Thinking NATO through Theoretically

(Mark Webber)

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Note: although the paper below has a stand alone quality as an examination of how IR theory can be applied to NATO, it is presented here in its original form as a chapter in a book currently being written with James Sperling entitled NATO: Decline or Regeneration? In this light, feedback is particularly welcome as the book remains a work in progress.
Having outlined in the previous chapter the context of NATO's recent development, in this chapter we move toward a somewhat more abstract treatment of the Alliance. Our purpose here is to elaborate a number of theoretically-derived propositions geared toward our central concern, the question of NATO'S regeneration or decline. The propositions outlined below are offered in a spirit of theoretical eclecticism and are drawn from three well-known theories of International Relations (IR): neo-realism, liberal institutionalism and social constructivism. Our intention here is not to demonstrate the supremacy of any one theory but rather to fashion a comprehensive view of NATO through a tailored application of all three. This approach is not without its problems and some would reject it outright. It is, therefore, justified at some length below. Before we consider theory, however, our first task is to define NATO itself. This is a task often avoided in studies of the Alliance, but for us it is crucial: how one defines NATO determines, in our view, how it ought to be studied.

Defining NATO

One standard IR text has suggested that it is debatable whether NATO can any longer be regarded be as an alliance.1 This seems at odds with NATO's own view of itself and with common usage, in which 'the Alliance' and NATO are referred to as one and the same. Indeed, John Duffield has suggested that 'NATO conforms easily to commonly-used definitions of alliances' and constitutes the most significant example of the type.2 In what manner this is so depends on how one defines an alliance. Many definitions have been proffered in this regard, but several core features stand out.

Alliances are principally seen as vehicles for the combining of military resources by a group of states in response to (or in preparation for) some assumed contingency usually defined by reference to an external threat posed by another state or group of states.3 Such cooperation is premised on the twin assumptions that combined rather than simply national power is the better deterrent against a possible attacker and, should an attack occur, that an allied rather than a national response is likely to be more effective.4 Alliances also have a formal character. They are based on an agreement which typically spells out the scope of cooperation, as well as the obligations and interests which flow from it. It is these formal stipulations which distinguish alliances from less specific and less constraining arrangements such as alignments, ententes and international coalitions.5 Further, their military emphasis means that alliances have limited aims and an orientation that is principally external. Other, inward-looking, facets of their activity such as protecting alliance members from one another and acting as a framework for political community are regarded as secondary.6 Finally, alliances are inter-governmental. They may constrain the freedom of action of their members to some degree but national prerogatives prevail; alliances, in other words, 'allow their members to retain final freedom of action in foreign policy.'7

4 Snyder, 'Regional Security Structures', p.106.  
During the Cold War NATO conformed to these features seemingly very well. It was formed in 1949 with a treaty basis that clearly emphasised mutual defence obligations. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, noted the objective of maintaining a ‘collective capacity to resist armed attack’ while Article 5 famously emphasised the principle of collective response ‘including the use of armed force’ in the event of an attack on one or more of its members. The centrality of this commitment was spelt out in ‘The Report of the Committee of Three’ of 1956. The obligation to collective defence, it asserted, is ‘[t]he foundation of NATO’ and ‘the cornerstone of the foreign and defence policies of its members.’ The report noted that ‘the ways and means by which the obligation is to be discharged may alter as political or strategic conditions alter’. Nonetheless, ‘the basic fact’ that drives NATO, it was argued, was a recognition that ‘[n]o state, however, powerful [could] guarantee its security […] by national action alone.’

In this respect, the position of the US was crucial. Indeed, reflecting a certain American reluctance to tie itself beyond question to the defence of Europe, the language of Article 5 was ambiguous on exactly how mutual defence would be pursued. Yet uncertainty on this score became more and more hypothetical once NATO began to develop integrated military structures after 1950. In parallel, NATO became an overt instrument of American foreign policy. NSC 68 signed by President Truman in 1950 marked a conceptual shift toward forward defence against the Soviet threat and an assumption that NATO would constitute the military arm of what, in David Calleo’s phrase, would become ‘an American-directed “integrated” alliance’. On this basis, post-World War Two American troop withdrawals from Europe were reversed and NATO’s single most important office, that of supreme allied commander Europe (SACEUR), was established, with General Dwight Eisenhower its first incumbent. Subsequent holders of the office would all be American and would simultaneously hold the office of head of the US European Command.

By the early 1950s, then, NATO’s essential Cold War purpose was seemingly clear and for the next nearly four decades it continued to develop along familiar lines. While the Allies differed in their estimation of the Soviet Union and harboured mixed feelings at the leading role of the US (most obviously evidenced by France’s withdrawal from NATO’s integrated military command in 1966), unity continued to be fostered by a shared appreciation of threat. Until the latter 1980s, the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact enjoyed a conventional military superiority over NATO in the European theatre and, from the mid 1960s, strategic nuclear parity with the US. This consequently became NATO’s overriding concern. The North Atlantic Treaty itself did not spell out the source of danger to the Alliance, however, subsequent keynote NATO documents were clear on this score. The Committee of Three noted that NATO’s formation was driven by ‘the fear of military aggression by the forces of the USSR and its allies’. The Ottawa Declaration of 1974 placed ‘the defence of Europe’ at the centre of NATO’s attention, and ministerial guidance adopted the following year noted the need to maintain NATO’s ‘defensive strength against aggression of threats of aggression’ on the part of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. In a similar vein, the ‘Washington Statement on East-West Relations’

8 ‘Text of the Report of the Committee of Three on Non-military Cooperation in NATO’ (approved by the North Atlantic Council, December 1956), paras.6, 36-37, at: http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b561213a.htm
11 ‘Declaration on Atlantic Relations issued by the North Atlantic Council’ (Ottawa, June 1974), para.4. at: http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b740619a.htm
adopted some ten years later noted that the Soviet Union posed ‘a continuing threat to Alliance security and vital Western interests.’\(^\text{13}\) NATO’s London Declaration of 1990, by outlining the case for an adaptation of NATO made it clear that this process was one driven by far-reaching changes to the threat environment that had been centred on the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.\(^\text{14}\)

Just how determining was the Soviet threat to NATO during the Cold War can also be seen in two other crucial developments. The first concerns NATO's military organisation. Initially, NATO had only a very skeletal structure but the launch of the Korean War in 1950 provided the impetus for change. Here, the US and other NATO states drew the inference (probably erroneously) that Stalin's support for the communist cause was a prelude to a Soviet assault on West Germany. In response, NATO undertook a rapid reorganisation with the aim of creating 'an integrated force under centralized command and control'.\(^\text{15}\) This gave rise to three separate regional commands centred on Europe, the Atlantic and the southern North Sea/English Channel. Each of these was subordinate, in turn, to the NATO Military Committee and its executive agency, the International Military Staff; the same was also true of a number of specialised military agencies concerned with standardisation, armaments cooperation, communications and so on. The Military Committee, meanwhile, drew its authority from NATO's top decision-making authority, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and attached to it, the Defence Planning Committee. From the late 1960s, a separate set of arrangements was also inaugurated concerned with nuclear defence planning.

How these arrangements related to the Soviet Union became more nuanced and controversial as the Cold War progressed. The notion of a full-scale Soviet-led attack on the central European front, while still fundamental to NATO planning, was supplemented by an increasing attention to the possibility 'of attacks of a minor or probing kind' anywhere in the North Atlantic area, including on NATO's southern flank (embracing the Mediterranean and NATO members Italy, Greece and Turkey) and the high north (including NATO member Norway).\(^\text{16}\) In response, NATO maintained an ongoing review of its conventional and nuclear postures.

