

Nato Military Interventions In Kosovo, Libya, Afghanistan, And Their Impact On Relations With Russia After The Cold War

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to find out how NATO military interventions in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan have affected relations with Russia. In order to achieve the aim and hypothesis of the study, the critical geopolitical approach is chosen as a theoretical framework.

A schematic critical geopolitics conceptualization of Gearóid Ó. Tuathail is used as the method of research. This thesis mostly pays attention to three essential parts of the critical geopolitics: “formal geopolitics” (analyses of think tanks, specialists, etc.), “practical geopolitics” (the decisions of policy makers, official statements, documents, strategies and speeches) and “popular geopolitics” (the discourse of the media and surveys). The combination of these three elements allows determining the certain NATO’s and Russian geopolitical discourses towards crises in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan. With regard to evidences of crises, NATO’s and Russian geopolitical discourses are assessed from very positive, positive, neutral, to negative and very negative. It provides an opportunity to see how both sides have acknowledged these crises and how in long terms NATO’s military interventions in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan have influenced relations with Russia in international order.

Moreover, descriptive method, discourse analysis and a comparative approach are used to scrutinize Russian and NATO’s geopolitical discourses towards crises. The analyses of NATO’s and Russian geopolitical discourses show that the hypothesis different NATO and Russian geopolitical discourses towards crises in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan have affected reciprocal relations is correct. The crisis of Kosovo in 2008 marks the end of the Russian flexible policy towards NATO and marks a new beginning of a permanently hostile geopolitical discourse against NATO in Europe. NATO military interventions in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan have negatively affected relations with Russia mostly in Europe. Mutual cooperation and diplomatic disputes towards crises in Libya and Afghanistan are minor in comparison with the NATO-Russian relations in the European continent. Consequently, Russia concentrates most of its attention to the geopolitical tradition towards Europe.

Keywords

Critical geopolitics, geopolitical discourses, international relations, NATO, Russia, Kosovo, Libya, Afghanistan, the US

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Introduction

After the Cold War new ideas started to appear in academic discourse. The classical and modern geopolitics, realism, neorealism, and neoliberalism are no longer adequate to fully explain the changes and transformations of the world since the 1990s. Geography as a fundamental factor of geopolitics lost its significance. Power balance, game theories, and self-interest are not the driving forces of the state in the international order. Nowadays since 1990s countries with the same ideologies, values, and identities started to (re)unite and (re)establish regional or even global organizations and alliances. In 1949 NATO was established as a military defense alliance, which unified Western countries against the Soviet menace. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the external threat of NATO also disappeared. Consequently, NATO had to search for a new vision in order to exist as an alliance.

Since 1990s NATO's transformation was significant in several aspects that geography, general mapping system, and classical and modern geopolitics are not able to explain. The Alliance expanded and incorporated new allies all around Europe; it implemented new overseas missions outside its boundaries; it expanded its capabilities from peacekeeping and reconstruction missions to humanitarian aid and the fight against piracy and global terrorism. In addition, in the last two decades NATO transformed its military and modified effectiveness.

Changes in the international system were a fundamental factor that propelled NATO's new geopolitical and military developments. Eventually, NATO as a military alliance became a political tool, which has been used to implement Western countries' policies toward the rest of the world. Consequently, NATO's military missions have interfered in Russia's geopolitics, which has encouraged a reshaping of Russia's relations with the Western military alliance. NATO's actions challenged the Russian geopolitical interests in the world. As the result, it was necessary to rethink the Russian security strategy, modernize its military capabilities, and mobilize the support of the media and the local citizens against NATO.

This research is topical due to its deep review of past NATO military conflicts that determined the contemporary relations of NATO and Russia. American and NATO military interventions made Putin to conclude that the West is dangerous and unpredictable.¹ In the current multipolar world, the relations of NATO and Russia could determine the balance of power in Europe (war in Ukraine), Caucasus (frozen conflict in Georgia), and in the Middle East (Syria). The struggle and resistance of

¹ Janis Berzins, Russian new generation warfare is not hybrid warfare, *The war in Ukraine: Lessons for Ukraine*, (2015), 41.

Russia toward NATO leads to new debates, negotiations, and conflicts, which might highly influence regional and even global geopolitics, economies, and social affairs.

This research seeks to find out how different crises in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya were acknowledged by NATO and Russia. The hypothesis of this research claims that different NATO and Russian geopolitical discourses toward crises in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have affected reciprocal relations. With regard to the hypothesis, the aim of the research is to find out how NATO military interventions in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have affected relations with Russia. In order to fulfill the aim of this research three goals are introduced: to conceptualize the critical geopolitical theory and relate it to NATO and Russian positions; to compare and contrast Russian and NATO's geopolitical discourses toward the Kosovo, Libyan and Afghanistan crises and clarify the consequences for the mutual relations and cooperation in the international order; to encapsulate all insights.

Research methods: Descriptive method, discourse analysis, and a comparative approach will be applied.

This research is different from other similar works with its exclusive approach to NATO and Russian relations, which were affected by NATO military interventions in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan. This research reviews history for more than a decade, which actually allows a better look at military operations from a distance. As an alternative to nowadays popular neoclassical realism theory, the critical geopolitics is chosen as a new approach to explain the international order from the different broader perspective. Critical geopolitics seeks to investigate geopolitics as a cultural, social, and political practice. Critical geopolitics helps to review not only what is "outside" of actor/state, but what is "inside," the "domestic" and the "foreign," "there" and "here".² Analysis of three different cases gives an opportunity to anticipate and indicate how NATO and Russia have acknowledged these crises and how their different geopolitical discourses toward crises have led to reciprocal accruing disagreements, which eventually influenced contemporary conflicts in Ukraine and Syria.

Conceptualization of the critical geopolitics and its relation to NATO and Russian position

In the late 1980s, critical geopolitics appeared as a critique of modern geopolitics. However, the key critical geopolitical literature emerged only in the 1990s. The end of superpower rivalry, which had shaped the structure of (geo)

² G. O. Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge; second edition (2006), 8.

political thought for over 40 years, further fueled interest in the spatiality of power in geography and throughout social science.³ The rethinking of power structure required critical thought that progressively was labeled as critical geopolitics.

According to Gearóid Ó. Tuathail and Simon Dalby, the main scholars of the critical geopolitics school, critical geopolitics “has emerged out of the work of a number of scholars in the fields of geography and international relations who, over the two last decades, have sought to investigate geopolitics as a social, cultural and political practice”.⁴ Critical geopolitics is not about “the outside” of the state but about the very construction of boundaries of “inside” and “outside,” “here” and “there,” the “domestic” and the “foreign”.⁵ For instance, the construction of Russian foreign policy also involves domestic policy, and it also reshapes political identity of indigenous and external actors. The same could be said about NATO, the fight against global terrorism affects member states and their political discourse.

Furthermore, “the main goal of the critical geopolitical approach is not just to characterize the geography of politics, but to analyze the actual politics of the geographical specification of politics”.⁶ In other words, critical geopolitics does not only concentrate on the relations only between states, but it also analyzes how particular relations and policies were created, approved, and implemented.

John Agnew, another critical geopolitics writer, claims that “critical geopolitics can be defined in a broad way as the critical sense that world politics is underpinned by assumptions and schemas about the ways in which geographical divisions of the world, strategic plans, and global images enter into the making foreign policy”.⁷ One can presuppose that premises and schemas are socially constructed by particular people who were influenced by identity, history, geographical position, etc.

