Survival politics

IO Survival Politics

International Organisations amid the Crisis of Multilateralism

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International Organisations amid the Crisis of Multilateralism

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

NATO leaders gathered in Brussels on 25 May 2017 for the first meeting among allies since Donald Trump had entered the White House in January that year. Despite ongoing construction works, NATO officials had decided to open the alliance's sleek new headquarters on Boulevard Léopold III to impress the former real estate tycoon. This was part of a wider effort by officials to design the meeting in a way that would placate the US President. Trump had been fiercely critical of NATO ever since his emergence as a public persona in the 1980s, calling NATO 'obsolete' and insisting that allies needed to 'pay up for past deficiencies, or they have to get out. And if that breaks up NATO, it breaks up NATO' (Trump 2016). In the event, the attempt by officials backfired. When Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg greeted the President, among the first things Trump indignantly asked was: "Why did you spend so much money on this ridiculous building?" 'Jens knew that he was in trouble then', the official present continued (see chapter 4, Interview#7).

This brief encounter was a herald of what was to come. At this meeting in Brussels and in the subsequent years, the US President continued to criticise the alliance as an outdated and wasteful relic, berated fellow allies for inadequate defence spending, and espoused a nakedly transactional approach to collective defence, which challenged NATO's foundational principle of unconditional solidarity in face of military threats. In a sign of how close Trump came to announcing the US exit, US lawyers of the NATO delegation were instructed during the 2018 summit to analyse the North Atlantic Treaty for legal pathways of withdrawal (see Schuette 2021a).

Trump's threats to NATO also reflected a wider, more profound challenge to the multilateral order. Multilateralism refers to the coordination of relations among at least three states based on 'generalized principles of conduct' (Ruggie 1992: 571) and 'diffuse reciprocity' (Keohane 1986), whereby over the long run states should mutually benefit and more than had they engaged in a different form of institutional coordination. The rare convergence of states on liberal generalised principles such as open trade, cooperative security, and universal human rights in the post-Cold War era no longer exists (see Ikenberry 2020: 33ff.). Without a widespread agreement on the abstract principles that should organise international interactions, multilateral arrangements likely give way to transactionalism with states acting in an ad hoc fashion to realise particular self-interests. And when IOs do not satisfy these interests, states will circumvent, undermine, or even exit them.

Accordingly, international organisations (IOs) – such as the EU, WTO, or the UN – and multilateral arrangements – including the Paris Climate Agreement or the Iran Nuclear Deal – have all suffered from contestations both by Western and emerging powers. Membership withdrawals from IOs, systematic violations of key norms and rules, purposive blocking of the functioning of institutions, and funding cuts have become an omnipresent feature of international politics. In turn, transactional bilateralism and informal cooperation outside of established multilateral institutions has proliferated (e.g. Meissner 2018; Roger 2020; Vabulas and Snidal 2013; Westerwinter et al. 2021). The contemporary crisis of multilateralism may

mark an inflection point in global governance, at which the post-Cold War trend toward greater multilateralisation of world politics is halted and even reversed.

However, the NATO episode also demonstrates countervailing forces that seek to protect existing IOs. The example of NATO officials' efforts to impress Trump with a shiny building may appear banal but they suggest that senior officials do not intend to stand idly by and watch their organisations perish. Indeed, over the subsequent three years, the NATO leadership went above and beyond existing playbooks to protect the Alliance from President Trump. Stoltenberg used statistical acrobatics to present defence spending figures in a way that pleased the US President; he employed bureaucratic tools to organise meetings to insulate NATO from Trump; he actively circumvented the White House; and the Secretary-General appeared on Fox News, a highly partisan channel, to give a laudatory interview on Trump. Such political behaviour would have previously been unthinkable for a Secretary-General of NATO.

These anecdotes illustrate the key dynamics that lie at the core of this dissertation. From Brussels, to Geneva, to New York, senior officials have scrambled to help IOs weather threats to their existence. They have publicly defended their IO, driven reform efforts, and built new coalitions with external actors, in doing so often departing from accepted scripts. And to some avail: while some IOs, like the WTO, face collapse, others such as NATO outlived President Trump. Based on extensive empirical research, including 87 interviews with senior officials, this dissertation demonstrates that the extraordinary behaviour by IO institutional actors was not an aberration but a widespread phenomenon. This dissertation then is about the contemporary crisis of multilateralism, the threats to IOs, and the quest by key officials to exercise political agency. In other words, it is about the *Survival Politics of IOs*.

The research question: How do IOs respond to existential crises?

The central objective of this dissertation is to understand the behaviour of IOs when they face existential crises and the implications for the crises outcomes. Threats to the survival of IOs are of course not a new phenomenon; recent research shows that a third of IOs since 1815 have died (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020) and almost 40% of IOs since 1950 have descended into a zombie state where they merely operate perfunctorily (Gray 2018; see also Debre and Dijkstra 2021; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019). However, two antithetical features distinguish contemporary from past crises.

First, the contemporary crisis of multilateralism appears unprecedentedly intense and widespread (Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021; Bunde, Eisentraut, and Schuette forthcoming). Contestation emanates not only from rising powers, which are dissatisfied with the institutional status quo, but also from the US hegemon and other established powers, as well as civil society actors. The era in which IOs enjoyed a 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970: 4) among Western electorates is long gone (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Schuette 2019a). Unlike in the past, where fellow states would have been the primary addresses of demands for change, dissatisfied powers and civil society actors increasingly target international institutions (Stephen and Zuern 2019). Indeed, a broad spectrum of IOs has been contested, ranging from

NATO, the UN and its agencies, the EU, the International Whaling Commission, the Paris Climate Agreement, to the International Criminal Court. In explaining the severity of the contemporary crisis of multilateralism, scholars point to the confluence of 1) power shifts from the US toward China in particular (e.g. Ikenberry and Nexon 2019; Kruck and Zangl 2021); 2) functional gridlock of existing institutions and their concomitant failure to effectively address collective action problems such as the 2008 financial crisis, climate change, or refugee and migratory movements (Hale et al. 2013; Jupille et al. 2013); 3) the decline of liberal hegemony and greater ideological diversity (Stuenkel 2016; Voeten 2020); and 4) severe legitimacy deficits as a result of the rise of liberal intrusiveness as IOs' authority expanded and liberal missions intensified (Zuern 2018; Boerzel and Zuern 2021).

Second, IOs have simultaneously never been more powerful, or authoritative, as measured by their autonomy from states, binding powers, and policy competences. Amid the 'bureaucratisation of world politics' (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), recent works show that IOs have assumed significant authority beyond the immediate control of states (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zuern, Tokhi, and Binder 2021). Indeed, a burgeoning research agenda on institutional actors in IOs demonstrates that they both develop independent preferences and increasingly influence the policy-making cycle beyond the immediate control of the member states (Bauer and Ege 2016; Bayerlein et al. 2020; Biermann and Siebenhuehner 2009; Chorev 2012; Eckhardt et al. 2021; Ege 2020; Jinnah 2012; Johnston 2014; Knill et al. 2019). Reinforcing this agential turn in the IO literature are recent accounts that focus on the influence on individuals in world politics (Copelovitch and Rickard 2021; Drezner 2020; Hall and Woods 2018; Jervis 2013; Kaarbo 2017; Merand 2021; Saunders 2022; White 2022). For some, it is precisely this rise in political authority of IOs which underlies their contestation (e.g. Zuern 2018).

The scholarly debate, however, on how IOs behave under these two conditions is still in its infancy. While there is a vibrant research agenda in the discipline of public administration on national institutions in crisis (e.g. Boin et al. 2020) or EU studies (e.g. Jones et al. 2021), international relations scholars have only recently started studying systematically how IOs behave in crisis. Large-n studies point to the role of IO secretariats (Debre and Dijkstra 2021) and the quality of its bureaucracy (Gray 2018) to explain the outcomes of crises of IOs, but they cannot probe their causal arguments. Another strand zooms in on one sub-category of contestation by exploring the legitimation practices of IOs in response to legitimacy crises (Dingwerth et al 2020; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Lenz et al. 2020; Tallberg and Zuern 2019). Others show that IOs can exploit external crises to make authority leaps, which is not the same, however, as responding to a crisis of the IO itself (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; White 2019). Von Allwoerden (2022), Zaccaria (2022), Hirschmann (2021), and Heinkelmann-Wild and Jankauskas (2022) offer the first insights on concrete IO responses to contestation.

This dissertation therefore sets out to advance this debate. It is premised on the proposition that the dialectic conditions of both unprecedented authority and crises may give rise to distinct kinds of IO behaviour. The dissertation is hence guided by the following question: *How do IOs respond to existential crises?* To provide an answer to that question, the dissertation focuses

on contemporary crises (since 2014) because they are most likely to represent the aforementioned dialectic conditions. The dissertation also zooms in on a sub-set of IOs – the EU, NATO, and OSCE –, the selection of which was inspired both by methodological demands as well as political salience of the cases. Given the scope, there is no claim for empirical exhaustiveness, although the findings should possess external validity beyond the chosen cases.

The dissertation offers a conceptual answer to the research question, which emerged from the individual empirical contributions. The completion of several case studies crystallised a common and distinct logic of IO behaviour in diverse settings, which is hereafter conceived as *IO Survival Politics*. Hence, the dissertation initially pursues concept formation by defining Survival Politics and discussing its ontological underpinnings, empirical manifestations, and logical differences to other types of IO behaviour (Gerring 1999; Goertz 2020). This conceptualisation – the 'captur[ing] in abstract terms [of] the common features of the class of the empirical phenomenon' (Perri 6 and Bellamy 2013: 130) – serves to logically connect several Survival Politics mechanisms, in order to show that they represent a distinct type of behaviour. As a result, the conceptualisation of Survival Politics aims to both make an independent contribution to the literature on IOs and function as the basis for subsequent empirical chapters. In doing so, the dissertation draws inspiration from and contributes to a variety of disciplines including international relations, public administration, and EU studies, as well as recent sub-disciplinary discussions on regime complexity, legitimation, crisis management, and power transition. The ensuing empirical cases illustrate the different types of IO Survival Politics by providing evidence from three different eurocentric IOs, before the conclusion offers cross-case reflections.

The argument: IO Survival Politics

The central argument of this dissertation is that when IOs face existential crises, institutional actors engage in distinct forms of extraordinary behaviour to help the organisation survive, which differs from the behaviour usually associated with secretariats. This section conceptualises IO Survival Politics, explains the analytical framework, juxtaposes it with normal bureaucratic politics, and situates the argument within the wider literature on international organisations and multilateralism.

Conceptualising IO Survival Politics

IOs seek to ensure their survival. What appears a truism is in fact a contentious ontological claim. That states seek survival in a hostile world is among the most prominent and enduring premises in international relations theory (Fazal 2008; Howes 2003; Waltz 1979). However, this defining characteristic does not tend to be conferred upon IOs, which most scholars consider epiphenomena, functional instruments, or arenas for state bargaining. While more constrained than other units in the system, IOs are, however, potentially political actors (Louis and Maertens 2021). Some IOs have powerful resources, political levers of influence, and external supporters with stakes in the IO's continued existence. They are composed of individuals who likely identify with the mission of the IO and whose career prospects may be

dependent on the organisation's survival (von Billerbeck 2020). There is therefore no a priori reason why the logic of survival does not apply to IOs. IO Survival Politics then occurs when in face of existential crises, institutional actors engage in distinct forms of extraordinary behaviour to help the organisation survive.

The scope condition for IO Survival Politics is that IOs need to come under existential crisis. Crises consists of threats to an entity that compel a response under time pressure and uncertainty (see Boin et al. 2016; Lipscy 2020; Reus-Smit 2007). Existential crises, in turn, put IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions, which could variably result in the dissolution of the IOs or their decline into a zombie-state, in which the IO continues to operate on paper but without operational significance (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Gray 2018). Yet, even existential crises may vary in the degree of uncertainty or time pressure (Hofmann and Kreuder-Sonnen 2022; Seabrooke and Tsingou 2019). Some crises, such as an environmental disaster, may be acute and demand an instantaneous response. Others, such as global warming, may be creeping as its most serious consequences will materialise in the later future (Boin et al. 2020; Reus-Smit 2007). Nonetheless, acute crises should be more conducive toward extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors as the concomitant greater degree of uncertainty should remove normal behavioural constraints. This dissertation interrogates this assumption by analysing existential crises that vary in their temporal dimension.

Generally, only the most severe types of crises meet the scope conditions of existential crisis, including the looming spectres of withdrawal of key member states (see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019); cuts to the resources of the IO to the extent that it struggles to fulfil core tasks (Heldt and Schmidtke 2017; Hirschmann 2021); blocking key appointments to render an IO inoperable (Hopewell 2021); repeated and unsanctioned violations of the IO's foundational norms (Koschut 2016); substantial repatriation of delegated powers (Hooghe et al. 2017); or the empowerment of competing institutions at the cost of the incumbent (Debre and Dijkstra 2021). The existential nature of crises, however, is not predetermined by their properties but subject to the interpretations and discursive framing of key actors (e.g. Buzan et al. 1998). It is therefore the empirical task of the researcher to individually demonstrate the perceived existential nature of each case.

It is in the context of existential crises that IO may engage in Survival Politics. Crises contexts not only tend to enhance the role of key decision-makers as uncertainty and time pressure often privilege informal agency over institutional procedures (Lipscy 2020). They should also alter the underlying behavioural logics of IOs because functional ambitions to provide effective problem-solving or extend the IO's authority should be subjugated to the safeguarding of the IO (see Knill et al. 2019: 87). Indeed, when their survival is at stake, institutional actors are likely to resort to exceptional behaviour because following the normal playbook is likely to be insufficient. They will probably intensify the strategies with which institutional actors exert influence during normal times. But senior officials may also go above and beyond the strategies used under conditions of normal policymaking and act with particular assertion and employ unprecedented measures as the short-term logic of survival overshadows long-term concerns

over reputation or backlashes from member states (see Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; Schmitt 1922). That is, the difference between IO behaviour during crisis and normal policymaking contexts is likely both in degree and kind. In doing so, institutional actors engage in politics, whereby they work against structural, institutional, or legal constraints to reassert agency and create space for consequential choices (Mérand 2021: 7ff.).

IO Survival Politics then occurs when senior officials go to the extremes to protect their organisation. It may thus be defined as the *extraordinary political behaviour, both in degree and kind, by institutional actors to ensure the survival of the international organisation in existential crisis.* The agents in this model are the institutional actors of the respective IO. IOs tend to consist of executive governing bodies of member state representatives, such as the UN Security Council or the European Council, assemblies of parliamentary representatives, and the bureaucracy who owe primary loyalty to the IO (Jankauskas 2022; Rittberger et al. 2019). The institutional actors in question in this dissertation are those members of the bureaucracy who hold influential positions within the IO and are thus most likely to shape its behaviour. These include the secretary general (or executive head), deputy secretary general, and directors of units. IO Survival Politics presupposes entrepreneurial behaviour by senior officials as it requires them to push boundaries of previously acceptable behaviour (see Petridou and Mintrom, 2021).

Analytical framework

The necessary condition for IO Survival Politics is that institutional actors develop survival instincts. That is, they need to initially perceive that the IO is in existential crisis and subsequently develop preferences for survival. What counts as existential crisis is not objectively predetermined but subject to interpretation of those institutional actors who can most likely shape the IO's responses (i.e. secretary-generals, deputy secretary-generals, or other senior officials like unit directors or members of the secretary-general's private office). During normal conditions of policymaking, institutional actors are no monolith (Bauer and Ege 2016). They tend to have heterogeneous backgrounds and pursue a variety of institutional and personal preferences (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Ege 2020). But when their 'organizational security' (Barnett and Coleman 2005) is at stake, the desire to survive, or 'positional orientation' (Knill et al. 2019), should override alternative preferences. Existential crises should therefore prompt 'administrative cohesion' (Bauer and Ege 2016). While parsimonious, the premise of survival instincts is the necessary starting point for the analytical framework depicted below.

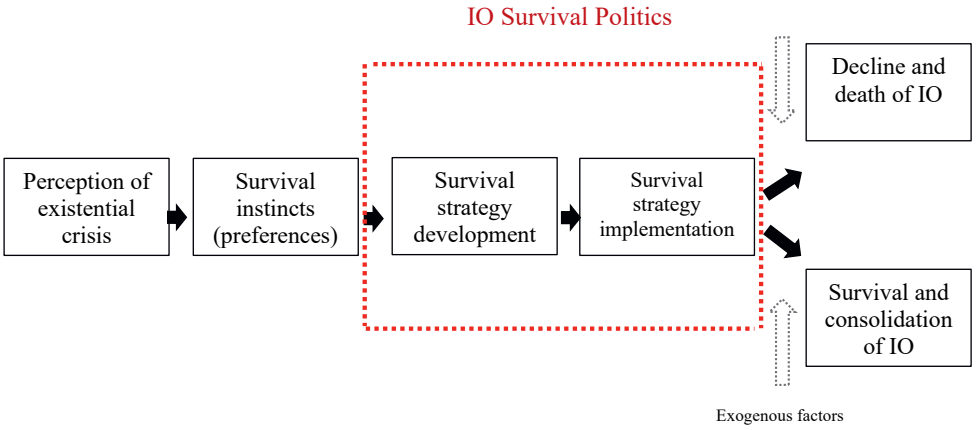

Figure 1.1: Analytical framework

IO Survival Politics consists of two distinct analytical stages. First, senior officials intellectually develop a survival strategy. Based on the classic triad, a survival strategy should identify the levers of influence institutional actors possess (means); indicate how these levers should be pulled (ways); and specify the ultimate objective (ends), such as surviving by fending off contestation, reform, or appeasement (see Lykke 1989; also Chorev 2012). While survival strategies will rarely appear as formalised master plans, to amount to a survival strategy there need to be clear indications that officials' responses were not of an ad-hoc nature but followed a discernible plan (see Silove 2018). As elaborated below, interviews with closely involved officials serve as key method to ascertain whether institutional actors followed such rationale. Developing a survival strategy requires a secretariat of sufficient size, cohesion, and differentiation from the member states to offer the intellectual firepower to analyse the crisis and devise a response (Bauer and Ege 2016; Debre and Dijkstra 2021). It also needs the leadership of senior officials, who must recognize the gravity of the crisis, diffuse that sense throughout the bureaucracy, and provide thought leadership (Boin et al. 2016; Hall and Woods 2018). As a result, only IOs with basic institutional capacity, not very small IOs or informal institutions like the G7/20, can be expected to engage in Survival Politics, which would explain the large-n findings that institutionalisation (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020) or the size of the secretariat (Debre and Dijkstra 2021) correlate positively with survival.

The second stage of IO Survival Politics entails the implementation of the survival strategy. That is, institutional actors use their varying levers of influence to achieve their objective of survival. Formal and informal agenda-setting powers, for instance, allow senior officials to raise public awareness, frame issues favourably, and shape internal proceedings (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Tallberg 2010). They may also utilise their networks to build coalitions with external actors to overcome opposition from certain member states or affect the calculus of initially intransigent states (Abbott et al. 2015; Dijkstra 2017); broker compromises among other actors that favours their preferences (Beach 2004); or use bureaucratic tools to shield the

organisation from dissatisfied member states (Beach and Smeets 2019). To amount to IO Survival Politics, these tactics need to be implemented with greater intensity and through distinct and extraordinary ways compared to conditions of normal policymaking.

The repertoire of available levers is IO- and context-dependent. Relevant institutional properties include delegated authority (Hooghe et al. 2017), administrative resources (Xu and Weller 2008), autonomy from member states (Gray 2018), or communicative capacities (Ecker-Erhardt 2018). Like the development of survival strategies, their implementation requires adept leadership by key officials to mobilise the institutional capacity, activate existing networks, and tailor responses to the specific circumstances (Knill et al. 2019). Unlike the first stage of Survival Politics, however, the implementation of survival strategy is not solely in the hands of institutional actors, which is signified by the grey arrows in the visual representation. IOs are rarely the most powerful actors and face significant legal and institutional constraints as well as structurally dominating member states (Hall and Woods 2018; Moravcsik 1998). There is ample literature on the influence powerful states directly exert in IOs (e.g. Stone 2011; Tokhi and Zuern 2022) and that institutional actors anticipate the preferences of the key member states and act accordingly (Clark and Dolan 2021). It should therefore not be expected that institutional actors in intergovernmental organisations would and could overtly contradict core interests of veto players or even hegemons (Schuette 2021a). When preference constellations are diffuse, however, institutional actors face opportunities to use their available responses to act on their perceptions. As such, the degree of preference centrality among veto players – that is, how salient an issue and how clearly defined a government's preference is – delineates the opportunities for agency of institutional actors (see Ege et al. 2022).

Thus, the institutional actors' influence on survival is observable at these two reference points – the development and implementation of survival strategies – relying on the counterfactual logic that if institutional actors had been absent, the outcome of the existential crisis would have differed. Any claims of mono-causality are of course misguided; even the most extraordinary political behaviour and cunning survival strategy may not protect IOs in overdetermined situations. But the greater the degree of development and implementation of astute survival strategies, the greater the likelihood of IO survival and consolidation. Should survival strategies fail, in turn, existential crises are likely to precipitate decline or even death whereby (key) states withdraw memberships or repatriate authority, key norms lose their prescriptive power, or the IO can no longer ensure the provision of crucial public goods (see Pevehouse 2004; Debre and Dijkstra 2022; Schuette 2022b).

Survival Politics versus normal bureaucratic politics

This dissertation explores whether IOs behave in distinct ways in contexts of existential crises. Distinction is a relational attribute and thus the concept of IO Survival Politics requires comparison with other forms of IO behaviour. The discipline of international relations had long been occupied with the question whether institutions even had any passive impact on state behaviour at all (e.g. Keohane 1984; Mearsheimer 1994/95; Keohane and Martin 1995). In such state-centric readings, institutional actors were relegated to passive, technocratic servants

who follow the orders of the state principals. Inspired both by Barnett and Finnemore's seminal works (1999; 2004) and the research agenda on delegation (e.g. Hawkins et al. 2006), the institutionalist literature has since shown that institutions can not only shape state behaviour but that IOs have an independent political role (Trondal et al. 2010). For Ege and co-authors '[t]he question, then, is not *if* IPAs [international public administrations] influence policy-making but rather *how, to what degree, and when* this influence occurs' (2020: 555).

The literature on bureaucratic politics under normal circumstances identifies several strategies through which institutional actors can exert cognitive, prescriptive, and executive influence, which maps onto the three stages of the policy-making cycle (e.g. Biermann and Siebenhuehner 2009; Nay 2012; Widerberg and van Laerhoven 2014). Most prominently, IOs 'structure knowledge' (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 710) by using their expertise and standing as arbiter to classify information and confer meaning. This allows them to potentially set the agenda, define the problem and frame the discourse in a way favourable to the IO during the policy initiation process. Subsequently at the policy drafting stage, IOs can use both the power of the pen to draft proposals and procedural strategies to influence legislative proceedings (Beach and Smeets 2019). IOs can also make common cause with select groups of actors (Dijkstra 2017). And during the implementation phase, institutional actors often possess discretion when evaluating, monitoring, and enforcing policy (Ege et al. 2020).

Like the bureaucratic politics perspective, Survival Politics also emphasises the ways in which institutional actors wield influence in and over IOs. Both approaches thus share the same ontological foundation. But there are three reasons to assume that IO Survival Politics nonetheless logically differs from bureaucratic politics in degree and kind. First, institutional actors are likely to be more cohesive during existential crises than normal policymaking because preferences for a single outcome – survival – will be unified and strong. Under normal circumstances, institutional actors tend to pursue a variety of sometimes conflicting personal, normative, and functional preferences and often succumb to intra-institutional rivalries and turf wars (Ege 2020). Second, institutional actors will likely have a shorter time horizon during existential crisis. During normal policymaking contexts, institutional actors need to be concerned about their reputation as supposed effective and neutral technocratic actors without divergent institutional preferences to maintain the goodwill among member states, which imposes behavioural limitations (Louis and Maertens 2021). But with survival at stake, medium- and long-term reputational concerns should give way to the overriding objective of survival and thus remove obstacles to bold behaviour. And third, the nature of existential crises implies greater uncertainty among crucial actors about preferences and strategies and, potentially, the relaxation of some structural constraints, which should allow institutional actors greater room for manoeuvre (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Cortell and Peterson 2021).

It is for these three reasons that institutional actors may engage in extraordinary political behaviour that differs from bureaucratic politics in degree and kind. That is, they may behave more assertively in pursuing the same strategies as under normal policymaking. But institutional actors may also countenance distinct forms of behaviour to ensure survival. Such expressions of IO Survival Politics could include shedding the mantle of technocracy and

acting openly political by directly engaging in distributional or ideational debates, or questioning what previously were considered policy axioms. It could also entail no longer shying away from confronting recalcitrant member states, sharpening public communications toward challenger actors, or breaking with existing procedural and institutional norms of appropriate behaviour to play a more proactive role. Compared to the state-centric view of IOs as toothless administrative bodies and the bureaucratic politics claim of discernible but limited influence, IO Survival Politics thus attributes the greatest degree of potential agency to institutional actors.

IO emergency politics is another cognate concept that warrants comparing with IO Survival Politics (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; Kreuder-Sonnen and White 2021). These authors contend that in severe crises, IOs can behave assertively to make authority leaps. Like IO Survival Politics, emergency politics relies on the logic of exceptionalism as the critical bedrock against which extraordinary IO behaviour is possible. Yet, the respective ends of such behaviour diverge. Where emergency politics is intended to empower the respective IO and extend its authority vis-à-vis other actors, IO Survival Politics is a mode of behaviour to survive existential crises.

Situating IO Survival Politics in the literature

This section situates the concept of IO Survival Politics within the wider (theoretical) literature on the crisis of multilateralism as well as on IO survival studies. Scholarly accounts of the *causes* of the crisis of multilateralism, or the liberal international order, abound (e.g. Ikenberry 2020; Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021; Mearsheimer 2019; Zuern 2018). But they pay strikingly little attention to the *consequences* for and *responses* by IOs themselves. This reflects persistent trends in IR theory of emphasising institutional stickiness and continuously neglecting insights on IO agency. As a result, the prevailing meta theories largely privilege structural explanations of IO survival and decline and death (Kaarbo 2017). Table 1.1 below visualizes the competing accounts.

For realist approaches, IOs exist to advance the interests of the most powerful states in the system. The spectre of institutional decline rises when major shifts in the balance of power mean that the existing IO no longer reflects the interests of the newly powerful states, which will set out to create alternative institutional arrangements that lock in their new position in the system (Gilpin 1981; Ikenberry 2001; Mearsheimer 1994; Walt 1987). Since the international system tends to be in flux according to realism, institutional decline ought to be a regular feature in international relations. Hegemonic stability theory, however, also identifies a power-based impeding factor of decline: hegemonic leadership (Kindleberger 1973; see also Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). Hegemons may shoulder disproportionate burdens, offer material incentives to otherwise reluctant states, or threaten to punish disloyal states to discourage the decline of the IO.

Theory	Drivers of IO decline and death	Impediments to IO decline and death
Power	Change in power distribution	Hegemonic leadership
Functionality	Diminishing utility and emergence of alternative arrangements	Institutionalisation and adaptability
Legitimacy	Legitimacy deficit as a result of endogenous institutional changes	Intransigence of normative structures
Bureaucracy	Pathological behaviour by institutional actors	**IO Survival Politics**

Table 1.1: Theories of institutional decline

For functionality-based accounts, IOs serve to reduce transaction costs of cooperation by supplying information and stabilising expectations, yielding absolute gains for all. They hence assume that IOs 'should persist as long as their members have incentives to maintain them' (Keohane 1988: 317). Given that, on the one hand, transaction and negotiation costs as well as risk and uncertainty involved in reforming or replacing an IO are high, and on the other hand benefits created by the IO should increase over time due to positive feedback loops, functionality-based theories suggest that IOs tend to be durable (Jupille et al. 2013; Keohane 1984). Moreover, the rational institutionalist literature also highlights that IOs are often designed to be readily adaptable to changing environments. Imprecise mandates (Lenz et al. 2014), general rather than specific assets (Wallander 2000), and majority- rather than consensus-based decision-making procedures (Scharpf 1988) enhance an organisation's adaptability. Institutional decline should thus be rare and only the product of substantial exogenous changes, and the concomitant emergence of new institutional arrangements.

Legitimacy-based institutional theories emphasise that institutional features need to be congruent with the standards of appropriateness among the constituents (Cottrell 2016; Lenz and Viola 2017). Rather than changes in the power configurations or diminishing material gains, legitimacy deficits therefore constitute the cause of institutional decline (Tallberg and Zuern 2019). Legitimacy deficits may arise 1) endogenously when organisation features such as procedures, purposes, or performances change or 2) exogenously when cognitive shifts change prevailing norms and value among constituents. Indeed, a recent research agenda demonstrates that the authority and intrusiveness of IOs has increased substantially since the end of the Cold War without proportionate reforms of internal procedures (Boerzel and Zuern 2021; Zuern 2018). At the same time, most constructivists emphasise the stability of norms as reflections of time intensive processes of internalisation (Cottrell 2016; Keck and Sikkink 1998; but see Panke and Petersohn 2011). Thus, even constructivists, who nominally depart from the assumption that actors construct their environment, tend to consider agents as bearers of social structures (Flanik 2011; also Barnett 1999). Legitimacy-based accounts would

therefore expect legitimacy deficits, and thus decline, to primarily root in endogenous institutional changes rather than normative shifts.

Grounded within but going beyond bureaucratic approaches to international relations, IO Survival Politics thus contributes a distinctly agential perspective to explain the survival or decline and death of IOs. While Barnett and Finnemore's work (1999) serves as a reminder that bureaucracies are often prone to pathological behaviour that can eventually spur institutional decline, IO Survival Politics should increase the likelihood of weathering existential crises. These competing accounts of drivers of and impediments to IO decline and death are not mutually exclusive. Many crises will have several drivers and require an interplay of structural and agential factors to resolve. IO Survival Politics, as the ensuing chapters show, alone is never sufficient to permanently fend off an organisation's crisis, but it is often necessary to create the conditions in which other factors, such as member state leadership, can make a difference to the fate of the IO.

The research design

The primary objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the behaviour of diverse IOs during periods of existential crises tends to follow a distinct pattern. Rather than aberrative incidences of political agency, it illustrates that IO Survival Politics is a coherent response undertaken by a variety of IOs faced with diverse existential threats. By providing a conceptual framework of IO Survival Politics, the dissertation offers the opportunity to engage in systematic and comparative empirical research of this distinct and consequential type of behaviour beyond the cases under investigation. This section elaborates on the case selection logic, chosen methods to pursue the research objectives, and the data sources.

Case selection

The ambition to form a new concept suggests selecting multiple diverse cases to show that IO Survival Politics is not idiosyncratic but appears in a variety of contexts (Rohlfing 2012). The dissertation focusses on the EU, NATO, and OSCE. The initial choice to focus on central eurocentric organisations, which all operate (among others) in the realm of foreign and security policy, follows four logics. First, with the exception of the EU, international security organisations are a comparably understudied population of IOs. Most systematic work concentrates on economic and environmental IOs (see Lake et al. 2021: 236; Haftendorn et al. 1999 and Dijkstra 2016 are notable exceptions), which is hardly surprising given that the scope conditions of institutionalism are more conducive toward low politics rather than the high-stake realm of international security (Keohane 2021).

Second, and as a corollary, international security organisations should be hard cases for exhibiting political agency. When international policies involve questions of life and death, states should fiercely protect their control over vital policy decisions and institutional actors should generally have less leeway to act independently (Dijkstra 2016). Even the EU possesses fewer competences in the realm of foreign and security policy than in, for instance, trade policy

(Schuette 2019b). It follows that if international security organisations engage in Survival Politics, other IOs are likely to as well. Third, there were also practical concerns due to the need to conduct dozens of interviews with officials. All three IOs are headquartered in Europe and the author possessed some pre-existing contacts in these organisations, which increased the confidence that sufficient officials would be willing to act as interviewees. Last but not least, the political salience of cases, the author's previous work on the EU and NATO, as well as intellectual interests in European security served as motivation to focus on these organisations.

Crucially, there is substantial diversity among the chosen sample of IOs. The EU, NATO, and OSCE vary in their institutional design, functions, and size. According to the International Authority Database (Zuern, Tokhi, and Binder 2021: 436), the EU is the most authoritative IO in the world (with a IAD score of 0.70), while NATO's authority is more limited (0.20) and the OSCE ranks among the least authoritative (0.13).[1] Accordingly, the EU's institutional actors possess the greatest formal and informal powers compared to the constrained NATO Secretary-General and almost completely powerless OSCE Secretary-General. This pattern is also reflected in the staff size with the EU employing 43 000 staff, NATO 7500, and the OSCE 3500 (Debre and Dijkstra 2021). In addition, the level and type of funding differs significantly with the EU's budget calculated on an annual basis of around EUR 150 billion compared to NATO's 2022 budget of EUR 2.5 billion and the OSCE's 2021 budget of EUR 138 million (excluding field missions) (European Commission 2022; NATO 2022l; OSCE 2022; see also Heldt and Schmidtke 2017). The EU is also a general-purpose organisation, where NATO is principally a collective defence organisation and the OSCE a collective security organisation.