NATO faced certain limitations in fostering military integration and in achieving ancillary goals among allies relating to force modernisation, interoperability, burden sharing and military budget planning. In the final analysis, integration was subject to the retention of national prerogatives, entrenched in inter-governmental, consensus-based decision-making. Only West German armed forces were fully subordinate to NATO (*check*). For other Allies, armed forces remained under national command but with specific forces assigned to NATO for particular purposes. As a consequence, during the Cold War, military integration in NATO could not be said to match the more centralised structures of the Warsaw Pact. It was, nonetheless, extensive and allowed for highly-developed practices of consultation, information exchange, joint training and exercises and, crucially, multinational force planning.\(^\text{17}\)

The second development indicating the centrality of the Soviet Union during the Cold War concerns the minimal significance that was attached to other contingencies. Security threats other than those posed by the Warsaw Pact, for instance, were regarded


\(^{16}\) NATO: Facts and Figures, p.107.

very much as secondary. The 'threat' posed by Germany or the Greek-Turkish conflict were partial exceptions to this (discussed below) but how each was dealt with was arguably a fortuitous by-product of NATO's Cold War orientation. Other threats – for instance energy security, instability in the Middle East, environmental degradation, the rise of China and Third World crises - all of which grew increasingly prominent from the late 1960s - were of acute concern to individual Allies but much less so to NATO as a whole. NATO did create in 1969 a Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society which undertook pilot studies and drew up recommendations on matters such as environmental planning, disaster relief, and air and sea pollution but this remained a marginal aspect of Alliance activity. During the Cold War, similarly, NATO undertook consultations on a variety of 'out-of-area' issues and by the 1980s these figured often in NATO declarations and communiques. Yet such statements did not reflect much in the way of policy coordination or operational activity. Indeed, the further NATO strayed away from its core concern with the Soviet Union, the more likely it was to disagree. Thus the split between France/the UK and the US over Suez in 1956, and later resistance by European Allies to American efforts to utilise NATO 'out-of-area' – be this in giving military support to Israel during the October War or in supporting the Carter Doctrine of American force projection into the Gulf region. Notable also was the fact that prominent instances of wars outside of Europe involving Allies did not elicit a NATO response - America's war in Vietnam and the Falklands conflict between the UK and Argentina being cases in point. Operation Desert Shield/Storm was a notable exception to this pattern in that considerable logistical and political support was provided to the US-led coalition and a NATO operation was mounted to support the defence of Turkey. None of these measures, however, involved a NATO command option being exercised for the deployment of forces in the conflict itself.

To summarise, the picture we have of NATO during the Cold War is that of an alliance characterised by a considerable degree of military integration, but subject to national prerogatives, and a clear focus on its core mission – a defence against the Soviet bloc. NATO thus conformed well to the conventional definition of alliance noted above. In other respects, even during the Cold War, NATO departed from an alliance as narrowly understood. Its longevity and its sizeable membership marked it out as unusual and, alongside this, three broader developments are also worth remarking on.

The first concerns NATO's internal security function. At its formation there was, as we have seen, a clear appreciation of an external threat. Alongside this, and of particular concern to states such as France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium, was the question of guarding against a revived Germany. Rather than forming an alliance against Germany, the West German state was included in NATO as a means of restraining its military power. By such means, NATO acted to blunt the strategic rivalry between France and Germany and made a signal contribution (alongside a parallel process of integration afforded by the European Community) to resolving the 'German question'. Just how significant was NATO's role in fostering good relations among its members is not, however, clear cut. There is a view that shared membership can actually make relations

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18 What is 'out-of-area' for NATO is defined by implication in Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In that clause the application of NATO's collective defence provisions are held to apply to the territories of the 'the Parties in Europe or North America [...] the islands under the jurisdiction of any Party in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer' and to forces, vessels or aircraft stationed on these territories as well as in the Mediterranean Sea. What lies beyond the confines of this definition is 'out-of-area'.


21 By which is understood the destabilising influence on European order of German great power status. The division of Germany after World War Two was one further method for dealing with this. Although over time, the division of Germany came to constitute a 'German problem' in its own right given its destabilising impact on relations between the Communist bloc and NATO.
between 'allies' worse (witness in this connection the enduring animosity between Greece and Turkey); there is also a powerful argument that what mattered during the Cold War was not NATO as such but rather the unique role played by the US as 'Europe's pacifier'. Yet these qualifications notwithstanding, NATO did carry out important intra-alliance functions. As John Duffield has argued, it helped prevent conflict among its members in important ways: by increasing intra-alliance trust and transparency, by denationalising defence policy through the formulation and execution of joint actions (even though elements of national policies remained, the rivalries that this might produce were minimised) and by 'binding the United States to the continent'.23

The second way in which NATO departed from traditional alliances was in regard to its political functions. Alliances viewed simply as military constructs set little store by political cooperation.24 We have already seen, however, that NATO acted as a forum for consultation among its members and this function in the Cold War context was extended to coordinating dialogue with the Warsaw Pact states, as occurred, for example, in the CSCE process and conventional arms control talks of the 1970s and 1980s. More broadly, NATO was also viewed as the embodiment of some deeper political community. As the Committee of Three asserted, '[w]hile fear may have been the main urge for the creation of NATO [...] a sense of Atlantic Community' was also present, premised on 'common cultural traditions, free institutions and democratic concepts'.25 This claim was clearly overblown, not least because NATO tolerated at various times distinctly undemocratic members such as Portugal, Greece and Turkey, and because its organising concept, an Atlantic community was fuzzy both historically and as a political entity. Yet as an idea, the notion of community was important. It certainly played upon the imaginations of NATO's founders in both Europe and North America.26 It could also be said to exist in the abstract as a 'way of life and a means of governing', the values and practices of which were defined in contradistinction to those of the Soviet bloc.27 The fact that NATO was anti-communist was thus just as significant as was its purported embodiment of democratic values.

The third feature of note concerns the well-developed institutional structure which NATO developed during the Cold War. Alliances are, in fact, not immune to the development of formal institutions. The institutions of NATO, however, were unusually extensive.28 These bodies were, in part, created to serve the cause of military integration, a task which over time became increasingly complex and subject to high levels of bureaucratisation. NATO's highest military committee and command structures have already been alluded to above and alongside these stood a range of other bodies some with more obviously political purposes. According to an official NATO account dating from the late 1970s, some 18 principal committees (and countless minor ones) were directly responsible to the NAC/Defence Planning Committee. NATO's International Staff headed by the Secretary General, meanwhile, constituted a separate set of bodies organized according to functional divisions (defence planning, defence support, political affairs, scientific affairs).

NATO's divergence from conventional understandings of alliance has become even

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22 J. Joffe, 'Europe's American Pacifier', Foreign Policy, No.54, 1984.
24 Fedder, 'The Concept of Alliance', pp.78-79.
28 The Warsaw Pact developed integrated institutions to an even greater degree than did NATO. However, compared to other alliances, NATO's formal institutions were uniquely well-developed.
29 NATO: Facts and Figures, pp.204-241.
more pronounced since the Cold War's end. Since that event no single overarching threat, let alone a threat posed by another state has taken the Soviet Union's place. NATO has in the intervening period carried out a thorough-going overhaul of its military and political structures and has undertaken a wide range of operations and tasks that have taken it well beyond the core defensive purposes of the first forty years of its existence. This process of adaptation holds important implications for any consideration of NATO as a military alliance.

