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An overview of the XXI century security architecture - before and after Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract. In this article, we analyze the XXI century security architecture starting from an international security overview before the Invasion of Ukraine and ending with the one after this invasion. The research method that will be used is the comparative analysis between them. The working hypothesis refers to the Russian Federation as being the Great Power that determined a new security architecture in the XXI century, the opposite one that was designed by the Russian Federation through the Invasion of Ukraine.

Keywords. Security architecture, Invasion of Ukraine, Russian Federation, Great Powers, United Nations.

1. Introduction

Invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022) became a reference point in XXI century security architecture. Looking in the recent past, Crimea annexation (2014) was the first act in the new security landscape designed by the Russian Federation and a wake up call for the European and international community. On the one hand, this annexation developed the Russian state’s hidden intentions and also the instrument willing to use it, hybrid threats, choosing not to cross the border between peace and war from the beginning. On the other hand, it showed the European and international approach by sanctions applied, by own security measures adopted and by non-recognising the annexation.

After eight years, the Invasion of Ukraine was the second act of the same actor in the same country. This time, the Russian Federation moved on to the next level and crossed the border between peace and war by using conventional threats and nuclear rhetoric. It crossed the thin line, but not the red line that would have meant using nuclear weapons, a line from which there was no way back. As a result, this invasion determined a lot more sanctions (eleven packages of sanctions up to September 2023) and security changes that we haven’t seen before in decades. Regarding these security changes, it is worth mentioning that the Russian Federation wanted before this invasion security guarantees, such as Ukraine not becoming a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member or this political and military alliance not expanding in the East. After the invasion, it happened exactly the opposite.

2. An overview of the XXI century security architecture before Invasion of Ukraine

First of all, an international security architecture understanding at a macro level is required. To establish a framework, we choose the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (URSS) fall in 1990 as a reference point, after URSS have shaped the XX century security architecture in the last 50 years. After the fall of communism and in the beginning of democracy hope for communist states in 1990s, a new international order took place, but with the Russian Federation instead of URSS as one of the main players.
The main organization that from 1945 have had responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security is the United Nations. The main actors that have been permanent members since the beginning and that have had veto power over the Security Council’s resolutions are: the United States of America (US), China, Russian Federation after URSS disintegration, France and the United Kingdom. These five states are located in the West flank (United States of America, Great Britain and France) and in the East flank (Russian Federation and China) and are known in the international landscape as Great Powers.

Since the World War Two end, when the United Nations was born, there has been a constant and an increased competition between these five Great Powers, between democracy and authoritarianism, between liberal and realist paradigm, between multipolarity and unipolarity, between equal power distribution and hegemony, between international and national interest. Beside this antagonism and inherent competition for power, the five Great Powers succeeded in cooperating and in reaching an unanimity in international conflicts, overall. This cooperation and unanimity in decisions maintained a balance of power in the international security architecture, with ups and downs along the way, from 1990 to the beginning of 2022.

Further in this first section, we will indicate some of the main difficulties met in this security cooperation process. Then, in the next section regarding the XXI century security architecture after the Invasion of Ukraine, we will indicate which are the main changes shown in European and international security architecture. We mention that these changes have shown after the Invasion of Ukraine and that these five Great Powers did not reach a consensus in this security matter.

We have to take into consideration the difficulty of one organization to maintain peace, simultaneously, when there are different conflicts around the world at the same time. To give a recent example, we indicate the Global Conflict Tracker research [2] about international peace and security threats that was realized on 22 February 2023. According to this research, there were 25 conflicts in the world located in: Mexico, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South China Sea, North Korea, Pakistan, India, Taiwan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel and Palestine, Libya, Yemen, Sahel, Iran, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia. Even if the most conflicts are located in the Middle East and Africa (14), Asia (7) and the least in Europe and Eurasia (Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh), one of the two turned into an invasion (Ukraine, 24 February 2022).

