

NATO's New Design

Struggles, Practices, and the Alliance's post-Cold War transformation

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Abstract

How did the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) survive the end of the Cold War, the changing international security environment, and the loss of its galvanizing Soviet threat? When the Alliance outlived the end of the Cold War, scholars provided explanations for the somewhat surprising persistence. While traditional approaches failed to provide persuasive answers, constructivists in International Relations (IR) emphasized that NATO persisted because it transformed. They highlighted the democratic identity and discourses as central to NATO's transformation and its post-Cold War persistence.

I suggest that we can better understand NATO's persistence by focusing on its practices and their transformative effects. I investigate NATO's transformation and argue that the Alliance not only persisted because it relied on existing practices but also because it introduced and normalized new practices. Practices such as joint defense planning or the "show of force" in conflict zones established NATO as a democratic and interventionist identity community. I explain the meaning of practices, how they represented normality for NATO practitioners, and how they established a new identity community.

Struggles have been pivotal in introducing and normalizing practices. After the Cold War, Alliance policymakers struggled to build a "new NATO" in the context of post-communist states' membership aspirations and the Bosnian war. These struggles resulted in the establishment of the "open door" policy and NATO military interventions beyond the traditional defense area.

For my investigation, I draw on Bourdieusian and the "practice turn" in IR. Bourdieu's concepts such as field, habitus, and capital help me to explain the divergent approaches of Alliance policymakers that sparked struggles between them in the context of Eastern enlargement and NATO's military interventions. Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic struggles allows me to understand why policymakers asserted and reasserted certain practices after the Cold War as the dominant way of doing things.

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Abbreviations

AFSOUTH	Allied Forces Southern Europe
AFNORTH	Allied Forces Northern Europe
CEECs	Central and Eastern European Countries
CINCSOUTH	Commander in Chief South
CSCE	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
DIB	Defense Institution Building
EEAS	European Union External Actions Service
ESDI	European Security Defense Identity
EC/EU	European Community/European Union
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
IFOR	Implementation Force
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MoD	Minister of Defense
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NRF	NATO Response Force
NSC	National Security Council
OAF	Operation Allied Force
OJE	Operation Joint Endeavor
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PM	Prime Minister
SecGen	Secretary-General
SFOR	Stabilization Force
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
STANAG	Standardization Agreement
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
VOPP	Vance-Owen Peace Plan
WEU	Western European Union

Introduction

While the post-1990 world evolved past the relics of the Cold War, the persistence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO or the Alliance) called for scholarly scrutiny and examination. The disintegration of the Soviet Union did, therefore, not only mark the end of decades of bipolar tension. It also initiated a cascade of new questions concerning the future role of NATO in the still uncharted post-Cold War world.

The prevailing assumption was that, given the disappearance of the formative Soviet threat, NATO was bound to wither away after the Cold War (Mearsheimer 1990: 52). From this perspective, the lifespan of military alliances was entangled with the security interests of states. The absence of an agreed-upon threat was seen as having deleterious consequences for NATO's survival (Moore 2007: 5). Since states were perceived as utilitarian actors, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was expected to redefine their interests and render NATO redundant (see: Walt 1997: 158).

However, while NATO members necessarily redefined their security interests after the Cold War away from the Soviet threat, the Alliance did not wither but vigorously adjusted to emerging calls to contribute to democratic changes and to manage future crises (Rotfeld 1991: 588). It adopted a range of new missions and tasks and outlived the end of the Cold War (Moore 2007: 9-10).

As Robert Rauchhaus writes, “[o]f the many significant changes to the organization, two decisions, the enlargement of NATO and the airstrikes against Yugoslavia, stand out as the most crucial” (2001: 3). NATO expanded its membership to 31 countries in 2023 and conducted a vast spectrum of sustained military operations in humanitarian contexts in ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya. With this, NATO transformed into an expansive democratic community and became Europe's military crisis manager, reaching new milestones of longevity (Møller 2014: 181; Moore 2007: 2).

Against the backdrop of a missing formative threat, the transformation and the persistence of NATO were both noteworthy and puzzling at the same time.

The core inquiry guiding my research thus consists of the question: *How has NATO been able to transform and persist after the Cold War given the demise of its galvanizing Soviet threat?*

In the scholarly community, the question of NATO's post-Cold War transformation and persistence in the absence of a constitutive threat has often been addressed but was left with inattention to some theoretical considerations (Webber 2016: 2). Especially explaining the genesis and role of the practices that gave life to NATO's policies of Eastern enlargement and its military interventions has been neglected.

In my study, I explain NATO's transformation and persistence by focusing on the internal power dynamics in the Alliance that instantiated a cooperative and interventionist policy change to construct a "new NATO" after the Cold War. Within this policy change, new threat perceptions and practices became gradually normalized.

I, second, pivot to the concept of practice. Practices played a central role in the construction and maintenance of the "new NATO". They established NATO as a post-Cold War democratic and intervention community which helped the Alliance to outlive the end of the Cold War. The understanding of practices as "embodied" by agents, that is, "incorporated into the body" (Adler-Nissen 2013: 8), supports, thereby, explanations of the durability of NATO's new practices and the effectiveness of power relations in the Alliance.

I, therefore, argue that NATO persisted after the Cold War world because it transformed by changing its policies and normalizing its practices. Struggles between agents were a pivotal social dynamic that initiated the post-Cold War policy turn, normalized NATO's new practices, and constituted NATO as a democratic and interventionist identity community.

In the following, I will locate my approach to NATO's post-Cold War persistence in a brief overview of considerations of NATO's persistence in security studies. Then, I will outline my approach. Finally, I will provide an overview of the chapters of my study.

NATO in security studies

For the scholarly community in International Relations (IR), the Alliance's persistence has been of great interest. NATO's post-Cold War persistence and evolution were either studied as an individual phenomenon (e.g., Kitchen 2009, 2010) or contextualized within greater changes in European security (e.g., Hansen 2006; Villumsen-Berling 2015).

Particularly in the sub-discipline of security studies, international alliances such as NATO were treated as "among the most significant phenomena" for world politics and international relations (Duffield 2018: 268). One of the main concerns in security studies has therefore been to provide explanations about the life of security alliances by answering the puzzle of NATO's post-Cold War persistence (see: Behnke 2013: 18).

Insights from the theoretical IR mainstream have dominated the debate in security studies and discussed NATO as an instrument of great power politics or emphasized its institutional capabilities that safeguarded its post-Cold War persistence (e.g., Duffield 1996; McCalla 1996; Rynning 2005; Waltz 2000). However, theoretical blind spots have remained as they could not explain how NATO was able to adopt new roles after the Cold War other than referring to the decisions of powerful states as the principal agents in the international system.

Existing shortcomings were addressed by constructivist accounts that emphasized ideational aspects of post-Cold War transformations in NATO's persistence. This came with the overarching argument that NATO persisted because it transformed into a new post-Cold War organization. Constructivists highlighted "[...] the importance of common identities, values, and norms in the formation and sustainability of an alliance" (Driver 2021: 316). The practices of NATO served, thereby, often as an explanatory variable between identity and community or discourse and identity.

However, constructivists have not considered how either identity is constituted by practice or how discourse becomes effective within practical contexts (see: Neumann 2002: 628; Pouliot 2010: 39-40). Thereby, they also failed to consider the pivotal role of historic actors in NATO and the effects of the power relations between them (see: Driver 2021: 316).

The “practice turn in IR” addressed some of these concerns by providing conceptions that considered practice as the hallmark of NATO’s transformation. NATO’s survival was determined by post-Cold War practices that, for instance, supported the construction of a security community together with post-communist states. New practices spurred NATO’s transformation into a practice community and “became part of the institution’s *raison d’être*” (Adler 2008: 197, 208).

While these approaches reconsidered the primary role of practices in the transformation and persistence of NATO, they have largely failed to account for the role of agents, forms of power, and struggles *within* NATO that transformed the Alliance into the present post-Cold War institution. However, agents, power relations, and practices accounted for both the transformation of NATO after the Cold War and its persistence. They constructed NATO as a new post-Cold War identity community.

A sociological take on practices becomes, thereby, central. It explains how power relations between agents in NATO shaped new practices but also how these practices developed as symbolic actions that stabilized new meanings. This allows making sense of tensions between change and continuity because it views these tensions as mediated by the power relations that are inherent to normative environments such as NATO. This means that, through the workings of power, change in and through practice became perceived as safeguarding the Alliance’s persistence.

Such aspects were revisited by scholars who have drawn on the work of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu and considered that a link between power and practice played a role in NATO’s survival after the Cold War (e.g., Williams and Neumann 2007). However, these scholars have not yet illuminated the intricate processes that enabled post-Cold War NATO to adopt and maintain a host of new cooperative and interventionist practices.

To fully grasp NATO’s persistence and its post-Cold War transformations, I will address how NATO was able to change its practices, maintain them, and cultivate a new identity. This approach is underpinned by notions of the habitualization of practice— similar to the understanding that peace in security communities hinges on the self-evidence of diplomacy (Pouliot 2008: 279).

By understanding how NATO enlargement and NATO's humanitarian interventions consistently developed as mainstays of NATO that were fixed by the normalization of practices, we can better grasp its persistence after the Cold War.

Conceptual approach

My approach draws on the Bourdieusian practice turn in IR and explores the struggles in NATO that went into the transformation of NATO and the normalization of post-Cold War practices. It reconsiders the role of social agents and the inequalities between them regarding symbolic and material forms of power as a source and weapon in struggles (see: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 3). I, moreover, investigate the role of new practices in the Alliance's post-Cold War persistence.

I draw on Bourdieu's toolbox of field, habitus, and capital. Bourdieu depicts a field as a relatively autonomous social space that is hierarchically structured by objective social positions. These positions are defined by forms of capital, that is, valuable material and non-material possessions (see: Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 37). Agents who occupy these positions possess a habitus—they embody their historical experiences and trajectories which constitutes their dispositions to act in a field (Adler 2013: Preface).

These concepts help me to better understand the different actions and approaches of NATO agents as emanating at the intersection of their habitus and the field, that is, their historic trajectories and positions in NATO. In will explore the approaches of NATO policymakers within security contexts based on their habitus and positions in the Alliance.

Moreover, observers have largely overlooked that NATO's practical transformation originated from competitive dynamics *within* NATO that were closely connected to forms of capital as deployable forms of power. As Jamie Shea observes, NATO's "[...] successive transformations have often been preceded by bitter internal debates" (2010: 11-2). Agents' incessant struggles for power and domination characterize the many forms of social organization (Adler-Nissen 2013: 5).

The importance of the nature of relations between agents and their struggles in NATO can, therefore, not be understated and gives us a more nuanced understanding of NATO's persistence.

Bourdieu's notion of social struggles as pivotal field dynamics helps me, thereby, to understand why new policies and practices became dominant in NATO and prevailed after the Cold War. This is closely connected to an understanding of NATO agents' capital possessions as forms of power that they deploy in their struggles. I will explore how the historic approaches of NATO agents gave rise to struggles in security contexts, how agents strategically deployed their capital in these struggles, and how struggles affected both NATO and NATO agents.

The notion of NATO as a social field where these struggles take place is, therefore, complemented by an analytical focus on NATO agents, their struggles, and the practices that result from agents' competitive relations.

This conceptual apparatus builds on the understanding that, after the Cold War, NATO introduced new activities, practices, and understandings that did not exist before (e.g., NATO peacekeeping). As Emanuel Adler writes, "[p]ost-1991 NATO practices [...] represent a quantum leap from NATO's Cold War practices" (2008: 208). The normalization of these practices exerted profoundly structuring effects on NATO and its agents.

I center the 1990s as a critical period in NATO during which agents struggled over NATO enlargement and NATO interventions and established the design of today's NATO (see: Hunter 2019: 297). I provide the insight that while struggles from 1993-95 established a new cooperative as well as interventionist policy, the struggles around the 1997 NATO Madrid summit and the 1999 Kosovo intervention reconfirmed both policies and their practices. These struggles instituted a guiding model for NATO's future actions which was tantamount to the normalization of its post-Cold War practices.

NATO agents, their struggles in the Alliance, and the post-Cold War practices that constructed the "new NATO", are the analytical key to my study. In a wider sense, struggles within NATO were constitutive of those cooperative and interventionist practices that, rooted in their normality, constructed a new post-Cold War democratic and interventionist identity community.

With this, I seek to contribute to explanations about the life of security alliances in security studies within the broader frame of the practice turn in IR. I want to highlight that the change of policies in security alliances does not go back to identity or discourse but to the relations and perennial inequalities between security actors. Security studies can profit from the concepts of the Bourdieu-inspired turn in IR by taking on board notions of agency, struggles, and practice.

From this perspective, material power is but one form of power and one of many aspects in the struggles between security actors that establish security practices, normalize them, and give rise to novel identities and concomitant interests. In this sense, actors' relations are foundational aspects of social reality. It is through their (competitive) relations that the meaning of security becomes fixed (see: Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 5). This shows that the life of security organizations is often a historically contingent construct that depends on the struggles of agents, their historic dispositions, and the power they wield.

Chapter structure

The inquiry of the chapters will be conducted along three lines. First, how did NATO change its policies after the Cold War? Second, which practices were introduced by the policy change? And third, how were these practices normalized?

In Chapter 1, I engage with the literature and the theoretical concepts for my study. I engage with the above-mentioned constructivist approaches to NATO and point out their blind spots. Then, I present the Bourdieu-inspired practice turn as a response to the gaps left by IR Constructivism. I divide them into approaches that illuminate power struggles and those that reflect on the more inarticulate levels of agency. I carve out my position by emphasizing that both strands can be beneficial to understanding the post-Cold War NATO. I conclude the chapter by presenting methods that rely on interviews, textual ethnography, and multimedia analysis.

In Chapter 2, I engage with the theoretical approach. In the chapter's first part, I present the Bourdieusian approach to the social world by discussing the Bourdieusian toolbox of field, habitus, and capital. This is followed by a discussion of Bourdieu's notion of struggles. In the chapter's second part, I present how this approach can be applied to post-Cold War NATO. Consequently, I discuss the concepts of agency, struggles, and practice and link them to NATO. I argue that while we need to focus on elite positions in NATO to identify the relevant actors, struggles between them took place around an Atlanticist/Europeanist divide in NATO-as-field.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the 1993-94 struggle over NATO enlargement. I argue that this struggle led to a policy shift in NATO towards opening the Alliance to post-communist countries which began the Alliance's transformation.

In the chapter's first part, I lay out the continuation of NATO after the Cold War, the developments in post-Soviet Russia, and the membership aspirations of the Central and Eastern European countries as the context for struggles in NATO. Then, I present the different positions of NATO members on enlargement which I view as historically constituted. These perceptions were a catalyst for struggles. I focus on the relevant policy-makers such as French President Mitterrand and their historic perceptions. In the chapter's second part, I discuss the struggle over NATO enlargement. I begin with the discursive interventions of policymakers, discuss the French challenge, and the American turn towards enlargement. The chapter closes with the discussion of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) as an outcome of the struggle in NATO.

In Chapter 4, I engage with the struggle over NATO's interventionist policy in 1993-95. I argue that this struggle resulted in a policy shift that abrogated traditional notions of NATO as a collective defense Alliance towards a new interventionist one. This represented a further step towards the Alliance's post-Cold War transformation.

In the chapter's first part, I discuss the Bosnian war as context and present the different positions of NATO members. While the U.S. position was characterized by a lack of interest in Yugoslavia, European NATO members viewed the efforts of diplomacy and traditional peacekeeping as historically justified interventions in Bosnia.

In the chapter's second part, I begin with the interventions of NATO Secretary-General (SecGen) Manfred Wörner. I discuss these interventions in the context of his leadership style. I will provide a discussion of the struggle between the Allies to move the Alliance toward military action in Bosnia considering NATO's support for the United Nations (UN). Finally, I discuss NATO's forceful intervention in the war in the aftermath of the Srebrenica massacre. I highlight the role of NATO SecGen Willy Claes in moving the Alliance into a full interventionist policy shift.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the practices for the "new NATO" that followed the policy shift. I argue that these practices were endowed with the meaning of constructing the "new NATO".

In the chapter's first part, I discuss the practices that were related to NATO's enlargement policy. This concerned the practices in the PfP such as multinational defense planning or military exercises, consultations with Russia, and the Membership Action Plan (MAP). These practices had the meaning of constructing a "fortified democratic community" against the backdrop of the departure from the strategic community of the Cold War. In the chapter's second part, I engage with the practices of NATO's interventionist policy. I discuss the deployment of the Implementation Force (IFOR) to Bosnia and its dual task structure of military security and humanitarian relief/civil reconstruction. These practices were endowed with the meaning of constructing NATO as Europe's "crisis manager" and represented the separation from the defensive Cold War NATO. I conclude both parts of this chapter with evidence from my interviews, uncovering practitioners' perceptions concerning NATO's new practices.

Chapter 6 argues that the practical shift towards constructing NATO as a democratic post-Cold War community was far from settled by initiating the PfP. Instead, strategic rationales encroached on the Allies, resulting in power struggles around NATO's 1997 Madrid/Spain summit. These struggles initiated a future model for NATO enlargement and reconfirmed the democratic community as a critical part of the "new NATO".

In the chapter's first part, I lay out the context of NATO-Russia relations and the developments in Central and Eastern European countries. I historically derive the positions of NATO states' policymakers on their preferred candidates and connect them to struggles for power in NATO. In the chapter's second part, I engage with the struggles in the run-up to the Madrid summit. I highlight the role and power of NATO agents in the outcome of these struggles. I also engage with the aftermaths of the Madrid summit and the struggle over Ukraine's candidacy at the 2008 Bucharest summit.

In Chapter 7, I argue that the Bosnia intervention did not routinize military interventions as NATO Allies dithered when Kosovo descended in 1998 into ethnic conflict. The subsequent struggle over a new humanitarian intervention in Kosovo reconfirmed NATO as an interventionist alliance and rendered humanitarian interventions an implicit norm in international relations. This model ensured that NATO evolved as a central element of Western interventions which safeguarded its persistence.

In the chapter's first part, I discuss the ethnic conflict in Kosovo and the role of the Contact Group. I engage with the divided positions on intervention and historically derive the stances of leading policymakers. I argue that the traditional Atlanticist/European poles in NATO were subdivided into a threefold camp structure in the Kosovo context. In the chapter's second part, I engage with the ensuing power struggles between the camps in NATO. I shed light on the critical leadership of SecGen Javier Solana in moving the Alliance forward on military action. I, then, discuss the struggles that led NATO into a full interventionist cycle in Kosovo. I consider the implications of the Kosovo intervention for NATO as an interventionist Alliance. This was incisively framed by the "Blair doctrine" Finally, I discuss the 2001/02 intervention in Afghanistan which reconfirmed NATO as Europe's "crisis manager".

Conclusion

My research delves into the dynamics and interplay of agents, struggles, and practices that enabled NATO's post-Cold War transformation and persistence.

At the core, my approach draws on Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus, and capital. This approach allows me to understand the approaches of NATO policymakers in security contexts, emanating from the confluence of their historic dispositions with their positions in the alliance. Moreover, Bourdieu's notion of struggles enables me to understand why certain policies and practices became dominant in NATO after the Cold War and how they prevailed.

On one hand, my approach foregrounds the power relations in NATO that were critical to the practical transformation of the Alliance. On the other hand, it focuses on the practices that constructed the "new NATO" as a democratic and interventionist identity community and explains how these practices prevailed.

It seeks to add to existing knowledge about NATO's post-Cold War persistence by explaining the role of competitive dynamics in NATO and the constitutive qualities of new practices. This means that the relations between agents are at the basis of the dynamics of change and reproduction. Moreover, this understanding adds to the IR sub-discipline of Security Studies that the life of security organizations hinges on agents, their power, and the social dynamics within these organizations. This interplay is critical to the meaning of security and how it is practically produced.

Chapter 1

Literature Review: Contemplating NATO's persistence

The end of the Cold War compelled scholars and practitioners of international politics to rethink international relations. New themes emerged: the role of military power in international relations was in decline, the traditional approach to international relations and national security needed to be rethought, and conceptions of security needed to be broadened (Baldwin 2007: 99-100). The calls for new ways to think about military power, international relations, and security, grew predominantly “[...] out of the collective failure of scholars to anticipate either the timing or the nature of the end of the cold war” (Baldwin 2007: 100; Fierke 2001: 115).

In the academic discipline of International Relations (IR), this questioned the hitherto dominant rationalist approaches, realism, and liberalism (see: Villumsen-Berling 2015). Drawing on the same theoretical panoply, security studies reflected these controversies. Regarding the lifespan of alliances and NATO's unwavering persistence, answering how alliances survive structural change and how they adjust was a central but contested question that invited new theoretical perspectives.

Particularly realism's “neo”-variant and liberal institutionalists could not conclusively answer why NATO survived after the loss of the Soviet threat (see: Frederking 2003: 364; Gheciu 2005: 211, 217-8; Risse-Kappen 1994: 188; Sorensen 1998: 85-6). Neo-realists could not account for the persistence of NATO since they approached NATO from the perspective of traditional military alliances whose lifespan is comparatively short and purpose-driven (e.g., Snyder 1990: 104-6, 117).

Trapped in a logic of constitutive threats, Kenneth Waltz wrote, “[i]n an interim period, the continuation of NATO makes sense. In the long run, it does not” (1993: 75). That NATO nonetheless lived on was explained by the continuing superpower interest of the United States which reconfirmed the fundamentally utilitarian logic of neo-realism (Hyde-Price 2016: 50-2).

For liberal institutionalists, the persistence of NATO has been a question of adaptable institutions, hinging on the intent of member states living in an anarchic international system and acting under systemic pressures.

However, this left only insignificant room for both agency and its constitution (e.g., Johnston 2017: 4; Wallander 2000: 712). Moreover, liberalism had no explanation for the accession of undemocratic, authoritarian, states to the Alliance (e.g., Portugal) during the Cold War (Flockhart 2016: 140; Sjursen 2004: 695). This could have been answered by viewing NATO members as socializing agents (e.g., Gheciu 2005).

It was, therefore, a call upon constructivists who viewed the reason for NATO's persistence as rooted in a communitarian spirit that transformed NATO members' interests rather than an external threat (Sjursen 2004: 687). Confronting both traditions' conceptions of unceasing, determining, features of the international system, constructivism, emphasizing the social construction of social reality (and anarchy), gained increasing prominence within IR after 1990 (Fierke 2001: 115; Guzzini 2000: 154-5; Hopf 1998: 171-2).

Constructivism emphasizes the intersubjective nature of the social world where reality is the practical product of shared meanings, knowledge, and interpretations. It viewed especially identity as constitutive of actors' interests, preferences, and those social practices that "[...] constitute the actors and the structures alike" (Flockhart 2016: 141-2; Hopf 1998: 175, cit.: 173).

Constructivists stressed therefore that theorizing needs to escape the inevitability of preconceived structural mechanisms to provide contextual understandings beyond the Cold War (see: Gheciu 2005: 218; Guzzini 2000: 155). Consequently, research informed by constructivism engaged with post-Cold War security and its entangled institutions such as NATO (see: Adler and Barnett 2000; Flockhart 2016: 142; Sjursen 2004: 687).

Contributions set out to provide new explanations for the key post-Cold War security puzzles: NATO's persistence and the quick adaptation of its practices in the absence of a galvanizing threat (Berdal and Ucko 2010: 103).

The strongly mission-driven character of the post-1990 NATO, that is, the Alliance's Eastern enlargement or its military interventions in ex-Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, benefited this undertaking. The overall argument was that NATO persisted because it transformed into a political and interventionist Alliance (see: Aybet 2010: 35; Moore 2007: 8).

Regarding explanations of NATO's transformation into this Alliance and the reasons for its persistence, constructivists are divided. The distinction between conventional and critical variants helps to understand what is at stake as they proposed different points of departure for the study of NATO (see: Hopf 1998: 172).

Conventional constructivism refers to approaches that add identities to an otherwise rationalist, positivist approach, providing a via media between rationalist and interpretivism. Critical constructivism, informed by poststructuralist perspectives, questions the consistency of such an attempt, pointing at the discursive construction of reality.

While critical constructivists highlighted the discursive formation of NATO's identity and practices, conventional constructivists treated this identity as an independent variable and the hallmark of NATO transformation (see: Frederking 2003: 364; Hopf 1998: 183). Both, however, agreed on the centrality of liberal-democratic norms. The disagreement was rather about whether identity existed *a priori*.

In my review, I discuss constructivist approaches to NATO. I find that their focus on the Alliance's transformation is important to understand its post-Cold War persistence. NATO persisted because it transformed.

However, I argue that it is necessary to consider the role of practices. Practices, rather than identity and discourses, played the primary role in the transformation of NATO. They offer conceptual inroads to better understanding puzzles such as NATO's post-Cold War persistence. Practices have constitutive qualities, produce as well as reproduce identities, and provide the frame within which discourse takes place.

I look at Bourdieu-inspired "practice theory" approaches. Bourdieu shows that symbolic struggles and practical knowledge come before identity or the actualization of our language capacity.

Bourdieu notes that “[...] the principle of our action is more often practical sense than rational calculations [...] and far from being fixed *a priori* [...]” (2000 [1997]-a: 64; *Italic by author*). He, therefore, provides relevant insights on the persistence, emergence, and transformation of identities and discourses that supported NATO’s persistence and transformation. Bourdieu proposes relevant conceptual tools that explain how NATO persisted, how it was able to adopt practices of political cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs hereafter), sustained various rounds of expansion, and intervened militarily out-of-area.

In my review, I divide the Bourdieu-inspired “practice theory” approaches into “power/struggles”-approaches and “agency beyond rationality” approaches. I discuss their contributions but also problematize their analytical focus regarding the study of NATO to carve out a route for my study along these spectra.

I find that while NATO’s transformative post-Cold war practices were thematized, they have often been treated as explanatory bridges for other phenomena in NATO. For example, Pouliot (2010) focuses on NATO-Russia relations within the broader context of NATO’s eastern enlargement and the interventions in ex-Yugoslavia. Scholars have, thereby, failed to consider the dynamics of change and reproduction *within* NATO. Explanations of how NATO’s Eastern enlargement and its military interventions became possible, how they were sustained, and how this affected NATO have been absent.

Emphasizing the role of power and legitimate authority, I suggest an approach that engages with both struggles within NATO and the Alliance’s post-Cold War practices contained by Eastern enlargement and military interventions. At the end of the chapter, I present the methodology and methods for this study.

1.1 Conventional constructivism

NATO as an identity community

Explanations of NATO's persistence and the adaptation of practices are rooted in the conceptualization of NATO as the "[...] institutionalization of the transatlantic security community based on common values and a collective identity of liberal democracies" (Risse-Kappen 2007 [1996]: 191). To explain this institutionalization, as well as the functionalization of NATO, conventional constructivists crafted their arguments beginning from the democratic identities of Alliance members as "[...] the most proximate causes of choices, preferences, and action [...]" (Hopf 1998: 174, fn. 10).

With the concept of a security community, especially mainstream constructivists explained how NATO's "collective identity" supported the post-Cold War NATO and the adoption of new political and interventionist tasks (see: Schlag 2009: 9; also: Williams and Neumann 2000: 358-9).

The original concept of security communities, developed by Karl Deutsch in 1957, experienced a revival by constructivists who emphasized the role of the social in international politics (Adler and Barnett 1998: 5, 12). Members of a security community share identities, norms, and meanings, which justifies their peaceful relations. These identities are constituted by (domestic) norms and values (Jepperson *et al.* 1996: 54-5). Deutsch used these criteria to define a security community.

"Common meanings" enable shared understandings from which interactions arise (see: Adler and Barnett 2000). Norms (e.g., the non-violent resolution of conflict) enable mutual expectations about actors and their behavior (Jepperson *et al.* 1996: 54-5; Webber *et al.* 2012: 42).

Given the externalization of their (liberal) norms, democracies are likely to develop a "collective identity" that benefits the institutionalization of cooperation in specific institutions (Risse-Kappen 2007 [1996]: 193). A democratic identity provides for the foundation on which collective arrangements such as NATO rest since it allows for the definition of the Self and the relations to the Other (also: Wendt 1996: 51, 53). Where shared identities induce cooperation, arrangements "will persist" (Hopf 1998: 191).

Considering the democratic identity of the states that organized their international relations within NATO, constructivists thus claimed that “[...] the alliance exists now only in name; in function it is a community” (Kitchen 2010: 9).

The concept of NATO as the “Western/transatlantic security community” amounts consequently to that of NATO as a “community of values” or “identity community” (see: Schlag 2009: 4). The puzzling question of the Alliance as the strongest emerging post-Cold War security institution could then be explained by its collectively held liberal-democratic identity that engendered “[...] the strong sense of community pertaining to the domestic structures of liberal states” (Risse-Kappen 2007 [1996]: 166, 194). Therefore, identity is the foundation of a security community and structures the international system (see: Bially-Mattern 2000: 299-300).

However, NATO’s collective democratic identity, which already existed during the Cold War, required after the superpower standoff a reaffirmation to confirm its post-Cold War relevance and to uphold the community. Many assumed that the ending confrontation of the superpowers needed to lead to a “[...] peaceful expansion of the Western security community, and [...] the international promotion of norms and values of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy” (Gheciu 2008: 1). As Webber et al. writes, “[a]cting on the basis of values [...] affirms the identity of the Alliance and thus the reason for its continued existence” (2012: 43).

Thus, NATO “[...] redefined its own role and security concept along the lines of a democratic security community, and then initiated a set of policies with the aim of increasing security [...]” (Lucarelli 2005: 85). Necessarily, this integrated the explanation of NATO’s new (identity-) practices into constructivist research (e.g., Kavalski 2007: 155).

For instance, NATO’s liberal democratic identity made it the preferred vehicle for identity projection to the CEECs after the Cold War. Through engagement with the CEECs, NATO’s identity became, in turn, acknowledged and reaffirmed (Gheciu 2005: 5, 16). While constructivists affirmed that NATO’s persistence was related to its practical engagements, they looked through the lens of Alliance’s post-Cold War practices to explain the continuing centrality of NATO’s democratic identity.

Collective identity and NATO's post-Cold War persistence

For conventional constructivists, NATO's liberal identity has been the hallmark of NATO's post-Cold War transformation. The Alliance's liberal identity provided explanations for why the Alliance adjusted to a new international environment, changed its force structures, engaged in political relations with the former enemies in the East, and intervened under a UN mandate in Yugoslavia (Risse-Kappen 2007 [1996]: 191).

Constructivists argue that from the angle of NATO's identity, alone the political expansion of NATO was a natural reaction to the beginning democratization process in the CEECs (2007 [1996]: 192). Given that, at the beginning of the 1990s, NATO operationalized its collective democratic identity, Thomas Risse-Kappen concluded that "[...] NATO remains alive and well so far" (2007 [1996]: 191).

This identity, including the Allies' shared sense of history and free markets, became the linchpin of new partnership/enlargement initiatives and military intervention in the Western Balkans. Democratic norms and principles were critical to NATO's post-Cold War success and provided the framework within which the Alliance redefined its scope of action (Aybet and Moore 2010: 6).

Therefore, constructivists argue that norms and practices are closely related (see: Webber *et al.* 2012: 43-4). As Veronica Kitchen writes, "[...] the question of 'who we are together' defines the question of what we do together" (2009: 97).

Because of its collective democratic identity, common interests could be identified, and NATO was able to reach a consensus regarding its post-Cold War practices. The identity-driven transformation of NATO into a political and interventionist alliance was, in turn, expected to strengthen the well-being of the Alliance.

For instance, the socialization of former communist states into liberal norms and their related security practices infused NATO with a new sense of purpose (see: Gheciu 2005; Moore 2007). The Alliance redefined its mandate and remained relevant for post-Cold War security. As Webber *et al.* writes, "[i]dentity, [...] is reinforced through practice as well as values as such" (see also: Sjursen 2004: 692; 2012: 44; Williams and Neumann 2007: 68).

Particularly the first round of NATO enlargement was a value-driven process, that is, a process based on the vision that a democratic Europe (“whole and free”) could guarantee future common security (Williams 2021b). Others noted that “NATO has always embodied the *inside* logic of security, involving the pursuit of a stable, progressive, international order through the construction of “good” domestic institutions” (Gheciu 2005: 233, *Italic by author*).

Considering that NATO’s practical engagements started from democratic norms and identity and, in turn, reinforced them, constructivists took an optimistic outlook on NATO (Barany and Rauchhaus 2011: 302; Risse-Kappen 1995: 220-1; Webber *et al.* 2012: 43).

However, the issues that emerged with the new agenda did not go unnoticed in constructivist research. NATO enlargement proved to be challenging because it was the “[...] incorporation of what was previously the Other, i.e., including members from another type of order” (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 721, *cit.*: 726).

These states’ capacity to adapt to NATO standards “[...] has been modest at best” (Young 2017: 3). Likewise, before NATO’s ever-first military intervention in Bosnia began, some members (e.g., France, Spain, or Italy) rather preferred using the Western European Union (WEU) “as their military intervention instrument of choice” (also: Haftendorn 1997; INTVW4 2021).

That NATO completed several rounds of enlargement (e.g., 1997, 2004, 2009) and weathered the disputes that came with the military interventions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya, was justified with a reference to the democratic identity of the Alliance (see: Garey 2020: 30).

As Wallace Thies writes, “[w]hat sets NATO apart [...] is the ability to act in concert *despite* disagreements [...]” (2009: 296; *Italics by author*). Both sides of the Atlantic share values revolving around support for democracy, human rights, and market economies; and ensure finding the least common denominator of interests (Daalder 2001: 564). This was viewed as a consequence of identity-based dimensions that served constructivists as a point of reference for their explanations (Thies 2009: 23).

While mainstream constructivists thus viewed identity as the hallmark of NATO's transformation and longevity, NATO's activities were, at most, intervening variables. This was essentially anchored in the certitude of NATO as a liberal value community that, based on the Washington Treaty, admits only states that commit to democratic values (NATO 2019: Preamble, Art. 10). A profound transformation of NATO's fundamental democratic identity was thus largely unthinkable, served as a point of departure for regulated and predictable behaviors, and made it superfluous to ascribe transformative effects to them.

Conventional constructivism in perspective: identity or perceptions?

Conventional constructivists emphasize that NATO's liberal-democratic identity facilitated the adoption of a new politico-interventionist role after the Cold War and helped the Alliance to overcome obstacles associated with this role. Because of their shared identity, democracies solve problems well (Kitchen 2010: 33).

Thereby, NATO's identity "[...] provided the impetus and some broad guidelines for action [...]" (2009: 111). Despite these claims, constructivists remain unable to explain why certain activities become adopted. Identity may serve as a frame for practices but is insufficient to illuminate their adoption.

For example, despite their shared liberal identity, NATO members believed that NATO could not enlarge to democratizing CEECs and constructed barriers to keep them out (Asmus and Vondra 2005: 208; Fierke and Wiener 1999: 730). However, German Defense Minister (MoD), Volker R  he, began striving for NATO expansion in 1993. In 1994, NATO declared its opening to new members and introduced new activities. NATO's collective liberal identity (and associated norms and values) may have provided the frame of reference for activities. But it cannot explain why they were adopted or why agents reached a consensus on controversial topics and why perceptions fundamentally change.

Considering this problem, constructivists claim that multiple identities have been at play within NATO. For instance, incorporating tasks of political cooperation and crisis management, NATO's (liberal) corporate/type-identity has been behind the adoption of new practices (Flockhart 2016: 148).

While it is certainly possible to explain the *modus operandi* of policies such as defense cooperation or military interventions ("liberal practices", e.g., Adler 2008) by referencing NATO's identity, constructivists remain unable to make clear how they become adopted (see: Flockhart 2016: 150). Rather, the social world is "black boxed" by creating types of identity and adducing them *ad infinitum* to make sense of Alliance practices (see: 2016: 151).

However, what agents do usually takes place because it appears reasonable or rational from their perspective (Bourdieu 1992: 66). This should not be mistaken with an "instrumental rationality", but rather understood as perceptions that are deeply rooted in the conditions of existence and dispositions of agents (1977: 115).

Although constructivists view NATO members as sharing a sense of the value of the community that guides actions (see also: Guzzini 2005: 496; Kitchen 2009: 97), it is rather that NATO agents are endowed with perceptions that make actions commonsensical in contexts (see: Bourdieu 1998: 25).

For instance, the promotion of the liberal version of security (e.g., liberal subjectivity) became part and parcel of the new "rules of the security game" after the Cold War (Neumann and Pouliot 2011: 110; Pouliot 2010: 150). To survive, institutional agents had to internalize the new logic and adapt their outlook toward the active promotion of liberal norms (Rotfeld 1991: 588; Rühle 1995: 131). This later resulted in the deployment of unprecedented actions that established post-Cold War identities such as NATO's interventionist identity.

This indicates that, structured by agents' perception, social action becomes constitutive of identity. It can be compared to employees who, through their quotidian work, adopt specific identities that do not exist before their work.

Because constructivists do not problematize relations of power and the role of social agents, they cannot see that identity results from agents' historic perceptions about how to construct the social world. Agents' relations to the social world are practical. Identity results from the dominant way of doing things that renders certain actions imperative in contexts.

Understanding perceptions and how they translated into action requires uncovering the power dynamics in NATO. According to Bourdieu, understandings and doings result from the incorporation of relations of domination through which commonsense is shared between dominant and dominated agents (2000 [1997]-a: 170). This is, eventually, a question of who possesses the authority to legitimize the ways things are done (see: Pouliot 2010: 47).

This raises a related issue that constructivism proves unable to answer. It cannot provide an account of why NATO's "patterns of action" can "carry on for so long" (Flockhart 2016: 150) and how this reinforced the Alliance. For instance, NATO conducted four large-scale military operations between 1995 and 2014. Whereas constructivists expected a strategic retreat from these engagements with deleterious consequences for the Alliance, operations were sustained over a long time (see: Webber *et al.* 2012: 81, 88).

The issue is that the normality or the "self-evidence" of doing something stabilizes actions and fixes identities. As Pouliot explains, the "[...] self-evidence of diplomacy makes the social fact of international peace possible" (2008: 283).

Agents find it hard to imagine alternative ways of going on. Social actions become regulated, appear meaningful to agents, and become constitutive of social reality— they are socially productive (see: Pouliot 2008: 279-80, 283; 2016: 257).

However, what is normal and what is not is also a matter of power and authority. How certain actions become normalized and how/what meaning is attached is not a question of identity but of the legitimate power that endows agents with the instruments to perceive their doings as meaningful in the construction of the social world (see: Pouliot 2008: 282; Swartz 1997: 83).

1.2 Critical constructivism

Rhetoric action and discursive identities

The primacy of identity in NATO's transformation and persistence has been shared between mainstream and critical constructivists. However, the moot point between them was whether identity was a given or required reconstruction in contexts.

According to "critical constructivists", the "identity-school of thought" clings on to causal logic and neglects the "relationship between word and world" (see: Frederking 2003: 364). Therefore, they critique the idea that NATO's persistence can only be ascribed to democratic principles that make it natural to cooperate. Instead, identity requires discursive constructions in contexts to emerge as a hallmark of transformation. The criticism did not claim that democratic norms, values, or corresponding identities do not matter for (the study of) NATO.

Rather, critical constructivists, and some poststructuralists, contended that rhetorical action, that is, (changing) arguments, sensemaking, and discourses, played an overriding role in in the Alliance's persistence and emerged as a driver of transformative practices (see also: Hansen 2006: 5; Schlag 2017: 158-9).

As Andreas Behnke argues, the Alliance's "[...] 'stability', its persistence and continued authority in security political matters, needs to be understood as a problematic outcome of discursive representations" (2013: 71). The post-Cold War NATO persisted because it has been "talked into persistence".

From this viewpoint, rhetoric/discursive change is constitutive of both identity change and practice (see: Kitchen 2009: 102). Interests, identity, and behaviors are then a result of contextual constructions (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 723). This means that because of (shared public) language (dialogue, argument, or discourse), NATO was able to change its identity and adopt new practices (e.g., Fierke 1999: 32).

Stressing the role of language, Karin Fierke suggests that NATO's survival has been a question of "language maneuvers", of political maneuvers that deployed arguments about NATO's continuing relevance to address emerging security issues (1999: 34-6). In the context of NATO's enlargement, she suggests that the long-standing language of values pressured NATO into eastern expansion while it was not necessarily a concern integral to NATO's values (1999: 29; 2002: 347). This means that "[a]ctors become entangled in their language" (1999: 31). If they do not live up to proclaimed ideas and norms, disrespect or shame would be the consequence (ibid.).

What she calls "past promises", made toward communist countries during the Cold War, had flown into the redefinition of NATO's identity after 1990 (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 729). The 1993/4 PfP, which was designed to engage with the CEECS and Russia, entangled NATO to the degree where it had to make true its promises of membership for the CEECs. In the context of interaction and dialogue, NATO became transformed as it eventually admitted new members in 1999 (1999: 42-3, 49-50).

Rhetoric arguments between Allies became mechanisms that supported translating domestic norms into behavior and collective identity into policy. As Veronica Kitchen writes, "[i]n both cases, the allies must argue about how their domestic or international identities translate into action in particular situations" (2010: 33-4). To reference norms and identities as independent variables is therefore not enough to understand the post-Cold War NATO.

Language in practice (active disputes and arguments about norms and values) constructs (the new limits of a changing) identity (see: Kitchen 2010: 15). Identity is therefore a discursive construct that defines what is true for a group of actors and supports claims about the future course of action. In such processes, legitimate actions and norms of community members become defined and, thus, the content of existing identities is redefined (2010: 44-5).

Talk and argument connect identity and policy within the boundaries of particular discourses (2010: 36-7). This became linked to successful constructions of narratives (e.g., enlargement) that reinforce identities (Flockhart 2014: 83). To grasp NATO's persistence, we are instructed to examine those Alliance discourses and arguments that reference democratic concepts (see: Kitchen 2010: 96).

For instance, the new post-Cold War security environment offered the NATO Allies the opportunity to redefine their identity. Particularly NATO's crisis over action and inaction in Bosnia became a threat to liberal-democratic values. However, this crisis was not a threat to the security community because norms existed independent of discourse. Rather, it was a threat because NATO's rhetoric of responsibility and values had become discursively dominant in the context of NATO's transformation and persistence. This compelled the Allies, in the face of the Bosnian War, to redefine their scope of action, their discourses, and, with it, their identity (2010: 115-6).

The NATO Allies began mobilizing humanitarian discourses that supported the expansion of NATO's mandate to end the Bosnian War. Eventually, this helped constitute a novel interventionist identity (see: Hansen 2006: 122; Pouliot 2010: 159) and played into the overarching narrative that the Bosnia intervention "saved NATO" by having successfully gone "out of area" (Flockhart 2014: 83; INTVW5 2021; Webber 2016: 3).

NATO's transformation was thus characterized by discourses that mobilized and reconfirmed collective identities. NATO's actions were viewed as consequential of these discourses.

Critical constructivism in perspective: discourse and practice

Critical constructivists associate language with the construction of (new) identities for the post-Cold War NATO. They also associate language with the construction of contexts and reasonable action for a given identity. Through a rhetorical process of naming, language contextually situates agents and meaningful action; identity becomes socially constructed. Critical constructivists thus view rhetorical action/discourses as the hallmark of NATO's post-Cold War transformation. However, they neglect the practical background of rhetoric action. I argue that discursive constructions are actions that come with "practical knowledge".

For instance, Karin Fierke (2007) sheds light on the role of what she calls "naming games" concerning NATO's Bosnia intervention.

These “games” have provided the West with answers about “how to go on” in an otherwise decontextualized post-Cold War situation. Language constructed certain rational moves during the Bosnian war in relatable contexts such as the Vietnam War (2007: 275-7). Rhetoric contextualization enabled NATO to become a political and interventionist actor while language emerged as a critical factor in the construction of identities (see: Fierke and Wiener 1999: 723-5).

However, as Erik Ringmar writes “[m]uch of what takes place in world politics is not just happening; rather, it is made to happen, and to appear, in a certain fashion—it is *performed*” (2015: 1; *Italic by author*). Language is an essential part of such (practical) performances (see: Neumann 2002: 627). Communicative actions exist in practical relationships to the social world, and so do discursive identities (see: Pouliot 2010: 39-40).

This means that discursive actions often materialize in practical contexts such as organizational procedures or bureaucratic routines. As such, they are underpinned by “practical knowledge”. Agents often intuitively know when a certain context calls for communicative action (Pouliot 2008: 276). They not only incorporate the rules of language in and through practice but also the rules that pertain to the use of language in specific contexts (2008: 271). Rules may be known, but their situational and correct application is learned through practice (2008: 267).

Taken-for-granted knowledge lingers behind communicative acts which make them possible in contexts. The discursive “know to” is enabled by a tacit “know-how”. This sheds light on the role of historic agents which critical constructivists do not consider.

Because of the practical background of discursive identities, their constitutive actions (e.g., discourse and argument) are reified “practical knowledge”. This knowledge is not only acquired practically but established through power relations in which legitimate authority plays a fundamental role (Pouliot 2010: 47). Critical constructivists fall, therefore, short of illuminating the conditions, that is, authority and power, that enable communicative action and facilitate the adoption of discourses. The question of *who* has the authority to invoke identities or to create contexts, and on what grounds, remains unanswered (see: Bourdieu 1991: 8).

Power relations are involved in the rhetoric (institutional) production and productivity of identity (see: Bially-Mattern 2000: 304; Williams and Neumann 2007: 68). This is of relevance since the social reality and the principle of its construction is often imposed by subtle forms of power (Bourdieu 1977: 165; 1990: 134; Guzzini 2005: 508, 520). This power, wielded by legitimized agents, works towards the naturalization of conceptions of the social world (Bourdieu and Eagleton 2012: 438-9).

I argue that identity and discourse exist in a practical relationship to the social world, they materialize in and through practice. As mentioned in the introduction, “practice” is to be viewed as “embodied” by agents, understanding social actions in the context of the normative environment in which they take place. This points towards considerations that have been missed in constructivist research.

First, it is not identity or discourse that played a primary role in NATO’s transformation and persistence but the Alliance’s practices. Consequently, NATO enlargement and military interventions as frames for practices after the Cold War become important analytical foci (see: Rauchhaus 2001: 3). Second, we need to thematize the power relations behind practices (and identity and discourse) that endow agents with the necessary perceptions about how to go on in the social world.

With a look to practice(s)

Investigating the IR puzzles of NATO’s surprising post-Cold War persistence and the adoption of transformative practices involves NATO’s liberal identity and NATO’s discourses. However, while they may tell us about how agents act prospectively, they cannot tell us, *eo ipso*, why they become mobilized or effective. Not least because of the neglected role of agency and power in NATO (see: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 29), applying constructivist approaches to the above-stated puzzles is questionable.

Despite constructivism’s important insights into the construction of the social, we cannot presume *a priori* that a collective identity exists and has causal effects. Nor can we assume that language acts construe identities without reifying actors’ tacitly held assumptions. In the context of practices, identities, and discourses are concepts to be explored *inter alia*.

The collective knowledge of individuals or groups cannot be identified outside of practice as identities and meanings are governed through practices (Adler 2019: 122; Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 22).

To understand why NATO adopted new practices after the Cold War, why practices persisted, and how this affected NATO, we need an approach that zooms in on NATO actors and NATO as a site of and for practice (see also: Neumann 2002: 629-30). As Vincent Pouliot stresses, “[...] social phenomena cannot be explained without paying attention to the actual doings that give them shape” (2016: 50).

Privileging practices help us get beyond the face value of identity/discourse to understand what enables them, why they are perceived as worth adopting, and how they become mobilized and effective in the process of social construction. Moreover, the focus on practices helps us understand what logic agents follow (Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 2).

We can track where this knowledge is located, understanding how agents construct the social world and recover the meaning of their practices. Because “[...] to capture what is going on in the world, one starts from the bottom and goes up” (Pouliot 2016: 50). By this, we can show that NATO’s practices are *structured*, that they are enabled by practitioners’ understandings, and that they have *structuring* (constitutive) effects (see: Adler and Pouliot 2011: 3; Cornut 2015: 5; Pouliot 2016: 9).

As Iver B. Neumann writes, “[...] it is always necessary to ask what disposes people to enact the practices they do, how and when they do; and their aims, their lived experience and their inherited knowledge [...]” (2002: 629). When we understand how NATO agents are dispositioned, we can understand their practices, what sustains them, and how this affects the Alliance.

Practice theories are a hotchpotch of approaches that share the view that “[...] incorporated and material patterns of action [...] are organized around common implicit understandings of the actors” (ibid.; also: Schatzki *et al.* 2001: 12). However, this raises questions whether agents’ actions are invariably constrained by these understandings.

A rule-guided approach to practice can be found with the Austrian-born philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein viewed language as the prototype of meaningful and structured human practices.

Like “language games”, practices are lived meanings and rules (see also: Fierke 2007: 276). From this viewpoint, learning to participate in practice is learning “rule-following” in and through practice (“meaning in use”; Frost and Lechner 2016: 343-4). Action is constituted and guided by commonly held and mastered (social) norms that allow for the deliberation of an agent’s action and contemplating the actions of others (2016: 339, 344).

Such understanding views the “international society” as regulated by social rules that define and condition certain states of affairs, such as the balance of power or international diplomacy. States of the international society view themselves as bound to common rules (2016: 346). By implication, when any such affairs appear imbalanced from the perspective of shared social norms, action should follow.

For instance, “[...] states should cooperate to thwart the rise of a hegemon” or “[...] the will to restore peace should be preserved and communicated in order to bring hostilities to a lasting end” (2016: 349).

Any such rule-bound guideline for action makes it possible for agents to produce meaningful and recurrent practices. Rules do not only give meaning to actions and determine when they should arise.

Within contexts, they also demarcate the possible range of meaningful deeds that constitute them as practical patterns. As Lechner and Frost write, “[a]ny theory that is rule-based is bound to restrict the agent’s freedom of action: rules operate as action constraints” (2016: 339). This means that only action *B* can follow given rule *A* in a recurrent context *C*.

Moreover, rule-following has tacit dimensions. Wittgenstein famously quipped: “[t]his is simply what I do” (see also: Neumann 2002: 629, fn.5; cit. in: Pouliot 2008: 271). Practical learning forms “innate” perceptions that are due to antecedent relations of power. As Rebecca Adler-Nissen writes, “[t]he theorisation of social action as always embodied implies that to be effective, power and hence politics are incorporated into the body” (2013: 8).

Put differently, an analysis of practices is bound to an analysis of the power relations that enable them. However, that does not mean that agents are narrowly constrained and practices necessarily mechanistic—like action *B* given rule *A* in context *C*.

From the perspective of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, they are rather “regulated improvisations” engendered by the “habitus”. This analytical concept highlights the “bodily as well as cognitive basis” and “inventive as well as habituated forms of action” (Swartz 1997: 101). Thus, agents’ historical dispositions,

“[...] point toward a theory of action that is practical rather than discursive, prereflective rather than conscious, embodied as well as cognitive, durable though adaptive, reproductive though generative and inventive, and the product of particular social conditions though transposable to others” (ibid.).

This has been heeded by theorists of the “practice turn”. They have been inspired by the work of Bourdieu which helped them to explain the actions of social agents as well as the antecedent power relations in normative environments that shape fields, agents, and their practices.

Understanding practices as primary in the transformation and persistence of NATO as well as structured and structuring actions that involve relations of power, I locate my work within the Bourdieusian practice turn by drawing on his conceptual apparatus. The literature should support an understanding of the application of Bourdieu within the practice turn and identify interstices for my approach.

1.3 The “practice turn” in International Relations

Within the “practice turn in IR” (Adler-Nissen 2013: 5), which became prominent at the beginning of the millennium, constructivists (and then poststructuralists) took an inflection to make their analysis more sociological. With this, they started looking at (international) rituals, conventions, and practices of individuals or groups within their organized contexts (e.g., the state or institutions). On one hand, it became important to understand what action symbolizes/means and to get to the bottom of agency. On the other hand, it became important to understand how normative environments affect agents, that is, e.g., how institutions predispose them to act.

Thus, the focus on practice answers the call for a new relevance of political sciences by addressing “[...] problems that matter to and are identified by groups in the local, national and global communities in which we live, and in ways that matter by focusing on context, values and power” (Vromen 2010: 253).

While practices have long been studied in IR, and some scholars followed Anthony Giddens, Theodor Schatzki, or Michel de Certeau, others became interested in the works of Pierre Bourdieu (see: Cornut 2015: 2).

They share with Bourdieu the view that politics is socially constructed and argued that his theoretical and epistemological considerations can serve as a point of departure for objects of study in IR (Adler-Nissen 2013: 1, 4; *ibid.*). They also shared Bourdieu’s insistence on the primacy of objective relations between agents rather than discourses (see: Vandenberghe 1999: 52).

A Bourdieusian perspective foregrounds the overlooked facets of international politics such as knowledge practices and the construction of knowledge through power struggles (Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 42). With this, scholars subscribed to the fundamental idea that a substantial part of our doings comes from internalized understandings. This enabled them to explain why a certain identity was adopted (e.g., agents’ historic trajectory) or why a certain narrative/discourse was chosen (e.g., jockeying for dominant positions).

Bourdieu's ensemble of conceptual tools has been employed to study contexts such as NATO, and the European Union (EU), or the practice of diplomacy within both. These undertakings came largely from two scholarly directions: one group stressed the role and workings of power and struggles; another group foregrounded the role of naturalized practical understandings. However, both groups shared the view that because of practices, NATO transformed and persisted.

Power and struggles

Borrowing from Bourdieu, the authorship that foregrounds "power and struggles" between agents ("power/struggle-scholarship") directs our look to struggles (as type of practice; Adler-Nissen 2014: 662) to understand *what* agents do, by *what means* they do it, and which practices emerge as dominant.

Social reality, or hierarchical relations between agents, is the outcome of their unceasing conflict/competition that is supported by the power(s) at their hands. Discourse is but one feature of power and identity far from fixed. NATO is no exception to this.

In terms of NATO's post-Cold War practices, scholarly renditions treat Eastern enlargement and military interventions as explanatory examples of how struggles shaped the relations between security actors or how NATO maintained its "cultural power" (e.g., Villumsen-Berling 2015: 87; Williams 2007: 130). However, they do not account for the genesis of these practices and their constitutive qualities independent of their narratives.

Trine Villumsen-Berling brings in Bourdieu to argue that IR can benefit from his concepts to better understand central research puzzles such as the "[...] the paradigmatic case of European security after the Cold War [...]" (2012: 451). She depicts European security after the Cold War as a field in which orthodox positions (advocates of military balancing, e.g., NATO) and heterodox positions (advocates of dialogue or common security, e.g., peace research) challenged their hierarchical structure (2012: 452; 2015: 28).

A field, she explains, is a Bourdieusian tool to analyze a space that functions according to a relational logic and in which conflict and struggles occur (2015: 27). With this, she mobilizes the pivotal idea of social hierarchies as the outcome of conflicts/struggles between dominant and dominated actors who attempt to transform or conserve the structure of their objective field positions (Bourdieu 1993: 92; *ibid.*). This structure is determined by the capital distribution between actors (e.g., acquired economic, cultural, social, and symbolic possessions) and, with it, “[...] the interdependence of entities that compose a structure of positions among which there are power relations” (Hilgers and Mangez 2015: 4, *cit.*: 5, see also: 8-10).

In the case of European security, as Villumsen-Berling explains, struggles between actors emerged over the power to define post-Cold War security. The previous Cold War convergence between the theoretical paradigm of realism and NATO’s military practices became contested by alternative understandings of security, as well as new social science actors and practitioners with different forms of capital (2012: 459; 2015: 28-9).

Her account focuses on “doxic battles”, that is, “*world-making* battles” that determine (from anew) the valued forms of capital and dominant understandings in the field (2015: 107; *Italic by author*). In these “power struggles”, NATO, but also competitors (e.g., the European Union (EU); 2015: 138), mobilized forms of capital so “[...] that [it] came to change the very basic features of what European social reality consisted of” (2012: 455, *cit.*: 456).

Williams and Neumann add to this notion of (power-) struggle the role of “symbolic power”, that is, “[...] the ability to use symbolic structures of representation and the occupation of social positions from which they can be effectively enacted and social and material power thereby mobilized” (2007: 65).

They evince that constructivists overlooked that power struggles stood behind the formation of the security community and by which the security field was “reconfigured” (2007: preface). Particularly the role of “civilizational discourses” as symbolic power, deployed in struggles, plays a critical role in their contribution.

NATO's persistence and post-Cold War role can be understood in terms of an institution that produces identity, accumulates and retains forms of capital, and exercises cultural and symbolic power (2007: 62). This renders (constructivist) discourses only effective when they relate to a socially recognized (legitimate) position from which they can be authoritatively enunciated (2007: 66).

Discourses become tied to symbolic power ("authoritative ideas", emerging in threat contexts; 2007: 63) which then affect valued forms of capital and their efficacy in struggles. Institutions such as NATO are thus the recognized terrain for the enunciation of symbolic power discourses as means in struggles over legitimate identities and action in newly emerging orders (2007: 70).

Consequently, NATO was able to reformulate its identity by discursively tying Western culture to security in the "cultural field of security" (2007: 64). Thereby, it valorized and redeployed its capital (e.g., social [e.g., networks, members] and military) to become "[...] the military and material expression of a value-based civilizational structure" (see also: Mérand 2010: 360; cit.: Williams and Neumann 2007: 76). Through this, NATO created a new "institutional narrative" by which it escaped the limits of traditional alliances and expanded to the CEECs while retaining the power to discipline new members (2007: 75-7).

The "power/struggle-scholarship" thus conceptualizes the social realm as a field, a "structured social space", where, depending on the topic (e.g., "diplomacy", "security"), different types of actors (e.g., state, non-state, individuals) "struggle for dominant positions" (see: Adler-Nissen 2014: 659).

They stress that "power struggles" come before the emergence of novel actors and their practices (2014: 680-1). Forms of capital and symbolic power are then eminently relevant resources to determine/legitimize the "stakes" of the field, its boundaries (struggles over what?), who gets to stay in the field, and the value of capital holdings (hierarchic position; 2014: 660). However, the "power/struggle-scholarship's" emphasis on *what agents do* (struggles) and *by what means* (capital and power), comes at the cost of highlighting *how* they do it (tacitly or reflectively).

This is often due to the problem of the great diversity of actors' backgrounds within fields (e.g., European security; Villumsen-Berling 2015: 27). To some degree, this could be addressed by Bourdieusian IR scholars who studied smaller fields such as EU or NATO diplomacy (e.g., Adler-Nissen 2014; Pouliot 2010). Thereby, they added a critical notion to the study of power and struggles: "agency beyond rational actors" (cit.: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 27).

