set out in the CFE Treaty. The treaty gave Russia the largest number of personnel, at 1,450,000, and at the same time excluded personnel outside of the area of application (AoA).⁶³⁹ At this time, while WTO had dissolved, NATO was later to expand eastward. By most signatories accepting mutual limits,⁶⁴⁰ the concept of indivisible security was upheld and there were no changes to Russia's deterrence.

By the mid-1990s, Russia confronted not only a strengthening Western alliance, but also uprisings in the Caucasus. Zonal limits legally limited Russia's ability to respond both to the violence in its south as well its ability to move forces within its territory even for deterrence; limits which had been set when the USSR had existed. After two years of negotiations, the CFE Flank Agreement⁶⁴¹ was signed in May 1996 and entered into force in May 1997. The new

⁶³⁷ "Concluding Act Of The Negotiation On Personnel Strength Of Conventional Armed Forces In Europe."

⁶³⁸ "Concluding Act Of The Negotiation On Personnel Strength Of Conventional Armed Forces In Europe."

⁶³⁹ The AoA was referred to as the Atlantic to the Urals (ATTU) and covers the area from Europe's Atlantic coast to the Urals (west to east), and Norway to Türkiye (north to south). Thus, it excludes north America (Canada and the US), all of Russia east of the Urals, and any military forces deployed or based in areas outside of the AoA.

⁶⁴⁰ Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova did not commit to limits, but their omission was unlikely viewed as threatening to Russia.

⁶⁴¹ "Final Document Of The First Conference To Review The Operation Of The Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe And The Concluding Act Of The Negotiation On Personnel Strength" (Vienna, May 31, 1996).

agreement improved Russia's sense of security, upholding their notion of indivisible security and increasing their ability to deter threats. From Russia's perspective, the security dilemma remained mitigated as the agreement did not in any way change NATO members' TLE limits. Both sides retained their ability to defend without increasing NATO's ability to attack.

With NATO expansion on the horizon,⁶⁴² Russia and NATO signed the Founding Act in May 1997, just weeks after the CFE Flank Agreement entered into force. The Founding Act⁶⁴³ committed NATO to abstain from "permanent stationing of substantial military forces" in central and eastern Europe while Russia would "exercise similar constraint ... in Europe."⁶⁴⁴ Whilst the definition of permanent and substantial would later become a source of disagreement, the Founding Act once again reiterated the concept of indivisible security,⁶⁴⁵ and this agreement was a mutual attempt at retaining the military balance despite forthcoming NATO expansion. The Founding Act also emphasised key areas of agreement to adapt the CFE Treaty. The promise of not positioning NATO forces, other than those native to each member state, not only preserved Russia's deterrence, it also gave Russian an offensive advantage as it could, theoretically, mass forces within CFE limits at a much higher ratio than any of its western neighbours who would be constrained by the Founding Act from having comparable forces on their own territory. While this offensive advantage created a security dilemma it was, at least for the time being, in Russia's favour; that is, NATO's future expansion would not threaten Russia while Russia would be in a better position to threaten NATO. NATO expansion was neither Russia's preference, nor was it in their interests,⁶⁴⁶ but the Founding Act at least upheld the notion of indivisible security with NATO promising, implicitly, not to increase NATO's offensive military capabilities in ways that would threaten Russia.

With the WTO's demise, NATO's expansion, and other eastern European countries gravitating towards the West, all CFE Treaty parties agreed to revisit the treaty, adapting it to the new geopolitical situation in Europe. In November 1999, the Adapted CFE Treaty

⁶⁴² States that were not a NATO member were considered for membership throughout 1996 and 1997, with accession talks beginning with Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in July 1997.

⁶⁴³ "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation," May 27, 1997.

⁶⁴⁴ "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation," art. IV.

⁶⁴⁵ Article I states: 'Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the EuroAtlantic community is indivisible...'

⁶⁴⁶ "NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard," National Security Archives, March 16, 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard>.

(A/CFE)⁶⁴⁷ was signed by thirty countries which included all of the original CFE signatories, plus former USSR states at the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Summit in Istanbul, Türkiye. At the same time, the Charter for European Security was signed by all 54 members of the OSCE.