[1] Note that in the delegation database by Hooghe et al. (2017: 150ff.), the OSCE scores marginally higher (0.188) than NATO (0.135).

IO	Institutional features	Case	Type of threat
EU	Purpose: General Authority: high Staff: high Resources: high	1) Brexit	Threat: external Source: state Time pressure: acute
		2) Crisis of multilateralism	Threat: external Source: states Time pressure: moderately acute
NATO	Purpose: task-specific Authority: medium-low Staff: medium-high Resources: medium	3) Trump Presidency	Threat: internal Source: state Time pressure: acute
		4) EU security and defence initiatives	Threat: external Source: IO Time pressure: moderately acute
OSCE	Purpose: task-specific Authority: low Staff: medium-low Resources: low	5) Post-2014 Legitimacy crisis	Threats: internal & external Source: states & IOs Time pressure: moderately acute

Table 1.2: Case selection

In addition to variation among IOs, the selected incidences of existential crises also exhibit varieties of threats (see Boerzel and Zuern 2021). This dissertation relies on five empirical cases to illustrate its core arguments: the EU's responses to the 1) Brexit referendum and 2) the crisis of multilateralism; NATO's responses to 3) the Presidency of Donald Trump and 4) recent EU's security and defence initiatives; and 5) the OSCE's responses to its legitimacy crises since 2014. As such, the incidences include threats from within by key member states (5) as well as the hegemon (3); threats from without by departing members (1) and great powers that are not members of the IO (2); threats that emanate from state-actors (1, 2, 3, 5); threats by other institutions (2, 5); and acute (1, 2, 3) and moderately acute crises (2, 4, 5). Acute cases are those where dramatic and unexpected events – like the Brexit vote and the election of President Trump – had rapidly upended the status quo. Moderately acute cases, in turn, include such cases where distinct events – like Russia's annexation of Crimea or the series of EU defence initiatives – had intensified a creeping crisis.

The selected cases were not the only serious crises the three IOs have encountered since the end of the Cold War. NATO's future was in doubt in the early 1990s, the Euro Crisis raised the spectre of EU disintegration, and the Russian attack on Georgia in 2008 challenged the foundation of the OSCE. But the cases at hand share two distinguishing features. First, they all occurred in one crucial period – the second decade of the 21st century – which due to Russian (and Chinese) revisionism and electoral challenges to international cooperation in key Western states marked an inflection point for the three IOs specifically and global governance generally. Second, both EU cases also pertain to foreign policy – dealing with a de facto third state (the

UK) and other IOs – rather than economic or rule of law issues, which should increase the coherence with the NATO and OSCE cases.

Methods and data

In addition to the concept formation of IO Survival Politics, the empirics of this dissertation intend to set it apart from other studies. The empirical section consists of five stand-alone case studies and relies on a multi-method approach. Each chapter follows a common approach to understand how IO Survival Politics works in practice by analysing the nature of behaviour of institutional actors amid existential crises and its consequences for the respective outcomes. The chapters all trace crisis perceptions, responses by institutional actors in form of the development and implementation of survival strategies, and evaluate the role of institutional actors in shaping the eventual institutional outcome. Thus, the chapters use minimalist theory-developing process-tracing with the ambition to build the mechanism linking institutional actors' perceptions, behaviour, and outcomes (Beach and Pedersen 2019; Bennett and Checkel 2014). However, the final step in the process of Survival Politics builds on probabilistic reasoning – the greater the degree of Survival Politics, the more likely the IO persists – rather than strictly causal reasoning given the complexity of factors involved in shaping final outcomes. Counterfactual reasoning therefore serves to buttress the individual findings of IO agency by reflecting on alternative explanations and potential outcomes had IOs not acted the way they did.

When conducting the case studies, however, an unexpected pattern of extraordinary behaviour began to emerge, which served as the point of departure to pursue concept formation alongside the empirical ambitions. In other words, the notion of IO Survival Politics developed inductively from novel empirical evidence. Thus, the chapters do not explicitly use the concept even if they address many of the constitutive elements. While cases were not chosen in a structured comparative manner (by isolating variables) and the primary ambition is to demonstrate the occurrence and understand the workings of IO Survival Politics in diverse settings, the common empirical approach nonetheless allows for tentative comparisons. Hence, the conclusion offers some cross-case reflections on the abstract factors responsible for the varying occurrence and success of IO Survival Politics.

Both the overarching research objectives and the chosen methods require close insights into the perceptions of senior officials and IO decision-making processes at moments of great peril. But senior officials do not tend to publicly disclose their strategies in coping with existential crises and the recency of the cases meant that archival research was unsuitable. In order to understand the micro-mechanisms of IO Survival Politics specifically and IO behaviour in crises generally, this dissertation therefore relies on 87 elite interviews with those key officials present in crucial meetings (see Mosley 2013). Indeed, the seniority of interviewees and number of original interviews constitute one distinguishing property of this dissertation.

Selected through purposive sampling given the small number of directly involved officials in decision-making in crises, interviewees included former secretary-generals, deputy secretary-

generals, ambassadors to the respective IOs, chef de cabinets, members of the US National Security Council, and other high-ranking officials in IOs and governments from a variety of national backgrounds, all of whom were intimately involved in the episodes in question. Interviewees were asked, among others, to describe their perceptions of the crisis, whether conscious strategies were formulated in response, and how the responses were implemented. The interviews were semi-structured to equally allow for comparability and remain sufficiently flexible to pursue emerging leads. They lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes and were held in person in Brussels and Vienna as well as more often than not virtually thanks to the pandemic. In line with security restrictions and to encourage candour, interviews were pseudonymised and not recorded. The data are archived on a secure and encrypted server managed by a consortium of Dutch universities. The interview approach received an approval by the Maastricht University Ethical Review Committee Inner City Faculties on 18 October 2018.

Due to the inevitable biases, the evidence generated through the interviews was additionally triangulated with a wealth of other information. Speeches and press conferences by senior officials, public communications by IOs, and legal documents served to buttress the findings. Where appropriate and available, secondary literature, media reports, and memoirs also complemented other sources.

Findings

The empirical analysis yields three major overarching findings on the role of IOs amid the crisis of multilateralism. First, *in existential crises, IOs behave in surprising and extraordinary ways compared to contexts of normal policymaking. This IO Survival Politics occurs across a range of diverse IOs in face of diverse threats.* To a varying degree, four of the five chapters represent cases of extraordinary political behaviour by EU and NATO institutional actors to weather what were perceived as existential crises. Unprecedentedly intense and extraordinary forms of behaviour abound; officials used innovative institutional designs of negotiation teams, emancipated themselves from and even opposed previous patrons, engaged in previously unthinkable forms of overt and political agenda-setting, or publicly confronted perceived challenger IOs. Thus, the dissertation shows that institutional actors can exhibit greater agency than even acknowledged in the bureaucratic politics literature. Indeed, in the cases of EU and Brexit (1) and NATO and Trump (3), the influence of officials was arguably history-making (see Peterson 1995). Both cases were highly contingent and salient, and at critical moments senior officials' behaviour had a discernibly causal effect on momentous outcomes.

It follows that IO Survival Politics is observable across diverse IOs. Indeed, as the cases of NATO demonstrate, the phenomenon is not limited to highly authoritative organisations such as the EU as may have been presumed in the institutionalist literature. IOs with a minimum-level of institutional capacity can equally engage in extraordinary political behaviour and thus shape outcomes of crises. Informal leadership by key institutional actors proved more consequential than formal powers. In addition, the cases also suggest that IO Survival Politics is a logical response to a variety of threats. These included internal threats emanating from a

hegemonic member state; external threats from challenger IOs or great powers which challenge the global order; and acute crises, like Trump's threat of withdrawal from NATO, and moderately acute crises, such as structural challenges by emerging and established powers to the multilateral order.

Second, however, *not all existential crises cause IO Survival Politics to the same extent*. Notwithstanding common awareness of the existential nature of the respective crises, the empirical cases exhibit varying degrees of extraordinary political behaviour by institutional actors and, as a corollary, varying degrees of causal impact on crises outcomes. The EU's handling of the Brexit negotiations and NATO's management of Trump are prime examples for IO Survival Politics in terms of both crafting a cunning survival strategy and successfully implementing it. In the cases of the EU's response to the crises of multilateralism as well as NATO's reaction to EU security and defence initiatives, the implementation of survival strategies was constrained by the role of member state preferences and complexity of shaping other IOs. In turn, the OSCE actors' efforts to craft a survival strategy were limited and the implementation thereof failed almost entirely.

Five factors appear relevant in explaining the varied occurrence of IO Survival Politics. First, while IOs do not require a significant level of formal powers to engage in Survival Politics, the case of the OSCE suggests that some minimum levers of influence are necessary. Otherwise, institutional actors are little more than administrative bodies unable to craft and implement a survival strategy. Second, above that minimum level of formal powers, the examples of Secretary-General Stoltenberg and the Commission duo of Barnier and Juncker emphasise that informal leadership by senior officials is crucial for IO Survival Politics. Third, IO Survival Politics is more likely to be pronounced when the addressee is a state rather than another IO due to the complexity of shaping the behaviour of another organisation. Fourth, the constellation of key member states' preferences delimits the space for IO Survival Politics. The polarisation among the OSCE's participating states or the relaxation of key member states' views on EU-NATO relations highlights that survival strategies that contravene core preferences of key member states are destined to fail. And fifth, the more acute the crisis, the greater the potential for IO Survival Politics. The conclusion offers a more detailed cross-case comparison.

Third, *IO Survival Politics is only a temporary remedy to the crisis of multilateralism*. IO Survival Politics is a short-term response to specific threats. It focusses on symptoms, not roots of the crisis of multilateralism. NATO officials may have prevented President Trump from withdrawing the US from NATO, but they cannot resolve fundamental questions over burden-sharing or transatlanticism at a time of great power competition; Commission officials may prevent Brexit from causing a domino effect, but they alone cannot rectify the underlying flaws of the EU system of governance that contribute to Euroscepticism across the continent; EU officials can prevent the momentary collapse of multilateral organisations, but they cannot substantially reform IOs that suffer from a profound legitimacy deficit in the eyes of emerging powers; and OSCE leaders cannot bridge the fundamental geopolitical divide between Russia and the West to devise new common principles for the European security architecture.

By weathering specific threats, what IO Survival Politics can achieve is to create the conditions in which fundamental reforms of the multilateral system become possible. But it is neither functionally possible for IO officials to mobilise the adequate resources and political will to be the engines of wholesale reforms of the multilateral order. Nor is it normatively desirable, given the enduring democratic deficits that beset the system of global governance. IO Survival Politics, in other words, is more a painkiller than remedy for the crisis of multilateralism.

Outline of individual chapters

Following this introductory chapter, the body of the dissertation consists of five chapters, four of which are single authored and three of which have already been published. The chapters share the overarching approach of zooming in on one specific form of threat which institutional actors perceived as existential, tracing the respective development and implementation of a survival strategy, and evaluating its outcome. Each case illustrates a distinct type of survival strategy, thereby demonstrating the wide applicability of the concept. Table 3 summarises the contributions of the individual empirical chapters.

Case	Status	Existential crisis	Survival strategy	Outcome
EU and Brexit	Published with: *Journal of Common Market Studies*	Risk of Brexit causing domino effect of further withdrawals	Managing member state withdrawal	Survival, prevention of UK divide-and-rule, no further withdrawals
EU and crisis of multilateralism	Under Review	Potential decline and collapse of key IOs and multilateral order	Sustaining the IO's environment	Survival, temporary stabilization of system, failure to reform and extend multilateralism
NATO and Trump Presidency	Published with: *International Affairs*	Trump's repeated threats of US withdrawal	Navigating hegemonic member state threats	Survival, Trump eventually embraced NATO
NATO and EU security and defence initiatives	Published with: *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*	EU's challenge to NATO's dominance in European security	Shaping institutional overlap	Survival, temporary consolidation of NATO's position
OSCE and post-2014 legitimacy crisis	Under Review	Widespread violations of OSCE's key norms	Relegitimising the IO's authority	Decline, threat of descend into zombie-state

Table 1.3: Overview of empirical chapters

The second chapter, *Forging Unity: European Commission Leadership in the Brexit Negotiations* (Schuette 2021a), analyses how the European Commission responded to the shock decision by the British electorate to leave the EU. After illustrating that EU officials

perceived Brexit as an existential threat to the continued existence of the EU, the chapter shows that, contrary to the widespread assumptions, EU officials developed polity rather than private interests. In other words, survival instincts kicked in and EU officials developed the survival strategy to act in an unprecedentedly transparent and consultative manner to forge trust and unity among the remaining EU27 during the withdrawal negotiations. Based on a novel institutional set up of the Task Force 50, the Commission intensified common ways to exercise influence via the provision of expertise and drafting of negotiation documents (instrumental leadership) but also went beyond ascribed influence by taking hugely consequential decisions to structure the negotiation agenda (political leadership), which proved crucial in achieving a successful agreement that all member states signed up to.

The third chapter, *The show must go on: the EU's quest to sustain multilateral organisations since 2016* (Schuette and Dijkstra 2022a), examines how the EU responded to the profound crisis of multilateralism since 2016. The wider crisis of the multilateral order was tantamount to an existential crisis for the EU, which is both heavily invested in and reliant on that order. The chapter demonstrates that by 2018, EU officials had converged in their perception of the existential nature of the crisis and set out to defend, reform, and extend the multilateral order. In doing so, the EU emancipated itself from previous modi operandi. Unprecedented behaviour included directly challenging the US, its erstwhile patron and reflexive partner, creating innovative institutions, and flouting radical new ideas such as establishing an alternative SWIFT. The EU's Survival Politics proved rather successful in defending existing institutions under threat, but it had only very limited success in reforming IOs or extending multilateral arrangements to new spaces.

The fourth chapter, *Why NATO Survived Trump: the neglected role of Secretary-General Stoltenberg* (Schuette 2021b), zooms in on the repeated threats by President Trump to withdraw the US from NATO, which would have marked the de facto end of the alliance. Given that NATO officials could not openly challenge the hegemonic US, their survival strategy consisted of overtly supporting US demands on burden-sharing deemed least threatening to the alliance while subtly resisting Trump's demands to soften NATO's Russia policy considered most dangerous. Secretary-General Stoltenberg's strategic management of the idiosyncratic US President allowed him to exercise extraordinary political agency as NATO's leaders have hitherto been largely viewed as marginal actors. In pursuit of survival, Stoltenberg used strategies that were previously unimaginable including actively circumventing the White House, framing statistics in a favourable manner, and setting the agenda by appearing on Fox News, a partisan channel. In the end, NATO officials played a significant role in helping NATO survive Trump.

The fifth chapter, *Shaping institutional overlap: NATO's responses to EU security and defence initiatives since 2014* (Schuette 2022b), addresses how NATO actors responded to the EU's quest to develop into a Defence Union, which posed a challenge to its incumbency in the European defence architecture. Faced with significant institutional and member state constraints, NATO actors pushed their room for manoeuvre by using discursive and behavioural means to embrace some initiatives while pushing back against those considered

most harmful. These attempts to influence decisions by another organisation included shielding negotiations from member states, openly criticising EU efforts, and launching own initiatives assert NATO's primacy. Once again, institutional actors proved more consequential in responding to existential challenges than anticipated by the literature as NATO and the EU restructured their relationship with NATO maintaining its primary position as European security provider.

The sixth chapter, *When an international organisation fails to legitimate: the decline of the OSCE* (Schuette 2022c), analyses how OSCE officials tried to respond to the organisation's crisis of legitimacy in the context of east-west polarisation and the Russian war on Ukraine. Confronted with direct threats from Russia and its allies on the one hand and neglect from the Western participating states on the other, officials were aware of the existential crisis the OSCE found itself in. They primarily sought to revive the legitimacy of the OSCE via institutional reforms and public communications. Unlike the other cases, this chapter registers the failed attempts of engaging in Survival Politics due the combination of weak formal powers, inadequate leadership, and unfavourable geopolitical environment. As a result, the OSCE is now on the brink of collapse.

The final chapter concludes the dissertation. These five empirical chapters provide an answer to the research question how IOs behave when they face existential crises. The dissertation argues that the contemporary dialectic conditions of both unprecedented authority and crises give rise to distinct forms of extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors to save their IO, which is conceived as IO Survival Politics. Based on novel empirical evidence from 87 interviews, it shows that IO Survival Politics is not an aberration but a logical response by a variety of IOs to diverse threats. By directing attention to hitherto largely neglected agential qualities and types of behaviour by institutional actors, the dissertation seeks to fill crucial lacunae in the literature on the consequences of the crisis of multilateralism for IOs and their responses. The conceptualisation of IO Survival Politics should also advance institutional theory and provide the foundation for a new research agenda.

In addition to these scholarly contributions, the findings also bear important political and normative consequences. The dissertation allows for a better understanding of most salient processes of the crisis of multilateralism. Appreciating that individual agents carry much responsibility for helping key IOs like NATO and the EU survive recent crises should caution policymakers against any sense of complacency. These episodes were contingent and could have ended differently, which would have likely had drastic consequences for the shape of the European, and international order. Indeed, the cases show that institutional actors can only provide temporary relief but not permanent remedy for the malaise of the multilateral order. By helping IOs survive, institutional actors provided the context within which democratically accountable policymakers and civil society actors could set out to address the roots of the crisis and recast the multilateral order. Without substantial reform, however, the multilateral order will continue to be in a state of peril.

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2

Chapter 2

Forging Unity: European Commission Leadership in the Brexit Negotiations

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Abstract: This article explains why the European Union has remained strikingly cohesive during the Brexit withdrawal negotiations by focussing on the role played by its negotiator: the European Commission's Task Force 50. The analysis demonstrates that the Task Force 50 set out to forge unity among the EU27 by exercising both subtle instrumental and direct political leadership. The Commission significantly influenced the outcome of the negotiations by shaping the agenda and process, brokering deals, and ultimately achieving a withdrawal agreement that all member states signed up to. Its transparent and consultative behaviour generated trust among member states, which allowed the Commission to play such a prominent role. These findings challenge the prevailing view that the EU has become increasingly intergovernmental at expense of the Commission. Drawing on original interviews, the article substantiates this argument by tracing the Commission's leadership activities in the run-up to and throughout the withdrawal negotiations (2016 – 2020).

Introduction

The confluence of recent crises has caused almost pathological divisions among the member states of the European Union (EU) (Webber, 2019; Schuette, 2019). The EU was paralysed and struggled to reach consensus on how to cope with the Euro, Schengen, and rule of law crises. Against this backdrop, Brexit threatened to become the final straw that would lead to the unravelling of the EU (van Middelaar, 2019, p. 120; Oliver, 2018, p. 256). Then European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker (2017) exemplarily dreaded that the 'Brits will manage without big effort to divide the remaining 27 member-states'. Contrary to these gloomy predictions, however, the EU remained strikingly united during the Brexit withdrawal negotiations with the United Kingdom (UK) and concluded agreements both with the May and Johnson governments largely on its own terms. While the EU had preferred a closer future relationship than the one transpired, it protected the integrity of the single market, safeguarded the rights of EU citizens in the UK, avoided a hard border in Ireland, and demonstrated the difficulties of leaving the union.

This article seeks to explain this puzzling unity among the EU27 and, by extension, the negotiation success. Extant accounts emphasise asymmetrical bargaining constellations (Schimmelfennig, 2018), negotiation errors on part of the UK (Rogers, 2019), path dependencies (McTague, 2019), the maturing of the EU as a strategic polity (Laffan 2019), or a combination of rational, bureaucratic, identity, and framing factors (Jensen and Kehlstrup, 2019). This article, instead, specifically zooms in on the role of the EU's actual negotiator: the European Commission in form of its Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 (TF50) under the leadership of chief negotiator Michel Barnier. The article traces the role of the TF50 in the run-up to (June 2016 - March 2017) and throughout (March 2017 – January 2020) the Brexit negotiations.

It finds that the Commission was acutely aware of the potentially existential threat Brexit posed for the EU and, unlike in other negotiations where the Commission tended to pursue parochial interests, therefore set out to forge unity among member states to protect the overall EU polity. To do so, the Commission exercised both subtle instrumental and direct political leadership which proved crucial in shaping the process and agenda, brokering deals among the EU27, and ultimately achieving the withdrawal agreement that all parties signed up to. The consciously transparent and consultative conduct was critical in producing a trusted and cooperative relationship with the member states and other institutions, which enabled the Commission to show such prominent leadership.

These findings challenge the growing consensus among scholars that the EU has become increasingly intergovernmental (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Bickerton *et al*., 2015). Van Middelaar (2019), for instance, suggests that recent crises posed sensitive questions of redistribution, citizenship, and borders, prompting the European heads of states and governments in the European Council to dominate crises responses and circumvent EU institutions and procedures. The Commission's discernible leadership also differs from its roles during the renegotiations of both the UK's membership terms, when it was largely sidelined,

and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, when it struggled to shape negotiations (Beach and Smeets, 2019; De Bievre 2018).

The article advances this argument by, first, discussing theoretical perspectives on leadership in the EU. Second, it outlines the methodological approach. Third, the article assesses the Commission's scope for leadership in terms of institutional, contextual, and personal factors. The fourth part traces the Commission's instrumental and political leadership activities. Finally, the conclusion discusses limitations and offers reflections on the wider applicability of Commission's leadership approach.

The contested leadership of the Commission

As a fragmented and complex system of multi-level governance, the EU lacks a singular leadership structure (Toemmel and Verdun, 2017, p. 103). With multiple sources of authority, the EU constitutes an 'intensely leaderful polity' (Mueller and Van Esch, 2019, p. 2), where different actors – including the EU institutions, national governments, or non-governmental actors – can exercise different types of leadership. This article focuses on the most recent typology of leadership as *instrumental* and *political*. Political leadership denotes direct acts of shaping the agenda and building coalitions to reach a consensus on the desired outcome (Ross and Jenson, 2017; Toemmel, 2013), while instrumental leadership refers to institutional activities such as drafting proposals and the use of varieties of expertise to subtly influence an outcome (Beach and Smeets, 2019). It has been the perennial occupation of EU integration theories to offer competing accounts of which (type of) actor possesses the ultimate leadership authority. The classic dichotomous debate between neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism on whether supranational institutions or national governments dominate the integration process, however, has recently given way to more nuanced discussions.

New intergovernmentalism (NI) remains in the tradition of liberal intergovernmentalism by identifying the intergovernmental actors in the European Council as the political leaders of the EU. However, it recognises that delegation of powers to EU institutions have occurred (Bickerton *et al*., 2015). Yet, rather than empowering the traditional supranational institutions such as the Commission, member states have created de novo bodies that tend to be controlled by specific mandates and tight oversight mechanisms. In this new intergovernmental era, there is allegedly little space for Commission leadership. The new institutionalist leadership (NIL) theory shares NI's premise of the centrality of the European Council in post-Maastricht EU politics, but deviates from NI's conclusions on institutional leadership (Beach and Smeets, 2019; Smeets and Beach, 2020). NIL argues that the current era is characterised by a division of leadership responsibilities between the European Council and the other EU institutions. In the control room, national governments remain in charge of the overall process and provide *political leadership*. The complexity of recent crises, however, required governments to delegate authority to supranational actors in the machine room. In doing so, supranational institutions like the Commission can exert *instrumental leadership* of subtly steering negotiations on EU reforms or with third parties.

With the election of Jean-Claude Juncker as Commission President in 2014 after the highly politicised *Spitzenkandidaten* process and his declared intention to lead a 'political Commission', a third strand of literature on institutional leadership has emerged. This group of scholars is primarily motivated by the conceptual question what 'political Commission' designates and the empirical question whether the Juncker-Commission indeed constituted such a 'political Commission' (Kassim and Laffan 2019; Toemmel 2019; Nugent and Rhinard 2019). These scholars rarely explicitly engage with the theoretical debate on institutional leadership and their vantage is hardly a consolidated theoretical approach. However, the findings that the Juncker-Commission acted unprecedentedly political in substantive (e.g. the Juncker Plan and White Paper on the Future of Europe), institutional (i.e. reorganisation of the College and presidentialisation of the Commission), and rhetorical terms challenges NIL's premise that the Commission would be confined to providing instrumental, not political, leadership.

These competing perspectives suggests that the interplay of three probabilistic conditions determines what type of leadership, if any, the Commission can exercise: its institutional position in the EU landscape; the context of public and member state opinion vis-à-vis European integration; and the personal capacity of potential leaders (Toemmel, 2013; Kassim *et al*., 2013). Those scholars upholding the 'Commission in decline' thesis point to unfavourable institutional and contextual developments since the Maastricht Treaty. Institutionally, the continuous empowerment of the European Parliament, the decline of the traditional Community method of policy-making and concomitant rise of the European Council have come at the expense of the Commission (Puetter and Fabbrini, 2016; Dinan, 2016; Kassim *et al*., 2013; Bauer and Ege, 2012). Contextually, increased politicisation of the EU and consequently reluctance among member states to support greater supranational integration allegedly reinforce the unfavourable institutional developments (Keleman and Tarrant, 2011). Empirical studies also note that with the possible exception of Juncker, Commission Presidents since Delors have lacked the personal capacities to exercise significant leadership (Toemmel, 2013, 2019; Mueller, 2017).

These three perspectives also share – to a varying degree – the premise that the relationship between the Commission and other EU institutions is driven by the zero-sum logic of power maximising institutions. NI and the literature on the 'political Commission' assume a power struggle between the Commission and European Council/Council. NIL emphasises a division of labour, in which, however, the Commission is the subordinate executor of tasks informally delegated by the European Council, even if that allows the Commission to steer proceedings behind the scenes. Recent institutional developments question this hierarchical perspective on the inter-institutional relationship, and Brexit is a case in point. Not only has the European Council limited administrative resources and sanctioning powers to control the Commission, the parallel process of presidentialisation in the European Council and the Commission – with the creation of the President of the European Council and the incremental empowerment of the office of the President of the Commission – has created a new inter-institutional dynamic. As a result, the division of labour is often negotiated by the two Presidents, which is conducive to producing more complex and positive-sum cooperation (Bocquillon and Kassim, 2020).

In sum, this section analysed competing perspectives on the Commission's leadership in order to distil a consolidated theoretical framework based on three probabilistic conditions, which allows formulating expectations on the Commission's leadership and guides empirical assessments beyond this specific case. The framework suggests that the stronger the institutional position of the Commission in the Brexit negotiations, the greater the support among member states for a common approach to the negotiations, and the more astute and prominent the Commission's leadership personnel, the more likely the Commission can exert instrumental and political leadership.

Methodological approach

The ensuing analysis assesses what type of leadership, if any, the Commission exerted, its importance for forging unity of the EU27 during the withdrawal negotiations and, by extension, the successful conclusion of the withdrawal agreements with the May and Johnson governments. While several factors contributed to the negotiation outcome, the limited scope here does not allow for systematically engaging with the aforementioned alternative explanations. Given the emphasis on multi-causality, the aspiration is to illustrate that the Commission's leadership was one causal factor. Following a congruence analysis of the three theoretical conditions, this paper relies on minimalist process-tracing to link the Commission's leadership with the outcome, where the causal process is not unpacked into its component parts (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 7). Instead, observable empirical manifestations for each of the leadership strategies need to be made explicit *a priori* to evaluate their existence and impact.

It adds analytical clarity to distinguish instrumental and political leadership strategies conceptually, even if in practice they often overlap. Instrumental leadership strategies consist of drafting legal texts and position papers as well as utilising expertise to influence the outcome. By holding the pen, the Commission can construct the scaffolding for subsequent debate (Beach, 2004), while its expertise on policy, procedure, legality, and political context allows it to frame the debate in terms favourable to its goals, for instance by presenting policy options without alternatives or influence the perception of payoffs of the different options (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). Observable indicators for the provision of expertise include position papers and information sheets, hosting of technical seminars, and organisation of the TF50 to effectively draw on the wider expertise of the Commission. Drafting is observable through textual evidence of draft position papers and negotiation texts.

Political leadership strategies, in turn, refer to agenda shaping and brokerage activities. By raising awareness and active framing (agenda-setting), prioritising items on the agenda (agenda-structuring), and wilfully circumventing other matters (agenda-exclusion), the Commission can shape the negotiation agenda in its favour (Tallberg, 2003). By building coalitions with an array of similar-minded actors and sounding out member-states' concerns to identify, and subsequently push for, possible zones of agreement, the Commission can also act as central compromise broker among member-states. Empirical footprints for agenda-shaping include the mandate and negotiation directives, media interaction, the communication of red

lines, progress reports, draft agreements, and interviews with negotiators. Evidence for brokerage, in turn, can be found in shuttle diplomacy by the negotiator and bilateral meetings with stakeholders, coalition-building through intensified interaction with a particular set of actors, drafting of single negotiation texts, and interviews with involved negotiators.

14 semi-structured original interviews with EU officials from the TF50, European Parliament's Brexit steering group, the European Council, as well as national officials directly involved in the negotiations (i.e. Brexit delegates) from a diverse range of member states such as Germany, Italy, and Poland serve as the primary source of data. The interview response rate was approximately 60%. Publicly available information such as official documents published by the TF50, press statements, media interviews, and journalistic accounts were used to triangulate the evidence generated in the interviews.

The Commission's scope for providing leadership in the withdrawal negotiations

This section evaluates the presence in the withdrawal negotiations of the three conditions identified in the theory section that explain the exercise of leadership: the Commission's institutional position in the negotiations, the context of member states' sentiments and interests in the withdrawal negotiations, and the qualities of its leadership duo.

Institutional position, the TF50's set-up, and the appointment of Michel Barnier

Due to the unprecedented nature of Brexit, no institutional blueprint existed how the EU would conduct the looming negotiations with the UK. The EU had to devise new structures and *modi operandi*, which eventually produced the institutional set-up that enabled the Commission's leadership. By December 2016, the EU had translated the vague Article 50 stipulations into a multifaceted governance system for the Brexit negotiations (European Council, 2016). The European Council would sit at the helm of the negotiations with the powers to set the negotiation guidelines, determine whether 'sufficient progress' had taken place on the first phase issues, and grant extensions to the withdrawal period. The Commission's TF50 was appointed lead negotiator, which endowed it with greater bargaining power than during reform negotiations or crisis management, when EU member states tend to circumvent existing procedures in which EU institutions possess an important formal role. The exclusive conduct of negotiations via the TF50 put it into a commanding position of influence (Gostyńska-Jakubowska and von Ondarza 2020). The General Affairs Council (GAC) would coordinate the withdrawal process with the Commission. It thereby also served as a control organ to ensure that Commission abided by the negotiation guidelines. Member states appointed Belgium diplomat Didier Seeuws as the chair of the GAC's Working Party on Article 50. Last, the European Parliament set up a Brexit Steering Group under the chairmanship of Guy Verhofstadt.

In line with Juncker's wider ambitions to deploy the Commission's expertise for political priorities, he chose a distinct set-up of its negotiation force. While negotiations teams usually only consist of Commission officials, Juncker superimposed a political figure on this

technocratic structure: Michel Barnier. Juncker and his team had feared that the Leave side would win the referendum and made contingency plans prior to 23 June. Aware of the constitutional rather than technical nature of the looming negotiations, Martin Selmayr, then Juncker's chief of staff, suggested to approach Barnier rather than Jean-Luc Demarty, as the Director General for Trade in the Commission the natural choice in normal trade negotiations (Interview #13). When formally appointing him head of the TF50 on 1 October 2016 Juncker duly stressed Barnier's political credentials: 'I wanted an experienced politician […] He has an extensive network of contacts in the capitals of all EU Member States and in the European Parliament.' A former French cabinet minister and two times European Commissioner, including for the internal market, Barnier possessed deep knowledge of national and EU politics as well as relevant technical matters, and was thus in a unique position to transcend the political-technical divide. The appointment of a well-connected and experienced political heavyweight endowed the TF50 with greater authority and proved critical in persuading national leaders to step back and grant the formal negotiation mandate to the TF50 in December 2016 (Interviews #6; #11; McTague, 2019).

Barnier had at his disposal some of the most experienced and brightest officials from the Commission. Sabine Weyand, who was as Deputy Director-General of DG Trade closely involved in the trade negotiations with Canada (CETA) and the United States (TTIP), was appointed his deputy. At its peak in the summer of 2018, the TF50 had almost sixty permanent members of staff. Furthermore, each TF50 staff member had a point of contact in one of the Commission's DGs and thus access to the entire firepower of the 33000 people strong Commission bureaucracy (Interview #6).