Agency beyond rationality

While not neglecting the role of power, the "agency beyond rationality-scholarship" highlights the principles and consequences of agents' natural(-ized) ways of perceiving and acting. Before proceeding to NATO-related works, I first discuss a contribution that serves as a signpost for my study.

Rebecca Adler-Nissen touches upon two important Bourdieusian analytical concepts: the "habitus" of agents and their "practical sense". The habitus is that scheme that is quintessential in producing "agency beyond rationality".

Adler-Nissen explains that agents' hierarchical positions, dispositions, as well as position-takings reflect a habitus, that is, "[...] a system of durable dispositions that make individuals act, perceive, and think in a particular way and in accordance with the field throughout time" (2014: 661).

While a habitus that is perfectly adjusted to a field possesses an unarticulated "practical sense", or "feel for the game", a mismatch with the field, often experienced by newcomers, produces a hysteresis effect. From the perspective of the field's dominant actors, the hysteresis effect is expressed by maladjusted practices that, in turn, appear commonsensical to newcomers (2008: 669-70; *ibid.*).

Adler-Nissen argues that the establishment of the EU's External Action Service (EEAS) involved struggles over legitimate visions of national and EU foreign policy (2014: 667). This means that the EEAS potentially challenged the dominance of national diplomats in the field who traditionally held the monopoly over foreign diplomatic services and reproduced the symbolic power of the state (e.g., number of positions, privileges; 2014: 669, 671).

The takeaway is that the recognition of newcomers is a relational process, dependent upon the field's dominant actors. A maladjustment of challengers, an "incorrect" practical sense, showcased by "unnatural" practices, can then lead to negative sanctions (e.g., exclusion) which reduces the prospects of accumulating and exercising symbolic power. Therefore, struggles and symbolic power are crucial to the assertion of a specific habitus over another and the taken-for-grantedness (naturalization) of its (international) practices (2014: 665, 671-2, 680).

Transferring the habitus concept to NATO, Vincent Pouliot underlines the tacit aspects of "agency beyond rationality", the "practical sense". In his book "International Security in Practice" (2010), he offers an insightful account of NATO-Russia relations after the Cold War. NATO's new post-Cold War practices play a role for Pouliot to the degree that they provide the frame within which NATO's long-standing diplomatic practice in the Russian context unfolds.

For Pouliot, "[...] practice is the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear self-evident or commonsensical" (2010: 12). Accordingly, the self-evidence of diplomacy, which is anchored in a stock of "tacit background knowledge", is what constituted NATO as a mature (functioning) security community. When the dispositions of agents match their positions in the social hierarchy of the field, agents behave in tune with commonsense.

Pouliot emphasizes that when agents' dispositions naturalize their acquiescence into the very hierarchy of the field, its rules, and the distribution of capital, self-evident practices emerge. The practical sense is part of relations of domination that keep agents in their place.

Occupying a dominant and a dominated position points therefore to certain kinds of natural behavior. If this practical arrangement between dispositions and positions comes out of sync, practices lose their self-evidence, and "[...] the practical sense of different agents clash" (2010: 233). This is exemplified by the outbreak of "symbolic struggles" between agents over their positions in the hierarchy and the very rules that come with it (2010: 229).

Pouliot applies this notion to the interactions between NATO and Russia after the Cold War but also to instances in transatlantic relations.

His analysis reveals that NATO's double enlargement caused the resurgence of Russia's "great power habitus" which, considering the loss of Soviet supremacy at the end of the Cold War, denaturalized the self-evidence of hierarchies and diplomacy in NATO-Russia relations. The consequence was that Russian dispositions transcended Russia's hierarchical position and spilled over into struggles over the terms of NATO/Russia practices such as peacekeeping in the Western Balkans (see: 2010: 123-4, 133).

Both sides developed divergent understandings about self-evidence which was highly influenced by their historical habitus. The practical senses of the two players clashed. NATO-Russia relations did, therefore, not develop into a security community.

Beginning from the assumption that "[p]eople do not simply fall into their place; they fight, they contest and they jockey for positions", Vincent Pouliot refines his approach in the book "International Pecking Orders" to describe, through the lens of diplomacy, the contestation and reproduction of diplomatic hierarchies (2016: 55). He draws on Goffman's "interaction orders" and Bourdieu to show "[...] that the process of practice generates social stratification through a never-ending struggle for mastery" (ibid.). Agents struggle to establish their ways of doing as dominant through the recognition they gain for their practices.

Importantly, social structures are also located within agents. He calls such "micro-mechanism" the "sense of place" of diplomats, that is, the internalization of diplomats' place in a hierarchy (2016: 71). The "embodied feel for the game", is the linchpin of "agency beyond rationality" that is both constraining and enabling. It allows diplomats to behave logically and with ease according to their place in the diplomatic order (2016: 72).

It is therefore called "their practical sense of limits and possibilities" that lies at the root of all practical mastery, that is, their competence and standing (2016: 74). Thus, struggles for competence are not only structuring by producing hierarchical effects in the (international) pecking order but are also structured by diplomats' embodied sense of limits and possibilities. The claims of dominant players affect hierarchies: "[t]he sense of place involves the adjustment of expectations to what is possible and what not" (2016: 98).

Pouliot's work thus provides important clues that power, authority, and struggles affect the tacit layers of action. They keep adjustment processes, practical senses, and practices going—power is a natural component of both struggles and practices (see also: Leander 2008: 13-6).

Pouliot applies this notion to the negotiation of NATO's 2010 strategic concept. He contends that the consensus for the 2010 strategic concept worked mainly through the "sense of place". Put differently, the practice of consensus functions based on diplomats' dispositional structures.

These structures keep an informal hierarchy together, that, under the semblance of equality, enables the construction of consensus (2016: 113-16). Pouliot thus concludes that "[...] the NATO order actually rests on a highly political yet effective hierarchy of standing, which operates largely thanks to the diplomatic sense of place" (2016: 87).

Struggles and transformation

Above, I presented notions of "practice theory" that offer a different "social constructivist" understanding. While the "power/struggle-scholarship" emphasizes NATO's struggles to recast the security field's hierarchical structure, the "agency beyond rationality"-scholars emphasize the role of self-evidence in practice. With this, they confirm that the adoption of identity or the efficacy of discourse goes decidedly beyond the self-awareness of the "who I am" or linguistic utterances.

Reviewing the literature on NATO, especially that of the practice turn, I encountered two problems concerning post-Cold War NATO. First, practice scholars missed out on analyzing NATO's post-Cold War transformation in the context of the struggles within the Alliance that constituted the policies of NATO enlargement and military interventions. Simultaneously, they have not analyzed the practices contained by these policies, how they established NATO as a post-Cold War alliance, and how this helped the Alliance to survive. This, for instance, concerns key practices such as the show of military force in conflict zones or joint defense planning as a Western approach to democratic peace.

Second, scholars have often treated them as a bridge to explain other post-Cold War phenomena such as the mistrust in the NATO-Russia relationship during the 1990s/2000s (see: Pouliot 2010: 107). However, we need to view them as distinct doings with a historic genesis and having constitutive force. Nonetheless, important signposts toward an analysis of NATO's transformative post-Cold War policies and practices have been established. As Pouliot writes,

“[...] the practice of enlargement per se [...] allowed the organization to become a sort of club of democracies, thus wielding even more power over its neighbors and, in general, the many players in the field whose dispositions were in tune with the security-from-the-inside-out paradigm” (2010: 154).

Emanuel Adler's “community of practice” shows that NATO's cooperative security practices supported the development of new liberal dispositions in the CEECs. Practices provided the social frame for definitions and redefinitions of identity by incorporating “[...] conscious and discursive dimensions and the actual doings of social change” (2008: 199).

Through the expansion of the community and the reproduction of liberal practices, NATO became the leading security institution in Europe which sustained the security community (2008: 201, 214, 220; 2019: 172). Moreover, Williams and Neumann stress that the Alliance's military dimension underpinned the post-Cold War symbolic power and dominance of NATO (2007: 91).

While these scholars conceded a role to cooperative and military practices in the persistence of NATO after the Cold War (see: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 49-52, 65), they did not retrace the struggles that took place *within* NATO in the context of Eastern enlargement and the emerging ethnic conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia.

These struggles were essential in shaping the design of the post-Cold War NATO (see: Hunter 2019: 297). In other words, scholars failed to account for the power relations within NATO that were involved in the constitution and reproduction of the Alliance's post-Cold War policies and practices. From this perspective, new policies and practices were engendered, sustained, and normalized by struggles in NATO.

The Alliance's post-Cold War transformation has consequently been the result of both struggles between NATO agents and new practices which came to be viewed as the way to go and which supported the Alliance's persistence.

This fundamentally Bourdieusian understanding calls for an analysis of NATO as a field in which actors struggled over building the "new NATO". As Pouliot writes, "[f]ield analysis helps understand why, and how, NATO was able to wield so much symbolic power as to redefine the [...] rules of the game toward the internal mode of pursuing security" (2010: 154).

By treating NATO as a social field, we can account for the fundamental role of NATO agents, the interplay of occupied NATO positions with individual dispositions, as well as the power struggles and practices that resulted from the confluence of these social dynamics. Above all, we can show how NATO's policies and their practices became produced and reproduced and why agents perceived them as regular ways of going about the social world. As Anna Leander from her time as a student recalls, "[p]ower rested on the innumerable practices people engaged in without thinking much about it, just because it was the right thing to do, and they all somehow knew it" (2008: 14).

I proceed by adopting an approach that accounts for the change and reproduction of NATO's post-Cold War practices by considering the pivotal social role of struggles between agents *within* NATO. I view the adoption of NATO's post-Cold War practices as historically generated by struggles between NATO actors and their stability rooted in practitioners' dispositions. Moreover, my approach accounts for the constitutive quality of practices. This means that practitioners reify practical knowledge in and through practice. The investigation of the power and authority in NATO that constructed this knowledge plays, therefore, a central role.

My approach is informed by both the "struggle/power" and "agency beyond rationality" scholarship. In extension, they provide the means to understand the meaning of agents' practices and their productive effects on NATO. As Pouliot claims, we need to peel off the several layers of an onion to understand the onion's complexity (2016: 254). Bourdieu's concepts such as field, habitus, capital, and practice provide me with adequate tools to this end.

This indicates a theoretical and methodological route for this study. There have been historic processes at work with constitutive effects for NATO—the question is only how we (methodically) access and (conceptually) understand them. Whether field struggles or practices, they can be viewed as pivotal “constitutive processes” that, for the analysis, are amenable to a constructivist approach to social reality.

1.4 Methodology and methods

To arrive at explanations for the Alliance’s persistence, I seek to explain the dynamics of transformation and normalization (reproduction) through the struggles in NATO and the Alliance’s practices. I am not only interested in exploring how certain new ways of doing came about. I also want to show why they were sustained and productive. In terms of ontological and epistemological commitment, my methodological approach accounts for the constitutive qualities of “processes”.

This paints quite a different picture of NATO’s evolution after 1990. Although IR-scholars often included NATO’s new practices in their explanations to support their identity or power-based arguments, they overlooked that the Alliance’s practices are not simply a process that intervenes between independent and dependent variables.

On the contrary, practices produce a “socially emergent” world. Important conceptualizations such as ideas, material forces, or agents’ dispositions do not exist apart from practice but become materialized in and through it (see: Pouliot 2016: 12).

Likewise, explanations of change have often been unsatisfactory: a transformation/modification of NATO’s identity or changed patterns of action did not merely come about at “critical junctures” or “events”, accompanied by sense-making narratives (see: e.g., Flockhart 2014: 76-84; Johnston 2017).

As Vincent Pouliot notes, because of a “process-reduction fallacy”, “[...] scholars tend to mistake dynamic flows for static conditions” (2016: 13).

Rather, transformations of NATO were processual constructions underpinned by struggles between agents as a pivotal social dynamic. And these dynamics are to be found on the intersubjective level; expressed by what agents deem to be significant, real, and worth struggling for (2007: 364).

This points to a constructivist understanding of the social world. As Emanuel Adler writes, “[...] constructivism sees the world as a project under construction, as *becoming* rather than *being*” (2005: 10; *Italic by author*). This sides with “[...] a dynamic view of social life in which new practices, institutions, identities, and interests emerge with new constitutive rules and newly evolving social structures” (2005: 11). Social realities such as the continuing post-Cold War NATO are the result of historic social and political processes: “[l]eaders do not sit down and ‘remake the world’ all at once” (see: Pouliot 2010: 63; cit.: Sayle 2023: 65).

Consequently, I advocate “process-based” research, a “process ontology”, that does not steer clear of variables but takes on board what Pouliot calls “analytic granularity”, that is, the processes that account for the complexity out of which social reality emerges (2016: 15-6). I seek to explain social life with the help of the multidimensional processes that generate it. Constructing “[...] a dynamic account that tells the story of a variety of historical processes as they unfold over time”, helps to trace these processes (2010: 63).

However, before I can know their structuring effects, I refocus my attention on their structured nature, emerging at the confluence of historic contexts and agency. This needs to be reflected in the collected data. In the following, I engage with my analytical approach and data collection.

This helps me to get at processes not only in the sense of what historically happened regarding my analytical object but mainly concerning what agents say and do—their subjective and local (practical) knowledge. I ask what certain assumptions mean in context and observe how they, as representations reflective of agents’ positioning in social space, permeate discourses and practices that are “*representative*” of subjective knowledge.

When representations maintain a degree of intersubjective stability over time (e.g., as evolving discursive patterns), they create the conditions for action (or inaction) (Neumann 2008: 62).

My analytical approach helps me to make sense of the collected materials. The subsequent theory chapter helps me, in a third step, to theorize processes—to “pour observations into a conceptual mold”.

Analytical approach

Two main analytical themes emerge from the above-outlined approach. First, my research recovers agents’ subjective knowledge or “practical sense”—it “gets at” agents’ knowledge systems. As Christian Bueger writes, “[...] the majority of ‘field workers’ [...] want to understand meaning and how it is made and enacted in practice” (2020: 4).

Second, it traces how subjective knowledge informed historic processes in NATO. To arrive at explanations of agents’ practical actions, interpretation becomes the “objectification” of meaning (Pouliot 2007: 365). This is best achieved by what Pouliot calls “subjectivism”, the development of objectified and subjective knowledge about international social life (2007: 359).

The researcher zooms in on agents and contextualizes the recovered knowledge by relating it to unfolding practices. The application of this approach is, however, no linear research strategy but rather to be understood as mutually supportive steps (see: 2010: 65).

Inductive research

An inductive approach forms the core of my research. It means that to assemble a picture of how NATO agents came to think, perceive, and act in and on the social world, I immerse into “the local”. Inductive research is exploratory and discovers the categories with which agents construct social reality.

As Iver B. Neumann writes, “[p]eople sort and combine sensory impressions of the world through categories (or models or principles)” (2008: 61).

To understand these categories, I pay attention to the details of NATO agents' historic trajectories, their social positioning, reasoning, and their practices in contexts.

It is a perspective that seeks to understand the complexity of a phenomenon (Pouliot 2007: 364). The main intent is to uncover the taken-for-granted perceptions of NATO agents with which they construct social reality through practice. Moreover, as inductive analysis enables me to advance to the perceptions with which NATO agents engaged in their practices, it supports the endeavor to make generalizable conclusions from the observation of practices of a necessarily limited number of state/institutional actors.

This is important with a look at NATO as an organization that comprised, for instance, in 2015 about 3.13 million active soldiers from 28 member states (Rudnicka 2022). The research of such a sizable organization does not allow for convincing conclusions about an "organizational habitus". Instead, traces and tendencies of governing perceptions need to be uncovered within local practices (including discourse-as-practice) of a limited number of state/institutional actors as well as in their effects on NATO.

This acknowledges that recovered "practical knowledge" can never comprehensively and evenly include all of NATO's members. Induction leads me, therefore, to arrive at more general conclusions by explaining delimited local practices of certain agents.

Historiographic research

The focus on processes favors a historiographic approach that observes how agents produce evolving history. Social life is viewed as a temporal and sequential process. This points to setting historic practices in a relationship with their historical context and agents' historic subjective knowledge. Recovered local meanings become objectified concerning history and time and denaturalize practices as contingent social constructions (Pouliot 2007: 367, 372; 2010: 75, 77-8).

Using a case study approach supports the operationalization of this historic-processual understanding. A case study is an in-depth and holistic approach to phenomena that emphasizes their historicity and context. It allows one to explore and explain a certain historical phenomenon by tracing and linking sequences of events and by capturing its various “constitutive processes” and their nuances (Lamont 2015: 135).

From this viewpoint, the practices that gave form to NATO’s political and military policies after the Cold War were of a decidedly historic emergence and were born of unfolding relations between agents and their attempts to mark them as the dominant way of doing things. These policies represent traceable historical and practical processes of change and normalization that were backgrounded by historical contexts and underpinned by the intersubjective knowledge of agents— expressed through practice. As a result of interpretations of historical contexts, practices appeared reasonable to NATO agents.

NATO as an “organizational field” serves as a context in which historic events take on meaning and practices and discourses-as-practice make sense. It can be reconstructed by recovering the decision-making and practices that spanned the field. In this sense, “to trace” is to see underlying “mechanisms” at work (practical knowledge) but to merely understand them as scientific constructs, heuristic devices, to make sense of empirical observations. Practices and mechanisms are thus both “social processes” that operate on different levels (i.e., articulate and inarticulate; Pouliot 2015: 238).

Historicization allows me to create a historical “narrative plot”. I not only get to the bottom of why and how NATO’s practices and not others came about but also why and how they became “socially productive”.

Observing practices involves the exploration of historic contexts, historic practical knowledge (inductively and interpretatively recovered), and evolving practices as mediating variables between both— producing outcomes that can be understood as reifications of change or normalization. Given their practical knowledge and agents’ interpretation of a particular context, practices assume “causal” or “generative” power: they “[...] elicit practices elicit practices, etc.” (2015: 242, cit.: 239). Agents’ diverging contextual interpretations may then characterize the nature of their relations and oftentimes produce competing approaches to social life.

Pointing at data collection, drawing on historical texts and debates supports the recovery of the historical context within which practical sense and practices were set in motion. Interview data and textual ethnography recover what agents read from context and why they produce certain practices. Practices can be observed in participant observations, read in textual analysis, and talked about in interviews (2013: 48).

Data collection methods

Framing the social world in terms of processes (e.g., competitive relations, practices, and the workings of power) centers on agents' practices. While it is often not possible for researchers to directly observe practices in NATO (Pouliot 2010: 83), the data collection needs to facilitate the assembling of a coherent picture. Since interviews have only limited possibilities to explore the whole picture, I deployed textual analysis, including newspaper analysis, multimedia, and historic debates to corroborate interview data.

Interviews

Qualitative interviews are a data collection method that balances the lack of genuine participant observations. Here, the technique of asking questions serves as a proxy method and enables the interviewer to closely learn an interviewee's accounts (e.g., feelings, doings, understandings) and to analytically "read between the lines" of what is said (see: Vromen 2010: 258).

It is, thus, a data collection method that helps the researcher to glean a stock of subjective knowledge such as self-evident assumptions and quotidian practices, expressions indicative of positional thinking, pride of place, or evaluations of others (see: Salter 2013: 86). Interviews support the endeavor to make sense of agents' sayings and doings through the contextualization and historicization of the data (Pouliot 2007: 369).

I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews (pre-designed questions and open discussion) as well as written correspondence with observers and former/active practitioners who occupied NATO civil/military posts. Face-to-face interviews lasted approximately one hour. Written correspondence, invited by practitioners, was structured by pre-designed questions.

I divided practitioners into four groups. The first group consisted of seasoned NATO actors who worked at the periphery of Alliance politics and diplomacy. The second group were practitioners from the CEECs who worked in a political or military context in NATO. The third group were former high-ranking/commanding NATO officers who were still affiliated with the Alliance. The fourth group were NATO observers and experts with a former military background in NATO.

In the interviews, I set out the context of the significant changes in NATO's policies after the Cold War and asked practitioners to recount their position at the time as well as their experiences with NATO's eastern enlargement and military operations and their feelings about both. The conduct of interviews often evolved into narrations that somewhat departed from the original questions. Generally, this provided me with a broader picture of the evolving historical processes in NATO.

Furthermore, I aimed at accessing and interpreting the knowledge that underpinned their storytelling: to understand what practitioners deemed as "normal". Agents' "practical sense" must be interpreted because through its self-evidence it naturally withstands articulation by agents (see: Cornut 2015: 17). I, therefore, confronted interviewees with counterfactual narratives ("imagine that...what would you say?"). I also presented interview partners with choices—the actions they would select given a constructed context.

The interviews were transcribed, and I superimposed three broad categories on them. Further categories emerged inductively from the data. First, I identified the main or recurrent themes in practitioners' narrations. Whether their narrations corresponded with historical facts or deviated was not assessed. While I refrained from making retrospective judgments, I was interested in understanding what they deemed necessary to tell (and how they told their story). I let practitioners speak and interpret/contextualize/historicize their accounts and how they make sense of their time in NATO.

Second, I was interested in practitioners' beliefs regarding the context I set out. Given NATO's history since 1990, I was interested in what practitioners did not call into question. Was the adoption of new military practices and the enlargement of NATO viewed as a normal/necessary business that made sense in the evolving post-Cold War context? What did they deem as worth "fighting for" in this context? If they criticized NATO's practices, did they call them into question fundamentally or rather question their conduct?

Third, I was interested in how practitioners perceived others in the NATO context. It was helpful that practitioners of the first and second groups personally encountered and dealt with historic diplomats/statesmen and knew the Alliance's Secretaries-General. I observed the way they talked about them and what they found striking. The third group was particularly helpful in conveying their perceptions about the practical processes in NATO and their observations of the conduct of allied nations. The narrations of all groups helped me to better differentiate between perceived normality in NATO and anachronisms.

Except for one practitioner, all interviewees wanted to be anonymized. I, thus, designated all interviews as "INTVW" and assigned ascending numbers. In the case of direct quotations, I used (former) job titles. Moreover, practitioners agreed on direct quotes after consultation.

Textual analysis

As Pouliot writes, "[t]he method of qualitative interview assumes that relevant agents are alive and willing to discuss their experience with the researcher. This, of course, is not always the case" (2010: 70). Accessing textual material is not only important to obtain insights into historic events and processes but also to study positions and dispositions of agents without interviews.

Textual analysis is a

“[...] textual ethnography—a careful reading of the written traces of social practices” by “[...] which one engages in a kind of “participant-observation” of the textual records of some

legitimation struggle, jotting “fieldnotes” as one reads—much as one would when studying the social practices of some group of people” (Jackson 2014: 275, 276).

I supplemented my approach to text (and multimedia) with discourse analysis. It is an analytical reading of texts, linguistic utterances, film, or other signs (e.g., visual cues or gestures) that uncovers how agents apprehend the social world and seek to translate their knowledge into (practical) action (Neumann 2008: 63, 72; Vromen 2010: 264).

On one hand, I accessed primary sources that were reflective of NATO agents' dispositions and practices and which do not contain scientific analyses (see also: Vromen 2010: 262). It was particularly important for me to get hold of situation-near accounts that were produced after 1990. I collected historical textual sources such as compiled interviews with NATO practitioners and observers. For instance, how did Pentagon officials perceive the PFP? Why was it seen as a milestone of NATO's post-Cold War transformation (e.g., Kruzel 1996)?

I combined this with the study of memoirs of diplomats/statesmen (e.g., Albright 2013; Blair 2010; Clinton 2004) and collections of essays in which practitioners (politicians and diplomats) reflect on their role and contribution to NATO's (trans-)formation. They also provide detailed observations from within NATO decision-making circles (e.g., Asmus 2004; Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000; Hamilton and Spohr 2019).

Thereby, I could gain an overview of historic relations between NATO agents. In their memoirs, practitioners often talk about interpersonal relationships in evaluative and/or emotional ways. Moreover, they function as “proxy interviewers” by recollecting observations about historic decisions, practices, and discussions with other agents. I wanted to trace practices backward—to uncover the perceptions of policymakers that elicited practices like chain reactions. For instance, how does a country's approach to peacekeeping relate to the historic dispositions/positions of individual decision-makers?

This was complemented by archival research on the internet. I accessed the newspaper databases of *The Guardian/Observer*, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*. Although newspaper articles often contain some analysis, they were an important source and provided me with historical observations and process-near interviews/quotes of NATO practitioners.

Besides raising my awareness regarding historic events and processes in and around NATO, these sources helped me to recover what agents deemed as “normal” given historical contexts. To gain insights into practices, I further accessed official documents that contained official regulations. For example, the Dayton Agreement allowed me to gain direct insights into the structured nature of NATO’s tasks in Bosnia (OSCE 1995).

I consulted NATO’s online library to access speeches such as that of Secretary-General Robertson after 9/11 (NATO 2002c). However, I refrained from drawing on declarative statements since they reflect the consensus *ex post* and not the process *ex ante*.

I further consulted digital archives such as the Wilson Center (wilsoncenter.org) that hosts the “Clinton Library”. Overall, I analyzed six larger declassified documents, integrating memoranda and containing verbatim records (e.g., Sens 1995). I also analyzed the White House’s internal correspondence, for instance, about the controversial topic of Romania’s early accession to NATO. This helped me explore the U.S. position and the steps that were envisioned (Fried *et al.* 1996).

The study of these sources was combined with a host of secondary sources (academic books and journals). Especially accounts of historians were an important source because they meticulously trace those historic developments/processes that surrounded the enlargement of NATO and the military interventions in ex-Yugoslavia (e.g., Sarotte 2019, 2021). Moreover, because academic observers often directly describe and quote practitioners, I was eager to glean thick descriptions of their perceptions, roles, and impact within NATO.

Multimedia

Complementary to these materials, I accessed multimedia sources. Digital videos helped me to supplement my knowledge and strengthen my acuity about NATO's history and functioned as a sort of "proxy interviewer". Video sources often reduce the complexity of historical processes and interlink and contextualized information (e.g., NATO's decisions during the Bosnian war) to a narrative that helps the viewer to understand and make sense of a chain of events.

However, because of their complexity reduction, video sources merely rounded off the picture I had obtained. Besides that, they provide important visual cues as to how agents feel about events and situations by showing them in situation-near interviews that are embedded in historical contexts. This not only enabled me to get behind what has been said but, in obvious cases, to visually aid my assumptions through hints that interviewees sometimes give with their looks, voice, or gestures.

In the endeavor to recover agents' local knowledge, and to "make sense of their sensemaking", I accessed NATO's *YouTube* channel (www.youtube.com/@NATO) and the archive of the Associated Press (www.ap.org/content/archive).

Videos were thereby not haphazardly searched but chosen concerning topics such as Charlie Rose's interview with French President Chirac or "Jamie Shea's history class", discussing NATO's military interventions (NATO 2013; Rose 1999).

I paid attention to the presentation of NATO's engagement with the CEECs or NATO's peacemaking/keeping. Were they viewed as logical or necessary actions? In this context, was NATO understood as a primary security actor? I also paid attention to how the narration in documentaries interlinked those actors and processes that historically initiated and sustained NATO's new practices.

Debates

A major interest was to trace how NATO agents' dispositions played out in processes as well as historic relations within the Alliance. As it is commonly accepted knowledge that relations within NATO were frequently characterized as "crises", I intended to center these crises and their historic debates.

In NATO, documents such as verbatim records or conference notes are generally subject to security classifications. Most of what happened within the Alliance, the debates, and discussions, remains classified information (see also: Sarotte 2021: 8). More generally, "[m]any government documents are not available until 30 years after the event they record" (Vromen 2010: 262).

For this reason, I had to rely on different sources. On one hand, I looked at "proxy debates". Historic national debates would reflect some of the sentiments that were brought into NATO. For instance, the United Kingdom (U.K.) Parliamentary debates (House of Commons/ House of Lords; hansard.parliament.uk) are coherently recorded and accessible. While these debates contain vivid exchanges between the members, I focused on the British defense secretaries such as Douglas Hurd and Michael Portillo.

Another accessible source was investigative hearings of the U.S. Senate on U.S. participation in military interventions and NATO enlargement (<https://www.congress.gov>). These hearings are valuable sources since respondents are usually questioned by several senators/members of Congress. They give testimonies under pressure, bringing out their practical knowledge. Moreover, their answers often reveal important insights into the relations between NATO allies.

I engaged with two U.S. hearings of 1997/98 on NATO enlargement. I was interested in the renditions of decision-makers such as Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright who participated in NATO decision-making. I connected discursive statements with what I knew from the study of memoirs and related it to policymakers' position in NATO. This helped me understand why a specific discourse was mobilized and how it could become effective.

1.5 Conclusion

I started with the “constructivist challenge” after the Cold War. Considering the theoretical shortcomings of rationalist accounts, conventional and critical constructivists viewed NATO’s persistence and NATO’s vitality through the lens of its liberal-democratic identity and identity construction. Identity and discourse were the hallmarks of NATO transformation and, therefore, of the Alliance’s persistence. However, I argued that while practices constitute identities and discourse is a practice, we need to view practices as the hallmark of NATO’s post-Cold War transformation and persistence. This situates practices contained by eastern enlargement and military interventions in the analytical focus.

I considered Bourdieu-inspired approaches as a point of departure because they show that symbolic struggles and practical knowledge come before identity or the actualization of our language capacity. Practices are not intervening variables between $X \rightarrow Y$, but socially productive processes that are of distinct historic emergence.

However, concerning the question of how NATO was able to adopt the practices of political cooperation with the CEECs or intervene militarily, I found that practice approaches also open new questions. Not least the missing centrality of NATO’s post-Cold War practices as explanations for its persistence, that is, their genesis and their normalization as signifiers for change and reproduction is puzzling.

Why was NATO able to adopt these practices after the Cold War and how did they support the Alliance’s persistence? “Power/struggles”-approaches provide important theoretical inroads but do not explain, for example, how struggles over post-Cold War security shaped agents’ perceptions and actions.

“Agency beyond rationality”-approaches explain the constitution of practices and their durability by rooting both in practitioners’ dispositions. Moreover, Pouliot (2016) provides valuable clues that power and struggles are involved in the constitution of the “normal” ways of doing.

This approach imports notions of authority which can contribute to both explanations of the genesis and self-evidence of practices. While providing the tools that range from the internalized structures of the habitus down to the micro-structures of one's "sense of place", Bourdieusian practice scholars still leave their concepts to be applied to evolutionary politico-military NATO practices. The task is assumed by this study.

Finally, I laid out the sources with which to engage. Utilizing interviews or "textual ethnography", I collect data and overlay them with a "subjective" approach. It proposes the inductive recovery of data and historicization of practices, involving the interpretation of meaning.

While this is no linear research pathway, it claims that the relationship between historical context and practitioners' practical knowledge drives practices. NATO's political and military post-Cold War processes and practices resulted from this interplay. Having laid out my approach, I will go on by explaining the theoretical-conceptual "mold" of the analysis.

Chapter 2

Theory: Conceptual building blocks

This chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical-conceptual foundation for this study. It is engaged with the conceptual frames provided by a selective application of Bourdieusian concepts. It suggests concepts that provide access to a particular understanding of the social world and support the endeavor to assemble a theoretical framework for the study of NATO's post-Cold War persistence.

To carve out a route to a theoretical-conceptual design to show how NATO adopted political and military practices after the Cold War in the absence of a galvanizing threat, how it normalized them, and how this supported the Alliance's persistence, this study seeks to answer why practices play a role in the study of the Alliance.

This is supported by three claims. First, by focusing on NATO's post-Cold War practices we can understand why NATO persisted. Second, NATO's transformation into an Alliance that engages in political cooperation and military interventions took place in and through practice. The Alliance's transformation consisted of practices. Third, the study of practice offers inroads to the study of NATO because it allows us to understand that ways of doing and perceiving hinge on more than identity but on the historicity of actors and their position in a field.

Practices structure the social world by making it "hang together" (Adler and Pouliot 2011: 5). As Duvall and Chowdhury write, "[p]lacing practices at the center of analysis, making them a "conceptual focal point", [...], should aid and enrich researchers' efforts to grasp the complexities of international social-political life [...]" (2011: 335).

Such understanding is mainly inspired by approaches that I above called "agency beyond rationality". Social agents create and recreate the social world through quotidian performances that carry with them explicit and implicit expectations (see also: Martin-Mazé 2017: 206).

The structuring qualities of practices come with a particular understanding of practices: they have tacit dimensions (Wacquant 2013: 275). However, this is but one aspect of a more comprehensive approach to the social world.

How certain practices are adopted and become part of agents' repertoires is another aspect. This is suggested by what I call "power/struggle- approaches" that bridge the rather static (dis-)positional logic of agents' habitus. Usually, this logic prevents different (hierarchical) actors' dispositions and practices from being changed or adjusted (see: Martin-Mazé 2017: 206, 216).

However, the nature of relations between agents is key to explaining how practical logic can become entrenched. These relations, which often play out in symbolic struggles, justify, and normalize perceptions across the field. As Médéric Martin-Mazé writes, when "[...] actors successfully do battle over the cognitive categories that are used to construct the world, they change how the world is perceived and practiced" (2017: 216, cit.: 217). Struggles over the perceptions of the social world relate to agents' practices.

For my study, I propose to apply a relational conceptualization of the social world (see: Vandenberghe 1999: 44-5). Relations between social agents anchor those perceptions through which agents experience and construct the social world (Wacquant 2013: 275). While relations are competitive and play out in social struggles, the construction of the social world is performed by practices as a form of normalized behavior (see: Maton 2008: 54). As Andreas Reckwitz emphasizes, "[a] practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (2002: 250).

Bourdieuian scholars suggest similar conceptualizations: practices are embodied and have constitutive effects (see: Adler-Nissen 2012: art. 6; 2013: 1). A relational approach to the social world and the explanation of practices as "embodied performances" shifts the focus to the range of Bourdieusian concepts. If we stress a relationship between struggles and practices, the analysis needs to involve power relations between actors. The use of concepts like field, habitus, and capital and their interplay offers a way to set the social world in motion and elicit an understanding of how it works.

It helps me to assemble conceptual building blocks to investigate how NATO changed its practices after the Cold War and how it entrenched them. These concepts reflect a certain story of the social world: fields are social spaces where actors with historic dispositions struggle from their (objective) position to defend or change a field's *status quo*.

This “toolbox approach” is promising concerning two aspects. First, it allows me to understand micro-level dynamics of change and reproduction in NATO via the concepts of field, habitus, and capital. And second, it allows me to understand micro-macro interactions in NATO, that is, between practices and the field.

In the first part of this chapter, I set out the approach to the social world that allows me to depict it as arising from the interplay between the above-mentioned Bourdieusian concepts. It is a world that is made up of social fields which are inhabited by agents with historic dispositions, wield forms of capital as power, and struggle over specific “stakes”. These conceptualizations are part of the conditions from which practices eventually arise. I will detail and understand them as a “conceptual toolbox” on which I can draw to grasp and elicit the dynamics within NATO after 1990. In the second part, I will explain how the toolbox can be applied to NATO by assembling the framework that revolves around the concepts of agency, struggles, and practices.

2.1 Conceptual building blocks

The field

Bourdieu's concept of the field suggests the notion of social life taking place within a demarcated social space. Having been a keen rugby player in his youth which possibly inspired him, Bourdieu suggested that social life is organized much like a sports field and the game taking place within it.

The concept supports the endeavor to investigate the foundations for human activity (Thomson 2008: 68-9). Fields are spheres of practice (Swartz 2013: 60). Analytical attention is shifted away from three levels (systemic, state, domestic), traditionally used in IR, to one in which the dynamics created through social interactions are analyzed (Adler-Nissen 2013: 10; see: Bigo 2017: 25, 40).

A field is organized around an implicit or explicit “stake”. It is thus a “structured, rule-governed, objective social space” that comprises distinct rules by which relative autonomy from other fields is constituted (Salter 2013: 85). Social relations in fields are principally competitive and “[...] with various social agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position” (Thomson 2008: 69).

Much like in a sports game, both subversive and reproductive dynamics are deployed by agents who differ regarding their abilities, capabilities, material, and symbolic possessions. Fields are thus structured by a hierarchy of positions which are based on these individual properties (Villumsen-Berling 2015: 27-8).

The field becomes “a social space where everyone has an interest in winning- that is, securing the most advantageous position within it” (Grenfell 2008: 156). Thus, the concept takes, no matter in national or international contexts, critical social qualities like legitimacy not as a given but because of agency. It thus affirms the possibility of constantly changing imperatives, practices, and conditions involved in the production of legitimacy, authority, and international relations.

Like in sports games, agents’ conduct in the “field’s game” is structured by specific rules. First, both dominant and subordinate agents share the assumption that their involvement in the game is worthwhile (Villumsen-Berling 2015: 28). The notion of *illusio* subsumes the broader interests each field creates. He stresses that “a fight presupposes agreement between the antagonists about what it is that is worth fighting about” (Bourdieu 1993: 73). Thus, *illusio* encompasses a tacit recognition of the “stakes of the field” or the stakes of the “game” played within this delimited social space beyond any utilitarian meaning of the word “interest” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 117).

Furthermore, the *nomos* expresses what is permissible in the game. It lays out a fundamental norm structure, that is, divisionary principles and preferences that orient social action (Bourdieu 1992: 210, 223; 1998: 25). As such, the *nomos* needs to appear as commonsensical to decide who stands inside and who stands outside to a field’s *nomos* (see: Goetze 2017: 195-6).

This creates boundaries to what is unacceptable by regulating “ways of doing and seeing, pertaining to a particular field” (Bourdieu 1998: 66, 72; cit.: Epstein 2013: 171). As a spatial notion, it prescribes standards of normality that enable or disable agents and charge their power relations (Epstein 2013: 165, 170, 176, fn. 2).

Finally, *doxa* complements these rules. In modern societies, it refers

“[...] to pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions mediated by relatively autonomous social microcosms (fields) which determine “natural” practice and attitudes *via* the internalized “sense of limits” and *habitus* of the social agents in the fields” (Deer 2008: 120, Italics by author).

Doxa has structuring effects on agents because the reproduction of *doxa* in practice reinforces their positions in social space. This puts the stress on field agents as carriers of a habitus.

Habitus and Capital

The *habitus* is a fundamental analytical concept that helps us make sense of social agents’ comportments, behaviors, and practices. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink write that

“neither constructivism nor rational choice provides substantive explanations or predictions of political behavior until coupled with a more specific understanding of who the relevant actors are, what they want, and what the content of social structures might be” (2001: 393).

Bourdieu’s concept allows for tentative answers because it views the content of social structures structured by practices and produced by a mediating principle between agency and structures: the agent’s habitus. Social structures and their characteristics or content can, therefore, never be separated from social practices and *vice versa*. Bourdieu describes the *habitus* as “structuring structures”- as *opus operatum* producing a certain *modus operandi*. This shifts the focus on agent’s practices as social actions prolonging the structures of which they are the product *via* the habitus as the principle of production of structures (Bourdieu 2000 [1997]-a: 172). The re-productive nature of the habitus is thus tied to a delimited scope for action. As Anna Leander writes,

“[...] ultimately there no escape from the habitus; it always shapes people’s actions. Even if people strategize and have interests and act and make choices, the way they do this remains inescapably tied to the habitus: the habitus disposes them to read and react to the world in specific ways” (2011: 299).

Pouliot concludes that the habitus is historical, practical, relational, and dispositional (2010: 31-3). It is historical because it is produced by history, a product of past experiences. It is practical because it is the principle that, according to acquired schemes of perception and appreciation, produces collective and individual practices (Bourdieu 1977: 82-3). It is relational because it is the product of the “internalization of externality”, the product of social relations. Finally, it is dispositional because it produces agents’ inclinations and propensities to certain actions (Pouliot 2010: 32-3).

Much of these properties determine agents’ positions in the social field. Their historic trajectories, experiences, and the history of accumulated sorts of capital flow into the constitution of a specific field position which inclines them to develop a particular habitus. Consequently, the relations between agents (i.e., distance of positions) in a field are characterized by the distribution (volume and structure) of accumulated forms of capital (Bourdieu 1993: 73). This means that an important function falls to the concept of capital. Intersecting with the individual history of agents or groups, sorts of capital become a principle of hierarchization (see: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 36).

Capital can assume economic (money, property, materials), social (networks, contacts), or cultural (e.g. knowledge, educational credentials, cultural techniques) forms (material and non-material forms; Bourdieu 1990: 128; Swartz 2013: 58). For Bourdieu, forms of capital are endowed with “fundamental social power” (Bourdieu 1990: 128; Swartz 2013: 34). Most noteworthy is the role of “symbolic capital”.

In a basic understanding of the field, agents make bids to “domination” vis-à-vis other authoritative articulations. Their historically accumulated symbolic capital is arguably the most important form concerning this bid and consists of “[...] non-material sources of value such as prestige, status, [legitimacy], and authority” (Nicolini 2012: 59).

For instance, as a social attribute, “competence” is a symbolic capital (Pouliot 2016: 56). However, it is important to note that every form of capital can become “symbolic” when it is recognized as such. As Davide Nicolini writes,

“[s]ymbolic capital is in fact the main basis of domination in that it carries with it the power of legitimation. This form of power thus bestows the capacity to attribute names, defines what counts as common sense, and institutes official versions of the social world” (2012: 59).

This notion grounds power not merely in material resources but also in “relations of recognition” (Bourdieu 1991: 73; Guzzini 2013: 85) through which authority and power become linked to recognized positions and capital possessions. Recognition (and misrecognition of capital as power, that is, “symbolic violence”) depends on the credit, esteem, or confidence of involved audiences to make domination possible (Bourdieu 2000 [1997]-a: 166; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 12; Sending 2015: 24).

Although the “politics of recognition” is methodologically complex, political, and often changing, it could be investigated through intersubjective contexts (Pouliot 2016: 56-8). What counts as a capital worth of recognition is contextually dependent and may be, at minimum, detectable in the extension of credit for something/someone by agents/groups.

Anchored in relations of recognition, symbolic capital renders agency more effective. Pouliot provides an example. The state, is, in a Bourdieusian sense, a field— “[...] a social configuration with a structure of positions inhabited by various actors that play by certain rules and compete over resources” (2010: 87). Citizens tend to share dispositions with state elites because the state concentrates symbolic capital (uncontested “meta-capital”) and thus possesses the legitimate means to impose perceptual categories via vehicles such as the education system (ibid.).

Symbolic capital mandates agents to speak on behalf of agents or groups. What Bourdieu calls the “mystery of the ministry” denotes the delegated authority that endows agents with performative/constitutive power, or, “[...] symbolic power to participate in a struggle over the boundaries of, for example, the legitimate people” (1991: 75; cit.: Hoffmann 2023: 3).

Pouliot writes, “[i]n the state field, certain agents are endowed with enough symbolic capital to speak in the name of the masses. The mass becomes what the authorized speakers say, representing it as a corporate body” (2010: 87). Thus, not *what* is said that is eminently important but *where* it is said from (Leander 2005: 812). Eventually, the interplay of recognized capital, historic habitus, and field position creates the ability to render discourses materially effective.

Practices

From a Bourdieusian viewpoint, practice results from the interplay of agents’ dispositions (habitus), their position in a field (capital), and the current social context (field) ($[(\text{habitus})+(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$; Maton 2008: 51). Accordingly, practices are a practical sense—at once sensible and meaningful action that construct the field as meaningful social space without rational computations by the practicing agents.

Practices are not just determined by the habitus of agents but by the confluence of habitus with the overall circumstances, including individual capital possessions (see: Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 37).

As above-mentioned, habitus reproduces the structures in which it finds itself: “[t]his is an ongoing and active process – we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making” (Maton 2008: 52).

As Pouliot and Mérand write, “[...] the individual incorporates her history, both personal and collective, into a set of guiding principles and dispositions which dictate effective practices” (2013: 29). In other words, practices bring out what has been embodied and work on the social world through these most innate (inarticulate) structures or dimensions (see: Cornut 2015: 5).

In turn, agents’ practices become a “practical sense”—they are experienced as a “normal” reaction, and the social world appears as commonsensical. Habitus is “[...] a way of knowing inscribed in bodies” (Nicolini 2012: 56).

Agents' practices are naturally adjusted to arising urgencies and exigencies (see: Bourdieu 2005: 9). Agents know by a practical sense that actively intervenes in the world, constructs it, and gives it meaning (2000 [1997]-a: 142; also: Yang 2014: 1527).

Thus, the habitus and its practices within a social space “[...] can be understood as a practical sense that give actors implicit rules on how to behave in a given situation in relation to their social position” (Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 37). Whether being strategic or not, practices are an expression of agents' implicit and difficult to articulate “feel for the social game” (Mérand and Forget 2013: 89). Akin to sports games, agents know the social game and what to do within it “by heart” (see: Nicolini 2012: 55).

When considering practices, the practical sense is a critical concept as it provides the floor for further considerations, ranging from agents' clashes across the field's structure to why doing certain things in a particular way becomes normalized.

In support of this argument, I want to refer to Vincent Pouliot (2008, 2010) who draws on Bourdieu but translates his concepts for the study of processes in institutions. Pouliot's logic of practicality serves, therefore, as a supplementary understanding by arguing that what people in NATO do is not completely determined by rational choice but rather rooted in non-representational spheres of action.

The “logic of practicality”

Pouliot's logic of practicality underpins the claim that the spring of social action lays in the “practical sense”. Transferred to the argument of the primacy of practices, it means that the Alliance's doings are rooted in more than a liberal normativity or identity. It, thus, takes issue with constructivist arguments such as a logic of appropriateness that centers on norm diffusion, socialization, or identity.

Vincent Pouliot introduces the *logic of practicality* to suggest “[...] that most of what people do, in world politics as in any other social field, does not derive from conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection - instrumental, rule-based, communicative, or otherwise” (2008: 258).

This means that “[...] practices are the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear “self-evident“ or commonsensical” (ibid.). Thus, the capacity to act rationally or to comply with certain norms is buried within a much deeper (pre-reflective) “background knowledge”. Pouliot argues that tacit or inarticulate knowledge learned in and through practice expresses itself through unassessed and simply enacted practices (2008: 271). He writes, “[p]ractical knowledge is unconscious because it appears self-evident to its bearer [...]” (ibid.).

The expressions “tacit knowledge”, “common sense”, or “self-evidence” all describe a “practical sense” that is derived from the “nonrepresentational” sphere of agents. When practitioners’ embodied dispositions encounter a certain context, their background knowledge, or “practical sense” enacts the appropriate action—whether norm-compliant, communicative, or instrumental.

As Pouliot contends, “[...] it is thanks to their practical sense that agents feel whether a given social context calls for instrumental rationality, norm compliance, or communicative action” (2008: 276). When a context calls for norm compliance, agents may be able to articulate the norm, but they can hardly express why they came up with it in the first place (2008: 277).

The motor of social action is thus not merely located in clustered rules or reflexive practical background understandings, but their “tacit” nature that flows from the intersection of agents’ embodied dispositions and their (hierarchical) field positions.

As Pouliot explains, “[...] the practical sense reads from context and embodied dispositions the need for socially appropriate or norm-based action” (2008: 276). Thus, acting upon norms and rules is the result of historically stable incorporation of actions into the habitus by which arbitrary rules have become forgotten (Bigo 2011: 228; Nicolini 2012: 57).

Incorporation/habitualization of practices favors their “normalization” and opens the possibility of an iterative return to them. Practices and their meaning are rooted in the non-representational sphere of action. Agents, often unaware of what governs their practices, play with them in a way that usually defies academic objectification. Practice involves, for instance, “situated clues” and “feelings” (Nicolini 2012: 63).

It thus emerges “[...] as patterned and interest-oriented [and meaningful] at a tacit, pre-reflective level of awareness that occurs through time” (Swartz 1997: 67). Practice is “immanent” and “[...] social action is not determined by rational choice” (Bigo 2011: 228).

2.2 Field Struggles

Practices do not come without prior contestation. In other words, the social world becomes organized by relentless struggles for power and domination (Adler-Nissen 2013: 5). Such an approach has relevance for NATO’s transformation after the Cold War. As Williams and Neumann write, “[...] a period of transformation involves a struggle over the forms of identity and action which will be regarded as legitimate within the emerging order” (2007: 39-40, cit.: 70). More generally, this differentiates, for instance, the concept of (security) community from the Bourdieusian field.

Given the aforementioned competitive nature of fields, “[a]ctors partaking in the same field share much less than participants in a community [...]” (Martin-Mazé 2017: 209). As Bueger and Gadinger emphasize, the community concept “[...] silences questions of power and hierarchies; [i]dealizes collectives and overemphasizes social cohesion [...]” (2018: 31).

From the perspective of Bourdieusian fields, however, agents have differential interests that relate to both the context of social fields and agents’ positions/dispositions (see: Grenfell 2008: 156-7; Williams and Neumann 2007: 35). Field struggles create a “perpetual motion”, a dynamic, that absorbs all agents and produces hierarchies as well as opportunities and constraints for all of them (see: Bourdieu 1981: 307). As Hilgers and Mangez note, “[...] fields are marked by struggles that constantly modify their internal power balances” (2015: 11).

As dominant actors (capital-rich players) mainly have an interest in preserving the structure of the field (structure of domination), they participate in struggles by dynamically mobilizing forms of capital (Bourdieu 1981: 307; see: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 6).

On the other hand, subordinate actors may seek to challenge dominant conceptions or the distribution of capital in the field by deploying subversive actions. The effective mobilization of capital becomes, thereby, key in overcoming the stasis of Bourdieusian fields and providing an explanation for change (Villumsen-Berling 2015: 37). Therefore,

“[...] struggles matter. Without them, practices would unfold very differently across the international. Actors would be stuck within highly integrated and functionally stable social wholes, where nothing would ever change” (Martin-Mazé 2017: 203).

Competitive actor relations are the prevalent *modus operandi* in fields. Agents do not only accumulate capital but also gain legitimacy and power. In consequence, field struggles can change the distribution of positions fundamentally and affect agents' perceptions and practices. Thus, studying international fields involves identifying the main struggles and the means with which they are supported.(Villumsen-Berling 2015: 29).

Position-takings

The perceptions and actions of social agents often correspond to their relative location in a field. Bourdieu describes this as a correspondence between mental and social structures (2000 [1997]-a: 221).

Agents oftentimes unconsciously pursue interests that relate to their field position which may result in transformative or preservative actions (Hilgers and Mangez 2015: 10-1). As Patricia Thomson writes, “[...] the field *mediates* what social agents do in specific social, economic and cultural contexts” (2008: 75). What they do is determined by their field position and by the developments and changes of other positions (Vandenberghe 1999: 52). The unconscious pursuit of agents' interests suggests a practical sense in action.

Agents internalize their location in the social field and act and react accordingly. Bourdieu indicates this internalization as a “sense of place” which has practical dimensions to it.

They possess a bodily knowledge of their current as well as potential position in social space which regulates experiences and moves within it (2000 [1997]-a: 184). This agency is a result of an “internalization of external constraints and possibilities” and brings together agents’ dispositions with self-evident understandings about (delimited) positional opportunities (Wacquant 1998: 221; Yang 2014: 1527).

Pouliot operationalizes this understanding and is used here as a supplementary understanding as it closely examines the interplay of agents’ dispositions and positions. He argues that the micro-mechanism of the “sense of place” is a “practical feeling” that, for instance, allows diplomats to regulate their moves around the negotiation table (2016: 71, 74; see also: Sending 2015: 29). It is a practical sense at the positional level— a “sense of limits and possibilities” that both constrains and enables agents (2010: 35; 2016: 74).

For instance, in world politics, meetings between statesmen involve the “sense of one’s place” and of the place of the other as an expression of their “bodily knowledge” (Pouliot 2010: 32). Elsewhere, he calls this “positional agency”: agents think *from* their position. It “[...] refers to those practices that derive from their performers’ location in a field’s hierarchical structure” (2010: 35), which is a driver for social action (or inaction).

This concept underpins agents’ perceptions about positional *opportunities and limits*—practices are naturally adjusted to objective boundaries in the sense that “where you sit is what you *do*” (Pouliot 2010: 35; *Italic by author*; see also: Swartz 1997: 111).

As Pouliot writes, “[g]enerally speaking, people go on with their lives using the tools and resources that are ready at hand and enact practices based on their resource endowments and the opportunity constraints they face” (2010: 35). Meaningful practices that present themselves as the “way things are” result from this interplay.

At a more analytical level, “positional agency”, i.e., how agents think and act *from* their positions, is thus underpinned by both their historic trajectories/dispositions *and* capital possessions. Whether they strive to improve their positions in a field or to change the field’s rules, their actions, and how they draw on accumulated resources, are largely dictated by their historic habitus.

Power struggles

Field actors share a drive towards the accumulation of capital. This means that common interests are not enough to argue for a community but rather that they provide the grounds for clashes over sorts of capital (Martin-Mazé 2017: 210). Field struggles assume the status of struggles over “[...] the monopoly of legitimate violence (specific authority) [...]”— which is tantamount to the preservation or subversion of the field’s (capital) structure (Bourdieu 1993: 73). The “sense of one’s place” that usually makes “pecking orders” functioning and diplomats self-evidently playing by the rules (Pouliot 2016: 271), is sometimes thwarted by intractable power struggles that make it difficult to maintain compromises (see: Ivanov 2010: 352).

These struggles can be understood as struggles over “relative positions and capital accumulation” that may involve redefinitions of what counts as capital (see: Adler-Nissen 2014: 662). They count as “power struggles”. Capital accumulation or redistribution may result in greater distinctions between dominant and subordinate positions and, with it, redistributes the right to assert the most legitimate/valued form of capital (see: Villumsen-Berling 2012: 461).

Agents move across a field while striving to accumulate valued forms of capital according to the field’s principles (see: Yang 2014: 1526). Authoritative definitions become imposed and reproduced in practice. Together with the agreed interest of all players in field struggles, affairs in the field appear natural while the field “exerts symbolic power on agents in subordinate positions” who uphold the field’s distinctions (Villumsen-Berling 2012: 461-2).

Power struggles thus affect agents' habitus through the redistribution of capital. The field is in a state of perpetual motion through which agents adopt new perceptions and accept new practices as the way to go over again.

Constitutional struggles

Another form of struggle can be subsumed under the broader notion of “power struggles” as it affects the power of those agents who assert their vision of the social world. Such “constitutional struggles” can be understood as what Bourdieu calls “symbolic struggles” over the right vision of the social world. Importantly, they shape the conditions for all other struggles (e.g., struggles over positions; see: Hoffmann 2023: 10).

Agents' symbolic struggles imply claims to socially recognized authority—the capacity to define and impose perceptual/cognitive schemes and categorizations on the field, that is, symbolic power. This capacity hinges on symbolic capital. As Bourdieu writes, “[i]n the struggle to impose the legitimate vision [...] agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital [...]” (1991: 106).

This power becomes even more effective when agents use legitimate means within the range prescribed by the field's nomos. The monopolization of a matrix of norms can be re-read as adding power to material and symbolic forms of capital (see: Villumsen-Berling 2012: 42). Agents or groups who draw on symbolic capital can credibly redefine the social world and, with it, change how agents construct it.

Social struggles make the practical sense possible (Pouliot 2010: 75). Such “fundamental struggles” can be understood as “constitutional struggles” that naturalize categories of perception and shape or align dispositions as well as “position-takings”, that is, specific practices deployed to move across a field (see: Adler-Nissen 2014: 662).

As Catherine Goetze writes,

“[t]ypes of knowledge or practices do not become dominant because of their intrinsic value but because they emerge as socially recognized forms of worldviews and behaviors; and commonly

this happens through a complex struggle in which dissenting and alternative knowledge forms or practices have been socially deconstructed and discarded” (2017: 27).

Struggles are led over “the order of things” (Pouliot 2010: 232-3; see also: Villumsen-Berling 2012: 471). In this sense, positional agency—agents’ dispositions, positional perceptions, and practices are no dogma but rather relational and, thus, changeable. As Rebecca Adler-Nissen writes, “[...] dispositions are subject to permanent revision” (2014: 661).

Emerging and reemerging struggles

What triggers struggles? Bourdieu tells us about the broader motivations for field struggles by viewing actors existing in competitive constellations and acting for the greater purpose of accumulating capital and authority. I refer to Pouliot for a specification for this conceptualization. By viewing struggles as responses to a dissonance between agents’ positions and dispositions, a more detailed explanation for the emergence and reemergence of struggles is possible.

Pouliot argues that the so-called “hysteresis effect” is at the root of symbolic power struggles over the “order of things” (2010: 178). Take, for instance, the ending Cold War. Williams and Neumann argue that the demise of the Cold War

“[...] entailed a shift in the field of security practices and the exploitation of a new set of generative possibilities already contained within the habitus of security actors and institutions, and wielded strategically in order to influence the distribution of capital and the structure of the field” (2007: 40).

The increasing dominance of “democratic peace” as discourse and political practice in the 1990s was part and parcel of the strategic exploitation of existing organizational capacities (ibid.). While Williams and Neumann contend that the end of the Cold War opened a “window of opportunity” for transformation, they do not explain *how*.

The demise of the Cold War was a change of structural conditions that led to what Bourdieu calls the “hysteresis effect”. It occurs mainly when fields undergo structural change (Yang 2014: 1530).

Transferred to the international, this means that although fields are relatively autonomous, external changes matter. For instance, international terrorism profoundly reshaped after 9/11 political contestation within national fields (see: Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 19-21). The occurrence of such events often arrives unevenly with agents. The established way of doing things can therefore have a relatively short half-life: hysteresis occurs with changing contexts. Hysteresis describes a dissonance between the previously acquired dispositions and the current structure of the field that results in maladjusted, “quixotic practices”.

As Pouliot explains, “[w]hen their practical sense (i.e. the interplay between habitus and field) is socially ill-adapted to a concrete situation, quixotic agents do not behave in tune with commonsense” (2010: 48). Domination does not only rest on the distance between actors in terms of their (structural) properties but it is also embodied.

A mismatch between changing structures and agents’ past trajectories, that is, their dispositions, can therefore weaken “the order of things” (2010: 49). To use another example, Emirbayer and Johnson write concerning organizations (e.g., firms, IOs),

“[...] they proceed on basis of largely unreflective presuppositions and valuations that give way to explicit calculations [...] only when problematic circumstances arise that render such habitual or iterational modalities of response no longer feasible” (2008: 18-9).