Other academics argue that the basic concept behind critical geopolitics is that intellectuals of statecraft construct ideas about places; these ideas have influence and reinforce their political behaviors and policy choices.⁸ However, the discourse of geopolitics does not belong to exclusively political elites anymore. Critical geopolitics broadens the analysis of geopolitics from state actors located in formal

³ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Ashgate, (2013), 6

⁴ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, *Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics*, Routledge; second edition, (2002), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Ashgate, (2013), 6

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

⁸ Fouberg, Erin H., Alexander B. Murphy, and H. J. de Blij, *Human Geography: People, Place, and Culture* (10 ed.), (2012), 535.

institutions (such as government ministries, universities or think-tanks) to nonstate actors.⁹ For instance, Russian president Vladimir Putin does not create his own doctrines and strategies, his ideas are influenced and shaped by political advisers, policymakers, and even by civil society groups, insurgencies, NGOs, etc.

Consequently, discourses are seen to influence the rules and conventions by which political behavior is structured, regulated, and judged.¹⁰ The scholars of the critical geopolitics school claim that geopolitics must be conceptualized as a form of political practice and a discourse. However, many writers limit the critical geopolitical approach with particular phrases and ideas. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby are some of among the few scholars who have fully conceptualized and theorized the critical geopolitical approach. Their input to critical geopolitics is significant. They distinguish five fundamental arguments of critical geopolitics:

1. Geopolitics is a much wider cultural phenomenon than is normally defined and comprehended by the geopolitical tradition of wise men's statecraft.
2. Critical geopolitics bears witness to the irredeemable plurality of space and the multiplicity of possible political constructions of space. Thus, it pays particular attention to the boundary-drawing practices and performances that characterize the everyday life of states.
3. Critical geopolitics argues that geopolitics is not a singularity but a plurality. Critical geopolitics must be considered as a political activity carried out by a range of political actors and not limited to a small group.
4. Critical geopolitics argues that the practice of studying geopolitics can never be politically neutral. It is always influenced by certain values, experiences, etc.
5. Ultimately, in conceptualizing geopolitics as "situated reasoning" a critical perspective also seeks to theorize its broader socio-spatial and techno-territorial circumstances of development and use. Historically, the question of geopolitics has always been the question of states and their societies, technological networks and their relationship to territoriality.

The five arguments above conceptualize the critical geopolitical approach in terms of the meaning, space, and stability. However, the critical geopolitics argue that these three elements are influenced and shaped by other factors, such as certain values, identity, history, state apparatus, etc.¹¹ Consequently, the knowledge of these

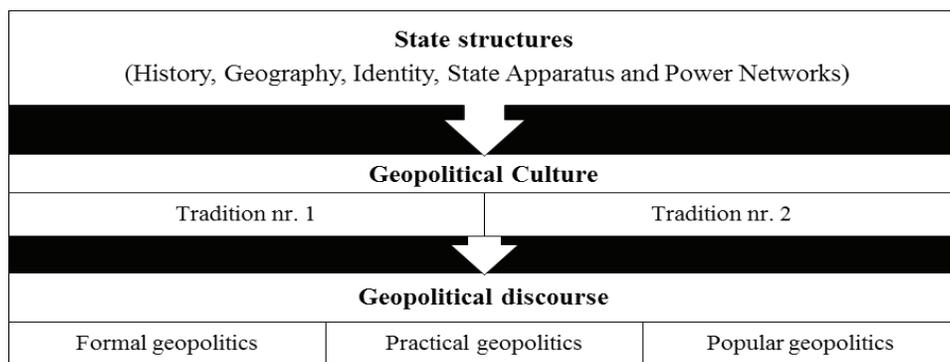
⁹ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, Ashgate, (2013), 7.

¹⁰ Klaus Dodds, *Global Geopolitics: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge (2004), 31

¹¹ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, *Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics*, Routledge; second edition, (2002), 6.

features is fundamental to the successful operationalization of the state's/agency's "the real geopolitics." At this point "the real geopolitics" must be understood as the criticism to the classical geopolitics, which, according to the critical geopolitics, is outdated and could not explain the contemporary events. However, this research does not seek to find out "the real geopolitics" of NATO or Russia.

Gearóid Ó. Tuathail provides a schematic critical geopolitics conceptualization which is also used as the methodology for this research. The table below presents its key features.



Graph No. 1: Geopolitics: A Critical Geopolitics Conceptualization.

Source: G. O. Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge, second edition (2006), 8.

Gearóid Ó. Tuathail argues that all states, as recognized territorial units within an international system of states, have a geopolitical culture.¹² Geopolitical culture is mostly understood as a state's/agency's unique identity, position, and influence in world politics. In other words, it could be also defined as geopolitical tradition, which is one of the approaches to the geopolitical culture. States or agencies do not limit themselves only with one geopolitical tradition. Regarding the certain characteristics of the state or agency there might be even more than one geopolitical tradition. In addition, Gearóid Ó. Tuathail asserts that geopolitical culture or tradition is conditioned by a series of factors:

- A state's geographical situation
- Historical/political formation and bureaucratic organization

¹² G. O. Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge; second edition (2006), 7

- Discourses of national identity
- Traditions of theorizing its relationship to wider world
- The networks of power operating in the state.¹³

Gearóid Ó. Tuathail's distinction once again approves that the geopolitics is more than a political geography and mapping. On the one hand, it is a broad and even complicated structure of certain elements, but on the other hand, it helps better to understand the actions taken by the particular state or agency in the international order.

For instance, there might be three different geopolitical traditions in the Russian Federation: "Russia within Europe," "Eurasian theory," and "Russia as a bridge between East and West".¹⁴ Every tradition was influenced by particular historical factors, such as *Slavophilism*, or by western models and institutions, or by particular technological and economic developments. Besides, the Russian geopolitical tradition in Europe has been influenced by European states and NATO. The Alliance's actions invoked a particular Russian response and counter-reaction, which have led to reciprocal accruing disagreements and cooperation. Regarding NATO's past historical events and new global severities, geopolitical traditions could be distinguished as "Euro-Atlantic collective defense" and "crisis manager." It is possible to argue that NATO could be considered as a hybrid, a collective security club and an agency for conflict prevention. On the one hand, NATO concentrates on the security of Euro-Atlantic space, and on the other hand it seeks to expand its capabilities and participate in various operations and missions all around the globe. However, as the research suggests later, NATO's geopolitical tradition of "crisis manager" was partly unsuccessful due to particular reasons.

Moving on, the geopolitical tradition finds concrete expression in the form of particular geopolitical discourses. Discourses are not merely speech or written statements but actually the rules by which verbal speech and written declarations are made meaningful.¹⁵ Moreover, in the critical geopolitics approach, discourses are not only produced by political elites, but also throughout state-centered society at multiple sites.¹⁶ Gearóid Ó. Tuathail distinguishes critical geopolitics discourse into "formal geopolitics," "practical geopolitics," and "popular geopolitics."

¹³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, "Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy", *Political Geography* Vol. 11, No. 2, March 1992, 95.

¹⁶ G. O. Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge; second edition (2006), 9.

“Formal geopolitics” refers to the experts or the strategic community of the state who create political doctrines, strategic studies, or specific bureaucratic reports. For instance, NATO’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and Allied Command Transformation are the key institutions that promote changes by driving, facilitating, and advocating continuous improvement of Alliance capabilities to maintain and enhance the military relevance and effectiveness of the Alliance. In Russia, the Ministry of Defense and the Security Council are the leading institutions that ensure the establishment of particular strategies, doctrines, etc. Undoubtedly, under all these institutions there are many committees, working groups, think-tanks, and bureaucrats who are responsible for the efficient creation and implementation of strategies.