Source: https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker, accessed in 07.06.2023
In this macro security process, we have to take into consideration the difficulty of keeping safe under the same roof approximately 8 billion people that are grouped in about 200 states. About 200 states means about 200 leaders that have different visions about their own security and about international security, but at the same time they are aware of their own incapacity to ensure security by themselves. So, they are looking for a security vector, such one of the Great Powers. On top of that, they are looking for an international organization to ensure them other main areas, such as: maintaining international peace and security, upholding international law, protecting their human rights, supporting sustainable development and climate action or delivering humanitarian aid when needed, areas that are covered by the United Nations [1].

Also, we have to take into consideration the difficulty of these five Great Powers of going in the same direction and making compromises when they have different histories, cultures, values, visions, approaches and interests, but the same responsibilities that should prevail. It is also relevant that China and the Russian Federation have had the same leaders on the domestic and international stage, in the last 10 years (China) and in the last 20 years (Russian Federation). More than that, the future continuity of the Chinese and Russian Federation leaders is being assured through Constitutional changes in this regard.

In the 21st century beginning, the Russian Federation and China are emerging as the main actors that have hegemonic ambitions, but using different power designing instruments, the military (the Russian Federation) and the economic one (China). By projecting power, these two Great Powers aim for a transition from soft power to hard power by replacing the liberal with the realist international relations paradigm. According to United States’s document, called Interim National Security Strategic Guidance [3] (2021), we would be facing: on the one hand, a more assertive China, the only competitor that can challenge and change the international system and on the other hand, a disruptive Russian state on the world stage. According to United Kingdom document, called Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy [4] (2021), we would be facing: a more active Russian state in European proximity and a Chinese state that becomes a systemic challenge or competitor, taking into account its increasing international stature. Regarding the Russian Federation, the Invasion of Ukraine confirmed what the United States of America and the United Kingdom predicted in their strategic documents.

Also, there are other actors and non-actors that have the potential to destabilize peace around the world. As some examples, in the Middle East, an eloquent exemple is Iran through nuclear capabilities development. In the Indo-Pacific region, the North Korean leader threatens with its nuclear weapons and in the Kashmir region there are two nuclear powers involved, Pakistan and India, that are fighting for its claim. From the democratic states, there are expectations that the other three Great Powers (the United States of America, France and the United Kingdom) and their allies to counterbalance the Russian and the Chinese hegemonic ambitions and their desired transition, on the one hand. On the other hand, there are expectations from them to manage the Iran, North Korea, Pakistan and India state’s potential to destabilize peace in their regions and not only.

Regarding the Russian Federation’s global strategy before the Invasion of Ukraine, a macro image shows a Russian state that interfered in Great Powers democratic elections (United States in 2016 and 2020, France in 2017) and in their foreign policy (United Kingdom in 2016) through hybrid threats, in order to shape the society’s perceptions. Regarding the regional strategy, a macro image shows that the Russian state has been trying to encircle Black Sea region through hybrid threats, through military presence in Georgia - Armenia - Azerbaijan – The Republic of Moldova and culminating through invasion (Ukraine, 2022).

Regarding this Russian interference in Great Powers democratic elections, it intended to weaken the democratic ideology, to divide the societies and to diminish their trust in their potential democratic leaders, aspects that would allow the Russian Federation to interfere and weaken it more. Regarding this Black Sea encirclement process, it is influenced not only by geography and history, but also by strategic interests and regional power. In short, unstable states around Black Sea region means an unstable Black Sea region and an unstable Black Sea region means that the Russian Federation can interfere and gain access.
3. An overview of the XXI century security architecture after Invasion of Ukraine

Nowadays, there is a lot that is going on in the world that has brought so many changes, challenges and threats, from peace to crisis and from crisis to war. From 24 February 2022, when the Russian Federation launched the Invasion of Ukraine, a very delicate equilibrium has been crossed, the international order and security has been challenged and the confrontation took place of dialogue. At this point, the Russian Federation became from a reliable regional and global actor an unpredictable one and from a risk it became one of the biggest threats to European and international security. In this section, we start from the premise that the Russian Federation is the Great Power that determined a new security architecture in the XXI century, the opposite one that was designed by the Russian Federation through the Invasion of Ukraine.