As with the CFE Treaty, the A/CFE Treaty was a broad, complicated treaty meant to limit the number of conventional weapons in Europe. It dropped the geographic zonal system in favour of limits set for each state party, with one limit applying to the TLE the state party could have on its own territory from its own forces, and an additional limit on the amount of foreign TLE on their national territory (national and territorial ceilings, respectively). The A/CFE's treaty retained the five categories of TLE, though territorial ceilings only applied to tanks, armoured combat vehicles, and artillery because attack helicopters and combat aircraft were considered too mobile for effective monitoring and verification. Russia was apportioned by far the largest amount of TLE for any country⁶⁴⁸ - and as with the CFE Treaty, it could still hold uncounted equipment outside of the AoA east of the Urals. One of the key elements of the A/CFE was its articles permitting other states to join the treaty - an issue of high significance to Russia as the Baltic States had not joined the CFE Treaty.⁶⁴⁹

The A/CFE Treaty was a new mechanism for Russia to prohibit NATO from building up forces along Russia's borders, especially if and when the Baltic states joined the treaty.⁶⁵⁰ The expected limitations on national and NATO forces in the Baltic states⁶⁵¹ coupled with agreed limits in existing state parties such as Norway and Türkiye retained Moscow's perception of security through deterrence. Just as importantly, the A/CFE Treaty was an honest attempt on the part of NATO to respond to Russia's genuine concerns about alliance expansion by retaining the CFE's central elements, but adjusting the limits to reflect the changed

⁶⁴⁷ "Agreement On Adaptation Of The Treaty On Conventional Armed Forces In Europe." One senior Russian official stated that the CFE Treaty would 'vanish' as soon as any Eastern European country joined NATO, Michael Sheehan and Rosemary Durward, "Conventional Arms Control and Security in Europe," *Defense Analysis* 12, no. 1 (1996): 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07430179608405678>.

⁶⁴⁸ For example, Russia's TLE for tanks was 6350, with the next largest holding allocated to Germany at 3444.

⁶⁴⁹ One of President Putin's justifications for suspending the CFE Treaty was that it did not include the Baltic states, thus there were no treaty limits on the size or composition of NATO forces in those countries.

"Information on the Decree "On Suspending the Russian Federation's Participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and Related International Agreements"," Office of the President of Russia, January 14, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3327>.

⁶⁵⁰ Mark R. Wilcox, "Russia and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty)—A Paradigm Change?," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 4 (2011): 567–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2011.624456>.

⁶⁵¹ The TLE for the Baltic states could not be set until they applied and acceded to join the treaty.

geopolitical situation.⁶⁵² The new system of national and territorial TLE limits, as well as the potential to include new signatories, upheld the concept of indivisible security by locking in a relatively even military balance and with all state parties accepting limitations, monitoring, and verification.

The 1999 Charter for European Security⁶⁵³ was more of a political declaration without specific CAC measures, but made two critical statements that reinforced Russia's existing vision for Russian and European security in a continent of growing NATO military power (which had recently been demonstrated in the NATO campaign against the Former-Yugoslavia in support of separatist Kosovo⁶⁵⁴). First, the charter expressed support for "the formation of a common and indivisible security space." Second, signatories agreed that they would "not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States." Taken together, these two statements reinforced Russia's view that NATO expansion should not change the military balance and result in a net loss of Russia's military power.

By 2007, the security and geopolitical situation in Europe had changed significantly since 1992. Putin had been in power since 2000, NATO had added 10 new members including the three Baltic states, and against Russia's wishes the US had invaded Iraq, changed its government, and occupied the country.⁶⁵⁵ In the area of CAC, ratification of the A/CFE had been stalled since its signature in 1999 mainly due to disputes over Russia's continued military presence in Georgia and Moldova against their governments' will.⁶⁵⁶ In January 2007, the Kremlin announced it was "suspending" its participation in the CFE Treaty due to "exceptional circumstances," giving six reasons including the absence of the Baltic states from the treaty and a significantly increased military capability on the part of NATO due to expansion.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵² Jeffrey D McCausland, "NATO and Russian Approaches To Adapting the CFE Treaty," Arms Control Association, Undated, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-08/features/nato-russian-approaches-adapting-cfe-treaty>.

⁶⁵³ OSCE, "Istanbul Document 1999," November 19, 1999, sec. Charter for European Security.

⁶⁵⁴ Russia expressed its disapproval of NATO use of force 'beyond the zone of its responsibility without the sanction of the UN Security Council' in "National Security Concept of the Russian Federation," December 17, 1999, <https://nuke.fas.org/guide/russia/doctrine/gazeta012400.htm>. President Putin used the example of the Kosovo conflict when he justified the invasion of Ukraine, wherein he stated that Russia's adversaries failed to consider 'the interests of all states' when, among several military actions, they conducted 'a bloody military operation was waged against Belgrade, without the UN Security Council's sanction but with combat aircraft and missiles used in the heart of Europe'. Putin, "Transcript."

⁶⁵⁵ Thomas Ambrosio, "The Russo-American Dispute over the Invasion of Iraq: International Status and the Role of Positional Goods," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 8 (December 2005): 1189–1210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500351357>. Putin raised the issue of the US 2003 invasion of Iraq in his speech justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Putin, "Transcript."

⁶⁵⁶ "Russia Suspends Participation In CFE Treaty," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 12, 2007, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1079256.html>.

