

NATO's 'Out of Area' Operations: A Two-Track Approach. The Normative Side of a Military Alliance

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Abstract

Even though many would have bet on NATO's demise after the Cold War and consider it now to be an archaic, antiquated alliance — as the reality that led to its formation no longer exists to justify its purpose — the need for collective defence in an increasingly complicated security environment stands as grounds for its ever-growing importance and its need to adapt to a spectrum of challenges that is becoming more diversified. NATO has long surpassed its military defensive role and has adapted to new challenges and new threats, while it has broadened its security agenda accordingly. The 'out of area' missions that dragged the Alliance out of its borders brought more meaning to the community of shared values, whilst allowing it to become both a security exporter, and a values and norms exporter. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan comprises NATO's transformation and adaptation to the new security challenges and its diffusion of norms in the 'near abroad'.

KEY WORDS:

NATO, normative power, military alliance, collective security, NATO operations

Introduction

For more than six decades, NATO has been the leading actor in terms of collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic space. Part of a framework that was tributary to the bipolar logic that shaped the entire Cold War period, the military alliance — whose basis was laid in April 1949 in Washington DC — was then counterbalanced by the Warsaw Pact created in 1955 as a competing alliance. The division on the West-East axis was also exerted in terms of political propensities, the security umbrella provided by NATO representing an important stability factor that allowed post-war European political integration, one of the three main purposes assumed by the military alliance. In fact, the assumption that the only purpose of NATO was to stand as an opposing pole to the Soviet threat was the main reason for deeming it obsolete and antiquated once the Soviet Union was dismantled. Still, the US was from the beginning disposed to keep its military presence on European soil, even though the Soviet threat would disappear. The American officials intended to keep their commitment towards Europe long term, as NATO was seen as an instrument of the US hegemonic strategy on the Old Continent. Indeed, Christopher Layne, one the proponents of the offshore balancing strategy,¹ noted that the behaviour towards Europe was not indicative of such a strategy, with no intent to retire militarily once the Cold War logic lost its meaning (2011: 148–149). In accordance with the stated purpose of this paper, the strategy of offshore balancing does not explain the redesign of NATO's strategic purpose, nor the US and EU burden sharing, nor the former's leading role in some of the missions, as will be discussed later.

In a multipolar world, threats, too, have diversified and now the main crises in which the US and Europe are involved have their roots outside the Euro-Atlantic space. Even if the only time the famous Article 5 was invoked was after the attack on 9/11, the main concentration of effort in terms of ensuring security has been seen in the eastern border of the Alliance or in its 'near abroad', which conveys the image of a regional alliance with global ambitions.

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1 This strategy is explained as follows: due to the blocking power of water, the US cannot seek to become an extraregional or global hegemon, and thus it adopts a behaviour of offshore balancing in order to make sure that no strategic rival will rise (for example, in Europe or East Asia). According to Mearsheimer, in an offshore balancing behaviour, the preferred strategy is that of passing the buck of responsibility to regional powers. See: Mearsheimer (2001: 42).

Recent crises that have threatened security on European soil — namely the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the terrorist attacks that saw hundreds of victims in 2015 alone, to which we can add the proliferation of non-state actors and non-conventional weapons, the nationalist contagion that threatens the EU from the inside, and the unresolved crisis in the Middle East with spill-over effects — have all challenged the role of NATO in ensuring security on its eastern flank.

NATO's continuous efforts to adapt its strategy and capabilities to the new regional and global security environment are of paramount importance for both the allies and the regions outside its perimeter which can become targets for an 'out of area' operation. While some argue that collective defence should remain the core task of the alliance, others press for a holistic approach towards new threats and a widening of the security agenda, thus adding a normative aspect into the security melting pot. This would imply a different strategic calculus for each different security situation, as the balancing behaviour vis-à-vis a single threat — the USSR — is no longer applicable to the new security environment. The formation of alliances is, in the view of Hans Morgenthau, "the most important manifestation of the balance of power" (1948: 137). In a realist vein, he explains the balance of power as a behaviour aimed either to decrease the power of the stronger or to increase the power of the weaker. Apart from alliance formation, other methods to achieve it are divide and rule, compensations or armaments (1948: 134–137). This provides an explanation for why the United States and the states of Western Europe formed an alliance at the end of the 1940s, namely in order to prevent an invasion from the Soviet Union. However, realist theories that deal with great power behaviour in the case of decline — called power transition theories — failed to predict the end of the Cold War, and thus realists tried to adapt their theories to the post-Cold War environment (Lebow 1994: 251).

This paper contends that in this new security paradigm, the behaviour of NATO is based on model promotion, norms diffusion and a soft balancing behaviour, as a new Strategic Concept proved and as will be detailed.