While hysteresis certainly opens the door to innovation by raising awareness of very few agents (2008: 30; Yang 2014: 1531-2), such dissonances exhibit a greater chance for the emergence and reemergence of symbolic power struggles (Pouliot 2010: 1-2). As Pouliot explains, agents’ dispositions rarely match onto positions (“dispositional variance”)— not only because of hysteresis but also because they are often historically exposed to a variety of fields. Practices never completely converge with positional properties (see also: Leander 2011: 298; Pouliot 2013: 47). This may be aggravated by newcomers who enter fields (see: Adler-Nissen 2014: 671-2).

Moreover, hysteresis is a reason for missed opportunities. Put differently, some agents do not have (or lose) the necessary dispositions to grasp historic opportunities (Bourdieu 1977: 83). Especially within organizations where processes rely on unanimous decision-making such a structural lag could contribute to organizational failure (see: Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 30). In consequence, practical knowledge has to be “[...] actively and often painstakingly [re-]fitted by the [symbolic power of] dominant agents” (Pouliot 2010: 46). As Emirbayer and Johnson write,

“[w]hat come to the fore are those processes whereby organizational life produces individuals predisposed to perceive, feel towards, and act within organizations in ways that conserve the power of the latter [...]” (2008: 30-1).

This is because of local contestations that involve the mobilization of capital and practices to assert practical logic. In other words, when agents due to their habitus perceive the practices of others as “hysteretic”, struggles between them emerge or reemerge. As Pouliot notes, “[i]t is the politics of competing authority claims that determine the fate of established versus subversive ways of doing things” (2016: 58).

Claims about “how things are done” are made: certain types of practices become “normalized” at the dispositional level. As Pouliot writes, “[p]ower is exerted at the level of inarticulate knowledge: meanings are imposed in and through practice” (2010: 46).

In sum, symbolic power (wielded in struggles) “somatizes” the dominant order, the “order of things”. It produces a taken-for-granted adherence to the social world and cloaks doings in and on this world in an aura of naturalness. Structures, rules, and practices are arranged in such a way that they seamlessly reproduce the field’s order (Pouliot 2010: 47).

Where the established order persists, the habitus produces practices as the regular way of doing things: practices are *doxa*. The ways of doing are consistent concerning field and time: iterative, meaningful, and socially productive practices emerge. But where hysteresis occurs and the “order of things” is disrupted, power struggles (re-)emerge to decide whether the established ways of doing will remain.

2.3 Framework

NATO as an organizational field

As Trine Villumsen-Berling argues, through the confrontation with new actors and security paradigms after the Cold War, NATO's previous dominance was "transformed into a new struggle for survival" (2012: 461). While she views the main stage for this struggle in the European security field, there are indications that the Alliance itself has been the stage. Actors within NATO struggled to define the future of the Alliance.

I view the Alliance as an organizational field with competitive dynamics, set by the hierarchy of positions and the capital that underpins them. The NATO alliance can thus be grasped as a social space structured by objective relations between positions where institutional and member state actors struggled around the stake of "building a new NATO" after the Cold War (see: Asmus *et al.* 1993).

This stake elicited the interests of the actors since the Alliance had been critical for deterring the Soviets during the Cold War (Papacosma 1996: 234). Because of its evident success, NATO's future awaited redefinition after the Cold War. This was even more necessary since a Cold War doxa was in place that viewed the Alliance as a traditional defense pact with political requirements for liberal democracies (INTVW4 2021). Simultaneously, the democratic principles of the 1949 Washington Treaty underpinned a democratic normativity in NATO, incisively captured by unanimous decision-making (see: NATO 2019).

Despite all mutuality, NATO consists of unequal parts (Garey 2020: 2). When considering NATO as a field, it is critical to know who has a say and what provides these actors with authority and power. This is to problematize "[...] who is authorised to speak in the first place and which authority (roles, institutions and the taken-for-granted understandings) supports the claims" (Guzzini 2005: 516). Concerning decision-making, NATO-as-field is structured by élite positions that are differentiated by the sorts of capital that brace them. These differences anchor competition in NATO under the surface of unanimity (see: Pouliot 2016: 113).

It is underpinned by Pouliot's argument that "only a few agents are allowed to step in to partake in the social constructions of international threats" (cit. in: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 30). Holding valued types of capital and occupying important institutional roles in NATO becomes thus part of the capacity to influence the developments in NATO by changing or preserving what the Alliance does.

Consisting of a civilian and integrated military structure, NATO functions based on a "chain of command" in both a civilian and military sense which concentrates decision-making power on top. NATO ensures that— independent of the individual holder—certain top positions are vested with a power that other positions do not have. The Secretary General's right to preside over the NAC as NATO's highest decision-making body is an example (Hendrickson 2006: 42).

Overall, this ensures that arbitration, responsibility, and leadership lie with elite positions, no matter where the source of ideas in the organizational structure may be located (ideas in, e.g., HQ divisions, are often worked out on subordinate staff levels and become "usurped" by leading agents).

The elite principle in NATO is complemented by those NATO statesmen and diplomats who regularly populate the NAC. As Pouliot writes,

"[i]n the contemporary era, security elites are the handful of individuals who gather at the highest level to make the ultimate arbitration regarding foreign and security policies: in addition to heads of state and government, security elites are comprised of senior ministers and top foreign policy officials and diplomats. Some high level officials from security-related international organisations should also be added" (cit. in: Villumsen-Berling 2015: 31).

Whether the state or IOs, security elites are empowered decision-makers. In a Bourdieusian sense, they are agents whose authority is conferred and who hold the right to define the social world by delegation (Bourdieu 1991: 113, 194). Their decision-making outlines the boundaries of the NATO "organization-as-field".

Diane Vaughan's study of "NASA-as-field" shows that the decision-making of relevant actors affects the boundaries in organizations (2008: 71-2). In this sense, dominant representations, struggles, and shared organizational practices delimit NATO-as-field (see: Bueger 2020: 4).

Fields are “[...] defined by the structure of the distribution of the specific forms of capital” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 108). In NATO, élite positions are, first, underpinned by country rank. This means that statesmen and diplomats of NATO states are supported by their country’s economic/military power. This underpins a critical point: “[f]rom a practice perspective, there is no such thing as state-to-state interaction in the literal sense” (Pouliot 2016: 75).

Depending on their role, people acting in and through NATO embody an entity such as their member state or the Alliance. They are “corporate actors” (2010: 88; *ibid.*). As Ivanov notes, based on country size and resources directed for the common defense, NATO has been a heterogenous club with different sub-clubs (e.g., CEECs) where members with similar features join together (2010: 344, 348; also: Sandler and Shimizu 2014: 44).

Defense spending is a cross-generational standing marker in NATO and has been hotly contested in rounds of “burden-sharing” debates (Williams 2021a). However, it depends on contemporary definitions of what the contemporary marker of standing is (see: Pouliot 2016: 81-2; Villumsen-Berling 2015: 23, 36). Pouliot observes that: “[t]he highest spenders are highly related to the top dogs, while the lowest ones associate with the bottom of the hierarchy of standing” (2016: 241). Such hierarchy is reflective of the relative power of states, particularly when they possess power in the organization’s specialized area (2016: 76).

In terms of this hierarchy, I want to reference the work of Vincent Pouliot and his academic team who statistically analyze the “pecking order” in the UN and NATO (2016: chapter 8). With the help of multiple correspondence analysis, a data analysis technique that expresses the relationship of various co-evolving processes, they depict the social order of these two organizations graphically (2016: 228).

Their analysis depicts a general pattern that has not significantly changed since 1990. The U.S. has remained the uncontested leader for decades while the UK followed. This somewhat contrasts France, Germany, and other European countries plus Canada that are distributed around the upper or lower middle (see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670; Pouliot 2016: 234, figure 8.1; also: Sandler and Shimizu 2014: 49).

Positions in NATO are, second, structured by the sorts of capital that agents are endowed with. As Bourdieu notes, agents are “bearers of capitals” whose capital endowments (volume and structure, e.g., cultural and social capital) and historic trajectories orient their actions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 108-9).

This signals that “[c]ountry standing provides [differential] opportunities and constraints for competent diplomats to work from”, it is mostly up to the dispositions of corporate actors to skillfully play a country’s higher or lower standing to their advantage (2016: 77). The ranking of states does not automatically produce effects. It is the statesman and diplomat who, by his historic qualities/skills, his historically accumulated capitals (e.g., cultural capital), knows how to effectively combine material structures (e.g., country rank) and symbolic resources (e.g., discourses of democratic peace).

While their position in NATO is characterized by relatively static material structures and delegated symbolic functions, power and influence are “what the statesman makes of it” (see also: Pouliot 2016: 13). Therefore, the relations between positions do not merely rest with a formal hierarchy of state power but are highly dependent “[...] on the personalities of those currently serving as SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe], CMC [Chair of the Military Committee], and Secretary General” (Gade and Hilde 2014: 167).

This quote foregrounds the power and legitimacy of agents and groups in social struggles. For instance, the post-9/11 HQ reform process (SecGen Jaap de Hoop Scheffer) was watered down because “[...] the impetus for reform had diminished for the time being as well as the credibility of the reformers” (see: Gade and Hilde 2014: 171; Mouritzen 2013: 345).

Historic trajectories/dispositions meet with material positions and constitute “positional agency”—creating positional opportunities. Historically acquired personal skills (e.g., negotiation, language skills) and qualities (e.g., educational degrees, political experience) add to positional agency.

This also means that, because of historic trajectories shaping the habitus, some agents feel more entitled to act based on their position while others do not.

For instance, the involvement in political scandals overshadowing SecGen Willy Claes's (1994/95) tenure, "[...] created disincentives for Claes to go public in his appeals for policy change [...]" (Hendrickson 2006: 71).

Concerning decision-making, NATO can thus be understood as an organizational field that is structured by elite positions. Occupying these variegated positions in NATO produces a difference in agents' perceptions. These perceptions result from the mix of country rank, historic trajectories, and the individual capital endowments they have historically accumulated. Consequential practices are, therefore, associated with an order that is underpinned by unequal capital distributions and, therefore, unequal powers (see: Pouliot 2016: 246-7).

Given the resultant competitive nature of the field, agents, their struggles, and the practical consequences of this interplay for NATO become the analytical focus. For the empirical investigation, I propose the concepts of *agency-struggles-practices* around which the analysis should be made.

Analytical framework: agency

In the following, I will look at the different functions of elite actors in NATO. The concept of agency allows me to understand why certain agents engaged in struggles after the Cold War and explain their actions via the concepts of field, habitus, and capital. I differentiate between institutional and state actors. Historically, these actors have driven the decision-making process in NATO.

Institutional actors fully represent NATO as an Alliance (NATO officials, e.g., Secretary General, SACEUR; see: NATO 2022c). State actors are the statesmen of member states (e.g., heads of state, foreign ministers, defense ministers, and NATO diplomats). Their function in NATO confers rights and duties that I will discuss below. This is, *prima facie*, important because their functions allow them to participate in social struggles over the Alliance's fate.

The most crucial role in NATO decision-making is played by the member state actors. This means that “NATO decisions express the collective will of its member governments [...]” (Leo 2014: 109). This is captured by the “rules of the game”, that is, NATO’s consensus decision-making, the right of members to veto decisions, and the principle of consultation to achieve compromises. Their membership in NATO and these rules enable state actors to actively shape NATO’s future (see: Honkanen 2002: 23-4).

As facilitators, institutional actors in NATO aid the process of decision-making. They cannot ride roughshod over the Allies, especially concerning the use of force (Leo 2014: 109). However, they can implicitly align with member states’ positions, advocate for them, and guide the decision-making process in certain directions in given contexts (see: Hendrickson 2014: 124-5).

This means that they can draw on the capital of those state actors whose positions they advocate. This integrates them into NATO’s hierarchical setting and makes them legitimate participants in social struggles.

The analysis of agents should thus contain two steps. First, it is important to include the relative rank of their country in NATO in the analysis. For this, I mainly refer to the above-mentioned “pecking order” in NATO that Pouliot statistically established (2016: 234). This is supplemented by Todd Sandler’s comprehensive surveys about NATO defense spending (1999; 2014).

Second, it is important to analyze the habitus of decision-makers based on their historical trajectories, individual motivations, perceptions, and accumulated capital. While I do not claim to conduct a variegated analysis that goes into the private routines of NATO actors such as Secretary-General Javier Solana, I investigate their personal and professional histories as well as political motives to derive an explanation for their actions in NATO.

The analysis of individual NATO actors in terms of country rank and habitus will be conducted in the empirical section of this study. In the following, I will discuss the functions of state and institutional actors in NATO that provide them with access to struggles in NATO. State actors in NATO are the heads of state, foreign ministers, defense ministers, and permanent representatives.

Institutional actors are the Secretary-General and the SACEUR. Experts are a “hybrid form” because they can work in national administrations or NATO.

State actors

State actors are the decisionmakers in NATO. Apart from nationals delegated to NATO for career service or military personnel, state actors as diplomats are organized within the NAC as the highest decision-making body. They embody and instantiate the state and its rank in the NATO hierarchy.

The NAC meets at the level of heads of state and government, foreign ministers, defense ministers, or permanent representatives (PermReps). However, foreign ministers take a large share of decision-making in NATO (Acheson 1996: 190). Except for PermReps, none of the state actors has a permanent function in the Alliance. However, formal, and informal meetings in and around the NAC characterize their functions in NATO.

Under the SecGen’s chairmanship, the NAC “discusses and approves NATO policy” (NATO 2010a: 35). Regardless of its formation (e.g., heads of state or “Ministerial”), each level represents the agreed policies of the members and thus possesses the same powers (ibid.).

State actors within NATO act in a diplomatic sense: they are corporate actors— embodying and instantiating the state in practice, while “[t]heir job is to pursue the national interest” (Pouliot 2016: 75-6). Through the instantiation of the state, they reproduce the hierarchy within which states are organized, and which is vulnerable to symbolic struggles.

The different types of capital that NATO states have at their disposal imply excludability and contextual rivalry (particularly regarding their use; Ivanov 2010: 356). Therefore, diplomacy in NATO primarily works to resolve conflictual relationships (see: Mahbubani 2020: 24). This means that “[...] individual allies tend to break the silence and veto decisions that do not correspond to their national interests” (Ivanov 2010: 356). National markers of standing support statesmen/diplomats’ struggle to overcome impasses and to tilt Alliance decisions in their favor.

Although I highlight the agency of individual statesmen who stood out in NATO's post-Cold War history, I also use the expression "administration" to summarize the nationally agreed approaches that different corporate actors have put forward in NATO. Mary Sarotte's analysis of the 1993-95 Clinton-administration debate about NATO enlargement (2019) is a case in point for national debates.

While NATO state actors take an important place in the study, it is not possible to analyze the trajectory and dispositions of every state actor who has been involved in NATO's transformation after the Cold War. This analysis is necessarily limited to those who were traditionally most representative of the struggles within NATO (American, British, French, German, and Italian actors), They will be discussed in the empirical chapters.

Secretary-General

The Secretary-General as a senior international politician is "the Alliance's top international civil servant" (NATO 2022b). As an international mediator, he is deeply involved in decision-making processes, collects information with the help of his staff, or reads and balances views and dispositions around the negotiation table in favor of Alliance consensus (Pouliot 2016: 108). However, to depict this position merely as "guardian of the pecking order" (ibid.) falls short of grasping its full potential.

After the Cold War, "[...] the individuals who have occupied this office [...] have increasingly become policy entrepreneurs: independent initiators of policy ideas and directions for the allies in leading NATO towards the end they desire" (Hendrickson 2014: 124). As a NATO observer confirmed, the individual power of NATO's Secretary Generals has grown substantially since 1990.

This power expanded in terms of influence, agenda-setting, or presiding over high-level meetings within NATO frameworks and the SecGen can make a policy impact by steering the decision-making process (INTVW8 2021). As such, the SecGen is authorized to speak with NATO members' and partners' heads of government and foreign and defense ministers to facilitate consensus *without* consulting the NAC (Hendrickson 2014: 126; NATO 2022b).

Particularly through NATO's expanded functions after 1990, "[...] the opportunities for the Secretary-General to successfully act as a policy entrepreneur and internationalized actor who is turned to by the allies for guidance and leadership in shaping policy" have increased (Hendrickson 2014: 124). This means that he can favor, advocate, and support the positions of certain Allies in given contexts which provides the SecGen with access to struggles in NATO.

Moreover, the position is vested with the delegated authority to speak on behalf of all of NATO, making the SecGen "principal spokesperson" of the Alliance (NATO 2022b). As a NATO official, he takes an active role by raising awareness of members regarding international security and suggesting actions in the general interest of NATO (Rauchhaus 2001: 16). Since, nonetheless, systemic constraints exist, it is the historic dispositions of the officeholder and her practical navigations that may result in the ability to foster "policy impacts" (see: Hendrickson 2014: 124).

SACEUR

The SACEUR is another institutional top position within NATO (Gade and Hilde 2014: 160). This function involved greater politico-military agency after the Cold War. The SACEUR is a top strategic military commander in NATO who is responsible for the overall conduct of NATO operations (analysis, planning, conduct, and control). He is also dual-hatted as the commander of U.S. and multinational forces in Europe.

While the SACEUR is responsible to the Military Committee, his enhanced political position enables him, case-by-case, to bypass NATO committees. This means that he possesses delegated authority. He "has an important public profile and is the senior military spokesperson" who maintains official contacts with the public media and pays public visits to NATO countries and partners (NATO 2022c).

While he is the "military center of gravity" in NATO, providing advice to the NAC (Gade and Hilde 2014: 167), his position is limited to "contributing to stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area by developing and participating in military-to-military contacts [...]" (NATO 2022c).

The SACEUR's function provides him with the necessary leeway to engage in struggles about NATO's future. As an American, he draws on and advances American power since he is simultaneously NATO as well as U.S. regional combat commander (Driver 2021: 318-9). Observers argue that the SACEUR "is uniquely positioned to leverage both U.S. military networks and the capacity for NATO institutional agency within NATO bureaucratic staff" (2021: 314).

SACEURs usually refer to a successful career in operational and strategic military leadership positions. Outstanding career tracks, experience, and leadership skills are selection criteria that enhance the authority of the SACEUR as a field position. The SACEUR is well connected to the highest echelons of U.S. politics.

Depending on individual abilities, the quality of connections to political actors allows him to navigate without antagonizing other NATO committees. How he navigates as a "political entrepreneur" to effectively influence NATO policies depends, however, largely on the historic dispositions of the incumbent.

Experts

Aside from the crucial role of the above-mentioned actors, other NATO/state officials (international/semi-international), here understood as "experts", have often weighed in the struggles and discourses surrounding the Alliance's post-Cold War transformation. For instance, experts occupy positions as division heads or deputies within NATO or represent policy branches of member states' administrations (e.g., in defense ministries) that deal with NATO policies.

Though relatively constrained by their performed roles, experts do not merely reproduce certain conceptions but possess some form of an independent agency that feeds on their historic trajectories. These actors can often refer to distinguished academic backgrounds and excellent political (even military) experiences.

The impression from my interviews was that they naturally make their views count by using means at their hands—even if they do not have, or very marginally, the final word in decision-making.

An example is the “Head of the Hybrid Challenges and Energy Security Section in NATO’s Emerging Security Challenges Division”, Michael Rühle, or Jamie Shea, the famous NATO spokesperson during the Kosovo intervention.

These actors have used their role, capacity, and networks to publish in (academic) journals, and books, or to make public appearances by giving interviews, speeches, and lectures—even beyond their retirement (e.g., Rühle and Williams 1997; Shea 2014).

Their roles in national administrations or the NATO bureaucracy have provided them with access to the struggles in NATO through the provision of advice to governments and the development of core ideas. Although actions could be understood as moves linked to professional careers, experts have contributed to topics by creating awareness in and beyond their organizations.

While it is not my aim to exhaustively analyze the practices of state/NATO security experts linearly, their agency will be included in the analysis where pieces come together as relevant during the research process.

Analytical framework: struggles

The above-listed actor types were involved in an overarching struggle about “building a new NATO” that mainly occurred during the first decade after the Cold War. It is an umbrella term that gained momentum within NATO amidst the rising feelings of crisis after the Cold War (see: Asmus *et al.* 1993: 28). Building this NATO involved struggles that were acted out along an “Atlanticist-Europeanist continuum”.

The empirical focus on struggles allows me to foreground transformative micro-level dynamics in NATO after the Cold War. Moreover, it allows me to explore how certain approaches to international security prevailed and transformed NATO while others were discarded and remained without effect on the Alliance. Finally, this focus enables me to show how these approaches were reasserted and normalized over time.

The intention to construct a “new NATO” rose out of the uncertainty about NATO as a political versus military institution after 1989. After the loss of the adversary in the East, supporters of NATO as continuing military power sought to retain their Cold War dominance against conceptions of “less NATO”, particularly favored by France. As Timothy Sayle writes, “[s]ome allies bristled at America’s vision for a continued, even strengthened, NATO” (2019: 217).

Under American leadership, the Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers (SHAPE) began in 1990 to design new structures and purposes for the Alliance out of which later new struggles over their use, usability, and scope emerged (see: Cornish 1996: 755; Smith 2000b: 66-7). The challenges that observers usually portray as exogenous (e.g., Villumsen-Berling 2015) were partly endogenous and should respond to the crucial question if NATO was a post-Cold War “paper tiger” or not (see: NATO 2013).

The “new NATO” became thus a real possibility by introducing new symbolic-material Alliance structures that invited foundational symbolic struggles about new NATO policies. These struggles should change fundamental security perceptions as well as how NATO members thought about the Alliance and what it could do after the Cold War.

Comparable to a struggle for distinction, NATO actors had different ideas of how NATO should support their security after the Cold War. According to Bourdieu, this struggle is a fundamental feature of social life and necessarily centers on “power relations among individuals, groups, and institutions” (Swartz 1997: 6). The main struggles were led for NATO’s “double enlargement”.

The term “double enlargement” meant the expansion of memberships and military missions “[...] to capture the new *raison d’être* of the North Atlantic Alliance in the post-Cold War era” (Biermann 2009). Although, these “foundational struggles” were largely decided by the end of 1995 and new practices were introduced, “power struggles” reemerged (e.g., over Kosovo in 1998/99). They should assert the established “ways of doing” as a principle of power for their advocates.

While this outlines the basic features that formed the design of the Alliance after the Cold War, the analysis of each of these struggles is conducted along the established agents in the field and their position-takings. Historically, the above-shown groups of agents were the relevant decision-makers whose struggles determined the course of NATO after 1990. Since the politics within NATO is shaped by institutional and state actors, non-NATO members or other organizations may affect NATO but cannot directly influence the internal processes.

For my study, it is important to identify the overarching context and the position of the established Allies in particular security contexts. Empirically, these positions were constituted by antagonistic perceptions roughly along an “Atlanticist-Europeanist continuum” (or “poles”; Ivanov 2010: 346). As Julian Lindley-French writes,

“[f]or the American, military firepower and maneuver are the credos, for Europeans it is stabilization and reconstruction. Somewhere in the middle is a working strategic consensus, but the very imbalance in power between the US and its Allies makes such convergence hard to achieve. Unfortunately, the split also extends to within Europe.”(2007: 75).

The camps’ specific approaches to transatlantic security as well as their composition often shifted with changing contexts. While Atlanticist-Europeanist identities have been relatively stable, they sometimes shifted to either side (Ivanov 2010: 347). Moreover, not all NATO members choose to participate in struggles. Especially nations that are grouped around the bottom of the NATO hierarchy, such as the new CEEC members, (see: Pouliot 2016: 234) often remain silent.

Thus, the camp structure has mainly been represented by the actors of more powerful NATO nations who emerged as main advocates and spokespersons within the camp structure. Particularly, actors of the U.S., the UK, Germany, France, and Italy were the main representatives of the Atlanticist-Europeanist continuum after the Cold War. While the Atlanticist pole was characterized by a dominant role of the U.S., the Europeanist revolved around France’s dominance with Italian support. The UK and Germany often shifted sides within given security contexts.

Others added to the two camps but did rather make use of their vote than their voice. It is, therefore, critical to identify these agents along the types introduced above. Once agents have been empirically identified, it is important to relate the perceptions they advocate to agents' above-mentioned historical and positional properties to carve out their field position.

Eventually, the recovery of these positional properties serves to derive an explanation of agents' position-takings in emerging contexts. It has been empirically observable that the different actions of actors often created a hysteresis effect.

While doing oftentimes corresponded with the historic dispositions and positions of certain actors and elicited a seemingly logical chain of practices, their counterparts in NATO viewed their perceptions and actions as out of tune with the power structure or the prevalent rules of the field. In consequence, counter-actions were initiated.

As Ivanov notes, “[...] when compromise is not possible, the diverging identity of the allies ‘breaks the science’ and they resist a collective action” (2010: 353). NATO’s protracted “crisis over Bosnia” or even over NATO’s failed post-9/11 headquarters (HQ) reform is a case in point (see: Mouritzen 2013: 345; Shea 1999: 11). This supports the overall understanding that

“[u]nder the veneer of consensus, NATO is a multilateral organization with many cracks. The presence of political divides should not come as a surprise: communities are always structured by various cleavages and power struggles” (Pouliot 2016: 113).

Struggles in NATO were thus pivotal social processes in which conservative and subversive dynamics impinged on one other. They often brought new actors to the forefront who intervened on behalf of one or the other side of the “Atlanticist-Europeanist continuum”. Their powerful interventions and the “strategic defeat” of certain Allies pushed NATO into a period where the transformation of the Alliance and its preservation became entangled.

To understand the outcome of these struggles, it is critical to explain how these actors strategically mobilized forms of capital against the backdrop of their historic trajectories, dispositions, and their location in the structure of the field. Put differently, outcomes need to be explained against the background of the “positional agency” of these “corporate actors”.

In my investigation, I found that the economic/military power of states (material-military capital) played an overriding role in agents’ struggles. Its value consists of the importance for the implementation of NATO’s policy turn towards Eastern enlargement and its military interventions after the Cold War. This is followed by cultural and social capital (military-cultural knowledge and social networks).

In NATO as a politico-military alliance, the material-military power of states has thus been converted into a symbolic capital that agents strategically deploy and serves as a source of symbolic power to shape perceptions and actions in NATO. This adds to the volume and structure of capital of individual actors (e.g., cultural, social capital) as a basis for effective social actions.

Traditionally, U.S. policymakers held the most symbolic capital in NATO, clouding the other members. The sources for this capital have been American economic and military might (e.g., troops, airpower, battleships), its advanced military technology, or its vast command and control resources (see: Ivanov 2011: 24, 47, 80-2).

In the context of struggles, international agents in NATO such as the Secretaries-General or the SACEUR also require attention. As I stressed, they participate in struggles by drawing on the capital of those NATO members whose position they (often implicitly) advocate.

This means that their position often appeared as neutrally favoring consensus but implicitly, sometimes overtly, supported one or the other camp. Put differently, “[t]he interests of NATO officials are not always identical to the interests of [certain] member states” (Rauchhaus 2001: 16). As I will show, their interventions in NATO were critical to tilt the power structure within NATO towards an active role after the Cold War.

Practices

Significantly, practices are a central concept for the study of post-Cold War NATO. A focus on NATO's practices allows me to foreground their structured and structuring effects. Moreover, I can show that an array of new practices after the Cold War were meaningful for NATO practitioners and contributed to the construction of the "new NATO".

As explained, practices are reasonable for agents without being explicitly grounded in reason or "conscious computation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 120). Anchored in an aura of naturalness, practices appear sensible, meaningful, and the regular course of action. Through self-evident perceptions and actions agents construct the field as a meaningful social space (Bourdieu 1992: 69; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 127-8).

Practices as meaningful actions are productive: "[a]s social beings, we return to established practices because they form the mutually recognizable patterns from which, and with which, we engage with the world" (Pouliot 2016: 51).

However, the meaningfulness and sensibility of practices, and therefore of the whole field, eventually hinges on the power relations in institutions and the perceptual categories that arise from these relations (Deer 2008: 121).

As for the "new NATO", a repertoire of practices of integration of post-communist countries, as well as collective military actions beyond the traditional defense area, became the hallmarks of NATO's policy change after the Cold War. NATO's "double enlargement" of the 1990s was consequently a change in and of practices. New practices turned the Alliance away from conventional territorial defense by materializing the policies of NATO enlargement and military interventions.

The task is to empirically determine if agents perceived these practices as sensible and meaningful, that is, the innate perceptions that structure them. Moreover, a focal point is the interaction of these practices with the organizational macro-level. How these practices became the regular way to go and how they constructed the "new NATO" are central empirical foci.

This means that practices had constitutive effects on NATO. Practices and practical contexts provided the essential frame for discourses of NATO transformation. They were also central to the constitution of NATO's post-Cold War democratic and interventionist identity. The gradual normalization of these practices as quotidian performances essentially constructed the "new NATO". I will analyze the particularity of these practices and how they constructed NATO as a new identity community. For instance, joint defense planning with post-communist states specifically functioned to offset the traditional security dilemma, setting the basis for identity in NATO to take hold.

However, for the "new NATO" as a democratic and interventionist community to materialize, new practices needed to be perceived as normal and prevail—in agents' perceptions and as their regular doings. What these practices were, how they were perceived, and how they prevailed over time was, however, not simply fixed or given but a matter of power and a central object of social struggles between agents, as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by outlining an approach that draws on the Bourdieusian toolbox. This approach supports a particular understanding of the social world or NATO as an international organization. NATO is a social field in which elite actors with historic dispositions struggle from their hierarchical position to preserve or change the course of the Alliance after the Cold War. Struggles resulted in a change of practices that came to be viewed as the regular course of post-Cold War action.

I begin by discussing the concept of a field as a social space that possesses a fundamentally competitive character. Moreover, the Bourdieusian field is underpinned by the interests that draw agents into the affairs of the field as well as by normative structures and taken-for-granted beliefs that regulate these affairs.

Then, I discuss the habitus as a principle that structures agents' practices because it is structured by their historical experiences and trajectories. In this context, the concept of capital becomes important.

In the course of history, agents accumulate forms of capital that come to reinforce or constitute their position in a field. The difference in volume and the structure of capital of agents reinforces the distance between field positions and underpins the essentially competitive nature of the field. Moreover, occupying a certain position in the field shapes historic perceptions and the habitus of agents.

Consequently, agents' practices are more "practical sense" than rational calculations. From their location in the hierarchy of a field, performers' practices often appear sensible and meaningful beyond discussion. In this context, I refer to Pouliot's *logic of practicality* as a supplementary understanding. The concept draws on Bourdieu and reinforces the claim that the practical sense plays a primary role in the actions of statesmen and diplomats in world politics.

Subsequently, I discuss the concept of field struggles. Arising out of the competitive nature of the field, struggles are a pivotal or constitutive social dynamic that can alter the structure of the field and change agents' perceptions and practices.

Agents' doings can be considered as "position-takings", performances that hinge on their position in a field. This means that the internalization of one's location in a field largely dictates the limits and possibilities of perceptions and actions. Vincent Pouliot's concept of "positional agency" incisively captures this.

Then, I classify struggles as power struggles and constitutional struggles. Power struggles are oriented toward the accumulation of capital and power. However, they can also redefine the value of capital, alter the distribution of field positions, and change or preserve agents' perceptions and practices.

Constitutional struggles are to be understood in the sense of Bourdieu's "symbolic struggles" that alter or preserve fundamental perceptions and categories with which agents go about in the field. While fields exist in a relentless state of competition due to their hierarchical makeup, I view the "hysteresis effect" as a trigger for struggles.

The distance between field positions and, thus, the divergence of local practices may result in agents' perceiving certain practices as "hysteretic", that is, as out of tune with the power structure or the fundamental rules of the field. Consequently, struggles over the "order of things" as a response to the agents' actions emerge or reemerge.

In the second part, I present the concepts of *agency-struggles-practices* as the guiding analytical framework. First, I present NATO as an organizational field with a fundamentally competitive structure.

Élite decision-makers are the relevant actors in NATO. Their function enabled them to participate in the struggles for building a "new NATO" after the Cold War. However, actors act within NATO as a hierarchical field of position. They can be understood as acting upon their historic trajectories and the volume and structure of their capital, including their country's relative position within NATO. I identify these relevant actors as the Secretary-General, SACEUR, NATO members' statesmen, and diplomats, as well as policy experts.

Subsequently, I engaged with struggles in the Alliance. The main struggles over the design of the post-Cold War NATO took place in the 1990s over "double enlargement" along an Atlanticist-Europeanist divide.

Constitutional struggles as well as power struggles characterized the tensions between subversive and reproductive dynamics within NATO—especially during this decade. The concept allows me to foreground the micro-level dynamic that led to the change and reproduction of perceptions and practices in NATO.

Finally, the concept of practices allows me to highlight the structuring effects of practices for the "new NATO". However, I contend that NATO's practices needed to prevail after the Cold War to have constitutive effects on NATO. What practices were perceived as the way to go and how they prevailed over time was, however, not a given but an object of social struggles between agents.

In the following, I will proceed with the empirical analysis.

Chapter 3

The struggle for NATO enlargement

By 1995, the Alliance was a key player in world politics and a top priority for U.S. foreign policy after the superpower conflict ended a few years earlier. By the new millennium, NATO had successfully filled the void left by the disintegrating Soviet Bloc and impressively showcased its continuing relevance. New practices, integrated by the military interventions in the Western Balkans or the expansion of the Alliance into central and eastern Europe, became cornerstones of NATO's unmitigated importance in transatlantic security (see: Hendrickson 1999: 84). As Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca Moore write,

“NATO demonstrated a newfound sense of political purpose in the early 1990s, first by reaching out to its former adversaries in Central and Eastern Europe and then by adopting a collective security role, beginning with its “out of area” operations in Bosnia and Kosovo” (2010: 1).

While the Alliance's change of policies after the Cold War became a cogent argument concerning its continuing existence, policy adoption was often explained as being grounded in a redefinition of roles (see: Aybet 2000: 167). NATO pursued a “new vision” and developed a range of initiatives that, based on a new security understanding of Allies, led to organizational expansion (i.e., “double enlargement”): “[...] the Alliance had committed itself to projecting stability beyond its borders” (Moore 2007: 2). This interacted with explanations that, based on either a democratic identity or U.S. power, foregrounded the galvanizing bonds between Allies as a reason for NATO's post-Cold War persistence (Burton 2018: XXI-XXIII).

While most observers confirmed this post-Cold War trend, they glossed over the fact that a redefinition of roles and aims became only possible through complex and competitive social dynamics within the Alliance (see: Hendrickson 1999: 84).

Bonds between the Allies did not take away from the problem that NATO's historic reorientation was traversed by trailblazing symbolic struggles within a military alliance that Julie Garey describes as "the sum of unequal parts" (2020: 2). The Allies expressed their political sensitivities by advocating specific roles for NATO and different paths to follow.

The materialization of NATO enlargement was anchored in competitive relations, characterized as "competitive cooperation" (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 160). Divergent views on what post-Cold War NATO is and how it should proceed were an expression of actors' dispositions and their hierarchical positioning within NATO-as-field.

Due to this, actors tended to interpret arising historical post-Cold War contexts in different ways—foundational struggles over the most basic understandings of NATO's future erupted. Struggles were led via an Atlanticist/Europeanist divide. While French policymakers sought to prevent a new political role for NATO, the U.S.-German axis wanted to transform NATO's posture.

However, despite intra-Alliance opposition (see: Garey 2020: 4; Thies 2009), NATO allies finally agreed on and enacted several programs and practices during the 1990s that were characteristic of NATO enlargement.

To better understand why new policies and practices became the accepted way to go, I will focus on the processes and power relations within the Alliance that rendered them acceptable. My approach takes into account what Spohr and Piirimäe concerning NATO enlargement find: most research is centered on the "how" at the cost of the "why", that is, "[...] on the motivations and calculations that drove key players" (2022: 161). Consequently, I will center on the historical perceptions of actors in NATO.

I will engage with the historic processes that transformed NATO from a closed Cold War club to an organization that declared its principal openness to new members in 1994. These processes were traversed by symbolic struggles, pivotal social dynamics, about introducing the policy of opening NATO.

Western state actors such as Bill Clinton, Warren Christopher, Volker Rühle, and François Mitterrand were the protagonists in these struggles. They were distributed around the Atlanticist-Europeanist pole in NATO and proposed their visions for the organization's future after the Cold War.

Struggles were symbolic or “foundational” as they were led for policy change and NATO agents' perceptions of what NATO could and should do in terms of eastern enlargement. However, policymakers' perceptions interacted with the historical context that I will, first, frame as the continuation of NATO, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the membership aspirations of post-communist countries.

In the second part, I will engage with the different interpretations of this evolving context by NATO actors along the Atlanticist/Europeanist poles. In the third part, I will take a closer look at actors such as German MoD Rühle to show how the foundational struggle over enlargement emerged and implicated a growing number of actors. Finally, I argue that given the French “defeat”, the U.S.-German-NATO coalition decided the struggle about “whether” to open NATO in early 1994.

3.1 International context

The continuation of NATO

Albeit a sense of the victory of the liberal-democratic institutions reverberated throughout NATO, questions appeared on the agenda of Western policymakers soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 (INTVW1 2020). The most pressing question, the immediate post-Cold War continuation of NATO, was resolved at the U.S. President's residency at Camp David in 1990. It is one contextual puzzle piece through which NATO's enlargement policy was later shaped.

At the end of 1989, it was not clear what should happen with NATO. While changes were underway and the rise of reformers in Hungary and Poland as well as the mass exodus of East German citizens in the summer of 1989 were unleashing waves across the Soviet Bloc, the U.S. and Soviet foreign minister, Baker and Shevardnadze, discussed the situation.

Fearing that the events could be exploited by the West, Shevardnadze proposed to disband both the Warsaw Pact and NATO, releasing the allies of both security pacts. Baker rejected this because the Soviets were still capable of undermining the European security order and transatlantic relations (Sarotte 2021: 29, 44). Although Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had announced major improvements in the East-West relationship earlier that year (Sayle 2019: 217), diplomats warned of unpredictable reactions should both pacts come apart.

In 1990, the most fundamental question was settled, however. The insistence of the George H. Bush administration on Germany as a NATO member secured the immediate continuation of NATO itself. To this end, U.S. President Bush convinced German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to go against proposals by his foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of both the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Genscher was largely dismissive of the idea that the superpowers could continue dictating Europe's future (2021: 35) and favored pan-European security, sponsored by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), instead.

Even a compromise short of dissolution that would have seen a reunified Germany without American troops—in favor of a deal with the Soviets—questioned NATO's continuing viability in Europe. Bush said that a NATO without a meaningful political place in the new Europe would wither American commitment (Sarotte 2010: 112-3). Germany played a pivotal role in this context (2021: 58).

Kohl was the experienced and feisty political leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) who had been German chancellor since 1982. Through his political experiences and life-long conviction about the importance of a politically unified Europe, he was willing to compromise with the Soviets to facilitate Germany's reunification.

However, having lived through the “bitter experience” of World War II as a teenager, Kohl was also convinced that a stable peace order can only be “embedded in the transatlantic partnership with the U.S. and Canada” (Kohl 2014: 9; Köhler 2014: 688; Sarotte 2021: 29-30). Kohl often stressed that Germany's “home is in the West” (Sayle 2019: 224).

This belief was reinforced by the partnership between Kohl and Bush who called Germany a “partner in leadership” (Köhler 2014: 579). Because this was still an unequal partnership under superpower doctrines, Bush secured Kohl’s commitment to a full German NATO membership and American troops on German soil which, for the time being, ensured NATO’s continuation and dealt Gorbachev a blow (Rynning 2014: 1386; Sarotte 2021: 69, 73-4). Kohl aligned with the U.S. as the dominant NATO power (see: Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 160).

Gorbachev’s declining power, however, sped up the demise of the Union and the emergence of regional instability. While other allies (the Dutch and Italians) were silenced on Germany’s future by Genscher in Ottawa (telling De Michelis “You are not part of the game!”), NATO’s immediate post-Cold War continuation was largely decided by the relations between Bush and Kohl.

Most NATO Allies supported German reunification and NATO’s continued role in post-Cold War Europe (Sarotte 2021: 62-3; Sayle 2019: 227-8). Bush also convinced Gorbachev of the positive role of a reunified Germany in NATO (Asmus 2004: 3). As Mary Sarotte writes, “[b]y 1990 the alliance had clearly succeeded; the Russians were “out,” the Americans wanted to stay “in,” and the Germans wanted to stay “down” (2010: 113; also: Sayle 2019: 224).

Although the Soviets were defeated on points, they still were a nuclear power whose visions and politics needed to be taken seriously (Sarotte 2021: 106; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022). Washington-Berlin-Moscow relations should remain crucial for the later policy of NATO’s enlargement.

During the following two years, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the politics of CEEC reformers further contextualized decisions about NATO’s future course. In addition to the “Americans “in” and the Germans “down”, we need to look at these external factors as well to understand why NATO’s policy change became possible in 1994.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union

In 1990, the Soviets agreed to a unified Germany that chose its alliance. For the Soviets, it was a time of change. Secessionist tendencies in the republics began to emerge and the buffer zone that lay in between the Russian heartland and the West ("Zwischeneuropa"; see: Spohr and Piirimäe 2022) came apart.

I set out the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite system as another puzzle piece of the geopolitical context that influenced the struggle over NATO enlargement. The desires of the post-revolutionary CEECs to establish democratic structures meant, in a first step, that, besides East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary reached an agreement with the Soviets on troop withdrawal by late 1992. The second step aimed at disbanding the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets suggested transforming this structure into a more political one. However, CEEC statesmen united fronts against the Warsaw Pact.

Upon Hungarian initiative, the *Visegrád Cooperation* between the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland was founded on 15 February 1991, and the desire to dissolve the Warsaw Pact was reaffirmed. Its military structure was declared defunct. The Soviets wanted to prevent the CEECs from joining European institutions while their domestic situation slipped (Asmus 2004: 9-10; Mastny 2009: 212).

In January 1991, Lithuania saw Soviet forces cracking down on nationalist protests, leaving dead protesters behind (Sarotte 2021: 112). In August 1991, a coup of communist hardliners against Gorbachev and his reformist politics failed but set in motion a secessionist process that dissolved the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Former Soviet republics emerged as newly independent states by the dozen, Gorbachev resigned, and the man who upstaged him during and after the August 1991 coup, Boris Yeltsin, became president of the Russian Federation. Yeltsin told Bush that he wanted to break with the Soviet past, build a system of independent states, and move Russia closer to the West (see: Sarotte 2021: 124, 129-33). Yeltsin was a special personality in post-Soviet Russia.

He was able to cultivate bonds with Western leaders like no one before him. However, Yeltsin sometimes clashed with them while trying to revive Russia as a great power.

All efforts of Western leaders to cooperate with Russia notwithstanding, “[...] the realities of the international environment ensured that competition, even rivalry, persisted” (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 159). The question of some 20.000 remaining Soviet nukes, the growing number of post-communist states, and Yeltsin’s desires for association would soon come to influence Western perceptions about enlargement.

This is captured by Pouliot’s proposition of hysteresis in NATO-Russia relations which draws on an ill-adapted Russian “Great Power habitus” in the international security field (e.g., Neumann and Pouliot 2011: 132). Russian actions were maladjusted to its lower position which sparked conflict with NATO actors. However, while I do not investigate NATO-Russia relations, I acknowledge their influence on NATO enlargement.

The CEECs

For the CEECs, the decay of the Soviet empire signaled enhanced geopolitical risks and greater uncertainty concerning their security. Everything could happen in a Russia that was economically shattered but still powerful in ways (see: Sarotte 2021: 119).

As the former Czech defense minister (MoD) Alexandr Vondra recalled the danger of a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The CEECs did not see themselves in a neutral position (INTVW7 2021).

My interview with Vondra was instructive. As a former dissident in communist Czechoslovakia and intimate friend of the country’s first post-Cold War president, Václav Havel, Vondra conveyed a strong Western orientation which was underpinned by his current position as a member of the European Parliament.

Vondra said that the 1991 coup in Moscow “served as a wake-up call” which intensified the Visegrád NATO track since they were not sure if the Kremlin would reverse reforms (ibid.). He conveyed the impression that NATO membership was a logical choice for Visegrád statesmen, especially since he made no mention of Havel who originally advocated a demilitarized Europe (see also: Asmus 2004: 11; 2010: 112; 2021: 79).

Visegrád leaders demanded signals from the West. Given their concerns with the Soviet Union, they requested NATO enlargement in their 1991 “Krakow declaration”. Since then, Alexandr Vondra said, “It was clear for us what we wanted to achieve” which resulted in a proactive search for enlargement advocates in the West throughout the next two years (INTVW7 2021; see also: Smith 2000b: 103). NATO enlargement was influenced by social dynamics with agents at the center.

NATO declared at the 1990 London conference to reach out to *Zwischeneuropa*. One year later, “NATO’s hand of friendship and the establishment of NATO liaison offices meant little [...]” (Kieninger 2019: 61). In November 1991, NATO unveiled the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). Early NATO cooperation aimed at building ties with the former communist countries and was situated nowhere near the later idea of NATO enlargement (Colbourne 2020: 499; Kornblum 2019: 287).

The initiative was adequate for loose cooperation and framed NATO as an outreaching political actor that shaped stability in Europe considering the danger of a security vacuum in *Zwischeneuropa* (see also: Moore 2007: 15, 23; Smith 2000b: 110). However, the NACC held the idea “[...] that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would be content with closer institutional cooperation with NATO short of membership” (Asmus 2004: 17).

However, they were not—also because Russia soon became a member of the NACC and the realization that the forum was rather cumbersome and weak took hold (Kay 1995: 113, 127). The Visegrád and other post-communist states wanted NATO enlargement. However, this was not, or incoherently the case for NATO members.

3.2 Alliance positions

Having secured the continuation of NATO in 1990 by forging the U.S.-German strategic partnership, American foreign policy planners speculated about a potential role for NATO in Eastern Europe. At the time, such ideas were controversial and hypothetical. The U.S. alone was not capable of offering the CEECs vast opportunities, but NATO or the European Community (EC) could. However, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990, ideas were shelved (Sarotte 2010: 118, 135).

Initially, there was no consensus on eastern expansion within NATO—mostly due to inconsistent interpretations of who should deal with the east and how. As Karin Fierke and Antje Wiener write, “[w]hile the idea of adding new members is not by definition in conflict with alliance formation, the expansion of NATO, as a Cold War alliance, had been largely unthinkable” (1999: 722). However, the Soviet breakup, the Yugoslav wars, and a potential Eastern security vacuum forced NATO members to reconsider their approach. The changes in the East questioned NATO's political relevance and disclosed differences between the Allies (Sayle 2019: 229; Smith 2000b: 104).

Atlanticist position

Although the Soviets tolerated a continuing NATO after 1990, the U.S. Bush administration prioritized that their decline and the changes in the European security environment were irreversible. Sided by Canadian support for the transatlantic architecture, NATO “was more important than ever”, Bush said (cit. in: Colbourne 2023: 78-9; Sayle 2023: 63).

After the Cold War, the U.S. reconfirmed its unmatched leadership with the successful intervention in the Persian Gulf in 1991 (Kaufman 1998: 23). American military dominance became the most important power in the transatlantic region: “[...] it is ultimately American views that matter when NATO's Article 5 guarantee is at issue” (Sarotte 2021: 15).

Transforming NATO to support democracy in the CEECs, but also that of Russia, was to anchor U.S. leadership in post-Cold War Europe. This position was historic as the U.S.-led NATO had been consolidated on the European continent and fended off the Soviets during the Cold War by encouraging democratic reforms in undemocratic countries such as Portugal (see: Smith 2000a: 60).

Although it was not an official American foreign policy, U.S. officials conveyed the image to the CEECs that NATO was not a closed club— that the door was ajar. However, talk of NATO enlargement would have worked heavily against the withdrawal of Soviet-Russian forces from Eastern Europe and the consolidation of pro-American interests in the region (Goldgeier 2020: 148; INTVW6 2021; Mattox 2001: 17; Sayle 2019: 232-3).

Fearing European allies' resistance that could advantage the nascent EU, the Bush administration feigned a low profile and kept enlargement an internal research topic, instead portraying NATO as one amongst other organizations that could support democratic transition in the east.

The State Department circulated memos saying that a sequential enlargement could assist the democratic transition in Russia and expand the U.S. foothold in Europe (Sarotte 2021: 141-2; Sayle 2019: 238). Fears grew that ascending European frameworks could absorb NATO's tasks and marginalize the American voice in European affairs (Horowitz 2019: 80-1).

President Bush stressed, therefore, in an interview that “[t]he sole responsibility of the United States is to advance the cause of freedom, for which it has both the moral stature and the necessary means” (cit. in: Boniface 2000: 7).

This can be understood by considering the Bush-Scowcroft axis. Bush was a pragmatist and moderate conservative politician. He had risen through the ranks of the bureaucracy as an envoy to China, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Vice President. His greatest interest was foreign policy, preferring stability over bold changes and real things over abstract ideals.

Bush aspired to be a “hands-on” and pragmatic leader who makes informed decisions, reached in close consultations with national security advisors (Powaski 2019: 15-6). The important foreign policy theme of this political club was international stability.

Bush's most critical influence was, Brent Scowcroft, a former Air Force general who held a doctorate in international relations and believed in the dominant approach of the Cold War: realism. He argued for the U.S. to maintain global stability and to work with allies and international organizations to this end. He called this "enlightened realism" (2019: 17). American isolationism must not be repeated and the U.S. needed to keep its influence in Europe via NATO (Bush and Scowcroft 1999: 257). To maintain international stability, the administration should actively shape the foreign policies of others (Haass 2020).

This approach was reconfirmed in the 1991 Iraq intervention when Bush refrained from removing Saddam Hussein to prevent a power vacuum in the Middle East (2019: 50). Moreover, NATO's transformation and expanded role became inevitable after the Soviet Union disbanded. Bush explained that European institutions were not able to guarantee future stability in Europe. Only NATO could do so by becoming a "political instrument of European stabilization rather than one of military confrontation" (Bush and Scowcroft 1999: 294, 331). The administration saw it, therefore, as inevitable to open the alliance rather sooner than later by giving it a new political role (1999: 332; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 165, 167).

However, Bush's defeat in the 1992 presidential elections put eventually a temporary halt to enlargement considerations since the subsequent Clinton administration initially focused on domestic issues (Mattox 2001: 18; Shiffrinson 2023: 97, 100-1).

Along the transatlantic spectrum of NATO-as-field, and rooted in the successful continuation of NATO, the German-American partnership was pivotal concerning the East. The unified Germany had political weight and was a bridge to keep the Americans engaged in Europe (see: Sarotte 2021: 72). An early product of the strengthened partnership was the U.S.-German initiative for the establishment of the NACC (Mastny 2009: 214).

Both sides favored the export of democratic structures. Moreover, a great share of the German public and political elites were in favor of keeping the U.S. involved in Europe (Whiteneck 2001: 36).

However, Kohl initially suggested an early EU enlargement. He was deeply concerned with European integration and keeping good relations with Russia. Kohl viewed the prospect of EU eastern enlargement as less traumatic for the Russians and preventive of nationalist backslides in *Zwischeneuropa*, particularly so given the emerging ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia (Heisbourg 1992: 131; Kohl 2014: 42; Whiteneck 2001: 37).

Initiated in the 1950s, the tracks of European integration and transatlantic ties had historically been West German core concerns. Yet, given the slow formation of the EU, its inadequacy for hard security solutions, and the weakness of the CSCE to rein in the ravaging Yugoslav war (see: Heisbourg 1992: 134; Mastny 2009: 215), Kohl favored transatlantic ties.

He often told Western leaders to “get their harvest in before the coming storm”, meaning that the West must rush before the situation changed (Sarotte 2021: 13). However, Kohl had to rely on NATO to do so. Bush and Kohl were playing a “hard game” and controlling the venues through which the Alliance gained political relevance (Sarotte 2021: 144).

While Germany was only a lower middle-tier NATO member (see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670; Pouliot 2016: 234), the strategic alliance with NATO’s top leader increased Kohl’s influence on NATO matters. He did, therefore, envision a timely NATO expansion (see: Arora 2006: 107, 109). The strong U.S.-German cohesion would drive the transformation of the Alliance into an integrative actor. However, at the end of 1992, NATO was still not much more than a big “talk shop” (Mastny 2009: 216).

Europeanist positions

The Europeanist continuum in NATO was a largely antagonist one and dominated by France. Having withdrawn from NATO’s integrated military structure in 1966, the French allies sought to restrict the development of NATO and the NACC to promote their vision of an EC/CSCE-dominated security system (Colbourne 2023: 86).

The French made clear that NATO was not envisioned to be in the lead of eastern expansion. Struggles *between* institutions in European security (Villumsen-Berling 2015) related to struggles *within* institutions.

France did not necessarily want NATO to vanish but viewed the end of the Cold War as the chance to demote the Alliance to the military structures of 1949: “[...] with various European members of NATO, led by France, saying that the Soviet threat was fading away, America’s mission was over” (Kaufman 2002: 58, fn. 39).

The Americans complained that they wanted to “let NATO wither on the vine”, aiming to reduce American influence in Europe without openly saying so. The French pushed for a minimalist role of NATO that granted them strategic autonomy and a greater say in European security (Colbourne 2023: 88; see also: Horowitz 2019: 78). This was a contender attitude seeking to challenge the U.S. position in Europe (Boniface 2000: 6).

Talks with the Americans over a changed distribution of power in NATO broke down in 1991, fueling suspicion between both sides (see: Bush and Scowcroft 1999: 331-2; Menon 2000: 42). The problem was the intent to establish an autonomous France with a nuclear force on De Gaulle’s legacy while trying to edge closer to the EU and, only tentatively, to NATO (Cole 1994: 191; Krause 1995: 15).

Mitterrand feared that French strategic autonomy could be sacrificed “[...] within an Alliance subservient to an American-German axis” (Treacher 1998: 93). He advocated practices that contradicted a continuing NATO writ large by opposing a new political remit (Bozo 1998: 42). Mitterrand proposed on 31 December 1989 a pan-European confederation to the CEECs (Sarotte 2021: 80; also: Spohr 2019: 260).

While others often pointed to the paradoxical nature of French actions (see: Spohr 2019: 513), for the president of a continental nuclear power and a leading European integrationist, this approach appeared sensible. He, therefore, stressed: “I am not the type to be drawn into the [NATO] system” (cit. in: Boniface 1997: art. 12).

Underpinned by a relative position below the top tier in NATO (see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670; Pouliot 2016: 234), his policies expressed the confluence of personal perceptions and France's NATO position which challenged U.S. domination. This often forced the impression that Mitterrand "[...] was retrospective and of the wrong generation" (Treacher 1998: 93).

Unsurprising then that he stormed out of NATO's 1991 Rome summit infuriated by the idea that NATO would gain a political role (Menon 1995: 23). As Alistair Cole writes,

"[i]n the context of rapid change in international relations after 1989, Mitterrand seemed rather disoriented, unfamiliar with the emerging world order, and distrustful of the emerging nationalism in central and Eastern Europe. Faced with the challenge of uncertainty, Mitterrand appeared to favour the preservation of the status quo wherever possible, and revealed himself highly critical of the process of micro-state formation out of the ashes of the former USSR and Yugoslavia" (1994: 211).

The French posture did not change much beyond the Chirac presidency (Smith 2000b: 107-8; Treacher 1998: 94). Paradoxically, France promoted a materially devoid WEU as a new security framework (Mastny 2009: 214).

On these terms, Mitterrand was against NATO enlargement and the transformation into a political actor. His mistrust of the processes in eastern Europe and the preservation of the "fortress Europe" created an image of him as one of the last Cold War politicians (Cole 1994: 121; Sarotte 2021: 72). From his viewpoint, the EC/EU, and the CSCE (then OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation]), were sufficient to deal with the new context. Moreover, French politicians demanded that France disengage from NATO as a moribund Cold War organization (Gallis 2001: 59).

By saying that NATO should not be weakened and diluted by the CEECs, the U.K. aided the French (INTVW7 2021). The government appeared to have no clear vision for NATO beyond the *status quo* of membership and accepted in 1991 an Anglo-Italian proposal for a European defense framework (Garden 2001: 75-7; Heisbourg 1992: 134).

While plans for enlargement unnecessarily disturbed NATO, the German influence worried London the most (Arora 2006: 119). The Secretary of State for Defense, Malcolm Rifkind, said in early 1993 that London would oppose German proposals for opening NATO to new members (Weisser 1999: 38).

For the time being, other European NATO allies remained quiet, undecided about NATO's future, and reassessed their stance with the evolving context. However, they did not want to involve NATO in the eastern region (Carpenter 1994: 151). Since the post-Cold War world was initially thought to be peaceful, they supported European frameworks (Schake 1998: 381).

For instance, fearing debates over the historically contentious relationship with the U.S. and NATO, the Romano Prodi government in Italy preferred a widening role of European institutions (Menotti 2001: 93).

NATO-as-field has been dominated by these actors, their historic perceptions, and actions. In contexts such as NATO enlargement, intersubjective relations sparked symbolic struggles. While state actors' negotiations were a part (e.g., Bush and Scowcroft 1999: 231-2), struggles were characterized by discursive interventions and decision-making.

This was a matter of who set the tone inside of NATO. It was, moreover, a question of which security relationship ensured that post-Cold War challenges would be adequately met in the interest of the West writ large (see: Heisbourg 1992: 129). Using their resources at hand, the result was that in 1993 political actors emerged on the scene and proposed new security ideas, trying to win over Allies and to push decision-making.

3.3 The foundational struggle over the “whether”

In 1992, Western policymakers observed the changes in the East, the CEECs’ membership requests, and the onset of the Bosnian war in April. But NATO enlargement was still a theme rather not to be mentioned within NATO. Too different were ideas about NATO’s future. Even in domestic contexts of NATO members, such a topic produced rifts across governing coalitions (see: Rühle 2019: 220). In 1993, the debate shifted.

Particularly the disappointment with the NACC risked that the CEECs looked elsewhere for their security and undo the intended political agency of NATO (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 164-5). Despite the debate mostly referencing Russia, the question of the primary security framework in Europe, and who should enlarge first, was implicit.

While the new Clinton government entered 1993 slumbering on the enlargement question, one rather nondescript political actor pushed the door open to change NATO’s policy direction: German MoD Volker Rühle. This was to become a struggle over “whether” NATO could enlarge *at all*, that is, over Allies’ fundamental conceptions about what NATO could and should do concerning the East.