Thus, the Commission was in the institutionally powerful position of lead negotiator. Yet, unlike in normal trade negotiations the European Council and GAC were more closely involved, implying little room for manoeuvre for the Commission to escape from its mandate.

Interest constellation of the EU27: Polity interests

The context within which the withdrawal negotiations took place differed from previous episodes when rising Euroscepticism sentiments across the continent had undermined the scope for Commission leadership. Following the shock of the Brexit vote, which was to be aggravated by the election of Donald Trump as US President in November 2016, member states were more willing to put existing differences aside. Moreover, they were generally uncertain about the procedure and substance of the negotiations, which opened the door for the Commission to proactively shape key early decisions, including its appointment as lead negotiator.

Above all, the prerequisite for the trusted and cooperative inter-institutional relationship that enabled the Commission's leadership was a particular interest constellation. Unlike in ordinary trade and reform negotiations, where the Commission would be expected to have distinct policy and bureaucratic interests, in the withdrawal negotiations the Commission primarily had *polity interests*. Brexit posed a peril to the very survival of the Union: it threatened not only to unleash a chain reaction by setting a precedent for other states to leave, but also the integrity of the

single market should the UK be allowed to opt-into parts of it, and the pacification of the island of Ireland underwritten by the EU. The Commission recognised the momentous nature of the withdrawal negotiations early on; maintaining cohesion became not only a means to a better negotiation outcome but an end itself to preserve the Union (Interviews #1, #6, #13). The TF50 had no interest to deviate from the negotiation mandate to pursue parochial gains and risk both undermining trust as well as incentivising individual member-states to break with the common line.

At the beginning of the negotiations, however, it was far from clear that the member states would share the TF50's outlook. Most recognised the importance of the integrity of the single market and shared broad interests on the three concrete issues of the first phase of the negotiations (Kassim and Usherwood, 2017; Interviews #2, #5, #9). However, member states differed substantially in their economic exposure and political ties to the UK, creating varying incentives to stray from the common negotiation position and make concessions to the UK (e.g. Chopin and Lequesne, 2020). Due to deeply intertwined political histories and economic relations, Ireland was more affected than any other member state (Laffan, 2017). EU membership provided the crucial context, in which Anglo-Irish relations improved and normalised. The single market rendered the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland *de facto* invisible in daily life and the EU played an important role in underwriting peace on the island. For some other member states such as the Netherlands, Denmark, or Poland, the UK was one of the most important trading partners. Meanwhile, Germany and the Nordic states considered the UK a crucial political ally in advancing a liberal economic agenda and providing teeth to the EU's foreign policy. For Central and Eastern European states, the UK was crucial in balancing the Franco-German couple and curtailing supranational tendencies (Turner *et al*., 2018). Member states thus had to balance particularistic interests vis-à-vis the UK with wider polity interests (Laffan, 2019).

It is therefore simplistic to claim with hindsight that the EU's unity was a predestined conclusion (Jensen and Kehlstrup, 2019, p. 2; Glencross, 2019, p.188). Among national and EU officials alike, there was a distinct fear at the onset of the negotiations that the UK would successfully divide-and-conquer the member states (Interviews #2, #5, #6, #7). Moreover, it was far from obvious that the other member states would risk negotiation priorities such as maximising the financial settlement by protecting the idiosyncratic interests of a small country like Ireland (Laffan, 2019, p. 10). Hence, the interest constellation prior to the negotiations was not determinate. While there were some key homogeneous interests, member states priorities varied. It arguably needed the Commission to mould the different priorities into a common position all member states could support.

In sum, the Commission found itself in an institutionally powerful position as lead negotiator, though with the member states closely involved; operated in an environment of uncertainty among member states and indeterminate interests constellation that was potentially conducive to allowing the Commission a greater role than hitherto; and its Brexit efforts were led by the prominent duo of Juncker and Barnier. This interplay of institutional, contextual, and personal factors was conducive to the Commission exercising instrumental leadership, but due to the

close involvement of the member states it was unclear whether it could exercise political leadership. As such, the withdrawal negotiations differed from previous negotiations, where the Commission exercised only modest influence. By way of example, the Commission had no formal role in the UK renegotiations of its membership terms prior to the referendum, which was led by then-President of the European Council Donald Tusk. Its taskforce was headed by a Commission official – Jonathan Faull – rather than a political figure and the negotiations took place before the twin shocks of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump that threatened the integrity of the EU and the international rules-based order respectively (Beach and Smeets 2019; Eckert 2018).

The Commission's leadership in the withdrawal negotiations

The following section examines the empirical evidence of the withdrawal proceedings to assess whether the Commission succeeded in exploiting this constellation of institutional, contextual, and personal factors. The ensuing sections flesh out the components of both instrumental and political leadership strategies and evaluates their significance in precipitating the negotiation outcome.

Instrumental leadership: subtly steering the negotiations

The immense technical complexity of the withdrawal negotiations produced a strong demand for instrumental leadership by the Commission. Indeed, the TF50 used its technical and legal expertise as well as drafting skills to delineate the contours of the negotiations. Once the TF50 was set-up in the autumn of 2016, it engaged in a massive exercise of reviewing the *acquis communautaire* – the entire body of EU law – to map the implications of the variants of Brexit for different EU policy fields (Laffan, 2019, p. 9). Aided by the Commission's DGs, legal service, and Council Secretariat, the members of the TF50 unraveled the extreme complexity of Brexit to identify the consequences of the UK's emerging red lines (Interviews #1, #6). Diplomatic meetings on the technical level in Brussels between national delegations, the Council's Task Force, and members of the TF50 in parallel to Barnier's shuttle diplomacy (see below) facilitated early consultations.

The TF50's early demonstration that it had a comprehensive grasp of the Brexit technicalities and its extensive consultations with central stakeholders proved critical in persuading those member states sceptical of the Commission leadership, such as Poland, or with significant stakes in the negotiations, such as Ireland, to rally behind the TF50 (Interview #8). When Michel Barnier and some of his senior staff met an Irish delegation on 12 October 2016, the latter were struck by his already existing understanding of the Good Friday Agreement and the potentially critical consequences Brexit entailed for peace on the island of Ireland (Connelly, 2018, p. 67). The TF50 had been aware of the land border issues not only in Ireland but also pertaining to Gibraltar and Cyprus from the early autumn of 2016 (Interview #1). In a recognition of the technical complexity and nascent political importance of the Irish border issue, in mid-2017 the TF50 assigned Nina Obermaier, a former official at the EU's diplomatic service where she handled the complex EU-Swiss relations, to deal with the Irish dossier

(Interview #6). Given its historic links to the UK, the Irish government had been tempted to engage with London bilaterally. However, it realised in in late 2016 that London lacked the political will and means to provide solutions to the border issue, and unequivocally backed the TF50, which was epitomised by its rejection of calls for a bilateral deal by the House of Lords in December 2016 (House of Lords, 2016; Connelly, 2018, p. 79ff; Interview #1).

By the time Theresa May triggered Article 50 in March 2017, the TF50 had cemented its role as sole negotiator and built up deep expertise across several affected policy dossiers, which would serve not only as a source of a permanent dominance by the TF50 over its UK counterparts, but also allow it to shape the tracks along which the negotiations would proceed. As one observer noted, the 'TF50 was patently on top of its brief' (Green, 2017). Indeed, the TF50 was quick off the starting blocks to gain an early mover advantage over the UK. Over the course of the first three months of negotiations alone, it published 14 position papers on withdrawal issues ranging from the financial settlement to data protection (European Commission, 2020). From the start, the negotiations thus took place on the TF50's terms (Interview #5).

The Irish border issue soon emerged as the politically thorniest and technically most challenging issue among the three main baskets. Throughout the referendum campaign, the Irish border issue had barely featured in public debates in the UK. This apparent lack of serious engagement continued in the early months of the negotiations, when the UK demonstrated a striking ignorance of the technical and legal challenges Brexit posed to North-South cooperation and the Good Friday Agreement more broadly, which was reflected in two position paper published on 16 August that vaguely referred to innovative technological solutions (UK Government, 2017).

In response, the TF50 in close collaboration with Irish officials drew on its expertise to arrive at a creative solution. On 9 November 2017, an internal paper was leaked, in which the TF50 argued that there should be no 'regulatory divergence' by Northern Ireland from the rules of the EU's single market and the customs union – this was the genesis of the 'backstop' that was to shape the negotiations until its very conclusion (Telegraph, 2017). The 'backstop' proved the crucial door opener for the next phase of negotiations. Despite outcries on the Conservative backbenches, in the British press, and from the Democratic Unionist Party in Belfast, UK and EU negotiators agreed on a joint report on 8 December 2017 with the backstop as its centrepiece. It was obvious that the situation in Ireland would remain a protracted political problem in the UK, but the TF50 together with Irish diplomats engineered a creative compromise solution. Article 49 of the joint report offers three solutions to avoid a hard border: 1) a trade deal, implying that the UK would stay in the single market and customs union; 2) specific solutions proposed by the UK; and 3) 'in the absence of agreed solutions', the 'backstop'. Notwithstanding that the first two options appeared unrealistic from the start, the wording allowed Theresa May to sign the joint report, after the Democratic Unionist Party had threatened to end its confidence-and-supply arrangement with the Conservative Party. The December compromise thus managed to resolve the issue by delegating the border issue to the next phase, yet with the critical caveat that recourse to the backstop would be the default option.

It was thus the TF50's internal paper, paired with subsequent creativity, that laid out the tracks for the joint report (Connelly, 2018, p. 348ff.).

In light of the looming deadline to finalise the Withdrawal Agreement in October 2018, the next episode in which the TF50 effectively used its expertise and drafting position to shape the outcome of the negotiations emerged soon after the joint report. In mid-January 2018, the TF50 set out to translate the political agreement into a legal text and draft the first version of the Withdrawal Agreement. Before the draft was circulated to the UK and published on 28 February, the TF50 sent versions to all national delegations. Once again drawing on its immense expertise, the TF50 received, answered, and in part incorporated into the draft 700 questions from member-states over the course of a few days ensuring a widespread sense of collective ownership (Interview #1; Laffan, 2019, p. 9). This pace and level of consultation not only further increased member states' trust in the TF50 (Interview #11). The timely publication also again allowed the TF50 to lay out the tracks as the ensuing negotiations would be based on the EU's document (Green, 2018). It included the legal operationalisation of the backstop in form of a 'common regulatory area' between the EU and Northern Ireland, not the entire UK as Theresa May wanted (European Commission, 2018: Art.3).

The backstop was to remain a sticking point with negotiators agreeing on an UK-wide backstop in the November 2018 Protocol on Ireland, only for Boris Johnson to agree for Northern Ireland to remain aligned to EU rules to avoid a hard border, in what closely resembled the EU's draft Withdrawal Agreement. In sum and as expected by the NIL perspective, the TF50 utilised its deep subject knowledge and drafting skills to gain negotiation advantages over the UK, pave the way of the negotiation, and generate trust among member-states. The TF50 discernible exercise of instrumental leadership thus contributed to the unity of the EU27.

Political leadership: shaping key decisions of the negotiation

The previous section demonstrated that the TF50 subtly shaped the negotiations by using its expertise and drafting skills. The following section shows that despite the close involvement of the member states, it also exercised more direct forms of political leadership in form of agenda-shaping and brokerage, which was accepted by the member states and the GAC working party who trusted the Commission not to pursue parochial gains. While President of the European Council Donald Tusk was a prominent and vocal public persona, he never undermined the TF50. Significantly, all political decisions throughout the negotiations by the TF50 were taken in close coordination with President Juncker and his cabinet – not the wider College of Commissioners given the Presence of the UK European Commissioner Julian King – which added both weight and legitimacy to its handlings (Interview #13).

The most strategic and consequential episode of agenda-shaping by the TF50 occurred at the beginning of the process. Following the unexpected referendum result, most member states were uncertain about their interests in the forthcoming negotiations. While the leaders had laid out broad principles in an informal meeting on 29 June 2016, few member states had expected and adequately prepared for the Vote Leave side to win the referendum (Interview #11). There

was a vacuum and the TF50 proactively moved to fill it. The TF50 used its aforementioned technical grasp to design the overall framework of the negotiations. First, it identified and then put three major baskets as priorities on the agenda – citizens' rights, financial settlements, and the Irish border issue – holding technical seminars on those matters with all member states to get them on board. Second, in private talks with key member states in January 2017, Barnier and his senior staff presented the idea to divide the negotiations into two distinct phases: the first phase would address withdrawal matters, while the second phase would focus on future relations (Interview #1, #9, #11). Only if 'sufficient progress' on withdrawal matters had been reached would the negotiations proceed to the next phase.

Described by one national official as a 'stroke of genius' on part of the Commission (interview #11), this example of agenda-structuring would allow the EU to control the process: only once the UK had settled its bills and found a solution to avoid a hard border in Ireland would talks about a future trade deal commence (Rogers, 2019; McTague, 2019). Due to the asymmetrical interdependence between the EU and the UK – in 2015, the exports to the EU accounted for 44% of UK exports compared to less than 7% vice versa (ONS, 2016) – the UK needed a trade deal much more than the EU, thus depriving the UK of much of its leverage (Schimmelfennig, 2018). The TF50 also temporarily excluded potentially divisive issues among the EU member states regarding future trade relations from the agenda, thereby strengthening unity on withdrawal matters. Convinced by the merits of the proposal, the national leaders duly included the phased approached in the negotiation mandate of 29 April 2017. Phasing the negotiations was no legal necessity – there is no reference to it in Article 50 – but an astute political choice devised by the TF50 that significantly strengthened the EU's hand.

In addition to this agenda-shaping, the TF50 alongside other EU actors also effectively framed the negotiations to shape the influence narratives and perceptions of the negotiations with the objective to highlight the difficulties involved in exiting the EU to bolster support for the EU. By publishing draft agreements, guidelines, negotiation directives, position papers, and agendas for negotiation rounds, the TF50 used transparency as a negotiation tool (Council of the European Union, 2017). It successfully created the impression that it was both united and well-prepared for the negotiations, in stark contrast to an opaque and divided UK government (Rogers, 2019; Jensen and Kehlstrup, 2019). Indeed, this strategy seems to have been successful as Eurosceptic parties across the continent no longer want to leave the union and support among the public for membership across the EU increased from 53% in September-October 2016 to 62% in September 2018 (Eurobarometer, 2018; Chopin and Lequesne, 2020; de Vries, 2017). Suave, serious, and well-known, Michel Barnier played a crucial role in the EU's framing efforts. As the public face of the EU, his remarks on the Brexit negotiations at press conferences following negotiation rounds or rare interviews resonated widely. Especially his repeated warning that 'the clock is ticking' struck a chord with European publics, even becoming the title of an ARTE documentary (Laffan, 2019). It appears implausible that a technocrat from the Commission could have played a similarly effective public role.

The TF50, furthermore, became the central broker of compromises among the EU27. The Barnier Method comprised three levels, on which extensive coordination and consultation took

place to sound out the concerns among member states (Interview #14). First, Barnier himself travelled widely, visiting every capital at least twice, and liaised with national parliamentarians, businesses, trade unions, and local citizens, symbolically visiting the Irish border and Danish harbours. He thereby countered the narrative of aloof technocrats in Brussels and ensured collective ownership of the Withdrawal Agreement among stakeholders across the continent (Interview #7). Second, the Commission engaged bilaterally with member states on an informal level, hosting more than 150 meetings with national delegations and regular pre- and debriefs before and after negotiation rounds (Interview #1). Several national officials emphasised the unprecedented transparency of the Commission's conduct in stark contrast to previous trade negotiations (Interviews #5, #8, #9). One early example of the high-level diplomatic exchanges was Juncker's successful effort in two private meetings in August and September 2017 to convince the reluctant German chancellor Merkel to keep the Irish border as an issue to be included in the Withdrawal Agreement (Interview #13). The German government had repeatedly questioned the need to deal with the border in the first phase of the negotiations, referring to its potential to derail the negotiations.

Third, the TF50 forged synergetic relations with the other EU institutions. It co-operated closely with the Council's working party under Didier Seeuws, with senior TF50 staff attending working party meetings three times a week during the course of the negotiations. Aware of the need for its consent at the end of the process, the TF50 also fully involved the European Parliament in the negotiations by granting it extensive level of information and access to the negotiation process (Interview #4). Barnier regularly attended and updated the European Parliament's Brexit steering group to ensure inter-institutional unity (Closa, 2019). The TF50 exploited the cohesion among the EU institutions to strengthen its negotiation position vis-à-vis the UK by using the European Parliament's red lines on particularly citizens' rights, for instance on family reunions and applications for settled status, to push for a more ambitious agreement (Bressanelli *et al*., 2019). Thus, the Commission's conduct allowed for unprecedentedly close inter-institutional cooperation, which enabled it to exercise political leadership unopposed by the member states (Kassim, forthcoming)

The resulting status as trusted broker proved critical in reaching the final deals with both the May and Johnson government. When the negotiators agreed to the Withdrawal Agreement on 13 November 2018, the TF50 took the initiative to reach a deal by conceding that the backstop would entail an all-UK rather than Northern Ireland-only customs union, which to many member states came as an unexpected and concerning development and prompted level-playing field concerns (Interviews #12, #14; O'Rourke, 2019, p. 281). Between the 13 November and the European Council on 25 November, TF50 negotiators managed to assure member-states that the EU would maintain its leverage in future trade negotiations and that the level playing fields provisions including in the deal were watertight (Interview #1, #9). However, as one official noted, 'in normal circumstances, this would not have gone through' in such a short span of time (Interview #12).

In a similar vein, the TF50 could rely on its reputation when it convinced member-states to endorse the revised Withdrawal Agreement on 17 October 2019. Negotiations between the

TF50 and its UK counterparts on a revised Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland dragged on deep into the night of 16 October, with the final text only being circulated among member-states at noon on 17 October, three hours before the European Council began. In light of the time pressure of the looming Brexit deadline on 31 October, member-states trusted TF50's reassurances that the deal reflected its interests (Interview #2).

In sum, the Commission actively shaped the agenda of the withdrawal negotiations and was critical in brokering compromises among the member states to reach a final deal. Contrary to the expectations in the literature, the inter-institutional relationship was characterised by extensive consultations, transparency, and ultimately trust, which led member states to welcome the Commission's political leadership.

Conclusion

This article has investigated the causes for the puzzling unity among the EU27 during the Brexit withdrawal negotiations by tracing the role played by the Commission's TF50. The empirical findings plausibly affirm that alongside other causal factors, indeed, the TF50 contributed significantly to the successful negotiation outcome. In contrast to the preceding renegotiations of the UK's membership terms, the Commission was in an institutionally powerful position, operated in a context of uncertainty and shock among member states, and was led by the effective leadership couple of Juncker and Barnier. The TF50 transparent and consultative conduct in the pursuit of its policy interest generated trust among the member states, which therefore accepted its instrumental and political leadership. It provided legal and technical expertise, drafted key documents, shaped the agenda, and brokered compromises. Backed by Juncker behind the scenes, Michel Barnier's role not only as chief negotiator but also public face of the EU during the negotiations and shuttle diplomat proved crucial in granting the TF50 authority in the eyes of the member-states and the public.

These findings make two central contributions to the existing literature. First, the article nuances the debates on inter-institutional dynamics in the EU. It lends evidence to the claim that the Commission generally and the Juncker Commission specifically can exert political leadership. Indeed, the Commission's role in the withdrawal proceedings proved more influential than the intergovernmental narrative suggests and more political than the new institutionalist leadership perspective expects, It is undoubtable that at a time when the EU increasingly affects core state powers, member-states will seek to be closely involved in the decision-making processes, which is corroborated by their active involvement in the withdrawal negotiations. However, this does not inevitably mean a shift of power from institutions to national governments and the concomitant decline of the Commission, but may give rise to a more complex, positive sum collaboration among the EU actors.

Second, it identifies conditions under which the Commission can exert political leadership, which is hitherto underspecified in NIL and literature on the 'political Commission'. The analysis demonstrated that favourable institutional and contextual factors were necessary but insufficient for the political leadership by the Commission. It required the conscious efforts by

the Commission's leadership couple of Juncker and Barnier to exploit this favourable constellation by building symbiotic relationships with other EU institutions, which allowed the Commission to exert political leadership to forge unity. This inclusive approach stands in marked contrast to previous episodes when the Juncker Commission sought to assert leadership insensitive to the concerns of key member states and other institutions – Juncker's failed intervention during the bail-out negotiations with Greece or the Commission's proposed refugee relocation quotas are cases in point (see Toemmel 2019).

Brexit is, of course, an exceptional case. Time will tell whether the context-specific insights on the agential qualities of the Commission possess external validity (see Debre and Dijkstra 2023; Schuette 2020). The negotiations on the future relations that nominally started in March 2020 will provide the first test case for the continued cogency of the Commission's leadership. Some contextual factors differ, as interests among the EU27 are more heterogeneous on economic and security cooperation with the UK than on withdrawal matters and national parliaments will likely have to ratify the deal, both of which will make it more challenging for the TF50 to maintain unity. Beyond Brexit, the Commission's leadership may also provide a governance template for other delicate policy fields such as major trade negotiations or EU foreign policy. Here, too, the EU could conceivably benefit from appointing an actor with a clear political mandate who, sensitive to the interests of the member states and the European Parliament, can draw on the existing technocratic structures to exercise leadership on behalf of the EU.

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3

Chapter 3

The EU's quest to sustain multilateralism since 2016

Co-authored with Hylke Dijkstra

Abstract: The multilateral order is in crisis. States increasingly contest, undermine, and even withdraw from international organizations (IOs) and other multilateral institutions. Challenges emanate not only from emerging powers dissatisfied with the institutional status quo forged for and by Western powers but also from established Western states as well as transnational civil society. No other actor but the EU is more intimately entangled with the multilateral order. This article therefore reviews to what extent and how the EU actively sustained multilateral institutions since 2016. It identifies three types of mechanisms: defence, reform, and extension of multilateralism. Based on interviews with senior officials in EU institutions and the member states, the article finds that the EU has proven to be rather successful in temporarily defending existing institutions under pressure. However, it largely failed to reform multilateral institutions and extend multilateral cooperation to new areas. In doing so, the article contributes to a differentiated understanding of the EU as a foreign policy actor and the processes of the crisis of the multilateral order.

Introduction

Multilateralism is in crisis (Lake et al. 2021). Russia's attack on Ukraine reflects not only a flagrant disregard for multilateral norms, such as peaceful settlement of disputes, but it is also likely to intensify great power competition and undermine multilateral cooperation. Meanwhile, China continues to pursue mercantilist trade policies, while eroding human rights law and building alternative institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. But threats to the multilateral order also emanate from the West. Donald Trump's America First exemplified unilateralism with severe consequences for specific multilateral institutions, including NATO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Paris Climate Agreement. The United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) and Japan the International Whaling Commission. Almost inevitably, the multilateral system is increasingly 'gridlocked' (Hale, Held, and Young 2013), thus unable to produce adequate solutions to pressing global problems.

Multilateralism means that three or more states cooperate based on 'generalised principles' that should apply to all states regardless of their particularistic interests (Ruggie 1992: 571). In the long term, successful multilateralism should generate 'diffuse reciprocity' (Keohane 1986), whereby states mutually benefit and more than had they engaged in ad-hoc bilateralism or hierarchical forms of coordination. The contemporary crisis of multilateralism pertains both to its substantive and procedural nature (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann 2020). For one, states no longer agree on the generalised principles that should undergird cooperation. Liberal principles, such as open trade, cooperative security, and universal human rights are heavily contested as a result of greater ideological diversity and power shifts away from the West (Ikenberry 2020: 33ff.; Voeten 2020). For another, amid growing nationalist tendencies in many established democracies and great power competition, rules-based cooperation across regions as such is in jeopardy.

The crisis of multilateralism is critical for the EU. As the most advanced multilateral institution itself, the EU is the main beneficiary of the limited multilateral post-1945 order and particularly the more extensive post-1989 multilateral order. Protected by the US security umbrella, the military feeble but economically liberal EU profited from the growing interconnectedness and legalisation of international relations based on the generalized principles of open trade and cooperative security (Ikenberry 2020). The crisis of multilateralism is therefore of critical consequence for the EU as its very existence is bound up with the multilateral order. The EU has long recognised this in its various strategies including the 2016 Global Strategy, 2021 Joint Communication on multilateralism, and 2022 Strategic Compass. As the 2019 final review of the EU Global Strategy aptly notes '[f]or the EU the stakes are sky high […] our Union has a vital interest in being the centre of gravity of the work to promote and protect multilateralism globally' (2019: 15).

Preserving the multilateral order therefore presents a key strategy for the EU to prosper and survive, yet scholarly analyses of the EU and the crisis of multilateralism remain surprisingly limited. Scholars have studied extensively how the EU routinely participates and performs in international institutions (Laatikainen and Smith 2006; Jørgensen, Oberthür and Shahin 2011;

da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014; Wessel and Odermatt 2019; Marx and Westerwinter 2022) and how it projects its internal standards to the rest of the world (Bradford 2020). Research has therefore focused on how the EU has carved out a multilateral role for itself, but the present crisis requires the EU to change strategy and sustain the pillars of multilateralism.

This article analyses empirically to what extent the EU has responded to the crisis of multilateral order since 2016. It focuses on what the EU has actively tried to do to sustain key institutions rather than multilateral norms. While individual member states' initiatives are touched upon, the article concentrates on the EU's collective actions, i.e. the efforts initiated by or channelled through the EU institutions such as the European External Action Service. This follows the logic that the EU as a multilateral organization not only has potentially more to lose from the crisis of multilateralism than individual member states, but also that European initiatives are more likely to be effective when undertaken collectively. The year 2016 offers a suitable starting point because it marked an inflection point in global governance. Following the successful adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran all in 2015, the Brexit referendum and election of Donald Trump in 2016 as well as China's increasingly visible assertive efforts to change the multilateral status quo hailed a new era. The article relies on a review of the literature, publicly available sources, including official documents, complemented by ten interviews with senior EU and member state officials to trace the EU's perceptions of and responses to the crisis of multilateralism.

The article finds that while senior EU policymakers felt the need to proactively sustain multilateralism it nevertheless took until the spring of 2019 that the EU started adopting keynote strategies on multilateralism. Thenceforth, the EU was in 'survival mode' (Interview #3) to *defend* existing multilateral institutions to maintain the institutional status quo. In doing so, the EU emancipated itself from previous constraints and engaged in extraordinary behaviour compared to its usual routines in IOs, including openly challenging its erstwhile patron the US and partnering with a variety of other states. The EU has been less active, however in *reforming* multilateral institutions and *extending* multilateral cooperation to new areas. The EU entered a survival mode, not a transformation mode. The article starts with the mechanisms of how the EU can sustain multilateral institutions, before discussing the empirical evidence, and reflecting upon the wider implications.

Sustaining multilateral institutions: three mechanisms

It is generally understood that the liberal international order and multilateralism are in crisis. While there is disagreement between scholars on how deep this crisis runs (e.g. Rose 2017; Ferguson & Zakaria 2017; Ikenberry 2018; Mearsheimer 2019), even the optimist Ikenberry (2018) notes that "[t]hese are not happy times for liberal internationalists" (abstract). In a special issue of the journal *International Organization*, Lake, Martin and Risse (2021) similarly write that while the liberal international order "has proven resilient in the past … this time might be different" (p. 225). For them internal threats, resulting from domestic actors contesting the authority of international institutions, and external threats, such as the rise of

China and other authoritarian states, "come together in a major challenge to the principle of multilateralism and to core multilateral institutions" (p. 243). While the scholarship on the crisis of the liberal international order is impressive, limited attention is paid to the protagonists of multilateralism. By studying to what extent the EU has responded to the crisis of multilateral order, this article therefore contributes to this much larger debate in International Relations.

So what can the EU do to sustain multilateralism? There is no shortage of literature on how the EU and its member states coordinate and perform within multilateral institutions. As the EU gradually developed its external relations profile, scholars have focused on 'intersecting multilateralism' (Laatikainen and Smith 2006) where the EU interacts with and participates in multilateral institutions (e.g. Jørgensen et al. 2011; da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014; Wessel and Odermatt 2019; Marx and Westerwinter 2022). Research is extensive, yet it largely concentrates on how the EU has tried to progressively develop multilateralism as well as on its efforts and constraints to develop into a foreign policy actor. While the study of 'actorness' is useful to understand routine EU behaviour, the crisis of the multilateral order has forced the EU into an exceptional survival mode in which different logics apply. With notable exceptions of think tank reports (e.g. Gowan and Dworkin 2019), scholars have not studied these efforts. Combining recent advances in the literature on the resilience of international institutions with our longer-standing knowledge about EU actorness in those institutions, this article identifies three mechanisms through which the EU may sustain multilateral institutions.

The first mechanism for the EU through which to sustain the multilateral order is to *defend* existing multilateral institutions. This mechanism builds on the understanding that multilateral institutions have a degree of agency separate from their member states (Pollack 2003; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Hawkins et al. 2006). As they are actors in their own right multilateral institutions can try to resist (or ignore) external pressures, particularly when they come under direct contestation by a key member state(s) (e.g. Debre and Dijkstra 2021; Hirschmann 2021; Schuette 2021a). Multilateral institutions are not alone when trying to resist such challenges (author): they can rely on like-minded actors, including other member states, NGOs, and also the EU. The EU, as a key stakeholder, can support multilateral institutions in fending off such pressures. Manifestations include plugging budgetary gaps, establishing provisional arrangements to overcome momentary blockades, resisting attempts to capture the institution, using coercive means to deter or sanction violations of key multilateral norms, making side payments to dissatisfied members, and launching a public diplomacy campaign to defend the institution. Defending multilateralism, for the EU, thus implies a short term, tangible response to maintain the institutional status quo.

The second mechanism for the EU is to help *reform* existing multilateral institutions to adapt them to a changing environment. This builds on a general insight in organisational theory that organisations ultimately need to adjust to survive, as they draw upon their environment for essential resources (Aldrich 1999, p. 194). Compared to defending institutions, reforming them is a more complex and longer-term undertaking (e.g. Nielson and Tierney 2003; Barnett and Coleman 2005; Lipscy 2017). Reform may help multilateral institutions overcome gridlock and become more effective. It may also be a way to strategically coopt emerging powers (Kruck

and Zangl 2020) and satisfy challengers (Hirschmann 2021) resulting in the survival of multilateral institutions. While reform initiatives can come from multilateral institutions themselves, the EU, once again as a key stakeholder, has the ability to spearhead and support multilateral reform efforts (cf. Brooks and Wohlforth 2009 on the US support for reform efforts of multilateral institutions in a previous decade). To drive reform efforts, the EU can provide support to the leadership of key multilateral institutions, build coalitions with new partners, support appointees from underrepresented parts of the world, engage in public diplomacy to make the case for institutional reforms, or provide necessary resources to replace a former key member state. However, such efforts place the EU in a reform dilemma. On the one hand, the EU cannot risk that challenger states became permanently alienated and engage in counter-institutionalisation or systematic non-compliance with the rules and norms of the order. On the other, the EU disproportionally benefits from the institutional status quo. Reforms are likely to entail concessions of previously enjoyed privileges and also risk incentivising others to challenge the order (see Jurado, Leon, and Walter 2021).

Third, the EU can also help to *extend* multilateralism to previously ungoverned areas. Part of the crisis concerns the general perception that the multilateralism is not keeping up with growing global problems (Hale et al. 2013), which fuels calls to resort to unilateralism or strategic bilateralism instead. Given the emergence of a plethora of new global governance challenges – such as pandemic response and vaccine distribution, digital taxation, regulation of AI, digital currencies and cyber security, or prohibition of lethal autonomous weapons – providing effective multilateral answers can therefore reinforce the principles of international cooperation and multilateral order (e.g. Haner and Garcia 2019; Cihon, Maas, and Kemp 2020; Wenham, Eccleston-Turner, and Voss 2022). Indeed, states have to make key institutional choices when new issues arrive on the international agenda (Jupille et al. 2013). This includes expanding the mandate and scope of existing multilateral institutions (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001; Hall 2016; Hooghe et al. 2019) as well as establishing new institutions. Statism in light of new challenges effectively implies a decline of multilateralism (author). The EU has an intrinsic interest in showcasing the benefits of multilateralism to counteract trends toward competitive multipolarity at the expense of principled cooperation. Manifestations of extending multilateralism spearheaded by the EU include launching new initiatives to close governance gaps within or outside existing institutions, as well as building new coalitions with states or non-state actors. It also involves providing diplomatic capital and public diplomacy to make such new governance arrangements realities.