From the XXI century beginning till 2023, there have been identified three levels of Russian state strategy: from hybrid threats to conventional ones and from conventional ones to nuclear rhetoric. Also, we noted that there are four types of war that the Russian state is leading: a psychological war at home (1); a hybrid war in the Republic of Moldova that might become the next target if Ukraine falls into Russian hands and also in other states (2); a political war against the West (3) and the most relevant a military war in Ukraine (4).

Regarding the political war against the West, we notice a very concerning evolution. The Russian Federation has adopted in March 2023 a new foreign policy doctrine, called The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, in which the United States is mentioned as being "the source of major risks to the security of the Russian Federation" [5]. The real concern is how this threat position between the two Great Powers will affect in the end the entire international system and security. Depending on the relation between the five Great Powers, the whole international order and security will be affected. If there is no stability at the top, there will be no stability at the base either. More than that, an instability will allow the past conflicts to be reborn, the security lines to be redrawn and the authoritarian states to push the limits.

Regarding the military war in Ukraine, when Russian Federation made the move on the international chessboard through Invasion of Ukraine, it revealed relevant aspects, such as: what the Russian Federation leaders’ intentions and ambitions are compared to those declared and assumed; how the Great Powers respond in such cases; how the others states either support, abstain or condemn what happened; how the alliances are shifting; what the international organizations’ vulnerabilities are when it comes to responding to the threat and how these vulnerabilities are exploited; how security is still fragile nowadays, just like it was in the past; how it is possible that the security lines be redrawn and how international order is challenged and requires constant improvements.

After the Invasion of Ukraine, we have seen a more threatening Russian state that used not nuclear weapons, but nuclear rhetoric. As a response to the conventional and nuclear threatening Russian state there have been more security changes in a short period of time than in the last thirty years. In the North-East and East Europe security architecture, we mention changes in the Russian Federation proximity, such as: a North Atlantic Treaty Organization expansion in the East; Finland as a new NATO member state; a Swedish state that is close to join NATO as Finland succeeded; a Poland state that has started a macro rearmament process after almost 50 years and that has taken other security measures in the Kaliningrad proximity [6]; a defense budget and NATO troops increasing in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

Also, there have been changes in Republic of Moldova, such as: a starting withdrawal procedure from The Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkmenistan, the Republic of Moldova) announced to be initiated by the Republic of Moldova [7], following the Georgia (2009) and the Ukraine (2018) states withdrawal example. Also, there was a legislative initiative to establish a National Center for Informational Defense and Combating Propaganda [8].

In Armenia, there have also been changes, such as: a declaration of the Armenian prime minister regarding the possibility of leaving the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kârgâzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) in case the treaty obligations are not respected [9]. Also, Armenia and Azerbaijan have begun United States mediated peace negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh territory.
Relevant changes regarding European Union (EU) took place: a significant cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization; a very strong engagement of European Union for a non-member state (Ukraine); a strong commitment to reduce the European Union’s reliance on Russian energy; a debate of unanimity versus qualified majority voting reappeared in European space, a unanimity process that have been exploited and blocked by Hungary several times when it came to sanctioning the Russian state.

Also, there have been relevant changes, such as: an Ukrainian state that has started accession to the European Union and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a credible security provider; a Republic of Moldova and Georgia states that evolves in terms of meeting the necessary conditions for starting the European Union accession process. It is worth noticing that as Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have started to come closer to Europe, the Russian Federation has started to come closer to them.

