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DOI : 10.14746/ps.2023.1.4

THE UNITED STATES AND UKRAINE'S ASPIRATIONS FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine of 2022 and its international implications posed a great challenge for NATO, including the United States. One can speculate whether, if Ukraine were a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, there would have been Russian aggressions in 2014 and 2022. The events of the past cannot be reversed, but they should be studied and the prospect of Ukraine's possible membership in NATO should be considered. The aim of the article is to analyze and evaluate the attitude of the United States towards Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership after the Cold War, with particular emphasis on the period after the outbreak of the war in 2022. The article poses the main questions: What role does Ukraine play in the US-Russia geostrategic rivalry after the Cold War? Has the United States been determined and consistent in supporting Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership after the Cold War? Has the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022 affected the US attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership? The first part of the article analyzes the issue of Ukraine as an area of geostrategic rivalry between Russia and the USA. The second part discusses the US's efforts to bring Ukraine closer to NATO and its approach to the possibility of Ukraine's full membership. The third part discusses the US attitude towards Ukraine's membership in NATO in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. One of the elements of the European policy of the United States was support for NATO's "open door" policy, including the accession of post-Soviet states to the Alliance, including Ukraine, which plays a key role in geostrategic competition with Russia. Despite repeated declarations of support for Ukraine's membership aspirations, individual American administrations were not sufficiently determined to persuade the allies to finalize this process. This was due to both international factors, mainly Russia's protests, and internal factors, including the changing approach to NATO membership of the Ukrainian elite and the country's lack of adequate preparation for this membership. As a result, the attitude of individual American administrations on this issue fluctuated. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, the US ruled out the possibility of a military confrontation with Russia. Covering Ukraine with the security guarantees of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Alliance would lead to this. Therefore, the administration of President Joe Biden postponed the issue of Ukraine's possible NATO membership until after the end of the war, including after talks on the terms of a peace deal. During the research, scientists and experts in international relations and US foreign

policy from research centers in Washington D.C. and New York were interviewed. The interviews were individual, non-standardized, unstructured and in-depth. The method of content analysis of text sources was also used.

UKRAINE AS AN AREA OF GEOSTRATEGIC RIVALRY BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE USA

The major change in the balance of power between the West and Russia after the Cold War is illustrated by the fact that for the first time in history, the United States can contest Russian influence in Ukraine, in which Russia has dominated or ruled for about 350 years (Zakaria, 2012). Although President George H. W. Bush was initially skeptical of Ukraine's independence, the US quickly became a strong supporter of the newly independent state (Cameron, 2005). For strategic reasons, striving for a peaceful political transition of Ukraine and its rapprochement with the West, the United States refrained from criticizing President Leonid Kuchma's corrupt and authoritarian tendencies (Bouchet, 2015). The administration of President Bill Clinton financially supported Ukraine, as well as tried to bring it closer to NATO, to secure Ukraine in a democratic Europe (van Apeldoorn, de Graaff, 2016). Russia, which sees Ukraine as its sphere of influence, has tried to counteract these actions. Since 1991 Russian diplomats and military attachés lobbied Western politicians and spread anti-Ukrainian information among officials in different international organizations, including NATO. They portrayed Ukraine as an unreliable and immensely corrupt state (Locoman, 2022). Western diplomats often used information provided by the Russians, which made it difficult for pro-Western Ukrainian politicians to lobby Ukrainian aspirations for integration with Western organizations.

For the United States, the key issue was securing Ukraine's nuclear arsenal. As a consequence of the negotiations, the US became one of the signatories of the Budapest memorandum of December 1994, which was to guarantee Ukraine political independence and territorial integrity in exchange for relinquishing nuclear weapons to Russia (Haesebrouck, Taghon, van Coppenolle, 2022). The transfer of these weapons from Ukraine, as well as Belarus and Kazakhstan, to Russia was also to be an important element in the creation of special relations between Washington and Moscow (Marshall, Rofe, 2009). The warming of relations failed because Russia did not democratize and did not change its negative position on the issue of NATO enlargement to the East. Moscow began to take increasingly assertive actions to stop this process. After the pro-Western Orange revolution of 2004, Ukraine even more became an object of rivalry between Russia and the United States (van Apeldoorn, de Graaff, 2016). Ukraine, sandwiched between Russia and the new NATO members, gained an enormous geostrategic significance to the USA (Bandeira, 2017). The Americans knew, however, that the significance of Ukraine for Russia was incomparably greater, because it perceived this country as the main element in rebuilding the empire. Washington also realized that Ukraine's accession to NATO was a red line for Moscow. Ahead of NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit, President Vladimir Putin warned the U.S. Undersecretary for Political Affairs William J. Burns, saying: "No Russian leader