First, NATO now operates against a wide, but indeterminate, spectrum of threats, 'risks' and 'security challenges'. NATO's 'Comprehensive Political Guidance' (CPG) of 2006 thus names '[t]errorism [...] and the spread of weapons of mass destruction' as the 'principal threats' facing the Alliance alongside '[i]nstability due to failed or failing states, regional crises and conflicts [...] the growing availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry; the misuse of emerging technologies; and the disruption of the flow of vital resources [...]'. 'Collective defence', the CPG asserts, 'will remain the core purpose of the Alliance' but defence against whom is left unclear. The means of attack – 'unconventional forms of armed assault', 'asymmetric means', 'the use of weapons of mass destruction' and 'terrorism' - are specified but not the perpetrators of any such action. Hence, in the words of one NATO planner, 'the probable future security environment' will continue to be characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability.

Second, and linked, the threats which NATO asserts as pressing are not simply state-based. NATO did, in effect, wage war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in 1999's Operation Allied Force, but the earlier intervention in Bosnia and later in Afghanistan have both been against non-state entities (Bosnian Serb forces and the Taliban/al-Qaeda respectively). The list of threats in the CPG also imply that it is non-state entities (unnamed terrorist organisations) who pose the greatest challenge to NATO. Neither the CPG nor the 1999 'Strategic Concept' from which it derives its authority, single out specific states (be this Russia, China, or the FRY) as potential adversaries.

Third, the altered threat environment has widened differences of perception among allies. During the Cold War, disagreements between the Allies were generally those of emphasis and approach. All concurred that the Soviet Union was a threat, but differed on some of the tactical issues of how to maintain the appropriate defensive posture (hence the long-running dispute over the proper balance to be struck between conventional and nuclear forces). No such consensus has existed in the post-Cold War period. Key-note statements of NATO which articulate a strategic vision reflect a formal convergence of official positions, but the range of views within the Alliance concerning the relative importance of threats is both qualitatively and quantitatively diverse. Qualitatively, because Allies have often been in open disagreement on the urgency of the threats which face them; and quantitatively because NATO now embraces, through enlargement, more Allies and so more shades of opinion. This state of affairs will permeate much of the analysis of later chapters. For now it is sufficient to mention only briefly certain well-known episodes. NATO's interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo and latterly Afghanistan have all been occasioned by intra-Alliance discord. This has usually been reported as a disagreement over tactical means (how best to execute a campaign, burden-sharing among Allies) but equally it has been a disagreement about strategy: should, in fact, NATO be engaged in the operation in the first place? Does the 'threat' invoked to justify the operation really have substance? And does it touch sufficiently upon the national priorities of individual Allies to warrant

30 'Comprehensive Political Guidance' (Endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government, 29 November 2006), paras. 2 and 5. at: http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/b061129e.htm
32 Alongside the 'Comprehensive Political Guidance' and the 'Strategic Concept', Communiques of summits of Heads of State and Government are also important in this respect.
involvement? As was apparent in the previous chapter, when it came to the issue of Iraq, questions of this type evoked a significant crisis in the Alliance, one so profound that no consensus at all could be reached on the alleged threat posed by the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Post-Cold War NATO thus departs from conventional definitions of alliance in that it no longer is a body geared to countering a specific threat. It has also become increasingly obvious that NATO's functions have extended beyond the military sphere. The political dimension of the Alliance developed during the Cold War has been given a greater emphasis. As early as the 'London Declaration' of 1990, NATO asserted its intention to enhance its 'political component'. Nearly two decades on, having undertaken an enlargement of both functions and membership (and, as a part of this, a further enhancement of its institutions and integrated military structures), the Alliance has evolved such that, according to one official source, '[i]t is a different institution to that which defended Western Europe for four decades during the Cold War or even that which oversaw Europe's post-Cold War transition in the 1990s'. Further, 'it will no doubt have transformed itself again as it develops coordinated responses to the security challenges facing member states in the early 21st century.' In so doing, NATO has become 'much more than a defensive alliance', it is a body concerned with 'continuous consultation, coordination and cooperation between members on political, military, economic and other aspects of security, as well as cooperation in non-military fields such as science, information, the environment and disaster relief.'

When surveying its history as a whole, James Morrow’s description of NATO as 'a very unusual alliance' does not seem out of place. Pinning down its essential character has thus proven difficult. NATO has been variously seen as a 'post-modern alliance', a 'virtual alliance' and 'a “big security” organisation.' NATO's own descriptions reflect a similar range. The Alliance has been referred to as 'a security manager in the broadest sense', as a multilateral institution, and as a 'value-based organisation.'

This is not the place to attempt some sort of definitional synthesis. For our purposes, these different definitions are offered because they reflect the complexity of NATO, its multi-faceted character and fluid evolution. In short, the case can reasonably be made that NATO is *sui generis*; it is an alliance without precedent and has come to constitute a form of international organisation that is one of a kind. Elements of what characterises NATO have similarities with other bodies, be these alliances such as the Warsaw Pact or multi-purpose bodies such as the EU, the UN and the OSCE. But as a totality that combines an integrated military structure, collective defence provisions and broad operational capabilities alongside extensive political and security consultations (with members and non-members alike) and a claim to the development of political community, it is without parallel.

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33 NATO, Public Diplomacy Division, NATO Transformed (Brussels: 2004), pp.3, 44.
34 'Riga Summit Declaration' (Issued by the Heads of State and Government, North Atlantic Council, 29 November 2006), para.11, at: http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm
How to Study NATO

If we are to assume that NATO has a unique character, how then do we go about analysing it? Alliance theory as we suggested in Chapter 1, is an incomplete approach in this respect precisely because NATO does not conform to alliances as commonly understood. But can we apply other, broader, IR theories? Our answer here is in the affirmative, based on an assumption that NATO, although exceptional, nonetheless embodies core characteristics of theoretical relevance. These characteristics are as follows:

- NATO is an inter-governmental organisation of states, which retains a core competence for security (over and above territorial defence as such) involving the deployment of military instruments;
- NATO has developed a diverse and sophisticated array of institutions and has well-established institutionalised procedures for the formulation and conduct of its actions;
- NATO is the self-declared embodiment of Euro-Atlantic values and on this basis has laid claim to a community identity.

Each of these corresponds to a particular way of conceptualising NATO: as an alliance, as an institution and as a community organisation. These conceptualisations, in turn, are associated with three distinct theoretical frameworks in mainstream IR: neo-realism, liberal institutionalism and social constructivism.38

Privileging these three theories should not be taken to imply that others do not have something to offer. There is, for example, a useful literature on NATO derived from public choice theory and new institutional economics, and Sten Rynning has produced an illuminating study of NATO based on classical realism.39 However, our selection is not meant to be exhaustive (embracing all relevant theories), only indicative (embracing the most relevant theories). The three theories pursued in this volume are not only well developed within IR but also have the benefit of speaking directly to the question we have posed.40 Our approach, further, is premised on the assumption that a combination of theories can provide complementary rather than conflicting perspectives and together offer a fuller picture than is possible through single-theory investigation.41 Following Gunther