⁶⁵⁷ "Information on the Decree "On Suspending the Russian Federation's Participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and Related International Agreements".

Putin's statement specifically refers to the CFE Treaty's establishment of a military balance and Russia's view that this had been undermined with NATO expansion and failure to implement the A/CFE Treaty. In other words, Russia made the case that the A/CFE's non-implementation had resulted in a security environment where NATO's gains were at the cost of Russia's relative military power (contrary to the agreements of indivisible security). Though Russia did not explicitly express concerns about its deterrence, its objections to increased NATO military power and US military presence in former WTO countries, Putin's demand that NATO lower TLE limits collectively, abolish flank restrictions within Russia, and agree on the definition of "substantial combat forces," suggest that Moscow saw its conventional deterrence eroding.

In 2009, Russia proposed the European Security Treaty (EST)⁶⁵⁸ in another attempt to address NATO's clear military and political superiority (NATO had just welcomed its latest members, Albania and Croatia, months before the EST proposal was released).⁶⁵⁹ Once again, Russia insisted on indivisible security, with the proposal stating that "Parties shall co-operate with each other on the basis of the principles of indivisible, equal and undiminished security."⁶⁶⁰ And that "A Party to the Treaty shall not undertake, participate in or support any actions or activities affecting significantly security of any other Party or Parties to the Treaty."⁶⁶¹ Though the proposal does not offer any specific CAC measures, it does state that, "A Party to the Treaty shall not allow the use of its territory and shall not use the territory of any other Party with the purpose of preparing or carrying out an armed attack against any other Party or Parties to the Treaty or any other actions affecting significantly security of any other Party or Parties to the Treaty."⁶⁶² While this is a vague sentence, Russia could subjectively interpret that any NATO military forces outside of their state of origin were prohibited because it affects Russia's security. Here again, Russia was attempting to create; or return to a military balance that was at least symmetric, if not in its favour. Permanently militarily handicapping eastern European countries would have helped Russia retain its deterrence. NATO countries largely rejected the proposal immediately due to the constraints it would place on the alliance.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁸ Dmitri Medvedev, "The Draft of the European Security Treaty," President of Russia, November 29, 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>.

⁶⁵⁹ Patrick Nopens, *A New Security Architecture for Europe?: Russian Proposal and Western Reactions*, Security Policy Brief 3 (EGMONT Royal Institute for International Relations, 2009).

⁶⁶⁰ Medvedev, "The Draft of the European Security Treaty," art. 1.

⁶⁶¹ Medvedev, art. 2.1.

⁶⁶² Medvedev, art. 2.3.

⁶⁶³ Brad L Hull, *Russia's Proposal for a European Security Treaty: Origins and Prospects* (Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School, 2019); Ulrich Kühn, "Medvedev's Proposals for a New European

In 2014, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea and supported separatists in eastern Ukraine, removing much of the region from Kyiv's control. NATO's response included deploying rotational forces to eastern Europe, including the Baltic states.⁶⁶⁴ In 2015, Russia suspended its last vestige of CFE involvement when it withdrew from the treaty's Joint Consultative Group (JCG) in which they had remained after the 2007 suspension in order to retain some voice in the treaty's implementation, and as a means to continue pressing their goal of A/CFE implementation.⁶⁶⁵ This is not to say that Russia was determined to turn their backs on CAC, with Putin stating in its 2015 National Security Strategy that it sought the "improvement of the mechanisms of arms control specified by international treaties" with the US.⁶⁶⁶ Soon after, Putin stated in his 2016 *Foreign Policy Concept* that "the Russian Federation seeks to bring the conventional arms control regime in Europe in line with current realities."⁶⁶⁷

In the next blow to CAC in Europe, in August 2019, the US announced its withdrawal⁶⁶⁸ from the bilateral Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty which had been signed by the US and USSR in 1987 and entered into force the following year. Though the treaty was focused on land-based shorter and intermediate range nuclear missiles, because it was difficult to differentiate conventional and nuclear missiles in this class, both types of missiles and their launchers were banned.⁶⁶⁹ The US withdrew because it suspected Russia of violating the treaty by attempting to develop a treaty-prohibited conventional land-based cruise missile system.⁶⁷⁰

Security Order: A Starting Point or the End of the Story?," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.09.2.01>. Russia's goal to obtain what would be, in effect, a veto over NATO decision making is covered extensively in Kühn, *The Rise and Fall of Cooperative Arms Control in Europe*, 2020. If Russia had been granted such authority either in the a NATO forum or in the OSCE (if NATO policy became subject to OSCE decision), Russia would have been able to manage the military balance in the absence of a formal CAC agreement. However, broader issues of security governance in Europe are beyond this chapter's scope.