Defending, reforming and extending multilateralism are therefore three mechanisms through which the EU can provide support for multilateral institutions. While conceptually logically distinct, the EU can use them in parallel, for instance by framing reforms as necessary to 'save' a multilateral institution. The EU and its member states possess, in this respect, important levers to pursue these mechanisms in support of multilateralism including through the collective EU institutions in Brussels and EU delegations to multilateral institutions. Europeans have long been central actors in the multilateral order and occupy central positions in an array of IOs, including the UN Security Council or the IMF (see Wessel and Odermatt 2019 for an overview). Member state diplomatic services tend to be well resourced and connected in the

world, while the EEAS has strong networks in IOs and has increased the coherence of EU foreign policy writ large (see Blockmans and Wessels 2021; Spence and Batora 2015). The EU and its member states are also pivotal funders of IOs' regular budgets as well as extra-budgetary activities (see below), which grants them outsized influence. And the size of the EU's internal market and the concomitant market power gives the EU enormous leverage in shaping global regulatory governance and foreign policies of dependent states (Bradford 2020; Velluti 2020).

At the same time, however, internal and external factors can constrain the EU's strategic capacity to sustain multilateralism. Internally, the EU needs to forge an internal consensus on most external actions not only among heterogeneous member states, in which EU external action is increasingly politicized (Biedenkopf, Costa, and Gora 2021), but also among the array of EU institutions involved in foreign policymaking. Doing so requires effective leadership either by senior institutional actors in the Commission or EEAS or key member states (Amadio Viceré, Tercovich and Carta 2020; Helwig and Siddi 2020; Koops and Tercovich 2020). Especially in crises, when normal constraints are likely to be relaxed, such informal activities should be crucial. Nonetheless, the EU still needs a legal basis to act. While the Union enjoys exclusive competences on trade policy, it shares competences with the member states on relevant foreign policy issues such as energy policy or humanitarian aid, and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is subject to special, intergovernmental decision-making procedures (Gstöhl and Schunz 2022; Keukeleire and Delreux 2022). In addition, the EU needs to have access to adequate resources to fund its external activities. The EU's seven-year budget from 2014-2020 included 66 billion EUR for 'Global Europe' activities.

Externally, the EU's ability to sustain the multilateral order is shaped by the extent to which it can attract followers among other influential actors and its varying legal statuses within multilateral institutions (Torney 2019). The EU is no hegemon, and for it to sustain the multilateral order, it relies on support by other stakeholders. The constellation of preferences among other powers thus shapes the EU's ability to build necessary coalitions. Furthermore, the EU's ability to exercise formal and informal influence over decision-making within institutions varies. Since the EU is not a state but, de jure, an IO itself, its status within IO is often ambiguous (see De Baere 2018). While it possesses full membership in some IOs like the WTO, it only enjoys enhanced permanent observer status at the UN General Assembly and most specialized agencies, and it has no formal status at the UN Security Council.

The EU's efforts to sustain multilateral institutions since 2016

This section analyses the extent to which the EU has responded to the crisis of multilateral order since 2016. As the purpose is to better understand which of the mechanisms the EU has used and how, this article focuses on key examples of EU actions in support of multilateralism. This is also in line with the empirical strategy where we rely on publicly available documents and interviews. EU documents, such as the 2021 Joint Communication, are a starting point in identifying instances of the EU trying to sustain multilateral institutions. These documents indeed highlight areas where the EU and its member states have been particularly active. This information is triangulated by ten interviews with senior officials, who have recounted their experiences and perceptions of the crisis of multilateralism. In terms of the interviewees, we

have spoken to senior civil servants familiar with the thinking of key EU officials such as European Council President Donald Tusk, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and High Representative Federica Mogherini. We have also spoken to interviewees with first-hand knowledge of Council policy-making and those based in major multilateral institutions and powerful states. All interviewees were selected on the basis of their formal positions in their organizations and we had a high response rate (71%). All interviews were largely unstructured allowing interviewees to recall instances they thought were most important for the EU's effort of sustaining multilateral institutions.

We have verified all the official EU documents and the interview data with the extensive public sources and secondary literature. For many individual multilateral institutions, there is a wealth of publicly available sources and our task was to trace how the EU responded to the variety of challenges to individual institutions. This research strategy does risk creating a bias to EU action as opposed to multilateral challenges to which the EU did not respond. Nevertheless, by comparing the different available mechanisms that the EU has used, variation across different multilateral institutions, the degree of success in sustaining the multilateral order across domains, and considering cases of non-action, it is possible to draw meaningful conclusions about the EU's approach in general. This empirical section of the article starts by analysing the crisis of multilateralism as perceived by the EU before zooming in on each of the mechanisms.

Perceptions of crisis at the top: better late than never

With hindsight, 2016 was a turning point for the multilateral order. It was the year of the Brexit referendum, the election of Donald Trump, and the EEAS adopted for the first time a strategic document on China reflecting its troublesome rise. Senior EU officials, however, only partially recognised the momentous nature and it took at least until 2019 for the EU to develop an overall strategic response to sustain multilateralism.

EU officials immediately understood the momentous twin shock of Brexit and Trump, but it was mostly considered a challenge of populism rather than a challenge against the multilateral order. The response to the Brexit referendum was swift. Fearing a domino effect with further member states leaving, the Commission responded decisively to forge unity among the member states and protect the EU polity (see Schuette 2021a). The election of President Trump, on the other hand, stunned European policymakers into initial ostrichism. They convinced themselves that Trump's rhetoric would not match his action, and that the 'adults in the room' would sufficiently constrain him on foreign policy. French President Macron tried to court Trump and UK Prime Minister May sought to revive the special relationship. At the EU level, too, senior officials initially hoped that they could merely 'wait out' Trump (Interviews #7, #9).

Evidence to the contrary mounted quickly throughout Trump's first year in office. In line with his fierce criticism of the Alliance, Trump refused to explicitly endorse NATO's Article 5 collective defence clause at the summit in May. In June 2017, he announced that the US would cease participation in the Paris Climate Agreement. In October 2017, he declared that the US would exit from UNESCO and decided not to recertify Iran's compliance with the JCPOA (he

abrogated the deal in May 2018). In December 2017, he recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital in a rupture with long-term US policy and international law. And the Trump Administration reduced, or even halted, funding of several UN agencies as well as the UN's operating and peacekeeping budget.

Many EU officials continued to harbour hopes of the return of traditional US leadership. One EU interviewee describes how it required 'a big psychological shift' (Interview #7) to stop denying the new reality that the US had gone rogue. According to another official, the 'awareness set in to do things differently' (Interview #9) only in the second half of 2018 after Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA in May, the UN Human Rights Council in June, refused to sign the G7 summit communique in June ('the' rules-based international order was changed into 'a' rules-based international order), and came to the verge of announcing the US withdrawal from NATO in July (Schuette 2021b).

The Trump Presidency clearly was not the only challenge. China had equally started to actively undermine the principles of multilateral cooperation. And it took the EU, once again, some time to understand this challenge. Notwithstanding evidence of China's intensified mercantilist approach to international trade and attempts to reinterpret the UN charter (Foot 2020), the EU still considered China a crucial partner as late as 2015 (Interview #6). For some officials, China's refusal to recognise the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the territorial dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea was 'a game changer' (Interview #6). The EEAS pushed for, and eventually adopted, a new joint strategic document on China (European Commission 2016). However, the EEAS strategy never enjoyed significant political ownership in the Commission and capitals (Interview #6; Biscop 2021). It was only in 2018 that views in the upper echelons in Brussels on China tangibly changed (Interview #9). This followed two failed EU-China summits, deteriorating human rights situation in Xinjang, and intensified Chinese attempts to capture key UN agencies.

Thus, the EU belatedly woke up to the profound challenge of multilateralism. But in 2019 it produced three major policy documents. In March, the Commission and EEAS published the EU-China Strategic Outlook, in which they defined China no longer only as a 'cooperation partner' and 'economic competitor', but crucially also as 'systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance' (European Commission 2019). Unlike in 2016, the initiative came from the top by Commission President Juncker and Secretary-General Selmayr (Interview #6). In June, the Council set out concrete conclusions to strengthen multilateralism by 'upholding international norms and agreement', 'extending multilateralism to new global realities', and 'making multilateral organisations fit for purpose' (Council 2019). Also in June, the EEAS published the third annual review of the EUGS, in which it dedicated much attention on how to 'preserve, promote, and strengthen multilateralism' (EEAS 2019). A key change involved what one interviewee (Interview #1) called 'strategic partnering'; that is, to go beyond partnerships with traditional allies and reach out to other actors to build new, issue-specific cooperation. The centrality of the EU institutions in all of this was also clear compared to the limited response of the individual member states. Germany and France notably spearheaded efforts to create an Alliance for Multilateralism, launched in September 2019, to uphold and

adapt multilateral principles. But it quickly became apparent that the Alliance was largely symbolic (Interviews #4, 5).

Together, the three EU documents signalled strategic change. The EU at last recognised the return of power politics and profound danger for the multilateral order. According to one interviewee, the EU finally entered 'survival mode' (Interview #3). Strategies adopted by the EU since 2019 have further consolidated this new mindset. The 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism provides an overall strategy document and the 2021 Trade Policy Review called for an "An Open, Sustainable and *Assertive* Trade Policy" (emphasis added). The 2022 Strategic Compass notes that multilateralism "has come under strong questioning" (p. 7) and an internal document on China in 2022 urged member states to be even tougher on China (Financial Times 2022). The next section examines the extent to which this change in strategic discourse ushered in concrete policy changes to sustain the multilateral order.

Defending multilateralism

When multilateral institutions come under direct contestation, for instance by Trump or China, the EU can provide support in helping those institutions in maintaining the status quo. Since 2016, the EU has regularly resorted to defending multilateralism and this section provides three key examples: the WTO, UN, and Paris Agreement. To start with an area where the EU has some of the strongest powers (trade), the WTO and its Appellate Body faced considerable contestation. While the US's growing frustration with the WTO's dispute settlement system was longer standing, the Trump Administration starting blocking appointments of judges to the Appellate Body in mid-2017, thus rendering it defunct by December 2019 (Zaccaria 2022). For the open and deeply interconnected EU economy, the impending collapse of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism – the 'crown jewel of the multilateral trading system' (Hopewell 2021: 1026) – presented a grave challenge. When compromise negotiations with the US failed in late 2018, the EU took the initiative and started building coalitions to devise an alternative dispute settlement mechanism (Multi-Party Interim Arbitration Arrangement, MPIA). By December 2020, most major economies bar the US had agreed to participate in the MPIA.

The MPIA is a remarkable case in point of the EU's attempts to sustain the multilateral trading order amidst US contestation. The EU not only exhibited strong leadership in the WTO. It also protected its core interests by building followership beyond its natural partners, including China, and openly acting against the declared interests of the Trump Administration. The success in setting up this backstop institution was enabled by a combination of internal and external factors. The EU managed to speak with one voice because it had exclusive competences on trade and its member states, despite some qualms about divergence from the US, shared the fundamental interest in protecting the multilateral trading system. Moreover, the EU enjoyed credibility among WTO members and its proactive initiative resonated with the interests of most other members (Hopewell 2021: 1036-40). At the same time, the MPIA was considered a short-term interim and status quo solution to sit out Trump, yet President Biden has hitherto refused to rejuvenate the Appellate Body. This backstop, which was initiated

by the EU to keep the WTO dispute settlement mechanism alive, has therefore not yet resulted in a wider and longer-term WTO reform effort.

President Trump, however, not only took aim at the WTO. The UN also drew his ire. The US administration exerted pressure via rhetoric attacks on these institutions as well as cutting funding and, in the case of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) withdrawing membership altogether. While the totality of funding increased over Trump's tenure largely due to budgetary decisions taken by Congress (CFR 2021), the contributions to peacekeeping and selected agencies decreased, in part drastically. Indeed, the US defunded the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 2018 and 2019, leading the agency to the brink of collapse and the substantially reduced contributions to the WHO for 2020-21. The Trump administration also withdrew funding for the UN Population Fund in 2017. Finally, the US lowered its contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget by almost USD 1bn. For the EU together with its member states, the budgetary pressure on key UN agencies and peacekeeping operations was thus a litmus test for its ability to defend multilateralism. Its response was to unilaterally plug some of the gravest funding gaps where feasible (Interview #1). The EU increased its overall contributions to the UN, UNRWA, WHO, and UNFPA. However, since the EU is not a UN member and therefore does not fund UN peacekeeping operations it was more constrained in this area and rather had to rely on its member states (#Interviews #1, #2, #4). The EU and its member states stepping up by making additional budgetary resources available was nonetheless a clear manifestation of the defence mechanism outlined in the conceptual section above.

The Trump Administration and especially China also increasingly sought to redefine essential principles of the UN Charter. The US wanted to revise UN language on gender inclusivity and also violated international law by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. China, in turn, intensified its efforts to undermine the normative foundation of the UN by championing a hierarchical, sovereigntist view, whereby notions of peace and security as well as economic development enjoyed priority over human rights (Foot 2020; Interviews #2, #6). These efforts were manifest in Chinese discourse in the various committees, its attempts to defund UN programmes and agencies that focus on human rights, and its active efforts to introduce Chinese language such as the 'a community with a shared future for mankind' and references to the Belt and Road Initiative into official UN documents (Interview #10). To advance its vision of the UN, China also began to adopt a more strategic approach to elect Chinese nationals to senior positions within the UN agencies. By 2020, four out of fifteen UN agencies were led by Chinese nationals and China campaigned for its fifth position with a candidate for Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

These normative challenges to the UN met a twofold EU response. First, the EU stepped up its strategic communication efforts. Driven by the EEAS's Strategic Communications division, the EU began a public diplomacy #MultilateralismMatters campaign to showcase its achievements (Interview #7). At the same time, the EU also started to actively push back against US and particularly Chinese discursive challenges in the various UN committees (#Interview #6). One official described how the EU delegation at the UN is 'fighting battles

with China on language every day' (Interview #8). This also entailed calling out violations of international law more forcefully, even when committed by the US as for instance in the case of the recognition of Jerusalem (Interview #5). Second, the EU eventually started pushing back against Chinese strategic candidatures. The Chinese efforts to take over senior leadership positions had initially remained beneath the radar (interviews #6, #7, #8). A lack of coordination between the US and the EU had further meant that as late as 2019, the Chinese candidate became head of the Food and Agriculture Organization (Interview #4). During the elections of the next head for the increasingly politicised WIPO, the US and EU coordinated their efforts to prevent a Chinese national from winning the contest (Interview #4). A more strategic EU approach to diplomacy to maintain the status quo in multilateral institutions was thus apparent.

Climate change mitigation has also been a central objective for EU external action. Trump's decision in June 2017 to exit from the Paris Agreement was therefore another critical challenge to the multilateral order and the EU's core interests. And it was not without precedent; President Bush had withdrawn the US from the 1998 Kyoto Protocol and thereby unleashed a domino effect of declining participation and commitment by key emitters. The EU's aim was thus to prevent another Kyoto. But the EU is no hegemonic power on environmental politics and its decreasing share in global carbon emissions nominally reduces its influence. Declaring that the EU was 'ready to lead the fight' (Sefcovic cited in Toplensky 2017) to safeguard the Paris Agreement and prevent an exodus of other states, the EU therefore resorted to what Oberthuer and Dupont (2021) call exemplary and diplomatic leadership to help the Paris Agreement survive.

To gain credibility and diffuse ambitious environmental policies, the EU set out to lead by example. The European Green Deal, agreed in 2019, enshrined new emissions reduction target of 55% by 2030 and Net Zero by 2050 and launched a set of policy initiatives on a variety of environmental legislation. The EU also sought to engage other key actors to comply with Paris and ratch up their commitments. For instance, it includes in its trade negotiations the condition to comply with the Paris Agreement. The EU and its member states are with 23.3 billion EUR in 2020 also the largest climate finance contributors to developing countries (EC 2022). The EU launched a diplomatic offensive to keep especially China in the Agreement (e.g. Keating 2018). The EU also circumvented the White House to engage with substate actors such as the State of California. On the rhetorical level, too, the EU engaged in containment of the US contestation of multilateral climate policy (Petri and Biedenkopf 2020). The EU's initial response to the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has thus been largely successful. No domino effect of other leading emitters exiting ensued, and states have continuously, if insufficiently, ratcheted up their carbon reduction targets. The EU's defence of the Paris Agreement drew on the mobilization of enormous domestic resources and widespread support among other states. Despite energy and climate being mixed competences, the EU has largely acted as a unified actor in international climate policy.

Reforming multilateralism

While the EU has thus set up backstop institutions to address the crisis at the WTO, provided additional funds to UN agencies, fought back against Chinese influence at the UN, and dealt with non-state actors to keep the Paris Agreement alive – all with the purpose of defending multilateral institutions – this section analyses the most prominent attempts by the EU to reform IOs under contestation. Reforming challenged multilateral institutions is normally a longer-term process than defending the status quo. The focus is on the UN system, the WHO, and the IMF. As the linchpin of the multilateral system, the UN is regularly subject to demands for reform. Where many developed states criticize the UN's inefficiencies and overspending and prefer greater executive power of the Secretary-General, developing states often press for greater development spending and further empowerment of the General Assembly (e.g. Baumann 2018). Moreover, non-permanent members of the Security Council have long sought to reform and enlarge the highest decision-making body to better reflect the power distribution of the 21st century (e.g. Binder and Heupel 2020). Upon his appointment in 2017, UN Secretary-General Guterres set out to address some of those criticisms via a comprehensive reform of the development system, management of the organization, and the peace and security architecture (see Mueller 2021).

The EU has reflexively supported Guterres' reform agenda across the three pillars. There is widespread consensus among officials that the EU has even been the 'most consistent' driver of reforms among the key members (Interviews #1, #2, #7). One official also emphasised that, unlike the US, for the EU it was not only about increasing efficiency and cutting costs, but also about a better integration of development policy into overall political direction of the UN and enhancing accountability (Interview #7). The EU has therefore been a key supporter of a more central role for the UN resident coordinators in the implementation of UN programmes across the world. Previously, officials of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) coordinated the work of the other UN agencies. Since 2019, the resident coordinators report directly to the UN Secretary-General, and they lead the UN country teams thereby providing much more political direction with a view of implementing the SDGs. The EU has not just supported this major administrative overhaul but has also provided financial support to the newly empowered resident coordinators through the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda.

The EU has missed no chances to publicly declare its support for Guterres (Interview #7). This has also been true for the most recent initiative 'Our Common Agenda' launched by the Secretary-General in 2021, which represents an ambitious agenda on the 'future of global cooperation through an inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism' (Guterres 2021) and will result in a UN Summit of the Future in September 2023. Guterres, however, has shied away from Charter reforms and addressing some of the holy cows of the UN system such as the Security Council or the functioning of the General Assembly. The EU's attempt to allow the UN Secretary-General greater budgetary discretion has hitherto also failed to garner sufficient support (Interview #7; Mueller 2021). In light of internal divisions, however, over Security Council reforms (Interview #1), the EU never even tried advocating for 'a top to bottom recast of the multilateral blueprint' at the UN (Interview #2). Due to its limited role in

peacekeeping, the EU could also not play an active role on peace and security reforms (#nterview #1). As a result, the EU's role in driving UN reforms has been constrained.

Another UN agency that has faced heavy criticism and demands for change is the World Health Organization (WHO). Not only the US, but countries from across the world lamented the performance of the organization especially in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic in January and February 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the EU was not a major player in the WHO despite being a major funder; as merely an observer, the EU cannot fully participate in governing body meetings and global health was low on the agenda in Brussels despite blatant failures of the WHO during the Ebola outbreak in 2014 (Svendsen 2021). However, the WHO's impotence in face of Chinese suppression of vital information about the virus and its subservient behaviour vis-à-vis the Chinese government, the US withdrawal from the organization, and the initially national scrambles to secure Personal Protective Equipment highlighted the need for substantial WHO reforms (Interview #2).

The EU has been at the forefront of such efforts. In response to Trump suspending US funding for the organization, the EU and its member states pledged more than 50% of the emergency funding to combat Covid-19 as part of the WHO's Strategic Preparedness Plan in 2020, with the EU accounting for 20% of it (WHO 2020). The Council Conclusions of October 2020 also spelled out several reform proposals, including 'a revision of the alert system for declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern', the creation of 'an independent epidemiological assessment on-site in high-risk zones', and 'increased transparency' mechanisms (Council 2020). With the Biden Administration's decision to return to the WHO, the EU has since allied with the US to push for these changes, but it has hitherto faced strong opposition from China and Russia in particular and no WHO reforms, such as reducing the heavy reliance on voluntary contributions, have yet materialized. The EU has also led efforts to start negotiating a new pandemic treaty or related instrument to complement or succeed the 2005 International Health Regulations. European Council President Charles Michel called for such as an international pandemic treaty in November 2020 which was followed by a G7 endorsement in February 2021, and a joint statement of many EU leaders, partner countries ranging from Kenya to South Korea and Indonesia, and the WHO Director-General in March 2021 (European Council n.d.), prior to the start of negotiations in 2022.

In contrast to the EU's attempts to propel some reforms of the UN system and WHO, key economic and financial multilateral institutions have received less attention. The IMF continues to be defined by institutionalised inequality in terms of its voting structure that heavily favours the West. The 14th Quota Review, based on economic indicators in 2008, was only implemented in 2016, at which point the high growth rates among emerging powers and stalling growth among European states meant the new quotas remained detached from economic realities. In turn, the 15th review concluded in 2019 without changes. As a result, the EU's (including the UK) current quota share of 30% is almost twice as high as its share of global GDP (Mohan 2020). The EU appears satisfied with the status quo; compounding matters, it continued to insist on its monopoly over the IMF's top job when it ensured Bulgarian Kristalina Georgieva would be appointed as managing director in 2019. One former official

conceded that the 'EU is doing little to act on' awareness that emerging countries, particularly China, be better represented in IOs like the IMF (Interview #3).

In sum, the EU's impact on reforms of the multilateral order has been significantly lower than on its defence. While the Union made some attempts at reforming the UN system and the WHO, the results were limited at best. As demonstrated by the example of the IMF or UN Security Council, the EU member states have also been unwilling to concede historical privileges to address the central underlying grievances of emerging powers with the result that the legitimacy crisis of many multilateral institutions has exacerbated. For the EU there is a clear reform dilemma between the status quo that it favours and changes required for multilateral institutions to adapt to a changing environment.

Extending multilateralism

The crisis of multilateralism not only stems from dissatisfaction with existing institutions but also a general perception that the multilateral order insufficiently addresses pressing collective action problems. Technological developments and external shocks reveal governance gaps. As the reflexive supporter of multilateralism, the EU is thus expected to propel new multilateral initiatives. This final section provides three brief examples on attempts to establishment new multilateral institutions in the areas of migration, vaccines, and cyber security. While the logic of extending multilateralism sometimes overlaps with reforming multilateralism, the focus here is on new multilateral institutions as opposed to already existing ones.

One of the lessons of the European refugee crisis of 2015 was the need for an international framework on migration, highlighting a clear gap in global governance. While it began as a UN process in 2016, the EU was the primary driver throughout the negotiation and drafting process of the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM), a non-binding framework to better manage migration from the local to the global level (Badell 2020). However, the initial EU unity began to crumble after President Trump pulled the US out of the agreement in late 2017. Hungary soon followed suit. While the EU found an innovative way to maintain a common EU-minus-Hungary negotiation position by appointing Austria as speaker (Interview #1), Austria itself and other increasingly sovereigntists member states joined the chorus of critical voices in the autumn of 2018. In the end, only 18 EU member states signed the GCM. What had started as an EU-supported initiative to extend multilateralism ended as a disaster for the EU's credibility (#Interviews #2, #4, #8). While the GCM is likely to be considered legally relevant over time (Interview #1), the increasing internal divisions prevented the EU from effectively extending multilateralism.

The second major new multilateral initiative, during the study period 2016-2021, was the Covax Facility to ensure equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccinations to developing countries. Launched in 2020 by the WHO, Gavi, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Covax pursued the declared ambition of delivering 2 billion vaccinations by the end of 2021 to combat the pandemic. Here too, the EU was a major diplomatic player and central donor. While the US and China quickly descended into a bilateral conflict, the EU

spearheaded diplomatic negotiations to find a multilateral response rather than relying on bilateral donations (Interview #8). One observer notes that 'nobody else was doing anything' on vaccine distributions (Interview #4). The EU institutions have also pledged in 1 billion USD in funding with the individual EU member states adding another 2.5 billion USD (European Council 2022). At the same time, the EU's leadership suffered from what was widely perceived as vaccine nationalism by especially the wealthy member states, who bought up and hoarded a disproportional number of vaccines (e.g. Watkins 2021). Germany furthermore spoke out against a Covid-19 vaccine patent waiver at the WTO. A so-called TRIPS waiver was ultimately agreed in the WTO, but only in June 2022, almost two years after the proposal had been suggested by India and South Africa, and therefore essentially after much of the world had already been vaccinated.

While the EU recently committed to extend multilateralism to fields such as AI or biodiversity (European Commission 2021: 8) and initiated a treaty on pandemic prevention, these initiatives are yet to bear fruit. The same goes for several other initiatives to extend global governance, for instance over lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) or cyber warfare in the context of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG). Here the EU faces a combination of internal divisions, a primacy of member states (such as France and Germany) in negotiation forums, and few opportunities to provide leadership (e.g. Badell and Schmitt 2022; Douzet, Géry and Delerue 2022). Covax and GCM therefore constitute the most notable EU attempts since 2016. In both cases, the EU initially drove negotiations but internal factors – vaccine nationalism and anti-migration sentiments respectively – undermined the EU's multilateral efforts.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the extent to which the EU has responded to the crisis of multilateral order since 2016. The EU has long punched below its weight in multilateral affairs. But the episode from mid-2018 onward marks both an awakening to the existential crisis and an emancipation from previous modi operandi. Upon belatedly realising the existential crisis to the multilateral order, survival instincts kicked in and the EU entered 'survival mode' (Interview #3) by setting out to defend critical institutions under pressure. In doing so, the EU not only acted with unprecedented urgency but also pursued hitherto unthinkable strategies. The EU made common cause with China against the US to establish the MPIA as a temporary remedy for the blockade of the WTO's Appellate Body; it plugged significant funding gaps of UN institutions and engaged in strategic communications efforts to confront both American and Chinese normative challenges to the UN system; and it provided diplomatic leadership to keep the Paris Climate Agreement intact.

The relatively successful attempts to defend specific institutions under pressure is only one side of the coin, however. The other is that the EU has proven less willing and able to reform or extend multilateralism. The EU made some attempts at reforming the UN system and the WHO, but produced limited results as the emerging schisms between the US and China, but also democracies and autocracies generally, have hardened fronts and rendered compromises

on significant reforms very difficult. Internal factors are, however, also carry responsibilities. The EU's unwillingness to concede what especially developing states consider unjustified institutional privileges has exacerbated resentments in the Global South and undermined the EU's credibility as a defender of multilateralism. Compounding matters, the parochialism demonstrated by member states in questions of vaccine distributions and the GCM prevented more effective multilateral solutions to new problems.

To understand how the EU has tried to sustain multilateralism, this article has empirically discussed a large number of EU efforts across different institutions. It has not gone into much depth for individual institutions, which would merit further research. Nevertheless, from this overview of efforts a clear picture emerges: the period from 2016-2021 was one of EU survival politics, of 'saving the savable' (Interview #3), rather than a reinvention of multilateralism. The EU did prevent the collapse of the multilateral order but many of the profound challenges besetting the order remain. Preventing regression from the status quo has thus proven easier than forging a positive change thereof. To sustain the multilateral order in the long term, the EU will have to shift from survival mode to transformation mode. With the arrival of the Biden Administration, the EU once again has a key ally in launching new multilateral initiatives such as on global corporate tax or climate financing. In the past, the EU had complacently relied on US leadership. But in light of the domestic turbulences in the US, this is not a viable strategy going forward. While the EU cannot replace the US hegemony, it will have to assume greater multilateral leadership responsibilities and also intensify its efforts to build partnerships beyond the G7 by working with the likes of Mexico, South Africa, or the African Union. Indeed, the EU will have to recognize that without conceding of some of its institutional privileges, reforms of key IOs will be impossible, which is likely to fuel outright opposition toward to the very multilateral order by dissatisfied states.

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4

Chapter 4

Why NATO survived Trump: The neglected role of Secretary General Stoltenberg

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Abstract: The election of Donald Trump posed an existential challenge to NATO. At the end of his tenure, however, the US president had neither withdrawn membership nor substantially undermined the alliance from within. This article helps explain the puzzle why NATO survived Trump's presidency. Extant explanations emphasize domestic factors such as the US foreign policy machinery and entrenched liberal ideology, structural reasons, and Trump's idiosyncratic personality. While these accounts possess some explanatory value, they remain incomplete as they omit one central factor: NATO's leadership. Drawing on more than twenty original interviews with senior officials, the article demonstrates that particularly Secretary-General Stoltenberg's strategic responses were a necessary factor in changing Trump's stance on burden-sharing and helped maintain a robust deterrence policy toward Russia. These findings carry important implications both for theoretical debates on international organizations' agency in fending off contestation and policy debates on which actors shape NATO by emphasising the hitherto understated role of the secretary-general.

Introduction

NATO only just survived the Presidency of Donald Trump. Trump had distinguished himself from virtually all US Presidents since the Second World War in his active hostility toward the alliance during the presidential campaign. When in office, he repeatedly toyed with the idea of withdrawing from NATO and was on the verge of publicly doing so at the 2018 NATO summit.[2] But whereas the President withdrew the US from the Iran Nuclear Deal, Paris Climate Agreement, UNESCO, and undermined the WTO, WHO, UN Refugee Agency, and the Green Climate Fund from within, Trump eventually changed his public position on NATO in 2019. In his state of the union speech in February, he described his tentative change of mind: 'For years, the United States was being treated very unfairly by NATO — but now we have secured a $100 billion increase in defence spending from NATO allies' and at the London Leaders meeting in December, he declared that 'NATO serves a great purpose.'[3]

Given that the US is the de facto indispensable power, the intuitive explanation for NATO's survival would be that it successfully adapted to Trump's demands. However, the empirical record suggests that NATO only partially adapted to Trump's demands for greater transatlantic burden-sharing and resisted his calls for closer relations with Russia. Two specific puzzles therefore emerge. First, why did Trump change his stance on transatlantic burden-sharing, even though increases in allied defence spending remained significantly below his demands? Second, why did the US even reinforce NATO's defence and deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia, despite Trump's calls to the contrary?[4]

While the dust has barely settled on the Trump Presidency, three types of explanations can be deduced from general analyses of Trumpian foreign policy. The first locate the sources of Trump's relatively continuous NATO policy on the domestic level. Some argue that the US foreign policy establishment constrained the Trump Administration's foreign policy impulses and ensured continued support for NATO. Others point to inherently expansionist tendencies of liberalism, allegedly entrenched in US society, that prevent a constrained foreign policy and withdrawing support for NATO.[5] The second camp emphasizes that continued support for

[2] On Trump's unprecedented opposition to the liberal international order, see Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony. The Unravelling of the American Global Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); and Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic. The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020), Joseph S Nye jr, The rise and fall of American hegemony from Wilson to Trump', *International Affairs*, 95: 1, 2019, pp. 63-80..

[3] Donald J. Trump, "Address to the Nation: State of the Union" (Washington, D.C.: Congress, February 5, 2019); and Donald J. Trump, "Press point by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US President Donald Trump" (Brussels, December 3, 2019).

[4] On NATO's adaptation post-2014, see for example Thierry Tardy, 'The risk of NATO's maladaptation', *European Security* 30: 1, 2021, pp. 24-42.

[5] Patrick Porter, 'Why America's' Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment', *International Security* 42: 4, 2018, pp. 9-46; Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions. America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Picador, 2018); and John J. Mearsheimer, 'Bound to Fail. The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order', *International Security* 43: 4, 2019, pp. 7-50.

NATO is the rational utility-maximising behaviour associated with US hegemony.[6] The third camp directs attention to Trump's idiosyncratic personality and cognitive features to explain his erratic and seemingly inconsistent foreign policy behaviour.[7]

These three perspectives are to a degree complementary and carry some explanatory power, but they remain incomplete. The domestic argument cannot explain why Trump changed his stance on burden-sharing relatively late in his term when the 'adults in the room' such as Defense Secretary Mattis or Chief of Staff Kelly – the major constraints on Trump – had departed the administration. The structural argument fails to explain why Trump was repeatedly on the verge of withdrawing from the alliance and who the actors were that persuaded the reluctant Trump of the merits of continued support for NATO. And the psychological argument is by itself insufficient to offer a comprehensive account of Trump's NATO policy; discerning the effects of Trump's personality requires understanding how they interact with the alliance's institutional and political environment.[8]

To explain Trump's puzzling NATO policy, this article incorporates but goes beyond domestic, structural, and psychological arguments by focusing on the neglected role played by NATO's Secretary General Stoltenberg and senior officials in Brussels. The omission of these actors in extant analyses is not surprising. Most scholars view NATO as a traditional military alliance, which lacks meaningful institutions and thus constitutes merely an instrument of state power.[9] Frank Schimmelfennig exemplarily observes that 'strong versions of institutional theory [which emphasize the agency of the Secretary General and wider bureaucracy] have not been prominent or supported in studies of NATO.'[10]

But NATO is more than a narrow military alliance held together by common threat perceptions. NATO is a security organization, undergirded by strong institutions, interdependencies, and a shared value foundation.[11] Indeed, recent contributions affirm the growing importance of

[6] Mark Webber, James Sperling, and Martin Smith, *What's wrong with NATO and how to fix it* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021); James Sperling and Mark Webber, 'Trump's foreign policy and NATO: Exit and voice', *Review of International Studies* 45: 3, 2019, pp. 511-526; and Robert Jervis, 'Liberalism, the Blob, and American Foreign Policy: Evidence and Methodology', *Security Studies* 29: 3, 2020, pp. 434-456, Trevor McCrisken and Maxwell Downman, 'Peace through Strength': Europe and NATO deterrence beyond the US Nuclear Posture Review', *International Affairs*, 95: 2, 2019, pp. 277-296..