In 2014, the Wales Summit Declaration reinforced one of the '3Cs' defining the three core tasks of the Alliance since the 2010 Strategic Concept, namely collective defence, as the most important task of the Alliance

(Major 2015: 2). "The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territories and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty" (NATO 2014). The other two Cs are crisis management and cooperative security, the former being the main security framework comprising strategic tools for NATO operations outside its borders. According to Cohen, the broad concept of crisis management includes both conflict prevention and crisis response (Cohen and Mihalka 2015: 17–18), with a shift in focus from reactive defence to prevention and diplomacy. We can therefore argue that NATO has become a promoter of stability outside its borders and therefore an active diffuser of norms, values and security, while trying to define its proper role between that of a regional alliance and a global one.

One of the purposes of this paper is to unfold the idea that the missions in which NATO engaged on its periphery, starting with Bosnia and Kosovo and then Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, to name but the most important and large-scale ones, highlight the normative scope of this military alliance, while at the same time marking a shift in the key priorities of the Alliance. In order to achieve the stated purpose, one idea of departure is that the 'out of area' missions in which NATO has engaged can be approached from a two-track perspective: a normative one with regard to enlarging the scope of engagement and a role of agenda setting for NATO, as these conflicts have contributed to better shaping the role of the Alliance in the light of new threats and challenges.

From a methodological point of view, this paper will be based on qualitative research, namely analysis of the content of documents, employing comparative analysis in order to highlight the change in role for NATO. The argument will start from the assumption that the security agenda of the Alliance was widened as a response to the numerous crises — in number and the variety of threats involved — that loomed over its periphery, requiring answers distinct from a sole military aspect. The second part of the argument will focus on the idea that NATO has surpassed its regional role, demonstrating a strategic pendulum that situates it between a regional and a global focus. This part of the paper will involve employing some theoretical aspects that were first developed in the study of Europeanization to explain the diffusion of norms and values. Before concluding, the focus will shift between the two sides of the coin

when it comes to “out of area” operations, arguing that the lessons from each intervention were sometimes incorporated into success in the next one, while at other times they were dismissed and led to a loss of legitimacy within the Alliance. This loss of legitimacy can also be explained through the lack of credibility for an intervention in the first place, as was the case in Iraq, after the coalition forces did not manage to find the weapons of mass destruction allegedly developed by the Saddam regime on which the intervention was initially based (Mahnken and Keaney 2007: 246).

NATO 2.0: ‘out of area’, towards a normative community

This part will develop the argument that successive interventions abroad sparked the need for a redefining of purpose in terms of both terms of engagement and a departure from a strategy of path dependency. This implied taking steps towards the creation of a normative community and leaning towards a strategy of norms balancing, namely a strategic framework devised to counteract diverse threats by model promotion. Unlike the balance of threats approach imposed by the structural conditions during the Cold War, this paper argues that the ‘out of area’ operations pushed NATO to adopt a model of response to threats that is preventive in scope rather than reactionary, as previously indicated with regard to the 2010 Strategic Concept.

Initially based on a membership of 12 states when it was founded in 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty, NATO now comprises 28 states, bound by, some argue, a transatlantic security community of shared values and common interests (Kroenig 2015: 50–52). After the Soviet threat no longer posed the greatest danger to Western security, and the threat looming from Russia was one in a basket of threats different in nature and scope, NATO’s security agenda began to focus on its ‘near abroad’, whether it was about the ex-communist spheres of influence or the area outside the traditional sphere of influence as defined by Article 6 of the founding Treaty. The process of ‘uploading’ stability outside its

perimeter began just after the Cold War ended, with the enlargement policy and the intervention in Bosnia Herzegovina to resolve an ethnically motivated conflict. After a decade, NATO raised worries about “leaving the continent” by expanding its missions, undertaking counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and fighting against piracy threats far in the Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa. In many of the conflicts in which NATO undertook reconstruction or stabilization missions — Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, Afghanistan — the emerging vacuum of power in the conflicts' aftermath was replenished with extremist forces. This made the deployment of troops for post-conflict stabilization not only an institutional inertia or an undertaking to justify NATO's post-Cold War scope, but a necessity. The modelling of the new NATO role thus arose from the need to construct a counter-narrative for different threats that loomed in areas of strategic interest. The concept of normative power was used by Ian Manners with relation to EU's foreign policy, and in this regard he mentions many factors that influence the process of norm diffusion, being contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and the cultural filter (2002: 244–245). He also mentions that the process of norm diffusion took place with almost no physical force. In the case of NATO, a shift in strategy that accompanied the campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan marked the leaning towards a normative and civilian rather than purely military-based approach. More precisely, the Commander of ISAF troops in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, advised reducing the level of violence (NATO Headquarters 2009). This led to the creation of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams aimed at providing security for the civilian population and promoting a certain approach towards quelling the violence (Marston 2008: 231).