⁶⁶⁴ Lanoszka, Alexander, Moens, Alexander, and Christian Leuprecht, eds., *Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence, 2017-2020*, NDC Research Papers Series 14 (Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College, 2020); Christian Leuprecht et al., "Leveraging the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Two Years On," in *The Riga Conference Papers 2019: NATO at 70 in the Baltic Sea Region* (Riga: Latvia Institute of International Affairs, 2019), <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/the-riga-conference-papers-2019-nato-at-70-in-the-baltic-sea-region-815>; Jüri Luik and Henrik Praks, *Boosting the Deterrent Effect of Allied Enhanced Forward Presence* (Tallinn, Estonia: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2017).

⁶⁶⁵ Wilcox, *The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and Russian Foreign and Security Policy (Dissertation)*.

⁶⁶⁶ Putin, "English Translation of the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy."

⁶⁶⁷ Vladimir Putin, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, November 30, 2016, https://www.rusemb.org.uk/rp_insight/.

⁶⁶⁸ Pompeo, "U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019."

⁶⁶⁹ Davis, "Lessons of the INF Treaty."

⁶⁷⁰ "Russia's Violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty," *United States Department of State* (blog), December 4, 2018, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/russias-violation-of-the-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty/>; "9M729 (SSC-8)," Missile Threat CSIS Missile Defense Project, March 31, 2022, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/ssc-8-novator-9m729/>.

As the agreement was bilateral, the US withdrawal automatically annulled the treaty.

Russia was likely developing the prohibited missile to obtain a new conventional military capability in order to counter NATO. As Kühn and Péczeli noted:

The assumption that Russia would need intermediate-range missiles primarily to counterbalance NATO's conventional superiority is not unfounded. In terms of the ability to project military power, Russia found itself in a comparative disadvantage at the end of the Cold War. While NATO extended its regional coverage, Russia lost many of its basing grounds and no longer had the capability to forward-deploy missiles in Europe.⁶⁷¹

The difference between NATO and Russian capabilities and requirements for land-based missiles is one of geography. A 500 km limit meant that Russia's land-based missiles would struggle to reach beyond eastern Germany, whilst NATO could hold all of Russia's important western areas such as Saint Petersburg, major Russian bases, and major units of Russia's most important Western Military District.⁶⁷² Longer range Russian missiles can target important ports, airbases, and most NATO member capitals. Russia's ability to target NATO transportation infrastructure is essential to delay and obstruct the inflow of reinforcements from North America.

The non-ultimatum ultimatums

From March 2021, Russia began massing troops along Ukraine's borders⁶⁷³ with close to 100,000 troops assembled by December 2021.⁶⁷⁴ On 17 December 2021, Russia delivered separate proposals to NATO and the US. They seemed then and appear now to be ultimatums, but lacking a concrete threat associated with their rejection, it is difficult to label them as such. The proposals were similar, but not identical, as discussed below.

The "Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and

⁶⁷¹ Ulrich Kühn and Anna Péczeli, "Russia, NATO and the INF Treaty," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 66–99.

⁶⁷² Muzyka, *Russian Forces in the Western Military District*. This Russian Order of Battle (OB) information predates the Russo-Ukraine War, and that in the near term Russian force strength, locations, and composition are in rapid flux due to losses and deployments.

⁶⁷³ Mykola Bielieskov, "The Russian and Ukrainian Spring 2021 War Scare" (Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), September 2021).

⁶⁷⁴ Pavel Polityuk, "Ukraine Sees No Sign of Russia Withdrawing Troops from Border," Reuters, December 16, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/exclusive-ukraine-sees-no-sign-russia-withdrawing-troops-border-2021-12-15/>.

member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”⁶⁷⁵ states “The Parties shall guide in their relations by the principles of cooperation, equal and indivisible security.” It then proposes several, specific CAC measures. Article 4 stated that NATO members “shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997.” This was essentially a ban on NATO forces deploying in any NATO member in central and eastern Europe. Article 7 further demands that, “The Parties that are member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization shall not conduct any military activity on the territory of Ukraine as well as other States in the Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia.” This broad and poorly defined ban (as which countries are part of each stated region are subjective) would be a significant restriction on NATO members.

As with past proposals and statements, Russia had raised the issue of indivisible security as a primary motivation and guide for CAC agreements and with this proposal they seem to seek to turn back the clock to 27 May 1997, the date of Founding Act’s signature with the implication that the changes in European security since that date have been to NATO’s benefit and Russia’s cost. “In the Russian view, NATO’s military activities in the Baltic region are not a response to a concrete Russian threat against the Baltic States, but are part of a larger strategy of confrontation with Russia intended to punish Russia for its actions in Ukraine.”⁶⁷⁶ As Piker notes, until the seizure of Crimea and conflict in Eastern Ukraine, “From 1997 to 2014, NATO deployed virtually no troops or equipment in new member states.”⁶⁷⁷ Putin had specifically objected to growing NATO military infrastructure near Russia.⁶⁷⁸