could stand idly by in the face of steps toward NATO membership for Ukraine. That would be a hostile act toward Russia [...] We would do all in our power to prevent it.” (Burns, 2019).

The pro-Western Euromaidan revolution at the turn of 2013 and 2014 led to Russia resorting to forceful arguments against Ukraine. Since Ukraine is of much greater strategic importance for Russia than for the US, according to the theory of realism, Russia was ready to reach for military solutions, which the US was not ready for. The United States reacted by imposing economic sanctions on Russia. According to critics of American policy, Russia's actions were to be a consequence of the US's policy of interference in the post-Soviet sphere of influence (van Apeldoorn, de Graaff, 2016). Carrying out a full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Russia shows that it is even ready to destroy the state and society of Ukraine in order to prevent its entry into Western allied and integration structures. The West, led by the US, has increased arms deliveries to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. The issue of Ukraine's membership in NATO has once again become an important topic of international debate.

Under the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, Russia was able to maintain military equipment in Europe at the level of about a third of NATO's and barely twice those permitted to the Ukraine (Marshall, Rofe, 2009). On the other hand, European NATO countries disarmed and NATO maintained a limited military presence on its eastern flank, which potentially gave Russia an advantage in the CEE region. Incorporating Ukraine, and with it Georgia, into NATO would give the US and the West a huge advantage over Russia by encircling it from the south-west and potentially installing military bases there (Bandeira, 2017). However, from the point of view of US strategic interests, NATO's excessive enlargement also entails potential threats. One of them is the overextension of NATO's political will and resources. The most serious challenge is related to the inclusion of Ukraine, which threatens a new division in Europe, Ukrainian disaggregation and confrontation with Russia. Given the global role of the US, there are also voices questioning the ability to defend each new member of the Alliance (Gardner, 2016).

US ACTIONS TO BRING UKRAINE CLOSER TO NATO

The United States has consistently upheld the principle that NATO is open to Europe's emerging democracies that share the Alliance's values and are ready to meet the obligations of membership. The American authorities take into account whether the inclusion of a new state will strengthen NATO and contribute to greater security and stability in Europe. In addition, the minimum requirements for candidates include: upholding democracy, including tolerating diversity; making progress toward a market economy; maintaining civilian control over armed forces; respecting the sovereignty of neighbors; and working on compatibility with NATO forces (U.S. Department of State, 1997). The inclusion of a new member in NATO is not an independent decision of the United States, as it must be unanimously agreed by all its members. However, given its position in NATO, the US voice is of particular importance.

President Clinton and his National Security Advisor Sandy Berger have repeatedly announced that the “open door” policy applied to former USSR states, including Ukraine. NATO’s dialogue and cooperation with Ukraine began in 1991 when Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). In 1994, cooperation was expanded by Ukraine joining the United States’ proposed Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, which was to pave the way for full membership in the organization. Another breakthrough came in 1997 with the signing of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, which established the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) (NATO, 2022a). That same year, preliminary negotiations for Ukraine’s membership of NATO began (Dumbrell, 2009). In 1999, i.e. after two years of the distinctive partnership, the opinion and reputation of the Ukrainian army among the American military was not good. Although the Ukrainians signed up for many joint activities, they did not have suitably qualified personnel to cope with them. The U.S. permanent representatives to NATO Alexander R. Vershbow during his visits to Kiev undertook a series of talks with the Ukrainians on how they could improve the functioning of the army and cooperation with NATO (Pifer, 2022). In the same year, the United States sought to sponsor a military structure linking Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUUAM), as a real alternative to the Commonwealth of Independent States led by Russia. Membership in GUUAM was to be an initial step on the path of these countries to NATO membership (Bandeira, 2017). In parallel, the US supported the idea of enlarging the European Union, and Ukraine was among the countries supported for membership in the organization (Toje, 2008).