Starting from the dichotomy outlined by Barry Buzan (1997) regarding the security agenda — that between traditionalists, who argue in favour of keeping the focus on military threats, and wideners, fervent supporters of keeping the security framework open to threats in the economic, environmental or societal realms — we can move on to assess the expanding NATO agenda. In this regard, the analysis will focus on a change in the Alliance's purpose from that of military defence to peace-keeping and humanitarian interventions, thus comprising the diffusion of norms and values with a Western imprint. Drawing on the experience in Libya, we can say that ‘out of area’ operations have long moved ahead of strict

military interventions that keep the state as a referent object for security. The intervention in Libya (authorized by the UN Security Council in 2011 as per Resolution 1973) can be viewed as an example of a humanitarian intervention driven by the NATO principle of “responsibility to protect” (R2P) (Kuperman 2013: 105), with a focus on protecting civilians, and so on human security. In fact, this reorientation of purpose was initiated in the 1990s, as the end of the Cold War pushed for a shift in the strategic development towards non-Article 5 crisis management (Webber 2009: 1).

However, this change in focus cannot be approached in isolation from other developments, such as the advanced techniques and changing nature of military affairs, as the greater mechanization of war also brought greater civilian damage and increased difficulty in protecting the population — hence the efforts for rehabilitation that followed. On top of that, two interventions, namely Vietnam (on the part of US mainly) and Iraq, marked a shift in public support for wars, as the atrocities against the civilian population horrified public opinion in the member countries. In the case of the Iraq war, for example, public support waned between 2003 and 2006, with 80 per cent of the US population supporting the war initially and 60 per cent claiming that things were going in the wrong direction in 2006 (Pirnie and O’Connel 2008: 17). The need for humanitarian intervention was looming. The literature supporting the idea that the mechanization of war made the great powers like the United States less effective in small wars — due to factors like the great burden for the population and difficulty in intelligence gathering (Caverley 2010: 122) — seemed to support the idea that a counterbalancing effort was needed, on humanitarian and moral grounds, to further justify the interventions and counterinsurgency actions of a military alliance. We can thus argue that the evolution in military affairs also acted as a catalyst with regard to a new approach towards crisis for NATO. Due to the increasingly asymmetrical nature of the conflicts in which NATO was involved during out of area operations, the development of its normative nature and humanitarian assistance arm can be considered a complementary toolkit meant to address challenges in a holistic way. In the case of Kosovo, for example, the air campaign brought a new perspective for looking at this kind of intervention. More precisely, it showed the impossibility of inflicting casualties on NATO and a new type of coercion brought by the massively asymmetrical nature of the cost and benefit balance: NATO had zero casualties during the

air campaign and air power proved to be an important factor in the capitulation of Belgrade (Byman and Waxman 2000). On the one hand, in order for an alliance to survive, the benefits shared among its members must exceed the costs: in the case of the air campaign in Kosovo, the benefit of winning was not adumbrated by the cost in casualties. Indeed, "securing assistance from others is less expensive than providing its own forces at the margin", as Morrow (1993: 214) notes, but benefits became less and less quantifiable in the new strategic approach of NATO.

In the paradigm of the normative approach discussed in this paper, the case is that assistance for nation building and humanitarian assistance goals is harder to quantify than pure military tasks with a clear 'mandate' to destroy an enemy. With the new approach, the enemy becomes an abstraction more than a target. With the air campaign conducted by NATO in Kosovo, the capitulation came after less than two months, but still was not able to prevent slaughter. This impotence acted again as a nemesis in Syria, when the long-expected NATO humanitarian intervention, modelled on that in Libya, did not occur. The anticipated high costs of a presumed intervention, which would have outweighed the benefits, means that all NATO could achieve in Syria was a pyrrhic victory. Moreover, the intervention of Russia, long expected from Milošević in Serbia, in order to be able to reach a settlement before capitulating, took the lead in this conflict. However, the US was not absent from this conflict, and it did not stand by: a military strike was conducted as a response to a deadly chemical attack unleashed upon the civilian population in Syria on 4 April (Humud, Blanchard and Nikitin 2017: 2). Even though many cite the reluctance of NATO to get involved as a failure — more so when compared to the situation in Libya, where it did not hesitate to intervene in order to topple the Qaddafi regime (Renner 2015) — this absence can be justified through the 'lessons learned' approach. That is to say, the more complicated security environment in Syria and the risk of repeating past failures from other interventions rendered the decision to let the US take the lead a rational one.