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38 Our three selected theories correspond roughly to the typology of Jack Snyder who suggests that realism, liberalism and idealism (constructivism) are the three dominant theories of IR. See his 'One World, Rival Theories', Foreign Policy, No.145, 2004, pp.53-62.
40 On these grounds, we have not pursued an elaboration of Critical Theory despite its growing standing within the field of Security Studies. We are in agreement with Ken Booth that the merits of the sub-field of Critical Security Studies (CSS) lie in critique (questioning 'the knowledge-claims of the powerful') and reconstruction (posing emancipatory alternatives to 'business-as-usual' practices of security). These two tasks, while valid in their own right, offer little practical guidance for the sort of exercise undertaken here, namely the investigation of a specific research question relating to NATO's development. Indeed, CCS, according to Booth, rejects the very basis for such investigation, considering it infused with the false claims to objectivity of positivist Social Science, divorced from the practice of emancipation and 'implicated in the replication of associated practices' of world politics. That said, Booth also concedes that CSS 'is a relatively new approach' that has yet to fully engage with 'detailed policy analysis' and 'discussions about security in concrete circumstances'. Consequently, unlike the three theories we have selected, CSS offers little direct analysis of NATO and no clear propositions relevant to our own analysis of the Alliance. See K. Booth, Theory of World Security (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.172, 244-45, 264-66.
41 This combining of theories, while not unknown in studies of NATO, is nonetheless unusual. For a rare example see F. Chernoff, After Bipolarity: the Vanishing Threat, Theories of Cooperation, and the Future...
Hellmann, our argument is that NATO is a 'highly complex phenomenon' and this very complexity means that any one conceptualisation, as well as the theoretical assumptions which follow from it, is insufficient to get to the essence of the Alliance. We are required, Hellmann continues, 'to get rid of [a] paradigmatic mindset when studying NATO', to abandon the idea that a single theory is sufficient and instead assume that each of a number of theories has something to offer. Combining theory in this way means we are better able to cast light on the phenomenon under examination and so, in the case of NATO end up with 'richer insights into the dynamics, which drive [its] evolution.'

The main objection to this type of approach is the notion of incommensurability. To retain explanatory power, so this position asserts, a theory must not be contaminated or diluted by contact with the incompatible assumptions of other, distinct ways of thinking. This, by necessity, rules out theoretical synthesis, pluralism or eclecticism. The incommensurability thesis does have its appeal, particularly if one wants to assert the merits of a distinct theoretical position, or if one steers to the view that progress in a discipline is achieved through theoretical contestation. There are, however, equally solid grounds for rejecting it. As Colin Wight has argued, because theories (or what he labels 'paradigms') are different in their underlying premises, need not mean that they are in conflict. To suggest that they are 'assumes that all concepts pertaining to a particular paradigm are tightly welded together in a monolithic hermetically sealed bloc. It thus seems that there can be no shades of difference of meaning only total consistency within paradigms, or total incompatibility between paradigms.' Such an assumption, Wight continues, 'completely underestimates the tensions within paradigms as well as the significant areas of overlap between them.' Further, one can take issue with the claim that synthesis or pluralism hampers disciplinary progress. Being wedded to a single theoretical position can be equally retrograde; it hampers communication within the discipline, encourages intellectual intolerance, and sidetracks debate into abstract turf-battles. Thus, according to Barry Buzan, 'incommensurability seems to be mainly a position of extremists [...] who insist either that their own story is the only valid one, or that their way of telling a story is the only valid one.' As Buzan and others have pointed out, theoretical pluralism is, in fact, commonplace within IR and a large body of respected scholarship seems untroubled by the claim that the discipline requires theoretical purity and paradigmatic competition to keep it healthy.

If we accept the merits of theoretical pluralism, it remains incumbent upon us nonetheless to be clear exactly how it is we are to utilise theory. Our starting position is that change in NATO is, like much else in world politics, complex and uncertain and so of the Atlantic Alliance (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995). The more general literature on alliance theory noted in Chapter One is more open to theoretical pluralism. However, works which adopt such an approach tend to say little about NATO. See, for instance, P.A. Weitsman, Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2004).


beyond the purview of a single interpretation. If this means abandoning the parsimony and elegance of single theories for comprehensive explanation then so be it.47 We assume that neo-realism, liberal institutionalism and social constructivism can cast a light on a particular and important aspect of the Alliance, but that taken on their own each is deficient because it ignores what the other theories regard as important. The complexity of NATO is such that, taken together, what each theory holds to be significant – be this state interests, institutionalisation or norms and identity – requires consideration.

Further, we follow Katzenstein and Okawara, in using theory for 'problem driven research' rather than 'approach [i.e. theory]-driven analysis'.48 In other words, in accepting theoretical pluralism our intention is not to demonstrate the merits of such a position per se. Theoretical pluralism, rather, has a heuristic value; it is the means by which we can attend to our central analytical problem - the nature of NATO's present and its possible future. Addressing this problem thus entails adumbrating a number of propositions derived from our chosen theories. In so doing, and in keeping with theoretical pluralism, we do not hope to arrive at a 'winning' theory - it will be clear as the book proceeds that all three theories fit some issues better than others and that each has its particular blind spots. Neither do we argue a priori that NATO is bound to follow a certain course of development. Rather, through the elaboration and testing of theoretically-derived propositions we will arrive at a composite picture of NATO's likely trajectory. The analytically most tidy picture that could emerge from this analysis is that all three theories point in the same direction, either toward regeneration or decline in other words. Such neatness cannot, however, be assumed as a theoretical necessity. The consequence of rejecting theoretical parsimony may well be the generation of conclusions that are mixed. How we make sense of this in order to arrive at a verdict on NATO that is meaningful rather than just confused is something we shall return to in the concluding chapter.

**Propositions about NATO**

In this section we set out a number of propositions about NATO derived from neo-realism, liberal institutionalism and social constructivism. These we see as relevant to NATO activities as a whole. They are laid down here in general terms as the basis for a more specific application to particular issue areas in Chapters 3-6.

**Propositions on NATO - Neo-Realism**

Neo-realism now constitutes a diverse body of theory. Most proponents of this approach, however, adhere to a number of core assumptions: that states (and great powers above all) are central to world politics; that states are rational goal-oriented actors; and that states exist in a situation of anarchy (the absence of a central, global authority able to impose enforceable obligations and ensure protection), a condition that breeds distrust and competition and so leads states to place a premium upon self-help, autonomy and security.49

Neo-realists differ on the types of state strategy that are likely to result from this state of affairs (hence the distinction between 'defensive' and 'offensive' realists) but all are

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47 Moravcsik, 'Theory Synthesis in International Relations', p.132.
agreed that cooperation is difficult to achieve. It is not, however, ruled out and neo-realists view alliances as a key medium in this regard. Alliances here are narrowly defined - they are 'formal associations for the use (or nonuse) of military force' and 'the instruments of national security policy.'\textsuperscript{50} They arise and are sustained in response to a common threat,\textsuperscript{51} and this external impulse takes precedence over domestic-level factors (for instance, the similarity of political systems). Should that threat diminish or disappear there is no expectation that an alliance will suddenly dissolve. However, the omens for it are not good. With its original purpose removed, the alliance in question will seek alternative projects of cooperation but these are likely to prove less than compelling. As Stephen Walt has suggested, in such a situation 'alliances will become more fragile and less coherent and will devote less effort and attention to matters of common defence. Over time, such an alliance is more likely to dissolve, or at least to lapse into irrelevance.' Neo-realism, Walt notes, 'does not specify how fast and how far the adjustment process will proceed; it predicts only the general direction the adjustment will take' - that direction, a gradually weakening of the alliance, is, however, clear.\textsuperscript{52}

This external threat assumption seems straightforward. Its logic, however, is complicated somewhat by neo-realism's attention to broader, systemic forces. As Glen Snyder suggests, '[a]lliances cannot be understood apart from their context in the international system [...] the nature of alliances varies with characteristics of the system.'\textsuperscript{53} At their most basic, these characteristics are derived from how the international system is structured. For Kenneth Waltz, international systems have three structural properties: the condition (or ordering principle) of anarchy already referred to, the absence of functional differentiation between states (all are concerned with security and survival), and the distribution of capabilities between states.\textsuperscript{54} Because the first and second of these are immutable, change within the international system logically occurs only in regard to the third. Further, because the main variation in capabilities exists between powerful states, this boils down to saying that changes to the international system, if they are to be of any consequence, reflect the rise and fall of great powers. Hence, the neo-realist concern with polarity – whether the international system is dominated by a single power (unipolarity), by two powers (bipolarity) or three or more great powers (multipolarity).\textsuperscript{55}

Not all neo-realists accept the inference that Waltz then draws from this scheme, namely that there is a structural imperative for states to ally to balance the power of a rival.\textsuperscript{56} However, neo-realists do steer to the view that polarity itself is of crucial consequence in explaining how states coalesce in different patterns of alignment. In this connection, neo-realists make a number of observations. First, alliances are most stable under conditions of bipolarity. This, as Jack Snyder explains, is 'basically because the structure of the system provides little opportunity or incentive for defection. The two

\textsuperscript{50} Snyder, \textit{Alliance Politics}, pp.4-5.