As part of PfP, Ukraine joined NATO’s stabilization activities within the so-called “out of area” operations. In 1998, the Polish-Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion (POLUKRBAT) was formed, which since 2000 was deployed as part of NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) with 545 Polish and 267 Ukrainian soldiers. The United States supported the formation of the battalion by, among other things, providing common types of Humvees and other equipment, including communications facilities (Pifer, 2022). During the global war on terror, especially in the context of the controversial military intervention in Iraq, the USA sought the support of CEE countries, including Ukraine, in a political dispute with Western European allies – mainly Germany and France (Gardner, 2016). Ukraine has engaged in missions carried out under the auspices of NATO, including Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean Sea. It was also interested in extending this mission to the Black Sea. In 2003, Ukraine sent nearly 1,700 troops to the US-led stabilization mission in Iraq. During the five years of participation in the mission in Iraq, more than 5,000 Ukrainian soldiers served, of which 18 died (Foliente, 2008). Ukraine sent a group of several dozen pilots, medical officers, bomb disposal experts and staff officers to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. The country also supported other NATO missions, including filling the Alliance’s strategic airlift gap by lending transport aircraft for the relief operation following the 2005 Pakistan earthquake (Hallams, 2010).

In 2004, the United States condemned electoral fraud in favor of the pro-Russian presidential candidate of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, supporting the leaders of the Orange Revolution. The revolution was a manifestation of the pro-democratic aspirations of part of the Ukrainian society and its rapid inclusion in the Western integration

and allied structures – the European Union and NATO (Kudelia, Kasianov, 2021). Ukraine's new political elites, headed by President Viktor Yushchenko, clearly adopted a pro-Western vector in foreign and security policy, including openly manifesting aspirations for NATO membership (Hansen, Toft, Wivel, 2009). It was similar in Georgia after the Rose Revolution of 2003. While the idea of joining NATO enjoyed relatively high social support in western Ukraine, it was opposed by the inhabitants of eastern and southern Ukraine, who had clearly pro-Russian views. An example of opposition was the June 2006 protests in Crimea against NATO PfP Sea Breeze 2006 military exercises. In January 2006, Gazprom stopped natural gas supplies to Ukraine, accusing it of stealing the raw material. This action was to force Ukraine to maintain a pro-Russian, or at least neutral, foreign and security policy, and above all to prevent it from joining NATO (Gardner, 2016). In May 2006, Russia's actions were strongly criticized by Vice President Dick Cheney, who condemned the use of energy resources as "tools of intimidation or blackmail" (Marshall, Rofe, 2009).

Neoconservatives in the USA were in favor of Ukraine's admission to NATO, despite criticism from the Kremlin and formal condemnation of this idea by the Russian parliament. The Ukrainian authorities sought to quickly include the country in the Membership Action Plan (MAP), which was strongly supported by President Bush and Vice President Cheney. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did not want to rush the process too much because they knew it could provoke Russia. On the international forum, this idea was supported by the new NATO members, but it was opposed by the so-called "old Europe," including Germany and France (Widmaier, 2015). This issue was discussed at the NATO summits in Riga in November 2006 and in Bucharest in April 2008. At the Bucharest Summit, the United States supported Ukraine's and Georgia's accession to the MAP, which would open the way for these countries to swift membership of the Alliance (Haesebrouck, Taghon, van Coppenolle, 2022). As part of the compromise, Ukraine and Georgia were not included in the MAP, but these countries were assured that they would become members of NATO (NATO, 2008). However, this was limited to declarations only, as in practice Ukraine and Georgia were not presented with a concrete pathways into the alliance. The most frequently used argument was that these countries did not meet NATO's technical criteria, which was in fact the lack of political will of Western European countries (Cecire, 2022). In the months following the summit, Russia supported secessionists from South Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to destabilize Georgia and prevent its inclusion in NATO. The Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 was also supposed to be a warning for Ukraine to verify its pro-Western aspirations.