According to Goldgeier, in order to face the emerging threats in the global security landscape, "NATO must expand its traditional understanding of collective defence to confront the twenty-first century threats of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to both states and

non-state actors, and cyber-warfare" (2010: 4). The author further states that this broadening in scope is also congruent with the aim of keeping the US bound to the Alliance, given its more interventionist approach to areas like Africa and the Middle East, from where many of the emerging threats seem to arise.

In the light of recent threats and crises that have destabilized the EU, we can further state that the congruency mentioned also involves keeping other allies bound to the Alliance. Given the pressure to expand the contribution in order to reach or surpass the two per cent national target (from GDP) allocated to collective defence — a target that very few of the members now reach or surpass — NATO was forced to move from its path of dependency on collective defence in the military realm. Formulated solely in terms of power relations, the osmosis between the EU and the US as part of NATO can be explained in terms of allying to balance the threat (Walt 1985: 8) presented by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, as already explained. However, threats have multiplied both in number and in nature, and the members now lack a common enemy. That is why we argue that we are now dealing with a balance of norms, as it is no longer a matter of balancing a threat, but of competing for the legitimacy of public opinion and imposing a security model. This view will be further sustained later in this paper by employing the theoretical framework on Europeanization. However, the idea of balancing norms can also be tracked in the case of the Afghanistan campaign, where NATO troops worked with the local security forces and the civilian population as a means of counteracting the enemy by offering a peace narrative based on certain values. In practice, this was made through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which consisted of 50 to 300 troops, including NATO troops (U.S. Army and Marine Corps 2006: 2–11). In fact, this approach was inspired by what the counterinsurgency literature has called the "hearts and minds" approach, a strategy aimed at winning the support of the population in a military struggle (Stubbs 1989). In short, the strategy's idea was to "extend the central government's reach and create zones of stability that will win over the local people and then expand" (Egnell 2010: 289). The fact that military troops became engaged with the local population and the central government, as well as with local security forces, is an indication that the idea of norms diffusion was ensured by transferring NATO's *modus operandi* with regard to security building into

many different structures. On the other hand, the balancing behaviour of the Alliance was more focused on norms than on purely military actions, and in this sense it engaged in a process of balancing norms: it did so by providing a counter-narrative to security, different from that of the enemy and from that of the subject of the intervention itself.

In fact, NATO developed many frameworks that helped sustain the idea of a widening approach towards security and diversifying the agenda of commitments. The alliance expanded not only in reach, but also in purpose. Apart from the enlargement process, which was *de facto* enacted in 1952 — even though the first three rounds of enlargement are rather regarded through a rationalist lens, drawing their logic from a strategic purpose and interest — NATO also launched initiatives like the Partnership for Peace and policies on weapons of mass destruction, arms control and non-proliferation, which show that NATO's 'theatre of operation' is no longer (only) Europe's and the USA's backyard.

NATO as a post-regional normative power

The theoretical analysis will further focus on the analogy with studies related to Europeanization to show that the diffusion of values and norms in the out of area operations of NATO stand as the background for a normative approach. Moreover, this comparative approach is employed to show that the balancing behaviour is now model-based rather than a response to threats from a purely military point of view.

NATO is a military power *suis generis*, but the broadening of its security agenda and its crisis management framework have consolidated its image as a normative power as well, shaping a "NATO exceptionalism" — the belief that NATO could use its security instruments to export democratic values and institutions in post-conflict frameworks. Indeed, we can argue that in terms of normative influence, NATO has emulated the United States, as the latter long promoted civil rights activism domestically and with the neoconservative stance of bringing the military complex to the forefront

(with a visible influence on foreign policy, especially post-9/11); this activism was incorporated into NATO's mechanism and imprinted with an outer reach capability. This step was not undertaken for its own sake, but, as Mary Kaldor argues, it is "not merely intervention to protect human rights but the creation of a moral community" (1999, cited in Harvey 2005: 84).

Indeed, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, for example, was focused not only on exogenous reconstruction on the part of NATO, but on an endogenous process of transitioning security from ISAF to local forces and thus a development of a local security force that would represent that same "moral community" that Mary Kaldor mentions. If Manners described the EU as a post-national normative power, we can say that NATO has become a post-regional one. Defined by Manners as an "ability to shape conceptions of 'normal'," and describing the EU's normative basis as comprising norms such as peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights, he also highlights that a normative power asserts itself through the diffusion of norms (2001: 10–13).