Sometimes “formal geopolitics” and “practical geopolitics” reproduce each other, particularly when politicians are directly involved in the strategy-making. On the other hand, “practical geopolitics” is mostly related with the leaders of the state and foreign affairs policymakers.¹⁷ “Practical geopolitics” represents the actual practice of policy that is usually expressed by official political speeches or the state’s/agency’s actions. In NATO, practical geopolitics is mostly related with the North Atlantic Council (NAC) where political decisions are adopted by permanent member-state delegations. In comparison with Russia, NATO’s “practical geopolitics” requires a consensus among all representatives of member states. Consequently, NATO’s political decisions and actions (“practical geopolitics”) represent a unilateral position of the entire Alliance. In theory, the Russian “practical geopolitics” applies to the already mentioned Security Council, current president Vladimir Putin, prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, and other important politicians. However, in the practical way, the Russian “practical geopolitics” belongs to the small circle of the decision makers, especially including Putin.

Last but not least, “popular geopolitics” refers to the mass media, state rituals, and public opinion. Taking into account that NATO is an agency/international actor that unites a group of states, thus both Russia and NATO use mass media for core dissemination of ideas and propaganda to societies. Similar to mass media, state rituals also shape and transform the opinion of people. For instance, NATO represented by the certain media as the exclusive club of democratic countries that protects human rights, international law, and Russia represented by its media as the counterbalance to the hegemony of the west (NATO).

¹⁷ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, *Introduction: Rethinking Geopolitics*, Routledge; second edition, (2002), 12.

What is more, Gearóid Ó. Tuathail argues that “not all geopolitical discourses are created or treated equally”.¹⁸ On the one hand, some geopolitical discourses are produced by military or state institutions, military specialists, and universities. On the other hand, one of the discourses could be also influenced by civil society: NGOs, think-tanks, etc. Moreover, journals and newspapers often promote certain geopolitical discourse that only serves a political agenda.¹⁹

Eventually, all three geopolitical discourses interact and influence each other, thus the lines between them could blur. Formal, practical, and popular geopolitics are the outcome of the predominating geopolitical cultures and traditions. In comparison with Russia as a state actor, NATO is considered as a military alliance; however, this research seeks to analyze NATO from a different perspective and perception. NATO member states represent a certain Western culture and traditions, which eventually unite them to the unprecedented agency in the international order. Undoubtedly, NATO as an international institution/agency depends on its member states and their political decisions; however, on the other hand, member states also depend on political and military decisions within NATO (for instance, NATO’s article V). This research will analyze NATO as an international actor, which has its political decision and strategy makers. The Western media, as the representative of the “popular geopolitics,” will be taken into consideration as the “a watchdog of NATO,” which monitors NATO’s activities.

A critical geopolitical approach helps to look at world affairs critically. It provides a framework within which indigenous events in one place could be linked to global politics. Besides, analyses of the geopolitical discourses could provide an opportunity to predict the future direction of regional or world politics.

This research will mostly pay attention to three essential parts of the critical geopolitics: “formal geopolitics” (think-tanks, specialists, etc.), “practical geopolitics” (the decisions of policymakers, official statements, documents, strategies, and speeches are compared and contrasted to each other). Legal documents such as NATO strategic concepts, Russian foreign and military strategies, UN Security Council resolutions, Prague Summit declaration, and similar reports are used. Moreover, official speeches of Russian and NATO political leaders are taken from Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and NATO official website) and “popular geopolitics” (the Western and the Russian media and the social media will be predominantly reviewed and compared. Regarding the circulation and popularity of the media, the news coverage from BBC, CNN, *der Spiegel*,

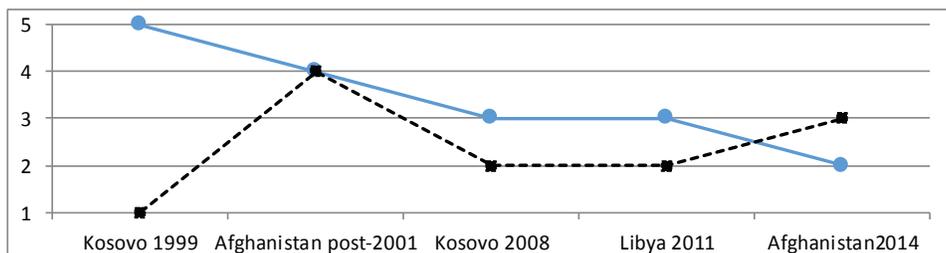
¹⁸ G. O. Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge, *The Geopolitics Reader*, Routledge; second edition (2006), 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Reuters, *The New York Times*, *Izvestia*, *Kommersant*, *Lenta*, and *Pravda* newspapers are analyzed. Moreover, several surveys such as *Financial Times*/Harris March–April 2011 and The German Marshall Fund of the United States, “Transatlantic Trends survey 2013” about public opinion toward the crises are used in order to supplement and justify arguments. The timeframe of the media and surveys are monitored from 1999 to March 2014).

The combination of these three elements will allow determining the certain NATO’s and Russian geopolitical discourses toward crises in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan. With regard to evidence of crises, NATO’s and Russian geopolitical discourses will be evaluated by the author of the article from *very positive*, *positive*, *neutral*, to *negative* and *very negative*. It will provide an opportunity to see how both sides have acknowledged these crises and how in the long-term NATO’s military interventions in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have influenced relations with Russia and the international order.

Ultimately, this research suggests that attention to long-lasting processes could help to realize how international actors create and recreate regional or global politics and how their different geopolitical discourses of crises have led to reciprocal disagreements and cooperation (between NATO and Russia). After analyzing all three critical geopolitics— “formal geopolitics,” “practical geopolitics,” and “popular geopolitics” —the table below recapitulates evaluations of NATO’s and Russia’s geopolitical discourses toward Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan crises in the period of 1999–2014. It provides an opportunity to look at NATO’s military operations and realize how it shaped relations with the Russian Federation.



Graph No. 2: NATO’s and the Russian geopolitical discourses toward crises

Source: made by the author regarding research. Discourse towards crises:

5 – very positive; 4 – positive, 3 – neutral; 2 – negative, 1 – very negative.

Dash line—Russia; Solid line—NATO.

NATO's geopolitical discourse

NATO's geopolitical discourse with regard to Kosovo crisis in 1999 stayed *very positive*. "Practical geopolitics" (NATO's political decisions) were strongly supported and partly influenced by the "popular geopolitics." Among specialists who represent "formal geopolitics," the 1999 bombings of Kosovo are seen as the most successful NATO's operation after the end of the Cold War. NATO was able to amplify its military attacks on Yugoslavia because the Alliance had successfully created the perception that it was responding in a measured and proportional way to the events on the ground.²⁰

After several years the idea of Kosovo independence among NATO members already started to appear in 2005. In the year 2006, NATO diplomats were firmly persuaded that "while Russia would be uncomfortable with Kosovo's independence they would still go with it".²¹ In the year 2007, the troika group, which consisted of the US, EU, and Russia negotiated the future of Kosovo. The unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence, supported by most NATO countries, came just weeks after the Contact Group report had affirmed that there would be no imposed solution.²² The gridlock of negotiations between different parties was broken by the self-willed Western countries' decision to support Kosovo's intention to become independent.

However, the question of the Kosovo sovereignty divided NATO member states into two different camps. NATO's "practical geopolitics" turned out as fragmented and not unilateral. The majority of NATO member states approved the confirmation of Kosovo's independence, but the rest opposed it. Spain, Slovakia, Romania, and Greece still do not recognize the status of Kosovo. The main purpose for their reaction is the contemporary domestic political and ethnic issues that these countries face. Nevertheless, NATO still tried to cooperate with Kosovo as one united Alliance.