For Rühle, NATO enlargement was the solution to emerging security problems, and his intervention “[...] set the tone of the debate for the next five years” (Whiteneck 2001: 40). Rühle initiated the struggle to adapt the Alliance to geopolitical changes. It resulted in the turn of the Clinton administration and the initiation of the PfP.

The “Rühle intervention”

Explaining the processes of the year 1993, Rühle described himself as “neither shy nor insecure” (2019: 218). Pressing for NATO enlargement was thought to produce greater stability in Europe and to allow the CEECs a “delayed” integration into the EU through NATO as the primary security organization (Rühle and Weisser 2012). Rühle’s discursive intervention set the ball rolling.

It initiated the foundational struggle about “whether” to open the Alliance which also should transform fundamental perceptions in NATO. Rühle’s actions can, thereby, be understood with a look at the *habitus* concept.

Pursuing a U.S.-oriented agenda, Rühle was an Atlanticist for whom the unity of NATO enjoyed the utmost importance (see: Sarotte 2021: 180). In 1970, he left Hamburg University as an English/German teacher to teach in the U.S. before he became involved in German politics. He mistrusted the Soviets and supported dissidents’ struggle for freedom in the East (see: Oelze 2023). Rühle did not only feel entitled to speak up on the dormant enlargement topic because he was defense minister and state diplomat in the NAC in 1992.

He felt deeply responsible because, as a deputy leader of the Parliamentary Group of the CDU and expert for foreign policy and defense during the 1980s, he went through “formative experiences”. He traveled to Poland where he got into close contact with representatives of the *Solidarnosc* movement. The dissident and later Polish MoD, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, became his closest friend. After the German reunification, Rühle felt responsible for helping overcome the divisions in Europe for those people who, with their struggle against communist regimes, brought the Cold War to an end (2019: 220).

Due to the historic stability of Western democracies and the transformations in the CEECs, he identified the transatlantic region with stability and *Zwischeneuropa* with instability. Germany’s eastern border was therefore perceived as the new European dividing line, a security situation that needed to be avoided. When his CEEC friends approached him and said that only NATO could provide them with adequate security, Rühle advocated the “opening of NATO”, as he preferred to say (2019: 221).

Thus, Rühle represented a more confident and ambitious generation of German leaders who were not afraid to speak out on taboos. To strategize his vision, he grouped with his top advisor, Vice Admiral Ulrich Weisser, “one of Germany’s most fertile strategic minds” (Asmus 2004: 30-1). In 1977, Weisser drafted German chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s speech for the “Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture” that started the historic debate about Intermediate Nuclear Forces (“Euromissile debate”, INF).

Weisser prepared the “Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture” in London on 26 March 1993. This was to become a landmark speech, in the best interest of the U.S., and an international “wake-up call” concerning NATO enlargement. Rühle wanted to set “his own geopolitical mark” (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 174). This move, or position-takings, was logical as he used the opportunities of his NATO position that gave him access to venues where he could speak about security. He writes,

“I was concerned that Alliance discussions on the issue had become desultory [...] It was time to put the topic on the international agenda. I deliberately chose the IISS [International Institute for Strategic Studies] because it is a special place to give an important speech [...] I wanted my speech to have a historic background” (2019: 218-9).

While the frame of the IISS should render his intervention effective, Rühle initiated a discourse of NATO adaptation to “[...] a totally different political and strategic landscape” (Rühle 1995: 131). Drawing on U.S. symbolic capital, he invoked the partnership with the U.S. and responsibility for Europe and world peace. To accommodate these U.S. roles, NATO must transform (1995: 133), that is, accepting U.S. leadership and expanding NATO’s foothold in Europe.

Rühle reassured those in favor of European frameworks by bringing on the idea of a rapid NATO admission as a fundamental precondition for EU membership without which a common market and reconstruction were impossible. The EU needed to do its share for European unity, but NATO should come first.

As the international system would now be “a contest between the forces of integration and fragmentation”, the West had to stabilize the East before the East destabilized the West (1995: 135; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 174). Transitioning countries in the east were still potential sources of instability that should be met with a cooperative posture of NATO (Rühle 1995: 135-6).

The Alliance should lead the process from discourse to practice. Rühle said, “[...] we should now begin to discuss the issue of expanding the Alliance and actively conduct this debate in the appropriate Alliance fora” (1995: 137).

The speech caused bewilderment:

“[...] the body language and gestures of those representatives of the British ‘strategic community’ as well as that of the NATO Ambassadors in attendance signaled their skepticism if not outright open opposition to Rühle’s speech” (Asmus 2004: 32).

Enlargement talk was informal and members did not want to appear on the official agenda (Arora 2006: 108; Weisser 1999: 23). Kohl told Rühle to stay out of the enlargement debate (2019: 222; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 162, 168). Since Russian policymakers began to act as if Russia was a reborn great power, the topic stoked fears of a new conflict (Voigt 2019: 238).

Technically, Rühle did not have the position to press further ahead on the debate. Despite his historical orientations, Rühle’s credibility and position in the NAC were too weak to initiate NATO’s transformation without strong allies. He had to bypass official diplomacy and ring the bell in the U.S. by mobilizing capital and involving the American RAND corporation.

His political friend Karsten Voigt, one of the very first enlargement proponents, went to Santa Monica in June 1993 to push the debate further together with the experts Ron Asmus, Steve Larrabee, and Robert Blackwill (Voigt 2019: 247). RAND president James Thomson agreed to consider the German perspective. RAND’s influence consists of independent policy advice with which U.S. policymakers corroborate their positions (Medvetz 2015: 231).

Rühle knew his limits in NATO—even members of the German government considered it inappropriate to take the lead on the issue (Arora 2006: 111-12). He, therefore, mobilized social and economic capital: “[e]ssentially *I paid RAND to help me* do something that was against the foreign policy position of the United States. RAND was very courageous to work with me” (2019: 226; own emphasis).

Rühle wanted them to bring out influential studies about how to enlarge NATO and what was now envisioned as the “new NATO” to convince the allies whose voice eventually mattered (e.g., Asmus *et al.* 1993; INTVW7 2021). The result was a forceful call for enlargement that Washington indeed noticed (Sarotte 2021: 165; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 175).

The Clintonites and the French challenge

Coming into office in early 1993, U.S. President Bill Clinton inherited vast economic problems and declining domestic support for a pro-active foreign policy. Russian reforms remained a top priority, however. When the enlargement debate reached political circles in the U.S., simultaneous challenges by Russia and France emerged.

In terms of their shared dispositions, Clinton and “[...] the Clintonites [democratic politicians/supporters] used to talk pure Enlightenment, but with a heavy admixture of Intel and Internet” (Joffe 2001: 150).

Clinton himself was heavily inspired by Kennedy who he met in 1963. He liked him for “his youth, strength, and commitment to getting the country moving again” (see: Alter 1993; Clinton 2004: 36). Kennedy’s politics of freedom and democracy “embodied my hopes for my country and my belief in politics” (2004: 54).

These aspects formed the Clintonites’ political basis. Democracy ensured human rights, peace, and prosperity. Philosophically, they viewed democracy and human rights as universal and their expansion as “essentially preordained” (Joffe 2001: 150). Practically, the 200-year history of democratic principles bestowed a mission for which they needed to sustain U.S. primacy: domestic democratic values and international interests converged. Multilateralism, institutionalism, U.S. leadership in Europe, and partnership with Russia and Japan were the bone structure of that “mission” (2001: 151-2).

The Clintonites reaffirmed continuing U.S. dominance in NATO but with the difference of democratic outreach to the East instead of Bush’s strategic balance. However, at the beginning of the Clinton presidency, the NACC was viewed as sufficient for this purpose.

Clinton wanted Yeltsin’s political survival in post-Soviet Russia. Considering ample defense cuts by NATO members, a nascent Russian threat was best defused by supporting the country’s democratic reforms.

Ascending oligarchs, nationalist hardliners, inflation, or organized crime obstructed Yeltsin's attempts to construct a new system (Clinton 2004: 458). The U.S. leadership thus refrained from quickly pressing ahead with NATO enlargement (Arora 2006: 106; Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 170).

However, voices calling for enlargement grew louder in the summer of 1993. In April, Visegrád leaders had approached Clinton at the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington. They explained their motives for joining the Alliance, which impressed Clinton. The ongoing Bosnian war, the uncertainty about Russia's path, and the CEEC's precarious position in *Zwischeneuropa* induced him to reconsider the issue (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 175).

This involved Warren Christopher who felt confident concerning his influence and power: “[a]s secretary of state, I had the power to make many decisions of significance” (2001: 272). Christopher acknowledged NATO's past achievements, but he found that “the question of what NATO was supposed to be and do next was ripe for decision” (2001: 273). He knew the RAND study and argued that NATO should be preserved and expanded given a possible resurgent “Russian imperialism”.

Christopher suggested that NATO should strengthen democratic institutions, ensure the civilian control of armed forces, and attend to human rights in the CEECs (2001: 274). Most importantly, however, was that his position in NATO was underpinned by unquestioned and continuing U.S. power and leadership: “the other fifteen members of NATO looked to the United States for leadership, and our immediate guidance was necessary to set NATO's course” (2001: 272).

While the strong U.S. position and his dominant role in the NAC allowed Christopher to set enlargement on the agenda for early 1994, the U.S. still had to clarify its stance on the topic (2001: 273). At NATO's June 1993 Athens summit, Christopher indicated the willingness to enlarge NATO which should push the administration (Arora 2006: 128). Enlargement should be scheduled “at an appropriate time” (Christopher cit. in: Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 176).

French policymakers felt challenged and rolled out an initiative that should gently push the Americans to the “shores of the Atlantic” (see: Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 189, fn. 103). In June 1993, the neo-Gaullist Prime Minister Edouard Balladour and President Mitterrand presented the idea of a “Pact on Stability” amongst European nations to the European Council.

This post-Cold War initiative should promote the integration of the CEECs into Europe by creating stable relations between them. The initiative would have put the OSCE in the driver’s seat for the agreement’s implementation and monitoring and strengthened the newly established Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU (CFSP; Dunay and Zellner 1997: 300-1; Perry 1999: 252). Moreover, French campaigning aimed at convincing the CEECs of membership in the WEU and substantially delaying their accession to NATO (Weisser 1999: 38).

This grew out of a somewhat paradoxical French position. While initiatives should make room for a leadership role in continental Europe, they remained limited maneuvers due to the fear of a complete U.S. disengagement. French policymakers and their policies had not kept in step with the Cold War’s end. French national identity and the country’s international rank were still a reference to an international setting that had ceased to exist and abrogated the basis for French “exceptionalism”.

Serious questions about the largely nationalist defense policies had to be asked, especially concerning the *de facto* devaluation of nuclear weapons after the Cold War (Treacher 1998: 96). Since French initiatives did not speak to the new power realities and could not be bolstered by France’s past *splendeur*, a perennial phenomenon during the 1990s, documented references to the pact disappeared (see: Plantin 1999: 107).

The EU also realized that CEEC accession would be a long-term process as there was resistance by members such as Austria’s chancellor Franz Vranitsky. The EU was not ready to take the lead on eastern enlargement (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 733; Perry 1999: 253; Sarotte 2021: 173). Deprived of EU support and faced with U.S. dominance, French attempts to prevent NATO enlargement were historically logical but ineffective due to less capital in material, social, and symbolic terms. France had thus no leverage over NATO enlargement.

The U.S. was suspicious but remained committed to the partnership with Paris (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 189, fn. 103). President Clinton hailed efforts of European integration. However, he said, “[...] I want to emphasize that NATO remains key, and we are committed to it” (2022: 175). This reflected concerns “[...] that NATO might begin to wither away if it were *not* enlarged” (Smith 2000b: 119, *Italic by author*).

Eventually, the French initiative was out of tune with the prevailing structure of dominance in NATO which kick-started the Americans. Put differently, the hysteresis of French policymakers committed the Americans to the struggle over NATO enlargement. Clinton conceded, therefore, that the French initiative pressed NATO hard to come to terms with its “goals” and “nature” (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 175). In his conceptualization, any participation of the CEECs in European organizations needed to lead through the “gates of NATO” first (see: Weisser 1999: 38).

The U.S. turn towards opening NATO

Aware of Rühle’s intervention, Clinton’s national security advisor, Anthony (“Tony”) Lake, drew on ideas of an unstable East and mixed them with the democratic peace approach of the Clintonites. As he was key to the acceptance of NATO enlargement in the U.S., the modification of Rühle’s earlier discourse set the U.S. on the enlargement track in 1993. New threat perceptions became gradually accepted (see: Goldgeier 1998: 85). The U.S. turn towards opening NATO can largely be viewed in a relationship with the adoption of Rühle’s discourse. It was adopted because it resonated with the political orientations of the Clintonites such as the relationship between democracy and peace.

After his landmark speech, MoD Rühle enjoyed a higher standing in the “strategic community”, alongside Republican Senator Richard Lugar who defended Rühle’s approach. In May 1993, Rühle called in the NAC to admit the Visegrád group: “[t]o me, therefore, accession of new partners is not so much a question of ‘if,’ as one of ‘how’ and ‘when’” (cit. in: Arora 2006: 142).

With rising symbolic capital and support from the U.S., he could render the topic more relevant in the NAC. Rühle's intervention did "[...] recast the debate in a way that made it more difficult for critics to dismiss NATO enlargement as an idea that was not serious" (Asmus 2004: 33).

Except for the fact that he favored a far quicker membership of eastern states, the approaches of both the U.S. and German governments were congruent (see: Spiegel 1993; Weisser 1999: 45). Rühle conceded that they were the only members that were "enthusiastic" about enlargement (Carpenter 1994: 152).

However, he was also in agreement with the charismatic NATO Secretary-General, Manfred Wörner, who felt encouraged by his intervention (Arora 2006: 129). Wörner, a former CDU politician, had been German MoD when he stumbled over a scandal involving allegedly homosexual activities of a German general, considered a "security risk" at that time. Politically reborn as NATO SecGen in 1988, he enjoyed high trust and respect within the Alliance, particularly in Washington (Sarotte 2021: 54).

He "[...] came to NATO with exceptional military and defense credentials" and as an advocate of the transatlantic approach to NATO, including American missile deployments to Europe or higher European defense spending (Hendrickson 2006: 45). Wörner's pro-American stance was deeply rooted in his youth and the downfall of the Third Reich. He often shared his memories of U.S. troops liberating Germany and American soldiers handing him chewing gum as a gesture of friendship (Hendrickson 2004: 515).

Until 1993, Wörner acted as a relay concerning NATO enlargement—traveling to the CEECs and discussing their views with NATO governments. After Rühle's intervention, he adopted Rühle's phrasing for his speeches, and according to his capacity, favored enlargement on the NATO agenda. This signaled the organizational structure's support (Arora 2006: 138; Whiteneck 2001: 40).

The topic brought together Atlanticist policymakers who enjoyed top ranks in the NATO hierarchy, historically supported a strong NATO, and could reference America's unrivaled standing and material power.

The capital-rich coalition and the diminished French influence created the conditions for the Atlanticists to decide whether, when, and how NATO enlargement should happen. Rühle's discourse was, thereby, not simply adopted but enunciated from an authoritative position that drew on the overriding symbolic and material capital of American policymakers. *Vis-à-vis* the weaker position of European policymakers, the discourse multiplied.

In September 1993, Tony Lake used it in an influential speech titled "From Containment to Enlargement" at Johns Hopkins University in which he proposed to promote democracy and market economies abroad (Goldgeier 1998: 87). Like Rühle, the means of his position were mostly discursive which, however, outlined an emerging consensus on NATO enlargement.

Lake was an influential foreign policy expert, central to the development of U.S. human rights policy and NATO enlargement. In 2019, Lake explained that rights became important when he learned as a boy about the Holocaust and was "merciless bullied" at school because he was younger and smaller than everyone else. These experiences formed "[...] a hatred of bullies and oppression of various kinds" (Stahl 2019: 2). At the end of the 1950s, while studying at Harvard University, he became a supporter of Kennedy's visions of America's global role and democracy promotion.

He recalled that "[...] America was going to be promoting democracy and good around the world and do so in an assertive way. That was very exciting" (2019: 5). When he became Clinton's advisor, it was his moment. He said that "[t]he President is "decisive." But it was a great chance to have some influence" (2019: 33).

NATO enlargement and the peaceful promotion of democracy fit squarely with his dispositions. He agreed to the notion that "back in the 1990s NATO was a human rights project" (2019: 35). Expanding Rühle's discourse was thus both self-evident and facilitated NATO's turn according to American visions.

In his speech, Lake said, therefore, that "the successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement— enlargement of the world's free community of market democracies" (Lake 1993: second intro page, original document).

Drawing on the Clintonite “philosophy”, he stressed that “[w]e see individuals as equally created with a God-given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (1993: 3). These rights are universal (ibid.). This justified the promotion of democratic freedoms and markets globally and the engagement with allies and partners across multiple international cooperation frameworks.

Similar to Rühle, who stressed the potential of instabilities elsewhere to destabilize the West, places with no or unstable democratic freedoms were declared as affecting U.S. security interests (1993: 4, 8-10). Given that threats such as regional conflicts linger on abroad, and not all regions accomplish a transition to democracy, the “line between foreign and domestic policy has evaporated” (1993: 3-4). American interests are to be defended globally while American (military) power and authority provide “unparalleled opportunities to lead” around the world (1993: 4).

For this reason, the U.S. “[...] strategy must be to help democracy and markets expand and survive in other places where we have the strongest security concerns and where we can make the greatest difference” (1993: 8).

Lake emphasized that NATO’s “[...] members must commit themselves to updating NATO's role in this new era” and “assume a broader role” —otherwise “[...] it will lose public support, and all our nations will lose a vital bond of transatlantic and European security” (ibid.). The 1994 summit would update NATO and interlink the enlargement of market democracies with collective security (ibid.). Thus, Lake’s discourse asserted that rising global challenges required American leadership and democracy promotion by acting through a transforming NATO to protect U.S. interests.

Following the speech, Wörner told Warren Christopher that the task of NATO is to anchor the countries in the eastern neighborhood “once and for all in the Alliance” and that Russia needed to be included (cit. in: Weisser 1999: 44). Lake’s discourse resonated with NATO and the U.S. government, gained consent on core premises, and created the conditions for pro-enlargement decisions. However, there were anxieties about stoking resentment in Russia with the global democracy approach (Sarotte 2021: 171-2, 174).

The PfP track

To accommodate these concerns, the SACEUR, General John Shalikashvili, developed a model that offered partnering nations some form of practical affiliation with NATO. The “Partnership for Peace” was one track with which the CEECs should become integrated into NATO structures sooner or later.

There was no credible challenge to U.S. concepts after the summer of 1993. Clinton announced on 18 October that “[...] he had decided to put NATO on a course toward gradual expansion, with the Partnership for Peace serving as a first step for some nations to achieve full NATO membership” (Christopher 2001: 276).

The PfP was more concerned with building a U.S.-directed security architecture than being a fast track for membership (Arora 2006: 130). The idea was that former Warsaw Pact states should first “[...] get some NATO mud on their boots before they received the alliance’s all-important Article 5 guarantee” (Sarotte 2021: 174). Consultations with NATO without Article 5 security guarantees were the PfP’s central mechanism. Signatories would learn about military activities such as peacekeeping. On the systemic side, countries needed to establish transparent and democratic defense sectors (Kruzel 1996: 29-30).

Hosted by R uhe, the 20-21 October 1993 meeting of NATO defense ministers in Travem nde, Germany, disclosed the PfP concept to the whole of Alliance members. At Travem nde, there was no French challenge anymore. The Americans had the (symbolic) power to instantiate their enlargement version.

MoD Fran ois Leotard, who was directly invited by R uhe, stayed away from the meeting because Mitterrand prevented him from attending (Menon 2000: 48; Zumach 1993). Given the ”failed attempts to ‘Europeanise’ the alliance”, France had to endorse the PfP and the philosophy behind it (Fortmann *et al.* 2010: 2-3).

The Americans made clear that the Alliance would not enlarge right away but would also not stay a closed club (Spiegel 1993). SecGen W rner bridged the remaining gaps between the Allies, ensuring that there were no “misunderstandings” (Asmus 2004: 52).

Backed by American power, Wörner announced facts. Thus, Wörner said at the end of the session:

“If I understand this discussion correctly, we can all agree that PFP is a wonderful thing, which can also serve as a mechanism to prepare new members for membership in NATO.” Full stop! Meeting is adjourned” (interview with Weisser, cit. in: Arora 2006: 144).

The program started a process that committed partners to NATO over several years and enabled the Alliance to revisit the question of membership later. The SACEUR stressed, “[i]t is useful to remember that we are talking so much less today about whether extension of the alliance [should take place], but so much more about how and when” (cit. in: Goldgeier 1998: 93).

During his visit to Europe in mid-January 1994, President Clinton affirmed that European security cannot be assured if the East remains engulfed in turmoil. The answer would have to be the integration of democracies, their economies, and militaries (Apple 1994).

Drawing on Lake’s ideas, he declared that “[t]he threat to us now is not of advancing armies so much as of creeping instability. [...] If democracy in the East fails, then violence and disruption from the East will once again harm us and other democracies” (cit. in: Goldgeier 1999: 55).

Finally, he added that the Partnership for Peace “[...] sets in motion a process that leads to the enlargement of NATO” (ibid.). He told the Visegrád leaders on January 11 in Prague “[...] that now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how” (Peters and Woolley 2021: 41-2).

NATO's political transformation

The PfP inaugurated a formal policy of opening NATO by making clear that the Alliance would inevitably expand at some point. It solved the puzzle of “whether” the Alliance could enlarge at all and thus ascribed new capabilities to NATO: it can enlarge by preparing interested partners for an Alliance membership. The PfP’s officialization by Clinton and the 1994 Brussels summit declaration, which confirmed the opening, ensured that this was the position to which NATO members subscribed (NATO 1994). NATO was to become a political actor.

The Alliance turned its back on Cold War containment to embrace enlargement through the promotion of democratic principles. As Pentagon expert, Joseph Kruzel, stressed, “[i]n the new, post-Cold War world, NATO can be an alliance based on shared values of democracy and the free market” (Kruzel 1995: 341).

This expressed a newfound sense of what is possible for NATO. The PfP engaged with Russia by offering it a partnership as well. This means that states without membership perspectives also became cooperation partners (see: Carpenter 1994: 151). Dividing lines in Europe were to be abolished and differences between countries as a consequence of enlargement were treated as “contours” (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 735).

While a second track was created by cooperating with Russia, the assurance that enlargement should not take place until after the Russian and U.S. elections in 1996 secured Russian consent to the PfP (Goldgeier 1998: 97). Russian perceptions on enlargement is a theme that is still important today (INTVW6 2021).

At the beginning of 1994, the policy of opening NATO was thus decided, and the Americans mapped out what was envisioned as the future dominant way of doing things. While Russia should be dealt with cooperatively, the CEECs should be prepared for membership. At some point, this double track would lead to NATO enlargement. This policy integrated new threat perceptions. As democratic transitions can fail, countries in the process of developing their democracies were viewed as sources of instability that potentially affect the security of NATO Allies (NATO 1991b).

To ensure that their democratization process cannot be reversed or fall prey to anti-democratic and nationalist sentiments, NATO was transformed into an integrative actor that reaches out to enlarge the community of democracies. The Alliance became regarded “as an expert guide” (Gheciu 2005: 5).

In Europe, a U.S.-directed security system was to be installed with a continuing and expanding NATO at the barycenter (Goldgeier and Shiffrinson 2023: 8-10; see also: Steinberg and Gordon 2001). Dynamics within NATO were thus at the root of changes in international security.

Framing the Alliance in terms of democracy promotion normatively delimited NATO’s discourse and practice but, hypothetically, set no end to NATO enlargement. The philosophy behind the policy of opening NATO and the PfP was then that all states with a democratic system are potential Alliance members.

For the Russia-track, it led to the signing of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and cooperative practices to address Russia’s geopolitical concerns. For the CEECs, it introduced a range of democratic defense practices with which they had to prove their qualification for NATO membership. Simultaneously, practices became endowed with a meaning that I will discuss in Chapter 5.

3.4 Conclusion

The decision to enlarge NATO through the initiation of the double track of the PfP and the cooperative engagement with Russia was a result of struggles between actors within NATO. These struggles initiated one side of what Zbigniew Brzezinski called NATO’s “double enlargement” (Biermann 2009).

The dynamic interplay between historical context and actors’ dispositions produced divergent perceptions of the structural changes after the Cold War and NATO’s role vis-à-vis these changes. Actors such as German MoD Rühle came to the fore and asserted their vision of NATO enlargement with the means that their position in NATO offered them.

Although no one denied the need to extend western reach to *Zwischeneuropa*, the question that lingered was concerning the framework to achieve this first. While, for instance, French proposals sought to enhance French leadership through European frameworks, the U.S. wanted to remain engaged in Europe through NATO's leading role.

For the Americans, French initiatives were out of tune with the structure of dominance in the field which engaged them in the struggle for NATO enlargement. The powerful advocacy coalition between Rühle, the Clintonites, and Wörner as well as the EU's protracted formation process—itsself “riven by intractable political conflicts” (Bradford 2000: 15) supported NATO as the premier framework for enlargement. If NATO should survive, this political task needed to be assumed before the EU.

Finally, the PfP introduced a policy change through a U.S.-led program that was able to promote democratic peace in Europe and engage and integrate Russia and the CEECs at the same time. It integrated new threat perceptions about the destabilizing effects of democratic transitions in the East.

For this to happen, the Atlanticists created an authoritative discourse on NATO enlargement which was underpinned by their materially dominant position and symbolic authority in NATO. Considering weaker French influence and failed attempts to diminish NATO in Europe, the Atlanticist discourse could become effective and provide the conditions for pro-enlargement decisions.

Yet, French challenges in NATO remained. This did not change with the 1995 Chirac presidency. However, while it had to come to terms with a powerful and transforming NATO after 1993/94, it sought to challenge the Americans by different means (Treacher 1998: 102).

In 1996, the French pushed for a European commander of the NATO headquarters in Naples (see chapter 6). In French eyes, the SACEUR was not only simply an American commander. He represented “[...] the dominance of the Americans over NATO” (Menon 2000: 209, fn. 38). French maneuvers in NATO were anathema to the Americans: “[f]or years, U.S. officials had groaned at the maneuvering and political horse-trading so much a part of life in the European Union” (Gallis 2001: 62).

Given that international security was too sensitive to be subject to backroom deals, many NATO decision-makers viewed French practices as out of tune with what should be normal within NATO (ibid.). This would resurface in the periodic rifts over bringing in members' preferred candidates for the process of NATO enlargement, which I will discuss in Chapter 6.

Divergent perceptions have thus remained a source of struggles within NATO during the twenty years of NATO's post-Cold War adaptation. As I will show in Chapter 4, this was true for the struggle over going "out of area" which from 1993-1995 shaped another side of NATO's "double enlargement".

Chapter 4

The struggle over NATO's military intervention in Bosnia

While NATO continued after the Cold War, Alliance members were divided on what to do with the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), a multi-ethnic country in the East Bloc that slowly descended into a bloody disintegration process.

Beginning in April 1992, the Bosnian War became a particularly grim example of the Yugoslav disintegration process. The excessive violence in Bosnia and the outright contempt for the values of the international community endangered the peaceful end of the Cold War. As Jamie Shea conceded, against the backdrop of the democratization processes in the east, NATO succumbed to the optimistic assessment that all former communists wanted to become democrats. Alliance members simply underestimated that communism could transmute into hard-headed nationalism (NATO 2013).

Considering the violence, the question of the premier security framework for conflict resolution became a key topic that strained relations between NATO Allies. This was underpinned by their fundamentally divergent approaches to crisis resolution.

From 1991 to 1993, NATO was in a state of “purposelessness” where “[...] it was difficult to envisage NATO intervening due to the strong belief that it was a collective defense organization which could not act legitimately “out of area” (INTVW4 2021).

Despite NATO's declaration that it “[...] must be capable of responding to [...] risks if stability in Europe and the security of Alliance members are to be preserved” (NATO 1991a: art. 8), it remained a light booster of other organizations' responses to crisis management (CSCE) and peacekeeping (WEU, UN) until 1995. This showed that the crisis management function was not backed by NATO members (see: Behnke 2013: 136; INTVW4 2021).

Nevertheless, the continuing war and the ineptitude of the international community to resolve it, eventually shifted pressures on NATO to reconsider its role. Around that time, the expression “NATO must go out of area or it will go out of business” emerged (Asmus *et al.* 1993: 31; Behnke 2013: 138).

Finally, NATO’s powerful military intervention ended the war in Bosnia in September 1995. While European frameworks proved unable to stop the war, NATO’s post-Cold War military operations became something like a *Deus ex machina*. NATO initiated a policy change and used military force to stop the inter-ethnic carnage.

This policy change marked a shift from the belief that NATO could not go out of area to the conviction that it must go out of area. The Allies realized the uniqueness of NATO’s military capital (INTVW4 2021). NATO’s Bosnia intervention changed the perception that the Alliance can do more than analyze or conceive strategies—it can successfully implement results because it possesses unique military capabilities (NATO 2013: 45:30 et seq.).

However, like NATO’s Eastern enlargement, the policy change was a result of foundational struggles between the Allies that enabled a series of decisions. They changed fundamental perceptions, that is, the belief that NATO cannot act “out of area”, which I consider as a change of the field’s doxa. Struggles followed different interpretations of the Bosnian War which shaped the Allies’ positions on NATO’s role in the conflict. Policymakers had very different ideas about who should become involved in European security and how so.

What observers termed as “NATO’s crisis over Bosnia” (e.g., Thies 2009: 276) were symbolic struggles over what NATO was and what it could/should do. As Joyce Kaufman writes, “there was serious debate within NATO as to what its own role should be, peacekeeping or traditional role of defense” (2002: 73). Bosnia became a matter of survival for NATO (Holbrooke 1998: 206).

My argument is that foundational (symbolic) struggles within NATO from 1993-95 were at the core of the turn towards a military interventionist policy that reestablished NATO as a powerful military alliance. These struggles revalued NATO's military capital and installed NATO as the military actor in post-Cold War Europe.

First, I will lay out the context. The declarations of independence of the former Yugoslav republics led to the cataclysmic Bosnian war in 1992. Second, I will engage with the different positions of the U.S. and the European Allies, represented by key policy-makers, during the initial phase of the war. I consider these positions as historically constituted and consequential for the different approaches to the war.

Third, I will discuss the beginning of NATO's involvement in ex-Yugoslavia, from the Oslo decision to the protection of UN forces. However, this cannot be presented divorced from the critical interventions of Secretary-General Manfred Wörner whose historic approach and leadership were instrumental in initiating struggles and facilitating piecemeal change in NATO.

Fourth, I will engage with the turnaround of the Clinton administration and the struggles between NATO Allies that followed from the different conceptions of conflict resolution in Bosnia. Fifth, I will present the 1995 "Srebrenica massacre" as a tipping point where a galvanizing threat to NATO reemerged and made united military action possible by which the Bosnian war ended.

Finally, I will engage with the role of SecGen Willy Claes who, through his "theatric diplomacy", facilitated those actions by which U.S. leadership in NATO became eventually reinstated and NATO consummated an interventionist policy change in Bosnia.

4.1 The disintegration of Yugoslavia

The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia (consisting of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro) presented an international context for Alliance practitioners through which they defined the future of NATO as a post-Cold War military actor.

The death of the leader Josip Broz Tito in 1980, an exacerbating economic situation, and the ending Cold War gradually destroyed the foundations of the multi-ethnic country. The federal system began to collapse with the election of nationalist leaders in Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia (Thies 2009: 273). The country spiraled into violence.

The first coordinated military action of the Belgrade-commanded national army ensued with the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia on 25 June 1991. This resulted in the Slovenian War which was followed by the outbreak of hostilities in Croatia.

The greater concern of Belgrade was not merely the breakaway of the formerly associated republics but to keep the Serbs living across Slovenia and Croatia in rump-Yugoslavia under the leadership of President Slobodan Milosevic, elected in May 1989.

The first mass killings by Serb units were reported on 26 July 1991 and were followed by atrocities in other Croat regions. This was accompanied by offensives of the army and Croat government forces (Calic 2019: 297-8). The emergence of “ethnic cleansing” in Croat regions and the labeling of other ethnicities as a threat to “greater Serbia” was a new expulsion strategy and made the actions of Serb forces an international concern (see: Frantzen 2005: 22).

At that time, the international community had few tools to resolve internal state crises. International law was ambiguous, and contradictions arose from people’s right to self-determination vis-à-vis the principle of state sovereignty. However, the process of state decomposition and the cycles of violence became a profound “political dilemma” that did not need legal but pragmatic approaches to its resolution (Calic 2019: 298).

Because the EC lacked experience and capacities, the UN became involved, and the international community mediated ceasefires that were continuously broken (see: Smith 2000b: 133). Finally, the UN envoy Cyrus Vance brokered in January 1992 a truce, and a United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was deployed to Serb areas in Croatia (Calic 2019: 299).

While the Bosnian government understood what it meant to remain in Milosevic-Yugoslavia, it requested recognition of independence on 20 December 1991 (Weller 1992: 591). Developments in multi-ethnic Bosnia (Serbs, Croats, Muslims) went further than in Croatia. In January 1992, the Bosnian Serbs declared to establish “an independent Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina” (ibid.). It became clear that any attempt to restructure multi-ethnic Bosnia along ethnic lines would involve a coercive expulsion of people (O’Shea 2005: 28).

This resulted in a shooting at a Serb wedding in Sarajevo on March 1. Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic took the opportunity to call to arms (2005: 29). Following other incidents, the war in Bosnia broke out in April 1992. The years of inter-ethnic violence (1992-95) were accompanied by attempts by the international community to negotiate peace in Bosnia.

Yet, the international efforts to halt the violence reached its boundaries at the intractable animosities of Bosnia’s ethnic groups. Prolonging the war, negotiations failed, and ceasefires were broken. The international community presaged spill-over effects and the destabilization of international security (see: Shea 1999: 10).

During 1991-92, the Allies converged on the question of keeping NATO out of Yugoslavia. Their differences revolved around different approaches short of NATO. However, struggles to reverse NATO’s marginalization in ex-Yugoslavia emerged in 1993.

The constellation and interests of Atlanticists and Europeanists produced conservative versus subversive dynamics in NATO, that is, an auxiliary versus an independent role in Bosnia, succeeding pessimists versus optimists in 1991/92.

As Jamie Shea says, “[w]e were on the sidelines because essentially we had profound political differences in our analysis of the fall of Yugoslavia” (NATO 2013: 8:21). In the following, I will explore the positions of the NATO Allies that provided the basis for struggles over NATO’s marginal role, especially the protagonists, the U.S., France, and the UK.

4.2 Interpretations of the Balkan Context

Considering the problem of how to maintain security in the post-Cold War world, the Yugoslav wars called once more the relationship between Americans and Europeans into question. As Derrek Chollet writes, the events in former Yugoslavia “[...] spoiled the hopes of many for a new Europe and a transformed U.S.-European relationship” (2005: 1).

For many European NATO members, Yugoslavia was a chance to idealistically define their common defense identity rather than building the capacity to implement it. For the Americans, the Yugoslav Wars were considered a European problem without letting the Europeans get too strong on it if NATO was to remain the center of European security (Lindley-French 2015: 64-5).

Concerning Yugoslavia, the Atlanticist and Europeanist poles within NATO were divided into pessimists and optimists which translated their stances into action versus non-action. While the U.S. put forward a gloomy analysis to end the war by intervention, European NATO members such as Germany, France, and the U.K. believed that the international community had the power, even if limited, to resolve the crisis (NATO 2013: 13:28 et seq.).

The Atlanticist position

When violence in Yugoslavia erupted, the U.S. George H. Bush administration was largely preoccupied with the fallout of the Cold War. The German unification or Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait ranked high on the list of foreign policy priorities. Yugoslavia received less attention because the government did not anticipate the way things developed (Chollet 2005: 1). Intervening in Yugoslavia was not envisioned.

The administration was against the breakup of the country because it feared that Yugoslavia served as an example for separatist forces in other eastern countries (Glaurdic 2011: 78; Szczesio 2014: 229). Yugoslavia’s continued unity was connected to U.S. demands for democratization, the preservation of human rights, and the prevention of the use of force in the republics (Touval 2002: 17).

This position developed in the 1980s. The Reagan initiative “laid the foundation for a defining feature of US grand strategy in the post-Cold War era” by linking democratic norm promotion to U.S. foreign policy. As human rights and democracy were on the agenda of successive U.S. administrations, it was also a great concern of the George H. Bush administration (see: Asmus and Vondra 2005: 206).

Democratization was viewed as curing all ailments that the downfall of communism had left. However, while the administration provided verbal support for the continuation of the SFRY, it left it mostly to the Europeans to play an active role (Szczesio 2014: 231; Touval 2002: 17).

In 1991, Foreign Secretary, James Baker, traveled to Belgrade to prevent a bloodbath, presaging the country’s violent disintegration. The visit feigned some sort of U.S. action in a situation that was perceived as relatively hopeless (Mulchinock 2017: 15). Baker merely came with a reminder about human rights and democracy (Touval 2002: 28-9).

Baker was not a born foreign diplomat and was influenced by the policy experts Lawrence Eagleburger and Brent Scowcroft. Both had served as career diplomats in Yugoslavia during the 1970s and held a cynical view of the country and its ethnic relations (Baker and Glasser 2020: 530). Baker appreciated Eagleburger for his loyalty, extraordinary intelligence, and mental acuity. Others criticized his sympathy for Serbia (Hodgson 2011).

The foreign policy triumvirate viewed the Balkans through a pessimistic but popular narrative that portrayed the region as a historically backward space ruled by ancient ethnic hatred and violence (Hansen 2006: 85). The area was “[...] an abstract symbol of the violence and instability that supposedly is a consequence of the mixture of heterogeneous nationalities in one region” (Tuathail 1999: 115).

In September 1992, Eagleburger said that “[u]ntil the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it” (cit. in: Panic 2015: art. 4). The narrative justified to stay out of the collapsing SFRY. Involvement in the insoluble conflict would have overstretched American resources.

Moreover, this approach bore Scowcroft's "enlightened realism" imprint (Chapter 3) and, deliberately or otherwise, supported Serbia. From this viewpoint, weakening Serbia would have destabilized international security as much as Saddam Hussein's removal would have. Domestic matters were left to the Serb government and state sovereignty was largely viewed as inviolable.

While Baker, therefore, declared that the U.S. had "no dog in the fight", that is, little interest in resolving the process of state dissolution given that the EC was taking responsibility (Szczesio 2014: 232).

Acting through NATO as a credible deterrent, at least against the inter-ethnic carnage, was therefore ruled out. Bush shared Baker's view saying, "[w]e're not doing contingency planning" [...] "[w]e're not thinking of intervening" (cit. in: Baker and Glasser 2020: 531). Baker told Bush that NATO would not become involved but, instead, the CSCE. When Scowcroft asked Baker what the CSCE should do, Baker replied: "nothing" (ibid.).

The non-interventionist approach of the U.S. closed the door on a role for NATO in the Yugoslav wars and contradicted the position it had consolidated after the Cold War. The U.S. had become the only superpower. Moreover, the U.S.-German partnership reconfirmed NATO's continuation and American power. Accordingly, "America would assume the role of the world gendarme. It was expected by the allies and partners of Washington" (Kiwerska cit. in. Szczesio 2014: 229).

What, however, the Bush administration in 1991/92 demonstrated did neither do justice to the role of the "world gendarme" nor its leadership in NATO. Baker said in a press conference on Yugoslavia: "there will be no unilateral use, unilateral use of United States force. As we have said before, we are not and we cannot be the world's policeman" (BBC 1995: -1:37:42).

It was decided that "[...] NATO, in the post-Cold War era, would not become involved in "out of area" commitments, particularly those in areas of no strategic significance" (Bradford 2000: 19-20; also: Mulchinock 2017: 14).

Until 1992, Eagleburger and Scowcroft (and Baker) directed the U.S. foreign policy outlook on Yugoslavia. The approach was a mix of their first-hand experiences in Yugoslavia, the resulting historical perceptions, and the prevalent “enlightened realism” of the administration. International stability, state power, and state sovereignty were the credos. This led to a situation where U.S. policymakers’ inaction contradicted their strength in NATO and the opportunities of their position. A loss of accumulated credibility and power was possible.

However, the administration was not hopeful about their European allies and their approaches to end the Yugoslav conflagration either. Eagleburger said, “[t]hey will screw it up” [...] “and this will teach them a lesson” (cit. in Simms 2002: 84). The military approach required unanimity which was hard to get in 1991/92.

Europeanist positions

European NATO Allies favored diplomatic interventions in the war by European institutions which suggested no role for NATO. Even Lord Peter Carrington, chairman of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, former NATO SecGen as well as UK foreign secretary, omitted references to NATO and bet on peace talks (Mulchinock 2017: 17). European governments were largely on par in Yugoslavia by promoting the UN and political solutions.

In 1991, Luxembourg’s foreign minister, Jacques Poos, declared that “[t]his is the hour of Europe—not the hour of the Americans....If one problem can be solved by the Europeans, it is the Yugoslav problem” (cit. in Glaurdic 2011: 178).

The European NATO pole was optimistic that something could be done about the violence in the neighborhood but that this should be achieved by political means short of military enforcement. The roots of this approach lay in taken-for-granted beliefs about NATO.

After the Cold War, most NATO members doubted if NATO could act “out of area” since it was not more than a collective defense pact and coordination forum (INTVW4 2021). Although NATO could conduct crisis management, enshrined in the 1991 strategic concept, these doubts lingered on (see: Bush and Scowcroft 1999: 551; Clarke 1993: 25). They expressed a contemporary field doxa that prevented Alliance members from grasping opportunities after the Cold War (given NATO’s well-functioning military machinery).

In confluence with European policymakers’ dispositions and their hierarchical position in NATO, taken-for-granted beliefs about the Alliance charged their approaches to Yugoslavia, stagnated the Alliance, and possibly withered it someday. They promoted the UN as the legitimate international crisis manager, and the EC/EU as a diplomatic vehicle. Turning away from offensive NATO actions in Yugoslavia was perceived as natural and legitimate. Given American indifference, European approaches dominated Bosnia and, despite their relative power, tilted the NATO hierarchy to their advantage.

To provide an outlook, as of 1993, these approaches were transmuted into symbolic struggles. The Atlanticist spectrum vied against entrenched ways of perceiving NATO. At the core, it was a struggle to replace the doxa that charged European approaches and threatened to wither NATO. Since most European members followed the dominant approach to Yugoslavia (diplomacy and UNPROFOR peacekeeping, e.g., Denmark, Holland) as the European great powers, I will explore France and the UK as representative cases.

France

Believing in the ethnic hate thesis and the containing functions of the Yugoslav federal system, French President Mitterrand conceived of three lines of action in Yugoslavia. First, a politically negotiated compromise. Second, humanitarian assistance. And third, the deployment of UN peacekeepers (Canivez 1997: 177).

German Foreign Minister Genscher created the conditions for a central UN role in Yugoslavia. He stressed that diplomacy should produce peace before peacekeeping forces entered the country—upon approval of the warring parties (Genscher 1995: 927, 939, 945).

On 23 December 1991, Germany recognized the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. This political move should internationalize the conflict, deter further Serbian action, and strengthen the breakaway republics. Importantly, this made the UN the custodian of security in the Western Balkans and provided the grounds for France and other Europeans to act on behalf of the UN (see: Szczesio 2014: 236).

France also supported the WEU as a military framework in Yugoslavia since any functional expansion of NATO was viewed as U.S. hegemony. Concerns about expansive U.S. interests related to understandings of NATO as a traditional defense alliance. Developing European security structures was consequential (Meimeth 1997: 85). Self-sufficiency was realized by French participation in maritime WEU- missions to monitor UN sanctions in the Adriatic Sea. More generally, this drew on the opportunities of the French challenger position as a continental nuclear power that traditionally desired strategic autonomy.

These desires, which rendered more self-sufficient practices (e.g., refusal to participate in NATO's new Rapid Reaction Force) for France's political leadership rather logical, strongly interacted with the limits President Mitterrand perceived for NATO. As he said in 1991,

“[i]t is simply a question of knowing the limits of the Atlantic Alliance and its military organization -the limits of its competence and its geographical area- in order to understand that Europe should not miss any opportunity to endow itself with a common policy, and, accordingly, a common defense” (cit. in: Boniface 1997: art. 8, also: art. 9, 11).

Concerning the SFRY, France deployed the strongest UN peacekeeping force. It was optimistic that a truce could be negotiated and that peace, as well as humanitarian assistance, could be implemented by the “Blue Helmets”. Paris even believed that UN forces could reverse the situation on the ground (Touval 2002: 94). As Frédéric Bozo writes, “France's reading of the nature and origins of the Yugoslav crisis in its early phase left little, if any room for a NATO role” (1998: 45).

It, therefore, set itself atop a Yugoslavia policy that was largely that of the UN while French policymakers became “[...] active supporter[s] of the UN revitalization that led to an increasing role of the organization in the field of conflict management” (Canivez 1997: 177; cit.: Tardy 2014: 774). The subscription to the UN should thereby not only prove that NATO’s functions beyond collective defense in the “Article 5 territory” were not required, but also succumbed to a dominant historic perception.

For France, but also Britain, “Yugoslavia was remembered as a valiant ally in the Second World War, and Serbia as an ally in the first” (Bennett 1995: 31; Canivez 1997: 182; Mulchinock 2017: 24; cit.: Touval 2002: 30). Paris did not accept Serbian responsibility and aggression. It looked for the reasons for the Yugoslav collapse in the ancient ethnic strife thesis while avoiding riling the Serbs to make negotiations happen (Canivez 1997: 178, 188).

President Mitterrand fell prey to Serb propaganda that, amongst other things, played on the historic relations between Ante Pavelić’s Croatia and Nazi Germany—implying aggression and brutality on the side of the Croats (coupled with personal experiences in World War II). He, therefore, failed to differentiate between aggressor and defender (1997: 179-80). The strategy of deploying impartial “Blue Helmets”, providing humanitarian assistance, and negotiations provided the opportunity to reconfirm French influence in Europe (see: Bozo 1998: 47).

Mitterrand’s position in NATO was underpinned by such interpretations, rejection of U.S. hegemony, and France’s relative strength as nuclear power slightly below the upper tier (see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670; Pouliot 2016: 234). Critical was that France possessed deployable military capabilities like the *Légion Étrangère*.

NAC diplomats such as MoD Joxe and Foreign Minister Dumas shared Mitterrand’s perceptions. They advocated American containment and independent European defense, eschewing NATO’s supremacy (see: Gow 1991: col. 2; Palmer 1991: col. 1). French actions aimed, thereby, at achieving greater independence and reducing NATO to early defense functions. As *The Guardian* stated, “France will also justify its unilateral action [in Yugoslavia] as proving that Europe need not and should not have to follow American leadership” (Palmer 1992: col. 4).

French interest in NATO actions did thus not arise which was underpinned by perceptions that NATO could not engage security threats (Palmer and Münster 1991: col. 4). The confluence of entrenched beliefs about NATO, historic animosities concerning the U.S., and French relative capabilities, created the conditions for the UN deployment to Yugoslavia (the *Légion* was deployed).

Britain

The UK went even further in preventing things from happening. As Brendan Simms writes, “[r]ight from the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, Britain sought to sabotage any kind of international political – and later military – intervention to curb Serb aggression and ethnic cleansing” (2002: 34). The position of British foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, grouped the UK around the Europeanist pole. Britain should help negotiate a peace agreement between the warring parties and send a UN peacekeeping force.

At a meeting of EC foreign ministers in September 1991, Hurd brushed aside the consideration of sending military forces to Croatia “[...] and with it all thoughts of wider military intervention in Yugoslavia” (Bennett 1995: 175). He stressed in a parliamentary debate that “[t]he proposition has always been that a peace-keeping force should enforce and keep a ceasefire which already existed. That remains the position [...]” (Hansard 2023d).

Hurd was described as “Rolls-Royce” amongst foreign secretaries: as having expertise, being a “civilised figure in an uncivilised world”, educated at Eton College and Cambridge. In short, he was “[...] a foreign secretary whose diplomatic experience and intellect are equal to the task” (Simms 2002: 32).

The question of why he pursued a policy in former Yugoslavia that let endless suffering happen is warranted. His policy refused to provide negotiation formats with a powerful military backup that would have given European diplomacy an edge in former Yugoslavia (Bennett 1995: 177).

The dispositions of British policymakers were marked by a “profoundly conservative philosophical realism” where a narrow British national interest enjoyed the highest priority (Simms 2002: 36). This involved deep skepticism about Bush’s “new world order” and the “international community” that both almost seemed an illusion. Instead, the British government identified a “new world disorder” with which it tried to deal “institution-by-institution” (2002: 37).

Behind this stood limited resources. Hurd acknowledged that Britain did not enjoy the luxury of withdrawing from international commitments. However, he emphasized that “[...] it is impossible to guarantee order and good government everywhere” (1993: col. 4). This was in line with the reduction of British defense spending after the Cold War which weakened the British role in NATO. A NATO intervention in Yugoslavia would have meant a reversal of that policy (Simms 2002: 38).

Thus, another aspect came into play. At that time existed exaggerated assessments of what it militarily takes to enforce peace in Yugoslavia. This assessment was coupled with historical beliefs about the “Balkan quagmires”, that is, the difficulties of fighting in complicated mountainous terrains against guerilla forces (see: Papacosma 1995: 259).

Such perceptions were derived from World War II where Marshal Tito’s partisans “[...] tied down large Axis forces in Yugoslavia” (Trew 2004: 5). In this context, the media reporting and the military analysis of the Yugoslav war, “[...] involved widespread use of imagery drawn from the past, comparisons with previous wars, and attempts to draw lessons” (2004: 3).

Consequently, Hurd emphasized that actions must be proportionate since to “[...] impose and guarantee order in Yugoslavia would take huge forces and huge risks over an indefinite period — which no democracy could justify to its people” (1993: col. 4). Such beliefs were underpinned by the UK’s bitter experiences in Northern Ireland (Drozdiak 1992: col. 3; Touval 2002: 94).

Observing the collapse in Somalia, where there should have been preventive measures in place, Hurd advocated an early and preventive political involvement “that can have a good effect” as a crisis develops (Hurd 1993: col. 5).

The CSCE/EC, but also the UN were critical to preventing crises from spreading. He told the BBC this was the only thing the West could do: “I believe it’s the only thing that can work” (1994: art. 27).

Hurd viewed the UN as a leader and endowed with a “unique legal authority” (that, to his mind, NATO did not have) which enabled it to deploy early on behalf of conflict prevention. However, “states must play their part” and “responding more quickly to UN requests for troops” (1993: col. 7).

In NATO, Hurd’s sentiments and historic beliefs merged with a weakening British position (below the U.S., downward trend during the 1990s; see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670; Pouliot 2016: 234). He emphasized that the UK does not have the “power or appetite” to establish protection in Eastern Europe and should not exaggerate its power to do so (cit. in: Simms 2002: 38).

This, however, was not inimical to British power since Hurd’s position was charged by dominating beliefs about a passive NATO which legitimized the UK’s preventive approach. NATO was a collective defense organization and should remain so—deploying with the UN demonstrated this. If anything, NATO was well placed by taking a supporting role in Yugoslavia (Hurd 1993: col. 6).

4.3 The struggle for “out of area”

Whether diplomatic tools or the UN’s humanitarian assistance, the international community’s approaches to the inter-ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia failed. Not only that a 1991 UN arms embargo on Yugoslavia advantaged the Bosnian Serbs and the YNA by consolidating an unequal power distribution between the conflict parties in the even more destructive war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Also, the beliefs in the historic culpability of all sides prevented acknowledging the “[...] calculated attempts to forge a greater Serbia out of Yugoslavia” (Bennett 1995: 238). It created a situation that not only challenged the viability of NATO but, above all, the dominant U.S. position.

The EU peace negotiator, Lord David Owen, told the people of Sarajevo in early 1993: “Don’t, don’t, don’t, live under this dream that the West is going to come in and sort this problem out” (BBC 1995: -1:36:09). Owen recalled later that he was well aware that key western countries “[...] did not believe that this [situation] could be helped in any way by military action” (1995: -1:35:59).

This resulted in overwhelming support for the UN that could not have been more disgracefully exposed at the peak of the Bosnian war in July 1995. The UN could, at most, discourage attacks by its presence, but not militarily operate, defend, or secure strategic areas (see: Tardy 2014: 773).

The years of bickering between NATO members prevented more ambitious strategies from crystallizing and contributed to the overall failure to end the internecine war (see: Bennett 1995: 237). However, NATO could have made a difference given its military capabilities (i.e., forces, structures, equipment; Papacosma 1995: 257). Its broad membership basis with several great powers and the even stronger U.S. made it unique.

Although some NATO members hoped for the viability of alternatives (e.g., WEU), no framework has ever come close to duplicating NATO’s capabilities. However, since NATO was conceived for collective defense with no charge in ex-Yugoslavia, only a new policy could change its role (Papacosma 1996: 236).

The Allies’ approaches did not pose immediate challenges between NATO’s Atlanticist and Europeanist poles but indirect ones. As Jamie Shea said, both positions “largely canceled each other out” (NATO 2013: 16:46).

In its 1991 strategic concept, the Alliance pointed to new “security challenges and risks” emerging from “[...] instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes, which are faced by many countries in central and eastern Europe” (NATO 2010b: pt. 8-9).

The Yugoslav wars fitted squarely into these scenarios. The RAND experts Asmus *et al.* write that the obvious tool for responding to them was NATO since “[t]he Persian Gulf War and the ongoing Yugoslav crisis have shown the European Community incapable of taking on such risk” (1993: 31).

If NATO did not engage these challenges, it would become increasingly redundant: “NATO must go out of area or it will go out of business” (ibid.; including eastern expansion). Pursuing European solutions and denying the Alliance to take on designated challenges was to challenge American leadership and to wither NATO.

Indicating this, the SACEUR’s plan to intervene in ex-Yugoslavia died at the hands of several Allies (Mulchinock 2017: 16-7). American indifference and European solutions worked heavily against the image that NATO had painted in 1990: to be an “agent of change” (Moore 2007: 1).

However, one key actor labored tirelessly to rescue it: NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner. He was traditionally an Atlanticist and envisioned NATO as a new alliance that intervened in crises from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural (Clarke 1995: 46).

He was key in the “struggle for out of area”, that is, for transforming the Alliance from a static military defense organization into a new interventionist actor that enforced peace in Yugoslavia. Wörner initiated a struggle as he intervened between the discordant positions of the Allies. In 1993/94, the struggle was continued by the Clintonites which eventually led to military action in August 1995. It was a struggle between heterodox and orthodox forces as the Atlanticists challenged the dominating Europeanist approach.

The “Wörner leadership”

Manfred Wörner exerted a decisive impact on NATO’s policy turn from complete disengagement in Yugoslavia in 1991 to full military intervention in 1995. As Ryan Hendrickson writes, “[d]ue to his diplomatic skills and the force of his moral and political arguments regarding NATO’s credibility, the evidence indicates that Woerner had an independent impact on alliance policy” (2004: 509). He was important for maintaining a discourse of responsibility since 1990/91. Moreover, Wörner carved out a role for the Alliance by establishing inter-organizational relations with the CSCE and UN (see: Smith 2000b: 133).

Wörner intervened between the NATO camps to involve the Alliance in Bosnia. Compared to the Cold War where Secretaries-General refrained from seeking policy changes when there were profound differences among Allies, Wörner's leadership was a critical change (Hendrickson 2004: 514).

Wörner challenged the policies of NATO members. For example, he "[...] would openly challenge the US to assume a greater leadership role on Bosnia within the alliance" (2004: 517). Rooted in a deep Atlanticism, Wörner sought to support the dominance of the U.S. to reemphasize NATO's military power (2004: 515).

He perceived the Allies' positions as going against his desire of leaving the Cold War behind. Grounded in his "[...] deeper historical and personal connection to the United States", the different approaches to Bosnia conflicted with his beliefs about the traditional power distribution in NATO, expectations of appropriate behavior, and his visions for NATO writ large (Hendrickson 2006: 52-3).

Wörner viewed the hesitant U.S. policies in ex-Yugoslavia as "veiled hypocrisies" (Mulchinock 2017: 31). Moreover, he was concerned that the Europeans promoted the UN as the hub of decision-making, not NATO (Hendrickson 2006: 51). His engagement in symbolic struggles rested, therefore, on perceptions of hysteresis in NATO.

The capacity to push for change was, thereby, largely symbolic in that it lacked command over military forces. However, it was based on the function of the Secretary-General's position that he filled with rich political experiences, many personal contacts, morale, and cultural capital such as his doctorate in international law.

While this provided him with the authority to credibly say what would be the best for NATO, he could not always make his visions count and needed to maneuver within the evolving context of the Bosnian war (Hendrickson 2004: 513). He played this context and his authority successfully to induce the stepwise reconsideration of NATO's passive policy—partly because functioning as symbolic capital, he was perceived by NATO members as "a forceful and effective leader" (2004: 509, cit.: 517).

Wörner changed NATO's organizational culture. The relaxed atmosphere of the Cold War business shifted to an energetic work environment with high standards of work ethics.

He made close contacts and Tuesday luncheons with NATO ambassadors imperative and used them to focus attention on Bosnia to convey his visions of American leadership and NATO's military "out of area" activism. Although European ambassadors often disagreed with him on Bosnia, Wörner maintained a professional attitude (2004: 518, see: 526).

As NAC chairman, Wörner acted passionately on Bosnia because he was convinced that such a tragedy should not happen under his auspices. As the former U.S. NATO ambassador, Robert Hunter, recalled "nothing was going to happen" without Wörner (2004: 518-20). His leadership was forceful in his bodily appearance, gestures, movements, and speech. Strategic vision, intellectual skills, and diplomatic tact were thus characteristic of Wörner's leadership style (2014: 128).

Retrospectively, Manfred Wörner, who died in 1994, and his successor Willy Claes, have been "catalysts" in NATO's evolution towards the use of military power outside of the collective defense area. As Jamie Shea writes, "[i]n hindsight, and somewhat ironically, the conflict in Yugoslavia was more important for NATO's post-Cold War evolution than the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union" (also: INTVW5 2021; 2010: 15). It was not "pre-ordained" that NATO would reintroduce military power for the sake of transatlantic security, but some NATO actors fought for that role (Crawford 2000: 40). This started with NATO's 1992 Oslo-decision.