The broad prohibitions on NATO deployments and activities all around Russia’s borders, from Murmansk to Mongolia, would have greatly increased Russia’s deterrence as it would have been difficult for NATO to threaten Russia with any capability to attack, or counter-attack. This would also, from Russia’s perspective, mitigate the security dilemma as NATO member and other states’ bordering Russia would no longer threaten Russia with their force posture which would be more defensive in nature compared to one with a NATO presence. The offer of accepting limits on its own deployments within Russia indicates their appreciation of

⁶⁷⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry, “Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of The Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - Министерство Иностранных Дел Российской Федерации (Draft Proposal),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 17, 2021, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en.

⁶⁷⁶ Richter, *Sub-Regional Arms Control for the Baltics: What Is Desirable? What Is Feasible?*

⁶⁷⁷ Pifer, “Russia’s Draft Agreements with NATO and the United States.”

⁶⁷⁸ “Meeting of Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Russia,” President of Russia, July 19, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58037>.

the security dilemma, as such restrictions would reduce, even if only marginally, the extent to which Russian forces threatened NATO member states. The inclusion of “intermediate and short-range missiles”⁶⁷⁹ suggest that despite Russia’s violation of the INF Treaty, they may have determined that such missiles are offensive in nature, offering a first-strike capability that could be especially effective against airbases, command and control centres, and key transportation infrastructure such as bridges to support a surprise attack by debilitating an unprepared defender. This proposal (along with the one to the US) is the first time that a new, specific weapon system was formally proposed for limiting since the TLE categories were agreed for the CFE Treaty. Though the term offensive is not used to describe the missiles, deterrence tends to be upheld or even increased and the security dilemma mitigated when offensive systems are limited while defensive systems are not, thus shifting the adversaries’ offense-defence balance towards the defence.

Simultaneously with the proposal to NATO, Russia proposed the “Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees.”⁶⁸⁰ As with the proposal to NATO, the proposal to the US stated, “The Parties shall cooperate on the basis of principles of indivisible, equal and undiminished security.” This is further elaborated by stating that the US and Russia “shall not implement security measures adopted by each Party individually or in the framework of an international organization, military alliance or coalition that could undermine core security interests of the other Party.” Thereafter are several measures concerning US prohibitions of military activities and capabilities in non-NATO former Soviet states and mutual non-deployment of forces in foreign countries when they pose a threat to the other State party.

Russia also proposed that there be a mutual prohibition on “flying heavy bombers equipped for nuclear or non-nuclear armaments, or deploying surface warships of any type, including within the framework of international organisations, military alliances or coalitions, in the areas outside national airspace and national territorial waters respectively, from where

⁶⁷⁹ This chapter is assuming Russia meant ‘shorter-range’ missiles rather than ‘short’ range as both the INF Treaty and the December 2021 proposal to the US refer to shorter-range missiles; and banning short range missiles would not only be impractical and might have been counter to Russia’s interests as they tend to rely more on indirect fire compared to NATO forces, which rely on airpower for similar missions. Sebastien Roblin, “This Is How the Army Thinks Russia Would Wage War,” Asymmetric Warfare Group, April 9, 2019, <https://www.awg.army.mil/AWG-Contributions/AWG-Recruiting/Article-View/Article/1809312/this-is-how-the-army-thinks-russia-would-wage-war/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.awg.army.mil%2FAWG-Contributions%2FAWG-Recruiting%2FArticle-View%2FArticle%2F1809312%2Fthis-is-how-the-army-thinks-russia-would-wage-war%2F>.

⁶⁸⁰ Russian Foreign Ministry, “Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees,” December 17, 2021.

they can attack targets in the territory of the other Party.” Lastly, article 6 states that neither side would deploy ground-launched shorter and intermediate-range missiles within range of one another’s territories.

Taken as a whole, such measures (if accepted by the US) could go far in addressing the military balance, essentially removing significant elements of US firepower from Europe. This rebalancing would go a long way in increasing Russia’s deterrence and partly resolving the security dilemma by keeping at bay US forces (which Russia views as threatening). Russia was essentially committing to not threaten US territory with shorter and intermediate-range missiles, heavy bombers, or naval vessels as long as the US did not do so; though the offer was a bit disingenuous given that Russia poses a minimal conventional threat to US territory.⁶⁸¹

Reflecting Moscow’s concern since the Cold War over certain weapons systems that were not controlled by the CFE Treaty, they proposed prohibiting heavy bomber or naval ships “outside national airspace and national territorial waters”⁶⁸² which would clearly give Russia a significant military advantage vis-a-vis the US, as Russia could hold at risk, or attack innumerable NATO targets from within its territory thanks to long-range weapons whilst the US would struggle to target any of western Russia and defend eastern Europe with comparable weapons.