[7] Michael N. Barnett, 'What is International Relations Theory Good for?' in Robert Jervis, Francis J. Gavin, Joshua Rovner, and Diane Labrosse, eds, *Chaos in the Liberal Order. The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 8-21.

[8] On this point, see Daniel W Drezner, 'Immature Leadership: Donald Trump and the American presidency', *International Affairs* 96: 2, 2020, pp. 383-384.

[9] Adrian Hyde-Price, 'NATO and the European Security system: a neo-realist analysis', in Mark Webber and Adrian Hyde-Price, eds, *Theorising NATO* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 41-60; Stephen M. Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', *Survival* 39: 1, 1997, pp. 156-179; and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland, 1979).

[10] Frank Schimmelfennig, 'NATO and institutional theories of international relations', in Mark Webber and Adrian Hyde-Price, eds, *Theorising NATO* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 93-115.

[11] Wallace Thies, *Why NATO Endures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Celeste Wallander, 'Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War', *International Organization*, 54: 4, 2000, pp. 705-735; and David Yost, 'NATO's evolving purpose and the next Strategic Concept', *International Affairs* 86: 2, 2010, pp. 489-522.

NATO senior officials,[12] which echoes an emerging wider research agenda on the significance of secretariats in fending off contestation.[13] Julia Gray, for example, shows that the quality of their bureaucracies is a key determinant of International Organization's (IO) vitality, while Maria J. Debre and Hylke Dijkstra demonstrate that IOs with greater bureaucratic capacity are less likely to die when challenged and more likely to exploit crises as opportunities for organizational growth.[14] Thus, the outcome of contestation is in many cases not predetermined but dependent on how the IO leadership responds.

Drawing on 23 original interviews with senior NATO and allied officials (both from the delegations in Brussels and capitals), this article therefore sets out to trace how the NATO Secretary General and other senior officials responded to Trump's contestation and evaluate how causally relevant these responses were for NATO's survival. It focusses on Trump's two central demands for greater transatlantic burden-sharing and closer relations with Russia.[15] The article finds that Secretary General Stoltenberg and senior NATO officials used agenda-setting and brokering strategies to overtly embrace Trump's demands for greater burden-sharing because they promised to generate most goodwill with the US President and were not harmful to the alliance. In contrast, NATO leaders used strategies of coalition-building and shielding to subtly resist Trump's calls for closer relations with Russia because they threatened to undermine NATO's *raison d'être*.

The empirical analysis suggests that Stoltenberg was decisive in managing the critical summit of 2018, where President Trump was on the verge of announcing a US withdrawal from NATO over burden-sharing disputes, and the Secretary General was critical in persuading Trump that allies were heeding his calls to increase their defence spending, even though increases fell short of Trump's demands. NATO leaders also helped shield NATO's defence and deterrence posture toward Russia from Trump, but here the US foreign policy establishment also played a critical role. Given the poor personal relations with Trump, no other allied leader had any noteworthy influence on the US President. Contrary to the bulk of scholarly opinion,

[12] John Deni, Security Threats, *American Pressure, and the Role of Key Personnel: How NATO's Defence Planning Process is Alleviating the Burden-Sharing Dilemma* (Carlisle: USWC Press, 2020); Heidi Hardt, *NATO's Lessons in Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Seth Johnston, *How NATO adapts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); and Sebastian Mayer, ed, *NATO's Post-Cold War Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For classic accounts, see Robert Jordan, *Political Leadership in NATO: A Study in Multinational Diplomacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979) and Ryan Hendrickson, *Diplomacy and War at NATO* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

[13] Michael W. Bauer, Christoph Knill, and Steffen Eckhard ,eds, *International Bureaucracy: Challenges and Lessons for Public Administration Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Leonard A. Schuette, 'Forging Unity: European Commission Leadership in the Brexit Negotiations', *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 2021. Epub ahead of print; and Monika Sus, 'Supranational entrepreneurs: the High Representative and the EU Global Strategy', *International Affairs* 97: 3, 2021, pp. 823-840.

[14] Julia Gray, 'Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations', *International Studies Quarterly* 62: 1, 2018, pp. 1–13; and Maria Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, 'Institutional design for a post-liberal order: Why some international organizations live longer than others', *European Journal of International Relations* 27: 1, 2021, pp. 311-339.

[15] This article only touches upon Trump's later demand for NATO to focus on China because the chosen two cases were arguably more significant for NATO's survival. Before NATO started discussing China in 2019, Trump had already changed his public position on the alliance. Nonetheless, the case of China also illustrates incidences of strategic behaviour by Stoltenberg, as shown below.

Stoltenberg and other senior officials thus exhibited a striking degree of agency in helping NATO survive Trump.

This argument is developed as follows. First, the article theorizes how and under what conditions IOs can respond to hegemonic contestation. Second, it shows that NATO had the institutional levers, external support, and leadership to respond strategically. Third, the article traces how the NATO leadership responded to demands for greater burden-sharing and rapprochement with Russia.

Secretary generals, IO leadership, and hegemonic contestation

This section theorizes how and when IO leaders can blunt hegemonic contestation. Secretary Generals are most likely to spearhead the responses to hegemonic contestation, but they tend to be supported by other senior officials who can draw on the IO's bureaucratic machinery, including the deputy secretary general, director of the private office, or heads of divisions. In turn, hegemonic contestation is here referred to as public criticism by a hegemonic member state accompanied by demands for institutional changes and, implicit or explicit, threats of withdrawal. Hegemonic contestation poses a grave danger to the survival of IOs as they tend to be extremely dependent on, and thus vulnerable to, the hegemonic member state, which makes unrivalled material contributions and possess superior sources of influence. With its very existence in question, the IO leadership should therefore naturally seek to exploit all its formal and informal levers of power to fend off contestation.[16] For survival-seeking IO leaders, however, hegemonic contestation poses a dilemma.

On the one hand, hegemonic contestation generates enormous pressures to adapt to the hegemon's demands. In IOs where the power distribution among member is balanced, IO leaders must weigh up the potential costs of inaction in the eyes of the contesting state against the costs of adapting in the eyes of the non-contesting states, which did not pressure for change and thus appear satisfied with the status quo.[17] In IOs characterized by stark power asymmetry such as NATO, however, IO leaders must prioritize the preferences of the hegemon over those of other member states to avert potentially fatal sanctioning or withdrawal. On the other hand, hegemonic contestation often also creates heavy pressures to resist. Hegemonic contestation is likely to address core rather than peripheral features of the organization because hegemons tend to possess sufficient influence within organizations to reform technicalities. This threat to core features is reinforced when the sources of hegemonic contestation lie in the nationalist populist turn at home, which explicitly rejects the foundational multilateral principles of IOs.[18] Thus,

[16] Joern Ege, 'What International Bureaucrats (Really) Want: Administrative Preferences in International Organization Research', *Global Governance* 26: 4, 2020, pp. 577-600; and Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, *Emergency Powers of International Organization*s (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[17] Catherine E. De Vries, Sara B. Hobolt, and Stefanie Walter, 'Politicizing International Cooperation: The Mass Public, Political Entrepreneurs, and Political Opportunity Structures', *International Organization,* 75: 2, 2021, pp. 306-332.
[18] David A. Lake, Lisa L. Martin, and Thomas Risse, 'Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on International Organization', *International Organization* 75: 2, 2021, pp. 1-33.

adaptation risks undermining the very material or ideational *raison d'être* of the IO, which the officials tend to identify with.[19]

Navigating this trade-off between potentially high costs of adaptation and resistance is a difficult task. Nonetheless, IO leaders may be able to do so if they respond strategically, which means that they proactively formulate and implement a response deliberately tailored to *overtly embrace* those hegemonic demands least harmful to the organization while *subtly resist* those deemed harmful to its integrity. Recognizing that outright resistance to the hegemon is unfeasible, IO leaders must adapt sufficiently to placate the hegemon while prioritizing certain features of the organization to protect from the hegemon's encroachment. Strategic thus contrast with passive responses of simply following orders of the hegemon, trying to sit out the contestation, or following a pre-existing playbook.[20]

Whether the IO leadership can respond strategically depends on three conditions. First, secretary generals and senior officials need to have internal levers of power, here referred to as institutional capacity, otherwise they are little more than toothless administrative actors. Formulating a strategy requires sufficient size of the secretariat so that secretary generals have enough policy-grade personnel available to analyse the challenge and devise a response.[21] In order to subsequently implement the strategy, the IO leaders need to possess formal and/or informal powers to set the agenda or take decisions.[22] The greater the level of delegation, the greater the array of potential responses available. Furthermore, IOs with public communications units should be better able to promote their strategy, particularly given the increasing mediatized environment of international politics.[23]

Second, IO leaders rely on a favourable opportunity structure because they operate in a complex environment where they are rarely the most powerful actor.[24] In the case of NATO and Trump, the constellation of domestic political actors and the role of other member states is relevant. The greater the internal resistance toward the hegemonic contestation, the greater the opportunities for IO leaders to build coalitions to resist hegemonic demands. Furthermore, the role of other member states, especially the big three European NATO members Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, should not be discounted even if the IO's dependency on the hegemon is pronounced. Should other member states be in broad agreement with the NATO

[19] Sarah von Billerbeck, ;"Mirror, Mirror On the Wall": Self-Legitimation by International Organizations', *International Studies Quarterly* 64: 1, 2020, pp. 207-219.
[20] Nitsan Chorev, *The World Health Organization between North and South* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012)*;* and Louisa Bayerlein, Christoph Knill, and Yves Steinebach, *A Matter of Style? Organizational Agency in Global Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[21] Debre and Dijkstra, 'Institutional design for a post-liberal order'; and Eugenia Heldt and Henning Schmidtke, 'Measuring the Empowerment of International Organizations: The Evolution of Financial and Staff Capabilities', *Global Policy* 8: 5, 2017, pp. 51-61.
[22] Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Tobias Lenz, Jeanine Bezuijen, Besir Ceka, and Svet Derderyan, *Measuring International Authority. A Postfunctionalist Theory of Governance, Volume III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[23] Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt, 'Self-legitimation in the Face of Politicization: Why International Organizations Centralized Public Communication', *Review of International Organizations* 13: 4, 2018, pp. 519–546.
[24] See for example Hylke Dijkstra, 'Collusion in International Organizations: How States Benefit from the Authority of Secretariats', *Global Governance* 23: 4, 2017, pp. 601-618.

leadership, they will be more likely to mount a strong defence of their preferences and vice versa.

Third, aligning the latent institutional powers with external opportunities, however, is not an automatic process but requires astute leadership by secretary generals and senior officials. They need to acknowledge the existential nature of the contestation, recognize the external constraints and opportunities, and then mobilize the institutional capacity. Public administration as well as political leadership literatures highlight the significance of leader's personal qualities such as intelligence, diplomatic talent, and empathy as well as the seniority in terms of their previous positions, and thus diplomatic network and reputation among heads of states and governments, for how effectively IOs respond to contestation.[25] In addition, they 'must get along with the United States.'[26]

If these three conditions are met, IO leaders can respond strategically to hegemonic contestation, which can be expressed in four mechanisms: agenda-setting, shielding, coalition-building, and brokering. While these mechanisms are analytically distinct, in practice they may overlap, or actors may employ a combination of these strategies. Agenda-setting means that usually secretary generals as the most prominent officials venue-shop for the most receptive location, raise public awareness and frame issues favourable, and shape internal proceedings.[27] Shielding entails isolating the organization from the interference of the contesting hegemon by keeping a low profile, using procedural tricks to exclude controversial policies from the agenda, or precooking summit conclusions.[28] Coalition-building implies that the IO leadership cultivates close relations with like-minded actors to alter the balance of power between proponents and opponents in the IO leaders' favour. The IO leadership can variably collude with like-minded member states, orchestrate affine intermediaries to pursue their objectives, or bring non-governmental actors on board.[29] What is missing from the existing literature is that IO leaders can also build coalitions with political actors from within the contesting state if the hegemonic demands are domestically controversial. Finally, brokering consists of facilitating compromises between contesting hegemon and other member states in a way that furthers their

[25] See for example Arjen Boin, Paul t'Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sudelius, *The politics of crisis management: Public leadership under pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[26] John Mathiason, *Invisible Governance: international secretariats in global politics* (Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2007), p. 80.
[27] Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, 'Agenda dynamics and policy subsystems', *Journal of Politics* 53: 4, 1991, pp. 1044–1074; John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co, 1984); Michael Schechter, 'Leadership in International Organizations: systemic, organizational and personality factors', *Review of International Studies* 13: 3, 1987, pp. 197-220; and Jonas Tallberg, 'The Power of the Chair. Formal Leadership in International Cooperation', *International Studies Quarterly* 54: 1, 2010, pp. 241-265.
[28] Derek Beach and Sandrino Smeets, 'The Unseen Hands – Collaborative Instrumental Leadership by Institutions in the British Re-negotiation Case', *European Journal of Political Research* 59: 2, 2019, pp. 444-64; and Leonard A. Schuette, 'Comparing the Politicisation of EU Integration during the Euro and Schengen Crises', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15: 4, 2019, pp. 380-400.
[29] Dijkstra, 'Collusion in International Organizations'; Kenneth W. Abbott, Philipp Genschel, Duncan Snidal, and Bernhard Zangl, eds, *International Organizations as Orchestrators*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Jonas Tallberg, Thomas Sommerer, Theresa Squatrito, and Christer Joenssen, *The Opening up of International Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

own preferences.[30] Secretary generals frequently act as formal or informal chairs in negotiations to overcome deadlock.[31]

In sum, hegemonic contestation poses an existential challenge to IOs, but IO leaders may be able to manage it if they respond strategically, which in turn depends on the personal traits of the secretary general and other leaders, the institutional machinery and powers, and the external environment.

NATO's strategic Trump management

This section analyses NATO actors' Trump management. Trump's demands for greater burden-sharing generated strong pressures for NATO leaders to adapt, while his calls for closer relations with Russia created strong pressures to resist. After briefly demonstrating that NATO met the three conditions that enable strategic responses, the following section examines how NATO actors navigated this dilemma between January 2017 and November 2020.

NATO's institutional powers, the US foreign policy establishment, and Stoltenberg's leadership

To respond strategically to Trump, NATO needs to have the institutional capacity to formulate and implement a strategic plan, find like-minded supporting actors, and benefit from astute leadership. NATO remains a largely intergovernmental organization, in which member states take decisions by unanimity in the North Atlantic Council and the International Staff and the Secretary General possess very limited decision-making authority.[32] In a formal sense, NATO's institutions are principally designed as supporting bodies for the allies. A deeper look, however, reveals that the Secretary General in particular has diplomatic and communicative powers at his disposal. As the permanent chair of the North Atlantic Council, he can set the agenda and facilitate compromises. He is also the organizer of NATO summits and acts as the spokesperson of the alliance. NATO ranks among the largest IOs with 1000 civilians working in the International Staff in Brussels, almost 500 of whom are policy-grade officials.[33] The International Staff includes a dedicated Public Diplomacy Division, while the Secretary General's Private Office also includes a Policy Planning Unit, an internal think tank that offers policy expertise and strategic insights.

In addition, NATO relies on like-minded actors to strategically build coalitions. Most other allies were privately in support of NATO's leaders but, as shown below, had very little influence on the US President. Political actors in the US, however, offered greater opportunities. In the US, a plethora of actors are involved in foreign policy making, including Congress, State Department, Pentagon, and the National Security Council as well as private

[30] Derek Beach, 'The unseen hand in treaty reform negotiations: the role and influence of the council secretariat', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11: 3, 2004, pp. 408-439.
[31] Tallberg, "The power of the chair".
[32] Hooghe et al., *Measuring International Authority*, pp. 731-740; Mayer, *NATO's post-Cold War Politics*.
[33] Dijkstra, *International Organizations and Military Affairs*, p. 7.

actors including think tanks and business groups. Indeed, there was bipartisan support in Congress for the alliance, key figures in the administration like Defense Secretary Mattis were ardent champions of NATO, and so were most non-governmental actors.

Last, Jens Stoltenberg was a former prime minister of Norway before becoming NATO's Secretary General in 2014. Former heads of state tend to view themselves as equals rather than servants of what previously were colleagues in the North Atlantic Council and should have strong networks among senior politicians in member states. The recent trend toward selecting former heads of state as Secretary General is indicative of stronger diplomatic prowess of the office.[34] With a European but non-EU background, Stoltenberg was widely perceived as trusted broker without a personal agenda.[35] Moreover, Stoltenberg's deputy, Rose Gottemoeller (2016-2019) was a former US Under Secretary in the State Department with extensive connections in Washington. Thus, the three enabling conditions were sufficiently met, and NATO should thus be expected to respond strategically to Trump's contestation.

Secretary General Stoltenberg and Trump's burden-sharing demands: agenda-setting and brokering

Trump's complaints about inequitable burden-sharing dominated his discourse on NATO in the early stages of his presidency, when he went as far as to condition US collective defence guarantees on allies meeting the 2% defence spending rule.[36] Threatening to upend 70-year long US grand strategy towards Europe at a whim, he demanded that allies must 'pay up, including for past deficiencies, or they have to get out. And if that breaks up NATO, it breaks up NATO.'[37] He also questioned the underlying logic of unconditional support for allies when positing that he would only defend Baltic allies against Russian aggression if they had 'fulfilled their obligations to us.'[38] The issue therefore posed a veritable threat to the very survival of NATO. Had Trump made true on his words to revoke US guarantees in case that allied defence spending did not meet his demands, this would have de facto terminated the alliance built on the principle of unconditional solidarity in face of external threats.

Trump's demands for greater transatlantic burden-sharing were largely shared by NATO actors, which had long been supportive of greater allied defence investment to meet the diverse security challenges in an increasingly hostile international landscape.[39] Adaptation would

[34] Hendrickson, 'The Changing Role of NATO's Secretary General.'
[35] Interview 2, NATO official, 4 June 2020; Interview 7, Former NATO official, 8 June 2020; Interview 11, NATO official, 18 June 2020; Interview 12, NATO official, 23 June 2020; and Interview 18, National official, 11 Jan. 2021.
[36] For debate of NATO defence spending, see Leonard A. Schuette, 'Toward a meaningful metric: replacing NATO's 2% defence spending target,' *Egmont Institute,* Security Policy Brief 138*,* March, 2021.
[37] Jacopo Barigazzi, "NATO chief counterattacks against Donald Trump," *Politico*, 27 Sept. 2016, https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-chief-counterattacks-against-donald-trump-jens-stoltenberg/.
[38] Max Fisher, 'Donald Trump's Ambivalence on the Baltics Is More Important Than It Seems', *New York Times*, 21 July 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/world/europe/donald-trump-nato-baltics-interpreter.html.
[39] See exemplary statements by the last three NATO Secretary Generals, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, 'Speech at Munich Security Conference' (Munich, 9 February 2007),

therefore not pose a threat to the integrity of NATO; the main risk for the NATO leadership lay in allies not increasing their defence spending sufficiently to satisfy Trump. As a result, they had to walk a fine line. On the one hand, they needed to publicly side with Trump and pressure allies to spend more on defence. On the other hand, they had to sell even modest increases as successes to please Trump. Indeed, senior officials were aware that allies would not immediately be able to drastically increase defence spending, given the political complexity and long-term nature of budgetary spending plans.[40] In order to simultaneously lobby allies and convince Trump, and in the absence of formal means to compel allies to increase defence spending, Stoltenberg used public communications strategies and procedural means to *set the agenda* and *broker* compromises in the background.

The Secretary General chose the public realm as his principal venue through which to pursue his strategy. In close liaison with NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, he used his prominent position to publicly pressure allies to increase defence spending and credit the US President for allegedly achieving greater burden-sharing.[41] As early as the day prior to Trump's inauguration on 20 January 2017, Stoltenberg expressed 'absolute confidence' that President Trump was committed to NATO and lauded Trump for his 'strong message' on defence spending, pledging to 'work with President Trump on how to adapt NATO'.[42] On Stoltenberg's first visit to Washington in April 2017, he embraced Trump's criticism of allies' insufficient defence spending. The Secretary General also expressed gratitude to Trump for his 'strong commitment to Europe'.[43] Appeasing Trump and playing to his ego seemed the purpose of Stoltenberg's visit to the White House in May 2018, when he thanked the US President for his 'leadership […] on the issue of defence spending [which] has really helped to make a difference', a sentiment he echoed at the Brussels Summit in July 2018.[44]

In 2019, the Secretary General intensified his tailored communicative efforts aimed at Trump and repeatedly referred to what emerged as NATO's new mantra on burden-sharing. In the run-up to Trump's state of the union speech in February, Stoltenberg appeared on Trump's favorite US news channel, Fox, crediting Trump for an 'extra $100 billion' allies will have added to their defence spending by the end of 2020.[45] When invited by Speaker of the House Nancy

https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s070209d.html; Anders F. Rasmussen, 'The Atlantic Alliance in Austere Times', *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2011; and Jens Stoltenberg, 'Secretary General: NATO and the EU can achieve more if we work more closely together' (Brussels: European Parliament, 30 March 2015), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_118367.htm.

[40] Interview 7

[41] Interview 1.

[42] Ryan Heath, 'NATO chief seeks to be Trump BFF', *Politico*, 29 Jan. 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-trump-strategy-stoltenberg-davos-world-economic-forum/.

[43] Louis Nelson, 'NATO's Stoltenberg: I agree with Trump on terrorism and defence', *Politico*, 13 April 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/natos-stoltenberg-i-agree-with-trump-on-terrorism-and-defence/.

[44] Eli Okun, 'NATO chief thanks Trump for leadership on military spending', *Politico*, 17 May 2018, https://www.politico.eu/article/jens-stoltenberg-donald-trump-nato-chief-thanks-trump-for-leadership-on-military-spending/; and Jens Stoltenberg, 'Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at a meeting with the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump' (Brussels, 11 July 2018), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156854.htm?selectedLocale=en.

[45] Gregg Re, 'NATO head: Trump's tough talk has added $100B to alliance, helped deter Russia', *Fox News*, 27 Jan. 2019, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/nato-head-says-trumps-tough-talk-has-helped-alliance.

Pelosi as the first Secretary General of any IO to speak in front of both Houses of Congress in April 2019, he lauded President Trump's positive impact on the alliance and again referred to the burden-sharing slogan.[46] Prior to the London Leaders summit in December 2019, Stoltenberg reiterated to Trump that 'your leadership on defence spending is having a real impact', citing new defence spending figures that showed a $130 billion increase to the defence spending budgets, which is expected to rise to $400 billion by 2024.[47]

Thus, the Secretary General strategically purported that Trump had prevailed over the opposition from other member states. Importantly, the Secretary General always chose to compare the spending figures to 2016 – the year of Trump's election – rather than 2015 when the allies' budgets first showed increases to obfuscate that reasons beyond Trump could be responsible.[48] The Secretary General not only understood the power of the media for public discourse in general and the US President – a reportedly avid consumer of US television – in particular, but also consciously tailored his simplistic and servile communication style to flatter the egocentric Trump.[49] One interviewee adds that Stoltenberg would always present the defence spending figures in very simple bar charts to capture his attention and cater for Trump's alleged short attention span and inattention to detail.[50]

Stoltenberg also used his procedural powers as chair of the North Atlantic Council to set the burden-sharing agenda at the most perilous moment for NATO during the Trump presidency – the NATO summit in July 2018. Trump's America-First rhetoric had been particularly pronounced during that summer and in June he had refused to sign the G7 statement. Trump was also due to fly to Helsinki for a controversial bilateral meeting with President Putin right after the NATO summit and there was a distinct fear among officials that Trump could decide at short notice to skip the NATO summit.[51] While Trump attended the summit, he affirmed officials' concerns when he unleashed a personal attack on German Chancellor Merkel at a bilateral meeting on the first day of the summit (11 July). The next day, tensions escalated further, and the summit was on the verge of collapse when President Trump hijacked a working meeting originally aimed at fostering relations with Ukraine and Georgia to threaten fellow

[46] Jens Stoltenberg, 'NATO: good for Europe and good for America. Address to the United States Congress by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg' (Washington, D.C.: Congress, 3 April 2019), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_165210.htm?selectedLocale=en.
[47] Jens Stoltenberg, 'Statement to the press by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg after meeting with US President Trump' (Brussels, 14 Nov. 2019), https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_170788.htm?selectedLocale=uk.
[48] NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012-2019)*, Communique PR/CP(2019)069.
[49] Interview 2; Interview 11, NATO official, 18 June 2020; Interview 12; Interview 15, National official, 23 July 2020; and interview 18, National official, 11 Jan. 2021.
[50] Interview 7.
[51] Guy M. Snodgrass, *Holding the Line: Inside Trump's Pentagon with Secretary Mattis* (New York: Sentinel, 2019), p. 272.

allied leaders that the US would 'go its own way' should his burden-sharing demands not be met.[52] According to one interviewee, the US delegation had 'no idea what was happening'.[53]

Sensing the impending danger, Stoltenberg used his procedural power as chair of the North Atlantic Council and decided to turn the working meeting into an impromptu crisis meeting on burden-sharing. This was a highly unusual, strategic decision by the Secretary General as NATO summits tend to be ritualistic and formulaic. Calling this meeting proved critical in appeasing Trump; it played to the narcistic propensities of the US President by allowing him to vent his frustration and pressure Europeans to make concessions, before taking credit for almost all NATO reforms undertaken since 2014 in the subsequent press conference, letting him walk away with a sense of victory.[54]

Complementing the agenda-setting strategy, Stoltenberg also sought to exert diplomatic pressures and broker compromises among other member states. His private office included several senior seconded officials, and he used them as ears and mouths in the capitals.[55] He also regularly toured the capitals to persuade Europeans and Canada of the need for greater defence spending. While some allies felt unease about Stoltenberg's overriding focus on defence spending as principal indicator for burden-sharing, his reputation as honest broker and skilled mediator allowed him to overcome these concerns.[56] He also tended to explicitly invoke the threat of US withdrawal to strengthen his case.[57] In November 2019, senior officials in Stoltenberg's private office helped broker a new Common Funding formula for NATO's budget. In order to alleviate Trump's criticism of allied, and in particular German, underspending, Stoltenberg's office worked behind the scenes with officials from the German chancellery and the US National Security Council to increase Germany contributions to match the reduced US contributions.[58] While this was largely symbolic given the relatively insignificant sums involved, it subsequently allowed Stoltenberg to publicly tout another victory for Trump's burden-sharing agenda.

By the end of 2019, Trump had publicly proclaimed his satisfaction at several points that 'people are paying and I'm very happy with the fact that they're paying'[59], despite the fact that increases were well-below his demands that every ally meet the 2% rule (not to mention spending 4% of GDP on defence, a demand he made at the 2018 summit). While national defence budgets have been on the rise since 2015, only 7 out of 29 allies met the target in 2019

[52] Robin Emmott, Jeff Mason, Alissa de Carbonnel, 'Trump claims NATO victory after ultimatum to go it alone', *Reuters*, July 12, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-summit/trump-claims-nato-victory-after-ultimatum-to-go-it-alone-idUSKBN1K135H.
[53] Interview 21, former national official, 9 March 2021.
[54] Interview 3; Interview 10, National official, 17 June 2020; and interview 21, Former national official, 9 March 2021
[55] Interview 1.
[56] Interview 2.
[57] Interview 2; Interview 13, National official, 9 July 2020; and interview 18.
[58] Interview 17, Former national official, 26 Oct. 2020; also John Bolton, *The Room Where it Happened* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 135.
[59] Ryan Browne, 'Trump praises NATO chief, says he's happy allies are paying', *CNN*, 2 April 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/02/politics/trump-stoltenberg-nato-praise/index.html.

and only 15 had set out plans to reach 2% of GDP of overall defence spending by 2024.[60] There is therefore a correlation between Trump's conversion on burden-sharing and Stoltenberg's' strategic responses; indeed, there are several pieces of evidence that suggest that the Secretary General and senior officials played a causal role.

First, Trump's own comments suggest that Stoltenberg was critical in persuading him. Throughout his tenure, NATO's Secretary General maintained an amicable relationship with Trump, a rarity for any leader.[61] Trump heaped lavish praise on him, describing his relationship with Stoltenberg as 'outstanding' and stating that he had 'done an excellent job', which was reinforced when Trump supported extending Stoltenberg's term as Secretary General for another two years. Crucially, he established a direct link between Stoltenberg and burden-sharing, exclaiming that 'the media never gives me credit but he gave me credit, now we're up to way over $100 billion.'[62] Moreover, Stoltenberg's $100 billion slogan evidently gained traction with Trump, especially after the Secretary General trumpeted the slogan on Fox News, which Trump immediately retweeted and then cited for the first time in his state of the union address only one week later.[63]

Second, several closely involved officials confirm that Trump began changing his stance after encounters with Stoltenberg, whose adroit flattery pushed the right buttons with Trump.[64] Close observers confirm this impression, with the then UK ambassador in Washington characterizing Stoltenberg as the 'master Trump-whisperer'[65], while one interviewee noted that the Secretary General was always one of the first points of contact when defence decisions were impending and that 'Trump looked to Stoltenberg for advice'.[66]

Third, the beginning of Trump's conversion can be traced to the 2018 summit, which was a critical juncture for the alliance. The outcome of the summit was highly contingent; US officials at the summit feared that Trump would announce the US withdrawal from NATO at the press conference on 12 July and had even instructed lawyers to analyse NATO's founding Treaty for advice on the legal mechanisms (though Congress would have prevented a formal withdrawal). Secretary Mattis was strikingly absent from the stage when Trump gave the press conference and expressed his willingness to resign that day.[67] Without Stoltenberg's unscripted and spontaneous decision to call the emergency session, all indicators suggests that Trump would at least have caused severe damage to the alliance.

[60] NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO countries*.
[61] Interview 21.
[62] Jens Stoltenberg, "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US President Donald Trump during the NATO-US bilateral meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House" (Washington, D.C.: White House, 2 April 2019), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_165349.htm?selectedLocale=en.
[63] David M. Herszenhorn, "Jens Stoltenberg's (Trump) mission accomplished," *Politico*, 3 December 2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/jens-stoltenberg-donald-trump-nato-secretary-general-brain-death-emmanuel-macron-mission-accomplished/.
[64] Interview 5, National official, 4 June 2020; Interview 6, National official, 5 June 2020; Interview 7; Interview 13; and interview 21.
[65] Darroch, *Collateral Damage*, p. 212.
[66] Interview 21.
[67] Interview 21; also Snodgrass, *Holding the Line*, p. 279.

And fourth, the principal alternative explanation that the US foreign policy establishment, or other allies, tamed Trump cannot account for the conversion, which began with the 2018 summit and culminated in his first public embrace of NATO's turnaround on defence spending in February 2019. By then, however, the 'adults in the room' had long lost influence or even left the administration.[68] Secretary of State Tillerson was fired in March 2018 and National Security Advisor McMaster resigned in April 2018. Defense Secretary Mattis and Chief of Staff Kelly resigned in December 2018 and January 2019 respectively, and had reportedly lost the President's ear long before.[69] One directly involved official confirmed that they 'had no intellectual impact on Trump' and 'never made a dent' in Trump's views on NATO.[70] Other NATO allies helped passively persuade Trump by moderately increasing their defence budgets, which NATO actors could then exploit, but they too had little direct influence on the President.[71] While then UK Prime Minister May successfully extracted a vague commitment to NATO from Trump at their first bilateral meeting in January 2017, their relationship quickly soured when Trump openly criticised her approach to Brexit.[72] Similarly, the good relations between Trump and French President Macron were short-lived. With German chancellor Merkel, Trump appeared to have a personal feud, although she helped Stoltenberg manage Trump at the 2018 summit by stoically enduring his attacks.[73] One official stressed that Stoltenberg was 'the only one in Europe who had Trump's ear'.[74]

In sum, this section demonstrates ample evidence that Stoltenberg not only responded strategically to Trump's contestation by tailoring their public agenda-setting to the idiosyncrasies of the US president and adroitly employing procedural powers to manage the 2018 summit. It also suggests that these activities were a causal factor in eventually persuading Trump that NATO were heeding his calls for greater transatlantic burden-sharing, despite very limited affirmative evidence. Stoltenberg's personal leadership was critical, which was manifest in his conscious decision to build a close personal rapport with Trump and his diplomatic skill to do so. He also understood the power of the media for shaping Trump's thinking and used his procedural powers as chair most effectively during the 2018 summit to avert the worst-case scenario. Several interviewees observed that Stoltenberg's predecessor, Anders Fogh Rassmusen, would have never managed to handle Trump given his allegedly more pronounced ego.[75] Trump's narcistic disposition and vulnerability to flattery was also a necessary for NATO's agenda-setting strategy to succeed.