The Oslo decision

With a lack of support from its members, it needed a felicitous moment to make the case for NATO's gradual involvement in former Yugoslavia. The appointment of Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali as the new UN SecGen opened a road for NATO which resulted in NATO's June 1992 Oslo decision to support peacekeeping activities.

In January 1992, Boutros-Ghali became UN Secretary-General. Boutros-Ghali favored regional and sub-regional organizations sharing in the burden of conflict management in their respective area of responsibility (Leurdijk 1997: 458; Smith 2000b: 133).

With this, “peacekeeping”, loosely defined as “[...] an essentially ‘non-violent’ use of military forces to preserve international peace and security, rather than using force to counter aggression”, received much attention as a tool for human rights protection (Frantzen 2005: 37). Peacekeeping became a hyped concept in Western opinion, as evidenced by European plus Canadian support for UNPROFOR. NATO staffers at Brussels and Mons believed that this concept was something that should interest NATO (Smith 2000b: 134).

In early 1992, the CSCE sent Wörner a letter mentioning a supporting role for NATO in the conflict around the former Soviet region Nagorno-Karabakh. This was felt to nudge NATO into the direction of a new role. Wörner stressed that there was scope for NATO to work under CSCE and UN auspices: “[n]otions like in- or out-of-area will more and more lose their relevance” (cit. in: *ibid.*).

He conceded that, for NATO, this process would take time but that this inevitably was the direction (*ibid.*). Then, Boutros-Ghali asked Wörner what NATO could potentially contribute to UN operations.

This established a contact between the two organizations that had not existed before and for which Wörner’s affirmative role was important (2000b: 135). NATO members had to discuss a potential function of the Alliance.

With the Bosnian war now raging, NATO foreign ministers reached in June 1992 in Oslo the decision to support peacekeeping activities “case-by-case”. They directed NATO’s focus to southern Europe where they assumed rising challenges. Wörner said that the decision was “strictly for peacekeeping; not for war fighting” (cit. in: Pick and Webster 1992: col. 1).

However, the Oslo decision did not specify a mission area. While it declared some willingness to step into the direction that Wörner envisioned for NATO, some European ministers torpedoed the decision, saying that they would not deploy to Yugoslavia because of the “treacherous fighting conditions”, even if there was such a request (Drozdiak 1992: col. 2). Importantly, the decision intentionally left out the UN and committed troops to the CSCE.

Well aware that the CSCE had never organized a peacekeeping mission, the advocates of the Alliance's collective defense role (i.e., the British, French, Italians, and Dutch) were confident that NATO would not be called upon (Pick and Webster 1992: col. 1; Smith 2000b: 136). NATO's involvement depended on the agreement of all 52 CSCE members and a good prospect for peace in the area of operation (Pick and Webster 1992: col. 1).

For the time being, NATO's peacekeeping in the Balkans was unlikely—not least because France and other members had reservations (MacManus 1992: col. 3). President Mitterrand foresaw this role for the WEU. As *The Guardian* reported, “[e]ager to minimize NATO's influence, the French would ideally have preferred to avoid any mention of the alliance” (Pick 1992: col. 2). Wörner's efforts to bring NATO into the new peacekeeping-hype were thus ineffective.

Troops remained at the disposal of nations until they decided to run NATO operations. The members' material (military) power as a symbolic capital overrode Wörner's capacity as Secretary-General. This was not changed by a hollow commitment to support the CSCE.

NATO and the UN

Although it was assumed that NATO peacekeeping was not going to happen, Alliance members were rapidly overtaken by the events. NATO was called on by the UN but was relegated to a “subcontractor”. Albeit Wörner engineered NATO's gradual involvement in Bosnia, his capacity to initiate greater transformations remained obstructed by NATO's division.

In July 1992, Boutros-Ghali sent a request to NATO for humanitarian relief support. NATO dispatched a naval fleet to help the WEU in the Adriatic Sea. Unfortunately, the deployment bore witness to the divisions in the Western camp and conveyed the impression that other things were more important than the unfolding humanitarian tragedy in Bosnia (Smith 2000b: 138).

The request also concerned the protection of humanitarian convoys into Sarajevo. While NATO estimated some 75.000 troops, UN actors said “[y]ou have given us the wrong answer. The answer is 2.000. Redefine the question so that 2.000 is the answer” (cit. in: Drew 1996 [1994]: 10).

Although NATO’s estimation reflected the military situation, it showed, in a nutshell, the dilemma of NATO. The Alliance had become a “subcontractor” of the UN. Characterizing their relationship, NATO had to concede in 1993 to a “dual-key” policy that enabled airstrikes in Bosnia merely after civilian UN authorities were involved (Holbrooke 1998: 70; Larsdotter 2012: 72).

Within this issue lingered Wörner’s main concern, that of a missing Alliance leadership (Kaufman 2002: 92). He expressed disappointment “with the way this crisis has been handled” (Wörner 1996 [1993]: viii). Adding to his disappointment, the UK deployed in August 1992 1,800 soldiers to Bosnia under the command of the UN— alongside the Canadians, Dutch, Danish, and French. Most members reaffirmed the leadership of the UN and diplomacy to end the Bosnian war (see: Wintour et al. 1992).

Wörner had no support, and the U.S. had no political will to deploy offensive military force (Kaufman 2002: 95-6). NATO’s symbolic hierarchy was inversed. Despite American power, the dispositions of the members of the Bush administration prevented the rise of interventionist interests which, in turn, strengthened the interests and power of Europeanists.

Wörner’s capacity to initiate change was impaired. After the toothless Oslo decision, his position was *de facto* demoted to the domain of subversive actions. He was left to attempt abrogating taken-for-granted beliefs about NATO and to undermine the legitimacy of European approaches.

In December 1992, the UN requested future support for UN resolutions in Bosnia. Again, this request made it imperative to sit together and work out an approach. However, continuing their ambiguities, the ministers wanted to refuse further requests for NATO troops (Smith 2000b: 140)

Nonetheless, a coordinated relationship between both sides began to develop since, during actions, NATO would come under direct UN authority. This was insofar important as NATO could not legitimately act without UN authority in a peacekeeping context (2000b: 141-2).

Constructing NATO as the military arm of the UN was for Wörner the only way to prove the Alliance's viability in "out of area" without disturbing the members who backed the UN (see: Tardy 2014: 775). He emphasized that although taking command in Bosnia would cause "[...] fierce resistance by non-NATO nations as well as some of our own members. There were good reasons for turning to the United Nations" (2008 [1993]: art. 3).

Given his function and symbolic capital, Wörner discursively challenged dominant perceptions in NATO. This was supported by the UN's permission to enforce no-fly-zones over Bosnia as of April 1993 and protect UN troops with close air support (see: Schulte 1997: 21).

Wörner's interventions conveyed a pattern. He implicitly challenged how European members viewed NATO, that is, as a traditional alliance that cannot act legitimately "out of area". He highlighted NATO's organizational advantages as well as the success and achievements of limited action in ex-Yugoslavia (e.g., Wörner 1993a). Moreover, he pointed to the difficulties of the UN:

"[w]e have seen how difficult it is for the UN to cope with complicated military operations in an environment in which there is no peace to keep. The old approach of sending a few hundred blue helmets whose authority is based more on what they represent than on their military prowess is no longer sufficient" (1993b: art. 20).

Drawing on the rank and capital of the U.S., Wörner also challenged the U.S. disengagement from combat tasks and, thus, sought to brace its traditionally dominant position in NATO before continuing inaction eroded it. As he stressed,

"[a] superpower simply cannot take a sabbatical from history, not even a vacation. We need U.S. leadership. Without the leadership of the United States there will be no leadership at all, and most likely no meaningful action in crisis situations. Either you meet crisis head-on, or they will jump you from behind. It is therefore infinitively better to remain in Europe and prevent wars [...]" (1996 [1993]: xii).

Considering the bitterness about the failure to end the war, Wörner reframed NATO within a new discourse of leadership and action. Certainly, his interventions provided some justification for action in Bosnia. However, they did not create a consensus beyond UN support. This was a question of struggles between members.

A problem from hell

The outgoing George H. Bush administration failed to fill its leadership role in NATO. Moreover, the personal experiences of many Pentagon officials who fought in Vietnam stifled their resolve to engage in Bosnia (Christopher 2001: 252). But, in 1993, the war reached new cataclysmic levels, the Serbs dominated, and peace plans such as the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) failed (Mulchinock 2017: 29). When Clinton took office in early 1993, it seemed as if there was a will to end the war.

As a presidential candidate, Clinton campaigned for Western interventionism, saying that “[...] the West must be tough in discouraging the ethnic aggression unleashed by the fall of Communism” (Engelberg and Gordon 1993; cit. in: Power 2003). The Clintonites believed that the war had consequences for American foreign policy and supported the Bosnian Muslims against what they saw as Serb aggression (Mandelbaum 2016: 103). The deployment of larger ground forces was discussed (Kaufman 2002: 98).

Clinton, however, reconsidered his interventionist position when Lord Owen warned of another Vietnam if the U.S. got involved (Mulchinock 2017: 30). Consequently, Clinton decided that “[...] Bosnia’s travail, though tragic, did not amount to a “never again” scenario that morally compels America to intervene” (Engelberg and Gordon 1993).

Clinton did not want to weaken the UN, divide European NATO allies over bombing Serb positions, and endanger U.S. troops under a UN mandate (Clinton 2004: 466). This unwillingness was reinforced by the bitter defeat in Somalia in 1993.

As Joyce Kaufman writes, “[i]t was clear that no country was willing to use ground forces to intervene directly in the conflict, and even the use of NATO air forces was controversial” (2002: 99).

Warren Christopher sought to relieve the moral imperatives that arose from the ferocious war, describing it as a tragedy born out of a century-old hatred between the ethnic groups and “a problem from hell which cannot expect a solution from anyone” (Thies 2009: 285).

Lift and Strike

In April 1993, NATO was asked to support the VOPP with a substantial land force. Avoiding this, Warren Christopher went to Europe to promote a “lift and strike”-policy. This policy would have lifted the arms embargo against Bosnian Muslims and endorsed NATO airstrikes against Serb positions without American boots on the ground. Pressures grew to “do something” short of American ground forces. But this remained a modest and unsuccessful bid to regain the U.S./NATO initiative on “out of area”. Moreover, the rift in NATO was growing bigger (Kaufman 2002: 100; Larsdotter 2012: 68; Sloan 1995: 161).

The events around “lift and strike” became a breaking point in the Alliance since they disclosed the different perceptions between the U.S. and Europeans about Bosnia. The Allies became openly pitted against each other—implying questions of Alliance leadership.

In early 1993, the Clintonites modified a few policies concerning Bosnia. The establishment of UN safe zones in Bosnia (e.g., Sarajevo and Srebrenica) signaled a tentative departure from the disengagement of the Bush administration (Hendrickson 2002a: 73-5). Clinton attempted to regain the initiative by deploying airpower through NATO. One U.S. security official remembered that Clinton became inclined to prove his military muscle because the avoidance of military service in his youth made him a target for ridicule by political opponents (Sarotte 2021: 152).

Based on the unavailable option of ground forces and the success of surgical airstrikes in Iraq, proposing airpower was consequential in the sense of Clinton's "positional agency". In perspective, however, it reduced American standing and power because only ground forces could sustain peace.

More importantly, the European strategy in Bosnia systematically upstaged Clinton. Their approach constrained his ability to achieve objectives in political and philosophical terms such as continuing American leadership and fostering democratic peace (Peceny and Sanchez-Terry 1998). Since the Europeans contrasted the traditional image of American leadership in NATO, Clinton needed to take (subversive) action to reverse the momentum. Proposing "lift and strike" made obvious that a struggle for leadership over Bosnia was about to happen (Kaufman 2002: 102).

Yet, while the Europeans were unable to produce results in Yugoslavia without the USNATO, the "lift and strike" proposal met with fierce resistance from France, the UK, Germany, and Italy. Fearing retaliation by the Serbs, most Europeans said that they did not want to endanger their UNPROFOR troops (Papacosma 1996: 242). Only U.S. ground forces would alleviate their fears.

Knowing the improbability, France demanded U.S. troops in Bosnia as a condition to accept airstrikes; and because of old allegiances, the UK was unwilling to accept the one-sided lifting of the arms embargo (Larsdotter 2012: 69). As the *Washington Post* commented, "the Atlantic relationship seems now fraught with jealous rivalries and petulant misunderstandings" (Drozdiak 1993: col. 2). With the Soviet threat gone, "[...] the alliance is taking its internal conflicts into uncharted territory" (1993: col. 6). An Alliance diplomat noted that

"[t]he disagreement about Bosnia is so large that we have basically stopped talking to or even shouting at one another. Now we present our positions, disagree and then shrug as if to say, "What else could you expect?" (cit. in: Thies 2009: 282).

This translated into other areas. President Mitterrand called for the EU to assert itself by taking on the U.S. One European ambassador claimed that standing up to the U.S. would get "people to rally round the European flag" (cit. in: Drozdiak 1993: col. 6).

Britain “developed an unhealthy close relationship with France over Bosnia” (Mulchinock 2017: 32). The 1991 strategic concept became increasingly meaningless and the Alliance was on its way to irrelevance (ibid.).

Facing resistance to “lift and strike”, the Clinton government backed down in May 1993 (Thies 2009: 281). Having no military forces in Bosnia, the U.S. had no authority to push the matter (Sloan 1995: 161). Moreover, Christopher did not insist on American leadership. Washington was confused about what to do in ex-Yugoslavia. As Ryan Hendrickson writes, “Christopher’s approach demonstrated that the United States was really not ready to take the lead on Bosnia” (2006: 48).

For the time being, the NATO hierarchy remained inversed since, without deploying military/material capital, the U.S. could not make symbolic power count. However, capital needed to be deployed to obtain the power to change things. Proposing airpower and denying ground forces was counter-productive.

Having deployed material-military capital in support of their approach, the Europeans held greater symbolic capital and successfully challenged the U.S. They enjoyed a critical advantage within NATO—they had the troops on the ground and the UN in the lead. This put them in the position to reinforce their *de facto* domination by dismissing American proposals for policy change as they deemed necessary, keeping NATO in place. Christopher writes, “[o]ur failure to recognize earlier that no other organization or state was going to assume that role was a lapse for which I and the rest of the Clinton national security team shared responsibility” (2001: 252).

Challenge wins

The following period was characterized by continuing rifts between the American and Europeans. Efforts to halt the advance of the Bosnian Serbs were futile. NATO could not go beyond the support of the UN and the relations between both organizations were affected by the ongoing NATO divide. At the beginning of 1995, the Americans registered another “defeat”.

In some cases, UNPROFOR came under direct fire. As Cimbala & Foster put it, “UNPROFOR had neither the military strength nor the UN mandate to achieve its mission” (2010: 101). Consequently, the Bosnian Serbs attacked the Sarajevo UN safe zone in February 1994, killing 68 and wounding more than 100 people.

This violation of the zone pressured the NAC to discuss further action. The forum established an exclusion zone for heavy weaponry around Sarajevo and backed an ultimatum with the threat of airstrikes on Serb positions.

However, the UK blocked the ultimatum. The British commander of UNPROFOR, General Rose, tried to delay it, allowing his country’s historic stance to creep into UN-NATO relations (Kaufman 2002: 109). Rose said in an interview in 1998 that he did not trust NATO and suspected an excuse to bomb the Serbs (Smith 2000b: 143, see: fn. 49).

Whether in the UN or NATO, Britain was opposed to military action, especially airstrikes. But UN consent was important to make NATO action possible in the first place (“dual-key”). As Brendan Simms writes, “[...] in private she [Britain] consistently sabotaged American initiatives: in February 1993, in April-May 1993, and throughout the following two years” (2002: 98).

However, NATO deployed air power for the first time in history and shot down Serb fighter planes in violation of the no-fly zone on 28 February (Kaufman 2002: 109). Subsequently, the Americans attempted to reverse the momentum by pushing for comprehensive strikes against the Serbs (2002: 113). Inevitably, they clashed with the French over bombing Serb units that advanced on Bihac—despite Clinton’s appeal to Mitterrand who, instead, announced a Serb victory.

Mitterrand accused the U.S. of supplying the Bosnian Muslims with weapons which revealed that they still not share the U.S. view on Serbian culpability. Christopher’s attempts to convince the UK and France to modify the arms embargo to the advantage of the Bosnian Muslims failed (Marcus and Harris 1994: col. 1; Thies 2009: 283; Williams 1994: col. 3).

The Alliance entered 1995, therefore, with another “defeat” of the Americans. While calling ethnic cleansing an “atrocious” but having no means to prevent it, the Americans ended their attempts to “badger and cajole” unwilling Allies into the use of air power against the Serbs (Marcus and Harris 1994: col. 2).

Warren Christopher announced support of European strategies in November 1994 (1994: col. 2; Williams 1994: col. 4). U.S. officials suspected that rifts were fabricated to gain influence over U.S. policy (Marcus and Harris 1994: col. 5). But with still no troops on the ground, the U.S. had no leverage and risked NATO’s relevance. Trying to bomb the Serbs while keeping a neutral attitude on the ground worked against one another (Papacosma 1996: 244).

U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrook remarked that those Allies who once looked to American leadership became increasingly ambivalent about the American role in Europe (1998: 83). One NATO official said that “[w]hat is happening is that contradictions which have existed for a long time within NATO with regard to Bosnia are now being exposed [...]” (cit. in: Papacosma 1996: 244).

Struggles between the Atlanticists and Europeanists over Bosnia stymied the emergence of clear U.S./NATO leadership on “out of area”. Despite ineffective UN peacekeeping and multiple negotiation formats, the Europeans demoted American leadership.

At the beginning of 1995, NATO was still not more than the old collective defense organization with an upgraded support function. U.S. officials understood that there was no solution to NATO’s internal stalemate and gave up the insistence on airpower (see: Thies 2009: 283). As one U.S. official said,

“[t]he United States couldn’t keep asking for things that weren’t going to happen. The strains on the alliance, the credibility question, the futility of it all—it was better to be realistic” (cit in: Marcus and Harris 1994: col. 2).

Turning the final page

In 1995, the military and humanitarian situation in Bosnia deteriorated. With it, the relationship between NATO and the UN turned sour. Finally, the “Srebrenica massacre” facilitated the identification of a common threat which helped to reinstate U.S. leadership in NATO. The massacre was a “triggering event” that pressured NATO to validate its declared transformations (Hunter 2019: 322).

During the first half of 1995, the Bosnian Serbs resorted to tactics of taking UN hostages to protect themselves from NATO airstrikes. They knew that NATO had no working policy in Bosnia. Western solutions were to send even more UN soldiers to protect those who were already there (Kaufman 2002: 114-5).

Willy Claes, Wörner’s successor, named the most pressing issue. He said that through working with the UN in Bosnia, “[...] NATO had made “itself ridiculous as a military organisation.” [...] “[i]f we cannot set the rules of our military operations, they will have to find other idiots to support peacekeeping” (cit. in: Smith 2000b: 145).

This was a departure from Wörner’s reconciliatory stance towards the UN. Wörner’s idea to make use of the relations with the UN but to gradually mature had not quite worked. Although Claes was not a “high profile choice” as SecGen, he was considered “solid” in international affairs and respected within the EU for his strong negotiation and diplomatic skills. He kept NAC sessions going regardless of time and often made use of his “discretionary power”.

However, he was also known for having a short fuse. He used “diplomatic theatrics and strong temper” to promote consensus which often worked because ambassadors did not want to become a target of his emotional outbreaks (Hendrickson 2006: 68, 76-8). Regarding Bosnia, Claes sought to present the Alliance as a capable military organization that was only impaired by the UN (Kaufman 2002: 115).

Despite having to deal with a bribe affair and being caught in the discord of Allies, “Claes helped empower NATO vis-à-vis the United Nations and eventually helped shift the center of diplomatic and military attention to NATO” (Hendrickson 2006: 115). But this became only effective with changing circumstances.

Another fall down the humanitarian slope in Bosnia facilitated turning the final page of the nearly four years of drama in ex-Yugoslavia. In July 1995, the Bosnian Serbs overran the UN safe areas Zepa and Srebrenica, pinned down UNPROFOR in Srebrenica, and separated and executed over 7.000 Bosnian Muslims. The Serbs calculated to humiliate the UN before the eyes of the world. Radovan Karadzic publicly ridiculed NATO’s threats (Papacosma 1996: 247). This became an unprecedented debacle for the Clintonites, especially regarding the coming elections (Anon. 1995a).

What, then, became known as the “Srebrenica massacre”, “[...] galvanized world opinion and convinced the key NATO allies that the time had come to whatever necessary to halt the slaughter before it reached the next apparent target [...] the safe area of Gorazde” (Christopher 2001: 254). Human rights activists said, “[i]f NATO cannot even protect Srebrenica” [...] “what can it do?” (cit. in: Simms 2002: 352). The Serbian culpability became (discursively) fixed.

Douglas Hurd said that “[e]veryone can now see that [the war] is largely the responsibility of the Bosnian Serbs” (cit. in: McCourt 2013: 252). This realization was like the re-emergence of NATO’s lost Cold War opponent. It was acknowledged that disorder in regions like ex-Yugoslavia has unpredictable consequences. Adopted by the leading NATO members (U.S., France, UK), representations of genocide became dominant, and the discourse narrowed. This framed the nomos in NATO, created normative strictures for sayings and doings, and paved the way for punitive actions.

French UN General Bernard Janvier became a subject of investigations by the Association for the Prevention of Genocide as he stood accused of preventing NATO airstrikes against the Serb incursion into Srebrenica (Baumann 2011a: 48). Other policymakers, such as Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo, were compelled to defend their inaction before The Hague tribunal (Sabljakovic 2001).

As Derrek Chollet writes “[...] after Srebrenica, the pressure became overwhelming” (2005: 37). U.S. Vice President Al Gore urged Clinton not to ignore Srebrenica and to “acquiesce to genocide” (2005: 28-9). Srebrenica could have marked the beginning of a sustained “genocide campaign” (Garey 2020: 51). Paired with the human rights dispositions of the Clintonites, this made it immoral to further pursue compromise solutions and unilateral military solutions acquired greater acceptance (see: Hansen 2006: 127).

Significantly, the genocide discourse and the arising humanitarian imperatives created the necessary conditions for American policymakers to announce overwhelming airpower and ground forces to reverse the situation in Bosnia. The deployment of the military under the genocide discourse became essential to regain dominance in NATO and to ensure that the Alliance remained relevant. Under these circumstances, British and French policymakers declared their willingness to deploy offensive military force with NATO (Hansard 2021: col. 951).

The following emergency meeting in London, on 20 July established a red line for the use of massive force. With the newfound unity of NATO members over the “Serbian threat”, NATO hollowed out the “dual key” arrangement with the UN (Christopher 2001: 253). After the fall of Srebrenica and the catastrophic performance of the UN, Boutros-Ghali relinquished the right of consultation on NATO action (also: Kaufman 2002: 122; Smith 2000b: 146).

The new French Chirac government partly changed the traditional approach and called for more U.S. engagement. It resumed “involvement in the alliance's military leadership, ending a haughty separation initiated nearly 30 years ago by Charles de Gaulle” (Anon. 1995b; also: Sarotte 2021: 239).

The Clinton administration took on the leadership over international responses in Bosnia (McCourt 2013: 252). It could do so because it had the vast military and command and control resources that Europeans largely lagged (Deni 2007: 65). The vacant post of the “leader of the free world” was to be re-occupied by the U.S. (Simms 2002: 352). The Clintonites knew that continuing inaction in Bosnia irreversibly damaged U.S. leadership and, with it, the viability of the transatlantic Alliance (Asmus 2004: 126-7; Chollet 2005: 28).

The use of sustained airpower against the Serbs and the deployment of U.S. troops became imperative. A loss of European dominance in Bosnia was implicated.

For this to happen, the order of things, that is, U.S. dominance in NATO, was reinstated and the NATO hierarchy was turned back on its feet. As the NATO practitioners Michael Rühle and Nicolas Williams noted, “[t]he United States will retain its leadership, unquestioned and even sustained by its allies” (1997: 113).

Operation Deliberate Force (ODF) and Claes’ es maneuvers

On 30 August, at 2 a.m. local, the international community commissioned NATO to execute ODF, after the Bosnian Serbs shelled a marketplace in Sarajevo, killing 37 civilians. ODF as a peace-enforcement mission demonstrated the commitment to peace and stability in the region by breaking the Bosnian Serb cordon around Sarajevo. The “non-article 5” crisis management operations, announced in the 1991 strategic concept, were operationalized.

As Derek Chollet notes, “[...] following 40 months of inconsistent resolve, NATO had stepped squarely into the Bosnian conflict with what was then the largest military action in the Alliance’s history” (2005: 62). A revived transatlantic unity embedded new NATO practices under the title of “non-Article 5 crisis management operations”.

The neutralization of Bosnian Serb targets with over NATO’s 3.500 air sorties accompanied American “shuttle diplomacy” and produced the conditions for peace negotiations in Dayton/Ohio in November 1995 (see: Holbrooke 1998).

This was to become a politico-military corrective for regions where the absence of “[...] either Western cultural values or constraining international regulation” risked the stability of post-Cold War Europe (Chandler 2000: 28). It confirmed the 1991 strategic concept’s threat perceptions as guiding for military actions.

NATO attained a critical role by implementing Dayton (Leurdijk 1997: 464). It “replaced the UN as military peacekeeper in Europe” (Frantzen 2005: 36).

For this to happen, the maneuvers of SecGen Claes were decisive and were mentioned too few to be dedicated by posterity. With the help of his “theatric diplomacy style”, he moved hours before ODF a few resisting Europeans towards the military option. Under his function, Claes formally authorized commanders to make military assessments and to order airstrikes. He was, too, privy to the operational details of ODF and granted the SACEUR, General Joulwan, leeway for the military option (Hendrickson 2006: 77-8, 82).

When the Bosnian Serbs violated the Sarajevo safe zone on 28 August, Willy Claes decided not to inform the NAC. While most Allies were ready to authorize massive force, Claes prevented with the vested “discretionary authority” any last-minute delay by not convening the NAC. Instead, he called both military commanders to start the campaign (2006: 82; Holbrooke 1998: 99). Shortly later, Bernard Janvier stopped it to negotiate with the Serbs. Claes called him in a tremendous outburst of rage and threatened to blame the UN if the campaign failed. Janvier floundered and the bombing resumed (Hendrickson 2006: 79).

Finally, these processes did not only reinstate American leadership in NATO. They also established NATO as an interventionist power with valuable resources to manage conflicts. With the dialectical failures of Europeans in Bosnia, American authority and power in NATO experienced a critical reevaluation.

As a former member of NATO’s International Staff emphasized, those who advocated European options during the Bosnian war shifted sides to NATO (also: Hunter 2019: 323; INTVW4 2021). As the British Secretary of State for Defense, Michael Portillo, in the House of Commons said,

“I believe that the operation must be undertaken by NATO, operating within the bounds of a United Nations Security Council resolution. I believe that NATO is the appropriate body. As has been proved recently, it is able to operate effectively in military terms” (Hansard 2023a).

NATO members adjusted to the dominant U.S. approach (see: Kaufman 2002: 122). The newfound unity switched NATO from “collective defense” towards an interventionist policy that not only allowed for further campaigns in Kosovo (1999) or Afghanistan (2001/02) but implemented new practices directly in mission countries over a sustained time. With this, the long-standing doxa of NATO as a collective defense organization and discussion forum was replaced with a new military interventionist one.

4.4 Conclusion

As an Editorial of the New York Times in December 1995 remarked: “[a]s NATO gathers a force of 60,000 troops to help secure the peace in Bosnia, the Atlantic Alliance is shaking off some cobwebs from the cold war” (Anon. 1995b). At that point, NATO had turned the page on the Cold War and introduced an unprecedented active military role to transatlantic security since the Alliance’s foundation in 1949.

It reunified Americans and Europeans on matters of military security and relegated the UN and the EU/OSCE/WEU troika to complementary responsibilities for international security. That Europeans opted for strengthening ties with the U.S. became a viable alternative in the wake of the Bosnian war (Kaufman 2002: 127). Consequently, European defense conceptualizations gave way to NATO and were now developed within NATO (Papacosma 1996: 251).

These achievements were the result of struggles to change the obstinate approaches of the Allies in the context of the Bosnian war and the ineptitude of the Europeans in ending the humanitarian disaster. While this chapter could only foreground the most important processes, there were numerous others, domestic and international, that led to the coagulation of the result.

As European policymakers supported certain solutions to the war, involving negotiations and a peacekeeping role of the UN, the U.S. stood out for its utter disinterest in the conflict.

While European policymakers' paths were consequential of their dispositions and positions in NATO, the Americans, too, were trapped by beliefs in a narrative of insoluble Balkans ethnic violence.

When the UN asked for support in Bosnia, NATO Allies had to carve out a potential role for the Alliance. SecGen Wörner reminded the Allies of NATO's capacity to act effectively in Yugoslavia. His recognized moral authority and diplomatic skills helped him to make claims and to fill his leadership position. However, it was a long way for NATO to become involved.

Struggles between the Allies erupted as the Clinton administration proposed solutions short of deploying their ground forces, however. This impaired the ability of U.S. policymakers to change circumstances in their favor since without deployed troops they had no credibility. Finally, the "Srebrenica massacre" became the tipping point. The threat that NATO lost with the end of the Cold War reappeared in some sense in the image of the Bosnian Serbs. The emerging genocide discourse gave rise to new threat perceptions about the unpredictable consequences of local wars.

SecGen Willy Claes's theatric outbreaks helped to make ODF happen. While airstrikes and the negotiation of a settlement, the "Dayton Accords", were one manifestation of the reinstated USNATO power, the possibility of the use of military force in international relations was born. This replaced the traditional doxa of a defensive NATO. NATO became an interventionist power with the capacity to end ethnic conflicts beyond its traditional membership base, and, upon a decision of its members, should do so.

The Americans regained their leadership position and refitted the Alliance's traditional hierarchy. To facilitate policy change, NATO began to implement a range of security practices in conflict zones. If consistent, they would stabilize NATO through its "out of area business". As Joyce Kaufman writes, "NATO not only continued to play a central role in that area but actually expanded that role when it had to confront the situation in Kosovo" (Kaufman 2002: 127).

Chapter 5

Practices for a new NATO

The previous chapters showed that, by the mid-1990s, NATO had initiated policy changes that signified the departure from the Alliance's Cold War design of traditional collective defense. The Alliance became redefined by the initiation of NATO enlargement and "non-article 5 crisis management operations". Stephen Larrabee writes that "[...] it was part of a larger process designed to "build a new NATO" [...]" (2003: 2). Following the policy change, NATO implemented programs and practices that established ways of doing things as "state of the art".

These practices were not just an intervening variable between $A \rightarrow B$, say, between a democratic identity of NATO and the membership of the Visegrád-group in 1999. Rather, they had their roots in intractable symbolic struggles between the Allies. The practices that follow these struggles represent the dominant way of doing things and create a commonsense world for practitioners within their respective contexts. Eventually, this is because they shape agents' perceptions with which they construct the social world in practice.

As for the question of how to deal with the CEECs considering their membership desires and a potential security vacuum in Eastern Europe, the Partnership for Peace was officialized at the 1994 Brussels summit. It was "[...] designed to bring NATO up to [...] a critical crossroad in its historical evolution [eastern expansion]" (1994: 113). As such, it was perceived as a program to prepare aspirants for NATO membership given the decision to enlarge the Alliance (Senate 1998: 96).

NATO's new policy of enlarging NATO consisted of a pattern, that is, the practical preparation of candidate states and their invitation/admission at NATO summits. Practices such as "multinational defense planning" represented a particular approach to peace and aimed to construct a "value community"—giving meaning to NATO's "open door"-policy.

I, thus, view practices as a hallmark of NATO's enlargement policy and NATO's persistence. They were essential for NATO to establish a democratic community together with the CEECs. This opens a perspective on community building through democratic practices and highlights the role of practices understood as the normal way of doing things. In this chapter, I will engage with such perceptions. It, moreover, stresses the satisfactory performance of democratic practices as an object of social struggles.

Furthermore, I will engage with NATO's interventionist policy. I argue that ODF's bombing campaign and the subsequent deployment of a sizeable military ground force to implement the "Dayton Accords" represented a pattern and laid out a basic blueprint for practices in NATO's post-Cold War military operations. Military forces engaged in practices that ensured local security and supported civil reconstruction such as regular armed patrols or road reconstructions.

I contend that these practices had a twofold meaning. First, they demonstrated NATO's unity and solidarity on matters of international security. And second, they demonstrated NATO's capability and capacity for crisis management which, in turn, reconfirmed the Alliance's overriding role in transatlantic security.

In the first part, I will discuss NATO's "open door" policy by including the PfP and its practical activities as part of a pattern of NATO's opening. Subsequently, I will discuss the effect of practices that I view as rooted in the meaning of building a "value community". I will discuss aspects of their normalization and performance.

In the second part, I will engage with NATO's interventionist policy. I will discuss the practices of NATO's first Bosnia intervention in both terms of military security and civil reconstruction. In this context, I will engage with the meaning of practices which has been to demonstrate that NATO is a unified and capable interventionist alliance.

5.1 NATO's "open door": the PfP-framework

Starting in 1994, the PfP initiative was a guide toward membership rather than an automatic guarantee (Johnsen and Young 1994: 51). Its themes were rooted in the idea of NATO enlargement. NATO agents took the role of transmitting NATO standards as the dominant way of doing things.

The direction of the PfP was anchored in the idea of NATO enlargement. The 1995 "Perry Principles" by U.S. Defense Secretary, William Perry, as well as the NATO "Study on Enlargement" spelled out the benchmark criteria for membership. They were simultaneously political areas that had to be satisfied and implemented by membership candidates. The criteria for membership were "[...] democracy, market economies, borders, civilian control of the military, and progress toward compatibility of the armed force" (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 144).

NATO's Study on enlargement picked up these criteria. Eligibility was premised on the "[...] commitment to democracy and markets, to the sovereignty of others, to NATO's consensus decision making, to develop interoperability in doctrine and equipment, and to the defence of other allies" (Goldgeier 1999: 94-5).

Newcomers had to conform to the bandwidth of obligations and responsibilities that the traditional members were already committed to such as the principles of the UN charter or the provisions of the North Atlantic Treaty (see: NATO 1995b: sec. B). However, such values were to be implemented by concrete practices such as the democratic control of defense sectors which proved a candidate's seriousness about democracy.

Where problems existed, NATO offered via the PfP a partnership framework programs that addressed the "specific needs" of partnering nations (Cragg 1996b: 8). The PfP was declared as an "Alliance activity" (Simon 1999: 2) that works

"[...] towards transparency in national defence planning and budgeting; democratic control of defence forces; preparedness for civil disasters and other emergencies; and the development of the ability to work together, including in NATO-led PfP operations" (NATO 2010b: 39, art. 35).

NATO partners could engage in the PfP and improve their defence institutions. This outlined two paths that the PfP framework worked on: a democratic transformation of defense sectors and the adjustment of CEEC armies to NATO standards.

The PfP did not interfere with other national sectors but rather observed general developments. As one senior NATO official emphasized, the hope was that a feeling of security through NATO membership would “lock in” their democratic progress (INTVW6 2021).

Those CEECs that saw their future as NATO members were expected to demonstrate commitment to NATO’s standards by implementing the political and military steps necessary to align with the Alliance. NATO was expected to facilitate this process by assisting and guiding their partner nations (Johnsen and Young 1994: 51). NATO agents’ role as socializers and the internalization of democratic standards by candidates were viewed as preconditions to the successful transform of defense sectors.

NATO personnel took, thereby, the role of “pedagogic agents” (e.g., NATO trainers, militaries, conveners, senior officials, advisors, statesmen) who often portrayed their tasks as the transmission of technical expertise (see: Gheciu 2005: 113).

They engaged in a process involving methods of consultation, argumentative suasion, or teaching to socialize their counterparts into the adoption of Western standards. Conferences, workshops, or seminars for eastern militaries and political elites were part and parcel of this process (Moore 2007: 68). Joint military exercises rounded these activities off.

Alliance officials were supported by NATO’s Cold War success and the new role as a post-Cold War security provider, demonstrated in Bosnia (see: Williams and Neumann 2007: 87). This helped them to shape a liberal commonsense in the CEECs and ensure continuity (Gheciu 2005: 115-6).

Although the CEECs preferred admission instead of going through the PfP, they had no choice since NATO agents had the power/position to include/exclude states from membership as they saw fit (see: Asmus 2004: 61; Williams and Neumann 2007: 65; in chapter 6, I will elucidate the struggles behind this).

The CEECs lacked the capital and power to shape the decisions of NATO agents. As later members, they were distributed around the bottom of the field's hierarchy, reconfirming their weaker position (see: Pouliot 2016: 234; Sandler and Shimizu 2014: 49). Consequently, NATO agents had the power to determine the case for inclusion. As Joseph Kruzel, one of the PfP-designers, stressed,

“[i]f they want to become members of NATO, they will have to learn NATO's business. They will have to send military officers to the Partnership Coordination Cell to begin planning with NATO, training with NATO, and making their defense policy in a multinational context, just as the United States does” (1996: 34).

The PfP was thus organized in two areas: building democratic defense institutions as part of a democratic government design (and observing other democracy standards), and interoperable armies, capable of adopting Western military standards. It was “[...] an important element of NATO's post-Cold War institutional adaptation [...]” (Smith 2000b: 114).

Practical initiatives were complemented by talks in the NACC, and as of 1997, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). However, NATO-CEEC consultative practices became less relevant for NATO enlargement vis-à-vis the outspoken practical nature of the PfP and lost traction over time (2000b: 214-5, 217).

Altogether, they had the positive effect of shaping similar dispositions and sustainable habits across the NATO region, as the British NATO diplomat, Sir Michael Alexander, observed. NATO's practices facilitated the adoption of a liberal identity by the candidates. He stressed that peace in the NATO region is possible because it is perpetuated in the people that make NATO, the PfP breached obstructive mental barriers (1996: 73-4).

This embodied a particular Western approach to peace: national defense, for a long time the source of security dilemmas and mistrust between states, becomes a messenger of peace through jointly practicing multinational defense planning in NATO as well as sharing practices, from daily roll calls to multinational exercises, that defuse the threats posed by the obscurity of national defense.

Security Sector Reform and Defence Institution Building

The PfP broke down the imperatives of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Defence Institution Building (DIB). The idea was that democratically and competently managed defence sectors would produce greater regional stability. The anchoring of reformed defense sectors, which incorporates a consensus on democratic defense standards, should provide the region with democratic stability. NATO assumed a central role in implementing this sectoral approach to regional stability in which democracy should “come through the backdoor” of defense reforms.

The concept of SSR took precedence regarding the changing security landscape and the linked re-conceptualization of security. Aspects of a state’s stability, security, and economic as well as political development became intertwined (Hendrickson and Karkoszka 2002: 177-83; Kerr 2017: x-xi). SSR emphasizes the reform of the spectrum of security agencies under the premise of human and civil rights. Democratic modes of governance in these sectors were viewed as essential for the production of regional security to which the enlargement of NATO and the EU should contribute (Chanaa 2002: 19-20; see also: Portillo 1996: 5-6).

As Zoltan Barany argues,

“[...] democracy cannot be consolidated without military elites committed to democratic rule and obedient to democratically elected political elites. Put differently, the political preferences of military elites determine whether democratic consolidation is possible” (2012: 3).

The PfP became an integrating mechanism to promote democratic reforms of CEE defence structures as a principal sector of national security. NATO envisioned democratic changes in the CEECs through the establishment of civilian control of the military, known as DIB, under which also transparency of defence budgets and defence policies falls. DIB seeks to prevent armies from becoming aloof of a state by creating an “apolitical military” and defense policies that support the stability of government (Boland 2017: 203). Thus, the PfP reaffirmed the civilian and democratic control of the military as the “gold standard” for NATO in a wider sense.

PfP activities targeted institutions for the oversight, governance, and management of defence at the national level (ministries of defence, MODs) by assisting in planning processes and defence policies (Kerr 2017: xvii).

Devising and implementing effective defense policies, defense objectives, and management practices “[...] that could stand up to scrutiny from within government, parliament, civil society, and outside organizations like NATO” was the hallmark of DIB (Boland 2017: 206). The PfP ensured democratic governance across the defence sector to establish democratic and professionally managed defence institutions (NATO 1994 [2009]: 6). The idea was that

“[i]f a country’s defense sector is unaccountable, poorly managed, and not subject to civilian control, it will be difficult for the rest of the government to govern effectively or to promote social wellbeing and economic prosperity—never mind for democracy to take hold” (Kerr 2017: xv).

DIB is, therefore, a largely political and cultural process (Boland 2017: 222) that, through defence sectors, channels norms to other state sectors. Transparent and democratic defence structures contribute to a state’s prosperity and security and thus ensure greater regional stability and vice versa (2017: ix, xiii; Young 2017: 48).

A critical component of DIB was, therefore, recruitment standards and defense management practices. CEEC defense institutions were often afflicted by old Warsaw Pact militaries that survived the transition to post-communism. Through the PfP, NATO increased the power of civilians over autonomy-seeking military elites (Betz 2004: 2; Epstein 2008: 111). NATO officials contrasted approaches to the reconstruction of defence sectors, labeled features as “misinterpreted”, and declared NATO’s model as teleologically “right” (see: Epstein 2008: 133-4; Gheciu 2005: 114-5).

In the sense of identity following practice, a liberal-democratic identity was the fall-out of defence policies that incorporate standards such as a non-threatening posture towards ethnic minorities (see: Gallis 1994: CRS-9). Democratic peace came then through the endeavor to render military structures transparent and more efficient (see also: Behnke 2013: 102; Kruzel 1996: 34).

In turn, democratic CEEC defense sectors contributed to effective multinational defence planning by cooperatively unmasking national defense data. Former opponents gained insights into these data such as “[...] specialized capabilities, including psychological operations (PSYOPS) units and civil support services, especially medical, transport, supply, and maintenance assets” (Moroney 2003: 27).

Moreover, habits of cooperation were supported by providing PfP nations with permanent offices in NATO headquarters (see also: Cragg 1996b: 8). The military representatives of these nations became integrated into NATO’s quotidian business by participating in a system that aimed to dissolve mutual suspicion and traditional threat perceptions.

NATO officials followed a rather peculiar logic: regular multinational defense planning (e.g., personnel, logistics, budgeting, strategy), and the transparency that this process entails, is a focal practice to facilitate peaceful coexistence amongst European nations (Kruzel 1996: 33-4; Pfeiffer 2008: 107). Shared defense planning practices effectively remove mistrust between states and offset the so-called “security dilemma” by allowing states to peek into each other’s national defense business. This unmade national borders by creating the “NATO family”.

Military Reforms

Besides DIB, another major component of the PfP was the development of interoperability of CEEC armies with NATO forces. The introduction of force review and defence planning processes was one pillar enabling forces to contribute to NATO’s military activities, and the participation in combat formations was another. Multinational defense planning addressed force requirements for interoperability with NATO which intersected with coherent defence policies required by DIB.

Defence planning and review became the bedrock for the preparation of the CEECs for NATO membership (see: Simon 1999: 3, pt. 2).

NATO not only promoted the ability of armies to jointly operate in live crisis scenarios but also introduced NATO's long-standing core practices: the NATO force planning process. In 1995, NATO introduced a Planning and Review Process (PARP) by which NATO partners could develop force planning targets for those national units that are foreseen for multinational training, exercise, and operations with NATO (Boland 2017: 202-4).

PARP showed that standardization between NATO and its partners in terms of doctrines, language skills, equipment, or procedures needed to be improved. The results affected the schedule of exercises and training to promote better doctrinal, communicative, and technical standardization according to NATO's Standardization Agreements (STANAGs) (Mehnert 2002: 49-50; Szónyi 1998: 24).

Poland, for example, harmonized and integrated about 1500 STANAGs until it acceded to NATO in 1999 (Simon 1999: 4). The upgrading of military equipment such as weapons and ammunition was a part of this harmonization process.

Regarding the cornerstones of defense planning, that is, defense budgeting, policy planning, or human resources management, NATO's International Staff carved out a discursive corpus (e.g., guidelines, principles, procedures, concepts) of Western norms that addressed the effective management of these areas (Young 2017: 43). PARP was thereby derived from core processes in NATO, executed by SHAPE together with members: NATO force planning. As a NATO official writes,

“NATO force planning is the process through which representatives of member countries, of the NATO Military Authorities and of the International Staff try to determine force posture that should be at the disposal of the Alliance in order to enable it to carry out the tasks the Allies have agreed it should be able to carry out [...]” (Pfeiffer 2008: 109).

Since the PARP copied this process, NATO required a partner's military and civilian staff to fully incorporate the process, defend its methodology and conclusions, as well as to live up to the requirements of the outcomes (Boland 2017: 206). The whole process aimed to introduce a new commonsense of defense planning.

As mentioned above, it was also learning to share sensitive defense data and to normalize this process through regular PARP cycles. This means that former Warsaw Pact doctrines were to be gradually replaced by acting according to NATO procedures and processes. This quality was important when new members entered the cycles of the NATO force planning process.

The activities that drew on the PARP were to produce the capacity to jointly operate with NATO troops in live military operations and to be able to contribute to collective defense. Instead of being a net consumer of security, the PfP established that partners should actively produce security through joint NATO practices (Simon 1999: 2).

NATO invited CEEC military units to training areas, for instance, to Grafenwöhr/Germany, to learn the nuts and bolts of Western military strategy and tactics (INTVW9 2021). NATO partners expressed great interest in participating in NATO operations. This means that “the requirement for interoperability was, therefore, necessary and obvious” (Boland 2017: 225, note 12).

The PfP transmitted this capability. Because it was successful, NATO introduced a new force model for NATO-PfP cooperation. Interoperability and joint defense planning were showcased by a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) that included NATO and non-NATO members as a “multinational, multi-service formation generated and tailored for [...] humanitarian relief, peacekeeping or peace enforcement” and which was to be deployed to Bosnia (Cragg 1996a: art. 4, 9; Sarotte 2021: 234).

The Membership Action Plan (MAP)

The MAP was introduced at the 1999 NATO Washington summit after the accession of the Viségrad group and complemented the PfP. However, the MAP was even more geared toward NATO membership. It represented a stronger “practical manifestation of the Open Door” which made participants believe that an invitation was necessarily pending (Simon 1999: 4). The MAP tackled the vestiges of the Warsaw Pact culture.

The CEECs had difficulties acquiring state-of-the-art defense technologies and shedding their traditionally heavy force structures (Moroney 2003: 26).

As U.S. President, George W. Bush, emphasized, the MAP was based on the idea that candidate states needed to work harder to achieve greater convergence with the traditional members in terms of defense reforms (2001: art. 15).

The program observed and sharply benchmarked achievements in the areas of politics, economy, defense, resources, security, and law—making sure that all areas support national defense sectors (Cascone 2010: 177; Moroney 2003: 24). Defense targets were more detailed than in the PfP. MAP nations needed to submit “annual national programmes”, showing their reform progress (Smith 2000b: 217). NATO worked closely together with the candidates to spur their accession.

In that sense, the MAP was a reaffirmation by NATO of its “open door policy” and the commitment to the Washington Treaty (Moroney 2003: 24; Simon 2001: 29). The idea that Western and Eastern Europe would progressively align through achieving even greater levels of standardization of mindsets and practices lay at the core of the tightened criteria of the MAP.

The Permanent Joint Council (PJC)

Cooperative practices with Russia were the second track that was outlined when NATO introduced its “open-door policy” in 1994. The NRC was critical to reduce tensions between both sides over NATO enlargement.

The declared engagement with Russia led to the establishment of discussion forums such as the PJC. The signatures under the 1997 NATO-Russia “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security” strengthened the intent to overcome former contrasts on behalf of stability throughout Europe.

The Founding Act established the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) (NATO 1997a: Intro; art. II and IV). In 2002, the PJC was transformed into the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) (NATO 2022a). Moreover, a novelty in the relations, NATO hosted the Russian Colonel Shevtsov as a deputy for Russian forces in Bosnia at SHAPE in Mons/Belgium (Joulwan 1997: sec. 2).

While questions of arms reduction or peacekeeping in ex-Yugoslavia were discussed, the main reason for the serious engagement with Russia was that NATO enlargement became a real problem in Russia and suspicion of NATO was growing. If NATO was able to manage relations with Russia, it was to emerge as the centerpiece of European security and stability (Drozdiak 1997a: col. 2).

An issue was whether NATO would station troops in new member states after the Viségrad group had been invited in 1997 to join NATO (Sarotte 2021: 292). With the PJC/NRC, NATO attempted to regularize consultations and soothe tensions arising from NATO's enlargement policy. One senior NATO official said, “[w]e are listening to Russian concerns. There is, however, no question of giving Russia—or anyone else—a veto over NATO decisions” (cit. in: Palmer 1997: col. 1-2).

However, during NATO's enlargement or the intervention in Kosovo, relations between both sides declined. This affected areas such as the negotiations on strategic arms reduction (Sarotte 2021: 317). While the 2001 U.S.-led “War on Terror” registered a short rapprochement, the NRC was eventually suspended after Russia's actions in Georgia and Crimea in 2008 and 2014 (2021: 348).

During the 1990s and 2000s, however, consultative practices with Russia were an inevitable track of NATO's “open-door” policy to prevent NATO enlargement provoked Russian counteraction. They alleviated fears that unanswered concerns of the Russians deteriorated European security or, even worse, triggered NATO's Article 5.

5.2 The meaning of NATO's “open door”

Normal expectations

In connection with perceptions within NATO that the PfP represented the current consensus of the traditional members, NATO marked its practices and the principles behind them vis-à-vis the membership candidates as the way of doing things. NATO established an “enlargement pattern” which, however, would not *per se* include all former Warsaw Pact states but those who satisfied NATO criteria.

The policy of opening NATO consisted of a procedure or pattern. Practices of democratic transformation were an essential part of a pattern that was completed by decisions about new members as well as the invitation/admission of candidate states at two consecutive Alliance summits. This was the actual “enlargement process” and built on the PfP by reconfirming the institutionalization of democratic practices as worth the effort.

Step-by-step, this pattern enlarged the Alliance to an ever-greater organization based on the institutionalization of a range of strictly democratic practices, simultaneously functioning as membership criteria. Invitations and admissions of new members at summits set the stage for forging the community by reaffirming NATO’s principles (see: Behnke 2013: 177). Altogether, NATO’s enlargement process to the East was framed by the continuing engagement with Russia.

However, it was not exactly that NATO understood all countries in the East “[...] as societies which naturally belonged to NATO by dint of their political structure and cultural values”, as Williams and Neumann argue (2007: 76). Rather, it understood those countries as an integral part of NATO that coherently institutionalized and normalized the criteria for membership and where a political backslide was unlikely. Other Eastern countries were encouraged to shed their past more comprehensively and to work harder to be admitted to the circle of NATO nations.

Expectations by NATO that new members unrelentingly strive to shoulder democratic defense and multinational cooperation in practice were implied. As NATO SecGen Javier Solana emphasized, NATO “[...] will be a community where the European Allies are expected to take more responsibility [...]” (1999: art. 19).

Such normality was, for instance, expressed by Czech policymakers. I asked former MoD Alexandr Vondra in an interview to imagine that NATO approached him and told him that the Czech Republic would not have to contribute anything to the Alliance except for filling a nominal membership position.

His prompt answer was “On the contrary, we have to do more”. According to him, this was also important to keep the U.S. engaged vis-à-vis a militarily undecided EU.

Moreover, striving to reach and uphold the defence spending marker of two percent gross domestic product would be crucial, as Vondra explained (INTVW7 2021).

Another interviewee, a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) of a CEE army who participated over lengthy periods in the Pfp/MAP, gave me the strong impression that NATO knowledge was the military “gold standard”. He described this by repeatedly saying that he was “hungry seeking the information” provided by NATO (INTVW9 2021).

Both were largely representative of a generation that was navigating with relative ease through the democratic transformations of the post-Cold War period. Throughout the CEECs, Western democracy had been a place of longing for decades. After the Cold War, former dissidents became policymakers and soldiers viewed their job as perspective without the ideological fetters of communist armies.

On the other hand, however, Romanian policymakers, who saw their country being excluded from the first round of admission in 1997/99, had problems understanding NATO’s intentions in the first place. Foreign Minister Adrian Severin said, “[i]t is difficult [...] to meet criteria that are never explicitly stated”. Severin likened it to “fighting with ghosts” (cit in: Dobbs 1997: col. 3).

Ultimately, NATO’s door was open to those who institutionalized and prospectively maintained relations of normality to the Alliance’s fundamental principles and the ways of doing “alliance business”. As U.S. President Clinton at a White House conference in May 1995 emphasized,

“NATO membership is not a right” [...] “Countries with repressive political systems, countries with designs on their neighbors, countries with militaries unchecked by civilian control or with closed economic systems need not apply” (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 147, see: 336, fn. 50).

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright confirmed the opening for functioning democracies in 1997, saying,

“[i]f we were creating a new alliance today, we would not leave a democratic country out in the cold because it was once, against the will of its people, part of the Warsaw Pact. The only question we would consider is this: which democratic nations in Europe [...] are willing and able to contribute to our security?” (Senate 1998: 63-4).

The main position was “[...] that any country satisfying the [...] conditions for membership can join, as long as it is part of a European community of states” (Kruzel 1996: 36-7).

Expressions of normality

As of 1994/95, enlargement NATO policymakers constantly reaffirmed NATO’s “open door”. This came with the emphasis on candidates’ ability to satisfactorily perform. Two aspects were important. First, democratic practices were anchored in practitioners’ perceptions. Second, they had constitutive effects on NATO. The whole process of PfP practices and NATO admission appeared, therefore, sensible.

The U.S. NATO ambassador, Robert Hunter, recalled telling the ambassadors of the PfP- nations: “[p]ay close attention. Anyone here representing a country that would like at some point to join NATO, you need to take PfP very seriously: repeat, very seriously” (2019: 314, *Italic by author*). Such demands were reasonable after the Cold War.

When the strategic rationales of the Cold War became obsolete, NATO members were in the position to carefully select new cooperation partners. There was no direct incentive to admit autocracies to the Alliance compared to the Cold War when, for example, the accession of Portugal was viewed as a “strategic necessity” (Smith 2000a: 47). To admit an undemocratic country and spend years teaching the basics of democracy or even sending troops in defense of authoritarian governments did not make sense.

On the contrary, “[...] states should not expect NATO to waive strict adherence to democratic standards as it sometimes did in the past” (Johnsen and Young 1994: 50). Newcomers had to make a case for their inclusion (1994: 51). The post-communist CEECs were to be put “[...] under a microscope to see whether they measured up to Western expectations” (Asmus 2004: 147). As Joseph Kruzel emphasized, “[t]he real nightmare for NATO would be to admit a new state to the alliance and then have it become fascist or revert to communism. NATO would not want to be obligated to defend such a country” (1996: 32).

The triumph of Western democracy in connection with what a NATO official interpreted as a strong Western orientation of the CEECs (INTVW6 2021), constructed the rationale for NATO's open door. This reinforced the naturalness with which Western policymakers and NATO practitioners claimed the rightness and righteousness of democratic criteria and their installation as a threshold for newcomers.

When I spoke to NATO practitioners there was never a semblance of doubt about the reasonability of what NATO demanded from newcomers. Instead, I often discerned sympathy and understanding for those who experienced difficulties adjusting on grounds of the problematic circumstances that the communist past had left behind. Interviewees talked from the perception that this simply was the way things were in the post-Cold War NATO (INTVW1 2020; INTVW3 2021; INTVW5 2021; INTVW6 2021; INTVW10 2021).

However, perceptions of normality masked that they originated in the power relations and discursive constructions in the earlier struggle for NATO enlargement (Chapter 3). They were successful because discourses were enunciated from authoritative positions underpinned by the symbolic and material capital of U.S. policymakers. Normality was arbitrarily constructed.

The main meaning of NATO's "open door" and its practices became, consequently, to construct a "new" and "democratically like-minded" NATO. Democratic practices had constitutive effects. Other considerations such as the "defendability" of newcomers and their military capacity were important but democracy remained the foremost marker.

PfP practices did not merely construct a democratic identity community in an abstract sense but a "well-fortified democratic community" materially capable of conducting joint military action (see: Barany 2004: 69). In this logic, states that did not satisfy NATO criteria were to stay in the "PfP pool" until they proved better.

A senior NATO official emphasized, "[t]his is not just a one-shot operation. If other countries continue on the path of internal reform and external reconciliation, the moment that they will be invited will be sooner rather than later" (cit in: Black 1997c: col. 3). Similarly, the Danish MoD Hans Haekkerup said at a NATO workshop,

“[t]he objective of opening up the Alliance to our Eastern neighbors should be self-evident [...] I would have a moral problem if I were to deny new, stable democracies in Central and Eastern Europe the same [NATO] guarantees [that Denmark has]” (1996: art. 2).

Practitioners thus expressed a new normality of admitting democratic states after symbolic struggles enabled NATO enlargement. Doing otherwise conflicted with their representations, as Haekkerup’s remarks indicate. Another senior NATO diplomat stressed, therefore, that “[a]ll European allies now see expansion as a done deed” (cit in: Drozdiak 1998: col. 2).

Technically, the enlargement process rewarded PfP/MAP nations’ efforts to institutionalize democratic practices. For candidates, this (re-)legitimized the whole process starting with a membership in the PfP/MAP. The credibility of NATO’s enlargement promise was essential to generating smooth democratic transformations in the CEECs (Eyal 1997: 714).

Thus, a new key process was in place to replace the Cold War strategic community with a post-Cold War “identity community” capable of military action. It should facilitate the transition from NATO’s representation as a Cold War fortress to a new and positive image (Lucarelli 2005: 90; Sayle 2019: 230). Strictly democratic practices provided the coherence that held an ever-greater number of NATO members together (see: Williams 2009: 72).

Simultaneously, they would prevent political unreliability and fickleness, or that domestic backlashes on democracy encroached on the Alliance, making it a supermarket for security where countries would go shopping as much as they want for whatever purpose they want.

This key aspect of NATO’s post-Cold War persistence was expressed in the form of a question by one senior NATO official: “if we take on eastern European nations before they have become democracies or have military and political structures like our own then how do we achieve consensus, how do we function on a practical level?” (cit. in: Smith 2000b: 119).

Moreover, participation in NATO’s activities, for instance, military operations was no inevitable obligation. The provisions of the Washington Treaty do not define compelling reasons for committing troops to “non-Article 5 operations”.

Democracy and democratic practices should ensure that the Allies could find, at least, the lowest common denominator. Enlargement was, therefore, a “value-driven process” that deliberately focused on the democratic qualities of a newcomer (Williams 2021a).