That Russia would obtain a significant strategic advantage with such an arrangement does not negate the underlying notion that naval vessels and heavy bombers pose a particularly threatening first strike, or offensive, advantage. Indeed, both US military campaigns in Iraq opened with the use of naval and heavy bomber land attacks targeting leadership and other command and control assets; and the 1999 conflict between NATO and Yugoslavia was won with airpower alone.⁶⁸³ While either weapon category could have been included in A/CFE negotiations, the A/CFE was an adaptation of the CFE rather than a fresh new look at CAC in

⁶⁸¹ This is not to say that it poses no threat; submarines could launch land attack missiles at the US, and Russian strategic bombers could target parts of the US, especially Alaska and parts of northern US. However, both capabilities entail significant risk in comparison to the US, which can much more freely operate its naval forces in the Baltic Sea and to a lesser extent the Black Sea, and can fly its bombers out of innumerable bases within Europe close to Russia.

⁶⁸² The feasibility and unprecedented restriction on naval ships and combat aircraft not being permitted to operate in a large swathe of international waters, as this proposal would mandate, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁶⁸³ “Where Are the Shooters? A History of the Tomahawk in Combat,” The Sextant, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/Recent/Article-View/Article/2686271/where-are-the-shooters-a-history-of-the-tomahawk-in-combat/http%3A%2F%2Fusnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil%2FRecent%2FArticle-View%2FArticle%2F2686271%2Fwhere-are-the-shooters-a-history-of-the-tomahawk-in-combat%2F>. This discusses the history of the sea-launched land attack history of the Tomahawk cruise missile. Grant provides a concise history of the B-2 bomber’s role in US strategic bombing campaigns from 1999 to 2019. Rebecca L. Grant, *B-2 Stealth Bomber at War* (Washington Security Forum, n.d.), <http://www.irisresearch.com/library/public/documents/B-2-Stealth-Bomber-at-War-2019.pdf>.

Europe; thus this is one reason why strategic bombers and naval vessels may have been left out even though the US had demonstrated both of their long-range offensive strike capabilities from 1990 through the Istanbul summit which had taken place shortly after the NATO-Yugoslavia conflict.

As important from a process tracing perspective of what was in the two proposals/ultimata was what was not. The proposal to NATO made no mention of Ukrainian domestic policies such as protection of Russian minorities, or demands to resolve the territorial disputes in eastern Ukraine (categorised as strengthening Putin's rule and Ukraine-specific issues in Table 16. The proposal to the US makes a general reference to non-interference in states' internal affairs, but otherwise no mention of Ukraine.

The US and NATO did not substantively accept the Russian proposals and Russia invaded Ukraine within a month. Though Putin's speech shortly after the invasion offered a large number of reasons for his decision, approximately the first third of his speech focused on military balancing issues with NATO and the US, including what he considered rejection of his December 2021 proposals.

Process tracing causal confirmation

Applying the pattern tracing methodology, the available information suggests that US- NATO competition was the invasion's overall, primary motivation. Specifically, that Putin's main complaint with NATO was related to its increasing military capabilities - a trend which Russia sought to reverse through conventional arms control. Again, this is not to say that other motivations were not relevant, because Russia invaded and sought to seize Ukraine, and not Moldova, Georgia, or Finland - to name countries that border Russia and have shown at some point in recent history pro-West/pro-NATO inclinations. The Russia-Ukraine-NATO relationships and dynamics were such that Putin likely felt that the one main issue - military imbalance due to CAC failure - with important secondary issues were collectively enough to compel him to invade Ukraine.

Process tracing suggests performing multiple tests on each hypothesised cause (see Table 16 for the causes). While almost all of the listed causes pass the "straw-in-the- wind" and "hoop" tests,⁶⁸⁴ based on their regular mention in Russian statements, the December 2021 "ultimata" to NATO and the US suggest that the CAC failure hypothesis is the only "smoking gun" cause, given that the demands made no substantive mention of the other causes. However,

⁶⁸⁴ Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing."

there is no “doubly decisive” evidence which confirms the CAC motivation and eliminates all others. This chapter can only generally establish relative causal weight in assessing that CAC failure was a predominant consideration, with other causes real but of lesser importance.

Counterfactual analysis

Implicit in the assessment that the failure of CAC in Europe was the key factor in Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine are several counterfactuals. First, that had a comprehensive CAC agreement been made with the US/NATO that addressed Russia’s concerns, Russia would not have invaded. Second, that if the other issues not related to the military balance and CAC had successfully been addressed, but the military balance continued to shift in NATO’s favour and no CAC agreement was made, Russia would still have invaded.