Schimmelfennig uses the normative theory of enlargement to explain that, after the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, "the Russian threat has so strongly diminished and the position of NATO in the international power structure has so vastly improved that enlargement is unnecessary as a balancing strategy" (2000: 5–6). This changed after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, the former showing a response to Kosovo and the latter a response to the enlargement rounds that broke the US promise not to expand NATO in the former Soviet space. A revisionist Russia started to use hybrid warfare techniques to disguise its overtly shaped mission to regain power in its former sphere of influence. This was the case in Crimea, where the 'hybrid tactics' employed by Russia came as a surprise to the West, as this unconventional type of war marked a stark contrast with the previous Chechen and Georgian war, in which Russia relied on extensive use of force (Renz and Smith 2016).

A closer look at the case of Crimea shows that what began as a strictly military operation was then mingled with a propaganda campaign, electronic warfare techniques and other "non-military tools" (Kofman and Rojankys 2015). The balancing logic was thus not fully abandoned

by Russia, which sought to undermine NATO's influence in its vicinity, first of all through coercive means, such as the deployment of troops at the borders. Nevertheless, Russia represents a single threat in a melting pot of a myriad others: thus NATO cannot afford to follow the logic of a threat balancing behaviour. Instead, by keeping its agenda open and getting involved in 'humanitarization' practices along with those of militarization, NATO is indeed pursuing a model balancing approach — that is, competing within the realm of normative discourses regarding security and how to best achieve it, what types of norms and values are more likely to lead to security. This view is consistent with Robert Keohane's definition of legitimacy as a normative concept. He argues that "normatively, an institution is legitimate when its practices meet a set of standards that have been stated and defended" (Keohane 2006: 2). This can be interpreted, in the case of NATO, in terms of advancing its normative security discourse and implementing its ideas. So far, at least in the most oft-cited campaigns, the stated goals when it comes to ensuring security have been defended on the ground.

If the enlargement strategy was adopted to counterbalance the Soviet threat, the current interventions carry multiple approaches. They can be seen rather as an effort to counter both the tendencies of some regions to become laboratories of extremism which is exported on the back of NATO and NATO's own hard power posture, the latter needing a counter-narrative for its allies. From a strategic point of view, we can argue that most times interventions in the near abroad were founded on a pre-emption rationale, in order to install stability in certain areas before embryos of extremism and instability flourished and threatened the very core of the Alliance. Ultimately, these threats could threaten the Alliance's very existence if the inability to adapt to a current crisis was shown to be a cause of these crises. Furthermore, using the debate between rationalist institutionalism and sociological institutionalism (Sedelmeier 2011: 11), we can draw on the latter to explain the enlargement instrument. On the other hand, opponents have argued that NATO's enlargement does not support the claim of the spread of democracy (Reiter 2001).

Simón mentions, as part of the security export mission undertaken by NATO, the "expeditionary operations and state-building enterprises in the western Balkans and Afghanistan", thus highlighting the diffusion of values

from which third parties benefited, while also mentioning the “lessons learned” from the ISAF mission in terms of gaining operational experience, expanding its logistical toolkit and developing a more well-developed conceptual approach (2014: 14–15). In light of this assessment, we can argue that the two-track approach is empirically sustained by the mission in Afghanistan — a decade long one. Another mission must be recalled to show that the influential role of out of area operations was two-sided. The first operation that saw NATO acting outside its borders, that in Bosnia, was described by Sperling and Webber as “a key driver for NATO’s development” (2009: 494). In fact, after this peacekeeping operation, the conflict management dimension was recalled at the Madrid summit in 1997 as being among the important tasks of the Alliance. Nonetheless, this campaign was also a test for NATO to prove its utility and relevance on the global scene after the Cold War, as many academics claim, shaping its new *raison d’être*. Another benefit of the Bosnia campaign on NATO’s side was the collaboration with Russia in this mission, a neighbour that many would have predicted would join NATO after the Soviet Union collapsed, a vision strongly contested after the 2014 events in eastern Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea. This action was a sign to the allies that Russia was becoming, once again, a threat to the collective Western security. This position, however — namely, the collaboration with Russia during the campaign in Bosnia — shows that NATO did not seek to assert itself as the dominant security provider in the European region, a position which would have collided with the normative stance and led instead to a *Realpolitik* position. Instead, NATO was left alone in ensuring security in the European region, as well as in other parts of the globe, hence broadening its scope. However, this expansion in purpose came, as stated, out of necessity, not as a firmly advanced purpose of NATO.