Consequently, enlarging NATO by admitting democratically sound countries became a cornerstone of NATO’s post-Cold war transformation and persistence. This became “part of a broader process of promoting stability and integration” for which NATO was a “keystone” in the Euro-Atlantic region, as RAND’s foreign policy expert Stephen Larrabee testified (Senate 1998: 115).

The irreversibility of Article 10 of the Washington treaty was settled when Alliance leaders declared at the summits in Madrid (1997) and Washington (1999) that “NATO’s doors remained open for new members as long as they fulfilled the accession criteria” (cit.: Barany 2004: 67; NATO 1994 [2009]). Article 10 stipulates that NATO members “[...] invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area [...] (NATO 2010c: 4).

5.3 NATO’s interventionist policy

The signatures under the Dayton Accords by the conflict parties and the representatives of the international community put into effect a ceasefire in Bosnia at the end of October 1995. On December 14, the agreement was signed, and on December 15, Security Council Resolution 1031 transferred all the authority from UNPROFOR to NATO’s Implementation Force (IFOR) to enforce the agreement (UNSCR 1995: part II-III). This section argues that IFOR laid down a basic blueprint for NATO operations. New theater practices became the hallmark of NATO’s transformation in military terms.

IFOR commenced on 20 December 1995 and was mandated for one year (Kirkpatrick 2006: 406; hereinafter OJE). IFOR consisted of 34 countries: 16 NATO members and 18 non-members such as Austria, Sweden, Bulgaria, and Russia (UNSG 1996: Annex, para. 3).

For the NATO allies, it had not only been obvious that the Bosnian war needed to be stopped by military airpower but that the Dayton Agreement needed to be implemented by military force on the ground. As of mid-1995, NATO members were no longer making hypothetical commitments to the Alliance's post-Cold War transformations and sent ground forces into former conflict zones (Mulchinock 2017: 141). Inter-ethnic violence could not be stopped without deploying ground forces beyond NATO's Article 5-area, effectively ending the era of Cold War peacekeeping (Frantzen 2005: 66; Mulchinock 2017: 145).

NATO's interventionist policy, actualized by struggles between Allies redefining NATO's scope of action, now contained the possibility to realize peace-enforcement operations (e.g., ODF) and peacekeeping operations on the ground to stop and prevent further human rights violations (IFOR).

The British diplomat, Pauline-Neville Jones, remarks that "[t]he transatlantic bonds of the Alliance, much drained by the political divisiveness of UNPROFOR, have been revitalised, and the allies' ability to peacekeep together has been shown to be more than theory. NATO works" (Neville-Jones 1996: 53-4).

However, combat troops, trained in the encounter of traditional force formations on different terrains, had little experience with the requirements of peacekeeping (see: Kirkpatrick 2006: 423). Contrasting the certainty of Cold War threats, the novelty of peace enforcement/keeping included uncertainties about threats, and "old military mind-sets clashed with new truths" (Kretchik 2011: 84). Thus, about 55.000 IFOR-soldiers were only beginning to share new practices.

Together with ODF's bombing campaign, IFOR represented the 1990s as NATO's "humanitarian decade" (Hodge 2013: 352). NATO's Western Balkans interventions in Bosnia, and later, Kosovo (1999) belonged to this decade since humanitarian efforts were the primary cause for action. The "humanitarianization" of the military, the emergence of the "do-good soldier", or ethical labels on warfare were its features (Dal Lago *et al.* 2010: 199).

However, the "humanitarianism" of the 1990s also supported strategic goals such as the revitalization and persistence of NATO after the Cold War (see: Hodge 2013: 354; INTVW5 2021).

Campaigns were accompanied by a discursive construction that stressed Western responsibility and capacity for help attached to the Srebrenica genocide discourse. As U.S. President Clinton in a speech on Bosnia emphasized,

“[...] America's role will not be about fighting a war. It will be about helping the people of Bosnia to secure their own peace agreement [...] In fulfilling this mission, we will have the chance to help stop the killing of innocent civilians, especially children, and at the same time, to bring stability to central Europe, a region of the world that is vital to our national interests. It is the right thing to do. [...] We cannot stop all war for all time but we can stop some wars” (CNN 1995).

The argument was that, given the human rights abuses in Bosnia, the violation of human rights was

“likely to continue if the peace agreement is not formally signed [...] or if it is signed but not carried out. [...] some foreign forces are needed to separate the contending armies and to control the standing down of heavy weapons” (Cutler 1995: col. 2).

This created normative strictures for the form of NATO intervention. During the 1990s, military practices were, therefore, adjusted to humanitarian theater scenarios. There were no clear-cut enemies on the ground when IFOR advanced into Bosnia since the Bosnian Serb forces ceased to fire at their opponents. Rather, NATO troops faced the danger of continuing covert violence between all former conflict parties, local disorder, or new streams of refugees (see: Frantzen 2005: 66).

Securing the required legitimacy for military interventions by the UN, NATO forces were, instead, to facilitate the reconciliation of contending groups, produce military and human security, and support humanitarian relief. The objectives of IFOR were, therefore, to calm and normalize the local situation by promoting regional stability, law, and order, and the growth of democratic institutions through peace-enforcement/keeping (see: Kirkpatrick 2006: 407). With this, both ODF and IFOR laid out a basic blueprint for further NATO interventions.

As one NATO headquarters official emphasized, “Bosnia is the catalyst or case study that shaped what the Alliance could look like” (cit. in: Kaufman 2002: 129).

As U.S. Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, affirmed, “NATO operations in Bosnia are a prime example of the new missions that NATO must be prepared to undertake” (cit. in: Bee 2001: 156). Modifications to this blueprint were made following the changing contexts for interventions. In terms of practices, IFOR was subdivided into two major areas of responsibility. First, NATO was primarily responsible for the establishment of a secure environment to enable ethnic reconciliation. Second, it was engaged in civil reconstruction.

Stabilization of security (primary tasks)

The stabilization of security and the improvement of human conditions were to be achieved by IFOR’s primary task of demobilizing the local factions. Regional stabilization was to be restored by restrictions on combatants’ military activities and movements as well as a military equilibrium through the reduction of ordnance. The Dayton Agreement outlined these tasks.

Practices that ensured compliance with these objectives were implemented by IFOR. According to IFOR’s commander, Leighton Smith, they created the foundations for the beginning reconciliation process (1996: 13). In hindsight, such basic security tasks reappeared in modified form in NATO’s subsequent military interventions, for instance, in Kosovo.

The stipulations of the Dayton agreement were robust authorizations to demobilize the warring factions around specific zones and, therefore, to mute the ethnic conflict in Bosnia. The durable cession of hostilities under the authority of IFOR (OSCE 1995: Annex 1-A, art. I, pt. 2a) was a primary task to provide a secure environment for the implementation of the non-military tasks of the agreement (IFOR’s secondary tasks). Secondary tasks were, for example, ensuring free and fair elections, economic reconstruction, or furthering humanitarianism under the overarching goal of state-building in multiethnic Bosnia.

IFOR, mandated and authorized to enforce the stipulations within Bosnia, was ordered to, firstly, monitor measures captured under the title “Military Aspects” (Annex 1-A; see also: Mulchinock 2017: 146).

The ethnic military forces were required to immediately restrict military activities, vacate firing positions, and complete the withdrawal behind a zone of separation. Within the zone, none of the three Bosnian ethnic groups were to possess weapons.

It was stipulated that “[v]iolators of this provision shall be subject to military action by the IFOR, including the use of necessary force to ensure compliance” (UN 1995: Annex 1-A, art. IV, pt. 2a, cit.: 2b). Consequently, the ethnic factions were ordered to withdraw to their barracks or areas designated by the authority of the IFOR-commander.

This included the withdrawal of all tanks, armored vehicles, or artillery. Redundant forces were demobilized and released from service (UN 1995: Annex 1-A, art. IV, pt. 5a, 5b). IFOR was authorized to remain the only armed force in the demilitarized zone and to control and regularly patrol a line of about 1400 km daily (Gawrych 2011: 121). Armed patrolling was a key practice that conveyed the readiness and strength of NATO forces in the service of security and order (essential in Kosovo and Afghanistan as well).

Under instructions by IFOR, the Bosnian ethnic groups had to store their weapons in special cantonment areas (Smith 1996: 14). Regular weapon site inspections by IFOR followed and chief negotiator Holbrooke touted the success of the provision in bringing the peace process on track (Baumann 2011b: 97-8).

A further agreement to be monitored under IFOR was the “Agreement on Inter-Entity Boundary Line And related Issues” (Annex 2). The proviso of this Annex legally manifested the separation of the Bosnian and Serb entities and gave the IFOR commander the authority to regularly monitor and decide about amendments to borders. To meet requirements and to provide a stable environment for the reconstruction of Bosnia, the agreement conferred comprehensive rights on NATO. Compliance with this approach was non-negotiable and IFOR was ready to use its firepower (Neville-Jones 1996: 53-4).

For regional stabilization, the Bosnian factions were required to adopt “measures to enhance mutual confidence and reduce the risk of conflict” (UN 1995: Annex 1-B, art. II).

They had to establish military liaison with each other and with IFOR in a Joint Military Commission (UN 1995: Annex 1-B, art. II, pt. (i); Annex 1-A, art. VIII). Moreover, the Bosnian militaries had to establish command posts at the IFOR-brigade level and below to control their forces and to daily report troop movements to IFOR (UN 1995: Annex 1-A, art. VI, pt. 7).

IFOR also responded with force to interference with the movement of people throughout post-war Bosnia, i.e., with the return of refugees to designated areas (see. UN 1995: Annex 1-A, art. VI, pt. 3d). It did so by assuming control over roads and traffic, and by supervising the marking of separation zones (AFSOUTH 2020: art. 28; see also: UN 1995: Annex 1-A, art. VI, pt. 2, 6, 9b, 9c).

In effect, IFOR was established as a supreme military authority throughout Bosnia and accelerated the cessation of hostilities by regularizing the above-mentioned tasks. Because it had been this powerful and well-organized authority, the Bosnian ethnic parties did not dare to test its strength and behaved largely cooperatively (Neville-Jones 1996: 53-4).

This was demonstrated during a notorious episode in July 1996, nearby the Bosnian town of Han Pijesak, where weapon storage was discovered, and the Bosnian Serbs denied IFOR access to the premises (see: Clark 2001: 73).

IFOR stepped up escalation by initiating “Operation Fear Naught”. The core message was to move international assistance and civilians out of the way to commence with airstrikes. In consequence, Serb leaders understood and relented to IFOR’s demands (Baumann 2011b: 108-12).

In such cases, NATO enforced local security through practicing the “show of force” to prevent a power vacuum from developing (see: Penksa 2010: 44-5). As the immediate post-war environment of Bosnia was characterized by factional competition, NATO’s quotidian display of military power and prowess repelled attempts to disrupt the order that was produced through the demonstration of high military readiness.

Civil reconstruction and humanitarian relief (secondary tasks)

For NATO and IFOR, it was a novelty that their responsibility needed to cover civil tasks. Traditionally, military commanders feared “mission creep”, that is, the inevitable assumption of non-intended tasks in military operations. However, the operational planning for IFOR considered that NATO’s assistance for civil tasks and humanitarian agencies would be required. Concerning the basic operational blueprint of IFOR, NATO’s military interventions in Kosovo and Afghanistan saw an even stronger engagement in civil tasks in former conflict zones.

In this sense, IFOR initially provided modest support for “nation-building” or civil reconstruction (Smith 1996: 15). While this also served to foster primary military goals, it helped the country to reestablish some normality in terms of freedom of movement, the improvement of people’s living conditions, or the conditions for the return of refugees.

IFOR cleared minefields, repaired roads and railroads, and reopened Bosnian airports for commercial aviation. It played an important start-up role in the resumption of agricultural activities, infrastructure rehabilitation, schooling, and local commerce (Neville-Jones 1996: 55).

Moreover, it constructed or repaired over 60 bridges and carried out the planning and construction of power plants and water distribution facilities. Furthermore, it reestablished telecommunication systems and organized comprehensive medical care. These extensive civil projects were funded through NATO’s common funding system.

NATO deployed engineers and its civil-military cooperation in support of the High Representative of the international community which also should ensure the maintenance of investments and projects in the long run (Smith 1996: 15). This means that the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Dayton Accords was to be coordinated and supervised by the creation of an Office of the High Representative (OHR; UN 1995: Annex 10, art. I, pt. 2).

Amongst a plethora of tasks, the OHR’s remit was to coordinate and guide the many international agencies that were to facilitate peace in Bosnia on behalf of the UN, EU, and other participating organizations and countries (UN 1995: Annex 10, art. II, pt. 1-9).

Weekly office calls and high-level coordination between military commanders, Western civilian representatives, and local policymakers were mandatory. Particularly striking was the Agreement on Elections and Human Rights and the Agreement on an International Police Task Force (IPTF) as a civilian law enforcement agency (see: UN 1995: Annexes 3, 6, and 11).

IFOR's support of the OSCE in the elections in September 1996 had been "a model of civilian-military cooperation" (Neville-Jones 1996: 57). Amongst a variety of tasks, IFOR provided the much-needed security for the elections to happen and escorted ballots across the ethnic boundary line.

IFOR played an essential role in post-war Bosnia. With a variety of practices, clustered as primary and secondary tasks, it constructed a basic blueprint for NATO post-Cold War military operations in post-war conflict zones where the remaining governmental authorities were too weak to ensure security and the well-being of the population.

In hindsight, these tasks and practices were to become an essential part of NATO's interventionism. Whether Bosnia, Kosovo, or Afghanistan, NATO's responsibilities in post-war conflict zones always comprised the two aspects of the production of military security and the support of civilian reconstruction. As the British field commander, General Jackson writes,

"[i]n addition to maintaining military security [...] If this meant lending a hand to the elections, for example, or in assisting rehabilitation, that seems to me to be entirely sensible and wholly laudable" (1997: 97).

The concrete ways, means, and mandates to fulfill these tasks, however, varied in context.

5.4 The meaning of NATO interventionism

During 1996, NATO's IFOR contingent substantially calmed the situation in Bosnia and paved the way for ethnic reconciliation, civil reconstruction, and Bosnian state-building. NATO's actions in Bosnia provided a narrative that Jamie Shea used to repeat: “[t]he Alliance was good for the Balkans, but the Balkans were perhaps even more beneficial for it” (also: INTVW5 2021; NATO 2013; 2010: 17). I argue that NATO's military operations provided the Alliance with the possibility to demonstrate strength and unity.

Together, ODF and IFOR instantiated a pattern of NATO action, functioning as a blueprint for further NATO campaigns. First, NATO would by high-intensity operations attack an enemy with massive airstrikes and force him to defer. By this, it would prove its resolve and credibility (Smith 2000b: 147). For instance, SecGen Willy Claes declared on 5 September 1995 that commanders concluded that the Serbs failed to comply with the demands to withdraw from the area. The air campaign would, therefore, be continued (NATO 1995a). As Warren Christopher noted, “[w]e were determined to send a message that the days of pinprick response to aggression and brutality were over” (2001: 257).

After the withdrawal of hostile forces, the Alliance would send a ground force, operated through the NATO chain of command. This ground force would occupy areas of operation and implement peace deals, that is, reinstate public order, provide local security, and support civil reconstruction. Under U.S. leadership, this included the support for Western-style democratic state-building with local modifications.

As I will discuss in Chapter 7, NATO nations showed that they followed the blueprint in further operations. Intense airstrikes and a massive ground intervention deployed practices that served the purpose of IFOR, that is, demobilizing opposition forces, creating security, and initiating civil reconstruction.

The 2011 Libya intervention proved to be an exception to this as it “[...] was unusual for a NATO operation in that an air campaign was not followed by a stabilization force on the ground [...]” (Shea 2014: 28).

Alliance military operations showed that NATO was the only Western international organization that could carry out dual military security/civil reconstruction tasks after the failure of the UN in Bosnia. As a Canadian official remarked, NATO decoupled from the UN due to “[...] a fear of endangering the credibility of the Alliance as a military power prepared and able to deliver on threats of force, because of an interfering or dithering UN” (cit. in: Giegerich 2013: 307).

Military operations became, therefore,

“[...] the proving ground where the Alliance could adapt to its major new post–Cold War role: organizing peace support operations beyond its members’ territories and learning to specialize not only in the techniques of conflict termination (naval embargoes, no-fly zones, and air campaigns) but also of peace implementation (ground forces turning “mission creep” into a full spectrum of tasks beyond more patrolling—from disarming militias to the reconstruction of roads and railways)” (Shea 2010: 17).

“Out-of-area” practices created an evolutionary process for NATO. With IFOR, the Alliance showed that it had become an “enabler”, that is, an effective implementation structure for conflict management in which the democratic practices of NATO members and their expansion eastward play a central role,

“[...] because it offers much higher legitimacy and the institutional machinery necessary to generate the consensus, the capabilities, and the interoperability that major use of force require” (Jakobsen 2014: 70).

Subsequent operational scenarios added new capacities, networks, or “lessons learned” to NATO. The Alliance accumulated theater knowledge and inaugurated new force structures such as a technologically advanced NATO Response Force (NRF) that could be quickly deployed and which rapidly advanced the capabilities for modern warfare (NATO 2002b). As the U.S. ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, stressed “[w]e’re deconstructing the old NATO to build a new one [...]” (cit in: Kaiser and Richburg 2002: col. 2).

It also increasingly combined its military activities with other crisis management tools. For example, in Afghanistan, terrorism was to be engaged by non-military means such as the freezing of financial assets and the sharing of intelligence between global partners (NATO 2002c).

Put differently, “NATO transformed from a reactive self-defence alliance into a military crisis manager – still ‘euro-centric’, yet with a far broader geographical and military remit than most observers had ever imagined” (Rühle 2013: 57). Until today, no other organization has been as nearly as effective concerning the deployment and use of massive military force to end crisis scenarios.

Given that NATO members agree on actions, the meaning of NATO’s interventionism was, thus, twofold. First, it would show the unity and solidarity between NATO members on matters of international crisis— to “convey a message” as Warren Christopher called it (2001: 257). And second, it demonstrated NATO’s unrivaled capacity for crisis management that, simultaneously, reconfirmed the overriding role of U.S. power in NATO.

Intervening in “out-of-area” would, thus, carry the meaning of this unified and militarily/technologically capable NATO. NATO SecGen Lord Robertson stressed that the Alliance’s tools have made it relevant in the post-Cold War world: “NATO’s credibility [...] comes from its capability” (cit. in: Kaiser and Richburg 2002: col. 3).

A consistent interventionist pattern was, thus, to reconfirm NATO’s interventionist capacity/capability, its continuing importance, and its nearly indispensable role in conflict management in international affairs. This provided for the expression of NATO as “a cornerstone of the Cold War security order in Europe” (e.g., Harris 2022; INTVW10 2021).

The successful dual management of military security and civil reconstruction, evidenced by the withdrawal of hostile forces and the installation of local security/reconstruction tasks, ensured NATO’s continuing relevance (Smith 2000b: 154).

However, this depended on the present and future attitude of the Allies as an outcome of struggles between them. As Peter Jakobsen writes, “NATO will, needless to say, not remain indispensable if it loses the capabilities required for enabling effective action with US support” (2014: 71).

For NATO members, IFOR embodied the first step in the direction of a unified and capable interventionist NATO with a primary role in transatlantic security. British parliamentarians affirmed that “IFOR has proved to be a powerful demonstration of NATO effectiveness [...]” and “ the presence of our troops in Bosnia has helped to save thousands of lives” (Hansard 2023b). Likewise, President Clinton emphasized that NATO forces “plowed the field in which the seeds of peace have been planted [...]” and that “[...] the initial NATO force [IFOR] has succeeded” (cit. in: Baker and Bradley 1996: col. 1, 2).

As a U.S. government official stated, “[i]n fact, I believed then and I believe today that if NATO had not become involved in the Bosnia peacekeeping operation, then we would be talking about the relevance of NATO today. I think that NATO would have ended up being irrelevant” (Senate 1998 [1997]: 4).

Particularly instructive in this context was my interview with a former leading U.S. military intelligence officer who participated in all major NATO interventions during the 1990s and 2000s. His narration, which included observation of others, expressed all the way NATO’s military action as a logical choice given the appalling human rights violation in ex-Yugoslavia and presumed spill-over effects for European security.

He stressed that all participating nations were “highly motivated”, even “content”, to “stop genocide” and to “contribute to European stability” (INTVW10 2021). Asked about his thoughts concerning the Bosnia intervention, he highlighted the joint endeavors of NATO troops, saying that

“it was interesting to see that a lot of the nations...because NATO was so was renewing its purpose through this operation [IFOR], there was a lot of coordination, collaboration, synchronization among the nations. So, there was an extra effort because we had to work the command-and-control issues out. [...] You know, we had French, Dutch, German, Polish...but we worked so well together because I think people were motivated because it was the first time they were in an allied combined operation [...] people were very enthusiastic with the mission” (ibid.).

Asked how he felt about NATO operations he said that “[i]t becomes an everyday life for us” (ibid.). Overall, his narration told a background story of a big and functioning international military machinery in which practitioners knew their place and that, therefore, adjusted well to the new “out of area” role, even perfecting it over time. He left no doubts about NATO’s capacity to manage this role, also when I confronted him with NATO’s full operational spectrum over twenty years which, as it is well-known, enormously burdened the contributing nations and strained relations between the Allies.

Given that practitioners were convinced that the post-Cold War NATO is a capable military organization and “suited for the job”, the Alliance’s operations were talked about as “business as usual”. This was the impression that I gathered from other interviews as well. Practitioners perceived them as a normal evolutionary step of NATO and viewed their professional development in the Alliance through the lens of operations (INTVW1 2020; INTVW3 2021; INTVW5 2021; INTVW6 2021; INTVW9 2021; INTVW12 2023).

It was not questioned that NATO could and did take on “the job” given that the humanitarian remit differentiated harmful actions of friend and foe into good and bad. Enjoying the advantage of retrospect, some practitioners felt the need to extensively and very emotionally debate how NATO could have achieved better results as, for instance, a former British NATO strategy planner did concerning the past ISAF mission (INTVW12 2023). This normality supported the perpetuation of both interventionist practices and NATO.

However, such perceptions had their origins in the accomplished mobilization of material and symbolic capital by U.S. policymakers in the struggle for NATO’s role “out of area”. Considering the adoption of a genocide discourse after Srebrenica, the consequential deployment of substantive airpower/ground forces to end the Bosnian War instantiated practitioners’ commonsense world (Chapter 4).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the practical implications of NATO's policy turn in the mid-1990s. As for NATO's "open door" policy, NATO operationalized the double track of preparing post-communist states for membership and engaging with Russia to avoid creating obstacles to NATO enlargement. Consequently, NATO determined in the PfP the reconstruction of post-communist defense sectors through civil-military and military reform programs. At the very core, this represented a Western approach to peace.

Democratically controlled defense sectors as well as the learning and doing of multinational defense planning should not only allow states to be able to peek into each other's defensive capabilities. It should also override old grievances, mistrust, and suspicion concerning national defense—the long-standing sources of security dilemmas between states. Building on the adoption of these practices by the CEECs, NATO decided about the candidates to be drawn from the PfP and invited and admitted them at Alliance summits ("enlargement process").

I argued that NATO did not view every post-communist country as a NATO member but rather those who satisfied the criteria for membership. Nations that wanted to become a member but did not live up to the criteria, were to remain in the "PfP pool". Criteria for this were not fixed but the object of struggles between Allies, as I will show next.

This ensured the departure from the strategic community of the Cold War. Back then, strategic calculations led to the accession of rather democratically ambiguous states such as Portugal. After 1990, NATO became an alliance whose new tasks were by choice and, in the absence of the Soviet threat, required democratic identities that ensured the Alliance remained a forum where mutual decisions were possible. Practicing democracy constituted this identity. The meaning of PfP/MAP practices was thus to construct a democratically like-minded and materially empowered NATO. Eventually, this a central role in NATO's transformation and persistence.

I also engaged with NATO's interventionist policy, initiated in 1995. I showed that, following Dayton, a sizeable ground force was deployed to implement the agreement. Practices were dual.

First, it produced military security locally. Patrolling of borders or the show of force was practiced daily to create a secure environment.

Second, NATO forces initiated civil reconstruction such as building bridges and roads. In this context, NATO played an indispensable role in providing much-needed humanitarian efforts in zones where Western or local civil authorities had not yet been installed. For instance, NATO's military police were to be the first crime scene investigators to record atrocities in Kosovo after the Serb withdrawal and before any other civil authority was installed in the region.

I also argued that the bombing campaign, aiming at the withdrawal of hostile forces, and the deployment of a sizeable ground force represented a pattern that incorporated the above-mentioned dual-practices track. Practices were transferrable to different interventionist contexts and assumed constitutive effects, guaranteeing the effective management of crisis and the centrality of NATO for crisis resolution.

The meaning of NATO's interventionism and its practices was twofold. First, it should demonstrate a unified NATO. And second, it should show the capacity and capability of NATO to live up to its self-proclaimed tasks, that is, to resolve crisis scenarios. The successful performance of these tasks in "out of area" was thus to become a cornerstone of NATO's post-Cold War persistence if NATO members decided to uphold the pattern which was object to struggles between them, as I will show in Chapter 7.

While my research indicates some normalcy about the practices that constructed the democratic and interventionist Alliance, I argue, with a look to the next chapter, that the taken-for-grantedness of NATO's "business", which some of my interviewees conveyed, was not completely settled in the Alliance. While the PFP/MAP became accepted as the program to prepare newcomers, it was far from clear what the whole enlargement process (decision/ invitation/admission) should look like.

One stage of the process, which I have left out so far, became the most contested stage during NATO's enlargement process: the process of deciding about new members. This means that power struggles, breaking out at new junctures of NATO history, were responsible for settling practices as NATO's "new normal".

Chapter 6

The struggle for a permanent “open door”

With the policy turn of the mid-1990s, NATO established practices to enlarge the Alliance. The satisfactory adoption of a set of democratic defense practices by candidates, and the officialization of new members by NATO, lay at the center of a pattern that enlarged NATO in successive waves. The “right” adoption of democratic norms and standards in defense and related policy areas would build a “fortified value community” vis-à-vis the “forced logic of previous expansions” of the strategic Cold War NATO (Gorka 1998: 23). As Alexandra Gheciu writes,

“[...] the establishment of a certain set of Western-prescribed liberal norms and institutions in the area of defense is “the right thing to do”—it is part of becoming a modern democracy, hence it is what emerging democratic polities like the former Communist states must do” (2005: 19).

While I am aware that practitioners often talk from the vantage point of retrospection, I included in the previous chapter insights from my interviews that conveyed some sense of normality about NATO’s post-Cold War doings. But it may be doubtful whether interviewees would have talked about the Bosnia intervention with the same conviction and soundness today if ODF had failed in 1995 or IFOR had been NATO’s final operation in 1996.

In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu remarked that “[w]hat today presents itself as self-evident, established, settled once and for all, beyond discussion, has not always been so and only gradually imposed itself as such” (2000 [1997]-b: 174). A large part of what we today perceive as normal has come a long way.

When policymakers hold press conferences and make statements, they rarely mention the drawn-out processes and arduous struggles— the many contingencies, letters, conferences, controversial phone calls, or backroom disputes—that precede decisions. In the same sense, the normality around NATO enlargement has been the result of processual and competitive constructions beyond the announcement of NATO’s policy change.

I argue, therefore, that the self-evidence of constructing a “fortified democratic value community” was far from settled with the initiation of the new policy in 1994. While the PfP/MAP became the accepted vehicle for preparing interested countries for membership, the final form of the process of NATO enlargement was not clear at all.

That is because once NATO’s post-Cold War policies were in place, strategic rationales encroached on the Allies and disquieted what should be the “new normal”. The main problem was that despite the Allies agreeing on opening NATO, it was not obvious who should be admitted based on unanimity and how so (Eyal 1997: 705). To determine the form of NATO enlargement after the post-communist CEECs had engaged in the PfP, new struggles between Allies erupted.

These struggles were not about fundamental understandings of what NATO was. Rather, at stages of NATO’s post-Cold War transformation period, some Allies tended to bend the new policies to their advantage, trying to increase their clout in NATO.

What I conceive of as a “power struggle over the form of NATO enlargement” in 1997, established the design for the future post-Cold War NATO as an expanding politico-military organization where debilitating debates about “whether and how” were, by and large, beyond discussion. As the former U.S. NATO ambassador, Robert Hunter, writes, “[t]he basic design of that era continues to be preeminent in today’s functioning of NATO. Since then, NATO has continued to adapt and to meet new demands [...]” (2019: 297).

However, this power struggle was no less important than the struggle to open NATO. While some NATO members sought to rearrange NATO’s distribution of power in the first place, this struggle reconfirmed NATO’s “open door” policy as NATO’s continuing reality.

The Atlanticists emerged as dominant and reasserted the design of a policy that was first formulated in 1994. Their approach reconfirmed that newcomers had to *thoroughly* adopt the democratic practices in the PfP. Only based on democratically developed candidates, NATO could, then, enlarge in several (open-ended) waves.

I will proceed by discussing the international context after the inception of the PfP in 1994. This context includes Russia which saw NATO expansion as an increasing threat and the CEECs which took steps to prepare for membership.

Then, I will outline the transatlantic and European positions on NATO enlargement. To sum up, the transatlantic positions, which included the U.S.-German strategic partnership, favored a small number of acceding states with a continuing “open door”. This should also encourage more states to thoroughly adopt democratic postures in the PfP. The European position around the Italo-French axis favored a big enlargement that would have included insufficiently prepared states and left doubts about a continuing open door. I will discuss their positions from a historical perspective.

Subsequently, I will discuss the struggles between the Allies around French demands for the Europeanization of NATO command that preceded the historic NAC meetings at Sintra and Madrid. This struggle left France in the wake. I conclude that its outcome was not decided in Madrid but due to the prior self-deprivation of symbolic capital.

Finally, I will show that Madrid decided on the form of NATO enlargement. The following wave of NATO expansion went uncontested. However, this smooth process was interrupted by another struggle around the 2008 Bucharest summit and a prospective membership of Ukraine and Georgia. The U.S. Bush administration challenged the fundamental principles of enlargement. However, their reassertion in the greater context of the “War on Terror” reaffirmed the NATO that we know today, and which recently welcomed Finland as a new member.

6.1 The road to Madrid

In late May 1997, NATO signed the Founding Act with Russia in Paris to institute more comprehensive cooperation and dialogue between both military and political matters (NATO 2009 [1997]). Above all, Russia should be reassured of the forthcoming NATO enlargement since the decision on new members almost three years after the initiation of the PfP was ripe.

While Russia could be moved to agree to NATO expansion, NATO members were fighting another uphill battle. Towards the 29-30 May NAC spring meeting in Sintra, Portugal, as well as the Alliance summit in Madrid in July 1997, they engaged in this battle.

There, as Ronald Asmus writes, “[...] for the first time, the latent differences between Washington and some of its allies over the scope of enlargement and its future broke into the open” (2004: 176). And, as Ryan Hendrickson notes, “the political dynamics of expansion were competitive” (1999: 84). Months of intra-Alliance struggle involved several NATO members but would mainly “escalate into a dramatic diplomatic shoot out” between the U.S. and France (Asmus 2004: 176).

The Sintra and Madrid-episodes were instigated by the lingering disagreements about NATO enlargement since 1994. But when the Madrid summit ended, one realization set in. The summit had been “[...] the culmination of years of political and diplomatic work involving some of the most far-reaching changes in NATO’s history” (ibid.). That is because Alliance members’ decision to enlarge NATO was “[...] one of the most important events in post-Cold War international affairs, American foreign policy, and East European politics” (Barany 2003: 2).

While Sintra and Madrid had a prologue, the historic dispositions of policymakers and Alliance practitioners played a critical role in the struggle over the form of NATO enlargement and, with it, the persistence of NATO after the Cold War. They were the “props” to the diplomatic showdown which was, as Ronald Asmus witnessed, “filled with drama, diplomatic intrigue, and political confrontation—with the Russians as well as with some of our closest allies” (ibid.).

In the following, I will discuss Russia and the Central and Eastern European PfP members, that is, the Visegrád group plus Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia as the context for ensuing struggles about the form of NATO enlargement in the run-up to Sintra and Madrid.

International context: Russia

Albeit NATO-Russia relations were envisioned to move politically towards enhancement through diplomacy, the relationship between both sides deteriorated. To strike a deal with the Russians required a unitary Western stance on NATO enlargement which, then, appeared to be rather shaky since NATO members could not agree on how to deal with Russia.

From early 1997 onwards, Yeltsin acted increasingly erratic (Spohr and Piirimäe 2022: 182). The problem was that Yeltsin, dealing with worsening health, faced enormous political pressures from domestic nationalist elites with unfavorable attitudes toward an eastward move of NATO. Russian policymakers castigated Yeltsin's PfP subscription as a "national betrayal" (De Santis 1994: 68). Consequently, Yeltsin politically vacillated by appearing as an adaptive interlocutor in private but as an assertive Russian nationalist leader in public.

Without the Soviet threat, the relationship with Russia created uncertainty about the form of NATO enlargement with Western policymakers. One Kremlin source was quoted, saying: "[i]f NATO moves eastward, Russia will move westward" (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 182). The Russians tried to discourage the implementation of NATO enlargement by threatening consequences for peace in Europe (Haglund 1999: 2).

Guarantees on a non-membership of any former Soviet republic were the baseline. In 1996, Foreign Minister Primakov reemphasized that "it is not acceptable to us that NATO is open to everyone" [...] "this is an issue that could disrupt or destroy everything. We must be very, very careful" (cit in: Asmus 2004: 192; also: Sarotte 2021: 254).

NATO SecGen Javier Solana registered, therefore, low Western support for the enlargement process, saying that if there was a choice to make between conflict with Russia and NATO expansion, the latter probably lost out. However, strong Western unity was needed to begin the enlargement process without inviting Russian counteraction. A united Western position would confront the confessed great power with a security reality to which it had to adjust rather than continue its attacks on NATO's enlargement policy (Asmus 2004: 182).

The Visegrád plus Romania and Slovakia

From its initiation in late 1994, the PfP program was a success with 23 eastern countries participating in the program. During the following two years, it became evident that the Alliance's remit had profoundly changed to a political and military one, also inviting 13 PfP-nations to become part of IFOR's Bosnia campaign (Hendrickson 1999: 87-8; USDoS 1997). Five serious candidates for the first wave of accession emerged from the PfP.

Since NATO had declared that the politico-military transformation of the CEECs was a gateway to membership, 12 participants filed a membership application, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Republic of Macedonia (Hendrickson 1999: 98, fn. 26).

For NATO, it signaled that it had to initiate the enlargement process. Therefore, NATO actors met with interested CEECs in January 1996 and asked them to present how they had met the criteria of the 1995 enlargement study.

These documents were analyzed by the NAC to facilitate decision-making on NATO memberships, thereby creating a distinction between future partners (remaining in the PfP) and Allies (Solomon 1998: pos. 1085-6, 1184).

In this group, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia—after the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993 the “Visegrád Four”—emerged as the strongest candidates. They lobbied extensively for their cause, especially in Washington. As *The Guardian* writes, “[m]uch more than west Europeans, Poles, and Czechs are firmly wedded to the transatlantic imperative- the need for America to be firmly engaged in European security arrangements” (Traynor 1996: col. 2).

They established liaisons with the U.S. Congress and published the achievements of ongoing democratic reforms. Top Visegrád diplomats pleaded with European Allies for their acceptance into NATO, particularly with France but also with those having a comparatively minor role such as Iceland (1999: 95; see: Simonyi 2019).

Since success was attributed to those states with well-developing market-economies and democracies, Poland enjoyed the best prospects. It was followed by the Czech Republic with a weaker outlook on military reforms, and Hungary which, however, was a NATO island with no borders with the first two (Barany 2003: 23). Nevertheless, “all three had more successfully than most of their neighbors implemented democratic and market reforms” (Hill 2018: 134-5). They were the front-runners for NATO’s first wave of post-Cold War enlargement.

In addition to these “Big Three”, Romania and Slovenia were considered as prospective candidates for NATO membership, rendering the arrangement the “Big Three plus” (see: Hunter 2019: 326). Other countries such as Bulgaria were not considered as they grappled with domestic turmoil and internal divisions (Eyal 1997: 707; Voigt 2019: 252-3). Likewise, the Baltics were too hot a topic and probably undefendable given the unresolved problems with the Russian neighbor (Sarotte 2021: 276).

At first glance, Romania’s prospective membership made sense strategically (see also: Traynor 1996: col. 5). It had high military potential, gravitated toward Atlanticism, and enjoyed good relations with neighbors. Its “Magyar-minority”-problems would best be dealt with in the Alliance. The 1996 elections overthrew the Romanian neo-communist government under Ion Iliescu, and the new Constantinescu-leadership placed a premium on the conditions for accession to NATO.

It made strides towards democratic reforms of both the state and the military and invested heavily in campaigning for NATO membership. It took PfP criteria seriously and labored hard to remove all obstacles to a membership (Asmus 2004: 214; Eyal 1997: 708).

However, the problem was that both democracy and market economy in Romania were far from consolidation, meaning that the country was not ready for membership in 1996/97 (Barany 2003: 24). As David Betz notes, “[b]ut however dramatic Romania's change of direction, it is not necessarily deep, because the center-right's election victory left a polarized electorate in its wake” (2004: 67). In fact, Romanian politics was messy and a backslide into authoritarianism was conceivable.

Likewise, notwithstanding the overall push for democratization across the CEECs, episodes of undemocratic politics of the re-elected PM Vladimir Mečiar (1995-98) emerged in Slovakia, making the country's NATO membership uncertain despite its 1995 economic boom (Hill 2018: 135; Kirschbaum 1999: 212).

Russian hostility towards enlargement and the envisioned membership for the “Big Three plus” constructed the international context for the next stage of NATO's “open door” policy in 1997. Not only that the admission of democratizing post-communist countries would reconfirm NATO's newfound political purpose of stabilizing the East.

Acceding partners were important because they set a precedence for more eastern states to follow their example by taking PfP/MAP reforms to heart. New members would, therefore, not only satisfy the strategic goals of the *status quo* NATO but were inextricably linked to the construction of a functioning democratic community. However, some NATO members prioritized their strategic interests and used candidates in their struggles for power in NATO.

Alliance members began lodging their proposition for candidate admissions in early 1997, lending support either for the “Big Three” or the “Big Three plus”. In the following, I will show the positions of NATO members concerning the question of who to admit to the Alliance.

Atlanticist positions

Throughout 1996, the U.S. Clinton administration remained silent on definitions of the enlargement process. While the PfP program satisfactorily progressed, the administration ordered the suspension of meetings on the question of “who”, fearing that leaking information could prematurely start NATO debates. Establishing its position in the “enlargement game”, it eventually declared strong support for the “Big Three” in mid-1997. The German government supported this position and reaffirmed the U.S.-German strategic partnership on NATO enlargement.

Since the initiation of the PfP, most Allies remained uncertain about the timing and direction of enlargement, still fearing to weaken the Alliance with new eastern members and unnecessarily provoke conflict with Russia (Hunter 1999: 3). This forced upon U.S. policymakers the impression that they should take the lead (Asmus 2004: 214; Gallis 1997: 4).

While having no vote in EU expansion, U.S. policymakers viewed NATO as the lead organization for European integration (Albright 1997a). However, the Clinton government presented a particular approach to the form of the enlargement process. As the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, declared, “[w]e must resist the temptation to accelerate the enlargement process for certain countries” (cit. in: Solomon 1998: pos. 1126). Talbott’s formula “small is beautiful” became the American catchphrase (cit. in: Rühle 2019: 229).

The formula was informed by Talbott’s concern for Russia. His knowledge made him an influential actor for NATO enlargement of the State Department. Talbott had been educated in Russian literature and language at Yale University. He gained invaluable experience as a foreign correspondent in the Soviet Union and, later, as a diplomat in the Soviet republics. He empathically understood the problematic situation that emerged with the end of the Cold War for Russia (see: Sarotte 2021: 8, 153).

Through his first-hand knowledge, he favored a piecemeal approach to NATO enlargement but one that sent a signal of resolve to the Russians— adding the “robust open door” to “small is beautiful” (“SIBROD”, see: Asmus 2004: 185, 216).

SIBROD shielded the Alliance from becoming diluted and ensured that enlargement was a multistage process instead of a single event. A smaller number of states would help the Russians to adjust to enlargement (ibid.; Sarotte 2021: 267).

The administration advanced, therefore, the 1996 NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act. The bill allocated 60 million U.S. Dollars to support the transition to NATO membership in selected PfP countries in 1997. A range of 60 to 125 billion U.S. Dollars over 15 years was calculated (Dobbs 1996: col. 7). This demonstrated U.S. financial/economic power vis-à-vis the cost-cutting Europeans that had difficulties supporting enlargement financially without the U.S. The administration decided that it

“[d]esignates Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as eligible to receive certain assistance for transition to full membership in NATO” and that “[t]he process of enlarging NATO to include emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe should not stop with the admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as full members of the NATO Alliance” (Congress 1996: sec. 6, art. b).

While the bill selected three countries for a first round to upgrade their armies, democratic reforms were presented as the poster child of membership:

“[t]he Congress of the United States finds that Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic have made the most progress toward achieving the stated criteria and should be eligible for the additional assistance described in this bill” (1996: sec. 2, art. 23).

While strategic considerations were important for country selection, the progress of democratic reforms was for the Clintonites essential to enshrine NATO’s expansion in legislative terms. Congress would not approve of CEECs that were not ready for NATO (Eyal 1997: 710).

Thus, the authoritarian tendencies of the Mečiar government resulted in Slovakia’s drop from the list and the potential addition of Slovenia to it (Hendrickson 1999: 89). Slovakia’s membership made sense strategically because it would have created a coherent NATO corridor from Hungary to Poland.

But from the new post-Cold War perspective, NATO's strategic considerations were ranked below a PfP-country's democracy development. Slovakia's disappearance from the list should showcase that NATO attaches great importance to the satisfaction of membership criteria (Eyal 1997: 707). Practices that exclusively satisfied democratic criteria were constitutive of the "new NATO". Although Slovakia's strategic significance was highlighted, the country's admission was necessarily deferred to later waves of accessions (Solomon 1998: pos. 1243).

Additionally, Slovenian membership threatened to derail NATO enlargement due to the country's proximity to local ethnic hotspots. Some argued that Slovenian officials concealed their role in igniting the Yugoslav wars by narrowly pursuing national independence (Dobbs 1996: col. 8). The Clinton administration renounced its contemplations of Slovenia's early admission (Hendrickson 1999: 94).

The U.S. position on the "who" of enlargement became, thus, clear while policymakers reassured excluded PfP-nations of NATO's continuing "open door". As documents from the National Security Council (NSC) show, the concern of the administration wanted to avoid the discouragement of "those whose performance against our criteria is currently subject to discussion (e.g., Romania)" (Fried *et al.* 1996).

While deepening the PfP traineeship was viewed as a solution (*ibid.*), President Clinton stressed that "the first new members should not be the last" (cit. in: Solomon 1998: pos. 1317). This perspective outlined the form of NATO enlargement: depending on their democratic progress, interested PfP countries should accede progressively during several waves. For the U.S., it answered the question of the "when" and "how" of enlargement (Chapter 3).

The American SIBROD was backed by the German government. Especially for MoD Volker R  he, NATO's "open door" was progressive. Candidates adjusted their conditions at different speeds to NATO's criteria. If whole regions like the Baltics should be brought in at some point in time, it was right to bring in the "Big Three" first (R  he 2019: 229). Considering his relationship with Poland, but also the democratic progress of Poland through many military cooperation programs, R  he saw the country as a member before the year 2000 (Meimeth 1998: 91).

In this logic, the rigidity of PfP practices was justified through the early admission of the most advanced PfP-nations, facilitating emulation by other CEECs. Karsten Voigt, the president of NATO's parliamentary assembly, went to Bratislava/Slovakia to sell the "open door" policy as a processual opening of NATO. His reaffirmation of democratic principles was met with disappointment by PM Mečiar. As Voigt recalls,

“[h]e did not accept my argument that the decision about inclusion in NATO would not be made based on geostrategic considerations, but also assumed as a prerequisite Slovakia's adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law” (2019: 258).

Chancellor Kohl was somewhat undecided about the form of the first wave of NATO enlargement, arguing for a strategic relationship with Russia (Meimeth 1998: 92). However, Kohl principally backed the SIBROD strategy (Asmus 2004: 188; Rühle 2019: 230).

He could not be convinced by a French initiative to win active German support for the "Big Three plus" (Gallis 1997: 14). However, for some more time, he decided to remain undecided on the minutiae of the enlargement process because the French-German axis was his core concern (see: Solomon 1998: pos. 1583).

This was an observable phenomenon that I will discuss in a later section, and which indicates a more dominant French role in European affairs. Some countries were careful not to displease France in the process of NATO enlargement.

However, Kohl came to terms with Rühle's position on the "Big Three" (2019: 229-30). After reconsidering the historic U.S.-German strategic partnership, Kohl told Talbott “[...] that the key to success was close U.S.-German cooperation” (Asmus 2004: 186).

He began to view NATO enlargement as a similarly important process as the 1990 German reunification. His historic stance towards the U.S. justified supporting SIBROD while warning against emerging waves of “anti-Americanism” in Europe (see: *ibid.*).

Kohl became very concerned with strengthening America's role in Europe, saying that the enlargement project must not fail and that he wanted to "capitalize on American leadership" (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 187, see: 186). He assumed that Yeltsin would not outlast his term and that it was unclear who would be next in Russia. Referring to dangers that arise from nationalism, Kohl supported a robust NATO enlargement over the militarily incapable EU (2004: 187). He told Talbott that

“[e]ven if the EU could manage expansion, it would not be enough to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe. My clear position is that EU is no substitute for NATO enlargement. It is important that you understand that this is our clear position” (cit. in: *ibid.*).

Finally, the U.S.-German partnership ensured that the “Big Three”-approach represented the design of NATO's “open door”. It foregrounded the democratic achievements of individual CEECs and foresaw enlargement as a stepwise but continuous process that did not lose sight of Russia. The Atlanticists sent the unequivocal signal that democratic practices, inside and outside the PfP, were an undisputable requirement of NATO membership.

Europeanist positions

As a European middle power, the French position on NATO enlargement was most critical. The Chirac-leadership favored the “Big Three plus”, shoring up the support of several southern NATO countries. However, the “Big Three plus” was not more than a crude strategic bargain that contradicted the meaning of the PfP.

After 1994/95, the French leadership somewhat relented to the U.S. dominance in NATO. The new Chirac-government sought a conditional rapprochement with the USNATO. However, this did not prevent France from establishing another contending position by promoting the “Big Three plus” for NATO membership in 1996.

In 1996, a majority for the “Big Three” emerged. Voices grew louder that only France remained to block their entry into NATO and thereby denied the significance of their struggle for democracy and freedom during the Cold War. Despite recent adjustments, French policymakers remained suspicious and reluctant concerning NATO enlargement.

To slow down the process, they warned against further antagonizing Russia. However, this was rather motivated by the long-standing fears of marginalization of France in light of growing U.S. dominance in Europe (Sedivy 2001: 7-8). Avoiding being overtaken by events, President Chirac announced his support of NATO enlargement and the “Big Three” in late 1996 (Gallis 2001: 66).

Nonetheless, French policymakers pressed hard for the inclusion of Romania and became Romania’s (plus Slovenia) biggest sponsor. The context of a dozen PfP-nations preparing for membership offered the possibility for France to choose strategically from the pool. President Jacques Chirac promised in Bucharest to strongly advocate Romanian interests in NATO and the EU (Gabanyi 1997: 34).

Chirac, who succeeded François Mitterrand in May 1995, represented both a continuation and break with Mitterrand’s politics. As a “European by reason”, he was not outright “anti-American” but opposed the American will as vehemently as during the 2003 Iraq crisis. He eschewed U.S. hegemony and saw the chance to rebalance it in NATO.

Nevertheless, he could reach settlements with the Americans when needed. His political approach as the first French post-Cold War president was guided by a deeper understanding of a rising multipolar world in which a strong Europe needed to play a central role. Consequently, he advocated a rule-guided “multilateralism” to safeguard France’s interests as a “medium power” (Asmus 2004: 136; Duclos 2019).

The consideration of French interests led him to announce the country’s gradual return to NATO’s integrated military structure which it had left in 1966 (Gabanyi 1997: 35). Because of the strengthened U.S. position in NATO and the continuing uncertainty about Russia, French interests could best be asserted from within the Alliance (see: d’Aboville 2019: 521, 524).

Since NATO's policies favored the U.S., French policymakers knew that they could only improve their power in NATO by working from within. A French official explained that "[...] the plans to enlarge and revamp the Alliance made it essential for France to be inside rather than outside so that we would be able to contribute to the work and the discussions" (cit. in: Plantin 1999: 100).

Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette declared that France would participate in the PfP's military cooperation. Additionally, it gained a role in SHAPE, the NATO Defense College in Rome, or the NATO School in Oberammergau (Menon 2000: 49). In the long-run, however, the EU was more important than NATO (Gallis 1997: 12).

For Chirac, a multipolar world meant that the U.S. could not determine the agenda for enlargement on its own. Consequently, he proposed to sign a compact with Russia on NATO enlargement and to put the admission of Romania as part of the "Big Three plus" on the NATO agenda (Walker *et al.* 1997: col. 3).

He did not trust the Americans to have the proper finesse to deal with Russia and lectured U.S. officials on how to approach Yeltsin. He also accused the U.S. of being an obstacle to the Franco-Romanian endeavor to integrate Romania into NATO (Asmus 2004: 185; Gabanyi 1997: 35).

Chirac received support from PM Lionel Jospin in early 1997. Jospin called for the integration of Romania but advocated a slowdown of the enlargement process. NATO enlargement was viewed as a hegemonic U.S. project, and policymakers such as Interior Minister Chèvenement critiqued U.S. leadership and enlargement altogether. Jospin reaffirmed Mitterrand's approach and emphasized that EU expansion should come before NATO enlargement (Gallis 1997: 12; 2001: 67).

As for Romania, Chirac preferred to highlight the democratic progress of the country since the death of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989. Strategically, Paris saw Romania as an important stabilizer of NATO's southeastern flank, bordering the troubled regions of former Yugoslavia and the Middle East. Moreover, French media and policymakers praised the historic relationship between the two Latin nations under the common language family and cultural influences (2001: 67).

French officials said they would only accept Hungary if Romania was admitted because it was a Francophone country with which France held historic ties (Asmus 2004: 214).

However, this all seemed to be a gambit in the “enlargement game” by a mobilization of social capital. As NATO ambassador Robert Hunter remarks, “[a]t USNATO, we believed French inclusion of Romania was calculated more to “get the U.S. goat” as anything else since the Romance language connection was not serious” (2019: 339, fn. 79).

The call for an agreement with Russia was a move to stall the enlargement process. Chirac told Talbott: “I repeat that to impose something on Russia would be a big risk. NATO enlargement is not urgent—although I would never say that in public, of course” (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 185). Moreover, advocating the “Big Three plus” should rebalance the Alliance away from the dominating transatlantic pivot that would be reinforced by the pro-American “Big Three”.

French policymakers called, therefore, for more European strategic autonomy in NATO by upgrading the WEU and a European commander of AFSOUTH in Naples/Italy who would be commanding the sixth fleet of the U.S. Navy and substantial U.S. airpower. These demands soured Franco-American relations. As one U.S. official said, “no one has ever mistaken the WEU for a serious security organization” (cit. in: Sarotte 2021: 246). But the French administration risked overtaxing the patience of the Allies with its intransigence on these matters (see: Plantin 1999: 99-101; van Hoof 2023: 429).

Furthermore, bringing Romania and Slovenia into NATO would refocus NATO’s attention on the southern region. French officials said that this was underscored by the Bosnian war and obfuscated by the claimed security needs of other countries like Poland. This reflected the French desire to bring several southern countries into NATO to counterbalance American dominance.

That most southeastern candidates could not keep track of democratic transformations was secondary to France’s strategic calculations and effectively diluted the meaning of the PfP and its practices (see: Asmus 2004: 215).

Moreover, the “Big Three plus” stifled the message of an ongoing enlargement process and rather conveyed the impression of a single event, thereby potentially undoing the efforts of those candidates in the PfP/MAP who took democratic principles seriously. Practices that merely indicated the satisfaction of democratic criteria were thus viewed as sufficient for NATO membership.

While these calculations made sense from Chirac’s multipolar perspective and challenged the U.S. from within NATO, France’s options were liable to derail NATO’s enlargement process. However, France’s strategy was encouraged by the group of southern NATO countries that supported the “Big Five plus” such as Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal (some suspected to “please France”; Asmus 2004: 212, 215; Gallis 1997: 15-19).

For instance, while the Italian Romano Prodi government generally favored a U.S. foothold in Europe, it was at loggerheads with the Clinton administration over Romania and Slovenia. The Italian concerns were largely shared within the group of southern NATO members. Since the government considered the southeastern regions (Western Balkans, Middle East, Northern Africa) as vital to its interests and as an arc of instability and fragility, it wanted NATO to pay closer attention to them. Consequently, obtaining NATO’s attention to these strategic areas occasioned Rome to “[...] make the case for a “larger rather than smaller” enlargement” (Gallis 1997: 17).

Surprisingly, these positions were backed by traditionally more Atlanticist countries such as Canada. Policymakers such as Canadian PM Jean Chrétien viewed the proposed form of enlargement as a patronizing U.S. move that was “[...] done for short-term political reasons, to win elections” (cit. in: Murray 1997). Chrétien even supported Slovakia—despite its obvious anti-democratic tendencies (Haglund 1999: 3).

The UK was somewhat sitting on the fence, fearing the dilution of NATO with unprepared members to the detriment of NATO’s military clout. However, it backed the “Big Three plus Slovenia” and partly advocated a counter position to the U.S. by hoping that the 1997 Madrid summit would initiate the end of NATO’s “open door” (Sarotte 2021: 286; Schimmelfennig 2000: 39-40).

The eligibility of the “Big Three” aside, the “Big Three plus”-approach was backed by a greater number of NATO states. The U.S. was outflanked by other Allies (Asmus 2004: 212). However, if the “Big Three plus” would win at the Madrid summit, NATO’s long-term strategic outlook could dramatically change and endanger NATO’s “open door”.

The further relevance and effectiveness of the Pfp/MAP would suffer from the admission of unprepared countries that were selected to support certain members’ struggle for power in NATO and not because of democratic qualities. In early 1997, strategic rationales were therefore set against building a new NATO as a democratic community. Power struggles between the Allies erupted. They not only decided who gained or lost power, but also whether genuine democratic practices prevailed and would continue to build the “new NATO”.

6.2 Sintra

On 27 May 1997, the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed, establishing the PJC. It opened the road to NATO enlargement on the second track that, besides the Pfp, was foreseen in 1994 (Chapter 3). The Clinton administration reacted to calls for the inclusion of Russia in the emerging security architecture.

Although the Russians tried to delay NATO enlargement, they eventually bowed to the inevitable. Clinton wanted to tear down old dichotomies, stressing that the Allies were building a new NATO “[...] just as the Russian people are building a new Russia” (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 203). The Alliance remained the primary security institution in Europe and would continue to commit the Americans to the continent (ibid.).

The conclusion of the 1997 NATO-Russia Foundation Act emboldened more NATO Allies to come out in favor of the “Big Three plus”. With France in the lead, they pressured the U.S. to take on a greater number of states in the first round (2004: 215). However, their strategic calculations about including Romania and Slovenia, which involved geographical reasons, were, to say the least, redolent of Cold War-mindsets (Drozdiak 1997b: col. 1).

French policymakers attempted to move across the field's hierarchy while the Atlanticists tried to preserve their position. Their above-outlined (dis-) positions dictated their moves.

As the strongest European NATO power and representative of a larger group of states, France performed a series of challenges to the U.S. The Romanian issue would be, thereby, the culmination of a sequence of strategic moves in the run-up to the historic NAC Ministerial in Sintra/Portugal on 29-30 May 1997.

The Europeanization of NATO command

The French decision to work from within NATO set the stage for struggles about the distribution of power in the Alliance with the U.S. According to Chirac's European/multipolar approach it was self-evident that power within NATO is redistributed, and the Europeanization of command would reflect this. A series of threats were followed by a "letter game" that decided this challenge for the Americans.

NATO enlargement was at risk of becoming a French "hostage" in the power struggle to Europeanize NATO and enhance France's position in the game. To Europeanize or reform NATO was to gain power—to obtain greater strategic autonomy in NATO and influence. It, therefore, made its support of NATO's "open door" highly dependent on concessions by the U.S. As the French policymaker, Michel Barnier, explained, "France's commitment to going further will be proportional to the readiness of our partners to carry out a thorough reform of the Atlantic Alliance in order to build [the] European pillar in it" (cit. in: Menon 2000: 52, see also: 212, fn. 108).

French policymakers threatened the U.S. to reverse NATO's policies if their demands remained unanswered (ibid.). They viewed American actions as largely dismissive of France's relative dominance in NATO which ignited their struggle. Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette insisted that a general reform decision had to be taken *before* NATO's enlargement would be initiated (Solomon 1998: pos. 1145). Moreover, he insinuated that "France would be willing to block NATO enlargement unless its demands were met" (Menon 2000: 53).

Essentially, France threatened to deprive the Alliance of the country's military and economic capital. France was still an important European partner that carried a large burden of NATO's policy change such as the military operation in Bosnia (see: Anon. 1997). Moreover, as one French diplomat said, "it's hard to press for an enlarged NATO without France being fully part of it" (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 224).

At the June 1996 NATO Berlin summit, the Americans made concessions regarding a greater strategic autonomy of the Europeans within NATO. They gave command of the WEU to the Europeans and the option to draw on NATO assets. European military missions would become possible (see: NATO 1997b). For the Americans, it was a tough call since they traditionally sought to throttle greater European independence (d'Aboville 2019: 534). President Chirac was satisfied and announced the return to NATO's military structures—if French officials found that the decision had been fully implemented by 1997 (Menon 2000: 54).

This honeymoon was short-lived, however. Soon, the French eyed more command posts in NATO and complained that the existing distribution of posts would not realize the desired "Europeanization". The complaint came in lockstep with an ongoing structural transformation of the new NATO and the creation of two key regional commands. The clash about the Commander-in-Chief South in Naples (CINCSOUTH) was the fallout and was accompanied by another threat.