[68] Thomas Wright, 'Trump's Foreign Policy Is No Longer Unpredictable', *Foreign Affairs*, 18 January 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-01-18/trumps-foreign-policy-no-longer-unpredictable.
[69] Jennifer Jacobs, 'Kelly Loses White House Clout as Trump Blazes Own Path', *Bloomberg*, 29 March 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-29/kelly-is-said-to-lose-white-house-clout-as-trump-blazes-own-path; also Snodgrass, *Holding the Line*, pp. 202ff.
[70] Interview 22, National official, 12 March 2021.
[71] Interview 22.
[72] Darroch, Collateral Damage, pp. 239ff.
[73] Interview 21.
[74] Interview 9, former NATO official, 15 June 2020.
[75] Interviews 1, 10, and 21.

In fact, Stoltenberg and the NATO leadership employed similar strategies in the case of China. Senior officials were aware how much importance the Trump administration attached to putting China on NATO's agenda but also of the reluctance of many European allies to militarise relations and distract NATO's focus from Russia.[76] Placating Trump required walking the fine line again of setting the agenda on China while subsequently selling the mere reference to China in the 2019 London Declaration as substantial progress. After Stoltenberg helped broker a compromise at the summit,[77] allies 'recognise[d] that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges'.[78] It was thus another incident of NATO demonstrating ostensible responsiveness to the US President even if the declaration implied no operational consequences. [79]

Stoltenberg and NATO's Russia policy: coalition-building and shielding

During the presidential election and when in office, Trump made a string of interventions that suggested he wanted to re-establish cordial relations with Russia. He repeatedly expressed his admiration for Putin, calling him a 'strong leader, a powerful leader' and that 'I would love to be able to get along with Russia'.[80] He also lobbied to reintegrate Russia in the G7, denied Russian interference in the 2016 US election, implicitly acknowledged Russia's annexation of Crimea, and cast doubts about whether his administration would uphold the sanction regime.[81] Moreover, his foreign policy team and trusted circle was stacked with Russophiles with close connections to Moscow (including Paul Mannafort, Carter Page, and Newt Gingrich).[82]

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine in 2014, however, NATO had shifted back to its original purpose of providing territorial security to its member states against Russia. Hence, Trump's ambiguous benevolence set off alarm bells and NATO and national officials worried that Trump would reduce the US investment in Europe and subvert NATO initiatives.[83] One official said that the 'Russia question was looming large over Brussels'.[84] Such a dilution, or even reversal of NATO's defence and deterrence posture toward Russia would have undermined the very *raison d'être* of the alliance originally founded to defend European against Soviet aggression. NATO leaders were steadfast in their opposition toward thawing relations with Russia but were caught in the dilemma of hegemonic contestation that rendered overt resistance to Trump unfeasible. Instead, the NATO leadership

[76] Interview 5.
[77] Interviews 2 and 4.
[78] NATO, London Declaration, 4 December 2019.
[79] See Jeffrey Michaels, 'A very different kind of challenge'? NATO's prioritization of China in historical perspective' *International Politics* 2021, first view.
[80] See Russia Matters staff, 'Trump on Russia: in his own words', *Russia Matters*, 13 July 2018, https://russiamatters.org/analysis/trump-russia-his-own-words.
[81] For a critical analysis on Trump's Russia sanctions policy, see Edward Fishman, James Lamond, and Max Bergmann, 'No, Trump has not been 'tough' on Russia', *Washington Post*, 13 October 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/13/no-trump-has-not-been-tough-russia/.
[82] On Trump's connections to the Kremlin, see Catherine Belton, *Putin's People. How the KGB took back Russia and then took on the West*. (New York: William Collins, 2020).
[83] Interview 2; Interview 7: Interview 13; and interview 14, National official, 13 July 2020.
[84] Interview 14.

set out to subtly resist Trump's demands by building coalitions with favourable actors in the US and shielding Russia policy from Trump.

The case of Russia policy involved a different logic than the case of burden-sharing. Rather than being a matter of political deliberation, NATO's stance on Russia was a matter of concrete policy making, which necessarily lend the US foreign policy bureaucracy a much greater role. Stoltenberg sought to exploit the political support NATO enjoyed among the US foreign policy establishment by *building coalitions* with supportive actors to coordinate policy and maintain US domestic support for the alliance.[85] Relying on his personal network as much as on his deputy's, the Secretary General worked through two channels in the US system: 1) the traditional transatlantic establishment in the State Department, Pentagon, and in parts the National Security Council and 2) Congress. After Trump's initial appointments of NATO-sceptical officials and foreign policy advisers proved short-lived, transatlanticist establishment figures took over. General McMaster was appointed national security advisor in the summer of 2017 (later replaced by NATO-supporting John Bolton) and swiftly brought in experienced foreign policy experts such as Fiona Hill, while General Kelly became White House chief of staff. Together with Secretary of Defence Mattis, they formed a strong alliance that sought to tame Trump's anti-NATO instincts.[86]

General Mattis in particular emerged as a particularly strong supporter of NATO's eastern policy and became senior officials' main point of contact.[87] It was General Mattis who devised NATO's Readiness Initiative, eventually agreed in 2018 with limited involvement of the White House, which committed allies to have 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 naval combat vessels ready to use within 30 days.[88] NATO, with active support from the US, also implemented the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative in 2017, agreed at the Warsaw summit in 2016, by deploying four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to bolster its deterrence. Mattis also reinforced the reputation of Stoltenberg in private meetings with Trump.[89] Throughout Trump's term in office, the Secretary General also cultivated relations with US parliamentarians. He regularly hosted US delegations in Brussels and spoke as first Secretary General of any IO in front of both Houses of Congress in April 2019 to rally domestic support for NATO.

Besides coalition-building, the NATO leadership also sought to *shield* NATO's Russia policy from Trump. In an attempt to keep the issue beneath Trump's radar, Stoltenberg prioritized burden-sharing over Russia policy in his public communications with Trump.[90] In the press conferences or remarks following their six bilateral meetings between April 2017 and December 2019, Stoltenberg always emphasized the need for greater burden-sharing. However, he did not mention Russia policy in three of the press conferences, while in the others

[85] Interview 17.
[86] Porter, 'Why America's' Grand Strategy Has Not Changed', pp. 43-44; and Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions*, pp. 221ff.
[87] Interview 7; Interview 20; National official, 8 Feb. 2021; and interview 21.
[88]Interview 3; and interview 23, National official, 12 March 2021.
[89] Snodgrass, *Holding the Line*, pp. 166-167.
[90] Interview 17; and interview 21.

he only addressed Russia cursorily.[91] By selectively engaging with Trump's demands in public, the Secretary General tried to focus his attention on the agenda NATO leaders supported and were least harmful to the organization, which illustrates that NATO's response to Trump's demands on burden-sharing and Russia were intimately connected.

The most visible and consequential instance of shielding occurred in the run-up to the summit in July 2018. In light of Trump's refusal to sign the G7 communique, senior officials tried to Trump-proof the summit. The Secretary General together with US diplomats successfully pressured ambassadors to agree upon a declaration prior to the summit to avoid last-minute interferences from Trump.[92] They decided to keep the text 'short and sweet' and publicly downplay the achievements to keep them beneath Trump's radar.[93] After Stoltenberg successfully appeased Trump, allies agreed on the Readiness Initiative, criticized Russia, invited North Macedonia to join, and established an Atlantic Command post to facilitate swift response to a potential war in Europe. Further manifestations of NATO actor's shielding efforts were their decisions to re-organize summits where Russia policy was a central discussion point. One of the first decisions of the Secretary General was to postpone Trump's first visit to NATO's headquarters to May 2017. Officials in the International Staff hoped that Trump's anger would dissipate over the months and that he would be taught the value of NATO by the 'adults in the room', i.e. General Mattis and his then chief of staff John Kelly.[94] In an attempt to prevent Trump disrupting celebrations, the Secretary General also downgraded NATO's 70th anniversary summit in April 2019 in Washington D.C. to a foreign ministerial meeting, which was attended by Secretary of State Pompeo instead.[95]

NATO maintained a robust defence and deterrence posture toward Russia throughout Trump's tenure, despite the US President's calls to the contrary.[96] NATO's new Readiness Initiative would, if implemented, be a significant step toward preparedness for conflicts with Russia. The US also steadily increased the budgetary allocation for the European Deterrence Initiative,[97] actively participated in military exercises (20 000 US troops participated in the Trident Juncture exercise in 2018) and took command of one multinational battlegroup in Poland under the umbrella of the Enhanced Forward Presence. Notwithstanding Trump's announcement to withdraw almost 12 000 troops from Germany – plans which have since been put on ice by the

[91] See for example Nelson, 'NATO's Stoltenberg: I agree with Trump on terrorism and defence'; Okun, 'NATO chief thanks Trump for leadership on military spending'; Stoltenberg, 'Statement to the press by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg after meeting with US President Trump'; Browne, 'Trump praises NATO chief, says he's happy allies are paying.'
[92] Interview 3; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 17; Interview 19, EU official, 26 January 2021; see also Bolton, *The Room Where it Happened*, p. 137.
[93] Interview 21.
[94] Interview 1, NATO official, 28 May 2020; Interview 4; Interview 7; and interview 16, NATO PA official, 24 July 2020
[95] Interview 3; and interview 4.
[96] Interview 7; Interview 12; and interview 14.
[97] The funding increased from $800 million in 2016, to $3.4 billion in 2017, to $4.8 billion in 2018, to $6.5 billion in 2019, to $5.9 billion in 2020.

Biden Administration – Trump did not substantially undermine NATO's posture vis-à-vis Russia.[98]

Where the NATO leadership played a causal role in converting Trump on burden-sharing, they played a lesser if still meaningful part in maintaining a robust Russia policy. The effects of Stoltenberg's strategic neglect of Russia in his public communications are difficult to discern empirically but it probably helped distract Trump. The most consequential episode of agency of NATO actors was their shepherding of the 2018 summit, which proved to be among the most consequential in years in terms of new policy measures on Russia. Nevertheless, the unwavering commitment to NATO in the Pentagon, the State Department, the National Security Council, and Congress was essential in resisting Trump's demands for closer relations with Russia.

Conclusion

NATO survived one of the gravest contestations in its history, which was not a predetermined outcome. This article departed from the puzzling observations that President Trump, first, changed his stance on transatlantic burden-sharing despite increases in allied defence budgets remaining significantly below his demands and, second, that the US reinforced NATO's defence and deterrence posture toward Russia notwithstanding Trump's preferences to the contrary. Inspired by flaws in existing accounts of Trump's NATO policy and an emerging research agenda on the agency of IO leadership under pressure, this article examined the role played by the NATO leadership, in particular Secretary General Stoltenberg. It traced how NATO actors responded to Trump by setting the burden-sharing agenda, shielding Russia policy from the US President, building coalitions with favourable actors in the US foreign policy machinery, and brokering compromises among allies in the background. The empirical section demonstrated that NATO leaders strategically navigated the dilemma of hegemonic contestation by signalling sufficient adaptation to placate the US President while protecting core features of the alliance from Trump's demands.

Whether Trump truly changed his mind on NATO is impossible to ascertain, but Stoltenberg and senior officials were a necessary factor in convincing Trump to change position on burden-sharing and managing the critical 2018 summit, while they played a supportive role in maintaining a robust Russia policy. Thus, NATO leaders exhibited a striking degree of agency in helping NATO survive. Indeed, had NATO leaders acted as passive servants, as most writings presume, Trump could have been much more destructive. Congress would have prevented Trump from formally withdrawing the US from NATO – in 2019, both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed legislation to prevent Trump from using federal funds to withdraw from NATO.[99] But without the actions of Stoltenberg, it is plausible that Trump

[98] Jens Ringsmose and Mark Webber, "Hedging their bets? The case for a European pillar in NATO," *Defence Studies* 20: 4, 2020, pp. 295-317.
[99] Joe Gould, 'Would Trump drive NATO exit? Congress works on roadblocks', *Defence News*, 16 Dec. 2019, https://www.defencenews.com/congress/2019/12/16/would-trump-drive-nato-exit-congress-works-on-roadblocks/.

would have still expressed his intentions to withdraw, the mere announcement of which would have de facto meant the end of NATO in its current form. A passive secretary general would have also been unable to build a close rapport with Trump and convince him in 2019 that he had successfully imposed his will onto allies to achieve greater burden-sharing.

In addition, servile NATO actors would have been unable to manage the highly contingent 2018 summit. National officials would have still tried to shield the proceedings from Trump. But without senior officials heaping pressures on allies to agree to a summit declaration early and, crucially, without the Secretary General strategically using his procedural powers to provide Trump the floor to voice his grievances, the US President would have likely refused to sign the summit declaration like he did at the G7 and in doing so blocked important NATO initiatives and massively undermined the credibility of the alliance. It is entirely conceivable that he would have continued publicly berating allies, toying with the idea of withdrawing, and potentially politicize NATO membership during the 2020 presidential election campaign.

The analysis therefore broadly vindicates the theoretical claim that IO leaders can protect their preferences, even amid hegemonic contestation. It demonstrated that this strategic capacity was contingent on Stoltenberg's astute leadership, IO leaders' often overlooked institutional levers of power such as the agenda-setting powers of the chair of the North Atlantic Council, and strong support for the alliance from the US foreign policy establishment. Other allies played a minor role in directly managing Trump, albeit without their moderate increases in defence spending, even the 'master Trump-whisperer' Stoltenberg would have been unable to influence Trump. The fact that these defence spending increases had likely not happened without Russian aggressions in Ukraine constitutes one of the many fortunate contingencies for NATO.[100]

On a broader level, the article's counterintuitive findings on NATO's agential qualities should nuance the prevalent state-centric view of NATO. Some insights are probably specific to the Presidency of Trump; his particular susceptibility to flattery and inattention to policy details, which helped NATO's strategic behaviour, appear seldom if not unique among heads of state or government. However, NATO has gradually become a stronger institution and the office of the Secretary General has also been empowered. The case of Trump's contestation testifies that NATO is a resilient security organization with greater power than is traditionally attributed to it. This should be particularly relevant because the fundamental debate about the future of the alliance shows no sign of abating. French President Macron's allegation that NATO was 'braindead' highlights persisting tensions in the alliance. Moreover, the rise of China, enduring conflicts among some of the allies, democratic decay across the West, or new security challenges to name but a few will raise question about the relevance of NATO, but the NATO leadership has demonstrated that they will not be passive pawns in the game.

[100] Interview 8, NATO official, June 9, 2020.

5

Chapter 5

Shaping institutional overlap: NATO's responses to EU security and defence initiatives since 2014

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Abstract: This article analyses how and when institutional actors can shape overlap with other international organisations. Growing overlap either poses the threat of marginalisation to the incumbent organisation or offers opportunities for cooperation. Institutional actors should therefore be expected to try shape the relations with the overlapping organisation to protect their own. The article theorises that institutional actors can shape overlap if they possess sufficient institutional capacity and face a favourable opportunity structure. Whether institutional actors embrace or resist overlap, in turn, depends on their perception of the nature of the domain expansion of the other international organisation. Relying on 20 interviews with senior officials, the article probes the argument against the case of the growing overlap between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union resulting from the latter's recent security and defence initiatives. Contrary to most expectations, it finds that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization actors played a consequential role in restructuring the relationship with the European Union.

Introduction

Institutional overlap is an increasingly common phenomenon in global governance. The growing complexity of transnational problems has led to the proliferation of new institutions, the expansion of existing institutions' domains, and increasing linkages between the policy issues they address (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Alter and Raustiala, 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter 2021; Panke and Stapel, 2018). As a result, inter-organisational interactions have increased significantly over the past decades with the result that international organisations (IOs) frequently overlap in terms of mandate, membership, and geographic realm of operation. Notwithstanding its significant consequences for inter-organisational relationships and thus the wider provision of global public goods, scholarly understanding of overlap, however, remains incomplete.

The bulk of the existing literature analyses institutional overlap through the perspectives of the member states. These accounts explore the role of states in creating overlap as well as the implication of overlap for state behaviour (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Clark, 2021; Gehring and Faude, 2014; Morse and Keohane, 2014; Pratt, 2018). In that reading, the organisations themselves merely constitute functional sites in which states pursue their interests. While member states inevitably play a crucial role in shaping institutional overlap, such a narrow focus neglects other potentially important players: the institutional actors such as executive heads and senior officials. Indeed, it is well established that insti- tutional actors not only develop independent preferences (e.g. Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Ege, 2020) but that they can exert influence in all three stages of the policy-making process, that is, policy initiation, policy formulation, and policy implementation (see Bayerlein et al., 2020; Biermann and Siebenhüner, 2009; Eckhard and Ege, 2016; Hall and Woods, 2018; Johnson, 2014). Beyond ordinary policy-making, scholars have recently found that amid the wider crisis of multilateralism, institutional actors can strategically respond to existential challenges (Debre and Dijkstra, 2021; Dijkstra et al., 2021; Gray, 2018; Schuette, 2021a, 2021b). Given that increased overlap may threaten the continued existence of the incumbent IO or offer opportunities to bolster its position, institutional actors should therefore be expected to also try to shape overlap to protect the organisation (Margulis, 2021).

This article therefore sets out to fill this lacuna by theorising how and under what conditions institutional actors shape the nature of overlap. Subsequently, it applies the model to the case of how senior North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) actors shaped the growing overlap with the EU since 2014, the *annus horribilis* for European security. The confluence of the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine, the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and the incipience of the so-called Refugee Crisis caused a seismic geopolitical shock to the European system. This chain of events invigorated the EU's hitherto dormant security and defence ambitions. The European Union's (EU) quest to develop into a 'European Defence Union' (Juncker, 2017) would not unfold in a vacuum, however, but carry significant consequences for the European security architecture. Above all, the expansion of the EU into the realm of defence and security could pose a serious challenge to NATO as the incumbent dominant security organisation in Europe.

The article posits that institutional actors can shape overlap if they possess sufficient institutional capacity and face a favourable opportunity structure. Whether institutional actors embrace or resist overlap, in turn, depends on their perception of the nature of the domain expansion of the other IO. To probe this argument empirically, the article relies on 20 interviews with senior officials from NATO, the EU, and national delegations (see Appendix 1). Contrary to most expectations, it finds that the Secretary General Stoltenberg and other senior officials played a consequential role in restructuring the relationship with the EU. While any account of the complex relationship between NATO and the EU is necessarily multi-causal, the omission in the literature justifies the narrow focus on NATO institutional actors to distil its importance as one factor among several in shaping the relationship with the EU.

Senior NATO actors proved instrumental in reaching the Joint Declaration, helped steer debates about EU defence initiatives, and maintained an amicable diplomatic relationship with the EU, with the result that the debate about European decoupling has lost heat. In the first phase (2014–2016), NATO actors embraced greater overlap with the EU. Both organisations realised that their respective security and defence instruments were inadequate to address the new security challenges and set out to create greater synergies between them, which culminated in the Joint Declaration of July 2016. In the second phase (2016–2020), NATO's institutional actors employed a strategy of selective embrace and resistance. They continued to work for greater political dialogue and produce practical results, but Secretary General Stoltenberg and other key officials pushed back against elements of EU defence initiatives they considered as efforts to decouple the EU from NATO. This variation in responses across the two phases rooted in different perceptions. NATO actors perceived the overlap following the events of 2014 in largely positive sum terms and thus acted to deepen cooperation. Conversely, they viewed the political symbolism, more than the substance, of EU defence initiatives in zero-sum terms and pushed back against them.

The article develops as follows. After introducing the theoretical model, the second section analyses NATO's responses to the geopolitical shocks of 2014, culminating in the Joint Declaration of 2016. Finally, the third section examines NATO's responses to EU defence initiatives from 2016 onward.

Shaping Institutional Overlap

This section develops a heuristic theoretical model to explain under what conditions and how institutional actors can shape overlap. It concentrates on functional overlap, whereby two or more IOs 'pursue the same or very similar tasks and mandates' (Biermann and Koops, 2017a: 17). More than geographical overlap (when two or more IOs operate in the same regions) or membership overlap (when two or more IOs share substantial part of their membership), functional overlap implies that decisions in one IO bear consequences for the other and thus renders it more likely that institutional actors will seek to shape it. Figure 1 below visualises the theoretical argument.

The point of departure of the model is that either the domain expansion of an existing organisation or the creation of a new organisation increases the functional overlap with the incumbent organisation, which is often a response to a critical event that renders the institutional status quo no longer viable. These processes that lead to increased overlap can assume the following two natures: they can either be coordinated or unilateral (Biermann and Koops, 2017b: 7–8). States may create new institutions or expand the domains of existing ones to strengthen the incumbent IO. Likewise, entrepreneurial institutional actors of two organisations may coordinate domain expansions for mutual benefits. The incumbent IO may alone be unable to overcome a collective action problem or require resources held by another organisation to fulfil its existing tasks (Clark, 2021). Institutional overlap then implies functional benefits and more effective provision of public goods. Moreover, institutional actors may also view the cooperation with the other IO as morally desirable, given that IO staff often conceive of themselves as moral vanguards and defenders of the multilateral order (Von Billerbeck, 2020).

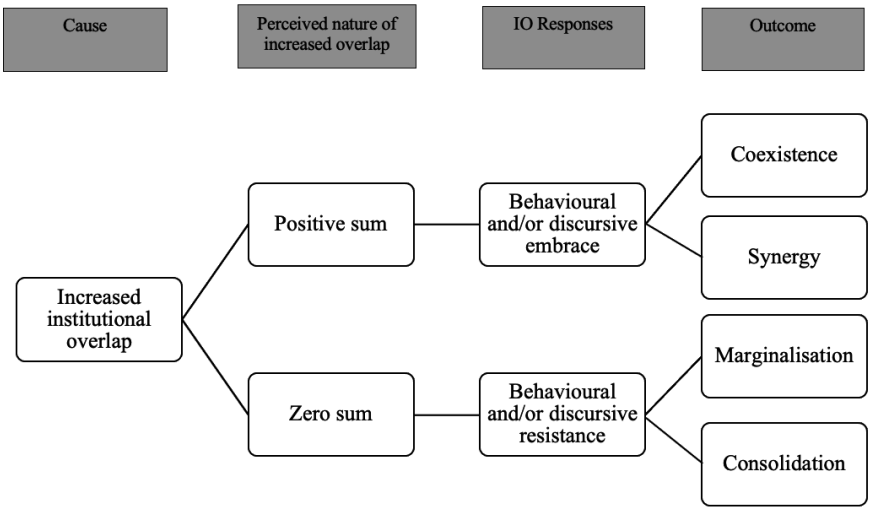

Figure 5.1. Model of institutional actors' responses to overlap

Second, states may create new institutions or expand existing ones without either coordinating with the incumbent or the intention to strengthen it. States may consider existing IOs as ineffectual, illegitimate, or intend to spur competition (Jupille et al., 2013). Alternatively, institutional actors can seek to expand their domain at the expense of the incumbent organisation in a quest to increase their bureaucratic power and creep their missions (Ege, 2020). Brosig (2011) adds that overlap is most likely a challenge to the incumbent if it pertains to core rather than peripheral fields of competence. The resulting domain challenge threatens the relevance of the incumbent and risks prompting conflicts over resources and influences.

However, in many cases, the nature of the overlap is not objectively given. After all, it is unlikely that a challenging IO will overtly advocate that it intends to replace the incumbent IO or that overlap will clearly fall in one or the other category. Instead, the nature of overlap is subject to interpretation of those institutional actors who can most likely shape relations with the other IO (i.e. secretary-generals, deputies secretary-generals, or other senior officials like unit directors or members of the secretary-general's private office). If these key actors within the IO perceive overlap in positive sum terms, they will embrace cooperation with the other IO. Vice versa, if they perceive the domain expansion of another IO in zero-sum terms, they will seek to consolidate its position and try to resist the challenger IO's expansion (Bayerlein et al., 2020: 36ff.). While perceptions in practice will not likely be neatly dichotomous or consensual among officials, these ideal types serve as an analytical illustration of the argument. Potentially infinite institutional and personal factors may shape perceptions, including historical relations between the IOs, bureaucratic cultures, familiarity between senior officials from the two IOs, or national backgrounds of officials. As such, perceptions are best treated as an open empirical question that should by explored by analysing public positions and, if plausible, private views through interviews.

To shape overlap, institutional actors have both behavioural and discursive means at their disposal (Tallberg and Zuern, 2019). Institutional actors can use behavioural means to embrace overlap by working the diplomatic backchannels to foster close personal connections with their counterparts to coordinate policies and strategies. In order to overcome potential resistance from member states (or other actors), institutional actors can also shield inter-organisational cooperation by keeping a low public profile, using procedural tricks to minimise the input from member states, or using drafting powers to lay out the tracks of proceedings (Beach and Smeets, 2019). Finally, institutional actors can also broker compromises among member states in a way that furthers their preferences. They can, for example, convene member states to negotiate, establish backchannels, or offer compromise texts (Tallberg, 2010). Discursively, institutional actors can exploit the prominent public position of their executive heads to set the public agenda in their favour and make the public case for greater cooperation with the other organisation. The ultimate objectives of these means of embracing overlap are thus to persuade or circumvent sceptical actors and manage the bureaucratic machineries.

Resisting domain expansion or the creation of a new institution is difficult for the incumbent IO, since it has no direct influence over the other organisation's decisions. Thus, institutional actors rely on a repertoire of behavioural and discursive means that can indirectly resist the challenging IO. Behaviourally, institutional actors can build coalitions with supportive member states by colluding with them or orchestrating opposition to the domain challenger (Dijkstra, 2017). They may also try to regain the initiative and launch a counter-domain expansion aimed at the challenging IO. On a discursive level, institutional actors can try to legitimise their incumbency by defending their policies and processes or publicly criticise the challenger IO. The ambition of these resistance strategies is to either directly intervene in the decision-making processes of the challenger IO (Margulis, 2021), or, if this proves impossible, at least win the

approval of the member states so that they can internally limit the challenger IO's domain expansion.

Depending on whether institutional actors successfully embrace or resist the increased overlap, there are two potential outcomes for each pathway. If institutional actors successfully embrace overlap, it will produce greater *synergies* with the other organisation and improve mutual effectiveness and public goods provisions, which may be manifest in joint declarations, sharing of resources, or coordinated decision-making. Should institutional actors fail to overcome roadblocks to greater cooperation, the organisations will merely *coexist* without synergetic effects. In turn, if institutional actors succeed in resisting the domain expansion of the challenger IO, it will *consolidate* its position as incumbent organisation and maintain its resources, delegated authority, mandate, and membership. Conversely, if they fail to resist, the incumbent IO will lose competences and risks being *marginalised* or, in the most extreme cases, replaced.

Whether institutional actors fail or succeed to act on their perceptions of increased overlap depends on two factors. First, the repertoire of available responses to the institutional actors depends on the organisation's *institutional capacity*. Any IO which intends to respond to challenges needs to have the capacity to undertake strategic action including the intellectual firepower to craft a strategic response and formal or informal powers to subsequently implement it. Otherwise, the IO would not be more than a toothless administrative body. Indeed, IO secretariats vary significantly in their institutional capacity (Debre and Dijkstra, 2021). Previous accounts show that NATO possesses a sizable secretariat with a designated policy planning unit, a public communications department to better promote the strategy, and influential agenda-setting powers as the Secretary General acts as the alliance's spokesperson, organiser of summits, and chair of the North Atlantic Council, the main decision-making body (Hendrickson, 2014). Moreover, the emerging norm to appoint former heads of state or government to the position as Secretary General has buttressed the diplomatic influence of the office. Indeed, the incumbent Jens Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian Prime Minister, stands out for his diplomatic skill and networks in Washington and European capitals, which he put to good use when protecting NATO from US President Trump (Schuette, 2021a).

Second, the external *opportunity structure* enables or constrains the success of the chosen responses. IOs operate in a complex environment where they are rarely the most powerful actor, and this is particularly pertinent in the field of security. Indeed, NATO is an intergovernmental organisation, which takes decisions by unanimity. There is ample literature on the influence powerful states directly exert in IOs (e.g. Mearsheimer, 1995) and that institutional actors anticipate the preferences of the key member states and act accordingly (Clark and Dolan, 2021). Indeed, formally shaping relations among IOs is subject to dual consensus requirements within and between the IOs and thus involves manifold potential veto players (Biermann, 2015). It should therefore not be expected that institutional actors in intergovernmental organisations would and could overtly contradict core interests of veto players. For example, Turkey and Cyprus have long-prevented formalising the relationship between the EU and NATO, while in the past, the United States opposed granting the EU a

greater role in European security (see Hofmann, 2009, 2019). When preference constellations are more diffuse, however, institutional actors face opportunities to use their available responses to act on their perceptions. As such, the degree of preference centrality among veto players – that is, how salient an issue and how clearly defined a government's preference is – delineates the opportunities for agency of institutional actors.

In sum, institutional actors will likely seek to shape institutional overlap with another organisation. They have a strong interest in defending their incumbent position or maximising opportunities to increase the functional provision of public goods respectively. Depending on their perception, institutional actors will respond to either try embrace or resist overlap. Whether they can do so successfully depends on the IO's institutional capacity that delineates the available repertoire of discursive and behavioural responses, whose effectiveness in turn is shaped by the opportunities offered by the respective member states.

The purpose of the ensuing empirical section is to illustrate the plausibility of the theoretical claim that institutional actors will, depending on their perception, choose varying strategies to shape functional overlap with another organisation. The case selection follows three logics. First, the case of NATO–EU overlap constitutes a hard case for the theoretical model. While NATO meets the scope condition of possessing some institutional capacity, it lacks the authority that other IOs like the EU have. Crucially, NATO is also heavily intergovernmental and operates in the sovereignty-sensitive sphere of security policy, which should increase the preference centrality among allies. Thus, if NATO actors can shape overlap, institutional actors from other IOs should do too. Second, the case exhibits variation on the perceived nature of the overlap and thus allows for exploring both pathways of the model. As demonstrated below, between 2014 and 2016, NATO actors perceived overlap with the EU in positive sum terms, while from 2016 onwards, these perceptions gradually gave in to more zero-sum dynamics as EU defence initiatives gathered momentum.

And third, there is a striking gap in the literature. Extant accounts of the relationship tend to analyse the NATO–EU relationship through the prism of either the key member states (Aggestam and Hyde-Price, 2019; Çelik, 2020; Ewers-Peters, 2021; Simon, 2013) or the EU (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier, 2021; Tocci, 2018). Indeed, the vast majority of academic literature considers NATO a weak or even irrelevant institution which serves at the behest of the member states (Bayerlein et al., 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2016; Walt, 1997). As the next sections show, however, this conception of NATO neglects its agential qualities. (see also Johnston 2017; Mayer 2014).

Towards the NATO–EU Joint Declaration (2014–2016)

This section analyses how NATO actors sought to shape relations with the EU between 2014 and the Joint Declaration signed in July 2016. It demonstrates that NATO actors perceived coordinated domain expansions with the EU in positive sum terms and astutely exploited a favourable opportunity structure among the member states to recast the relationship with the EU.

Geopolitical shocks of 2014: Positive sum perceptions

The relationship between NATO and the EU had long been characterised by minimal cooperation and reflexive ideological opposition to one another. While the two organisations increasingly overlapped in crisis management from the 1990s onward when both moved towards a 'collective security middle ground' (Smith and Gebhard, 2017), they had failed to effectively harmonise their activities (Duke and Vanhoonacker, 2016; Koops 2017). The enduring antagonism between Cyprus and Turkey – the so-called participation problem – prevented meaningful cooperation between the two organisations, with Turkey vetoing information sharing or allowing Cyprus partaking in EU–NATO meetings and Cyprus consequently resorting to denying any formal EU engagement with NATO beyond the limited Berlin Plus arrangement (Acikmese and Triantaphyllou, 2012). Bureaucratic rivalries on both sides of the town and lukewarm support in many capitals, including Washington, did little to change the fortunes of the relationship.