First of all, the image of an Alliance that was subject to the United States’ instrumentalism and caprice would have discouraged the rest of the allies. Nevertheless, to all intents and purposes, the US was still leading from behind in most of the aforementioned missions and it pushed and inspired its transformation agenda as well (Webber 2009: 46–47). Secondly, the EU proved that diverging interests and national preferences could delay collective action on its side in some cases, and the wars in the Balkans proved conclusive in this regard. Still, a new gear in terms of security cooperation was also fostered between the European states following

the Lisbon Treaty through the introduction of the Solidarity Clause (Art. 222) and the mutual defence clause (Art. 42.7), which is similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to NATO's Article 5. This shows a convergence in purpose which was visible in the orientation towards the concept of pooling and sharing at the NATO-EU level, as non-Article 5 missions are similar to those defined by the Petersberg tasks in 1992, referring to peace-keeping and peace-making roles, humanitarian help and conflict management. This 'socialization' led to a shift in approach, starting with the Libya campaign when the US encouraged Britain and France to take the lead. This can be considered a hallmark towards a 'post-American' alliance (Hallams and Schreer 2012: 1).

The projection of norms through systematic interactions and the tailor-made missions for each crisis situation — Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq interventions on behalf of NATO had different approaches on the ground — show that the norms diffusion process was not static, nor based on persuasion only. Recalling Manners' (2001) list of factors influencing normative power, we can assert that at least the overt factor, described as physical presence in third states, informational (clearly stated positions) and transference — defined as an exchange of benefits — were clearly common to the aforementioned interventions. Gheciu (2005: 4) brings a valuable insight by claiming that the term 'alliance' leads, from a conceptual point of view, to "coalitions that respond to threats" and that NATO has surpassed this stage, becoming a "security management institution", thus a more reactive than passive force. This claim will further be developed, to state that this conceptualization applies to both intra-crisis and outer crisis approaches. The same author also mentions "processes through which the alliance has acted to shape state identities around norms perceived as a source of peace and progress" (Gheciu 2005: 4). Indeed, important and centric values and norms of the EU — namely democracy, rule of law and human rights — have been incorporated into NATO's practice when it comes to peacekeeping operations and, extensively, crisis management operations. According to Kroenig (2015: 51–52), NATO's interventions outside its immediate neighbourhood and scope were also possible because the Alliance was "freed from dealing with a proximate military threat", a fact that allowed it to go past its "narrow security interests". This is also an explanation for why NATO seemed to have left Europe and gone beyond its borders: once the perimeter delimited by its borders was

considered secure, the Alliance went on to address the root cause of challenges before they bounced back and reached the West. This way of reacting is based on a preventive rather than a reactionary model. This pre-emption points towards the idea that NATO seeks to balance operationally, through soft means, by exporting its norms in certain regions in order to prevent a situation from escalating militarily and requiring hard power intervention.

Nevertheless, the threats that have emerged within NATO's sphere of action — namely the unlawful annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the terrorist attacks that have hit the heart of Europe during 2015 and the refugee crisis — have definitely widened the spectrum of challenges and brought closer the previously mentioned proximate military threat. If, in 2009, the mission in Afghanistan was made a priority for the American administration, with plans announcing an extra deployment of 30,000 US military forces in the region (Morelli and Belkin 2009: 2), domestic pressure has made further similar interventions, lasting over ten years, less and less probable. In fact, in January 2015, NATO forces left a security vacuum to be filled by national forces (Smělá 2013: 2). Given the fact that very few European allies have reached the goal of spending two per cent of their GDP on defence, with the US contributing roughly 73 per cent to the Alliance budget, the scope of the commitments abroad may decrease and thus the spectrum of ensuring stability through normative diffusion be brought to a halt. In fact, the lion's share of the US contribution has already been at odds with the domestic economic situation as well as with public and political opinions that called for a "separation" from far-reaching theatres of operation. After a long series of out of area operations, many allies are pressing for NATO to return home and provide credible security insurance for the perimeter it is bound to protect, in a growingly unstable security environment.

With the main threats coming from Russia and from the radiating instability in the Middle East now looming more over Europe than over the US, the latter has become more and more willing to disengage from its role of 'peace guardian' with relation to European stability. If political cohesion proved vital for missions like Libya, the absence of it may deem the interventionist side of NATO indeed antiquated and too costly for its main security arm, the US, although the cost in Libya was reduced in comparison

to Afghanistan and Iraq. Still, the reluctance of many alliance members to engage in the bombing of Libya seems to indicate that the decline in support for interventions in the near abroad is indeed past the stage of merely garnering momentum. In fact, the big absentee from the Libyan intervention and *de facto* absent from the Iraq mission — Germany — is now increasingly assuming the role of the gendarme of European security. As Wood notes in a report assessing the five big European roles involved in the Iraq War, the participation of Germany involved, by and large, providing “flyover rights for allied aircraft, security for US bases, stationing of Tornados in Turkey for protection of NATO allies and Israel, and wounded Americans were flown back to Germany” (Wood 2003: 8). The debate over Iraq and the different degrees of involvement of different allies shows that diverging views towards a certain NATO engagement can lead to role specialization or limited intervention, as was the case with Germany in Iraq, but rarely total disengagement. This indicates that allies focus on a common agenda and towards the same goals, but differences may appear in practice. On top of that, in the case of the war in Afghanistan, the US representatives stated from the beginning that “every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime” (Rynning 2005: 123). The same rhetoric applied to NATO allies, as their involvement as an alliance was in fact seen as assistance provided to the US in its fight against terrorism. Again, this binary positioning in terms of security shows that NATO represents a counter-narrative for certain threats and its aim is to balance through norms.