Political conflicts between the leaders of the Orange Revolution led to the Yanukovich assuming the office of President of Ukraine in 2010. The new president promised that Ukraine would be a neutral state, cooperating with both, Russia and Western alliances (Ozili, 2022). At the same time, there was a change in the directions of US foreign and security policy towards CEE, because while President Bush administration was trying to bring Ukraine within the Euro-Atlantic structures, the administration of President Barack Obama initiated a "reset" with Russia, the price of which was to stop these attempts (Ganga, 2022). The rebuilding of relations with Russia was, in turn, needed by the USA so that it could focus on limiting China's influence in the Indo-Pa-

cific region under the “Pivot to Asia” concept (Wang, 2016). The political situation in Ukraine and in the United States has postponed the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO.

The pro-Russian President Yanukovich, with blood of the citizens on his hands, left Ukraine under the pressure of the pro-Western Euromaidan Revolution at the turn of 2013 and 2014. The revolution broke out after the president did not sign the association agreement with the EU, which was another manifestation of reluctance towards Ukraine’s rapprochement with the West. The uprising of the pro-Western part of Ukrainian society met with the support of the USA. Russia reacted strongly to the revolution by annexing Crimea and initiating the war in Donbass. Neither the United States nor NATO in any way threatened Russia with military action to counter its aggression, because the vital interests of the USA were not violated, and Ukraine was not covered by allied security guarantees (David, 2016). The Obama administration imposed economic sanctions on Russia, which were supposed to add significant costs to Russia’s endeavour, starting with the political and economic elites supporting the Kremlin’s military policy (Kitchen, 2017).

The United States supported the reform of Ukraine’s security and defense system by providing training and armaments, including Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. In 2015, the USA co-organized the Multinational Joint Commission (MJC), under which, together with NATO members – the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania and non-NATO member Sweden have provided reforms and training for the Ukrainian army and police (Mallick, 2022). In 2016, NATO adopted the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), under which it supports the transformation of Ukraine’s security and defense sector, including through consulting and a range of capacity-building programs and initiatives (NATO, 2022a). Ukraine participated in multiple bilateral and multilateral military exercises with the United States and NATO Allies, including Rapid Trident, Sea Breeze, and Cossack Mace (U.S. Department of State, 2022a). Of particular importance were the annual large-scale multinational training exercises Rapid Trident – organized by Ukraine and the United States with thousands of service members from NATO allied and partner nations. In September 2021 these exercises featured 6,000 troops from 15 countries along with 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers. Ukraine’s participation in exercises with NATO troops as a whole and individual armed forces of the member states, including the US military, greatly enhanced Ukrainian combat readiness and defense capabilities, and bolstered the morale of the Ukrainian soldiers. During the exercises, individual armies, including the American one, advised the Ukrainian army on capacity building in various combat activities, including organization, command and control, logistics, and use of intelligence data (Kotoulas, Pusztai, 2022). Ukraine has also participated in various political and military cooperation projects and events organized by NATO.

Along with tightening political and military cooperation with NATO, Kyiv confirmed its goal of eventually gaining the membership in the Alliance. In 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted legislation reinstating membership in NATO and the EU as a strategic objective, and in 2019 the Constitution of Ukraine was amended adding a stipulation on “the strategic course” of Ukraine toward membership in these organizations (Minakov, Rojansky, 2021). In the National Security Strategy of Ukraine of 2020, among the key Principles and Directions, there is a provision concerning “devel-

opment of a special partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with the aim of gaining full membership of Ukraine in NATO” (President of Ukraine, 2020). In 2020, Ukraine received a special status of Enhanced opportunities partner, which have only the six closest cooperating countries to the Alliance (Masters, 2022).

At the end of 2021, the Joint Statement on the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership (The White House, 2021) and the U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership (U.S. Department of State, 2022b) were signed. These documents declared closer cooperation in the field of security and defense. This coincided with Russia’s amassing troops near the Ukrainian border. In January 2022, in the face of the growing threat of Russian aggression, which was warned by American intelligence, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to President Joe Biden to support Ukraine’s aspirations to join NATO (Reuters, 2022). During talks with NATO allies and Russia, President Biden unequivocally stated that he would not allow Russia to quash Ukraine’s ambitions to join NATO, but at the same time he had no immediate action plans for its inclusion in the Alliance. The US administration’s lack of will to quickly include Ukraine in NATO resulted from four fundamental reasons: reluctance to expand US military commitments; the need for political and legal reforms in Ukraine; the desire to avoid hostility from Russia; and the changing attitude of Ukrainian political elites towards NATO membership over the years (Wong, Jakes, 2022).