\textsuperscript{51} Neo-realists draw a distinction between alliances as a response to power and as a response to threat. For instance, during the Cold War, Canada, Turkey and the states of Western Europe did not seek to balance the power of the US even though it possessed capabilities sufficient to overwhelm them. Rather they sought through NATO to balance the Soviet Union. As Stephen Walt explains, '[a]lthough the distribution of power is an extremely important factor, the level of threat is also affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions.' The Soviet Union by these criteria posed more of a threat than did the US. Walt's analysis is generally regarded as an important advance on Waltz and we follow his terminology in this section. See Walt, \textit{The Origins of Alliances}. The quotation is from p.5.


\textsuperscript{53} Snyder, \textit{Alliance Politics}, p.16.


\textsuperscript{55} J. Donnelly, \textit{Realism and International Relations} (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.17, 121.

\textsuperscript{56} Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, pp.125-127.
superpowers have no common enemy strong enough to motivate them to ally, and their allies either have no incentive to realign with the opposite superpower, or if they do have an incentive, they will be prevented from acting upon it by their own patron. Further, bipolarity introduces a clarity to international politics. The other side is clearly known and the security calculus is correspondingly obvious: to ally with states which share one’s security perception in order to counter the common danger.

Under multipolarity this clarity is absent and so more difficult issues of intra-alliance management arise. To quote Snyder once more, in a multipolar system ‘there is almost always a degree of uncertainty about who is friend and who is foe. Alliance agreements reduce the uncertainty but can never eliminate it […] The existence of alternatives and the uncertainty of alignment generate an endemic distrust among allies.’ In the absence of a single point of danger to focus attention, ‘alliance collapse’ according to Snyder ‘is a far more imminent possibility.’ This is so because two types of fear are ‘ever-present’: the fear of being abandoned by one’s ally and the fear of entrapment, ‘being dragged into a conflict over an ally’s interests that one does not share.’

Under conditions of unipolarity the dangers of abandonment and entrapment also arise, although they do so in a very different context. The presence of an overwhelming power or hegemon leads to two possible courses of action for other states: to balance against the hegemon or to ‘bandwagon’ with it. Balancing is the focus of Waltzian interpretations and can take either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ forms – the former entailing military counter-measures and the latter a search for military and foreign policy autonomy. As for bandwagoning, this may occur as a survival strategy, joining with the threatening side, in other words, in order to pre-empt the danger of enforced subservience. Equally, it may be the consequence of a somewhat different calculation – ‘bandwagoning for profit’ involving alignment with the hegemon to pursue opportunities for gain. This latter course offers to small and medium states succour or protection by the powerful. But protection against what? In a unipolar configuration, there is no rival state or alliance which acts as a single point of reference for alliance cohesion. Threat perceptions in this situation ‘cannot be fully deduced from the system's structure’ and, more so than under bipolarity, are influenced by ‘geographic variations, different perceptions of intentions, various domestic factors, and ideology.’

To summarise at this point, alliances, if they are to be understood as a response to an external threat, are more sustainable in conditions of bipolarity. Under multipolarity and unipolarity uncertainty over threat leads to intra-alliance division and undermines cohesion. What, then, does all this mean for NATO? Most neo-realists assume that since the end of the Cold War, the international system has acquired a unipolar character. As Cold War bipolarity disappeared and with it the Soviet threat, neo-realists initially took the view that NATO would, in parallel, wither away. NATO would not necessarily be formally disbanded; it might ‘persist on paper’ but it would '[cease] to function as an alliance.'
preserving NATO – for instance, by anchoring a unified Germany and maintaining the transatlantic link – were rejected as meaningful alternatives. These might sustain the Alliance in the short term but in 'the absence of a worthy opponent' NATO's long-term future was in doubt. According to Kenneth Waltz writing in 1993, 'NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are.'

NATO's seeming durability has led to a subsequent revision of this position. One response is through an analytical sleight of hand. NATO, Waltz, has argued, has changed so much since the end of the Cold War that it can no longer be regarded as the same entity. But as Waltz himself concedes, it is the old purpose of NATO that has disappeared not NATO itself. Explaining the durability of the Alliance thus requires analytical attention to what NATO actually still does. In this respect, neo-realists have concentrated on what they see as NATO's basic character as an alliance of states. To paraphrase Charles Glaser, if an alliance offers to states a means for achieving their goals then neo-realism 'should predict that states will [continue to] develop and use it.' This then gives rise to two patterns of behaviour. The first concerns leadership. In a unipolar system, the leading power enjoys considerable freedom of action in its foreign policy. Thus, NATO is preserved only insofar as it serves American interests, be this as a means of pacifying Europe, projecting influence or obtaining access to a 'toolbox' of assets in service of US grand strategy. This is, however, a source of weakness as much as strength. Under conditions of unipolarity, the leading power has fewer incentives to maintain an alliance than under bipolarity when every possible ally is an asset in standing up to the other pole. With American commitment to its European partners much less assured than during the Cold War and with American capabilities so far ahead of its Alliance partners, a pattern of by-passing NATO or 'cherry-picking' its assets is consequently to be expected. NATO is a convenience for the US not a pre-requisite of action. As such it is dispensable and its long-term future far from assured.

The second pattern concerns the calculations of NATO's lesser powers. Their interest in NATO stems from a variety of motives. These will be partly about threat perceptions (hedging against Russia or Germany) but, much more so than during the Cold War, other divergent calculations are present. For some, NATO is a vehicle by which they can air their concerns in front of the leading power; for others it may be a means of holding that power in check; and for others still it is a means of offering their services to the leading power and thus of acquiring bargaining leverage. Taken in combination, these patterns of state behaviour suggest that among its members a residual interest remains in NATO but that membership has become

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increasingly driven by sectional interests. In the absence of the cohesive influence provided by a compelling external enemy, NATO, a neo-realist would argue, will exhibit a more intense bargaining among it members, a growing unwillingness of allies to join in cooperative projects, and a readiness to break from alliance discipline and pursue unilateral foreign policy initiatives.74

Two general propositions relevant to NATO present themselves on the basis of the foregoing analysis.

(P.1.) PATTERNS OF ALIGNMENT: a shift in the structure of relative power will lead to a change in the national calculation of interests and thus to patterns of alignment. In the absence of an agreed and compelling external threat, this suggests that NATO no longer conforms to the balancing logic which drives the formation and maintenance of alliances. NATO may still persist but its effectiveness and coherence will inexorably diminish.