However, the seismic geopolitical events in Ukraine and the Middle East shook the foundations of the European security architecture and created a critical juncture in the inter-organisational relationship. The crises of 2014 generated strong functional pressures to adopt an expanded notion of what constitutes security in the 21st century, which NATO had already had to recognise during its missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. In particular, there was a need to create synergies between NATO's primarily military instruments and the EU's mix of largely civilian instruments. Russian hybrid warfare and disinformation campaigns as well as the causal links between conflicts in the Middle East and refugee movements towards Europe highlighted the inadequacy of existing instruments of both NATO and the EU. Neither organisation could cope alone with the increasingly complex security challenges.

Jens Stoltenberg became NATO's Secretary General in March 2014. A practical-minded former Prime Minister of Norway, he quickly started making the case for closer relations with the EU (Interviews #12, 17). Among NATO's senior officials, there was a common realisation that the multi-dimensionality of, for example, Russian hybrid warfare functionally required a comprehensive response that was only achievable in better partnership with the EU, while it was also important to demonstrate the unity of the West (Interviews #1, 3, 6, 12, 17). In other words, NATO senior staff perceived potentially closer relations with the EU largely as a positive sum game, which Stoltenberg's public interventions also testify to, as shown below. In a fortunate turn of events, a new EU leadership also came into office in late 2014. Stoltenberg knew both Tusk and Juncker from prime ministerial meetings in the past, and he had known Mogherini, a fellow social democrat, for a long time (see Græger, 2016: 484). Close observers report of a particular strong personal chemistry among the leadership quartet (Interviews #11, 12, 17, 8).

Thus, the deterioration of the security environment in 2014 created a window of opportunity to overcome the deadlock in the inter-organisational relationship. The leadership of both organisations arrived in Brussels with the political will to revamp the NATO–EU relationship.

NATO actors perceived greater cooperation with the EU in positive sum terms and should thus be expected to use their discursive and behavioural levers to embrace greater overlap.

NATO institutional actors' discursive and behavioural responses to the shocks of 2014

The discursive evidence of Secretary General Stoltenberg's interventions between coming into office and the signing of the Joint Declaration affirms both the positive sum perceptions among NATO officials and, consequently, the expectation that he would use his prominent position to try shape the agenda in favour of closer EU–NATO relations. Between March 2014 and July 2016, Stoltenberg made 18 public interventions in the presence of various EU actors (see Appendix 2). A close reading of the relevant speeches and remarks shows that Stoltenberg's message was strikingly coherent and characterised by the leitmotif of complementary and mutually beneficial relations between the two organisations.

In every single intervention, he emphasised the pressing urgency to intensify the inter-organisational cooperation given the complementarity of the two organisations, citing that 'each organisation brings its own unique blend of expertise, experience and capabilities' (#14). He also always invoked functional and ideational justifications for closer relations, repeatedly referring to 'common security challenges in the east and south' (#2), 'a dangerous world' (#3) that the two organisations operate in, and 'common values of open free democratic societies' (#5). In an attempt to shape the agenda for the Joint Declaration, he became gradually more concrete in calling for three specific realms for further cooperation: hybrid threats, stabilisation of the common neighbourhood, and defence capabilities and industry (#10).

Throughout, he made clear that NATO was driving an ambitious agenda, declaring that there was 'a strong wish within NATO to do more' (#12) and that he himself 'had made a special effort to bring NATO and the EU closer together' (#14). Thus, Stoltenberg's string of interventions displayed the inter-organisational relationship in harmonious terms, rarely expressing a cautionary tone on the perils of duplication between the organisations (which was to change after the Joint Declaration, as shown below). In other words, and in line with theoretical expectations, NATO actors discursively embraced institutional overlap with the EU.

Deeds followed words. NATO institutional actors set out to overcome the inherent constraints imposed by the Berlin Plus framework and the participation problem to forge greater practical cooperation. There was a widespread disillusionment on both sides of the town with the ineffectiveness of existing formats (see Græger, 2016; Smith et al., 2017). The agenda of formal meetings between NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) had been ritualistic and in their substance limited to operational cooperation only, and thus rarely produced tangible results (Interviews #6, 7, 9, 10). Instead, NATO and EU actors circumvented the formal channels with the result that both cross briefings (with Stoltenberg regularly attending EU defence ministerials and Mogherini partaking in NATO meetings) and bilateral meetings between Stoltenberg and EU leaders increased significantly and improved atmospherically (Interviews #6, 10, 12; Græger, 2016: 483).

Stoltenberg met Mogherini on her second day and Tusk on his third day in office, affirming the importance mutually attributed to the NATO–EU relationship.

Informal political meetings between institutional leaders created a better political atmosphere and paved the way for a gradual improvement of the inter-organisational relationship beyond the gaze of the member states (Interview #7). Stoltenberg and Tusk, in particular, shared a common concern about the Russian threat and were committed to synergising NATO and EU efforts. Indeed, it was a bilateral meeting between the two leaders in 2015 that gave birth to the idea to agree on a new political framework for the EU–NATO relationship, which later gained Juncker's support (Interview #11).

The process leading up the Joint Declaration was nonetheless fraught with political difficulties and required substantial leadership on behalf of Stoltenberg and Tusk, Juncker, and to a lesser extent Mogherini. It was a balancing act for institutional actors. On one hand, the political salience and intergovernmental nature of NATO rendered it imperative for Stoltenberg to retain close support of key allies and not cross their red lines. In particular, he needed to keep the main non-EU allies on board for whom the benefits of closer relations with the EU were not immediately obvious – the United States, Turkey, Canada, and Norway (Interviews #12, 17). On the other hand, negotiations would have to remain sufficiently distant from the member states to avoid bilateral conflicts and the general difficulties of bargaining among delegations from 36 countries derailing progress (Interviews #17, 12, 11, 6).

To manage this balancing act, Stoltenberg used largely subtle leadership mechanisms. First, the NATO and EU leadership shielded the negotiations from the member states. They agreed on a common procedure to control the negotiations. A core group of only five negotiators from the respective cabinets would conduct the initial negotiations. Only upon agreement would the core group exchange complete drafts with national ambassadors, which ensured a stronger bargaining position. Moreover, by tabling complete drafts rather than allowing line-by-line discussions of the text, institutional actors limited the input from national delegates. Ambassadors were also not allowed to take drafts outside the meeting room so that institutional actors would remain in control of the negotiations. The shielding strategy culminated in the decision to have the three institutional leaders sign the Joint Declaration rather than the national leaders to avoid the risk of them wanting to reopen the negotiations (Interviews #17, 11).

In addition, Stoltenberg, Tusk, and Juncker sought to lay out the tracks of the negotiation. By holding the pen and presenting draft versions of the declaration, the institutional actors could frame the debate in terms favourable to their objectives. For example, some delegates made the case for a more technical declaration, but the leadership trio preferred the Joint Declaration to be principally a political statement (Interview #11). The debates with the national delegates thus always took place on the institutional leaders' terms. It were also the cabinets that came up with creative fixes for protracted problems. The enduring participation problem loomed large over the negotiations, and at various points, both Turkey and Cyprus objected to parts of presented drafts. The main sticking point was the characterisation of the existing relationship between the two organisations. The Cypriot delegation insisted on not referring to the Berlin

Plus framework, from which it has been excluded by Turkish vetoes, in any shape or form, while Turkey called for precisely that. After tough negotiations that lasted until the very morning of the Warsaw summit, the parties eventually agreed on a compromise solution proposed by the cabinets (Interviews #17, 11).

Outcome: More synergetic NATO–EU relationship

NATO actors around the Secretary General Stoltenberg thus used their discursive and behavioural sources of influence to reach the Joint Declaration with the EU, which was a manifestation of willingness on both sides of the town to relaunch their relationship. The declaration called for 'a new level of ambition' and pledged to intensify cooperation on hybrid threats, operations, cyber security, capacity-building, defence capabilities, industry and research, and exercises. These were later translated into 74 concrete actions. The implementation of these actions was delegated to NATO's International Staff and the European External Action Service (EEAS). While some dismiss these 74 actions as mere 'publicity' (Interview #1, 7), others point to some concrete deliverables that resulted from the joint cooperation such as the establishment of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki in 2017 (Koenig, 2018). Beyond specific policies, the Joint Declaration reinforced the previous trend of trying to circumvent political blockades by further informalising the inter-organisational relationship (Tardy and Lundstrom, 2019: 7–8). The political dialogue in bilateral meetings between the institutional leaders on both sides of the town as well as cross briefings have become normal practice. Furthermore, staff-to-staff level contacts have significantly expanded with the result of more comprehensive informal information exchanges and greater flexibility between the two organisations (Interviews #4, 6, 17).

While the Joint Declaration has not revolutionised the relationship between NATO and the EU, it set into motion unprecedented cooperative dynamics and created greater synergies between the two organisations. This section demonstrated that NATO institutional actors proved instrumental in managing the process of arriving at the agreement with the EU. Stoltenberg's discursive responses set the public agenda; his diplomatic skills and experience allowed him to establish close relations with Tusk, Juncker, and Mogherini; and both NATO and EU actors' astute usage of shielding protected the declaration from destructive interference from the member states and ensured unanimous approval in Warsaw in July 2016.

Despite the difficulty of convincing Turkey of the merits of the Joint Declaration, NATO actors benefitted from a relatively favourable opportunity structure among member states and changes to the preference centrality among key veto players. Close observers noted that Turkey exhibited greater pragmatism and willingness to discard its past categorical opposition towards closer relations with the EU (Interviews #7, 15). The intensified relations between the EU and Turkey in the context of the so-called Refugee Crisis, which culminated in the EU–Turkey Deal in March 2016, also helped improve the diplomatic atmosphere (Interview #6). Beyond the Turkey–Cyprus issue, the United States also tangibly changed its position vis-à-vis NATO–EU cooperation. While under the Bush Administration, the United States harboured scepticism

towards the EU, the Obama Administration pushed for closer cooperation between the two organisations and viewed it as one possibility to achieve more equitable transatlantic burden-sharing (Interviews #14, 17). The waning of Turkish and US opposition was thus the key enabling factor that allowed NATO actors to forge closer relations with the EU.

NATO amid EU defence integration (2016–2020)

This section analyses how NATO actors responded to the emerging dynamics in European defence integration from the summer of 2016 onward. After the signing of the Joint Declaration in July 2016, the relationship between the EU and NATO entered a new, more difficult phase as the EU launched several defence initiatives, which raised the spectre of zero-sum institutional overlap. This section shows that NATO institutional actors used discursive agenda-setting powers to encourage the EU where preferable and push back against unwanted domain expansions where necessary. On the behavioural dimension, NATO actors fostered the political dialogue with the EU to display harmony and produce practical results, while building coalitions to push back against elements of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and launch own initiatives to legitimate its incumbency.

The EU's quest for strategic autonomy: Mixed perceptions

For the EU, closer relations with NATO were only ever one of several necessary steps to cope with the new security environment (Interviews #4, 8). The EU's Global Strategy, published in June 2016, called for the EU to develop 'strategic autonomy', while the European Council declared ambitions of developing autonomous defence and deterrence capabilities of its member states (Council of the EU, 2016).

Enabled by Brexit removing one of the key obstacles to deeper defence integration and unprecedented willingness by the Commission to drive the agenda (see Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier, 2021), these rhetorical commitments would soon yield results. In December 2016, the EU agreed to establish the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), a military headquarter that the United Kingdom had long blocked out of fear of duplicating NATO structures. In May 2017, the Council endorsed the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) to promote transparency and coordination in national defence spending plans to facilitate joint capability developments and procurement. Defence integration gathered further momentum following the election of President Macron in France in May 2017 and the subsequently re-energised German–Franco tandem. The EU launched the European Defence Fund (EDF) in June 2017 to finance joint research and development of defence capabilities and established PESCO in December 2017, which aims foster the joint development of capabilities co-financed by the EDF where possible. Finally in June 2020, EU defence ministers agreed to develop a Strategic Compass to translate the EU's 2016 Global Strategy into tangible operational goals, identify capabilities needs, and support shared threat assessments.

These initiatives mark a conceptual shift in European security. While the division of labour between hard and soft security provision had been diluting since the 1990s, the EU's pursuit to

become a defence actor risked creating significantly greater functional overlap with NATO. As one senior NATO official points out, during the fruitful negotiations over the Joint Declaration, there was no talk about PESCO (Interview #17). NATO has long maintained that EU defence initiatives should pass the tests of avoiding the (in)famous three 'Ds' popularised by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: no duplication of NATO structures, no decoupling from NATO, and no discrimination against non-EU NATO allies (see Sloan, 2016: 166). Among NATO officials, the perception of whether the recent EU initiatives passed these tests was mixed and not always unanimous. Some were cautiously optimistic that EU defence cooperation will largely complement NATO. They argued that both PESCO and the EDF are capabilities-driven initiatives that should benefit NATO. They also pointed to the recent agreement that allows for third-party participation in PESCO thereby ensuring non-discrimination, as well as the fact that 38 out of 47 earmarked PESCO projects align with NATO priorities (Interviews #17, 6; Council of the EU, 2020). Others were more pessimistic about the prospects of EU defence initiatives actually yielding any tangible benefit to NATO, given that the size of the EDF's budget of €8 billion is small in comparison to national defence budgets and costs of modern armaments (Interviews # 1, 3). The pessimistic voices also viewed both the MPCC and CARD as duplicating NATO structures and putting added strains on scarce human resources of defence planners.

In striking contradistinction to the public discourse, however, none of the NATO officials interviewed expressed a fear that the specific EU initiatives posed a veritable threat to the primacy of NATO as European security provider. Yet, there was an aggravating concern about the symbolic decoupling these initiatives may imply. Discourse emanating from France and other parts of the EU, which painted the EU defence initiatives as part of a wider quest to become strategically autonomous from the United States as an end in itself, fuelled concerns about the return of ideological opposition towards NATO. US President Trump's reflexive opposition towards the founding ideals of the EU also buoyed the politicisation of the inter-organisational relationship (Interview #12). Thus, perceptions among NATO officials on European defence initiatives, which were also reflected in Stoltenberg's public communications, were mixed on the specific policies and zero-sum on their political symbolism.

In sum, NATO actors faced a complex situation. While EU defence initiatives were perceived to carry some potential for strengthening the EU–NATO relationship, their political implications risked fostering existing patterns of strategic divergences between the United States and EU. Thus, NATO actors set out to selectively support aspects of EU defence integration to avoid rifts between the two organisations and 'avoid a beauty contest' (Interview #1), while asserting NATO's primacy in European security.

NATO institutional actors' discursive and behavioural responses to EU defence initiatives

Unlike on the Joint Declaration, NATO actors had no direct levers to shape EU defence initiatives, given that the two organisations operate on the principle of decision-making autonomy. They therefore placed much emphasis on public agenda-setting to encourage the

EU where possible and caution where necessary, while working to achieve tangible cooperation results, maintain close diplomatic relations with EU leaders, and launching its own initiatives to legitimate NATO's primacy in European security (Interview #3).

Between the summer of 2016 and the end of 2020, the Secretary General made 37 relevant interventions (see Appendix 3). A thorough analysis of these public sources demonstrates that a gradual, but discernible discursive shift took place. Public communications in the aftermath of the Joint Declaration were largely focussed on first results of the new practical cooperation. Stoltenberg frequently invoked the unprecedented cooperation between the EU and NATO and that 'cooperation was now the norm, not the exception like in the past' (#8). As the EU's defence initiatives gained traction, Stoltenberg increasingly addressed them. He repeatedly welcomed initiatives such as PESCO as long as EU capability developments were complementary to NATO, coherent with NATO develop- ments, and made available to NATO (#12). This subtle messaging gave way to more direct cautions. At the Munich Security Conference in February 2018, he gave a comparatively confrontational speech, stating that 'with opportunity comes risk. The risk of weakening the transatlantic bond, the risk of duplicating what NATO is already doing and the risk of discriminating against non-EU members of the NATO Alliance [. . .] the European Union cannot protect Europe by itself.' (#17)

In the following interventions, he echoed his forthright cautions, regularly reminding listeners that 'after Brexit, 80% of NATO's defence spending will come from non-EU Allies' and that 'three out of four NATO battlegroups are led by non-EU allies' (#28). He also warned against attempts to 'divide North America from Europe' (#28). Reflecting the aforementioned concerns among NATO officials that the politics more than the substance of EU initiatives were concerning, Stoltenberg explicitly criticised the notion of strategic autonomy, among others espoused in the EU's Global Strategy, noting that '"Strategic Autonomy", it's not totally clear what that means, but it sounds a bit like they're going to do these big strategic things alone, and I don't think that's wise.' (#21)

Compared to Stoltenberg's discourse until the Joint Declaration, his public interventions thereafter differed in both tone and substance. He gradually moved from emphasis- ing practical cooperation, to the mixed message of welcoming EU defence efforts while cautioning against them undermining NATO, to outright warnings and assertions of NATO's primacy (this shift was noted by several officials, see interviews #8, 9, 16). Throughout, he made clear that he saw the potential for practical benefits from EU defence initiatives for NATO but expressed his opposition towards political distancing of the EU from NATO (and the United States). In other words, his discursive embrace pre-summer of 2016 gave way to a more ambivalent position on the institutional overlap with the EU and explicit legitimations of NATO's primacy in European security.

NATO actors had no direct behavioural means to influence EU defence initiatives. Instead, they used diplomatic means and agenda-setting initiatives to shape NATO's relationship with the EU and maintain its position as primary security provider in Europe. First, NATO actors

continued to embrace cooperation with the EU by working on inten- sifying the political dialogue with the EU and producing practical deliverables (Interview #1). Political contacts between NATO and the EU have grown; since the signing of the Joint Declaration in 2016, more than 120 cross briefings between EU and NATO officials took place (Interview #5). Stoltenberg also continued his close liaison with the EU leaders Juncker, Tusk, and Mogherini. They coordinated relevant speeches (Interview #3), maintained the regular bilateral meetings (see NATO, 2020a), and published joint press statements. In July 2018, NATO and the EU renewed their commitment to furthering practical cooperation by signing another Joint Declaration. Nearing the end of his term in office (before the allies extended his tenure), for Stoltenberg, this was an important political sign and served to lock in the new framework of inter-organisational relations in light of opposition from US President Trump (Interviews #11, 17).

The implementation of the 74 areas of cooperation identified in the two joint communications has been running relatively smoothly, according to involved officials (Interviews #4, 5, 6). Concrete results hitherto achieved include the establishment of the aforementioned European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki; the creation of a Structured Dialogue on Military Mobility to advance cooperation on military requirements, transport infrastructure, transport of dangerous goods, customs, and cross border movement permissions (Interview #17); and close cooperation between NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and the EEAS' Strategic Communications Divisions on fighting disinformation (Interview #3; NATO, 2020a). Reflecting the shielding practices in the run-up to the 2016 Joint Declaration, these activities take place on the institutional staff-to-staff level, which effectively insulate the practical cooperation from conflict among member states but places a natural ceiling on the level of ambitions (Interviews #7, 15).

Second, NATO actors lobbied behind the scenes to steer the EU towards a compromise solution on PESCO allowing third parties to participate (Interview #17). Stoltenberg used his close contacts with the EU leadership to make the case behind closed doors. He also built coalitions with those member states critical of what they saw as protectionist elements of PESCO like the United States or the Netherlands to coordinate their diplomatic initiatives (Interviews #14, 17). Third-party access was an important issue for non-EU allies and in November 2020 the EU under the stewardship of the German Council Presidency eventually agreed on conditions under which non-EU states may be invited to participate in PESCO projects (Interviews #18, 19, 20).

Third, NATO actors also took two initiatives to resist the EU's domain expansion and thereby legitimate its primary position in European security. At the London Summit in December 2019, NATO agreed to a forward-looking reflection process to foster allied unity and increase political consultation. This was a direct response to President Macron's criticism of a strategic void in the alliance (Interview #1), which had allegedly become 'braindead'. Aimed at shaping the debates around strategic autonomy and NATO's future role, the process entailed appointing an expert working group, which produced a report in November 2020 calling among other things for the 'recognition that NATO remains the transatlantic framework for strong collective

defence and the essential forum for security consultations and decisions among Allies' (NATO, 2020b: 56). Secretary General Stoltenberg seized the opportunity to set the strategic agenda by enlarging the reflection process into a wider NATO 2030 agenda and driving the process of revising NATO's Strategic Concept by the summer of 2022 (Ringsmose and Rynning, 2021). In doing so, he made clear that the priority for NATO is to define its own role before discussing further reforms of the inter-organisational relationship with the EU (Interview #16).

Outcome: Consolidation, for now

NATO institutional actors employed their discursive and limited behavioural means to resist what they perceived ideological elements of EU defence integration (where strategic autonomy was an end in itself), shape PESCO, and encourage practical cooperation and a publicly harmonious relationship. In doing so, NATO appears to have managed to consolidate its primary position in the European security architecture. After a period of transatlan- tic tensions over the EU's initiatives, tempers on both sides of the pond have cooled. Compared to the process of reaching the Joint Declaration, the causal impact of institutional actors is more difficult to ascertain. With the exception of PESCO, the EU's defence initiatives went ahead as planned despite the concerns among non-EU allies. Yet, NATO actors successfully contributed to taking the sting out of debates surrounding strategic autonomy by helping to reach a compromise on PESCO, not allowing the heated debates to drive a wedge between the two organisations and shifting attention to both the practical achievements of the inter-organisational relationship and NATO's own initiatives.

The scope for agency by institutional actors was more curtailed than in the previous period as preferences among allies vis-à-vis NATO–EU relations became more salient. This was a result, among others, of the elections of two presidents who were sceptical of closer NATO–EU relations: President Trump in January 2017 and President Macron in May 2017. The departure of the United Kingdom from the EU, which in the past had acted as a transatlantic bridge between the two organisations, exacerbated the growing tensions (Ewers-Peters, 2021). Thus, beyond continuing informal and practical cooperation on the staff-to-staff level, institutional actors could not advance closer cooperation. However, it offered opportunities for NATO actors to find willing veto players to resist elements of EU initiatives they perceived as threatening.

Conclusion

Cooperation between NATO and the EU has reached unprecedented heights, but the inter-organisational relationship continues to be plagued by bilateral conflicts on the level of the member states and ambiguous European aspirations. This article inquired into the perceptions and responses of NATO actors to the growing overlap with the EU since 2014. It shows that NATO actors initially viewed closer relations with the EU as necessary consequence of the geopolitical shocks of 2014 and hence employed their discursive and behavioural levers to push for the Joint Declaration. However, the EU's subsequent defence initiatives harboured the risk of symbolising strategic decoupling from NATO. In response, NATO actors pursued the dual

strategy of encouraging cooperative elements while pushing back against those perceived as unilateral and threatening. Overall, the article suggests that NATO actors made an independent contribution to the restructuring of the relationship with the EU by creating greater synergies while consolidating its primary position in the European security architecture. While institutional actors did not act in overt opposition to the expressed interests of the most important allies, the article finds ample evidence for institutional actors' strategic behaviour, which demonstrably affected the outcome of the overlap with the EU.

By 2021, the debates about whether European ambitions of strategic autonomy threatened the existence of NATO have calmed. The arrival of Joe Biden in the White House certainly helped taming anti-American instincts in many parts of Europe and the COVID pandemic has shifted attention elsewhere. Nonetheless, NATO actors helped de-dramatising the debate by facilitating a compromise on PESCO, maintaining a harmonious relationship with the EU throughout, and launching own initiatives to assert the continued relevance of the Atlantic Alliance. This is not to suggest that the fundamental debate about the future transatlantic relationship is over. The rise of China, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, democratic decay across the West, or new security challenges to name but a few will raise questions about the relevance of NATO. The debates in US foreign policy circles between 'restrainers' and 'engagers' shows no sign of abating, and the debate about European strategic autonomy is likely to garner momentum again during the French presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2022. Hence, the spectre of marginalisation will continue looming over NATO. But as this article shows, the alliance can wield substantial influence and will not be a passive pawn in the game.

The findings vindicate the theoretical contention that IO institutional actors have the ability to shape overlap when preferences among member states are diffuse, and that their choice of strategies depends on their perceptions of the nature of the overlap. Of course, the evolution of the inter-organisational relationship was enabled by systemic shocks and concomitant changes on the member state level, but these forces required the agency and individual leadership of institutional actors to materialise. The overlap between NATO and the EU constitutes a hard case for the theoretical model. Consequently, other IOs that have substantial institutional capacity and are likely to possess greater autonomy should be expected to also be able to shape institutional overlap. Further research could test the validity of these claims by analysing for instance the overlap between the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank or between the International Energy Agency and the International Renewable Energy Agency.

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Appendix 1: Interview List

1. NATO official, 3 December 2020
2. EU official, 7 December 2020
3. NATO official, 8 December 2020
4. EU official, 17 December 2020
5. EU official, 17 December 2020
6. NATO official, 18 December 2020
7. National official, 18 December 2020
8. Former EU official, 11 January 2021
9. National official, 11 January 2021
10. EU official, 11 January 2021
11. EU official, 26 January 2021
12. Former NATO official, 1 February 2021
13. EU official, 3 February 2021
14. National official, 8 February 2021
15. National official, 22 February 2021
16. National official, 9 March 2021
17. NATO official, 9 March 2021
18. National official, 28 April 2021
19. National official, 12 May 2021.
20. National official, 26 May 2021.

Appendix 2: Stoltenberg's public interventions (November 2014 – June 2016)

#	Date	Source
1	4.11.2014	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_114456.htm
2	18.11.2014	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_114859.htm
3	3.12.2014	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_115662.htm
4	18.2.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_117496.htm?selectedLocale=en
5	30.3.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118576.htm

6	14.5.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_119421.htm?selectedLocale=en
7	18.5.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_119822.htm
8	16.6.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_120675.htm?selectedLocale=en
9	26.6.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_120973.htm
10	16.11.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_124507.htm
11	17.11.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_124518.htm
12	1.12.2015	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_125361.htm?selectedLocale=en
13	5.2.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_127626.htm?selectedLocale=en
14	23.2.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_128311.htm?selectedLocale=en
15	10.3.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_129162.htm
16	19.4.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_130049.htm
17	20.5.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_131283.htm
18	28.6.2016	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_132843.htm?selectedLocale=en

Appendix 3: Stoltenberg's public interventions (November 2016 – December 2020)

#	Date	Source
1	15.11.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_137635.htm?selectedLocale=en
2	21.11.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_137787.htm?selectedLocale=en
3	6.12.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_138730.htm?selectedLocale=en
4	6.12.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_138729.htm?selectedLocale=en
5	13.12.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139368.htm?selectedLocale=en
6	15.12.16	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139424.htm?selectedLocale=en
7	18.2.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_141632.htm?selectedLocale=en
8	27.4.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_143329.htm?selectedLocale=en
9	3.5.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_143400.htm?selectedLocale=en
10	18.5.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_143863.htm?selectedLocale=en
11	7.9.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_146642.htm?selectedLocale=en
12	2.10.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_147499.htm?selectedLocale=en
13	9.10.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_147635.htm?selectedLocale=en
14	13.11.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_148840.htm?selectedLocale=en
15	14.12.17	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_150001.htm?selectedLocale=en
16	16.2.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_152237.htm?selectedLocale=en
17	16.2.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_152209.htm?selectedLocale=en
18	21.6.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156142.htm?selectedLocale=en
19	28.6.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156410.htm?selectedLocale=en
20	10.7.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156749.htm?selectedLocale=en
21	12.11.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_160241.htm
22	20.11.18	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_160495.htm?selectedLocale=en
23	30.1.19	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_162918.htm?selectedLocale=en
24	15.2.19	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_163791.htm?selectedLocale=en
25	4.4.19	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_165212.htm?selectedLocale=en
26	7.11.19	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_170606.htm?selectedLocale=en
27	9.12.19	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_171929.htm?selectedLocale=en
28	10.1.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_172436.htm?selectedLocale=en
29	15.2.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_173709.htm?selectedLocale=en
30	4.3.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174073.htm?selectedLocale=en
31	23.6.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176715.htm?selectedLocale=en
32	26.8.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_177561.htm?selectedLocale=en
33	7.10.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_178605.htm?selectedLocale=en
34	13.11.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179489.htm?selectedLocale=en
35	23.11.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179665.htm?selectedLocale=en
36	4.12.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179983.htm?selectedLocale=en
37	15.12.20	https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_180094.htm?selectedLocale=en

6

Chapter 6

When an international organisation fails to legitimate: the decline of the OSCE

Abstract: The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is in decline. The closure of its Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in April 2022 in the wake of the Russian attack is only the latest manifestation of the organisation's long term legitimacy crisis. While many other contested international organisations have demonstrated resilience and relegitimated their rule, the OSCE has failed to do and is on the brink of irrelevance. This article derives a novel theoretical framework to explain when legitimacy crises lead to decline. Drawing on twenty interviews with senior officials, the analysis suggests that the OSCE's failure to legitimate has two interrelated causes: 1) the polarization among the participating states on the remedies for the OSCE's legitimacy crisis that resulted from sustained Russian efforts to revise the principles of the European security architecture and Western neglect, and 2) the organisation's institutional weaknesses and impeded leadership that have prevented the OSCE from engaging in effective legitimation practices, which tends to be overlooked in the literature. In doing so, the article contributes to better understanding of the sources of the OSCE's crisis and nuances wider theoretical debates on legitimation and IOs in crisis.

Introduction

On 28 April 2022, the OSCE Secretary-General (SG) Helga Schmid and OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO), Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau announced the closure of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine. Following the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Russian representatives at the OSCE had refused to extend the mission's mandate and Russian Ambassador Lukashevich called the organisation "an amorphous structure" (TASS 2022). Since 2014, the SMM had served as the eyes and ears on the ground in Eastern Ukraine to monitor the security situation and provide information on violations of the ceasefire terms. As the largest field operation of the OSCE with 1300 staff and a budget of 108 million Euros (Lichtenstein 2022), and the only international mission active in Eastern Ukraine, the SMM was the crown jewel of the OSCE's activities.

The end of the SMM is the culmination of a long crisis of the OSCE. As the premier security institution that comprises states from both sides of the divide of the Cold War, the OSCE assumed wider tasks of building a pan-European security community during the 1990s. But from the 2000s onward, this expansive role became increasingly contested by Russia and its allies. Today, the OSCE is engulfed by a polycrisis which threatens not only its existence in its current form but also to destabilise the precarious European security architecture. Growing opposition in Russia and other post-Soviet states to the OSCE's liberal mission has challenged the purpose of the organisation. Competition from other international organisations (IOs) both in the West and East has undermined the OSCE's political relevance. And the remilitarization of European security affairs in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine as well as the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally undermines the very raison d'etre of the OSCE. As a result, the OSCE is in decline and potentially at the brink of descending into permanent irrelevance.

This article seeks to shed light onto the underlying causes of the OSCE's legitimacy crisis. The few extant accounts on the crisis of the OSCE focus on the normative conflict between Russia and the West (Boerzel and Peters 2019, Peters 2013), a wider lack of compliance to liberal commitments (see Friesendorf 2020), and weak operational implementation of its mediation strategies (Guliyev and Gawrich 2021, Remler *et al*. 2020). Incorporating these accounts, this article places the OSCE's crisis in the wider context of the crisis of the multilateral order. Indeed, the legitimacy of many IOs, ranging from the EU, NATO, the WTO, the UN Security Council, to the WHO, is currently contested (see Debre and Dijkstra, 2021a). But a recent research agenda on the agency of IOs in crisis demonstrate that organisations tend to be resilient (e.g. Chorev 2012, Hirschmann 2021, Schuette 2021a, 2021b). Many IOs have responded to crises of legitimacy by engaging in legitimation practices, i.e. attempts to change the legitimacy perceptions of key stakeholders in favour of the IO (Bexell et al. 2022; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016, Tallberg and Zuern 2019).

In light of these wider trends of IO resilience and legitimation in crises, the decline of the OSCE appears at odds and thus warrants explanation. The central argument of this article is that legitimation in crisis is subject to two conditions. The OSCE satisfies neither condition and

should thus be a likely case of legitimation failure. First, IOs need to engage in high intensity legitimation practices. Contrary to the assumption in the literature, not all IOs will be able to do so. The intensity of legitimation practices is determined by endogenous features of the IO: the formal and informal institutional capacity as well as the leadership styles of senior officials. IOs with weak bureaucracies or passive leadership will therefore unlikely be able to engage in any meaningful legitimation attempts in the first place. Second, legitimation is only partially in the hands of the IO because even high intensity legitimation practices require a favourable constellation of preferences on the remedies of the IO's legitimacy crisis among key constituents to succeed in changing legitimacy perceptions and thus avert decline. Homogenous or at least diffuse preferences should leave room for compromise to enact institutional reform and renew the IO's legitimacy. Conversely, heterogenous and salient preferences on the legitimacy of the IO among key stakeholders render it difficult, if not impossible, that even intense legitimation practices change legitimacy perceptions of all key stakeholders as practices aimed at persuading some will inevitably alienate others.