DISCUSSION ON THE US ATTITUDE TOWARDS UKRAINE’S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2022 WAR

In mid-March, in his first speech to the U.S. Congress after the Russian aggression of 24 February 2022, President Zelenskyy temporarily stopped seeking Ukraine’s quick accession to NATO, admitting that this would not happen in the near future. At the same time, he called on the West for support in repelling aggression and the creation of “new institutions, new alliances” (Edmondson, 2022). According to James H. Lebovic (2022), the Ukrainian President did not want to solicit something he knew he would not get anyway. He therefore focused on the support he could actually receive from the West, that is, on providing the armaments needed to fight the aggressor. The US unequivocally condemned unprovoked and unjustified Russian assault. President Biden said that the US Armed Forces would not engage in armed conflict with Russia, but would resolutely defend NATO allies. He also announced deliveries of armaments and military equipment to the Ukrainian army and humanitarian aid for Ukrainians (The White House, 2022). In the following months, this policy has been implemented, and the US provides Ukraine with more and more technologically advanced military equipment, which allows it to defend itself effectively.

At the NATO Summit in Madrid of June 2022, attended by Ukrainian representatives without voting rights, the Alliance adopted a new Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022b). In the Concept, Russia is defined as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.” The Alliance announced a number of actions to strengthen deterrence and defense and to ensure the collective defense of Allies. The allies confirmed the “open door” policy and of-

ficially invited Finland and Sweden to join NATO, which also feel threatened by Russia's military policy. Once again, they decided not to cover Ukraine with the MAP. However, they confirmed the topicality of the Bucharest Summit declaration and announced the development of partnership with Ukraine. In late September, President Zelenskyy signed a formal bid for an accelerated membership of Ukraine in NATO, claiming that Ukraine had already made its way to NATO, meaning sacrifice in the fight against Russia for its own and the Alliance's security. It is worth recalling that NATO was not founded as "an exclusive country club for the rich and strong but rather a harbor for the weak and imperiled" (Cecire, 2022). The leaders of Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania and Slovakia in a joint statement supported Ukraine's aspirations, calling on other NATO members to do the same. However, there was no such enthusiasm among Western European NATO members. Also the US administration did not meet Ukraine's expectations in this regard. National Security Adviser of President Biden, Jake Sullivan, said that the focus should be on urgent military assistance to Ukraine, and the discussion of possible NATO membership should be postponed: "Our view is that the best way for us to support Ukraine is through practical on the ground support in Ukraine, and that the process in Brussels should be taken up at a different time" (Seldin, 2022). This means that the United States does not consider the possibility of including Ukraine in NATO until a peace deal is concluded. However, at the NATO summit in Vilnius on 11–12 July 2023, the allies assured that Ukraine will eventually join the Alliance when conditions are met, that the MAP is not required for this and that the country has made significant progress towards full membership: "Ukraine's future is in NATO. We reaffirm the commitment we made at the 2008 Summit in Bucharest that Ukraine will become a member of NATO, and today we recognise that Ukraine's path to full Euro-Atlantic integration has moved beyond the need for the Membership Action Plan. Ukraine has become increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance, and has made substantial progress on its reform path." (NATO, 2023).

Julie George (2022) claims that the war in Ukraine is showing the need for NATO expansion. Sweden and Finland were included in NATO, and the Alliance decisively extended its activities to Ukraine, which would not have happened if there was no Russian aggression. She notes, however, that although in recent decades countries such as Ukraine and Georgia had the support of the US in their aspirations to join NATO, there are countries in Europe that have resisted this idea. Ukraine's path to NATO membership also faces a number of requirements that it would have to meet, including political and military transformation. While the need to reform Ukraine's political and legal system is still obvious, Ukraine is undergoing very rapid changes in terms of military, both organizational and in terms of the use of advanced military equipment used in NATO, mainly American.