The same as in 1999, "popular geopolitics" played important role establishing a certain NATO's geopolitical discourse. The Western media paid exclusive attention in February 2008 to the declaration of Kosovo's independence. During the month of February, BBC covered the story of Kosovo 79 times. BBC mostly analyzed the impact of Kosovo's independence on the Balkans region, Russia, and NATO.²³ Even

²⁰ John Norris, *Collision course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo*, Praeger Press (2005), 299

²¹ Judah Tim, *Kosovo: what everyone needs to know*, Oxford University Press, USA (2008), 135-136

²² James Hughes, "Russia and the Secession of Kosovo: Power, Norms and the Failure of Multilateralism", *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 65, No. 5, (July 2013), 1011

²³ BBC.co.uk, "Recognition for new Kosovo grows", March, 18, 2008; Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7251359.stm>

though CNN wrote only 21 stories about Kosovo in one month, these articles were more positive rather than unbiased regarding the question of the independence of Kosovo. Some articles simply glorified NATO: “Kosovo’s dream to become independent dates back decades, but only after NATO intervened militarily almost a decade ago did ethnic Albanians begin to feel their dream could become true”.²⁴ By contrast *Der Spiegel* mentioned Kosovo’s case 39 times and stayed more or less impartial the entire time about the reaction of Western countries, Serbia, and Russia.²⁵ Journals and newspapers often promoted a certain geopolitical discourse that served a political agenda that was more favorable to Kosovo’s state rather than to Serbia.

Even though Kosovo with a support of Western countries successfully declared its unilateral independence, the entire NATO’s geopolitical discourse could be understood as neutral. On the one hand, “popular geopolitics” covered positive news about Kosovo’s independence, but on the other hand, “practical geopolitics” was represented as fragmented and dispersed. The similar changes of NATO’s geopolitical discourse could be observed in the crisis of Afghanistan.

From the beginning, in the post-2001 Afghanistan the “popular geopolitics” played a fundamental role reflecting the US and its Allies campaign in Afghanistan and shaping societies’ perception related to the war against terrorism. This can be illustrated by an analysis of the quantity of Western media’s articles, which were based on “terrorism” or on “terrorism in Afghanistan.” For instance, three months after the 9/11 events BBC news wrote only 98 stories about terrorism in Afghanistan and 2016 news about terrorism itself. Similarly, the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, in the same period wrote 322 stories about terrorism and only 15 articles about terrorism in Afghanistan. After the tragic events in New York, one of the main newspapers in the United States, *The New York Times* wrote a record amount of news about terrorism – 2420 times, and as the offset, only 908 stories about Afghanistan’s terrorism. NATO’s first overseas missions tested its capabilities to deploy military units far from its boundaries, verify capacity to stabilize, and reconstruct a failed state. The successful first few years changed the perception of NATO: the Alliance appeared as the global policeman with the United States in front. NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan holds broader international implications with regard to the effectiveness of international strategies to combat

²⁴ Alessio Vinci, “Analysis: Kosovo now and then”, CNN February 15, 2008, Source: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/02/15/kosovo.vinci/index.html?iref=allsearch>

²⁵ *Der Spiegel*, “Debatte um Unabhängigkeit: USA erkennen Kosovo an - Deutschland und viele EU-Staaten wollen mitziehen”, March 18, 2008; Source: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/debatte-umunabhaengigkeit-usa-erkennen-kosovo-an-deutschland-und-viele-eu-staaten-wollen-mitziehen-a-536051.html>

terrorism and insurgency.²⁶ Notwithstanding, NATO was not entirely able to function without international partners, particularly Russia. To sum up, in the first years of the military operation in Afghanistan, NATO’s geopolitical discourse could be explained as positive.

Table 1: The Western media’s coverage of a “terrorism” and the “terrorism in Afghanistan”.

	11/09/2001 to 11/12/2001		11/09/2002 to 11/12/2002	
	“Terrorism”	“Terrorism in Afghanistan”	“Terrorism”	“Terrorism in Afghanistan”
BBC	2016	98	701	8
<i>Der Spiegel</i>	322	15	165	2
<i>The New York Times</i>	2420	908	602	96

Source: Made by the author regarding the data of the news.

Since 2005, NATO has turned to counterinsurgency to win the hearts and minds of the indigenous populations, thus the mission has expanded. NATO’s leadership was too focused on liberal convictions in the abstract and too unaware of the mission’s consequences.²⁷ The divisions between NATO member states have been a fundamental factor that impacted NATO’s geopolitical discourse in the mission in Afghanistan. Internal disputes and the occasional independent act of some NATO members, particularly the United States, upset external actions in Afghanistan and ultimately overrode the principles of the Atlantic political leadership. Inefficient unilateral American policy toward Afghanistan distracted the whole Alliance’s strategy. Contemporary relations between Afghanistan and NATO switched from bad to worse. Excluding Afghanistan’s internal divisions and counterinsurgency, the media, or in other terms, “popular geopolitics” is another fundamental factor that has impacted NATO’s geopolitical discourse. The early Western societies’ enthusiasm was transformed by the anxiety and later on, during the economic crisis, deep public disappointment became a normal phenomenon. The media is a key factor informing the Western population more often about the failures in Afghanistan rather than successes. In the last several years the fatalities

²⁶ Ivan Dinev Ivanov, *Transforming NATO: New Allies, Missions and Capabilities*, Rowman & Littlefield, (2011), 201.

²⁷ Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*, Stanford Security Studies (2012), 214

of NATO troops have reached the same number of casualties as the first eight years (2001–2008) of the war. Furthermore, the media has published contemporary interviews with Afghanistan's president who declares that "the entire NATO exercise was one that caused Afghanistan a lot of suffering, a lot of loss of life, and no gains".²⁸ The hostility of Afghanistan's politicians and society is constantly published in various newspapers and mostly it is negative content news rather than positive.²⁹ Consequently, the whole NATO's geopolitical discourse toward crises in Afghanistan could be defined as negative.

In 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, under the mantle of "responsibility to protect," came at a crucial turning point in the history of the world.³⁰ The vital aim of NATO was to stop the Libyan government from using force against its own people. The concept of "protecting the Libyan people" was also interpreted differently within NATO. NATO's "formal" and "practical" geopolitical discourses toward Libya gradually intensified and eventually NATO launched air strikes simultaneously coordinated with the opposition troops' ground attacks.

According to Ivo H. Daalder, the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO and, James G. Stavridis, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander of the U.S. European Command, "the alliance responded rapidly to a deteriorating situation that threatened hundreds of thousands of civilians rebelling against an oppressive regime".³¹ NATO's "formal and practical" geopolitical discourse was aimed to protect civilians, enforce no-fly zone and continue with the weapons embargo.

Notwithstanding the official opinion of NATO, the mission in Libya revealed the deficiencies of the Alliance and its strategic concept (2010), when the gap between the coalition of the willing (the United States, France, and the United Kingdom), who always drive military campaigns, and the rest of the member states became wider than any time before. Operation Unified Protector was not run by "political NATO" (practical geopolitics), but rather "command-and-control NATO" (formal geopolitics), where again the coalition of the willing was leading

²⁸ Yalda Hakim, "Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai says NATO caused great suffering", BBC, October 7, 2013; Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-24433433>

²⁹ Emma Graham-Harrison, "Relationship between Hamid Karzai and US grows ever more poisonous", The Guardian, January 28, 2014; Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/29/relationship-hamidkarzai-us-afghanistan>

³⁰ Campbell Horace, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*, Monthly Review Press (2013), 256

³¹ Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya The Right Way to Run an Intervention", *Foreign Affairs* vol 92, Nr. 2, (March/April 2012), 2.

the agenda setting and whole military campaign.³² Together with a fragmentation within NATO, the geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Libya and the overall NATO geopolitical tradition “crisis manager” decreased dramatically.