Relevant changes in European security architecture took place after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Vilnius Summit [10] (11 – 12 July 2023). These changes are based on the fact that the Russian Federation is perceived by NATO as being “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area” [10]. At the Vilnius Summit, a first exception was made for Ukraine in order to become a NATO member without the Membership Action Plan. Also, it will be established a NATO-Ukraine Council that facilitates Ukraine’s membership in NATO. At the same time, NATO reiterated the support for the Republic of Moldova and Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty and mentioned that Georgia made progress regarding the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package implementation.

At this Summit, it were adopted new regional defence plans; it was established a new multinational and multi-domain Allied Reaction Force; it was decided that North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s command and control would be strengthened in plans execution; it became functional the eight multinational battlegroups on NATO’s Eastern Flank that had been assumed at the Madrid Summit (2022). It was agreed to improve NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence, to continue the multi-domain operations work (land, air, maritime, cyberspace, space) through NATO’s Digital Transformation Implementation Strategy, to establish a NATO’s Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure and to improve information sharing and exchange best practice through a joint network. Also, it launched NATO’s new Virtual Cyber Incident Support Capability and took into consideration the possibility of establishing a Liaison Office in Geneva in relation to international organizations. Regarding the space domain, after the NATO Vilnius Summit, the NATO Space Centre of Excellence, established in France, received accreditation from the North Atlantic Council.

As far as the Russian state is concerned, there have been some domestic measures that will affect not only the cooperation between the Great Powers, the conventional and nuclear control, but also the international order based on rules and the international security that will be questionable. Regarding the conventional dimension, the Russian Federation announced on 10 May 2023 the withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe [11]. In the nuclear landscape, we assist at a Russian Federation state that in February 2023 officially suspended the nuclear disarmament treaty with the United States [12], a request considered by the United States officials as being legally invalid. More than that, the Russian Federation has announced plans to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus after 07 - 08 July 2023 [13]. With this nuclear rhetoric, we all are exposed and vulnerable, so we expect that the Great Powers will come again to a mutual agreement regarding this nuclear dimension. This desired and indispensable agreement is influenced by the Invasion of Ukraine, invasion that generated the nuclear rhetoric in the beginning.

We appreciate that the Russian state’s advance success in the East depends on the other Great Powers and democratic states allowing it to advance. In our view, depending on how the Invasion of Ukraine will be ended, the new European and international security architecture will be established by the winners and contested by the losers, this reference point (Invasion of Ukraine) being the trigger for the new security architecture. If the last architecture survived almost thirty years from the 1990's, we indicate that the new one will last as long as the Russian Federation stops living in the glorious past.
After the Invasion of Ukraine, in order to defend against the Russian threat, we have new chess moves in the Russian proximity security architecture. To sum up, the West Russian border with Europe coming from top to bottom (see the map below) looks like this: Finland become a North Atlantic Treaty Organization member state in 04.04.2023; Sweden is close to become a member NATO too; Norway and Denmark are from 1949 NATO members; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, that in 2004 become NATO members, increased their defense budget and the NATO troops; Poland, NATO member from 1999, has started a macro rearmament process and has taken other security measures in the Kaliningrad proximity; Ukraine started the process of becoming NATO member without the Membership Action Plan after Vilnius Summit (11-12 July 2023); the Republic of Moldova has a neutrality status, but the support of NATO for territorial integrity and sovereignty; Georgia made progress in the becoming a NATO member process; Armenia expressed the possibility of leaving the Collective Security Treaty Organization and together with Azerbaijan begun United States mediated peace negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