(P.2.) STATES AND LEADERSHIP: American support of NATO is dependent upon the costs of leadership. Should the benefits outstrip the disadvantages then the US will continue to support the Alliance; should the benefits remain static or fall then its support will be less forthcoming. Other Allies will calculate their interests in NATO according to sectional interest and the status of American leadership. Consequently, should the costs of followership rise then they will seek a recalibration of their role and will reduce their commitment to the Alliance; should followership be regarded as beneficial then their commitment will be maintained or strengthened.

Neo-realism does not specify an exact marker by which NATO's development can be judged. However, there is much that is implicit. To arrive at a picture of decline, for instance, would require evidence under the balancing proposition that threat perceptions are diverging, that NATO's military assets are no longer configured against a common threat (it is not, in other words, balancing anything) and that NATO's military structures are of lessening utility to its membership.75 Under the states and leadership proposition, meanwhile, it would be necessary to show that national policies have sidelined the Alliance and that the US, in particular, has a lessening appreciation of the benefits of NATO. Such evidence would not allow us to argue that NATO was at the point of termination, but it would be sufficiently compelling to indicate a trajectory of decline. Conversely, if the evidence pointed to a continuing member-state engagement with NATO and effective American leadership, we would be more sanguine about NATO's future development.

Propositions on NATO – Liberal Institutionalism

Reflecting their prevalence in international life, all three theories considered in this volume have something very direct to say about institutions. Liberal institutionalism (or as it is sometimes referred to, rational or functional institutionalism) is the most explicit. It is a body of work shaped by core concerns with how institutions arise, how they function and how they are maintained.76 Two of its leading exponents define 'institutions' as 'persistent

and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity and shape expectations. Despite this wide definitional ambit, liberal institutionalism nonetheless retains a concern with formal organized activity between states and so has found an application in the NATO case.

Liberal institutionalism shares neo-realism's assumption that states are rational, utility-maximising actors but parts company with the latter in its more positive assessment of the value of institutions. Institutions are seen as being useful in three separate ways. First, they help surmount obstacles to cooperation such as mistrust, uncertainty of intentions and high transaction costs. Second, they play an important role in addressing collective action dilemmas such as free-riding, the relative-gains problem, defection, and the 'tragedy of the commons'. And third, they furnish the practical means for policy coordination (information sharing, bureaucracy and so on). Scholars working in this vein differ on the degree to which institutions obtain an autonomy above the states which created them and in how far state preferences are shaped by institutional environments, but all agree that institutions do 'sometimes matter'. Even self-interested states, liberal institutionalists argue, have an interest in cooperation, either where interests are shared or there is an appreciation that policy coordination is the best means to achieve otherwise unattainable benefits. Institutions increase the likelihood of these cooperative results being obtained.

Institutionalist approaches are usually seen as more appropriate in the field of political economy than security. Institutions are not, however, unimportant in the case of the latter; the obstacles to cooperation may be higher but they can be overcome nonetheless. According to Celeste Wallander, institutions offer opportunities 'for monitoring and sanctioning others' behaviour, coming to mutually acceptable agreements, [and] increasing transparency about security interests and intentions'. Wallander has in mind here situations where states begin from a position of distrust. In fact, much institutionalised security cooperation proceeds from a point of non-adversarial relations. Within NATO, for instance, cooperation rests on a mutuality of interests built up over decades. As Wallander writes elsewhere, during its Cold War incarnation, the Alliance fulfilled the functional needs of its members through the development of institutional assets that both addressed the Soviet threat and helped to promote pacific relations among allies. NATO, in essence, served to promote cooperation in the sense defined above by steering individual state defence and security policies toward common ends.

The end of the Cold War has not put paid to this role. This has, in part, been a consequence of 'sunk costs' – NATO was a proven asset to its members and was retained because such a policy came at a lower cost than creating an entirely new set of institutional arrangements. These inertial factors, however, tell only part of the story. During the Cold War NATO achieved a high level of institutionalization and an ability to

manage security relations among its members. It had, in fact, developed as more than just an alliance; it equated to a 'security management institution' and, as such, was imbued with institutional assets which proved 'portable' once circumstances changed. As Wallander and others have argued, with the Cold War over NATO is not simply the least bad option but is a positive asset to its members, both new and established. Institutionalization and the consequent portability of its assets have meant an ability to adapt to post-Cold War circumstances – to address 'risks' as well as 'threats' and to present itself as an inclusive organization.84

Institutionalization, then, is a key variable when considering NATO. For liberal institutionalists this is a concept that embraces both 'the presence of formal organizations charged with performing specific [...] tasks' and 'the development of formal or informal rules' which govern how decisions are reached, how obligations are defined, and what functions members are to perform.85 Given this, it is possible to argue that there is a direct correlation between the course of NATO's development and the level and type of institutionalisation. As Forsberg and Herd have suggested, 'if institutions underpin effective cooperative efforts between states, then it follows that a dearth of institutions or weak, ineffective and outdated ones explain crises and the absence of cooperation despite common interests.'86

Prompted by these observations, we need to take into account two further considerations. First, institutionalization within the Alliance is variable and changing. Some functional areas (for instance, those concerned with joint military planning) have been associated with extensive and well-established procedures and structures, whereas others (partnership initiatives, for instance) have been the subject of less far-reaching efforts. It is possible to aggregate all these various processes and to talk of the institutionalisation of the Alliance as a whole, but equally, given the multi-functionality of NATO, it is also necessary to consider different sets of institutions within particular issue areas and thus differing degrees of institutionalisation. Such an approach not only accords with NATO's broadening agenda but has the added benefit of allowing for a more fine-grained set of observations able to distinguish between different NATO activities.

A second point concerns causality. The mere presence of institutions within NATO is not in itself sufficient to explain how the Alliance has developed. Institutions, after all, may be devoid of purpose or have only symbolic rather than functional value; consequently they may make little or no difference. By contrast, institutions which are functionally valuable, well-designed, and the site of tried and trusted procedures of interaction are more likely to have an impact – to be effective, in other words. In this light, institutionalization needs to be considered alongside effectiveness. Here, as Oran Young has suggested, there are three relevant markers: implementation, compliance and persistence. An institution is effective to the degree that it is (i) able to address a set of problems and to implement relevant policies; (ii) ensure compliance among relevant members to the core provisions and rules of the institution; and (iii) ensure its survival in a changing environment. And as Young makes clear, this is always going to be a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing proposition; it may also differ from issue to issue and from one time period to another.87

Of these markers, compliance is worth some additional comment given the particular nature of this phenomenon within NATO. Compliance in institutionalist terms can be conceived as operating at two distinct levels. First, it concerns the degree to which states comply with the norms of a particular set of institutional arrangements (a regime, an international organisation or some other form). Second, and more specifically, compliance is a measure of how well states conform to particular, policy-relevant agreements reached within this setting. Given its rationalist and functionalist frame of reference, liberal institutionalism tends to concern itself with the latter. Compliance in this sense assumes that agreement has been reached, usually through a process of bargaining and compromise, and focuses on the extent to which agreed commitments are being met. An ideal-type process of compliance within an inter-governmental setting might then involve: a convergence of state preferences, a consequent delegation of policy to an international institution, and the relevant states complying in practical terms with the resulting policy. In the NATO setting such a process of compliance would, in turn, have two notable peculiarities. It would be non-coercive – compliance is not induced by a fear of punishment. And it would be non-enforceable - states are able in NATO to demur from an agreed policy by opting out of its provisions.