Furthermore, analyzing NATO’s “practical geopolitical” discourse, political disputes over the Libyan campaign mostly appeared between the United States and France, which were pushing the American government to contribute to the campaign and help the European Allies to deal with the Gaddafi regime. At the same time (2011), NATO was simultaneously involved in peace-keeping mission in Kosovo and fighting against terrorism in Afghanistan, where thousands of NATO forces were still deployed.

Besides, the same year, the *Financial Times* and the Harris Datadase did a survey in the United States and the other Alliance member states regarding the military campaign in Libya. In the table below, the survey shows the striking skepticism of NATO member states’ public opinion toward the overseas mission. However, even the success in Libya did not alter and reshape beliefs of societies. In 2011, mostly all NATO member states were still in an economic recession or slowly recovering after the last economic crisis. Skepticism of the societies and the neglect of the public opinion prove that NATO’s decision to go against Libya was based on a few ambitious Alliance countries (France and the UK) and their unilateral political decisions and eventually criticized by “popular geopolitics.”

Table 2: Public opinion toward crisis in Libya.

	<i>Financial Times/Harris March–April 2011</i>		
	Support (%)	Neither (%)	Oppose (%)
United States	32	31	37
Britain	36	28	36
France	40	28	32
Germany	34	27	39
	<i>Financial Times/Harris March–April 2011</i>		
	Support (%)	Neither (%)	Oppose (%)
Italy	29	21	50
Spain	37	29	34

³² Sten Rynning, NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect, Stanford Security Studies (2012), 44.

Question of the survey: To what extent do you support or oppose the current military intervention in Libya? *Source:* Harris Database: http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/HI_UK_Corp_News_FT-Harris-Poll-Apr-2011.pdf

In overall, NATO's geopolitical discourse in Libya could be understood as neutral. Even though Gaddafi's regime was changed, internal disputes within NATO and criticism from "popular geopolitics" decreased a whole NATO's geopolitical discourse to neutral – neither positive, nor negative.

Russia's geopolitical discourse

In the 1999 in Balkans Russia's geopolitical discourse was hostile and critical to NATO's military operation against Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). This could be linked to Russia's past experiences in Afghanistan and Chechnya (1994–1996) when the application of hard power did not help to solve ethnic problems. Additionally, Russia was deeply concerned about the air strikes in FRY where Russian business was interrupted. Despite these facts Russia still sought to be involved in the international decision making, which aimed at rebuilding the devastated areas.

During 1999 Russia changed its own "practical geopolitical" position at least a few times. At that time the Russian President Boris Yeltsin faced a great diplomatic pressure from NATO member states, particularly from the United States. And even though on June 23, 1999 Russia affirmed its commitment to full implementation of the provisions and goals of the UN resolution UNSCR 1244, Russia was still de facto secondary to decision-making.³³ After five months NATO and Russian ambassadors met once again and emphasized "their commitment to full implementation of the provisions and goals of UNSCR 1244".³⁴ Furthermore, both sides also agreed "to cooperate closely in ensuring the protection of Kosovo's minorities and the establishment of a multi-ethnic, democratic society".³⁵ Official agreements, however, did not fully represent the real situation on the ground in

³³ Statement by the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council on the Security Situation in Kosovo (June 23, 1999); *Source:* http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27424.htm?selectedLocale=en UN SC resolution 1244 (1999); *Source:* <http://daccess-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/172/89/PDF/N9917289.pdf?OpenElement>

³⁴ Press statement: meeting of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council at Ambassadorial level (November 17, 1999); *Source:* http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27413.htm?selectedLocale=en

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Press statement: meeting of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council at Ambassadorial level

Kosovo. Russia's political elite ("practical geopolitics") and a whole Russian "formal geopolitical" position was still overwhelmingly against NATO's intervention. After long months of endless negotiations between both sides, Russia finally did not even have its own sector in the territory of Kosovo.

Moreover, all diplomatic agreements, negotiations and NATO military operations against Serbia were constantly monitored by the Russian media. To the contrast of the NATO "popular geopolitics," the Russian "popular geopolitics" (the media) appeared biased and one-sided in its coverage of the Kosovo events. Western countries, particularly NATO member states, were seen as aggressors. The Russian media was one of the main sources for information about the NATO campaign in FRY and a serious generator of the certain Russian geopolitical discourse. For instance, in more than two months (March 23 to June 10, 1999) the newspaper *Kommersant* wrote 147 stories about Kosovo. Many of the articles criticized NATO for invasion, for its activities supporting KLA, for constantly the increasing number of civilian casualties, etc.³⁶ In addition, *Kommersant* stayed positive about Serbia, Milosevic, and the high morale of the Serbian people.³⁷ A similar situation could be recognized in another Russian newspaper *Pravda*. Even though *Pravda* wrote less (only 52 articles in more than two months period), the content was similar. The newspaper was more positive about FRY than about NATO.³⁸ Eventually, the Russian "popular geopolitics" mostly can be characterized as an anti-NATO, pro-Russian, and pro-Serbian. In 1999 the NATO invasion and geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Kosovo did more damage to relations between NATO and Russia than any other event in the 1990s.

Looking from the general perspective, if NATO's a whole geopolitical discourse was evaluated as very positive than with regard to the evidences and analyses, the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Kosovo could be determined as very negative. The active involvement of NATO's "formal and practical geopolitics" led to the limitations and hostility of the Russian decision and strategy makers.

³⁶ Афанасий Сборов, "Милошевич раздражает многих", March 26, 1999; Source: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/215622?isSearch=True>. Геннадий Сысоев, "Война без правил", April 6, 1999; Source: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/15336?isSearch=True>

³⁷ Kommerstant.ru, "Я теперь знаю, как бывает в аду", March 26, 1999; Source: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/215619?isSearch=True>

³⁸ Pravda.ru, "Сегодня представители блока левых сил Украины пикетировали посольство США", March 25, 1999; Source: <http://www.pravda.ru/news/world/25-03-1999/904126-0/>. Pravda.ru, "Представитель СРЮ обвиняет НАТО в сговоре с Армией освобождения Косово с целью усиления влияния Альянса на Балканах", April 1, 1999; Source: <http://www.pravda.ru/news/world/01-04-1999/900472-0/>. Pravda.ru, "Силовой Метод Решения Проблемы Косово Завел НАТО В Тупик", March 6, 1999; Source: <http://www.pravda.ru/news/world/06-04-1999/900558-0/>.

Later, in February 2007, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, expressed Russia's importance in European affairs. His controversial speech at the Munich security conference emphasized two matters of fundamental importance: Russia sought to play greater role in the international arena and second, Russia would be pursuing its own independent policy regarding its political interest.³⁹ In January 2008, just one month before the declaration of Kosovo's independence, Moscow issued a new foreign policy strategy. Relations between NATO and Russia were recognized as an equal partnership, based on the international law and balance of power – “one's security at the expense of security of the Russian Federation” could not be violated.⁴⁰

Russian “formal and practical discourses” were affected by NATO's monopolization of the European affairs and its unilateral decisions. By 2008, the centralization of political power could be noticed in the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Kosovo. The media, which are a fundamental element of “popular geopolitics,” became closely related and even dependent on the Kremlin political elite, the “practical geopolitics.” Consequently, the “popular geopolitics” was a main distributor and reflector of Moscow's entire negative geopolitical discourse toward Kosovo and the upholder of its independence—the NATO Alliance.