While counterfactuals are imperfect at best and chapter length only allows a brief discussion, several counterfactual outcomes support this chapter’s hypothesis. Concerning Ukraine-specific issues, were the Kyiv government less democratic, but still seeking to join NATO (expanding its military power), Russia might still have invaded. While some claim that Putin opposes democracy in Kyiv,⁶⁸⁵ there is no evidence that Putin opposes democracy *per se*, but Ukrainian policies contrary to Russia’s interests. It is not difficult to imagine that if a democratic Ukraine were closely aligned, if not allied, with Moscow, then Russia would not have invaded.

Permanent possession of eastern Ukraine and Crimea, and with that, further Russification, was possible without invasion, as Russia already had control of these territories. If these territories’ status and identity were Putin’s primary concern, then he could have recognised eastern Ukraine’s independence and then annexed them without invading Ukraine. Were the fate of eastern Ukraine Putin’s priority, recognising their independence and implementing a policy of Russification might have been sufficient, although changing the government in Kyiv improves such an effort’s likelihood of success. Were Russian fears limited to Kyiv’s policies towards eastern Ukraine and Crimea; including military action, Russia would have likely focused its rhetoric and ultimata solely on these issues. And had Kyiv acceded to Moscow’s limited demands, Russia may not have invaded.

The theory that Putin invaded because he viewed Ukraine, in effect, an artificial nation-state that should be part of Russia, ignores that this status would exist no matter who Ukraine’s

⁶⁸⁵ Dickinson, “How Putin’s Fear of Democracy Convinced Him to Invade Ukraine”; Lebow, “International Relations Theory and the Ukrainian War.”

president was, or what policies NATO pursued. And it is difficult to believe, especially given pre-2014 Russian-Ukrainian relations, that Russia would have invaded were the Kyiv government pro-Kremlin.

Another suggested causal category is strengthening of Putin's rule, yet the case for this is even weaker. Shoring up domestic support, or rallying around the flag, could have been accomplished by many means - space exploration, demonising domestic opponents including through "false flag" attacks,⁶⁸⁶ or engaging in minor, lower-risk military actions. Whilst Moscow assessed seizing Kyiv would be a quick and easy endeavour,⁶⁸⁷ with huge domestic support payoffs, there is no evidence that Putin felt he needed such a boost in support to strengthen his already fairly stable regime at the risk of the Western sanctions and other measures that had been communicated to him repeatedly.⁶⁸⁸

Concerning Russia's competition with the US and NATO, if Ukrainian membership in NATO were Russia's primary motivation; and not the overall and widening imbalance of military forces and capabilities between Russia and the alliance, Putin might have issued an ultimatum to Kyiv, or accepted Kyiv's offer of neutrality shortly after the war began.⁶⁸⁹

If the failure to reach a CAC agreement which altered the projected military balance were the war's central cause, what would have happened had NATO and Russia established a balanced CAC agreement which fixed either an evenly balanced ratio of forces (such as the CFE Treaty), or a ratio that was in NATO's favour, but not decisively so - and locked in the ratio (the 1921 Washington Naval Treaty accomplished such a feat between major naval powers)? It is difficult to know with certainty, but Russia's continuous complaints about NATO force presence near Russia, increasing military infrastructure, and assessments that its indivisible security was not being respected would not have been valid, or necessary. Put more simply, if Russia did not view NATO as threatening due to an acceptable military balance legally established by a CAC agreement, Russia would not have invaded Ukraine.

⁶⁸⁶ For example, Mike Eckel, "Two Decades On, Smoldering Questions About The Russian President's Vault To Power," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 7, 2019, sec. Russia, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-russia-president-1999-chechnya-apartment-bombings/30097551.html>.

⁶⁸⁷ Mike Eckel, "Russian Officials Predicted A Quick Triumph In Ukraine. Did Bad Intelligence Skew Kremlin Decision-Making?," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 11, 2022, sec. Russia, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-invasion-ukraine-intelligence-putin/31748594.html>.

⁶⁸⁸ Hui Min Neo and Anastasia Clark, "Western Allies Vow 'Swift, Deep Sanctions' If Russia Invades Ukraine," *The Moscow Times*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/11/western-allies-vow-swift-deep-sanctions-if-russia-invades-ukraine-a76350>. It is unknown the full extent to which western allies had threatened Moscow, with what, and how seriously Putin took the threats.

⁶⁸⁹ Reuters, "As War Began, Putin Rejected a Ukraine Peace Deal Recommended by Aide," *Reuters*, September 14, 2022, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-war-began-putin-rejected-ukraine-peace-deal-recommended-by-his-aide-2022-09-14/>.

Conclusion: from war comes peace

This chapter has applied a pattern tracing and counterfactual mixed methodology to examine the Russo-Ukraine War as a case study of war causation and has presented the history of CAC in Europe from 1990 to present and shown how the USSR/Russia had established through the CFE Treaty what they considered a fair and reasonable military balance. They saw this erode, however, due to NATO expansion and growing NATO capability, despite pleas and agreements that the US and NATO cease violating the mutually-accepted ideal of indivisible security. This degradation of security decreased Russia's perceived deterrence against NATO.