Given this combination of rational self-interest and voluntarism one would expect compliance in NATO to be less than assured. As Ian Hurd has argued, compliance in situations of this sort is contingent upon the object of institutional loyalty 'providing a positive stream of benefits'. Such a situation 'can be stable while the payoff structure is in equilibrium but the actors are constantly assessing the benefits of revisionism.' Further, 'long-term relationships among self-interested agents are difficult to maintain because actors do not value the relation[ship] itself, only the benefits accruing from it. Such long-term relations may [...] persist, but only while the instrumental payoff remains positive.' To modify this picture somewhat, institutional analysis does allow for institutional effects, a predisposition toward compliance, by virtue of long-term exposure to the habits and demands of the institutional environment and raised expectations of compliance on the part of others. Compliance might thus occur even if a short-term interest is not being served. This is because of an appreciation that in the long-term non-compliance will be harmful to a state's reputation, will undermine the reliability of the institution from which that state derives other benefits and will encourage a cycle of harmful non-compliance on the part of others.

Institutional effects of this sort, however, become less assured over time when participation in an institutional arrangement is perceived as offering fewer and fewer benefits, when compliance or restraint is not matched by the behaviour of others, and when alternative courses of action outside the institution are considered feasible. Further, compliance is also a function of: (i) numbers (the more states involved in an institution and the greater the number of issues it has to deal with the greater are the
possibilities for non-compliance), and (ii) (un)certainty (the less predictable the issues that
an institution has to deal with the less certain are the benefits of cooperation). These
problems can be addressed through institutional innovation (for instance, the introduction
of more flexible decision-making procedures, more concerted policy-planning and so on),
and so we return to institutionalization.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can posit two propositions:

(P3) EFFECTIVENESS: the likelihood of NATO meeting new and multiple
security challenges – and of thus persisting as an effective actor - rises with institutional
adaptation and the development of portable institutional assets

(P4) COMPLIANCE: institutional adaptation decreases the probability of non-
compliance brought about by NATO's more complex agenda and rising membership

The processes at work here may balance one another – effective institutionalization, for
instance, may help to avert or contain incidences of non-compliance as well as boosting
Alliance effectiveness. They may, however, also be negatively reinforcing. A NATO that is
under-institutionalized would be less able to stem disagreement and non-compliance, and
so the effectiveness of the Alliance would diminish. Both propositions, by extension, offer
markers to judge NATO's development. In relation to the first proposition, a NATO
characterised by institutional stasis or deinstitutionalization – where, for instance, NATO's
institutions lag behind security challenges and are abandoned or marginalised by member
states - is likely to be a body in decline. Conversely, an Alliance marked by institutional
adaptation and flexibility, one in which Allies continue to regard highly NATO's institutional
procedures as valuable, is an Alliance that enjoys better long-term prospects. According
to the second proposition, a NATO confronted with a worsening problem of compliance is
suggestive of decline, particularly when such incidents involve key states. An ability to
recover from non-compliance or to contain and minimise its negative consequences,
meanwhile, suggests a NATO that is sustainable. Little evidence of non-compliance at all,
meanwhile, would indicate institutional good health.

Propositions on NATO – Social Constructivism

Neo-realism and liberal institutionalism are, despite their differences, both rationalist in
their approach to institutions. Rationalism views international institutions as the
receptacles of utilitarian strategies pursued by states. Institutions are thus either an
aggregation of power (neo-realism) or an expression of functional efficiency (liberal
institutionalism). Social constructivism is a broad church of thought, but in general its view
of institutions parts company with these assumptions. Here, two approaches derived from
constructivist thinking will be outlined and their implications for NATO considered.

The first, concerns the notion that international institutions (and formal inter-
governmental organisations, specifically) are an expression of identity. This is a view
derived from core social constructivist premises. Following Edward Kolodziej, three such
premises are relevant to the study of security. To begin with, for constructivists, 'all

94 Derived from B. Koremenos, C. Lipson and D. Snidal, 'The Rational Design of International Institutions',
95 On processes of (de)institutionalization see Koremenos et al., 'Rational Design: Looking Back to
Move Forward', in Koremenos et al. (eds.), The Rational Design of International Institutions, pp.316-317,
and W.R. Scott, Institutions and Organizations (second edition) (Thousand Oaks etc.: Sage
96 E. Kolodziej, Security and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005),
knowledge is socially constructed’. In other words, human relations, including international relations, consist essentially of thoughts and ideas and not just of material conditions or forces. Second, and linked, relations between humans and, at the international level, between states are imparted meaning through social interaction. In Alexander Wendt’s well-known formulation, the condition of anarchy which for a realist results in fear, insecurity and conflict is for a social constructivist a social structure and this may well be an ‘anarchy of friends’ as much as it is ‘one of enemies’. 97 Third, the character of human relations, be this between individuals, groups or states, reflects interests derived from identities and not the reverse as rationalist approaches would have it. For Ted Hopf, this has important implications for cooperation. Where identities are shared (where, in other words, the actors ‘have developed an understanding of each other as partners in some common enterprise’) then cooperation will be initiated and will persist. 98 As Thomas Risse-Kappen argues, this has a particular relevance if these identities are democratic. ‘[D]emocracies’, he suggests, ‘appear to infer external behaviour from the values and norms governing the domestic decision-making processes. These norms insure the non-violent resolution of conflicts. Together with the publicity of the democratic process, they reduce uncertainties about peaceful intentions. Democracies then view each other as peaceful, which substantially reduces the significance of the “security dilemma” among them and, thus, removes a major obstacle to stable security cooperation.’ More profoundly, ‘[t]he democratic character of one’s domestic structures then leads to a collective identification process among actors of democratic states’. 99

The strong possibility of collective identity formation among democracies, in turn, suggests that the institutions through which they cooperate can be more than mere expressions of functional efficiency. Specifically, NATO as a collection of democratic states helps to forge a ‘positive identity’ among its members, a sense of empathetic group loyalty which ‘transcends relationships built on particular interest calculations’. 100 NATO is thus an example of a ‘community organization’. Such a body, according to Frank Schimmelfennig, is ‘not so much constituted by geographical location and the concomitant security or economic interdependence’ but rather is established by a community of states, is based on a collective identity and acts ‘to realize the community values and to uphold the community norms’. 101 In NATO’s case, this community of values existed before the Cold War and was strengthened further during the stand-off with the Soviet bloc. With the Cold War over, the absence of a common threat to rival Soviet communism need not lead to a dissolution of NATO so long as these values continue to be shared.

On this basis, constructivist analysis has tended to be rather sanguine on NATO’s prospects. The values of democracy and free-market liberalism reinforced by a shared sense of history, mutual trust and ‘we-feeling’ of mutual sympathies among allies, have been regarded as lending a continued vitality to the Alliance. These qualities were the premise for enlargement and partnership initiatives (to extend NATO’s values) and for intervention in the Balkans (to protect these values when challenged). Acting on the basis of values in this manner affirms the identity of the alliance and thus the reason for its continued existence. 102 Or, to put it somewhat more emphatically, NATO has retained the

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102 V.M. Kitchen, ‘Argument and Identity Change in the Atlantic Security Community’, Security Dialogue,
potential to develop as the lynchpin of 'an expanding pacific federation, informed by a common commitment to democratic principles and embedded in an increasingly integrated Euro-Atlantic area.'