As the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) experts point out in the post-Ukraine War period, NATO will likely preserve its "open door" policy. This will be important both for expanding the zone of stability and security, and for promoting and strengthening democracy. However, despite the support of the West, including the United States, for Ukraine, it will be difficult for allies to agree on Ukraine's prospects for NATO membership. This is due to the fact that Ukraine's territorial integrity

and political future will likely be compromised because of the war (Polyakova et al., 2022). Steven Pifer (2022) argues that as the bombing of Ukraine progressed, it gave the impression that President Zelenskyy would be willing to make some concessions to Russia in order to quickly end the war and reduce the number of military and civilian casualties. One area of searching for a compromise could be the question of working out a certain formula for neutralizing Ukraine, with solid international guarantees, which would end the discussion on that country's membership in NATO. On the Russian side, however, there was no willingness to conduct real negotiations, because they believed that they could win on the battlefield and impose their own conditions. But if the Ukrainians and the Russians decide to start serious negotiations, such a scenario would be one of the possible outcomes. However, President Zelenskyy would then face difficult choices regarding concessions to Russia, which could be politically controversial at home.

Richard K. Betts (2022) believes that US support for the rapid inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO is unlikely. It is hard to imagine how this could be accomplished within the conditions set by NATO. Moreover, it is unlikely without complete defeat of the Russian invasion, and expulsion of Russian forces from Donbas and Crimea, as well as South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the case of Georgia. Despite the optimism caused by the successes of the Ukrainian army's autumn counter-offensive, such a possibility is still very remote. Cynthia Roberts (2022) believes that excessive optimism about the actions of the Ukrainian troops is unjustified. Based on historical analysis, she indicates that Russia has always waged wars "in the most costly way possible," losing far more men than an enemy and wasting resources. According to her, "this is the Russian style of fighting," sloppy and inefficient. Ultimately, however, Russia was able to prevail. This time, however, the West, including the US, supports the army fighting against Russia. The future of Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, and thus the possibility of realizing NATO membership aspirations, depends on the determination and consistency of this support.

James Goldgeier (2022) believes that the attitude of the United States towards Ukraine's membership in NATO will largely depend on the expectations of the Ukrainians themselves. If during the negotiations with Russia they decide to be neutral, with real guarantees from the US and other Western countries, and with the supply of defensive military equipment, the US will support such a position. However, if Ukraine decides to join NATO, he believes that it would involve some opposition in the U.S. Senate. The accession process would undoubtedly be much more difficult than in the case of Finland and Sweden. Nevertheless, he thinks that it is more likely than it was before the war. According to Stephen Biddle (2022), the possible prospect of Ukraine's membership in NATO depends on what settlement ends the war. Ukraine certainly wants to be covered by security guarantees, either institutionally or informally, collectively or bilaterally with individual members, which Russia will not want to allow. On the other hand, it's hard to imagine ending the war without some kind of a security guarantee. He believes that the war may take several more years, and thus negotiations on this matter may drag on. This may result in bloodshed and potentially significant political changes, both in Russia, Ukraine and the NATO. Therefore, it is difficult to guess what may happen in the future. In fact, various solutions are possible, especially

in the transitional period between the end of hostilities and Ukraine's accession to NATO. Such a solution could be, for example, bilateral alliances, including between Ukraine and the USA, and between Ukraine and individual CEE countries, especially Poland, which has the largest military potential in the region. The possible evolution of the situation in Belarus, neighboring Ukraine and Russia, may also play an important role in the development of a new European security architecture.