The available information strongly suggests that CAC failure is the war's most significant cause. It is difficult to think while the tragedy of the Russo-Ukraine War continues to unfold that there may be a positive outcome from the conflict. One, however, may be that this conflict reveals the need for a comprehensive CAC agreement across Europe which establishes and preserves a certain military balance.

This chapter's case study has several theoretical implications. First, that CAC failure - whether it is the failure to come to an agreement when one, or several parties pursue them, or if an agreement collapses - can lead to war. Second, this implies that when CAC agreements are respected and in force, that conflict will not occur between parties. The current writer's research suggests there is some evidence for this, but further study is required.⁶⁹⁰

This case study contributes to causes of war theory-building, for example through Putin's issue with the declining of military power (van Evera) and Russia's standing (Lebow). The conflict supports the theory that arms racing is a cause of war, as NATO's increasing capability and forces increasing in eastern Europe (which was in reaction to Russia's increasingly capable forces in its west) compelled Putin to invade Ukraine after over a decade of Russian military quantitative and qualitative improvements. Lastly, this case supports Jervis' (1991) assessment that "arms control rests on the theory that wars can occur because states have failed to realize the cooperation which their interests actually entail." Russia had sought such co-operation, but failed.

Russia continuously attempted to address their concerns through CAC agreements. The A/CFE revised TLE limits, but did not enter into force. The 1999 Charter for European Security reiterated the commitment to indivisible security, while the 2009 Russia-proposed European

⁶⁹⁰ Out of 20 CAC agreements in Europe since World War One of various types but which focused on adversaries balancing forces, wars only occurred between the state parties in relation to the rivalries addressed by the agreements in less than five cases in which the agreements were still in effect (that is before expiration or withdrawals).

Security Treaty proposed limits on signatories hosting foreign military forces, or deploying their own forces in foreign states. The December 2021 Russian proposals offered more specific controls on military forces along the Russian-NATO borders, controls on naval ships and heavy bombers, and broad prohibitions on NATO military activity. With CAC efforts clearly having failed despite over 20 years of effort, Russia invaded Ukraine in an attempt to shift the military balance back towards its favour.⁶⁹¹

It is important to note that whilst this chapter has attempted to explain one of Russia's principle reasons for invading Ukraine, the explanation does not equate to agreeing with, or supporting the invasion from, either a moral or strategic perspective. Future historians with the benefit of hindsight may one day inform us if Russia's decision were wise or ill-conceived; or an unfortunate, only means to reverse the otherwise inevitable erosion of Moscow's military and national power.

Russia's quest for an acceptable military balance raises the question of when Russia - or any state - would know when they obtained their desired balance. This balance could be assessed by static force comparisons, modelling, and simulations, or other means. Further research should be done on how different measures of military capability can be applied to different CAC scenarios. While Russia's continuous proposals which dealt with "indivisible security" and CAC offer insights into what they might find acceptable, lacking a negotiated draft agreement since the A/CFE Treaty, it is not possible to know what balance Moscow would have accepted and how it would compare with their goals."⁶⁹²

Another area of research might address how European CAC agreements and their institutions can address significant changes in the geopolitical security environment, "extraordinary events", or "exceptional circumstances" in the CFE Treaty's language, without having to revise and renegotiate an agreement in full. What insights do previous CAC agreements offer in how they were implemented, such as delegation to third-party organisations, such as an Intergovernmental Organization (IGO).

To the extent that a future conflict between NATO and Russia could be due to one or both sides being dissatisfied with the military balance and its relation to concepts and practice

⁶⁹¹ While it is unclear at this time what Russia expected to gain from installing a government in Kyiv friendly to Moscow, Russia might have added Ukraine as a Belarus-like ally or annexed the country altogether and counted all of Ukraine's military assets on its side as well as the favourable geography in which Russia would suddenly be able to threaten southeast Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and dominate the northern Black Sea.

⁶⁹² Arms control negotiations are complicated, with parties debating issues such as the area of application, which military systems to control, and exchanging demands and offering concessions throughout the negotiation period. Two studies offer examples of CAC arms control negotiations between NATO and WTO: Brayton, "MBFR and Conventional Forces Reductions in Europe"; Wilcox, *The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and Russian Foreign and Security Policy (Dissertation)*.

of indivisible security, and bearing in mind the potential for such a conflict to evolve into a nuclear war, a CAC agreement could prevent such a conflict from occurring. The Russo-Ukraine War reminds us of war's human, economic, environmental, and diplomatic costs. A NATO-Russia war would only increase these costs, likely tenfold, and thus should be prevented if possible.