Indisputable evidence of intra-Alliance division, at its worse over Iraq, has required an amendment to this view. NATO's collective identity, some constructivists have argued, has continued to be underpinned by shared democratic values and mutual sympathies and, transatlantic differences notwithstanding, these have actually been advanced following the Iraq debacle owing to the ongoing process of enlargement. This assertion has, however, generated a powerful counter claim to the effect that there has been a growing divergence between 'European' and American values, and that NATO's identity had been diluted by the entry of new, less-established democracies. Yet even if we reject this claim and accept that the transatlantic community of values has been stable, social constructivists do recognize that NATO has been challenged in other ways. The post 9/11 agenda of Afghanistan, Iraq, terrorism and WMD has been seen as according less with NATO's 'value-based approach to security' than the political and humanitarian agenda of enlargement, partnership and Balkan stabilisation that was NATO's main preoccupation during the 1990s. NATO has, in other words, been increasingly diverted into areas of concern where its collective identity is not at stake; the views of Allies are consequently more discordant and the quality of cooperation poorer.

Turning away from issues of identity, a second constructivist approach is more rooted in a concern with norms. This argues that community organizations such as NATO embody norms that structure the behaviour of their members. Such norms define what is socially appropriate and members will thus be guided or socialized by these rather than acting simply according to what is instrumentally rational. In the case of NATO, norms of this type are seen as an outgrowth of the democratic character of NATO's members. 'Democracies', Thomas Risse-Kappen argues, 'externalize their internal norms when cooperating with each other. Power asymmetries will be mediated by norms of democratic decision-making among equals emphasising persuasion, compromise, and the non-use of force or coercive power'. In this setting, the norms of consultation, consensus-building and nonhierarchy become significant. Bjorn Knutsen, similarly, has pointed to the norm of 'mutual responsiveness' or 'the willingness to mutually adapt to each other's security needs within a multilateral framework'. This Knutsen maintains has been the 'the basic norm in transatlantic relations since the foundation of NATO.'

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107 Schimmelfennig refers to a norm as 'an idea that defines a collective standard of proper behaviour [...] of actors [as well as] the appropriate means of action.' See his The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe, p.71.
109 B.O. Knutsen, 'NATO and the Changing Nature of the Transatlantic Security Community' (paper presented to the Sixth Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Turin, September 2007),
meanwhile, has pointed to the multilateral norms of indivisibility of security and reciprocity.\textsuperscript{110} Norm compliance in NATO is viewed as generally positive. Yet norms can be violated – in the NATO context, the crises over Suez and Iraq being significant cases in point. Why long-held norms become susceptible in this manner is seen as a consequence primarily of changes at the domestic level. Hence, throughout much of the 2000s, NATO’s troubles were pinned on the Bush administration with its revisionist view of global order and assertive unilateralism. In the NATO context, so the argument goes, this meant American indifference to the preferences of its allies and also a shift away from the indivisibility norm (evident, for instance, in the American preference for ‘coalitions of the willing’ and its penchant to opt in or out of the Alliance depending on circumstances).\textsuperscript{111} While the potency of the US in NATO is unique, other significant allies (France, Germany, the UK and Turkey for example), equally, have an ability (which they have sometimes put into practice) to stray from NATO norms in a manner that is disruptive to the Alliance as a whole.

While we might expect norms to be challenged on occasion, what is important for institutional good health is that norm violation does not become a disruptive and persistent pattern; if it does, Gunther Hellmann has argued, NATO ‘could indeed be endangered.’\textsuperscript{112} This would be the case for two reasons. First because norms are what make institutions work, their weakening, by definition, renders institutionalised cooperation less and less achievable.\textsuperscript{113} Second, a situation in which norms were no longer a reliable guide to behaviour would mean that the identity of the community organisation itself would have been subverted. States within NATO would, in an environment in which mutual responsiveness, consensus and compromise had broken down, no longer view themselves automatically as allies and partners.\textsuperscript{114}

Social constructivism as described in this section, then, offers two propositions relevant to NATO:

(P5) IDENTITY the institutionalization of cooperation varies according to how far the members share a common identity. And from this a corollary then follows: where the object of cooperation reaffirms that identity, the cohesion of NATO will be strengthened; where, conversely, the object of cooperation undermines that identity, the cohesion of NATO will be weakened.

(P6) NORMS shared norms underpin the cohesion of NATO. If the norms governing member state behaviour are respected then NATO will develop positively; if, conversely, these norms are repeatedly violated then NATO’s development will be adversely affected. The future of NATO, in other words, depends on the continuous reaffirmation of its underlying norms.

Under the first proposition we would be alert to the presence (or absence) of expressions of identity by individual Allies – that is, affirmations of loyalty (in both discourse and policy) to Atlanticism, the transatlantic community and to NATO itself. Similarly, we would also be interested in discourse and policy at the NATO level – the articulation, for instance, of a clear and consistent vision of common security. As for the second proposition, here, as already intimated above, what is relevant is how far Allies

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sjursen, ‘On the Identity of NATO’, p.702.
\item Hellmann, ‘A Brief Look’, p.17.
\item Scott, \textit{Institutions and Organizations}, p.182.
\item Knutsen, ‘NATO and the Changing Nature of the Transatlantic Security Community’, pp.3, 21-23.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
conform to established Alliance norms or, conversely, how willing they are to transgress them. Both these propositions are principally directed toward interactions within the Alliance, but equally they can be extended to NATO's ties with 'partners'. That cooperation will be more forthcoming insofar as partners accept NATO values (and hence identity) and norms is a useful working assumption.

Having now surveyed our three theoretical approaches, it is worth returning briefly to the issue of regeneration and decline. In Chapter 1, we described in broad terms what constitutes those two distinct trends. The definitions offered there can, in turn, be complemented by a more theoretically-derived assessment. Thus, a neo-realist view, which considers alliances as forms of balancing behaviour by states, will assume that alliance health is reflected in a convergence of threat perceptions, the effective operation of integrated military capabilities and the continuing utilisation of alliance structures by the predominant power. The unravelling of these trends, conversely, marks out alliance decline. By the logic of neo-liberal institutionalism, similarly, institutional adaptation and compliance with institutional agreements is a measure of regeneration, while deinstitutionalisation and non-compliance typifies decline. In the case of social constructivism, finally, a shared identity and a consensus on norms reflects cohesion and community, it presumes regeneration in other words; whereas a weakening of identity and norm divergence suggests an opposite trend.

Conclusion

In the course of this chapter we have argued that to understand NATO we need to break away from two confining mindsets: that NATO is an alliance narrowly understood and that its evolution and future can be understood through the lens of single IR theories. NATO, rather is a complex even *sui generis* body and this complexity, as well as the fluid environment in which it has had to operate requires a theoretically eclectic approach when undertaking analysis. To discipline this analysis, NATO has been subjected to a series of theoretically-informed propositions. We make no pretence at scientific exactitude in this endeavour. We will not be able to 'prove' what NATO's trend of development is going to be, but the approach we have adumbrated above does mean that we will be able to specify probable trends in its development. In Chapter One we argued that NATO's development can be understood by reference to two broad categories, those of decline and regeneration. The theoretical approaches surveyed in this chapter lend themselves well to these, in that each allows inferences to be drawn as to where NATO is heading. Yet while each is useful, our view is that none taken alone suffices. The increasing complexity of NATO and its growing embrace of ever more ambitious tasks means the possibility cannot be foreclosed that elements of both decline and regeneration may coexist, a consequence of different patterns of development occurring in different issue areas. Single-theory approaches are able to cast light on this process but alone offer only an incomplete account given either a predisposition toward a particular view of NATO's trajectory (most apparent in the unambiguous assertions of neo-realism) or the articulation of a specific (and arguably too narrow) conceptualisation of the Alliance. The theoretical pluralism advocated in this chapter provides a means of mapping this complexity. Its application through a series of issue-based case studies forms the substance of the next five chapters.