As Pierre Morcos notes in the current context, NATO cannot agree to admit Ukraine because it would have to immediately declare war on Russia, which occupies part of its territory. According to him, NATO would not be able to effectively defend Ukraine, same like Georgia. He claims that President Zelenskyy should focus on pushing for integration with the European Union, which is a more realistic prospect (Morcos, 2022). Unlike NATO, the EU enlargement focuses on economic, legal and social rather than military issues. For Ukraine giving up its aspiration to join NATO, the EU membership has been raised as part of the *quid pro quo* package together with alternative security guarantees. However, as long as the war lasts, both NATO and the EU membership are unrealistic (Youngs, 2022). After its completion, it seems that the Western European powers, as well as Russia itself, would find it easier to accept the possibility of Ukraine joining the European structures than the transatlantic one. On the other hand, the opinion on this issue of a disgraced and greatly weakened Russia may not matter much.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has advocated the "open door" policy of NATO. Without the consent of the US, there would be no enlargement of the Alliance to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states, which were previously part of the Soviet Union. Ukraine plays a key role in the strategic competition between the US and Russia after the Cold War. The US has been supporting Ukraine's right to independently decide on membership in international organizations, including military alliances. The practical support of individual American administrations for Ukraine's membership in NATO was varying. Among the main factors preventing the US from decisively supporting Ukraine's rapid inclusion in NATO was the fear of Russia's decisive response, as well as Ukraine's lack of adequate political and military preparation for membership in the Alliance. Moreover, in Ukraine itself, the attitude of political elites towards the issue of joining NATO was changing. The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 made the issue of that country's membership in NATO extremely important. During the war, covering Ukraine with the guarantees of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is unrealistic, because the Alliance, including the US, does not want an open military conflict between NATO and Russia. US consent to Ukraine joining NATO may only be possible after the end of the war. It will depend on the shape of peace arrangements, including Ukraine's decisions regarding its future, and the attitude of global and regional powers towards the future architecture of European and perhaps also global security. Regardless of whether Ukraine will join NATO or not, it is necessary to provide it with real security guarantees, mainly American ones, so that the process of rebuilding the state

can be seriously started. American business, which may play a key role in this reconstruction, will decide to invest only in a safe environment.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to analyze and evaluate the attitude of the United States towards Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership after the Cold War. Particular attention was paid to the period after the outbreak of war in 2022. The main research problem is the following questions: What role does Ukraine play in the US-Russia geostrategic rivalry after the Cold War? Has the United States been determined and consistent in supporting Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership after the Cold War? Has the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022 affected the US attitude towards Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership? The United States supported NATO's "open door" policy, including the possibility of joining the Alliance by post-Soviet states, including Ukraine. However, international factors and the situation in Ukraine meant that the US was not determined to finalize this process, and the approach of individual US administrations to this issue fluctuated. The outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022 caused the US to postpone the issue of Ukraine's possible membership in NATO for the post-war period. During the research, experts and scientists from research centers in Washington D.C. and New York were interviewed. The method of content analysis of text sources was also used.

Keywords: NATO membership, Ukraine, the United States, Russia, the war in Ukraine

STANY ZJEDNOCZONE WOBEC ASPIRACJI UKRAINY DO CZŁONKOSTWA W NATO

STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest analiza i ocena postawy Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec aspiracji Ukrainy członkostwa w NATO po zimnej wojnie. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona została okresowi po wybuchu wojny w 2022 roku. Główny problem badawczy stanowią następujące pytania: Jaką rolę odgrywa Ukraina w geostrategicznej rywalizacji USA–Rosja po zimnej wojnie? Czy Stany Zjednoczone były zdeterminowane i konsekwentne w poparciu ukraińskich aspiracji

członkostwa w NATO po zimnej wojnie? Czy wybuch wojny w Ukrainie w 2022 roku wpłynął na postawę USA wobec ukraińskich aspiracji członkostwa w NATO? Stany Zjednoczone popierały politykę „otwartych drzwi” NATO, w tym możliwość wstąpienia do Sojuszu państw postsowieckich, włącznie z Ukrainą. Czynniki międzynarodowe i sytuacja w Ukrainie powodowały jednak, że USA nie były zdeterminowane do finalizacji tego procesu, a podejście poszczególnych administracji amerykańskich wobec tej kwestii ulegało wahaniom. Wybuch wojny w Ukrainie w 2022 roku spowodował, że USA odłożyło kwestię ewentualnego członkostwa Ukrainy w NATO na okres powojenny. Podczas badań przeprowadzono wywiady z ekspertami i naukowcami z ośrodków badawczych z Waszyngtonu i Nowego Jorku. Skorzystano również z metody analizy źródeł tekstowych.

Słowa kluczowe: członkostwo w NATO, Ukraina, Stany Zjednoczone, Rosja, wojna w Ukrainie