In terms of "political weight" (or power) in NATO, French officials demanded that they wanted to be on par with Atlanticists. They threatened that in case "[...] we don't obtain anything, we will go back to the starting point, before the rapprochement with NATO undertaken in December 1995" (cit. in: Menon 2000: 56).

Traditionally, the Americans provided two strategic commanders, the SACEUR and SACLANT (Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic), while the Europeans proposed the Secretary-General. The establishment of two new key regional commands (AFNORTH and AFSOUTH) contained the risk of an even greater number of command posts in American hands (Asmus 2004: 167).

Chirac proposed, therefore, the creation of an American “super-SACEUR” with European regional commanders directly below in the chain of command. The control of the southern command in Naples was in line with the strategic orientation of the southern group of NATO members. It was an ambitious plan to reorganize NATO’s command structure followed by what I call a “letter game”.

Chirac responded in October 1996 to a Clinton letter and reaffirmed the French AFSOUTH demands. Clinton had written Chirac on 26 September to dissuade him from the request but proposed to meet French demands differently. On the letter’s margins, Chirac added in a handwritten English note “*capital importance of the southern command for France*” (cit. in: Menon 2000: 57, own emphasis). He knew that AFSOUTH was important to the Americans and weighed in his symbolic authority on the matter of reorganizing NATO (INSS 1997: 28).

Chirac’s letter was a tactical error—not only because it leaked to the public. The Americans, especially the Pentagon, were infuriated, viewing the French as taking a hardliner stance that did not equal their power and position in NATO (d’Aboville 2019: 536). Put differently, French policymakers were in hysteresis. As Marie-Claude Plantin writes,

“France's foreign-policy aims, not only on the specific issue of NATO enlargement but also in many other areas, were clearly out of step with those of its partners and not commensurate with its capacity to influence the course of events” (1999: 107)

Chirac miscalculated that the Americans would make concessions on the issue but Clinton wrote back: “*Jacques, I must be frank about the southern command: it’s no*” (cit. in: Menon 2000: 56; own emphasis). Clinton feared that resistance from Congress could endanger the overarching NATO policy (Cormarie 2023: 22).

In the following, Tony Lake visited Chirac in Paris, but the president remained tough. He wanted a real change of power in practice, saying that change was more in U.S. words than deeds. Fearing that NATO enlargement was taken hostage over AFSOUTH, Lake said that NATO could go forward without France but that the Americans preferred to have the French on board. Both sides went into a deadlock.

Chirac “was extremely upset” and took this personally. The French NATO ambassador reportedly said that NATO was a “sick” organization. An important financier of the enlargement policy would possibly be lost (Asmus 2004: 169; d’Aboville 2019: 536; Menon 2000: 59).

Finally, the standoff ended abruptly to the detriment of France when U.S. Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, in June 1997, announced: “CINCSOUTH is American” (cit. in: Menon 2000: 58). The Americans still had the greater power to fend off French attempts to reorganize the NATO command by linking it to the “open door” policy: “France has the resources of a middle power in a world in which American unilateralism is the order of the day” (Plantin 1999: 107).

American dominance was supported by vast resources as sources of symbolic capital one of which was the factual lead of NATO command posts. This transformed U.S. policymakers’ statements into facts, that is, symbolic power.

Significantly, because of the CINCSOUTH decision, Chirac announced that France would not reintegrate with NATO and the new command structure as well as abstain from funding NATO enlargement in the future (Menon 2000: 59). While Chirac supposed benefits from pressure on NATO, this decision worked to the detriment of France at the July 1997 Madrid summit, as I will show later.

After AFSHOUTH, France positioned another “heavy cannon” in the run-up to Sintra: the “Big Three plus”. Especially concerning Romania, the French were leveraging their resources at hand to challenge the U.S. They connected their struggle for power in NATO to the struggle over the form of NATO enlargement.

Having deeper connections with a Francophone country, it was natural for French policymakers and the media to promote these ties. By this, the French “[...] claimed to speak on behalf of Europe, and sought to give the story a “U.S. vs. Europe” spin” (Asmus 2004: 221).

Luncheon in Sintra and “Madame Secretary”

The agenda of the NAC Ministerial meeting in Sintra/Portugal on 29-30 May 1997 was set. The NACC was replaced by the EAPC framework which enhanced cooperation with NATO partners by broadening consultation topics on security (e.g., crisis management, arms control, or defense planning). The framework helped to distinguish between partner and ally by enhancing the PfP, making it more operational, and giving future allies a say in operational planning and joint military operations.

While these aspects were decided, the meeting was especially important regarding the decision on the invitation of PfP-nations at NATO’s July 1997 Madrid summit to initiate the accession process. That decision was still to be taken.

The positions were clear. The U.S. was against the “Big Three plus”, arguing that NATO membership was no consolation prize for countries that were not able to gain EU-membership. The stability of Romania was a concern of the Clinton administration, but it rejected the idea that NATO membership was a refuge to rescue a country from self-destruction.

While Romania was not ready for membership, Slovenia’s political contribution was questionable, too, because its military development lagged (Asmus 2004: 216, 218). As Ronald Asmus, one of the administration’s experts at Sintra, reported,

“[...] we were not prepared to jettison the performance principle to meet the short-term political needs of a specific government even if we admired it” [...] “we wanted to be in a position to argue that we were only bringing in the strongest countries that would strengthen the Alliance” (2004: 216).

On the other side, especially France and Italy were unswervingly going forward with the “Big Three plus”, setting up “senior working groups” in their foreign ministries to increase the coordination with their candidates. They were also contacting other NATO allies, trying to win their support. While France lobbied for Romania and Italy for Slovenia for the above-described reasons, Turkey enlisted in the support group as well.

In a confidential meeting, France and Italy solemnly pledged to tie the destiny of their candidates to one another—the admission of one means the admission of the other (2004: 215, 223). From the strategic perspectives of southern Alliance members and their orientation toward the southern NATO flank, it did make sense to invite the “Big Three plus”.

However, these historical perceptions and the chain of practices that followed, such as implementing senior working groups, were out of tune with the power structure within NATO. The Allies pulled in different directions and posed challenges to each other.

While the U.S. kept an eye out on the performance of membership candidates and the overall well-being of NATO, the weaker members mobilized their social capital to improve their strategic outlook. They risked making NATO’s membership criteria and the preparation in the PfP a laughingstock. Since it became unlikely for France to gain hold of key regional commands, the candidates of the southern group were now tasked to balance the Atlanticists in NATO—a remit that would have fallen to the European regional commander at AFSOUTH.

Moreover, some Nordic members (Iceland, Norway, Denmark) supported the Baltics. The Baltics made reasonable progress in the PfP but were excluded due to justified concerns over a Russian reaction. As Asmus notes, “[b]ringing in Romania but excluding Estonia ran the risk of making a mockery of the principle of performance [...]” (2004: 216). A confrontation in Sintra was inevitable since the Allies viewed each other’s strategies as contradicting their perceptions of how the power structure of NATO should be organized.

After the opening discussions on 30 May, the NATO foreign ministers began the conversations on the candidates during their informal luncheon in Sintra. This was the hour of U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright—“Madame Secretary”. Albright declared that the U.S. remained committed to SIBROD.

From her perspective, enlargement was an incremental process that ensured that the Alliance remained politically coherent and militarily effective. This was guaranteed by admitting the strongest and politically most advanced candidates first.

She invoked the democracy link between the PfP and enlargement, highlighting that NATO's security guarantees can only be extended to those countries that prove that they were irreversibly committed to NATO's values. States must meet NATO's criteria longer than a few months, alluding to Romania. Importantly, admitting countries that did not satisfy these criteria would undercut those in the waiting room (2004: 219; Eyal 1997: 710).

Despite other, more strategic, arguments for the "Big Three", Madeleine Albright would not leave the stage without having invoked the principles of democracy. She writes "[t]o understand me you must understand my father. To understand him, you must understand that my parents grew up in what they thought was a golden place" (2013: 12).

This meant democratic Czechoslovakia before the second World War which was linked to the United States and "[...] blessed with a wise leader, peacefully competing political parties, and a sound economy" (2013: 12-3). The country that she left to begin a new life in the U.S., remained a core concern of hers. NATO's "open door" was, therefore, "an issue very close to Madeleine Albright's heart" (Nijman 1998: 267). Her mind, as she repeatedly said, was influenced by her past as well as the "1938 Munich"—the risk of appeasement politics.

American leadership was consequential and had brought "prosperity and democracy" to western Europe and is now bringing them to the CEECs, as she emphasized in her 1997 Harvard speech (Albright 1997b; see also: Sarotte 2021: 280). Fluent in English, French, and Czech she obtained the highest academic honors in foreign affairs and political science, became a professor at Georgetown university, and later American UN ambassador (Nijman 1998: 271-2).

Her academic and professional knowledge led her to differentiate the international system into four groups that she outlined in a speech in 1997. The first group, consisting of democratic states, "[...] are those that understand that it is important to have some kind of rules of the game within the international system; that understand the value of working together" (1998: 273). The second group is transitioning democracies with developing institutions in need of support. The third and fourth groups are rogue and failed states.

The primary task of the 21st century was to bring all groups into the first one. Sanctions against rogue states served to induce a change in their behavior to allow them membership in the first group (ibid.).

The same logic was projected onto the PfP and the enlargement process. The “Big Three”, which were about to gain a first group-membership, enhanced their institutions during the PfP-membership and acquired the necessary know-how such as multinational defense planning while being in the second group. Other PfP-nations were still viewed as potential members. However, to gain membership status, some required “sanctions” to change their behavior, for instance, the exclusion from waves of NATO accession.

At the Sintra luncheon, the French-led group was not convinced: Paris was more successful than Washington in shoring up support (Asmus 2004: 219). But Albright insisted that Romania, which was pro-actively pushed by Chirac, still needed time (and inducements to move into the first group).

After lunch, the French delegation left the room tactically. Although the luncheon proceedings were strictly confidential, the French leaked to the media that Albright was isolated and that the majority of the 16 members supported the “Big Three plus”, effectively “intimidating” possible renegades (Albright 2013: 292; ibid.).

As Ronald Asmus reports, “Albright emerged from the lunch somewhat shaken and angry that she had so little support” (2004: 349, fn.13). However, later that day, some Allies confided to the U.S. delegation that they were in favor of the American position but that their governments were either hesitating or too timid to work against France.

But when U.S. delegates asked for their open support they demurred, saying that they still had to deal with Paris in the EU the next day while the Americans did not. It was Albright’s impression, too, that several Allies were in awe of France’s influence and did not want to displease it. However, they insinuated that they waited for the U.S. “to impose discipline” (Albright 2013: 293; Asmus 2004: 221).

After Sintra, Albright wrote Clinton a letter, saying that the meeting convinced her that the American approach was right but that the struggle over NATO enlargement was only beginning.

She informed the president that France was leading an “all-out campaign” in the name of Romania and had successfully moved the southern flank allies into position. With this, it was clear that Sintra was a disaster for the Americans.

Back home, the French were castigating the U.S. behavior as “hegemonic” (Asmus 2004: 220; d’Aboville 2019: 538). On the other side, as *The Economist* noted, “[...] the Americans see France as just one insolent country-over-obsessed with rank and titles as opposed to substance-in a fragmented and ineffective Europe” (Anon. 1997).

Showdown in Madrid

NATO’s Madrid summit was scheduled for 8-9 July 1997. A NATO diplomat said, “[t]his is going to be one for the history books. It’s going to help shape the post-cold war world for the next century” (cit. in: Jones 1997: 21). While observers often highlight that the Madrid summit became a success for the U.S.-German partnership thanks to Helmut Kohl’s pivotal moment, it was lost for the French (and southern allies) due to another overriding aspect.

In the month between Sintra and Madrid, both sides continued campaigning. Clinton met Kohl at the beginning of June for dinner in Georgetown, securing his support for the U.S. approach. Aware of the drama in NATO, Clinton began to weigh in on the ongoing diplomatic shootout. However, Kohl expressed the preference of avoiding open conflict with France at Madrid.

Secretary Cohen went to Brussels to bring the UK, Germany, and the Nordic States (dropping the Baltics) into line with the U.S. position and to discuss their strategy regarding the group of southern allies. Part of it was to mobilize inducements— economic benefits of enlargement for Western countries. The administration knew that the “rules of the NATO game”, the consensus decision-making, favored the U.S. approach if it had some Allies on its side and others were privily pro-American.

The consensus principle enables members to deploy NATO's (informal) hierarchy around the table, as Vincent Pouliot shows (2016). However, the British position remained problematic for the Americans since it rejected a continuous "open door" after Madrid (Asmus 2004: 223-5, 239; Sarotte 2021: 284, 288).

On the other side, Chirac met Kohl in Poitiers, France, for a Franco-German summit complaining to him about American hegemony and trying to win Kohl. Hubert Védrine explained to Albright that Chirac would not give in and force the issue in Madrid. The Chirac-Clinton meeting at the G-8 summit in Denver yielded no results; Chirac was still infuriated about the rejection of the AFSOUTH command.

He leveraged arguments of cultural closeness with Romania. Rejecting Romania would be morally and politically wrong. Reflecting France's positional options in NATO, which included the "Romanian connection", such arguments had become circular and were self-evidently integrated into the presidential discourse (2004: 224-5; d'Aboville 2019: 538). This discourse resonated with the southern flank allies because it was backed by an *Élysée* authority that claimed to speak on behalf of a common "cultural front" countering American hegemony in Europe (see: Asmus 2004: 239; Sedivy 2001: 8).

However, it stopped short of resonating with the Americans because the Americans perceived their relations, especially with France, not in straightforward cultural but more competitive terms. Despite the NATO hierarchy, adjustments were not automatic in Madrid. The ravine had to be bridged somehow by individual agency.

This bridge was Helmut Kohl. He told Clinton that the "Big Three" should be invited to the summit but that an "open door" for others, especially Romania and Slovenia, should be reconfirmed. Clinton replied that this would "[...] send a clear signal to the individual countries that if they can keep their democracies going and stay on the path of reform, they will be excellent candidates" (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 240).

Clinton assumed that if Kohl sent an unequivocal signal, it could keep Chirac from fighting on. Clinton would then accommodate France and make Chirac look like a winner (2004: 241).

At the first full plenary session on July 8, the heads of state delivered their speeches as expected, reconfirming the existing divide in NATO. Chirac and Prodi constructed a compelling case for the “Big three plus”. Chirac reiterated the need to create a new balance of power to support NATO’s continuing existence in the absence of the former constituting Soviet threat (Black 1997b: col. 2).

However, Kohl made a tactical move and did not speak openly during the first go around. He declined to speak and asked for a deferral of his speech to the later restricted session. His decision between Paris and Washington should be revealed in a more informal setting (Asmus 2004: 242-3). There, bolstering the Americans, he reconfirmed the importance of the partnership with the U.S. Based on his dispositions, he recalled the important historic role of the USNATO in German reunification and in securing peace in Europe.

Kohl also reconfirmed the decision on the “Big Three” as well as the continuing “open door”, which should encourage others in the waiting room to continue democratic reforms. Then, PM Tony Blair followed by stressing the overriding importance of membership criteria and warning that NATO was not prepared for Romania and Slovenia (2004: 243-4).

Following this, Chirac and Prodi made a last attempt by haggling over the wording of the final communiqué. They wanted to separate the promise of an “open door” to Romania and Slovenia from the Baltics which made their accession more likely given Russian resistance. However, during that session, Kohl was asking for the floor to take on Chirac directly.

He opposed the idea that the “open door” policy should discriminate between states apart from their qualification for NATO membership. Finally, when SecGen Solana declared the “Big Three” approach and a membership perspective for Romania as a face-saving compromise solution, Chirac and Prodi were silenced and the text was adopted. By piling into the consensus, smaller European members “defected” to the Atlanticists and deprived Chirac/Prodi of the social capital to rescue their approach (2004: 247-8).

For Albright, it was Helmut Kohl as a key figure who convinced everybody to reconsider the message NATO conveys and who “[...] persuaded everyone to put the heavy artillery away” (2013: 293). Clinton said, “I would do anything for Chancellor Kohl—even jump off this building—since he has done so much for the United States” (cit. in: Asmus 2004: 250).

However, this was a snapshot and did not necessarily mean that the U.S.-German strategic partnership reasserted its approach by convincing the French president. Perlocutionary speech acts or offering consolation prizes at Madrid could not have entirely overcome the entrenched gridlock with the southern flank allies.

What, instead, decided Madrid was not speech acts but actions. It was the fact that Chirac had earlier (rather emotionally) deprived himself of a symbolic as well as material role in NATO by renouncing the reintegration of France into NATO over the AFSOUTH issue.

Being not fully integrated into NATO, he could not muster the necessary consensus for his project. As British diplomats noted, “France had never had a chance of achieving its goal of five new members because President Jacques Chirac had already made clear that he was not ready to return to NATO’s integrated military structure” (cit. in: Black 1997a: col. 4).

While the literature mainly focuses on Kohl’s pivotal moment in Madrid (see: Asmus 2004: 250; Sarotte 2021: 288), it is this aspect of France’s self-deprivation of symbolic capital, of influence and recognition, that has been overlooked and which opened the door to the U.S. version of post-Cold War NATO enlargement. As Anand Menon writes, “[...] France remained apart from its allies, faithful as ever to a policy of Alliance without integration, and still dissatisfied with the progress made in reforming NATO” (2000: 59).

In this sense, it was the dynamic interplay of both context and agency that shaped the course of history. The Atlanticists had no credible challenge. Possessing overriding economic and military clout in NATO, they retained their symbolic capital vis-à-vis the Europeanists, were viewed as the stewards of enlargement, and marked the dominant approach to enlargement.

After Lord Ismay's famous quote (NATO is to "keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down"), the episode at Madrid changed it to keeping "the Russians out, the French down, and the Americans in the lead" (see: Nassauer 1997).

As Benoît d'Aboville writes, "[t]he French debate about further NATO enlargement also remained low key in ensuing years [...]" (2019: 540). Others noted that "[t]oday, NATO enlargement is not an issue in French political discourse. None of the relevant leaders have mentioned it in their recent foreign policy speeches" (Sedivy 2001: 8).

6.3 NATO after Madrid

Madeleine Albright recalls that "[t]he end of the Cold War had been like a gigantic mix-up at the European laundry. All the old labels fell off, and every nation had the chance to try on clothes with a different brand" (2013: 293). NATO's landmark decision in Madrid in 1997 brought a form of order to this mix-up. While the form of NATO expansion was decided in the power struggle between the Allies, democratic practices were reaffirmed and contributed to NATO's transformation after the Cold War.

In Madrid, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were invited to join the Alliance in 1999. Romania and others in the PfP such as the Baltics, Slovakia, or Slovenia were given a membership perspective. Several waves of NATO expansion were envisioned and it was decided that NATO should intensify its dialogue with PfP nations (see: d'Aboville 2019: 539). Above all, this reconfirmed the primacy of NATO's PfP program that promoted the thorough adoption of democratic (defense) practices and democratic identity.

One senior NATO official reaffirmed the significance of democratic habits and routines, saying that "[i]f it was just a question of military competence, we'd be taking the Poles, the Romanians, and probably the Slovenians" (cit. in: Fairhall 1997: col.1).

SecGen Solana stressed that “[n]o European democratic country whose admission would fulfill the objectives of the (NATO) treaty will be excluded from consideration” (cit. in: Blitzer 1997; also: Weisser 1999: 121).

With this, the “new NATO” as a democratically coherent but also military interoperable alliance would be able to better manage the future evolution of Europe (see: Kirschbaum 1999: 201). Democratic practices remained the core of the PfP/MAP and NATO’s enlargement process.

Clinton noted, therefore, that “[...] if Romania could stay the course, the U.S. would work to present it as a logical candidate for the next round of NATO enlargement” (Asmus 2004: 249). NATO enlargement would be the reward for a candidate’s hard work on democratic and military reforms as essential conditions for NATO enlargement to happen.

In an organization in which power struggles reconfirm that genuine democratic nations belong to NATO and preparation programs are geared towards the adoption of a democratic identity, thinking like a democrat becomes self-evident. As the former Estonian NATO ambassador emphasized,

“[p]reparing for NATO enlargement is important both for our own military and for NATO, but the underlying rationale of NATO enlargement is based on shared values, something which is as important today as it was 50 years ago” (Luik 1999).

While strategic considerations played a role in the struggle between both NATO camps, the focus on democratic criteria was congruent with the evolving character of NATO after the Cold War. The satisfaction of criteria became thereby a self-evidently invoked and overriding argument that was often deployed to thwart the strategic goals of overly ambitious members such as France. As Volker Rühle recalls,

“Chirac’s argument was that they [the Romanians] had much better tanks than the Poles. That was a very superficial view. My response was: I am not interested in the quality of their tanks. I am interested in their mindset” (2019: 229).

Accepting the dominant approach, President Chirac shifted after Madrid the emphasis on the continuing open door. Chirac's adjustments were inevitable if he wanted to regain influence in NATO. France's full return to NATO in 2009 confirms this.

NATO's 1999 Washington summit also launched the MAP (see: Williams 2021a: 6). As I showed in Chapter 5, the MAP was a reaffirmation of NATO's open door. More than that, it was born out of the Visegrád group's experience of slightly problematic adjustments to the military aspects of membership (while political aspects were satisfied). The Alliance's International Staff did not react by easing the criteria in response but by tightening them (see: Young 2017).

NATO wanted to enhance functions such as multinational defense planning to comprehensively shed a candidate's communist legacy structures, preparing PfP/MAP-nations even better for a NATO membership (see: Boland 2017: 204-5; Sedivy 2001: 6). Candidates were obliged to contribute to the "fortified democratic community". The admission process became "[...] a more intrusive and comprehensive review by NATO's International Civilian and Military Staffs by means of the Membership Action Plan" (Williams 2021a: 7).

With the MAP, NATO did, thus, not only reconfirm its commitment to a continuing enlargement process but also re-emphasized the overriding importance of democratic practices, the improvement of military capabilities, and the straightforward creation of a democratic environment at home. Newcomers continued to be measured against their MAP performance and candidates were mutually observing their progress which even more normalized what NATO asked them to do. These criteria simultaneously meant "goodbye to the old NATO" to evolve as the "principal guarantor of European stability in the 21st century", as a senior NATO diplomat observed (cit. in: Drozdiak 1997a: col. 2).

NATO post-Cold War expansion: the Prague and Bucharest summits

After NATO's Washington summit, further waves of expansion were fixed components of NATO's post-Cold War mission. Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and the three Baltic states were invited to join the MAP program in 1999.

Except for Albania and Macedonia which stayed conspicuously behind the adaptation to NATO standards, all other countries were invited to join NATO at the Alliance's 2002 Prague summit. The enlargement machine was moving into a second wave.

However, critics still attested most of the invitees had internal problems, and their admission during NATO's 2004 "Big Bang" enlargement was suspected to mean to some degree a dilution of membership criteria (Barany 2004: 73). Albeit these states continued in the MAP-program, their capacity to precipitate comprehensive changes was still limited.

Despite apprehensions, the debate about the admission of this block of countries was much more uncontroversial than the one around the 1997 Madrid summit (2004: 68; Goldgeier 2002). This can be attributed to the U.S. sway over NATO's "open door" policy since 1997, a short honeymoon with Russia after 9/11, and the U.S. decision to involve MAP countries in the "War on Terror" (WOT) in 2001/02. This should enhance the Western alliance in the fight against terrorism and expand Europe's zone of stability (Grdešić 2004: 111). European solidarity for the U.S. after 9/11 also guaranteed an uncontroversial second wave.

While the "Big Bang enlargement" must be understood in the geopolitical context of 9/11, the recognition took hold that some democratic reforms of long-standing PFP nations should better be continued within NATO (Kaiser and Richburg 2002: col. 5). The *Washington Post* argued that while the country miraculously emerged from a devastating communist dictatorship, a NATO membership would help it along the way (Nelson 1999: col. 4).

For instance, although “[t]he Romanian military also did a good job of satisfying its Membership Action Plan”, a second MAP was handed to Romania after the invitation in Prague (Kaiser 2002: col. 2-3). This gesture was a recognition of the efforts of some countries in the PfP during the 1990s (see: Sedivy 2001: 15).

While some of the PfP “firsts” eventually obtained the possibility to continue their reforms as a NATO member, newer MAP nations such as Albania (candidate since 1999) were still assessed against their performance in the program.

The representatives of Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania promised at the 2002 Prague summit to work hard to qualify for a third wave (Ash 2002: col. 2; Cascone 2010: 181). The continuing “open door” reassured MAP countries that their work was worth the effort and has been a “powerful tool of defense diplomacy” (Arbuthnot 2008: 43).

However, after the second wave of enlargement in 2004, another struggle erupted around the 2008 Bucharest summit and the controversial issue of potential membership for Ukraine and Georgia.

While Croatia and Albania were invited to join NATO in 2009 based on the successful conclusion of their MAP program, offering Ukraine and Georgia the MAP was highly contested (2008: 42).

The Bucharest summit was remarkable because, for the first time, the U.S. Bush administration could not secure a membership perspective for Ukraine and Georgia. After all, Bush wanted to extend NATO around the Black Sea to counterbalance Russia with a framework in which Ukraine and Georgia served as diplomatic bargains (Asmus 2010: 128). This signaled a temporary power shift in NATO.

A confident German chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy challenged Bush’s idea to offer the MAP and *de facto* invite both countries to join NATO (Himmelreich 2008). While the U.S.-German partnership was driving the first wave of enlargement, things changed with new governments and leaders while episodes like the 2003 Iraq split acted as catalysts (Asmus 2010: 118).

Merkel referred to the host of internal and external issues both countries have, emphasizing that they were politically not ready to join NATO (Asmus 2010: 120-1; Tharoor 2023). Such arguments had meanwhile become a “no-brainer”, or dispositional, considering the primacy of democratic conditions for NATO enlargement. She said that “[t]his is not about Russia and whether it has a veto. This is about whether these countries are ready and if we think this is the right time to take this step” (cit. in: Asmus 2010: 133).

To her mind, the U.S. proposal contradicted the fundamental premises on which NATO enlargement unfolded since 1997. As Asmus writes, “[g]rowing up in the East had cured her of any illusions about Communism and Russia” (2010: 119).

Merkel could assert her stance because Germany and France contributed to the “War on Terror” and the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. Forms of capital were on the table of NATO’s decision-making. This, and a late U.S. campaign to rally supporters, added to the power of the consensus principle in favor of Merkel and Sarkozy (2010: 131).

Since the ISAF operation struggled in 2008 with steeply deteriorating security levels in Afghanistan, compromise in NATO (avoiding another 2003 split) was an overriding demand and impaired the ability of the U.S. to solo-run. The success of ISAF was of paramount importance as it was assumed to affect the future of NATO and the U.S. in Europe (see: Michta 2009: 374).

The lessons of the Bucharest summit were, therefore, that strategic calculations could not override the primacy of democratic conditions. Even under shifting coalitions in NATO, the fundamental premises of NATO enlargement were self-evidently perpetuated by many Alliance policymakers who played critical roles in NATO after the 1990s.

6.4 Conclusion

After NATO's 2008 Bucharest summit, NATO enlargement stayed largely undisputed "on autopilot". Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has engaged in six waves of enlargement, growing to thirty-one member states. As a former member of NATO's International Staff writes, "NATO has maneuvered itself into a position of reaffirming at all major occasions its commitment to its "open door policy" [...] "This is a vicious circle that NATO has to break free of" (Williams 2021a: 11).

However, with an "open door", NATO expanded as a democratic community and reconfirmed its post-Cold War relevance, not least because the association of states in partnership frameworks and NATO forums kept NATO states and candidates relevant to each other.

Expanding a community that is based on a normality of democratic practices has thereby created the necessary conditions for the organization's growth and contributed to NATO's post-Cold War mission, transformation, and persistence. In other words, "NATO's political identity has been nearly as important as its military one" (Barany 2009: 117).

The 1997 NATO Madrid summit established the future model for NATO's enlargement. It was decided that NATO invite only those post-communist states that were sufficiently democratic and could contribute to the Alliance's common defense. Moreover, by accepting in the first wave only a small number of countries, NATO members made clear that further waves of enlargement follow. It thereby reconfirmed the significance of the PfP/MAP program.

Those who work hard to adopt a democratic identity through their defense sectors can become NATO members. This means that "[t]he countries that joined NATO have by their performance shown themselves to be responsible alliance members that share core Alliance values and basic principles" (Praks 2014: 5). This was not decided without power struggles as pivotal social dynamics. Tantamount to the influence of countries, Alliance policymakers tried to move across the field or to preserve their position. Their moves were thereby dictated by their historic dispositions.

The struggle between the Atlanticists for the “Big Three” against the “Big Three plus” of the France-led southern flank allies, was a struggle about one important question. Should the meaning of NATO’s “open door” policy persist and enlarge NATO based on a new logic of democracy? Or should it give way to strategic calculations where new members were included because they served strategic rationales? Particularly the struggle around the inclusion of Romania, a post-communist country that was far from being sufficiently democratic in 1997, was representative of this.

While the French-led group tried to bring in Romania on grounds of an overall desire to balance the Atlanticists, the U.S. rejected Romania because it sought to operationalize a democratic “open door” as a future NATO model that encouraged candidates to adopt democratic practices.

The multipolar/multilateral approach of French president Chirac together with the traditional French skepticism concerning the U.S. contributed to different ideas about NATO after the Cold War. For him, this NATO was Europeanized. The “Romanian connection”, which Chirac invoked as a historic cultural cauldron and French social capital, should precipitate the desired change of power in NATO. This should work together with threats to deprive the Alliance of French military and economic capital, which was required in the process of NATO’s transformation.

While I outlined both sides’ positions on NATO enlargement and the events in the run-up to the 1997 Madrid summit, I showed that Chirac’s defeat at the Madrid summit was precipitated by the loss of symbolic capital. This loss was self-inflicted by the decision to stop French rapprochement with NATO over the contested AFSOUTH issue. Since France had no power base in NATO, it gradually lost standing and influence while the Atlanticists retained it. Other members “defected” and deprived France of social capital.

With this, NATO enlargement took on the U.S. design whose fundamental logic remains unchanged. This was reconfirmed by the events of the Bucharest summit—signaling that the basic premises of enlargement were perpetuated even under shifting coalitions and contexts.

In NATO-as-field, pivotal social struggles thus reconfirmed Atlanticist dominance as well as the normality of practices that maintain the post-Cold War democratic community. The “open door” approach involved the acceptance of this dominance and the adjustment of practitioners’ dispositions, some of which I captured in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7

Business as usual in “out of area”?

With ODF and IFOR, NATO introduced “out of area” military operations beyond the article 5-area and thus departed from the traditional defensive posture that characterized the Alliance during the Cold War. According to a new logic, a massive bombing campaign followed diplomatic means and forced opponents to withdraw and to continue diplomacy under changed conditions. The campaign was succeeded by a sizable ground force tasked with the provision of military security and civil reconstruction.

This suggested a future NATO role in “out of area” crisis management—unlike UNPROFOR whose ineffectiveness discredited the UN’s traditional peacekeeping approach. While the Blue Helmets played an important role by keeping the international community involved in Bosnia, NATO’s military power and American diplomacy exposed its limits (see: Economides and Taylor 2007: 101-7).

When IFOR’s mandate ended in December 1996, NATO countries decided to send a slightly smaller follow-on stabilization force (SFOR). With SFOR, a critical feature added to NATO’s “non-article 5 operations”: NATO removed pre-determined deadlines. Building on IFOR’s military/civil operational blueprint, Western military interventions became a long-term commitment for NATO and “business as usual”—at least in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One interviewee highlighted the advantages of these deployments, saying that

“the good thing is, by being there [...] is that you get to know the geopolitical situation, you get to know the landscape of the operational area that you operate in, you get to know the system and processes in place. As a result, NATO’s policies...military policies [...] has been established and is working for a sustained amount of time” (INTVW10 2021).

This indicated that, due to antecedent power relations, practices of military security and humanitarian relief in Bosnia became routinized, creating the conditions for their internalization by practitioners. However, it was not clear if NATO would regularize it anywhere else with further NATO operations. But this was necessary because another ethnic conflict was gradually unfolding in the Serbian province of Kosovo. During 1998, this conflict developed into a partisan war between Serb forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). It had some of the features of the Bosnian war not least because it involved mass executions, ethnic cleansing, and humanitarian crisis.

However, NATO members' response to the events in Kosovo was not the swift deployment of airpower and ground forces to stop the conflict. Their responses were reminiscent of the years of indecision during the Bosnian war. Strategic rationales encroached on the Allies as their power in NATO was on the line again. It seemed that military interventions on behalf of transatlantic security remained a local phenomenon—delimited to Bosnia.

However, NATO eventually developed into an organization leading parallel operations and stepwise expanding its operational zone. In 1999, it deployed Operation Allied Force (OAF) to end the ethnic conflict in Kosovo, and in 2002 it intervened in Afghanistan (ISAF). These operations deployed ground combat forces.

As Webber and Sperling write, “[...] OAF was both the occasion for presentiments of catastrophe yet also a driver of change. Its operational and political implications run all the way to the mission in Afghanistan” (2009: 492). NATO increasingly removed geographical limitations on actions, adopting a global outlook (see: Petersson 2012: 125).

I argue that IFOR's operational blueprint (airpower, military security, and civil reconstruction) influenced NATO's subsequent military interventions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. However, a sustained interventionist NATO model emerged only with the alliance's involvement in Kosovo. The Bosnia operation was insufficient to develop such a model (Latawski and Smith 2003: 41).

The model, marking NATO as an interventionist Alliance, normalized notions of military actions to restore security and humanitarian conditions and support democracy in conflict zones. As Alexandra Gheciu writes,

“[...] there has been a reassertion of the (Kantian) project of building self-disciplined selves and polities, the project that became so powerful in Euro-Atlantic political circles following the end of the Cold War” (2008: 23).

NATO’s military power in Kosovo and Afghanistan aimed at the containment of “illiberal subjects” (dictators and regimes) to install humanitarian projects that, as Gheciu calls it, “disseminate a habitus emphasizing liberal self-restraint” (2008: 24).

While this has been part of NATO’s post-Cold War interventionism since Bosnia, the acceptance and beginning normalization of this notion came about by power struggles between NATO Allies over their involvement in Kosovo in 1998/99. As Dal Lago *et al.* writes, “[s]ince 1999, when the war against Serbia was conducted without the approval of the UN, the principle of Western military interference in all corners of the world has been fully asserted” (2010: 192).

This was the result of processes in which struggles between actors as pivotal social and constitutive dynamics played an essential role. That military interventionism subsequently formed a normative system contributes to explanations of other struggles between NATO Allies, for example, Libya in 2011 (2010: 190-1). Like in the struggle over NATO’s interventionist policy (1993-95), the historic dispositions of Western policymakers and NATO technocrats were important details to the course and outcome of what I understand as a “power struggle over the form of NATO interventions”.

First, I discuss the context of this struggle in the form of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo and the Contact Group’s actions to contain it. Second, I will engage with the different positions of Allies over Kosovo. Overall, I identify a camp structure within NATO.

The “agnostic camp” of the U.S. argued that NATO cannot be restrained by anyone, particularly not the Russians and Chinese in the UN. The “Catholic camp” with France in the lead argued that the UN is primary to NATO but that human rights violations allow for exceptions to the rule.

The “Lutheran camp”, led by the UK advocated a reform of the existing interventionist system. The “Blair doctrine”, discussed in the second half of this chapter, exemplifies this.

These camps largely fall under the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide of NATO-as-field with the traditional distribution of power in the field. While the “Agnostics” occupied the Atlanticist pole, the “Catholics” and “Lutherans” occupied the Europeanist pole. I use this approach to show that the Europeanist pole was subdivided over the use of force.

Third, I will discuss the struggles between the Allies that led to the initiation of a full interventionist cycle in Kosovo since Bosnia. I will center the role of NATO Secretary-General Solana who dissolved the deadlock between the Allies. Furthermore, I will discuss the struggle between the camps at the margins of the Rambouillet negotiations in February 1999. Moreover, I will look at the British challenge and the deployment of ground troops after OAF had started.

Finally, I will thematize the consequences of NATO’s interventionism in the context of NATO’s post-9/11 Afghanistan intervention. Thereby, I will discuss the normalization of military operations and their constitutive practices after 9/11 altogether.

7.1 International context: conflict in Kosovo

Like Bosnia, the conflict in Kosovo drew on ethnic animosities between Serbs and ethnic Albanians. Violent tensions between both groups in Kosovo surfaced after the death of Yugoslav leader Josip Tito in 1980 which marked the onset of the step-by-step decomposition of socialist Yugoslavia. Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic interfered politically in the ethnic tensions in Kosovo in 1987. Between 1987 and 1989, he stoked nationalist sentiments in those semi-autonomous Yugoslav republics that were threatened to break away from the federation. Violence erupted and the government sent troops to maintain order in Kosovo.

Thanks to the local tenure of the Albanian intellectual Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, Kosovo remained relatively stable during the first half of the 1990s while violence erupted in Bosnia. Aware of Serb military power in Kosovo, Rugova pursued a politics of ethnic conciliation and “passive resistance” (Judah 2000: 146; Mulchinock 2017: 97-9).

From 1996 on, this situation changed. Kosovo Albanians became frustrated with Rugova’s appeasement politics. A group of Serb men sitting in a café in Decani, western Kosovo, was killed in April 1997 in a KLA assault. This paramilitary faction aspired to break Kosovo free from Serbia through armed resistance. Kosovars became increasingly decided about their independence as they witnessed that the Serbs were defeated in Bosnia and Croatia (Glenny 2012: 652-3). At that time, support for the KLA grew outside of the region, and circumstances developed in the movement’s favor.

In 1997, the KLA increased its activities, assassinating Serb police stations and Serb officials, or executing Albanian collaborators. State collapse and unrest in neighboring Albania supported the independence movement because large stocks of weapons flooded the market (Kaufman 2002: 155). When the KLA killed Serb officials in early 1998, the situation dramatically escalated and pointed to an imminent conflagration.

In response, the Serb government forces launched a major offensive against KLA strongholds in the Drenica region in February. They killed the KLA leadership and wiped out whole families (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 27; Kaufman 2002: 157). It marked the beginning of a systematic military and ethnic cleansing campaign against Kosovo Albanians (Sciolino and Bronner 1999).

As the SACEUR, General Wesley Clark recalled, around that time “Kosovo hadn’t been at the top of my priorities” (2001: 108). However, the Serb campaign did not go unnoticed and gradually involved the international community. The community was represented by the members of the so-called “Contact Group” which had learned their craft in Bosnia and tried to prevent another conflict (see: Stahl 2010: 54).

The Contact Group

The Contact Group (U.S., France, UK, Germany, Italy, and Russia) met in an emergency session in March 1998 to discuss the situation in Kosovo. The informal great-powers grouping, meeting on various levels, was called into life in Bosnia but could not moderate the violence. However, all members were determined to prevent another Balkans tragedy. The problem was how this should happen.

During the attack on Drenica, the SACEUR recommended to Washington the reinstatement of the so-called “Christmas warning” of December 1992. George W. Bush had threatened Milosevic with actions against Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia if Serb forces began campaigns in Kosovo (Kaufman 2002: 157).

Clark’s recommendation was based on his experiences with Milosevic during the Bosnian war and the 1995 Dayton negotiations. He writes, “I sensed that events in Kosovo were moving very quickly, and I knew Milosevic well, and how he liked to test the reactions of the international community to see how much he could get away with” (2001: 110). SecGen Javier Solana knew Milosevic, too. He accused Milosevic of lying about the activities of his secret police in Kosovo. The Serb president answered, “[y]es, you are right, I was lying. But this is normal, everyone does it” (cit. in: Clark 2001: 111).

Drawing on these experiences, the Contact Group demanded a “red line” to be drawn. But where this line was and what should follow was unclear. The grouping rather relied on strong rhetoric than strong actions.

Madeleine Albright called for sending a strong message. As I showed in chapter 6, Albright was driven by the historical conviction that appeasement politics and hesitation only play out to the advantage of aggressors. She said,

“[i]t took us seven years to bring Bosnia to this moment of hope. It must not take us that long to resolve the crisis that is growing in Kosovo; and it does not have to if we apply the lessons of 1991 [Kuwait]. This time, we must act with unity and resolve. This time, we must respond before it is too late” (1998: art. 5).

Albright internationalized the conflict and related it to Western human rights standards by saying that “[w]e must first acknowledge that this crisis is not an internal affair of the FRY. The violence is an affront to universal standards of human rights we are pledged to uphold” (1998: art. 6, 14).

This laid out the general premises for a potential Western intervention. These were Western responsibility, immediate action, putting pressure on Milosevic, responding to human rights violations, and under the leadership of the U.S. However, it soon became clear that this rather meant diplomatic action. Initiating another military intervention was not a regular response to Serb transgressions given that Milosevic was still viewed as a part of the solution rather than the problem itself (see: Abazi 2023: 137; Yost 1998: 236).

Earlier on, the president of the Republika Srpska, Biljana Plavsic, told Solana and Clark confidentially that democracy in Belgrade was the solution to the Kosovo problem (Clark 2001: 111). But fostering (democratic) “regime change” with NATO firepower like later in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya was an elusive imagination then. As Joyce Kaufman writes,

“[...] with thirty-four thousand SFOR troops in Bosnia, it is also clear that NATO ministers were unwilling to send another deployment of troops to the area. Any apparent show of NATO unity belied the reality, however” (2002: 159-60).

Instead, economic sanctions were imposed, the “Christmas warning” reiterated, and NATO aircraft were deployed to neighboring Albania and Macedonia for a “show of force”. They should short-circuit Serb radar screens with a fly-by of a hundred fighter planes on the border to Yugoslavia (Clark 2001: 120; Judah 2000: 150). Nonetheless, it was no more than a “limp gesture” (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 29; Judah 2000: 166).

The obvious was that the U.S. acted inconsistently on the Kosovo issue, asking for sanctions to be lifted after Milosevic agreed to negotiate with the Kosovars in May 1998. This accelerated divisions within the Contact Group and pointed to the disunity that would shortly later resurface in the UN Security Council. It was framed by the typical “cat-and-mouse play” of Milosevic.

He negotiated with diplomats, made concessions here and there, but moved back to the *status quo ante* as soon as Western attention was deflected. Milosevic was determined to proceed against KLA “terrorists” and to play off Western allies to achieve his goals. He told EU envoys that military actions were over while government forces continued the shelling and more than 200,000 Kosovars fled for safety (Kaufman 2002: 160-2).

When the fighting resumed in early 1998, both conflict parties dropped any restraint on violence. It was obvious that this needed to end and international agencies had to get into Kosovo to provide humanitarian relief (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 41). Efforts by the Contact Group to reach a compromise between the Serbs and the KLA like in Dayton were futile and NATO Allies were largely divided on how to end this conflict. By mid-1998, Western diplomacy on Kosovo had essentially become a paper tiger. As *The Economist* noted,

“[...] once again the western powers do not seem able to agree on how to run the mission. With European governments prevaricating, it seems likely that America will set up the operation alone-possibly with a little help from Russia” (Anon. 1998a).

With this, opposing positions broke into the open and, like Bosnia, encouraged the ongoing fighting. While witnessing culpability on both sides, Western diplomats such as Richard Holbrook reported few but atrocious crackdowns of Serb forces.

It was the historic experience with Milosevic, his secret police meddling in Bosnia, and the increasing number of refugees that disadvantaged the Serbs. It made no secret of the fact that the international position became increasingly partisan, fearing that another Srebrenica would occur (Hendrickson 2006: 93; Judah 2000: 177-80; Mulchinock 2017: 102).

Finally, the historical experience of NATO members with Milosevic made the use of force more likely than passive solutions like the containment of the conflict (see: Redd 2005: 133). As of the fall of 1998, struggles between the Allies would not seek anymore to resolve questions of a military versus civilian approach but rather determine the proper conditions for the military use of force.

The central question was if NATO's military power could be used against a sovereign state that did not threaten any of the member states. At first glance, Serbia was taking down an armed rebellion. If this was the perspective, could NATO's interference with a country's internal matters be legitimate? (Judah 2000: 178-9).

In the following, I will engage with both sides' historic positions on the use of force in Kosovo. As in the other cases of NATO's new policies during the 1990s, the different positions were split between the members of the Contact Group, consisting of the most important NATO members and the UN Security Council. The split extended into NATO.

As Richard Holbrooke summed up, “[o]n the one hand you have us and on the other you have the French” (cit. in: Judah 2000: 182). Dynamics in NATO-as-field were upheld by the traditional power distribution. The Atlanticist/Europeanist divide was a simplification of field positions that, due to their hierarchical arrangement (underpinned by capital), engendered actors' different perspectives, interests, and outlooks on Kosovo. However, I will further elaborate on this divide with the label “agnostic”, “Catholic”, and “Lutheran” to highlight the contrasting political approaches between and even within this structure in the Kosovo context.

7.2 The use of force in Kosovo

Atlantic position

The U.S. position on the use of force in Kosovo was framed by the political agenda and affairs in 1998. First, NATO's first enlargement was to be ratified by the Senate. Second, the administration went through an escalation scenario with Saddam Hussein over weapon inspections. Finally, President Clinton faced impeachment over his extramarital affair with White House-intern Monica Lewinsky. Washington's appetite for yet another foreign-policy test was low (Sciolino and Bronner 1999).

In early 1998, the use of force in Kosovo was rejected by NSC staffers. There was the belief that the 1992 “Christmas warning” was outdated and that making empty threats would be counterproductive. While NATO was the main vehicle for security in the Western Balkans, Kosovo presented a new dilemma.

Reminiscent of the tug-of-war over UNPROFOR, one security official emphasized that “the idea of us using force over the objection of allies who have troops on the ground, subject to retaliation, is fantasy-land. Allies do not do that to each other” (cit. in: Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 30). The assumption was that there would be no NATO consensus for the use of force in Kosovo, given that the Allies already secured peace in Bosnia.

Over the fear of making empty threats without NATO's support, unilateral U.S. actions were ruled out (Sciolino and Bronner 1999). As an NSC official said, “moving that alliance to act is a Herculean undertaking, which would happen only in the most egregious circumstances” (cit. in: Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 31). Making recommendations of such kind to the president was, therefore, excluded.

Coinciding with the bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya/Tanzania and Clinton's beginning impeachment trial, a proposal by U.S. NATO ambassador, Alexander Vershbow, was ignored. This proposal called for “another endgame strategy” in Kosovo which would establish an international protectorate secured by an international force (Borger 1999: art. 13). There was no sign that any of this was considered in Washington. Entanglement in another conflict was a real concern (Kaufman 2002: 174). As a security official stressed, “from a policy perspective, we're not anywhere near making a decision for any kind of armed intervention in Kosovo right now” (cit in: Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 35).

A shift occurred in September 1998. It resulted from the efforts of General Wesley Clark, the SACEUR. The SACEUR as the interface between the military NATO and politics has a degree of independent agency, as I noted in the theory chapter. Clark often employed this agency in Washington. That Clinton was preoccupied with the Lewinsky-scandal created a favorable atmosphere for Clark who obtained greater chances for influencing the agenda (Redd 2005: 140-1, 144).

Clark oversaw NATO's operations in ex-Yugoslavia since 1997. He participated in the Dayton negotiations in 1995 and knew the Balkans. Educated at West Point and Oxford in politics, philosophy, and economics, Clark had what was a credibility bonus for U.S. policymakers and militaries at the time—combat experience in Vietnam. He was taken seriously in Washington—sometimes making trouble—and enjoyed good relations with Solana. Clark said that “[m]ilitary leaders carry their early education and experiences for the rest of their service” (2001: XXII).

He, thus, felt deeply obliged to work in the service of NATO and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the progenitor of the Alliance (*ibid.*). Clark sought to strengthen the Alliance where he could, writing that “NATO needed continued shoring up from me and others, or it could have crumbled” (2001: XXVI).

He often reconsidered President Plavsic's remark on democracy in Belgrade and was early to suggest some connection between military actions and democratic change in a sovereign country. However, he could not yet score on this point in Washington. The Clintonites were convinced to have no leverage to enforce “regime change” (2001: 129). Despite their “democratic peace” agenda, they were comparatively more risk-averse than the later Bush government, fearing domestic backlashes and disputatious NATO allies (see: Redd 2005: 146).

In September, Clark met with Secretary Cohen in Washington. He reported on Kosovo and warned of the consequences of inaction for the USNATO. He combined his accumulated military expertise with the opportunity of his position as the SACEUR to provide policymakers with guiding military assessments. Cohen was concerned about a push-back from European Allies but agreed on an ultimatum for Milosevic. This set the inter-agency ball rolling.

U.S. officials began to discuss the option of military force in the UN (Clark 2001: 134). However, it was there that they would not obtain a mandate for the use of force against Serbia. Russia and China made clear that they would strictly veto any such intention. What, then, drove the American position in the first place was not the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo.

What mattered most to U.S. policymakers was that the Russians and Chinese constrained them. Already during NATO enlargement, they made abundantly clear that the Russians do not have a veto in Alliance decision-making. It was about time to reaffirm this because independence from third parties was part of the often-invoked “NATO credibility”.

Consequently, William Cohen presented a new U.S. position. It should be possible to threaten or use force without UN authorization. He said that “[t]he United States does not feel it’s imperative. It’s desirable, not imperative” (cit. in: Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 36).

It was an “agnostic” position because a UN mandate was “neither sacrosanct nor absolute” (2000: 45). However, reenacting the Bosnia campaign was not on the table. At that point, the Americans were playing the “credibility-game”. As the British PM, Tony Blair, observed, “[t]here was no real appetite in the public or among the politicians for any action, let alone major military action involving ground forces” (2010: 241).

Nonetheless, a consideration of airstrikes came with agnosticism. It safeguarded U.S. dominance in NATO since 85% of the required force was American (2010: 246). The “agnostic outlook” was underpinned by the materially strongest position in NATO and offered the option of military force, if necessary. Continuing US power could only be guaranteed if the UN did not constrain NATO actions. Given the vast military capabilities, U.S. policymakers acted on the option of unilateral action and created a sword of Damocles over Kosovo to reaffirm American dominance in NATO.

Europeanist positions

A typical complaint of the Americans referred to their European allies’ preference for talks rather than actions (Stephens 2010: 45). While the French seemed to fit this perception concerning the use of force in Kosovo, the UK called for uncompromising military action.

French president Chirac explained in June 1998 that Serbia’s actions needed to stop because the conflict could have wider implications (AP 2015).

Chirac's position departed from the stance of François Mitterrand and Roland Dumas who had declared a regional strategic alliance with Serbia ("l'amitié franco-serbe"; Abazi 2023: 136).

The experiences of the Bosnian war and Milosevic's continuing ethnic entrepreneurship mobilized French society at an unprecedented scale. Intellectuals rallied against Milosevic in March 1998 in Paris and, in 1999, 70 % of the French population came to support NATO's action. Against this backdrop, Chirac later advocated NATO actions in Kosovo as a multilateral enterprise (2023: 144; Stahl 2010: 60).

Nevertheless, this was the outcome of processual change that began with French objections against NATO actions and advocacy for negotiated solutions in Kosovo (see: Stahl 2010: 57). While for the U.S. "NATO could do what it liked", Chirac declared in October that "any military action must be requested and decided by the Security Council" (cit. in: Judah 2000: 182). Aware of the Russian/Chinese veto on action, this was the well-known challenger role in NATO that was based on one fundamental/existential question.

In February 1999, Chirac gave a revealing interview with the famous U.S. television journalist, Charles ("Charlie") Rose, in Washington. Rose asked Chirac about the "new NATO" that was redefined by the U.S. and potentially allowed for more independent actions—even without France. Chirac replied: "[t]he problem is does NATO can take any decision by itself or does it have-- or is it necessary for it to have the agreement of the Security Council?" (Rose 1999: 07:47).

Chirac said that an independent agency for NATO, authorized by its members, would create problems for confronting other regional organizations that empowered themselves. A case in point was "United Africa" which ignored a UN embargo on Libya. Consequently, there must be a rule counting for everybody (1999: 08:41).

Moreover, Rose asked about the French discourse of American hegemony and those voices that called to challenge American dominance.

While Chirac tried to relativize these “accusations” with intermittent laughter, Rose continued to challenge Chirac who spontaneously responded: “[i]f somebody thinks that, he should have another idea. Make Europe strong enough not to be dominated. And that is a real purpose” (1999: 31:18).

Behind Chirac’s call for the UN as an authority above NATO stood lingering concerns about an unrestricted American dominance that used NATO as it wished and demoted Europeans to onlookers. This means that the “[...] insistence on UN approval reflected, in part, French resistance to U.S. leadership” (Skrpec 2003: 101). A unilateral American approach to international relations that facilitated NATO’s transformation into a regional organization with a global outlook was observed during the 2000s.

His advocacy of an independent European defense capability within NATO, the call for a stronger Europe, was put forward on 3-4 December 1998 with a declaration between the UK and France in Saint-Malo. Announcing an autonomous military capacity, the declaration stipulated that “[t]he European Union needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage” (CVCE 2015: pt. 1). However, it was also a confession that the WEU was dead and that neither the UK nor France could undertake unilateral actions, implying a loss of symbolic capital.

The declaration acknowledged that the greater frequency of humanitarian crises during the 1990s (e.g., Somalia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia) offered a window to justify Europe’s security agency (Walker 1998: col. 2). Given the international context and the difficult history of American-French relations, pursuing such plans was not factitious but rather self-evident.

However, French policymakers did not completely block actions in Kosovo. It conflicted with the pronouncement of a “new humanitarianism”, advocated by, for instance, the French activist and politician, Bernard Kouchner. This humanitarianism called for military interventions on moral grounds to “[...] stop atrocities and mass violations of human rights” (Ristić and Satjukow 2022: 191).

Britain already financially supported international organizations such as *Médecin sans Frontières* to demonstrate their humanitarian leadership (Hansard 2023c). Moreover, a new humanitarian rationale justified the EU’s military role.

Consequently, Chirac qualified the absolute need for a UN mandate in Kosovo and emphasized that a humanitarian situation constituted an exception to the rule. This allowed joining interventions to help those in danger. France was supported by its southern flank allies (plus Belgium and initially Germany), together establishing a “Catholic camp” which allowed for the sacrosanct rule to be violated only in exceptional circumstances (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 44-5; Hendrickson 2012: 86).

But, as Bernard Stahl writes, “[d]ue to France’s limited resources a unilateral policy was out of question and would have left Paris marginalized without any influence” (2010: 57). The exception to the rule was, therefore, also born of the limits of the weaker position in NATO that would marginalize France if the U.S. asserted the use of force.

It was thus both the attempt to prevent unilateral actions by the “USNATO” and a backdoor to participate in conflict resolution if such actions could not be prevented. Certainly, some kind of humanitarian action in Kosovo was in French interest. This included that Chirac preferred a negotiated outcome, engineered by Europeans (Gow 2013: 312; Skrpec 2003: 101).

The European “Catholics” were opposed by a “Lutheran camp” that sought to reform existing dogmas on the use of force. Some European members were even more permissive on the application of force in Kosovo than the Americans. If necessary, without the UN. The United Kingdom led this camp. The argument was that humanitarian situations like in Kosovo generally required emergency responses demonstrated by ODF/IFOR (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 45; Judah 2000: 181). This challenged Americans leadership and subdivided Europeans.

British PM Tony Blair was convinced “[...] that there was no way this was going to be resolved by diplomacy alone, and that military force would be necessary” (Blair 2010: 241). This position was grounded in the experiences of the Bosnian war, the failure to intervene when it was needed, and the belief that Milosevic capitalized on the disunity of western leaders (2010: 242). It was also grounded in Blair’s perceptions. He acknowledged that the post-Cold War period was characterized by globalization and interdependence, writing that

“[w]hen we talk of an interdependent world, we mean that we are linked, [...] that problems in one part of the world can easily trigger reactions in another; but also that we feel at a human level more connected across national boundaries than ever before” (2010: 238).

Blair acknowledged that interdependence needed responses by global alliances because “[t]heir problems will become ours” (2009: 14). Consequently, “[...] a traditional foreign policy view, based on a narrow analysis of national interest and an indifference unless that interest is directly engaged, is flawed and out of date” (2010: 239). Blair thus represented a newer generation of (British) politicians who thought outside the national box, like Germany’s Volker Rühle.

Regarding Kosovo, he observed the international community’s “primary instinct” to freeze the conflict and sweep it under the carpet (2010: 241). Blair believed that the situation was facilitated by the earlier misjudgment of PM John Major and Douglas Hurd who, relying on a false ethnic conflict thesis, appeased the Serbs and allowed “a level killing field” (Blair 2010: 243; Bower 2016: 134, see chapter 4).

Given global interdependence and fears of “crisis blowbacks”, he was inclined to permanently resolve emerging problems. Blair wanted, therefore, a credible military threat in Kosovo which irritated many NATO Allies: “[...] I was totally and unyieldingly for resolution, not pacification” (Blair 2010: 241). If diplomacy did not work, the military needed to act. Too often, Europeans stood out with scintillating declarations but did not enact them. Blair, desiring to shift the hub of NATO leadership to Europe, envisioned British leadership in Kosovo which strained relations with Clinton (ibid.). He.

The British government stood accused of hampering negotiations with Milosevic with its saber-rattling because the “Catholics” rejected the use of force beyond Bosnia. Resolving, not pacifying, the Kosovo crisis, however, would help Britain to regain leadership status in NATO after the lost years of the Bosnian war where the government succumbed to flawed views on the Serbs and relied on UNPROFOR (see: Norton-Taylor 1998: col. 4, 8; also: Skrpec 2003: 99). *The Observer* noted that “Blair is going to emerge from this war with Kosovo back in NATO’s hands and a position of European leadership no British leader has enjoyed since 1945” (Marr 1999: col. 5).

It showed a tendency to lead in situations where the U.S. was more hesitant (Kaufman 2002: 174). Later, this visibly resurfaced during the 2011 Libya intervention.

While this posed some challenge to the “Catholics”, the French were less unsettled, given the relative power of the UK and Blair’s alliance approach—visible at St. Malo. Like the French, Blair hoped that Britain would command a 60,000-strong European army within NATO, viewing the dependence on American power and their domestic politics as concerning given his drive for leadership. Discussing Blair’s military muscle, *The Observer* wrote that “[h]is belief in his own powers of reform is boundless” (Marr 1999: col. 4).