There is now more or less general acknowledgement of the fact that the military interventions of NATO in the Western Balkans, the Gulf of Aden and the Middle East have failed to meet their purpose of bringing stability. This can be seen in tandem with an announced intention of the United States to diminish its undertaking of a guardian role and the fact that at least two major threats are deemed long-term issues for Europe: the Russian new revanchist posture and the spillover effects of the Middle East conflicts (such as the refugee crisis and the terrorist attacks on European soil). All the above have highlighted the need for reassessment from within for the Alliance as an institutional structure, leading Germany to assume the role of Europe’s guardian in terms of defence. Before the British referendum

on European Union membership was held, Germany issued the Defence White Paper ("Weissbuch"), in which it more or less stated the intention to "lead the way" towards an EU army (Kern 2016).

Acquiescing to a view with regard to the propensity of US foreign policy to assume a global responsibility and the reluctance of the EU to follow in the steps of its bigger military ally (Valasek 2012), we can say that the normative power will decrease once the cluster-based approach takes the lead. Indeed, NATO now promotes a more cluster-based approach towards security in order to engage allies more and make their expected rising levels of contribution justifiable domestically. This type of approach, referring to countries pooling capabilities and benefiting from shared knowledge, was initiated by Germany with the concept of "framework nations" consisting of groups of countries for specific issues (Techau 2014). One example of this kind of collaboration is the military cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands, which was strengthened by the two countries signing an agreement at the beginning of 2016, thus enhancing their leading role in European defence cooperation. Neither this relationship nor the Franco-German initial push for European integration was born out of strategic considerations. First of all, even if weakened by war, Great Britain, France and Germany emerged as great powers following the Second World War. The rapprochement between the latter two and the denial of an important military role for Italy and Spain, for example, was based on their WWII behaviour. In the case of Spain, collaboration with Nazi Germany and a neutral status during the war condemned the country to diplomatic isolation afterwards (Bowen 2006: 62), which only added to the economic problems that denied Spain big power status within the European security arrangement. With regard to Italy, its poor military performance during the war and the Pact of Steel that obliged it to assist Germany during the war contributed to its image as a pariah after the Second World War. On the other hand, against the background of wartime distrust that continued in post-War times, the cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands can be explained first and foremost by the strong advocacy that The Hague conducted in favour of European integration and of including in it the German Federal Republic. Relations between the two countries after Nazi Germany had invaded the Netherlands were also based on economic interdependence, but the reason previously mentioned prevails: the bid

for European integration and the common security agendas of the two countries after the Dutch renounced their initial punitive agenda and post-War reparations demands (Lak 2011).

The lack of a holistic approach towards security, with an integrated rationale to be followed by the transatlantic community, will turn the normative aspect into a diffuse conceptual mechanism that will prove harder to implement and even harder to relate to security.

The Janus Bifrons of 'out of area' operations: lessons learned and legitimacy lost

Every intervention assumed by NATO outside its perimeter brought responsibility from at least two points of view: to ensure stability through nation-building efforts in war-torn regions affected by turmoil to which, willingly or not, NATO contributed (either by an inability to prevent ethnic cleansing in Kosovo or by the vacuum power created in some countries following the toppling of authoritarian leaders) and to maintain the legitimacy of interventions in a good light and ensure that support for this kind of effort remains high. Should nation-building efforts fail, undertaking new stabilizing missions would prove difficult, especially in light of the reluctance shown by many allies before the Iraq intervention.

From Somalia to Bosnia and to Kosovo, NATO has certainly improved its methods of ensuring stability and its sustainability, as the results showed. The coordination between military stabilization and civilian reconstruction efforts was improved after the Bosnia experience and, indeed, in Kosovo this lesson proved to be far more effective on the ground than in Bosnia. However, a line can be drawn between the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo and those in Somalia, Afghanistan or Iraq in terms both of applying the lessons learned previously and their internalization in the Alliance's practices and the outcome of the mission. Considering the latter aspect, James Dobbins (2003: 23) argues that the main distinction between the aforementioned interventions is the "level of effort that the United

States and the international community have put into the democratic transformation". He claims that more money and more troops have been deployed for post-conflict Afghanistan than in Kosovo, to take but one line of distinction.