Source: https://geology.com/world/world-map.shtml, accessed in 04.08.2023

4. A comparative analysis

Both before and after the Invasion of Ukraine, the main organization with responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security remained the United Nations. It is relevant that after the Invasion of Ukraine its credibility has decreased, taking into account the veto right used by the Russian Federation to block the United Nations Security Council’s decisions regarding the Invasion of Ukraine. Also, the main permanent members remained the United States of America, China, Russian Federation, France and the United Kingdom, even though there were advanced discussions about United Nations’ reform at the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Regarding the five Great Powers, what changed was the relationship between them. Before the Invasion of Ukraine there was an antagonism and inherent competition for power, but cooperation and dialogue in international conflicts and a balance of power maintained in the international security architecture. After that, we have seen competition between Great Powers at other levels, divisions between them and non-cooperation. On top of that, taking into account the new Russian foreign policy doctrine, we notice a very concerning evolution between the way the Russian Federation perceives the United States at the security level.
Regarding the Russian Federation threats, what changed is the Russian state transition from hybrid threats used before to conventional ones and to nuclear rhetoric. This new level of threats brought the Russian state to a new security perception level: from a reliable regional and a global actor to an unpredictable one and from a risk one of the biggest threats to European and international security. Given the Invasion of Ukraine, it became obvious the Russian Federation leaders’ ambitions and it became relevant to the democratic world how the Great Powers and the other states respond in such security contexts. At the same time, it became concerning the international organisations’ vulnerabilities, the security fragility and the international order imperfections.

Regarding the East European border or the European red line with the Russian state border, what changed from a security perspective, after the Invasion of Ukraine, was the fact that Finland, Sweden and Ukraine choose North Atlantic Organization Treaty as a security provider; that Baltic states, being North Atlantic Treaty Organizations member states from 2004, increased their defense budget and NATO troops presence; that Poland, being NATO member state from 1999, took macro rearmament measures and other security measures in the Kaliningrad proximity and last but not least that Republic of Moldova took measures to distance itself and to protect from the Russian state regional ambitions, on the one hand and to get closer to West, on the other hand.

Regarding the European Union approach after the Invasion of Ukraine, what changed was the increasing cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the diminishing of the European Union’s reliance on Russian energy and also the discussions regarding a qualified majority voting instead of unanimity. Regarding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in particular after NATO Vilnius Summit (11-12 July 2023), what changed was the level of threat that NATO assigned to Russian Federation; the possibility offered to Ukrainian state as an exception to become a NATO member state without the Membership Action Plan; the adoption of new plans, of new reaction forces and battlegroups in the defence area; the intention to strengthen the plans execution and the improvements in the air and missile defence in the maritime, cyber and space areas, information sharing and exchange best practice. Regarding the Russian Federation, what changed was the new foreign policy adopted in relation to the United States of America and the responsibilities the Russian state had in the conventional and nuclear disarmament treaties.

5. Conclusions
The comparative analysis between the XXI century security architecture, before and after Invasion of Ukraine, showed that the Russian Federation, one of the five Great Powers, through Invasion of Ukraine determined a new security architecture, the opposite one that was designed in the beginning. The new security architecture involved relevant changes at the organizations’ level: North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union; at the states located in the Russian border proximity: Finland, Sweden, Baltic States, Ukraine, Poland, Republic of Moldova and Armenia and also at the Russian Federation main areas: foreign policy, the conventional and nuclear dimensions.

Relevant for the future security architecture is the fact that Finland, Sweden and Ukraine choose the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a security provider instead of and against the Russian Federation. Also, relevant is the fact that the other NATO member states located in the Russian proximity took preventive security measures against Russian potential threats. These security choices and measures have considerably increased the distance between NATO and the Russian state, on the one hand and also the distance between these states and the Russian state, on the other hand.

At these security changes, we can expect nothing positive from the Russian Federation that considers the North Atlantic Treaty Organization expansion in the East a threat to its own security, a threat that is coming closer to its borders instead of going further. We notice that not only the North Atlantic Treaty Organization became a threat to Russian state security, in the Russian Federation perspective, but also the United States of America, mentioned in the new Russian foreign policy. Also, we can expect nothing positive regarding the conventional and nuclear initiatives taken by the Russian state, initiatives that exceed the Ukraine borders and involve the global borders that become vulnerable to the Russian potential threat. Given these facts, we appreciate that the XXI century security architecture is far away from stability.
References