Despite Blair’s bid for British leadership, his coalition building on Kosovo failed: “Chirac and the other Europeans were unwilling to join a military adventure involving ground troops” (Blair 2010: 244; cit.: Bower 2016: 134, see: 137; Latawski and Smith 2003: 133). Blair was “[...] somewhat isolated on the European side” and realized that the U.S. was closest to his stance— at least considering airstrikes (ibid.; Skrpec 2003: 100).

The French and British approaches served to accumulate power in NATO. They can be understood as a confluence of policymakers’ historic perceptions about American dominance and the materiality of positions in NATO, showing that France ranked below a militarily stronger and advanced UK (see: Hartley and Sandler 1999: 670).

However, while these approaches made sense concerning the protagonists’ perceptions and resources at hand, their material power base was insufficient vis-à-vis the leading U.S. The need for the St. Malo initiative or the dying WEU showed that both lacked the relevant material and symbolic capital to instantiate their visions.

As I noted in Chapter 4, the struggle over “out-of-area” decided that European security frameworks were to be developed within the USNATO. A twist toward a dominant position of European actors was, therefore, nearly impossible, and their power to critically influence the course of the USNATO was limited. What they could do, however, was to invoke NATO’s consensus principle.

7.3 The struggle for military action

End of 1998, the Alliance moved into a new deadlock on its “out-of-area” policy. Because the Americans would not allow anyone to constrain them, or the UK to decide when and how to intervene, NATO decision-making was paralyzed. However, some form of action was an option for all camps. The issue was the conditions for action and the form, given the Russian/Chinese veto in the UN.

So long as the “Catholics” insisted on the primacy of the UN or the construction of a compelling humanitarian case, the consensus rule paralyzed the Alliance, and the camps were gridlocked. Leaders of this camp threatened to block NATO’s further actions (Anon. 1998b).

The SACEUR observed that the threshold for the use of force by NATO was too high (Clark 2001: 125). I showed above that this threshold was part of the actors’ dispositions and, therefore, relatively difficult to dissolve. Clark describes this as the Allies’ “principled stand” (ibid.).

However, dissolving the situation was essential. It offered the U.S. to override the Russians/Chinese, the French to develop their autonomy, and the British to regain leadership status. Yet, it was obvious that another military intervention was unlikely and that responses in the form of ODF/IFOR were out of the question. As Daalder and O’Hanlon write, “[w]hile the situation on the ground in Kosovo demanded vigorous action, the NATO alliance appeared unalterably divided on how to move forward” (2000: 45).

An independent NATO agency inched out of sight, leaving it again to the UN to call upon regional organizations to restore peace and security (Chapter VIII, “Regional arrangements”)—if all members agreed. But “[t]he UN approach would only allow for more diplomacy, though by now it was becoming abundantly clear that more diplomacy would not solve the problem” (Skrpec 2003: 101).

Solana's case

Madeleine Albright and William Cohen indicated in the Contact Group in the summer of 1998 that even without the UN and NATO authorization a legal case for military action against the Serbs existed. Eventually, the humanitarian case construction by SecGen Solana moved the Alliance forward on military actions. The conflict parties started major offensives around that time. They overran settlements, executed civilians, and large numbers of people were displaced (Hendrickson 2002b: 244).

However, given the entrenched “principled stand” of the leaders in the “Catholic camp”, opposition to this American proposal was expressed (Hendrickson 2006: 95). The diplomatic helm returned to the UN which passed resolution 1199 in September, calling to end military actions to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and to come to a political compromise between the parties (Mulchinock 2017: 107).

Aware of the deadlock in NATO, SecGen Solana emerged as a key actor to move the Alliance towards military actions. Succeeding Willy Claes, the Spaniard Javier Solana became Secretary-General of NATO at a critical point when the Alliance was changing its policies towards eastern enlargement and military interventions.

Until 1995, Solana had served as Spanish minister of culture and then foreign minister, acquiring a broad range of contacts, knowledge, and skills in politics and diplomacy (Hendrickson 2006: 90). Being a choice of the Clinton administration,

“Mr. Solana is well known in Europe as a clever politician and diplomat [...] who hugs and kisses ambassadors and even generals, [...] talks with passion about things like NATO's “interoperability” [...] to promote what he calls NATO's new global mission” (Sciolino 1997).

With charm and balance, Solana won the Allies' trust, acting as “a quiet but critical negotiator for NATO” who exercised leadership during NATO's first wave of expansion and the Kosovo intervention (Hendrickson 2006: 92).

He, therefore, contrasted the more aggressive leadership styles of Wörner and Claes, conducting himself in a passionate but reflected and diplomatic way (Mulchinock 2017: 108).

He never embarrassed NATO diplomats in front of others like Claes and had the qualities of a consensus builder who maintained cohesion in the NAC. Disagreements were mediated behind closed doors. This earned him the recognition of an “honest broker”. Many NATO members extolled him for his integrity, high work ethic, and diplomatic skills, especially during NATO’s 1999 OAF which made the campaign a joint enterprise (Hendrickson 2006: 98, 100).

Beginning in summer 1998, Solana’s personal traits and diplomatic skills were decisive in convincing skeptical NATO members to take action in the absence of authorization by the Security Council. The problem was that only little interventionist precedent existed and previous actions in Bosnia were consecrated by the UN (see: Hendrickson 2002b: 243-4).

However, Solana was convinced that the latest developments damaged NATO because they contrasted what the Alliance had demonstrated in Bosnia, that it was a crisis manager and capable military actor. He, thus, supported the UK and U.S. proposals for military force (see: Abe 2019: 225; Hendrickson 2002b: 244). Solana drew on the (symbolic) capital and power of these more belligerent camps and became their key representative (see: Kille and Hendrickson 2010: 512).

The Allies’ discord unsettled him deeply. Since no SecGen wishes to preside over a disabled NATO in historic moments, he started to act. His actorness relied on a strong method. Solana calibrated the positions of NATO members and became their main representative. By taking full responsibility, he shielded the Allies from external pressures and avoided that they were publicly pitted against each other. Put differently, Solana went for NATO members into the firing line which sometimes included doing their “homework”.

Struggles between them were practically substituted by both Solana as a person and the Secretary-General. He, then, convinced governments to cooperate with NATO (Hendrickson 2002b: 244, 248; 2006: 99). All this undergirded his power to move the Alliance forward. Concerning Kosovo, it was thus not the Allies who devised a solution but Solana. He mainly relied on the latest UN resolutions, the impending humanitarian catastrophe, the lack of a UN mandate, and the Serb non-compliance with the resolutions to construct a case for military action.

With these legal claims in the briefcase, he visited the “Catholic camp” to point out their (humanitarian) commonalities with his case, being the case’s “principle [and responsible] architect” (Hendrickson 2002b: 245; Mulchinock 2017: 111).

UN SecGen, Kofi Annan, who called for urgent action to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, framed Solana’s case. Annan visited the NATO headquarters in January 1999, stressing that the experience of bloody wars during the 1990s made clear that the use of force is needed when other means failed, which may be the case in ex-Yugoslavia. Although UN SecGens cannot authorize force, Annan’s indirect endorsement supported Solana’s case (Latawski and Smith 2003: 12). The step to action was also accelerated by the Contact Group on October 8 when the Russians admitted that their veto cannot stop NATO’s power (Judah 2000: 183).

Legal analysts soon maintained that the UN Charter provides leeway to action for regional organizations if “their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations” (cit. in: Hendrickson 2006: 101). Subsequently, Solana declared at the NAC meeting on October 10 that a legal basis for independent NATO action existed. Solana’s symbolic authority rallied the consensus. The NAC agreed that NATO could legitimately stop evolving humanitarian crises.

Declaring to act based on UN resolutions self-empowered NATO which now only needed to deploy its forces merely “in the spirit” of the UN charter. This dissolved the gridlock in favor of the UK/U.S. The “Catholic camp” was silenced. The Italians had stopped objecting to the use of force by October 12. French Foreign Minister Védrine said that acting based on resolution 1199 would justify military actions (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 45; Guicherd 1999: 28; Latawski and Smith 2003: 13).

The Allies endorsed a three-level system for the activation of NATO forces against the Serbs. It was an escalation model to coerce Milosevic into compliance (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 45, 65). The first phase, ACTWARN, included a readying of NATO forces like a call to arms. The second phase, ACTREQ, included a more binding commitment which counted as a threat. The third phase, ACTORD, would finalize the process and mark the beginning of a limited bombing campaign after 96 hours (see: Kaufman 2002: 163).

The NAC oversaw the process. Solana was placed at the “epicenter” of the decision to use force (Hendrickson 2002b: 246). However, this was no enforcement model like in Bosnia since NATO contained Milosevic by threat escalation rather than defeating his forces. Ground forces were not planned (also: Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 53, 65). For the time being, Milosevic withdrew most of his troops in response to ACTORD and an unarmed OSCE-verification team entered Kosovo (Kille and Hendrickson 2010: 512).

However, the escalation model marked the beginning of another NATO transformation. Preceded by Solana's intervention, the NAC approval of October 10 diluted the UN's authority per self-authorization (see: Schlag 2017: 174; Weller 1999: 213). In early 1999, Solana explained that “[...] the NATO countries *think* that this action is perfectly legitimate and it is within the logic of the UN Security Council [...]” (cit. in: Latawski and Smith 2003: 13; own emphasis).

The NAC also sidelined the Charter's prohibition of the threat of force against a sovereign state (Article 2(4)) by placing it in the context of humanitarian crises (see: Weller 1999: 223). A NATO diplomat emphasized that “the safety catch will be removed, the gun will be pointed, and we hope this will trigger a switch in Slobodan Milosevic's mind” (cit. in: Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 45). If not, further action should follow (see: Judah 2000: 185).

Thus, threats of force became not only a legitimate diplomatic means but enabled NATO to elicit a chain of further practices. Put differently, issuing threats to stop human rights violations suddenly counted in humanitarian crisis contexts as an accepted practice and allows for other meaningful practices to follow.

Eventually, NATO's escalation model paved the way for the bombing campaign in March 1999 and the deployment of ground forces in June. However, this was not going to happen without another power struggle between NATO members in the Contact Group.

Rambouillet

Despite the Serb withdrawal, the conflict continued as early as January 1999. The KLA took advantage of the force vacuum, advanced in Kosovo, and the Serbs reentered to push them back. Random violence ensued, causing civilian deaths on both sides. On January 15, Serb forces executed 45 civilians in the village of Racak. In its aftermath, another struggle for a NATO response ensued at the margins of the Rambouillet conference.

NATO's threat of force proved short-lived. Unlike Bosnia, the province of Kosovo was vital to Milosevic's political survival, and he was going to risk a confrontation with NATO. However, having issued ACTORD two months earlier, planes remained on alert, but the Allies were suddenly unwilling to back it with credible force. The unity of the October 10 NAC agreement decomposed into the previous NATO camp structure.

President Chirac was still against war with Serbia, Clinton was amid impeachment in December, and Tony Blair got into a heated argument with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Bower 2016: 142). Schröder was convinced that no country's ground forces should be used and that no circumstances justified this (Blair 2010: 244).

Blair writes, "[i]t is amazing that people constantly miss the importance of the fact that any threat made in international affairs must be credible" (ibid.). But Racak made clear that unsupported threats had little use, Serb units would keep coming back, and OSCE observers were at risk (Lambeth 2001: 8). Consequently, Madeleine Albright worked out a new strategy for Kosovo.

This strategy drew on Alexander Vershbow's earlier proposal of an international protectorate, enforced, if necessary, by ground forces fighting their way into Kosovo. This was pegged to an ultimatum for peace that introduced NATO troops to supervise the implementation. If Belgrade rejected this plan, the air campaign would start.

Moreover, Albright considered a substantial U.S. force as it was clear since Bosnia that the Europeans needed American leadership to send their troops (Albright 2013: 442; Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 71-2).

The promise of U.S. power should reassure the camps for a final resolution of the conflict which approximated the belligerent UK position. However, the UK government was willing to send troops to actively fight a war while the U.S. wanted to avoid this (Kaufman 2002: 180).

Additionally, one last major diplomatic effort by the Contact Group at the chateau in Rambouillet/France in February 1999 should be made. This included that ACTORD was now backed by the clear intention to start the campaign (2002: 173). Rambouillet was the scene of a final power struggle between France and the U.S. before the Kosovo intervention. It was a last attempt to curb NATO's independent agency.

Supported by Italy and Greece, France hoped for a negotiated solution at Rambouillet since French policymakers shared sentiments with Serbia (Kaufman 2002: 184; Wiegel 2023: art. 4). Moreover, a peaceful resolution would throttle the operationalization of the newly self-empowered NATO and give Europeans a greater hand in peacekeeping without much U.S. support.

In the interview with Rose, President Chirac appeared, therefore, undecided about the culpability of the parties. Despite the international community's stance on Serb culpability since Bosnia, he said that the willingness to agree to the proposed autonomy system would decide on responsibility.

Chirac noted that

“[...] we'll have to see whose responsibility. Is it the responsibility of the Kosovars, who wouldn't accept the substantial autonomy system and want complete independence? Or will it be the responsibility of the Serbs, which wouldn't accept the presence of the ground troops in Kosovo to take care of the agreement?” (Rose 1999: 04:30).

While the talks at Rambouillet between the Kosovars and Serbs were going as difficult as expected, the French representatives made one last attempt to topple the NATO model that was blazing its trail since Solana's case. The real conflict was among the Contact Group, as the *New York Times* reported (see: Kaufman 2002: 177).

The French tried to make the Contact Group the top decision-maker on NATO's airstrikes. Furthermore, it should oversee the ground force that implemented the peace deal. This would have undermined NATO since the Russians participated in decision-making (2002: 178).

On top of everything, the French insisted that a Kosovo Force should be authorized by the UN since NATO could not independently deploy beyond its membership which meant reversing NATO's recent history since Bosnia (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 80). Western diplomats reported, furthermore, that "[...] France was adamant that the attacks not occur automatically" if there was no peace deal and that further consultations were necessary (cit. in: Kaufman 2002: 182).

At the margin of the negotiations between the Yugoslav conflict parties, this pitted the French against other NATO members (ibid.). They backed their words with actions and refused a group of NATO officers who came to deliver a briefing on the American strategy to enter the chateau Rambouillet (Albright 2013: 445). The message was that the Contact Group was in charge here and not the NAC.

The American delegation strongly resisted French actions since they threatened to reverse the latest achievements of independent NATO decision-making. It would also have meant that the successful Bosnia-model was not applied in Kosovo and a variety of international actors assumed bits of pieces of responsibility. The U.S. and UK viewed this as nullifying the post-Cold War power realities since Bosnia and insisted that NATO assumes independent decision-making and responsibility for peace implementation in Kosovo (Gow 2013: 313; Judah 2000: 219).

The UK delegation finally ended the heated exchange, proposing that the UN merely endorse but not authorize KFOR (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 80). The eventual French acceptance of the compromise did, however, not exclusively result from British mediation. They rather feared a blowback on their European defense project which relied on NATO assets and European partners.

At Rambouillet, a French source said that "[a]bove all, we do not want this to be seen as a test for Europe's common security and defense policy" (cit. in: Judah 1999). Paradoxically, less NATO now worked against autonomy and power for the French. Its weaker position in NATO dictated the course of history.

Indeed, after Chirac declared in 1997 that France would not reintegrate with NATO, it slowly resumed this process after Rambouillet (see: Wiegelt 2023: art. 4). It was now crystal clear that “USUKNATO” was at the helm of all subsequent developments and France would follow this lead. Hubert Védrine described this as a

“sort of wavering in the French mind between what we proclaim, our universal voice, our voice, our rank, our principles, our values and the exact opposite, which is a sort of melancholy when we see that it is not working and that we are not the centre of the world” (cit. in: Mulchinock 2017: 127).

However, France’s rapprochement had the positive effect of fortifying its NATO position. Demonstrating his sense of the possible, Chirac became convinced that French participation in NATO’s intervention would support the further construction of independent European security. The EU’s takeover of the Bosnia mission in 2004 (“Althea”) may confirm this.

However, Chirac’s final effort to restrict NATO’s geographical scope of operations at the 1999 Washington summit failed. While the Kosovo campaign completed the “new NATO” and rallied members in the name of “humanitarianism”, wherever that may be, he was relatively isolated and had to be content with the limited influence that the reintegration with NATO offered (Lequesne 2007: 6; Mulchinock 2017: 128).

The British challenge

The negotiations between Kosovars and Serbs continued in March 1999. The Kosovars signed the peace agreement on March 18 in Paris. However, the Serbs refused their signature and did not accept a military force in Kosovo.

The talks were adjourned, and Holbrooke warned Milosevic one last time. The Serb president anticipated that the air war was imminent but calculated that Serbia could endure it with lots of deaths while the West could not. The Rambouillet talks failed.

On March 23, Solana ordered the start of the air campaign against Serbia. On March 24, 08:00 p.m., NATO began with ODF airstrikes against rump-Yugoslavia. Eventually, this was possible because the Solana/Clinton/Blair-triumvirate held the reigns in NATO since October 1998 and dominated the Contact Group in February 1999. NATO spokesperson, Jamie Shea, observed a “new normalcy”. The decision-making in the NAC was “[...] remarkably fast. Everybody was very grim faced but composed” (cit. in: Judah 2000: 237).

However, Milosevic’s units continued ethnic cleansing as a demonstration of defiance. Military actions degenerated into social warfare against people and localities (“Operation Horseshoe”; Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 94; Kaufman 2002: 185-7). In response, NATO intensified the war to unprecedented levels until Milosevic agreed to negotiations in June.

Although OAF was a repetition of the 1995 peace enforcement, it did not proceed without arguments between the Allies over details such as targets and tactics. NATO Allies had different expectations when Milosevic would continue negotiations (Judah 2000: 229; Kaufman 2002: 186). What, however, was absent was the final decision on ground forces like IFOR/SFOR. Despite the promise of ground forces in Albright’s Rambouillet plan, there was another test to pass before the deployment of ground troops.

Particularly surprising was the U.S. resisted the deployment of ground forces. With Rambouillet’s failure, it was unlikely that Europeans would send forces into a hostile environment if the U.S. was not there. The U.S. position was thereby based on a historic misperception of Dayton. The Clintonites believed that ODF’s bombing induced Milosevic to relent. OAF was assumed to have the same effect. Albright constantly emphasized parallels between the two campaigns (Gow 2013: 325; Mulchinock 2017: 129).

However, it was rather the mix of conditions such as the Croat-Muslim offensive and NATO’s artillery strikes that made ODF so effective. Such conditions were absent in Kosovo. With this miscalculation, a Serb withdrawal was assumed too soon and ground forces were ruled out (Daalder and O’Hanlon 2000: 94, 98).

Moreover, the Clintonites blatantly failed to see that the air war could not achieve the declared humanitarian goals and the protection of Kosovar Albanians (2000: 131). Only ground troops, the post-Cold War “do-good soldiers”, that is, humanitarianized armed services rescuing victims and protecting children (Dal Lago *et al.* 2010: 199), could deliver humanitarian assistance and provide human security *in situ*. Consequently, another struggle erupted as the Britons pressed ahead, demonstrating leadership in Kosovo.

Accompanying this struggle, *The Guardian* titled “Clinton clash with Blair” (Kettle 1999). And, as Joyce Kaufman writes, “[...] nowhere can the growing divisions be seen more dramatically than in the opposite stands taken by Britain and the United States” (2002: 193). Blair wanted the deployment of ground forces which he publicly expressed. He capitalized on the wave of support at home and the British media’s framing of the conflict (Mulchinock 2017: 123).

Britain demonstratively began recruiting, mobilizing, and equipping its ground troops while the U.S. still hoped for an effective air campaign. It had deployed troops to Macedonia in February to be in the lead for the anticipated implementation of the Rambouillet accords (Gow 2013: 330; Judah 2000: 271). Units were on standby for entering Kosovo.

However, the UK could not win a war by itself and needed U.S. leadership. Mobilizing material/symbolic capital—forces and saber-rattling was to wake-up American leadership. Blair’s strong interventionist rhetoric challenged Clinton who, facing the regular Yugoslav army, feared failures like Vietnam and Somalia (see: Alexander 2013). Clinton admonished Blair to restrain his interventionist muscle as the Americans stood embarrassed amidst Clinton’s impeachment (Judah 2000: 270).

However, the U.S. strategy was out of tune with its leadership in NATO. *The Guardian* reported that Tony Blair felt a “deep sense of frustration” [...] “about Mr. Clinton’s [hysteretic] position on ground troops” and Clinton’s anger about the British attempts to lobby with both Madeleine Albright and William Cohen (cit. in: Kettle 1999: col. 2). As Daalder and O’Hanlon write “[w]hat was missing, therefore, was less allied will than a demonstrated American ability and willingness to lead a joint effort” (2000: 98).

Given the perceived obligation of U.S. leadership, Blair's challenge was both consequential and essential (2000: 141). Clinton "was genuinely steamed up" but Blair cornered him by deploying British forces (Blair 2010: 255).

Finally, a Kosovo Force was authorized on June 2 as the war needed to show results— at whatever costs. On June 4, with the Russians falling off his side, Milosevic surrendered. The U.S. designated its full military power to preserve its dominance in NATO where there existed no understanding of why the U.S. had resisted ground forces. Given that Bosnia already worked on these presuppositions, Jamie Shea self-evidently said, "nothing should ever be ruled out" (cit. in: Judah 2000: 271).

Ground forces are an essential part of campaign planning, otherwise, the success of the whole operation is at risk. Confirming this logic, Blair writes, "[...] how can we rule out ground troops when the military advice is unanimous that we cannot guarantee victory by the air campaign alone?" (2010: 255). The first KFOR units entered Kosovo on June 12 and NATO repeated a full interventionist cycle.

A new doctrine

Following Milosevic's capitulation, more than 40,000 soldiers entered Kosovo with "Operation Joint Guardian". KFOR was a revival of the tasks established by IFOR's blueprint. This military operation was accompanied by a new interventionist doctrine of the international community, the so-called "Blair doctrine".

As Leurdijk and Zandee write, "the set-up of KFOR strongly resembled that of the 'Stabilisation Force' (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the framework of the Dayton Peace Agreement" (2001: 114). The dual tracks of peace enforcement and humanitarian assistance structured NATO's tasks. The practices of Bosnia were reapplied in Kosovo.

Militarily, KFOR was to oversee the ceasefire, the withdrawal of Serb forces, and the prevention of new hostilities. It should create a safe environment for the work of other organizations such as the UN. NATO forces were ordered to ensure the physical separation of Kosovo Serbs and Albanians.

The safe return of refugees and displaced persons was to be guaranteed under KFOR's protection (see: Mulchinock 2017: 185-6). The KLA was demobilized and transformed into a civil emergency organization. This was a form of democratic security sector reform that made it subject to checks by international authorities (2017: 193-5). Moreover, the disarmament of the population had priority since nearly every household had automatic weapons.

Regular controls were conducted and programs for their collection/destruction were initiated. NATO established control across Kosovo and conducted on a quotidian basis a "show of force" by manning checkpoints, conducting patrols, or displaying tanks and fighter planes. This produced security by discouraging acts of vengeance.

On the civilian side, NATO forces assisted in the implementation of local governance and the rule of law. It took the first approach to the provision of healthcare and humanitarian assistance. KFOR pushed forward the reconstruction of the region's infrastructure which had been damaged by the intense air campaign. Moreover, NATO enhanced local security to protect and promote human rights (see: Leurdijk and Zandee 2001: 113-5).

Weekly protected transports for the remaining Serb population provided for human needs such as running errands or visiting relatives in Serb enclaves. Contact offices in town districts ensured that individual problems gained KFOR's attention. Supervised by the OSCE, KFOR organized and militarily protected regular democratic elections.

NATO repeated in Kosovo a full interventionist cycle (air and ground), first introduced in Bosnia in 1995. Until today, these practices have formed the core of NATO's efforts to freeze ethnic tensions in Kosovo. NATO's military and civil approach largely suppressed the outbreak of a major conflict. Nonetheless, "NATO forces will only withdraw when the state is viewed as being politically stable, and any resumption of major violence is seen as unlikely" (Mulchinock 2017: 205). However, the more pressing question is what it meant for NATO. With the repeating interventionist cycle, an interventionist doctrine for the international community was proposed.

The Alliance took a central role within this doctrine which essentialized the future provision of military and humanitarian agencies. Tony Blair outlined this in a speech in Chicago on April 22, 1999. Commensurate with his leadership ambitions, it came to be known as the “Blair doctrine” which influenced the interventions of the 2000s, not only the notorious ones in Afghanistan and Iraq but also the less-known ones such as in Sierra Leone (Blair 2009: 6).

Blair developed the doctrine on grounds of his perennial concerns for ground troops in Kosovo, the future of NATO, as well as “[...] a new order into which the military action should fall—a new framework in which the sovereignty of rogue nations such as Serbia should be sacrificed to the notion of human rights and the fight against genocide”(Vulliamy and Winour 1999: col. 1). It, therefore, “[...] comes close to claiming a right for NATO to intervene in “other people’s conflicts” wherever this seems the only way to suppress the evils perpetrated by dictators” (Young 1999: col. 1).

While this, of course, needed to be negotiated with the Allies, it seemed to have influenced dealings in NATO since Kosovo. This was not least because the British/American interventionist muscle established new rationales that allowed policymakers to enact discourses from a privileged position. They labeled Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, or Bin Laden as dictators and terrorists and depicted them as root causes for shockwaves in an increasingly interdependent world (see: Blair 1999: art. 29). Even less supportive Allies could not completely ignore these pilloried images that now dominated NATO’s agenda. In Chicago, Blair said that

“[n]o-one in the West who has seen what is happening in Kosovo can doubt that NATO’s military action is justified” [...] This is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values. We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand. We must not rest until it is reversed” (1999: art. 4, 5).

Consequently, “[i]f we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer” (1999: art. 32). Drawing on the Balkans experience, the rule for non-interference should be qualified in face of regimes which are a threat to their people and international security (1999: art. 33).

Human rights abuses in states thus established the grounds for Western military interventions given rogue regimes will inevitably come to affect Western interests. Plainly said, protecting human rights replaces conventional legal paradigms and justifies military interventions (Vulliamy and Winour 1999: col. 6). Consequently, as Diana Johnstone notes, the UN was superseded by the moral authority of the vague construct of “international community” (2002: 259).

While discussing issues such as economics, global interdependence, and security, Blair’s speech rested on a basic structure that focused on people, nations, and their economic and physical security in a globalized world. NATO is a central component of this structure by protecting Western nations from the downsides of global interdependence.

However, Blair presupposed the unity of NATO members, thereby taking for granted the outcome of intractable struggles that pushed NATO towards interventionism and removed restrictions on military actions. He did, therefore, not mention that it is the overriding power of NATO members such as the U.S. that, through their assertiveness, sustains both NATO and his interventionist doctrine (see also: Rynning 2005: 76-7). Eventually, this overriding power established vast obligations for NATO members “[...] to defend the concept of “humanitarian war” (Johnstone 2002: 261).

Others, such as the Italian PM Massimo D’Alema, were left in the wake saying that by going against the grain “[...] we would have ended up weakening the international prestige we had only just acquired” (cit. in: Johnstone 2002: 260).

Albeit the “Blair doctrine” could be dismissed as “hawkish”, it, however, indicated that Western military interventionism developed as a “social system of thought”, whether humanitarian or otherwise, and moved towards becoming an implicit norm in international relations rather than the exception (see: Dal Lago *et al.* 2010: 190-1).

The doctrine certainly raised eyebrows elsewhere. Nonetheless, it provided cause to rethink the traditional neutrality of some European governments (Rynning 2005: 173). The narrow cluster of post-Cold War Western interventions in ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or in the Sahel zone since 1995 may bear out this assumption.

The broad Afghanistan coalition of forty-eight countries with traditionally more neutral countries such as Sweden or Austria additionally supports the claim.

NATO After Kosovo

Ten years on, Blair reconfirmed the doctrine, advocating “[...] an active and engaged foreign policy” while “[...] those who oppress and brutalize their citizens are better put out of power than kept in it” (Blair 2009: 5, 6). While this would have to be modified today considering its extreme focus on the West, it bolstered subsequent developments such as the “War against Terror” which built upon the obligation to defend the concept of “humanitarian war”. NATO’s capacity to intervene and manage security was required in Afghanistan and reconfirmed NATO’s role as crisis manager.

In the 1990s, NATO began its transformation “[...] from a reactive self-defence alliance into a military crisis manager” and continued this path after 9/11 by way of practice (Rühle 2013: 57). As Sten Rynning writes, “Kosovo propelled NATO into the role as first responder to security crises” (2019: 439). The Atlantic Alliance “is no longer solely a defensive alliance [...]” (Kaufman 2002: 211). The deployment of military/humanitarian tasks in “out-of-area” meant, in turn, that NATO was Europe’s “military crisis manager”.

In the aftermath of 9/11, NATO members declared their solidarity with the U.S. and to provide all necessary means to combat terrorism. The Alliance now operated within the ambit of Blair’s doctrine when SecGen Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said that NATO faced challenges from “the dark side of globalization” (cit. in: McKeeby 2006).

As Diana Johnstone writes, “[t]hanks to Kosovo, NATO was already asserting its new role as a “humanitarian” strike force unlimited by geographical boundaries or international law” (2002: 265). In the context of the rising specter of terrorism, there were fewer concerns about sending troops beyond Europe. For instance, German Chancellor Schröder declared that the attacks of 9/11 ended the time of “secondary assistance”. To defend freedom, human rights, stability, and security, Germany’s “comprehensive responsibilities” included a place in military interventions (Meiers 2011: 89).

NATO practitioner, Michael Rühle, observed during the 2003 Iraq crisis that “[o]nly a few Allies held the view that the initiation of NATO’s planning should be made contingent on further developments in the United Nations [...]” (2003: 89). This meant the question whether NATO could go out-of-area had ultimately “fallen away with the twin towers”, as the French NATO ambassador, Benoît D’Aboville, said (cit. in: Kaiser and Richburg 2002: col. 3).

The proclaimed “humanitarian age” compelled NATO members to take responsibility for the security of their citizens and the suffering of the Afghan people in their own hands. Considering the gloomy imagery of Al-Qaeda, this undergirded the deployment of NATO forces to Afghanistan in 2002/3 (see: Kitchen 2010: 100-1). With NATO’s third interventionist campaign, ISAF standardized notions of peace enforcement and peacekeeping— combatting rogue forces and relieving humanitarian suffering outside Europe.

As one interviewee recalled, replacing the Taliban regime with democracy and human rights was inevitable to provide for security and better the lives of Afghan people (INTVW1 2020). Security could not be without democratic reconstruction and *vice versa*. With regional modifications, ISAF operated on the operational blueprint deployed in ex-Yugoslavia. It was a concerted effort to move from combat to democratic reconstruction (Whitaker 2003: col. 2). These practices had become NATO’s hallmark, impelling transformation, and safeguarding its persistence.

In 2003, ISAF expanded beyond Kabul to fight terrorism. The creation of a secure environment for civil reconstruction and the support of a democratically oriented Afghan state became the main tasks and legitimized ISAF’s heavy military character (Suhrke 2011: 220; UNSC 2003: pt. 1).

Moreover, NATO mounted a counterinsurgency campaign “[...] to protect civilian populations, eliminate insurgent leaders and infrastructure, and help establish a legitimate and accountable host nation government able to deliver essential human services” (Eikenberry 2013). NATO SecGen Robertson declared that

“[...] our militaries must be able to mount stabilisation operations of the kind NATO has undertaken successfully in the Balkans and the International Security Assistance Force is conducting in Kabul” (NATO 2002a).

The need for NATO was confirmed when international experts, diplomats, and aid organizations appealed to NATO in 2003 to expand its mandate in Afghanistan. The director of CARE International in Afghanistan said that “[t]here is a large security vacuum outside Kabul which cannot be filled by any other party” [...] “The only forces who can step in for the foreseeable future are international” (cit. in: Constable 2003: col. 2).

In the following years, NATO had to keep immense security efforts, leading to a surge in combat troops beyond 100.000 in 2009/10. For NATO it was business as usual. Alliance officials emphasized that, since Bosnia, NATO’s efforts “are a logical extension of its activities” (Kaiser and Richburg 2002: col. 6). Until the transition of responsibility to the Afghan government in 2014 and the beginning of “Resolute Support”, ISAF took place at an unprecedented scale, involving enormous financial and human costs.

NATO became Afghanistan’s most essential security provider and, together with humanitarian organizations, the most essential guarantor of human rights. That way, NATO’s mix of security and humanitarian practices, characterizing its post-Cold War doings, stayed with the Alliance for over two decades. They constructed the “new NATO” around its interventionist policy.

By way of practice, NATO thus confirmed the image of the competent military crisis manager that it had initially suggested with ODF/IFOR. This role was reinforced by NATO’s operational maturation (see: Suhrke 2011: 11). In 2009, Scheffer extolled the progress NATO has made in reconfirming its post-Cold War persistence (Anon. 2009). NATO’s sustained interventionist practices had constitutive effects on NATO.

However, it may be more ordinary than that. The apparent self-evidence of their work kept the Allies engaged. As one interviewee emphasized, for a long time, NATO nations have gone about their “out-of-area” missions as if they were a regular job— everybody supported NATO’s policies (INTVW10 2021). However, it was the series of power struggles in NATO that created this social world in which the normality of interventionist practices and of conceiving interventionist doctrines mirrored overriding American dominance.

7.4 Conclusion

Before NATO left Afghanistan in August 2021, it had managed to curb ethnic conflict in ex-Yugoslavia and to stabilize the Afghan government for the time of its presence. For about twenty-five years, peace enforcement and peacekeeping kept NATO engaged in “out-of-area” from Bosnia and Kosovo to Afghanistan and Libya. Evidence such as my interviews indicates that it was “business as usual”.

However, I intended to show that “business as usual” had not come by itself or by sheer practical repetition. On the contrary, it became only possible through power struggles that, once the Alliance was present in Bosnia, erupted over Kosovo.

This is to say that after Bosnia’s peace-enforcement and peacekeeping missions, it was not self-evident to extend NATO further once fighting had broken out in Kosovo. I showed that the power struggle over Kosovo within NATO became the defining moment that marked the interventionist Alliance and initiated a normalization of NATO’s out-of-area business. Simultaneously, this meant the normalization of IFOR’s blueprint, the provision of military security, and civil reconstruction which gave the Alliance its typical post-Cold War “humanitarian face”.

The confluence of the hard military craft and the soft humanitarianism in conflict zones went unquestioned. Soldiers waving at children were required. I recall the ISAF Commander’s campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people which, amongst a variety of measures, sanctioned ISAF personnel who behaved like Cold War warriors.

This was part of the “new NATO”. However, power struggles between the Allies in 1998/99 were the social dynamics to reach this point.

This struggle was driven by the Allies’ positions in Kosovo. The Americans as “agnostics” opined that NATO cannot be restrained in its actions, especially not by the Russians in the UN. Some form of action in Kosovo was conceivable to safeguard its dominance in NATO which implied that it could decide independent of the UN.

The “Catholics” advocated UN superiority but allowed for exceptions under humanitarian concerns. This position was either well-reasoned or paradoxical as it prevented an independent NATO but made room for a humanitarian rationale that promoted European forces in NATO.

The “Lutherans” advocated a completely new interventionist rule for the “international community”. Because of beliefs about the age of globalization and bitterness about the failure of the British government in Bosnia, Tony Blair, making a bid for leadership in Europe, appeared as particularly “hawkish” in Kosovo. A full-scale intervention in Kosovo was conceivable.

The approaches of both camps aimed to gain power vis-à-vis the Americans. Their means mirrored their field positions with the French having less material/military power than the UK. The ensuing deadlock over Kosovo was then moved forward by SecGen Solana. While taking full responsibility, Solana drew on the capital of the U.S./UK and devised an exception to a UN authorization of the use of force against sovereign Serbia.

However, in early 1999, it was clear that threats without credible force were without effect. At Rambouillet, the Contact Group attempted to resolve the conflict before the imminent air campaign. During the negotiations, the French tried to cut USNATO off from leadership by putting the Contact Group and the UN back in the driver’s seat in Kosovo. They, however, had to accept a compromise since this endangered their European project.

When the bombing campaign against rump-Yugoslavia took eventually place, the issue of ground troops was still on the table. A declared humanitarian goal could not materialize without a full interventionist cycle like in Bosnia.

Tony Blair was leading the struggle against a reticent Clinton. In each other's eyes, their actions appeared out of tune with the power structure in NATO. The mobilization of British troops and Blair's interventionist rhetoric challenged Clinton and led to an agreement on KFOR, deployed in June 1999.

This, finally, launched the interventionist NATO that was, at least hypothetically, unconstrained by the UN. While this had certainly psychological effects, military interventions became something like an implicit norm in international relations after Kosovo.

In the following two decades, NATO was at the center of an interventionist order that was led by the U.S. For instance, Secretary of State, Donald Rumsfeld, advocated NATO's full control in Afghanistan, saying, "I certainly agree that an expansion of Isaf [...] would be a good thing" (Whitaker 2003: col. 1-2). However, it would not have come to this without antecedent power struggles in NATO.

Conclusion

My research was guided by the question of how NATO survived structural change in the international system after the Cold War and the demise of its constitutive Soviet threat. I worked with the hypothesis that NATO persisted because it introduced transformative policies and normalized its practices.

NATO transformed into the new Alliance outlined in the 1991 strategic concept. My study engaged with the symbolic struggles and practices that transformed the static Cold War defensive military pact into the new post-Cold War NATO, reaching out to former communist states and militarily managing crisis scenarios.

Practices were the principal constructor of the “new NATO”. Using a Bourdieu-inspired practice approach, I pointed out the tension of how practices allowed making sense of the persistence of NATO and how they had to be transformed to ensure the Alliance’s survival. I argued that a range of new practices had constitutive effects on the “new NATO”. What these practices were and whether they prevailed was an object of social struggles within NATO-as-field.

Struggles between the Allies played a pivotal role in changing NATO’s Cold War posture and reconfirming NATO’s new practices. I argued that these struggles took place during the first decade after the end of the Cold War and established the design of the post-Cold War NATO (see: Hunter 2019: 297). Consequently, NATO’s new design has been the outcome of the normalization of practices, involving competitive dynamics between NATO actors around the construction of the “new NATO”.

Bourdieu’s toolbox of field and habitus helped me, thereby, to shed light on important NATO actors and to understand their historic approaches to the Alliance. Moreover, considering the central role of forms of capital that agents hold and deploy in struggles, it allowed me to understand how and why certain approaches could be asserted as the dominant way of doing things in NATO.

In the following, I will present general research findings, the study’s contribution to the field of security studies, and a chapter summary.

Findings and contribution

When Finland became the thirty-first member of NATO in April 2023, the Alliance had long discharged the Cold War face of a strategic and defensive military alliance to adopt a democratic and humanitarian interventionist one. Based on democratic practices, NATO repeatedly expanded its membership base and engaged in various “out-of-area” military operations for largely humanitarian purposes. Through new policies and practices, NATO transformed and emerged as a consolidated and vital political and military organization after the Cold War.

Scholars have provided a panoply of explanations as to why the Alliance survived the end of the Cold War such as the emergence of new threats and the power of the U.S., NATO’s high levels of institutionalization and functionality, or its role as socializer of members and norm-promoter in post-communist states (see: Duffield 2018: 274-9).

Adding to this, I shed light on NATO’s post-Cold War practices. They were at the root of NATO transformation and possessed constitutive qualities. They constituted identities and built a “new NATO” writ large. I, thus, found that a repertoire of new practices became the hallmark of the “new NATO” and that the transformation and persistence of the Alliance cannot be viewed as detached from practices. They have given life to the dynamics of reproduction and change in NATO because both were marked by practices.

As shown in Chapter 5, conducting joint multinational defense planning with CEEC partners and future allies within the PfP/MAP framework supported the construction of NATO as a new democratic community. Furthermore, the endeavor of American, British, and Dutch troops to, for example, secure the Afghan province Helmand and to create a safe zone for humanitarian aid and civil reconstruction confirmed NATO as a “military crisis manager”.

However, I showed that new practices did not arrive by themselves and, even less, were regularized by sheer repetition. Their implementation and normalization were inextricably linked to struggles between the NATO Allies. I showed that, during the 1990s, struggles in NATO were pivotal social dynamics that initiated chances of policies towards eastern enlargement and military interventions, introduced new practices, and reconfirmed them.

While foundational struggles changed traditional perceptions in NATO about what the Alliance could do in the post-Cold War world, power struggles normalized or entrenched the changes NATO had undergone since the mid-1990s. The struggles around the 1997 Madrid summit and the 1999 Kosovo intervention confirmed the significance of democratic practices for membership candidates and regularized humanitarian interventions respectively.

In the spirit of a Bourdieu-inspired practice turn in IR, elucidating the struggles between NATO Allies in the 1990s guided me to consider the individual actors, their dispositions, and power (capital). By including the individual level of analysis, this approach “[...] extends beyond the limits of the state as an imagined container of power” (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2021: 105).

For example, the adoption of security discourses in the context of symbolic struggles results from the interplay of individual dispositions and positions of actors in NATO-as-field, as the example of MoD Volker Rühle in Chapter 3 shows. The hierarchical order of positions in confluence with NATO actors’ individual trajectories and capital possessions enabled different perspectives, interests, and limits/opportunities to act.

Therefore, I conclude that the face of the post-Cold War NATO is a contingent phenomenon that depended on actors’ historic dispositions as well as their relative position in the Alliance which played out in symbolic struggles. In other words, different actors may have created a different NATO history at the same point in time. In this context, I find that the promise of some IR theories to make predictions based on a set of material criteria may be problematic if historical actors and their historic trajectories are not considered.

Moreover, by taking NATO’s policies and practices as a series of linear decisions and summit declarations, scholars often miss out on providing thicker explanations that draw on institutional/state actors and the competitive dynamics between them. The “new NATO” is not the result of singular events and declarations but of competitive social processes that confirmed and reconfirmed practices.

Finally, I want to show that while alliances and security organizations have a fixed place in security studies, a Bourdieu-inspired focus on practices has implications concerning four aspects.

First, the change and normalization of practices can support an understanding of the persistence of (security) organizations under conditions of changes in the international system. Organizations often respond to changed conditions by introducing new practices and making them part of organizational routines through new discourses, doctrines, and organizational structures.

For instance, the atrocities in Rwanda in 1994 and the UN's failure to protect the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995 spurred the development of the "Responsibility to Protect"-doctrine (R2P). R2P "entered both UN discourse and practice", for example, through a Peacebuilding Commission to assist peacebuilding and, in the cases of Libya and Côte d'Ivoire, to mandate the Security Council to use force to protect populations (Ryngaert and Schrijver 2015: 221-2). R2P placed peacebuilding and atrocity prevention within a normative framework that is still relevant today (see: UN 2023). This can be compared to NATO's "Blair doctrine" which framed the paradigm shift for the use of military force against sovereign states.

Second, the perceived self-evidence of security practices affects "international security". For example, empirical evidence suggests that NATO's new face was not accomplished by the mere introduction of new policies in 1994/95. As Joyce Kaufman writes, "[i]n reviewing the ways in which NATO responded first to Bosnia and then to Kosovo, it is now clear that the Alliance was able to act more rapidly and decisively in the latter case than the former" (2002: 223). As change happens gradually, new practices often become clad in self-evidence through processes that involve power and authority. The gradual normalization of acting "out-of-area" underpinned the expansion of NATO's security tasks on behalf of international security.

Third, security meanings and security practices are produced within fields as a social context and "[...] complex web of relations between different positions determined by inequalities such as power and wealth" (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2021: 105). Because the social is relational and organized in fields, contestations between security actors are an essential and mundane phenomenon. Working in and through security organizations, agents have different historical trajectories and power. These differences instigate contestations under the moderating veneer of rules.

Consequently, “security practices” are the outcome of field struggles that hinge on perennial inequalities between security actors.

Fourth, explanations of change can thus be more detailed. The change in the international system at the end of the Cold War did not simply trigger “[...] new growth and expansion of regional security projects” (Fawcett 2018: 288). On the contrary, it provided the overarching context for interpretations by individual state actors that, based on their dispositions, gave rise to new struggles and practices. Therefore, the end of the Cold War initiated the growth or expansion of regional projects because individual actors deployed forms of capital (power) and asserted their historic visions in symbolic struggles. This expansion process manifested in and through practice. Moreover, the adoption of new identities as a basis for growing regional projects has been the result of shared practices, as the case of NATO’s eastern expansion shows.

Chapters

In Chapter 1, I discussed the literature, starting from Constructivism after the Cold War that explained NATO’s vitality and post-Cold War transformation by focusing on a shared or discursively constituted democratic identity. I found that they do not consider the primary role of practices in the constitution of identity or as a frame for discursive practices. Moreover, constructivists neglect the role of agency and power in the constitution of both. Consequently, I argued that practices were at the root of NATO transformation and involved relations of power.

I looked at the “practice turn in IR” and found that Bourdieusian notions offer answers to the above-mentioned problems. I divided their approaches into power/struggles and “authority beyond rationality” approaches. However, while scholars have taken the post-Cold War NATO as an analytical object, they have not analyzed the historic genesis of NATO’s cooperative and interventionist policies and the role of power in their constitution and normalization. These policies and their practices gave life to NATO’s transformation after 1990 and are essential if we want to understand the design of today’s NATO.

I emphasized that practices are processes that deserve explanations beyond being viewed as an intervening variable between, for example, identity and democratic community. I view them as historically generated as well as possessing meaning and constitutive qualities.

In the chapter's remainder, I suggested the methods to engage with NATO's post-Cold War practices, contained by the policies of enlargement and humanitarian interventions. The methods to analyze what I understand as a "process ontology. The main method was interviews which I supported with textual and multimedia analysis. Besides understanding the historical processes that constituted the post-Cold War NATO, the material helped me to understand whether NATO agents perceived their doings as reasonable or normal.

In Chapter 2, I laid out a framework with which I proposed to study the genesis of NATO's "policy turn" after the Cold War and the normalization of its practices.

I proposed a conceptualization of the social world that draws on Bourdieu's toolbox of field, habitus, capital, and practice. This conceptualization helped me to understand the roots of the actions of policymakers. Since the field is understood as a hierarchical makeup, relations between agents are essentially competitive and bring into play notions of social struggles. This notion helped me to understand why certain practices became the dominant way of doing things.

I understood struggles, firstly, as "power struggles" with which agents increase their capital possessions and move across a field's hierarchy. Secondly, I understood them as "foundational" or "symbolic struggles" that aim to constitute the fundamental perceptions agents hold. I viewed these struggles as triggered by "hysteresis", that is, agents' perceptions and actions that are out of tune with a field's structure of dominance.

Thereafter, I discussed how this conception can be applied to NATO. I suggested understanding NATO as a field and conducting the analysis around the concepts of agency-struggles-practices. The field is hierarchically organized but also characterized by Atlanticist/Europeanist poles in contexts.

I showed the relevant state and institutional actors and proposed to understand them as historic agents whose function allows them to participate in struggles. Furthermore, I showed that the end of the Cold War gave way to struggles over building a “new NATO”.

Finally, I suggested that NATO’s post-Cold War practices, such as the deployment of ground forces within the interventionist policy, need to be understood as practices constitutive of the “new NATO”. Their introduction and normalization need to be viewed as resulting from power relations in NATO.

The following empirical chapters engaged with NATO’s post-Cold War policy changes. The inquiry congealed along three lines. First, how did NATO change its policies after the Cold War? Second, what new practices did these changes introduce? And third, how did NATO normalize them?

I understood agents’ perceptions and dispositions as historically constituted. Actions materialized due to a confluence of their dispositions and the capital they possess. In NATO, actors draw on the rank of their country as a symbolic capital, that is, a country’s economic/military strength. Traditionally, this form of capital has been most valued in NATO and provided, for instance, U.S. policymakers with the far-reaching capacity to influence processes in NATO.

In Chapter 3, I engaged with the struggle over NATO’s enlargement policy. First, I laid out the geopolitical context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the CEEC’s desire to join Western institutions. Second, I fathomed the different positions within NATO on eastern enlargement.

While the U.S./German strategic partnership considered this possibility, the European NATO pole under French leadership excluded a political NATO role and membership expansion. I highlighted the main actors’ historic dispositions in the formulation of their positions.

George H. Bush, influenced by his policy advisors, formulated a foreign policy that sought to create international stability through institutions. President Mitterrand excluded any political role for NATO after the Cold War out of a historic fear of American hegemony in Europe and ambitions for greater strategic autonomy.

These positions played an essential role in the struggle over NATO enlargement since a clear post-Cold War policy could not materialize. I classified this struggle as “constitutional” because it changed fundamental perceptions about NATO.

German MoD Volker R  he began the struggle in early 1993 with a landmark speech. Putting NATO first in Europe, he advocated NATO enlargement and continued American dominance. R  he acted thereby on his historic Atlanticism and experiences with Poland that laid bare the problems of NATO’s passive post-Cold War posture.

On the other side, the Mitterrand government proposed a stability pact that supported the primacy and expansion of European institutions. Denoting a shared habitus, this involved the “Clintonites”. Based on their conceptualizations of an expansive democracy, they envisioned the opening of NATO. Tony Lake, Clinton’s policy advisor, initiated a discourse that created the conditions for the American enlargement decision. A strong advocacy coalition, backed by American power and SecGen W  rner, advanced this discourse. While France as a medium power in NATO could not assert its proposal due to a lack of material and social capital, the Clintonites retained the power to decide NATO enlargement.

This established the PfP as a framework for the preparation of future NATO members in 1994. It also determined the practical content of the policy and promoted NATO’s political role since membership candidates were required to transform into full-fledged democracies.

In Chapter 4, I engaged with the struggle over NATO’s interventionist policy. I set out the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1990-92. Then, I showed that the American position on the Bosnian war was one of disengagement, falling prey to a Balkans narrative that depicted the Balkans as engulfed in ancient ethnic strife. The foreign policy team around James Baker viewed, based on their career experiences in Yugoslavia, the continuation of Yugoslavia, ancient hatred, and European responsibility for conflict resolution as a justification for their passivity in the unfolding crisis.

The Europeans, on the other side, assumed a pro-active role in the dissolving Yugoslavia. However, they supported diplomacy and the UN. This resonated with a prevalent doxa in NATO-as-field that portrayed the Alliance as a defensive pact that could not act “out-of-area”.

Based on his historic aversion to American hegemony and the perceived insolubility of historic Yugoslav animosities, Mitterrand supported a role for the WEU and the UN.

The core of these perceptions was shared by the UK whose Foreign Minister, Douglas Hurd, viewed NATO even more as a defensive pact. However, his support of diplomacy and the UN resonated strongly with British defense cuts. Policymakers did not perceive their country in the position to deploy troops to active warfighting. Such perceptions were underpinned by historic assessments of the Balkans battleground and the experiences of the UK in Northern Ireland. The deployment of UN peacekeepers (where no peace was to be kept) was consequential.

In 1993, the U.S. failed to fill its traditional leadership role and the Europeans imposed a dominant approach on Bosnia which, however, reconfirmed NATO as a defense pact. The ensuing foundational struggles were, thereby, central to replacing the underlying doxa with a new interventionist one.

NATO SecGen Manfred Wörner challenged the prevailing positions of the Allies. Based on his Atlanticism, Wörner perceived the practices of all NATO Allies as inverting the traditional power structure in NATO and promoting the UN as the hub of decision-making. While Wörner filled a symbolic role that was underpinned by his credibility, he showcased passionate leadership discursively, reminding the Allies of NATO's successful support of the UN in Bosnia. This underpinned Wörner's discourse and involved the Clintonites in the struggles about NATO's role in Bosnia.

Until 1995, the Americans played a subversive role in the field as they attempted to displace the dominance of the European approach to Bosnia. However, their historic reluctance to deploy ground forces hampered their ability to exert influence. On the other side, France and British policymakers used their "Blue Helmets" to steer Alliance decision-making, keeping NATO in place.

Galvanizing the Allies, the shift to action came with the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995. Srebrenica exposed the paradoxical nature of the European approach and instantiated a genocide discourse in whose shadow the Clintonites justified the use of force in Bosnia and reclaimed American leadership.

NATO SecGen Claes was instrumental in moving NATO into military action for the first time in history. With a theatric and aggressive leadership style, Claes initiated ODF in August 1995 which ended the Bosnian war. Finally, the U.S. took leadership in Bosnia because it possessed the vast military resources which the Europeans largely lacked. An interventionist policy and new doxa were introduced. The Allies accepted American leadership and NATO legitimately acting “out-of-area”.

Having presented the twofold policy shift of NATO, I engaged in Chapter 5 with the practices that were introduced by the policies. These practices had constitutive qualities. As for NATO’s enlargement policy, the PfP/MAP programs inaugurated a range of democratic practices with which the CEEC membership candidates should transform their post-communist defense sectors. Through the adoption of practices, NATO developed into a fortified post-Cold War democratic community.

Practices gave life to transformation and fed into the formation of a shared liberal identity. This community represented a departure from the strategic Cold War NATO by stipulating that the invariable implementation of democratic practices, such as joint defense planning, was essential for membership. Inevitably, functioning democracies became the steadfast basis for a working post-Cold War Alliance after the Soviet threat disappeared.

Besides the execution of a bombing campaign, NATO’s new interventionist policy included the deployment of ground forces into post-war Bosnia. IFOR introduced a basic blueprint for future interventionist actions. NATO troops should not only coerce enemy forces to withdraw but establish peace on the ground by military means.

Forces should also create humanitarian conditions by engaging in civil reconstruction and the provision of humanitarian aid. Practices such as the “show of force” or the reconstruction of local infrastructure should show that NATO was a (humanitarian) crisis manager which confirmed the relevance of its military operations for future crisis scenarios.

Through a range of sources from interviews and archival research, I found that these practices had a distinct meaning for agents, either to construct a democratic community or to confirm NATO as a capable crisis manager.

My interview partners conveyed a strong sense of normality about NATO's doings after it had changed its policy. Such perceptions were largely consequential of the social world that was created through the symbolic struggles in NATO.

With Chapter 6, I arrived at a crucial point in NATO history that reconfirmed the future of NATO enlargement. In Chapter 5, I included evidence from my interviews and newspaper research that conveyed a certain normality about NATO's practices. However, in Chapter 6, I challenged such retrospection and claimed that a perceived normality did not develop without further competitive dynamics in NATO.

I analyzed the struggles around NATO's 1997 Madrid summit. This struggle was a power struggle because some Allies, notably France, sought to advantage of NATO enlargement in terms of their power and position. Put differently, policymakers attempted to move across the hierarchy of NATO-as-field by accumulating power as competitive dynamics determined the state of relations between NATO members.

I set out the context for this struggle with the uncertainty about Russia's political future. Moreover, a further context was presented by the consideration of membership candidates. The "Big Three" and the "Big Three plus" represented groups of membership candidates and opposing preferences of the NATO members.

The U.S./German strategic partnership preferred the "Big Three". This group satisfactorily implemented democratic practices in the PfP. This ensured that democratic practices in NATO and their meaning of constructing a fortified democratic community prevailed.

The Atlanticist position was created by Clinton's advisor, Strobe Talbott, who, based on his historic experiences in the Soviet Union, proposed successive waves of enlargement. Moreover, rooted in the necessity for NATO to function based on democratic principles, the Atlanticists' strategic calculations were subordinate to candidates' democratic qualities.

The group of southern flank Allies under French leadership preferred the “Big Three plus”. The problem was that this group included Romania and Slovakia, countries that were democratically not advanced enough. The southern flank allies satisfied strategic rationales instead of advancing the new democratic community. The preservation of democratic practices was subordinate to strategic notions of NATO, reminiscent of the Cold War.

Rooted in historic perceptions of a multipolar world, the necessity of a redistribution of power in NATO, and the traditional renunciation of American hegemony in Europe, French President Chirac was key in advancing this view. His actions were consequential.

Struggles between the Allies erupted from anew around the NAC meeting in Sintra and were connected to French demands such as the Europeanization of NATO’s southern command. Importantly, Chirac renounced the reintegration of France after the Americans denied his demands. The U.S. traditionally held the most important command positions in NATO.

This, however, disadvantaged Chirac shortly later in Madrid because the renouncement deprived him of symbolic capital and reduced his influence in NATO. The weaker French position resulted in the fluctuation of most Allies to the Atlanticist pole, a loss of social capital, that was essential for the consensus rule. The Atlanticists thus decided on the future design of NATO enlargement.

Eventually, the admission of the “Big Three” in 1999 meant that democratic practices prevailed and remained of paramount importance in NATO. Other CEE candidates were encouraged to avidly continue their democratic transformations. NATO’s democratic face was preserved, and NATO enlargement stayed on “autopilot”. A smaller contestation between the U.S. and Germany/France at the 2008 Bucharest summit reconfirmed this when the MAP invitation for Ukraine was denied.

Finally, I discussed NATO’s Kosovo intervention in Chapter 7. Like the challenges around the 1997 Madrid summit, the Bosnia intervention did not mean a normalization of NATO interventions. When in Kosovo violence between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians in 1998 broke out, NATO was far from automatically repeating ODF/IFOR. The question was whether NATO could act against sovereign Serbia considering the continued human rights violations in the Western Balkans.

The Atlanticist/Europeanist divide in NATO was subdivided into three camps. The “agnostic camp” under the U.S. argued that the Russians/Chinese in the UN cannot restrain NATO. The “Catholic camp” under French leadership allowed for a violation of the rule only in exceptional circumstances. A primary concern of Chirac was to prevent an increasing interventionist agency of NATO. The “Lutheran camp” under UK leadership sought to revise the existing interventionist rule.

Amid this deadlock, NATO SecGen Solana took responsibility and constructed a humanitarian-interventionist case in October 1998 that permitted NATO to escalate threats against Serbia. His agency was supported by fully representing the Allies’ decisions which functioned as symbolic capital and underpinned his ability to influence the course of NATO.

During the 1999 Rambouillet negotiations, France sought to put the UN back in charge of Kosovo. This, however, failed due to the French reliance on NATO for the desired development of European defense capabilities. The lack of French material and symbolic capital acted against an independent role in NATO.

During the subsequent air campaign, the UK mobilized its ground troops to challenge the reticent U.S. The deployment of KFOR in June established a full interventionist cycle. NATO was reconfirmed as a military crisis manager. This was framed by the “Blair doctrine” as a paradigmatic system that legitimized military interventions against declared dictators and rogue regimes.

Military interventions evolved into an implicit norm in international relations (Dal Lago *et al.* 2010: 190-1). Antecedent power struggles in NATO created the necessary leeway. Finally, the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan reconfirmed and regularized the role of military and humanitarian practices in conflict zones.

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