For instance, the newspaper *Kommersant* in February 2008 covered 54 stories about the independence of Kosovo. Mostly all stories, which were more informative than biased, were related to the official reaction of Moscow. Many articles analyze the strong response of the Russian government, the President, and diplomats. *Kommersant* often emphasized the active role of President Vladimir Putin, who appears as the leader uniting CIS and the symbol of the Russian “practical geopolitics”.⁴¹

As the inverse to *Kommersant*, *Izvestia*, the official Russian news agency, during the same period covered 160 stories about Kosovo's independence, which was threefold more than *Kommersant* did. In addition, when Kosovo declared its unilateral independence; on the same day *Izvestia* published 20 stories, which were more polemical rather than informative news. *Izvestia* claimed that Kosovo did not have a future; it would not achieve full freedom and once Kosovars had the

³⁹ Oliver Rolofs, “A Breeze Of Cold War”, MSC, February 2007; Source: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/about/munich-moments/a-breeze-of-cold-war/>

⁴⁰ The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation (2008); Source: <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

⁴¹ Владимир Соловьев, “Президент и провожающие его лица”, *Kommersant.ru*, February 22, 2008; Source: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/855848?isSearch=True>

opportunity, thousands of them would flee to western Europe. Consequently, the certain agenda of the Russian “popular geopolitics” helped the ruling elite to set a particular geopolitical discourse, which was nothing more than anti-Western. In 2008 NATO’s geopolitical discourse toward the independence of Kosovo was neutral, but the entire Russian geopolitical discourse turns out as negative.

Despite events in Kosovo, Russian position toward NATO intervention in Afghanistan turns out as controversial. In February 2000, the new Russian President Vladimir Putin thawed NATO–Russia relations, which, after the Kosovo war in 1999, were frozen for three months. The events of September 11 signaled to the Russian politicians and strategic community (practical and formal geopolitics) how far terrorism could extend and even threaten such a power as the United States. Additionally, Moscow was deeply concerned about its own separatist regions and expanding global terrorism; consequently, it started to cultivate more pragmatic relations with NATO and its main contributor – the United States.

On September 19, 2001, in an interview with the German ARD Television company, Putin strongly emphasized that “the response to the aggression with which the United States has been confronted must be prompt”.⁴² From the outset Russia clearly stated its discourse toward the threat of terrorism. In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 events, Putin even raised the question of possible Russian membership in NATO.⁴³ Moscow was ready to cooperate with NATO in all feasible diplomatic and practical measures.

If in 1999 the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Kosovo and NATO was very negative, then after several years we can observe the significant changes. First, the general structure of the Russian *geopolitical culture* was shaped by the new state apparatus (new political leaders appeared) and relations with neighbors (Russia was still economically and politically weak, thus pragmatism was necessary). Second, the Russian *geopolitical tradition* toward Asia was impacted by the growing threat of terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Consequently, these elements influenced the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the crisis in Afghanistan.

For the next few years NATO–Russian relations in regard to the Afghanistan crisis became even tighter. In May 2002 at the Russia–NATO Permanent Joint Council Meeting, Russia agreed to “strengthen cooperation through a multi-

⁴² Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Russian President Vladimir Putin Interview to German ARD Television Company”, September 19, 2001; Source: http://www.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/0C81589342F914BF43256AD20041B18E?OpenDocument

⁴³ Martin A. Smith, “NATO-Russia relations: will the future resemble the past?”, in *NATO in search of a vision*, ed. Gulner Aybet and Rebecca R Moore, Georgetown University Press (2010), 108-109.

faceted approach, including joint assessment of the terrorist threat to the Euro-Atlantic area, focused on specific threats, for example, to Russian and NATO forces, to civilian aircraft, or to critical infrastructure”.⁴⁴ After the Rome summit in May 2002 the reciprocal cooperation was improved by the creation of the NATO–Russia Council where Russia received co-decision responsibilities: “military crisis management, counterterrorism, non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)”.⁴⁵ In 2003 both sides agreed to deepen cooperation ensuring security in Afghanistan and continue ongoing discussions at the NATO–Russia Council. In addition, Russia offered “to provide practical support to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan”.⁴⁶ Regarding the war in Afghanistan, Russia mostly contributed to the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan border control, transit routes that pass-through Russia, and bilateral training on practical aspects of the fight against terrorism. One could argue that both sides NATO and Russia have acknowledged the Afghanistan crisis in the same way – positively. Thus, it led to reciprocal cooperation.

Furthermore, as it was already observed, due to the certain entire Russian geopolitical culture, the media that represents the “popular geopolitics” had close nexus with the “practical and formal geopolitics.” It could be observed in all cases, especially in later ones, when the “practical geopolitics” usurped the “popular geopolitics,” which eventually started to serve (but not influence) for the entire geopolitical discourse. As for the results, the Russian government was also supported by the country’s media, which was influenced by the 9/11 attacks. Phenomena comparable to the Western media could be observed in the Russian newspapers as well. NATO’s and the Russian “popular geopolitics” were shaped by both the threat of terrorism and the other geopolitical elements (practical and formal geopolitics).

Nevertheless, the September 11 events fueled debates about terrorism, which was already in the Russian media’s agenda since the second Chechnya war in late 1999. In a three months period (September 11 to December 11, 2001), for instance, the newspaper *Kommersant* published 1000 stories related to terrorism, out of them 323 covered terrorism in Afghanistan and it was tenfold more than at the same

⁴⁴ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Russia-NATO Permanent Joint Council Meeting at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held in Reykjavik” May 14, 2002; Source: http://www.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/8E21ADD26AF395F843256BBA0034B640?OpenDocument

⁴⁵ Martin A. Smith, “NATO-Russia relations: will the future resemble the past?”, in *NATO in search of a vision*, ed. Gulner Aybet and Rebecca R Moore, Georgetown University Press (2010), 110.

⁴⁶ 8 Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Meeting Of The NATO-Russia Council At The Level Of Foreign Ministers NATO HQ, Thursday, 4 December 2003, Statement”, December 5, 2003; Source: http://www.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/2025FD4144F00CAF43256DF30032757C?OpenDocument

time one year earlier. Other newspapers, particularly those with close ties to the Kremlin, backed up the politicians and daily reported their speeches, interviews, and decisions regarding terrorism issues. The Russian “popular geopolitics” toward the Afghanistan crisis and NATO switched from negative post-Kosovo coverage to the positive post-9/11 coverage.⁴⁷ For instance, according to the newspaper *Lenta*, the events of September 11 restored negotiations on the establishment of a NATO mission in Moscow.⁴⁸

Eventually, the expansion of warfare in Afghanistan propelled reciprocal cooperation between NATO and Russia; thus the overall Russian geopolitical discourse could be acknowledged the same as NATO – positive. Hence, we can argue that the same geopolitical discourse toward the crisis leads to the natural cooperation.

However, from the inception of the Afghanistan crisis in 2001, the contemporary Russian geopolitical discourse toward Afghanistan has changed as well. Despite the fact that NATO constantly seeks accommodation with Moscow, Russia with its “current nationalistic and assertive mood, and with its opposition to core NATO policies, may not desire a truly cooperative partnership”.⁴⁹ On the one hand, it illustrates how the entire geopolitical culture could influence other international actors (changes in the Russian status apparatus, identity, etc. also shaped NATO’s geopolitical discourse). on the other hand, it also presents that the single fixed event/issue does not determine the geopolitical discourse in contemporary Afghanistan. Thus, the Russian geopolitical discourse was also shaped by the previous military crises in Kosovo and Libya.