Both Afghanistan and Iraq missions had a disruptive effect on the normative aspect of the Alliance, and this can be seen through the soft balancing posture that other powers have taken towards the US as a hegemon with a diluting legitimacy. First of all, if the Afghanistan invasion was considered justified — though not unanimously — under the UN Charter (Article 51 deems acceptable, as an exception to using force or threat of use of force against the territorial integrity of a state, military actions that are either authorized by the Security Council or undertaken in self-defence), this was not the case for Iraq. It is also important to mention that if the Afghanistan invasion was started following the 9/11 attacks in the USA, when Article 5 of the Washington Treaty was invoked — basically comprising the nexus of collective defence — the US intervention in Iraq had other institutional grounds in order to garner legitimacy in the face of international public opinion. Nonetheless, the invasion of Iraq took the pre-emption doctrine of the Bush administration too far, and support from other powers was lacking. The US seemed to break a principle of international law that since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 had proved central to the existence of states: that of the mutually recognized sovereignty of states. Moreover, the initiative for preventive war in Iraq was taken outside the framework of NATO. Still, both ISAF and Resolute Support (launched in 2015 to provide support to security forces and institutions) in Afghanistan and the NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) were established and set up in accordance with United Nations support and a UN resolution was issued for both. Nevertheless, when the training mission in Iraq expired in 2011, a new accord could not be reached to prolong it and thus the transition phase towards the national authorities, like in Afghanistan, could not be initiated, for the process of nation-building under NATO auspices was stalled. The focus in Iraq was on training and mentoring, thus highlighting the consolidation of the normative side of NATO. Still, both parties committed to a partnership with NATO, an aspect that can alone be considered a successful diffusion of norms, the initiation of partnerships symbolizing an acceptance from the two parties of NATO's legitimate source of values and norms beyond its military scope.

Even if the number of troops and the overall effort undertaken in Afghanistan were, according to arithmetical considerations, below the level of those committed in previous NATO missions (at least in the initial phase of the intervention), Iraq proved to be a case of “lessons learned” at the beginning of the operation in terms of troops committed on the ground to support the stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction effort.

However justifiable on security grounds and in terms of ideological and economic reasons, the moral legitimacy of out of area engagement may stall further actions of this type in the future. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were both wars of choice and the subsequent stabilization and reconstruction missions, based on pre-emptive action rather than retaliatory force, were possible precisely because the defensive and reactive posture typical for the Alliance during the Cold War was replaced by a more initiative-led and proactive one. This also favoured the emergence of its normative side, proactive and initiatory by nature, as the diffusion of norms and values through stabilization mechanisms is a unilateral process, coming as a projective initiative and not as part of retaliation tools.

The normative aspect of the Alliance was also visible in the crisis management exercises that involved collaboration on the part of the Allies. David Yost (2007: 64) draws on the differing strategic cultures of the Allies due to “their distinct national historical experiences with the results of employing military force”, and it can similarly be argued that crisis management experiences have contributed to shared know-how and improved techniques for conflict management on the part of the allies.

Conclusion

As experiences in Afghanistan, Kosovo and the Gulf of Aden, from which NATO decided to partially withdraw in the 2015–2016 timeframe, proved, post-conflict reconstruction was a vital part of these operations. It is also worth highlighting that mechanisms of both soft power and hard power are now part of NATO's interventionist arsenal. As Jamie Shea (2015: 7) mentions, there is no realistic way for NATO to engage in security frameworks outside its borders with no troops on the ground, thus criticizing the aforementioned withdrawal perspectives. At the same time, the interventions are built around certain security-specific norms in lieu of a certain soft balancing approach. As has been discussed, EU-NATO collaboration principles and binary security clusters (such as that between Germany and the Netherlands) are built on the same principle: allies that contribute to the same normative framework entrust their allegiance to an alliance that seeks to balance a security model.

In a more interconnected global security environment, NATO has to adapt both its capacities and its strategies. To this end, recent innovations like pooling and sharing resources, clusters determined according to capabilities and rapid reaction forces (the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force), the Alliance stays well connected to the emerging security environment. Nonetheless, the recent annexation of Crimea and the assertiveness of Russia have once again shifted the focus from crisis management predominating in the 3C paradigm to the dominance of collective security, with more contenders asking for NATO to 'come back from abroad'. Given its involvement in peace-keeping and post-conflict reconstruction, with a focus on democracy, rule of law and human rights approaches, we thus contend that NATO's interventions in out of area operations had a strong normative toolkit and were important for highlighting, too, the Alliance's continual redefinition of purpose in order to maintain its scope and relevance in the security environment.

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