Despite mutual disputes and different geopolitical discourses in Europe, from 2010 Russia has provided non-military support to NATO’s mission in Afghanistan. However, Russia’s cooperation with NATO is based only on pragmatic interests. A major point of the Russian geopolitical discourse is Afghanistan’s role as a producer and exporter of opium. Nevertheless, ISAF has chosen a policy of least resistance on opium growing, because it could drive indigenous Afghans to an armed resistance against the rest of the NATO troops in Afghanistan. Consequently, it influences the Russian geopolitical discourse, which is not satisfied with NATO’s geopolitical discourse in Afghanistan. Thus Russia seeks to further intensifying international

⁴⁷ Lenta.ru, “Россия и НАТО будут вместе ловить организаторов терактов в США”, September 13, 2001; Source: <http://lenta.ru/world/2001/09/13/sammit/>

⁴⁸ Lenta.ru, “Америка обошлась с Европой по-мусульмански”, May 29, 2002; Source: <http://lenta.ru/articles/2002/05/28/nato/>

⁴⁹ Jamie Shea, “NATO at sixty – and beyond”, in *NATO in search of a vision*, ed. Gulner Aybet and Rebecca R Moore, Georgetown University Press (2010), 25.

efforts under the auspices of the UN aimed at helping Afghanistan and its neighboring states to meet these challenges.⁵⁰ Hence, the same issues gravitate Russia to the cooperation and more pragmatic geopolitical discourse with NATO.

Currently Russia is working on two geopolitical discourses toward Afghanistan and NATO's presence there. First, Moscow does not fully reject the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan. If CSTO together with Russia might secure the external borders of Afghanistan, then NATO could still monitor internal security, but with one obligation – the forthcoming ISAF mission must be based on a UN SC resolution and UN mandate. And second, both Russia and even China have attempted to get guarantees from Afghanistan's government that NATO, especially the United States, does not establish a long-term military presence in Central Asia as “a prerequisite for their input into the region-led stabilization program”.⁵¹ Such a dichotomy in the Russian geopolitical discourse could be explained by the uncertainty in the contemporary Afghanistan.

However, in light of the Russian “popular geopolitics,” it is more likely that the second case might appear as the most acceptable. Already in December 2013 *Kommersant* announced that “following the discussion [between NATO's and Russian representatives], it became clear that the parties fundamentally disagree on projections about what awaits Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the main body of the foreign contingent in 2014”.⁵² Besides that, *Kommersant* also notices the pessimistic Russian geopolitical discourse toward Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces. Russian officials believe that contemporary Afghanistan soon will face unstable scenarios: “the return of Taliban to power, a civil war, or the division of spheres of influence between the Taliban and the current regime”.⁵³ A similar opinion could be also observed in other Russian newspapers such as *Izvestia*, *Lenta*, or *Pravda*, which constantly reflect Moscow's “formal and practical” geopolitics toward contemporary Afghanistan. Regarding the past experiences in Afghanistan and contemporary issues with NATO in Europe (the Ukrainian crisis), it is uncertain that Russia will seek to stabilize potential future threats in Central Asia or expand its political influence inside Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal of ISAF. Consequently, the overall Russian geopolitical discourse in contemporary Afghanistan could be described as

⁵⁰ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”, February 2013; Source: <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/nsosndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/869c9d2b87ad8014c32575d9002b1c38!OpenDocument>

⁵¹ Oksana Antonenko, “The Central Asian states and Russia”, in *Afghanistan to 2015 and beyond*, ed. Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, Routledge (2011), 215-216

⁵² Елена Черненко, “Россия и НАТО разошлись на афганском направлении”, *Kommerstant.ru*, December 16, 2013; Source: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2369414?isSearch=True>

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Елена Черненко, “Россия и НАТО разошлись на афганском направлении”

neutral. Russia depends on NATO's activities and the influence of the geopolitical discourse in contemporary Afghanistan. Besides, the contemporary issues in Europe complicate the Russian geopolitical discourse toward Afghanistan. Moreover, knowing that NATO's geopolitical discourse is acknowledged as negative in contemporary Afghanistan, it is unlikely to see the mutual cooperation between both sides as it was in the beginning of the Afghanistan crisis in 2001.

Despite that, when in March 2011, NATO launched an air strike campaign against the Gaddafi regime, several particular features in the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the Libyan crisis emerged.

On the one hand, Russia's "formal geopolitics" constantly accused and blamed NATO of overstepping UN SC resolution 1973 and launching air strikes against Libya. A few days after NATO began Operation Unified Protector, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation issued a press-release in which Russia "strongly believes that it is unacceptable to use the mandate derived from UN SC resolution 1973, the adoption of which was quite an ambiguous step, in order to achieve goals that go far beyond its provisions, which only provide for actions for the protection of civilians".⁵⁴ Besides, as it was already mentioned regarding the French military supplies to the insurgents, Russia criticized NATO for violating UN SC resolution 1970, which was intended to impose an arms embargo on Libya.

Nevertheless, the Russian "formal and practical geopolitics" sought to become a mediator in the Libyan crisis and together with NATO join a campaign to implement the UN SC resolution. However, NATO's "formal and practical geopolitics" were orientated on a unilateral decision to solve this crisis with air strikes, thus the Russian geopolitical discourse was not acceptable for NATO.⁵⁵ One month after NATO launched the air strike campaign, Russia was still not accepted into "the UN SC resolution 1973 club" where only NATO and its partners were participating in the intensive bombing campaign. Russia was seeking to resolve this conflict peacefully, not because Russia was deeply concerned about the civilian casualties and human rights, which are not always recognized in Russia, but because of pragmatic reasons. Few years before the Arab Spring, Russia agreed with the Gaddafi regime to sign bilateral economic agreement where Russia would cancel all Libyan debt in return for the possibility of Russian business companies to develop the Libyan civilian infrastructure and build railroads, factories, etc.

⁵⁴ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Statement by Russian MFA Spokesman Alexander Lukashevich on the Situation around Libya", March 20, 2011; Sou

⁵⁵ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Alexander Lukashevich's Response to a Media Question about the Situation Surrounding Libya", April 4, 2011; Source: http://www.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/2EF62115FCAC17F1C325786900369774?OpenDocument

Besides, the Russian “formal and practical geopolitics” sought cooperation with NATO due to the expectations that it might lead to the “club” of the international community, which dictates the international order. Eventually, the rejections from NATO’s side caused the counter reaction from the Russian geopolitical discourse, which turned out as negative.

Further, Vladimir Putin, the key figure of the Russian “practical geopolitics,” appeared as a sharp critic of NATO activities in Libya. The “popular geopolitics” quoted his official statements and in comparison with the “practical geopolitics” (the official statements), they were even more rigorous. Vladimir Putin harshly condemned the NATO air strikes on Libya; he argued that no one has the right to punish Muammar Gaddafi without trial; that the country’s whole infrastructure was being destroyed, and in essence one of the warring sides was attacking the other under the cover of aircraft.⁵⁶ Vladimir Putin was only one of the Russian officials who criticized NATO so strictly and more often than, for instance, Dimitri Medvedev, President of Russia at that time. It once again approves that despite the different crises, the Russian geopolitical discourse is synchronized to each other, especially the “popular geopolitics,” which does not influence the entire geopolitical discourse, but merely serve as the reflection of the Russian “practical geopolitics.” In overall, Russia was influenced by NATO’s geopolitical discourse towards crisis in Libya. Undoubtedly, the Russian geopolitical discourse could be emphasized as negative.

The outcome of geopolitical interactions

Undoubtedly, interventions of NATO military forces in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya have affected Russian foreign and security policies after the Cold War. The dramatic changes after 2001 presuppose that in spite of the Kosovo war in 1999, Russia was ready to cooperate with the Alliance. The year 2002 was promising for both sides; eventually positive reciprocal geopolitical discourses led to the establishment of the NATO–Russia Council where decisions and actions were taken by joint agreements. However, NATO’s unilateral decisions and specific geopolitical discourses toward crises excluded Russia from crisis management in Afghanistan and especially in Kosovo, which at the beginning of 2008 declared its independence. The crisis of Kosovo in 2008 dates the end of the Russian flexible policy toward NATO and marks a new beginning of a permanently hostile policy (the geopolitical discourse) against NATO in Europe. It could be explained by several examples.

⁵⁶ Gleb Bryanski, “Putin: Libya coalition has no right to kill Gaddafi”, Reuters, April 26, 2011; Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/26/us-russia-putin-libya-idUSTRE73P4L920110426>

First, despite the global economic crisis and the fall of oil prices in the period of 2008–2010, Russia still gradually increased its military spending from \$66 billion (2008) to \$93 billion (2013), now 40% more than in 2008.⁵⁷

Second, in order to create a counterbalance to NATO, Russia propelled negotiations within CSTO. Consequently, Moscow encouraged the creation of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force, which was established in 2009, and in 2010 CSTO approved the declaration establishing a CSTO peacekeeping force. Such attempts suggest that Russia seeks to duplicate NATO's activities, and eventually if Russia has an international peacekeeping force, it could have a legal basis to intervene in crises zones and unilaterally resolve conflicts, the same as NATO did in Kosovo, Libya, or Afghanistan.

Third, different geopolitical discourses could also be revealed by Moscow's official position toward NATO. According to the Russian military doctrine from 2010, NATO is the main external threat to the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the research suggests that the Russian government subsidizes and controls the majority of media and press, thus journals, television, and newspapers often promote and reflect a certain geopolitical discourse that only serves the Kremlin's policy, which is aimed against NATO.

Fourth, the crises indicate that Europe became the fundamental sphere of interest where the Russian geopolitical tradition has shifted dramatically in the last 15 years. With less interest and opposition to NATO in other regions, Russia concentrates its major resources toward European affairs, including the Caucasus region.

With regard to evidences of this thesis, the hypothesis that different NATO and Russian geopolitical discourses toward crises in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have affected reciprocal relations is fully satisfied. NATO military interventions in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have negatively affected relations with Russia mostly in Europe. Mutual cooperation and diplomatic disputes toward crises in Libya and Afghanistan are minor in comparison with the NATO–Russian relations in the European continent.

First, contemporary disputes and war in Ukraine prove that Russia is ready to defend its geopolitical tradition in the direction of Europe. Second, serious Russian geopolitical discourses of European affairs (disputes in Kosovo, Georgia, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine) suggest that the Russian geopolitical tradition toward Europe is fundamental in comparison with other geopolitical traditions (Eurasia or Russia as a bridge between East and West). Third, different NATO's geopolitical discourses with regard to crises led to reciprocal accruing disagreements than to cooperation

⁵⁷ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database"; Source: http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database

(with only one exception in Afghanistan 2001, when reciprocal discourse was the same). And finally, the Russian economic and military capabilities are not strong enough to oppose NATO's missions in overseas; thus Russia will concentrate most of its attention to the geopolitical tradition toward Europe.

Conclusions

The critical geopolitics turns out as a critique of modern geopolitics and classical geopolitics. The critical geopolitics concentrates on both the relations between states and creation, approval and implementation of particular policies or decisions. Gearóid Ó Tuathail's and Simon Dalby's conceptualizations of the critical geopolitics are used as the method of research. Every state or agency consists of history, geography, identity, state apparatus, and power networks, which determine the certain geopolitical tradition. Russia's geopolitical traditions could be named as "Russia within Europe," "Eurasian theory," and "Russia as a bridge between East and West," and NATO's geopolitical traditions as "Euro-Atlantic collective defense" and "crisis manager." Every geopolitical tradition consists of several geopolitical discourses that are divided into "formal geopolitics" (think-tanks, strategy makers, etc.), "practical geopolitics" (decision makers, official statements, documents, strategies, and speeches) and "popular geopolitics" (the discourse of the media and surveys). All three geopolitical discourses interact and influence each other; thus the lines between them could blur. This could be observed at the Russian case, when due to specific characteristics of Russia's geopolitical culture, elements of the geopolitical discourse become closely related, mostly controlled and monopolized by the "practical geopolitics." In the Alliance case, NATO's "formal and practical geopolitics" usually cooperate to each other, but the "popular geopolitics" often criticizes both of them. The combination of three critical geopolitics elements allows determining certain NATO's and Russian geopolitical discourses toward crises in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan.

With regard to Kosovo crisis in 1999 NATO's geopolitical discourse stayed very positive, "practical and formal geopolitics" were strongly supported and partly influenced by the "popular geopolitics." As the contrast to NATO, Russia acknowledged this crisis as very negative. The active involvement of NATO's "formal and practical geopolitics" led to the limitations and hostility of the Russian decision and strategy makers.

In 2001, NATO's geopolitical discourse toward Afghanistan could be explained as positive. With the support from the "popular geopolitics," NATO

strategy and decisions makers achieved only temporary success in Kabul and its surroundings. The same geopolitical discourse could be observed from the Russian side. The expansion of warfare in Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism propelled reciprocal cooperation between NATO and Russia. The homogeneous geopolitical discourse united both sides and increased mutual partnership.

However, in 2008 due to lack of consensus within the Alliance, NATO's geopolitical discourse toward the independence of Kosovo appeared as neutral. The overall Russian geopolitical discourse turned out as negative. NATO's "formal and practical geopolitics" excluded Russia from the decision making and ignored the Russian geopolitical discourse toward the European affairs. Consequently, the Russian geopolitical discourse became more hostile and the perception of mistrust toward NATO increased.

During the crisis in Libya, NATO's geopolitical discourse was acknowledged as neutral. Even though Gaddafi's regime was changed, internal disputes within NATO and criticism from "popular geopolitics" decreased a whole NATO's geopolitical discourse to neutral. As the contrast to NATO, the Russian geopolitical discourse was negative. Similarly to the Kosovo crisis in 2008, Russia was excluded from the decision making in the international arena. NATO's rejection of the Russian geopolitical discourse towards the Libyan crisis provoked the counter reaction from Moscow.

In the contemporary Afghanistan, due to the division within NATO and criticism from the media, the entire NATO's geopolitical discourse could be defined as negative. However, Russia's geopolitical discourse turns out as neutral. On the one hand, Russia is deeply concerned about NATO's issues in contemporary Afghanistan and the possible return of Taliban, but on the other hand, due to contemporary disputes in Europe Russia does not seek to cooperate with NATO so closely as it did a decade ago.

Taking into account all geopolitical discourses, the performance of NATO forces has been gradually decreasing and debates about NATO as the 'crisis manager' are questionable. Undoubtedly, NATO's geopolitical discourses influenced the relations with Russia. However, the hypothesis of this research "Different NATO and Russian geopolitical discourses towards crises in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan have affected reciprocal relations" is confirmed. However, it does not mean that only NATO military operations were the main factors that influence mutual relations with Russia. There are other significant factors: NATO expansion, global terrorism, economic crises, etc.

The crisis of Kosovo in 2008 marks the end of the Russian flexible policy toward NATO and marks a new beginning of a permanently hostile geopolitical

discourse against NATO in Europe. Mutual cooperation and diplomatic disputes toward crises in Libya and Afghanistan are minor in comparison with the NATO–Russian relations in the European continent. Russia does not have so much interest and it is basically too weak to oppose NATO’s activities around the globe. The Russian military operation in Syria shows Russia’s military capabilities are limited; thus Moscow concentrates its attention to its fundamental geopolitical tradition towards Europe, especially the post-Soviet area.