Drawing on twenty interviews with senior national and OSCE officials, the empirical analysis finds that since 2014 the institutional actors of the OSCE have been unable to engage in high-intensity legitimation practices due to institutional weaknesses and impeded leadership. The combination of a lack of even most basic autonomy from participating states, an annual budgetary cycle highly vulnerable to hijacking, and impotent office of the SG as well as wider secretariat causes the OSCE to primarily concern itself with internal crisis management rather than contributing to the collective security among its participating states. Furthermore, long-term Russian efforts to revise the principles of the European security architecture and Western neglect of the OSCE has led a polarization among the participating states on the remedies for the organisation's legitimacy crisis. As a result, the OSCE has failed to engage in relegitimation and several indicators suggest that both in absolute and relative terms the organisation is in decline, including a loss of budget, policy scope, policy output, and influence to other IOs. The findings on the OSCE carry implications for the wider literature on legitimation. The OSCE's legitimation failure and decline both nuances the prevailing implicit assumption that IOs tend to successfully engage in legitimation and points to the necessity for IOs to have meaningful institutional levers of influence and compatible normative views among member states.

This argument is persecuted as follows. The first section introduces the key concepts and develops a theoretical framework on legitimacy crises and decline. The second section examines the nature of the OSCE's legitimacy crisis, discusses the OSCE's institutional characteristics, traces and explains its discursive and behavioural legitimation practices, and demonstrates the organisation's decline. In doing so, the article contributes to better understanding of the historical and contemporary sources of the OSCE's crisis and nuances wider theoretical debates on legitimation and IOs in crisis.

Legitimacy Crises and IO Decline

This section theorises when IOs fail to legitimate. After defining key concepts, this section elaborates on the two explanatory factors of the theoretical framework: legitimation intensity and stakeholders' preference constellation on the remedies for the legitimacy crisis.

Defining Legitimacy Crises and Decline

In the context of IOs, legitimacy refers to the "generalized perception that [their] normative precepts are rightful, that they warrant respect and compliance for more than self-interested reasons, for reasons of their normative standing" (Reus-Smit 2007: 159). Legitimacy is crucial for IOs, which often lack the coercive enforcement mechanisms of domestic institutions, in ensuring compliance with its norms and rules (Dingwerth *et al.* 2020, Hurd 1999). Indeed, the OSCE is a norm-based organisation, which not only does not have enforcement powers but also only produces politically, not legally, binding commitments. Legitimacy crises arise when organizational features such as procedures, performances, or purposes are no longer congruent with the norms and values among the IO's constituency, which manifests in 'unusually intense public criticisms and protests against an IO' (Sommerer et al. 2022: 7; Lenz and Viola 2017). Thus, changes in the internal features of the IO and/or shifts in the normative environment can precipitate legitimacy crises (Cottrell 2009: 222).

In absolute terms, decline denotes the loss of authority, resources, member-states, or policy output (Pevehouse 2004). In relative terms, decline signifies that the IO loses members and/or policy competences vis-à-vis other IOs (Dijkstra and Debre 2021a, Schuette 2022). The spectre of institutional decline looms large over IOs as the liberal international order is increasingly contested (Lake *et al.* 2021). However, the literature lags behind these empirical developments as most institutionalist accounts eithers consider IOs stable and impervious to exogenous pressures or concentrate on the extreme case of the death and replacement of IOs (Cottrell 2009; Debre and Dijkstra 2021b; Gray 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; see also Peters and Hoogward 1988). Decline, however, delineates a distinct category on the spectrum spanning from stability to death; while it can merely be a precursor to the eventual death of an IO, decline can also lead to a new equilibrium, in which the IO is weaker (but still functional) than in the *status quo ante*.

It follows that legitimacy deficits or more intense forms of legitimacy crises can severely weaken an IO by reducing stakeholder's willingness to engage in political discussions, pool resources, or comply with collective decisions (Tallberg *et al.* 2018: 17). Thus, when member states consider an IO illegitimate, they may curtail its authority and resources, block the policy processes, or even withdraw membership. Alternatively, or in parallel, they may shift their attention to other institutions deemed more legitimate. While analytically distinct, the transition from legitimacy crises to institutional decline is empirically not always easy to distinguish. Legitimacy crises tend to be manifest in continuous public criticism of the general features of the IO, not of specific policies, and repeated violation of key norms and principles. Decline

ensues when these patterns translate into observable and sustained losses of resources, membership, policy scope and output, and political attention relative to other IOs.

Sources of Legitimation Intensity

Legitimacy crises can also be conceived as a 'wake-up call' (Sommerer et al. 2022: 11) for institutional actors, who need not stand idly by but can actively engage in practices to relegitimise the IO's authority in the eyes of its constituents (see also Agné and Söderbaum 2022). The substantive institutional features that form the basis of legitimacy judgements by the IO stakeholders as well as the initial perception of the institutional features can be subject to change. Note that other actors such as civil society or supportive member states may also engage in legitimation practices (see Gronau and Schmidtke 2016), but the focus here lies on those actors most likely to respond given that their fate is intrinsically bound up with that of the IO. These legitimation practices can be discursive and aim at changing perceptions of given organizational features by intensifying their public communication and using value-laden symbols. Discursive legitimation narratives tend to focus on either functional justifications – such as rational problem-solving capacity and welfare maximization – or normative justifications such as liberal norms of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law or communitarian norms such as shared history, identity, and sovereignty (see Lenz and Schmidtke 2021). Alternatively, legitimation practices can be behavioural and seek to reform the substantive features of the IO (Tallberg and Zuern 2019, Gronau and Schmidtke 2016). In general, the graver the crisis, the greater should be the legitimation efforts by institutional actors (for the wider debate on when IOs engage in legitimation, see for example Zuern 2018 and Lenz and Schmidtke 2022).

Two factors endogenous to the IO shape how intensely institutional actors can engage in legitimation: the IO's institutional capacity and leadership. A recent body of institutionalist literature demonstrates that institutional actors frequently act strategically to fend off contestation and this article draws on these accounts to distil conditions of high and low intensity legitimation (Chorev 2012, Debre and Dijkstra 2021b, Gray 2018, Schuette 2021a, 2021b). These insights on general responsiveness to crises are valid in the context of legitimation practices because the latter are specific forms of strategic crisis responses by institutional actors.

In contrast to passive responses of simply following orders, sitting out the crisis, or following an existing playbook, legitimation practices are strategic in the sense that they are proactive and deliberately tailored to change constituent's perceptions of legitimacy (Chorev 2012). Thus, institutional actors require the strategic capacity to devise and then implement legitimation practices. For IOs to devise a strategic response to legitimacy crisis in the first place, they need sufficient dedicated personnel, time, space, and resources, which Bayerlein *et al.* refer to as "cognitive slack" (2020: 37-8). The size of the secretariat and the existence of a policy planning unit within it is the principal indicator for an IO's generalised strategic capacity (Debre and Dijkstra 2021b). Without such capacity, IOs will merely be administrative bodies and unable to engage in legitimation.

To implement the devised legitimation practices, the IO needs specific attributes dependent on the type of practice. For discursive legitimation, IOs would profit from both a dedicated and well-resourced communications department as well as prominent leadership to be granted the media limelight. Behavioural legitimation is more difficult to achieve for IOs because it implies institutional changes. To do so, institutional actors need the formal and/or informal powers to set the agenda or even take decisions. Delegated competences (Hooghe *et al.* 2017), majority- as opposed to consensus-voting (Scharpf 1988), and imprecise mandates (Lenz *et al.* 2015) should render it more feasible for institutional actors to drive reforms. In addition to these formal institutional characteristics, strategic responses to legitimacy crises also requires astute leadership by senior officials (Hall and Woods 2018, Schuette 2021a). Leaders need to initially recognise the crisis of legitimacy, provide intellectual leadership in crafting responses, and then mobilise institutional resources to implement the responses. In doing so, they rely on their networks in capitals and other IOs as well as personal qualities such as communication skills, empathy, and diplomatic talent (Boin *et al.* 2016; also Adler and Pouliot 2011). In sum, institutional characteristics and leadership determine the intensity of legitimation practices.

Extant accounts of discursive legitimation measure intensity by quantifying the share of IOs' public communications that aims at justifying their authority (Lenz and Schmidtke 2021). While this is a valuable approach, and probably the only feasible one for large-n studies, the quantitative focus neglects the actual quality of interventions which can be assessed in small-n research. A qualitative focus directs attention not merely on the number of legitimation claims but on their effect on the desired audience. Audiences here include those stakeholders that are both critical and influential, such as dissatisfied member states, or electorates thereof, and relevant civil society actors. It matters, in other words, whether a legitimation claim is buried in an annual report or whether the SG promotes the IO in an interview with widely read international media. Discursive legitimation intensity, as conceived here, thus includes the quantity of legitimation claims, the quality of those interventions, and thus their effect, which can be assessed by, for instance, surveys on the prominence of an IO or expert judgement. In a similar vein, the quality of behavioural legitimation, i.e. of institutional reforms, should be the main criterion to assess legitimation intensity. Indeed, Zuern shows that symbolic institutional reforms usually fail to avert decline, whereas instances of substantial reforms – such as the creation of the G20 or the reform of IMF voting rights – can deepen global governance (2018: 13, 17, ch. 6). Once again, meaningful political reforms of an IO are likely to be of greater impact than minute managerial changes.

When do Legitimacy Crises lead to Decline?

The relationship between legitimacy crises and IO decline is not deterministic. Not all instances of continuous public criticism of the general features of the IO translate into the observable loss of significant resources, membership, policy scope, or political attention. In other words, decline always follows legitimacy crises, but not all legitimacy crises lead to decline. Indeed, there is space for agency by institutional actors to avert decline by relegitimising the IO's authority. Even intense legitimation practices alone, however, do not guarantee relegitimation,

which is only partially in the hands of the institutional actors. After all, it is the audience of the legitimation practices – consisting of key stakeholders with power over the fate of the IO – who ultimately need to change their legitimacy judgements.

There are two potential ideal type constellations of key stakeholders' views on the legitimacy of the IO, which derive from their material and ideational preferences. The constellation of preferences can be homogenous. That is, member states broadly agree on the causes of and remedies for the IO's legitimacy crisis. Whether institutional actors can satisfy the resulting demands is not given but homogenous views at least provide a potentially attainable objective to work toward (see Koschut 2016). For example, a broad coalition of states and civil society actors has long demanded greater democratic accountability of IOs. While those demands were far from consensual, opposing actors could hardly make a strong public case against more democratic accountability. Accordingly, recent research shows the rise of democratic legitimation by IOs (e.g. Dingwerth *et al.* 2020). The point of contention amid homogenous views then is whether institutional actors can do enough to satisfy the legitimacy demands.

In contrast, heterogenous views on the IO's legitimacy crisis imply that states prefer conflicting solutions. Heterogenous constellations place institutional actors in an "accommodation dilemma" (Jurado *et al.* 2021), in which satisfying one camp's demands may further undermine the IO's legitimacy in the eyes of the other opposing camp. The more polarised, the more difficult it is therefore for institutional actors relegitimise their authority. Indeed, growing heterogeneity among IO memberships increasingly characterises both regional and global IOs. As the liberal international order spread and gained new members after the end of the Cold War, views on both the liberal content of most IOs and the level of decision-making became more diverse (Ikenberry 2020, Zuern et al. 2019). Such diversity of views becomes particularly consequential in consensus-based IOs, where every member can wield a veto, and when powerful states are on opposing ends of the divide. There is ample literature on the influence powerful states directly exert in IOs (e.g. Stone 2011), and it should therefore not be expected that institutional actors in intergovernmental organisations would and could overtly contradict core interests of veto players or even hegemons (Schuette 2021a). Constituent's perceptions of the IO are not necessarily fixed, however, and institutional actors may try to shape those as part of their legitimation practices. In addition to the views among the IO's membership, in some cases there may also be other relevant actors, such as civil society, that can either support the legitimacy practices of the IO or, if in disagreement, launch counter legitimacy claims, which would make it more difficult for institutional actors to successfully legitimate their IO (Tallberg and Zuern 2019: 595-6).

In sum, the interplay of the two factors should explain when legitimation succeeds or fails. Success is likely when legitimation intensity is high and views among stakeholders on the remedies for the IO's legitimacy crisis homogenous. Vice versa, failure is likely when legitimation is low and views are heterogeneous. Other constellations are indeterminate a priori.

The ensuing empirical section uses this theoretical framework to explain the legitimation failure of the OSCE. The analysis is based on a triangulation of data gathered from twenty interviews with senior OSCE and national officials, analysis of speeches by the previous two SGs and annual reports (n=83), public documents, and secondary literature. The characterisation of the nature of the OSCE's legitimacy crisis relies on historical analysis. The subsequent descriptive analysis examines the congruence between the OSCE's institutional characteristics and previously established necessary institutional features to engage in strategic behaviour. The primary empirical section uses content analysis of public documents and speeches to evaluate discursive legitimation practices and traces behavioural responses. Finally, the article identifies indicators of decline and employs counterfactual thinking to evaluate the degree to which the failure to legitimate is responsible for the OSCE's decline.

Legitimacy Crises and Decline: the case of the OSCE

This empirical section analyses why the OSCE has failed to relegitimate its rule and avert decline. It first discusses the nature of the OSCE's legitimacy crisis to show the preference heterogeneity among participating states. Second, it analyses the OSCE's institutional weaknesses. Third, the section traces the discursive and behavioural legitimation failures. And fourth, it provides evidence of the OSCE's decline.

From Liberal Optimism to East-West Polarisation

A product of the détente period of the Cold War, the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 established the Conference on Security and Cooperation, the predecessor of the OSCE, as a dialogue forum to alleviate the strains in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the West. In the Helsinki Decalogue, it enshrined ten principles that constitute the normative foundation of the OSCE to this day, including the inviolability of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for human rights. Following the end of the Cold War, the Paris Charter of 1990 affirmed and expanded the Helsinki Decalogue in reflection of the zeitgeist that the liberal model of democracy, market economy, and international law and human rights protection had prevailed. This was the phase of liberal optimism; the liberal international order expanded, and President Yeltsin ostensibly sought to take Russia on a path toward democracy and membership of the West (Ikenberry 2020: 255ff.).

The new cooperative spirit between the West and countries of the former Soviet Union led participating states to transform the CSCE into the OSCE in 1995 and expand its remit to become a security building organisation by actively promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as guarantors for peace in Europe (Gawrich 2014). They created the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), with the mandate to observe elections in the OSCE's member states, advise governments on how to reform domestic institutions, and train officials in the then-new democracies. The OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media (RFoM) was set up to monitor the freedom of expression and of the media, while the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) was created for the task of analysing and making recommendations on how to address causes of ethnic tensions in the member states.

Under the auspices of Conflict Prevention Centre, the OSCE could now launch field operations to help the respective state meet its commitments, serve as the eyes and ears of the organisation, and thus prevent conflict.

Throughout the 1990s, the post-Cold War consensus on the liberal foundations of the European security architecture held, and cooperation worked relatively successfully in the OSCE (Zellner 2020). However, from the late 1990s onward, the relations principally between Russia and West deteriorated with significant repercussions for the OSCE. While Moscow continued to support the OSCE in the abstract, it grew increasingly critical particularly of the OSCE's missions to promote free elections and the rule of law. For the administration led by President Putin from 1999 onward, these activities constituted illegitimate interferences in sovereign realm of the member states rather than core tasks of the organisation (Kropatcheva 2015). Indeed, reflecting a wider trend of authoritarian regionalism, Russia and its allies increasingly pushed back against the liberal democratic foundation of the OSCE (e.g. Libman and Obydenkova 2018). In the 2000s, these concerns were buoyed by disagreements over NATO and EU enlargement, autocratic restoration in Russia, and colour revolutions in several former Communist states. In line with his crystallising belligerent anti-Westernism, first explicitly espoused during his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin increasingly viewed the OSCE as a "western agent" (Kropatcheva 2015). Meanwhile, the US and its allies increasingly preferred working through NATO and the EU at the expense of the OSCE and to disappointment of Russia, not a member of either organisation.

As a result, then Russian President Medvedev demanded in 2008 to renegotiate the very foundation of the European security system, and with it the OSCE. His proposal of a European Security Treaty included a call for transforming the OSCE into a "fully-fledged regional organisation" (Lavrov 2007) endowed with a legal personality (Steinbrueck Platis and Peters 2019). At the heart of the Russian proposal were, first, a return to the traditional non-interference principle by curtailing the autonomy of the OSCE's institutions and, second, the elevation of the role of Russia in Europeans security affairs by shifting decision-making away from NATO and the EU to an organisation where Russia was represented. While the Western states signalled willingness to discuss some modest reforms of the OSCE, neither the US nor key European members like Germany were willing to renegotiate the liberal foundations of the OSCE and hence, to Russian frustration, the reform efforts petered out (Peters 2013: 203-6).

By the mid-2010s, relations broadly between those OSCE participating states which are members of the EU and NATO and those that are members of the CIS had reached a new nadir, with the result that the OSCE has been almost completely blocked since (Hill, 2018; Zellner 2020). Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine from 2014 onward as well its military attack in 2022 challenged the most basic principle of the OSCE, the inviolability of borders in Europe that was the foundation of the Helsinki Accords of 1975, even if the SMM before its forced closure in 2022 temporarily demonstrated its relevance. Arms control negotiations have consequently been a collateral of the growing polarisation among the OSCE states; the Vienna Document on confidence and security building measures was not duly updated in 2016 as originally envisaged, Russia withdrew from the Treaty on

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, and both the US and Russia withdrew from the Open Skies Treaty in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

Other CIS states also openly violate key OSCE norms. In their conflict over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which escalated into an outright war in 2020, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan respect the OSCE's norms on peaceful conflict resolution. Democratic backsliding across the CIS region has also fuelled opposition to the autonomy of the OSCE's three institutions. ODHIR has come under increasing diplomatic pressure. Russia and its allies have used several strategies to subjugate ODIHR, including demanding a veto over its election reporting, curtailing its budget, and inviting rival election observers from the CIS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to challenge ODIHR's primacy (Interviews #10, 12, 13; also see Donno, 2021, Cooley and Nexon 2020). In 2020, Tajikistan and Turkey also blocked the renewal of ODHIR's director mandate while Azerbaijan and Tajiistan blocked the extension of the RFoM, citing excessive criticism of the domestic media landscape (Brzozowski 2020). This resulted in an institutional leadership crisis, as the four senior posts of the OSCE (also the position of the SG and HCNM) remained vacant for four months. In another example of its contestation, ODIHR decided not to send observers to the 2021 Duma elections following Russian insistence to limit the number of observers and thus effectively impair the ability to objectively assess the elections.

As the embodiment of the short-lived post-Cold War consensus on the terms and arrangements of the European security order, the OSCE is now engulfed in a severe crisis of legitimacy (see Boerzel and Peters 2019, Krastev and Holmes 2019). On the one hand, Russia and its CIS allies (as well as Turkey in part) seek to revise the very normative foundation on which the organisation is built and actively subvert its liberal missions. For them, the OSCE has become an instrument of Western policy (see Karaganov 2015) and they increasingly rely on authoritarian organisations that overlap with the OSCE such as the SCO and CSTO. On the other hand, while many Western states continue to profess their support for the organisation and defend the OSCE's liberal foundation, they increasingly look to the EU and NATO and thereby marginalise the OSCE (Haftel and Lenz 2022; Panke and Stapel 2018). Thus, the OSCE finds itself in a protracted dilemma, in which one camp contests the very norms of the organisation that the other camp values, which in turn undermines its ability to act as an effective guarantor of peace. High preference heterogeneity therefore characterises the OSCE's participating states.

The Design of the OSCE: an Institutionalised Process rather than an Organisation

Responding to this dual crisis requires the capacity to both devise and implement a legitimation strategy. The OSCE is an intergovernmental organisation. Lacking a constitutive legal treaty and legal personality, it remains a cooperative institution based on a political agreement that cannot issue legally binding rules (Platise Steinbrueck and Peters 2019). Indeed, the OSCE has no means of enforcing commitments and hence relies on the goodwill among its participating states. The OSCE's mandate is set out in a series of documents including the Helsinki Final

Act (1975), the Paris Charter (1990), and summit declarations of Helsinki (1992) and Budapest (1994).

At its core, the OSCE is an intergovernmental forum to for security cooperation in Europe. Accordingly, the main decision-making bodies consist of participating states' representatives and consensus requirements rein true. The Summit of heads of state or government is the highest body that meets irregularly (the last time in 2010) to set the political direction. Annual meetings of foreign ministers in the Ministerial Council function as the main decision-making organ. In turn, the Permanent Council composed of ambassadors meets weekly in Vienna to decide on the day-to-day business of the organisation. The most powerful position in the OSCE, however, is the Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) (Nünlist 2017). This annually rotating position is held by the foreign minister of the respective chair and is imbued with agenda-setting powers and political responsibilities for coordinating decision-making. The OSCE's executive structures include the secretariat as well as the three institutions, the latter of which enjoy significant autonomy both from member states as well as the secretariat (Zannier 2018). ODIHR has the power to publish their election observation reports as well as their preliminary findings without requiring approval by the participating states (see Donno 2021: 3). In a similar vein, the RoFM's can independently publish their reports on the quality of freedom of expression in participating states. In addition, the OSCE's field operations help implement OSCE commitments to prevent and resolve conflicts. They are formally accountable to the CiO and the Permanent Council, while the secretariat offers merely administrative support. Indeed, this fragmentation of authority regularly leads to coordination issues and "turf wars" (Interviews #10, #15) between the secretariat and the institutions and field missions.

The OSCE's secretariat should be the central actor for engaging in legitimation practices. To do so, it requires cognitive slack, prominent leadership, formal and informal powers, and communicative capacities. The position of the SG as the head of the secretariat is crucial for the organisation's capacity to act strategically. However, compared to other intergovernmental security organisations like NATO, the OSCE's SG is institutionally weak. Defined by a dozen Ministerial Council decisions (Greminger 2021: 42), the mandate includes largely administrative and only some limited diplomatic tasks. Principally, the SG acts as the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in charge of the effective use of human and financial resources. S/he also supports and represents the CiO and serves as the institutional memory of the OSCE across chairpersonships. De facto, the room for maneouvre of the SG is thus determined by the respective CiO. Unlike the SGs of NATO or the UN, the OSCE SG merely delivers a report on his/her activities during the weekly meetings of the Permanent Council but has no agenda-setting powers in the decision-making bodies (Knill *et al.* 2016: 1062). The SG also has no formal control over the three institutions or the field missions. In contrast to NATO, where the current and previous SG were former prime ministers, OSCE SG have usually been diplomats. Lamberto Zannier, SG between 2011 and 2017, was an Italian career-diplomat before taking up his post at the OSCE. His successor, Thomas Greminger, was a Swiss diplomat and, among others, ambassador to the OSCE. This norm is also indicative of states' unwillingness to endow the position of SG with greater diplomatic prowess, as former ministers or heads of state or

government tend to view themselves as equals rather than servants of what previously were colleagues (Boin *et al.* 2016).

Beyond the position of the SG, the OSCE's secretariat is relatively sizeable, consisting of around 400 staff in Vienna (though almost 3000 staff work in field operations) (OSCE, 2019). However, the organisation's human resource policy renders it difficult to attract and retain high quality staff, which is a key factor in shaping an organisation's vitality (Gray 2018), and many vacancies remain unfilled (Greminger 2021: 37). As a non-career organisation, the OSCE has strict term limits on service for its officials. Combined with the heavy reliance on seconded staff, this policy has led to high staff fluctuation, which in turn undermines institutional memory, expertise-building, and policy continuity (Zannier 2018: 47; also Knill *et al.* 2016). In part to counter these trends, it was only in 2017 that SG Greminger created the Strategic Policy Support Unit (SPSU) with five staff members by to offer medium- and long-term strategic capacity. The secretariat does include a communications department, but it lacks sufficient human and financial resources to raise sustained attention in the capitals and among publics, with the staff size of thirteen people not having changed in two decades (Greminger 2021: 41). Furthermore, since the budget cycle is annual, extensive delays in passing the budget are common as states frequently use their veto powers to "hostage-take" (Interview #10) the process to obtain concessions on unrelated subject matters.

In sum, the OSCE suffers from "deliberately fabricated institutional weakness" (Zellner 2020: 15) and a "leadership vacuum by design" (Interview #12) with the result that the OSCE today is "all about internal not external crisis management" (Interview #20). The position of the SG is institutionally weak, which is exacerbated by the norm to appoint seasoned diplomats, not political heavyweights. Moreover, the executive structure is fragmented, which undermines collective action. While the secretariat now has some strategic planning capacity, it suffers from staff shortages and turnover as well as under resourced communications department. The annual, consensus-based budget cycle not only hampers the efficient functioning of the secretariat but also invites blackmailing and issue linkages by participating states. Hence, Bauer and Ege (2016: 1031) find that in comparison to fourteen other IOs, the OSCE secretariat ranks as the least autonomous. As little more than a servile instrument of the participating states, the organisation should, according to the theoretical model, thus struggle to engage in high intensity legitimation efforts.

The OSCE's discursive Legitimation Practices

IO representatives can proactively use value-laden public communications to justify the organisation's identity and purpose, thus aiming to change the perception among critical member states of the institutional features. Even formally weak actors can use the public realm to shape policy outcomes (Schuette 2021a). These discursive legitimation practices can be observed in the IO's public documents like annual reports or speeches and interviews by senior officials, usually the SG as de facto spokesperson of the organisation. Hence, the following section analyses OSCE annual reports (n=7), all speeches by SGs Zannier (n=28) and Greminger (n=48) since 2014 as listed on the OSCE website, secondary literature, and

interview data to establish the quantity, quality, and effect of the OSCE's discursive legitimation practices (see appendix for primary sources).

The mere quantity of legitimation claims by the OSCE is high. Lenz et al. (2021) even find in a comparative analysis of 27 IO that none made proportionally as many legitimation claims as the OSCE. Indeed, an analysis of the annual reports since 2014 affirms that the organisation regularly rehearses well-known principles of "inclusivity", "platform for dialogue", and the "protection of human rights [and] media freedoms" (OSCE 2014) or whose relevance "has never been more apparent to prevent crises from turning into conflicts, to confront transnational challenges, and to seize opportunities for co-operation" (OSCE 2017), including the essential role played by the SMM in Ukraine. While the most likely part of the reports for legitimation claims to feature are the "Messages from the Secretary General", these introductory remarks tend to shy away from using any value-laden language and symbols or establishing new narratives to justify the continued existence of the organisation. Indeed, the legitimation claims tend to be ritualistic and are buried amid lists of the OSCE's activities.

The public interventions by SGs Zannier and Greminger broadly reflect the recourse to general values of the OSCE. In the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine, Zannier's speeches emphasise that the OSCE reacted flexibly and rapidly to the crisis, among others by rapidly establishing the SMM (Zannier #2). But beyond this functional justification for the OSCE's existence, Zannier does not engage with liberal or communitarian legitimation claims, merely noting how the growing east-west polarization undermines the OSCE's problem solving capacity (Zannier #25). Greminger's interventions also demonstrate his awareness of the deep normative conflict among the OSCE's participating states. Like Zannier, he minimises references to the normative underpinnings of the organisation, instead focusing on what he calls "islands of operation" and a "positive unifying agenda" (Greminger #10, also #17, #42, #46). In doing so, however, Greminger met with fierce resistance from numerous western participating states, which feared that focusing more on transnational issues would dilute the human and political-military dimensions, and thus normalize the violation of key OSCE norms by Russia (Interviews #11, #15, #17).

Hence, while the quantity of legitimation claims is notable, their quality and thus impact is questionable. The OSCE's SGs tend to remain very cautious in their interventions. One former official noted that the OSCE's public communications were hamstrung by its "inclusivity" and the "need to always speak on behalf of all participating states" (Interview #19). Indeed, the SG does not have a formal communication mandate but only a limited information mandate that tightly constrains the SG's ability to communicate proactively and autonomously (OSCE 2002). It is thus usually the chairpersonship that shapes the public image of the organisation. Moreover, the communications department is underfunded and SG do not tend to be well-known to generate much media attention. As a result, the OSCE's legitimation claims had little impact. While the organisation is well-known and reputable in those states, where it has field missions, its public prominence elsewhere remains low, as is recognised by both Greminger (2021:41) and Zannier (2018: 48). Based on data from speeches at the UN General Assembly, Debre and Dijkstra corroborate this view by showing that since the 2000s national leaders grant

ever less political attention to the OSCE (2021a: 19). One OSCE official goes as far as to identify a "crisis of visibility" both among the public and in most capitals (Interview #15).

In sum, the intensity of the OSCE's discursive legitimation practices remained moderately low. While it made many claims in the annual reports, the SGs themselves had to err on the side of caution and hardly promoted the organisation in public. The institutional constraints – a lack of a communications mandate and resources – were compounded by the normative heterogeneity among states. The original liberal values that the participating states west of Vienna still largely subscribe to are anathema to the communitarian vision propagated by the CIS states. Any kind of normative legitimation by the OSCE institutional actors would have produced a substantial backlash by the opposing camp.

The OSCE's behavioural Legitimation Practices

The more tangible approach to legitimise its right to rule is for an organisation to reform its substantive features to alleviate criticism among member states. The following section therefore analyses the institutional reforms undertaken under the SGs Zannier and Greminger.

Then SG Zannier initiated two institutional reforms. In 2011, he led efforts to create the "OSCE Network" of think tanks and academic institutions. This epistemic community provides policy expertise on subjects relevant to the OSCE policy fields and serves to partially offset the lack of strategic capacity and expertise resulting from the secretariat's constrained resources (Interview #19; see also Knill *et al.* 2016: 1065).[101] In addition, Zannier launched the Security Days in 2012, which convene a wide array of stakeholders to engage in informal dialogue on pertinent subjects. Topics hitherto discussed are wide-ranging and include both traditional and emerging concerns of the organizations, including military confidence-building, gender and conflict, the climate-security nexus, or violent extremism. Security Days were thus intended to circumvent formal fora that were largely blocked and set the agenda in order to generate new ideas for the OSCE's traditional roles and showcase its potential to play a meaningful role in emerging issues (Zannier 2018: 36; Interview #4). Given that both reforms predate the Ukraine Crisis, they aimed at generating new ideas about the general functioning of the OSCE rather than responded directly to the legitimacy crisis.

While Zannier was considered a cautious administrator in thrall of the participating states, SG Greminger aimed to be a more proactive and influential leader. Upon coming into office, he set out on an ambitious institutional reform agenda. Among the first decisions of his tenure was to create the SPSU. In his previous post as Swiss OSCE Ambassador in 2014, Greminger had noted that the secretariat was completely absorbed in daily files and lacked a central structure tasked with crafting medium- and long-term strategy (Greminger 2021: 25). Faced with opposition from some participating states, Greminger had to rely on extrabudgetary funding to attract five officials seconded from key participating states. The unit was subsequently involved in developing regional strategies for Central Asia or the Western Balkans and helped draft the

[101] For disclosure, the author's home institution is also member of the OSCE Network.

policy priorities for the Slovak and Albanian chairpersonship (Interview #5). As such, establishing the policy unit was an attempt to increase the autonomy and functional capacity of the secretariat (Interviews #11, #17).

The SPSU also played a central role in drafting the ambitious Fit4Purpose reform agenda to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the OSCE. In February 2018, Greminger presented a ten-point plan to reform the OSCE, which consisted of both managerial and political changes. The secretariat had not been reformed since its creation in 1995 and many structures and procedures lacked basic digitalization. A management review identified 80 necessary optimization measures, 68 of which were completed by 2020 including a new travel management tool, or electronic recruitment platform (see Greminger 2021: 32ff.). In addition to these technical reforms, the SG also proposed political changes. Most importantly, he advocated to change the budgetary cycle by moving from an annual to a bi-annual budget. The existing one-year budget had severely undermined the functioning of the organisation as a substantial amount of time had to be invested every year merely to get the budget passed. As a result, the OSCE regularly operates under provisional budgets that prevent it from launching new projects (Liechtenstein 2021). The annual cycle also invites participating states from using the power of the veto to heap political pressure onto the secretariat and institutions and prevents longer-term strategic planning. In an attempt to boost the capacity of the secretariat and the institutions, Greminger also suggested to revise the staffing rules by extending the maxim duration of service both for officials and directors as well as offering the possibility to return to the organisation after a cooling-off period.

However, both potentially consequential reforms failed to materialize. Yet again, the hurdle of consensus requirements was too high for institutional reforms. Several interviewees, however, also noted that beyond the weak institutional authority of his position, Greminger himself lacked the necessary political access in capitals and was insufficiently transparent and consultative about his political reforms both vis-à-vis participating states and other institutions (Interviews #12, #14, #18). Reflecting the fragmention of the OSCE, there was a widespread suspicion among officials in the institutions that Greminger's agenda was motivated less by efficiency concerns and more by a desire to "centralise power" (Interview #20).

Like many observers of the OSCE, Greminger also observed that the formal dialogue fora, such as the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation, had mutated into arenas where participating states merely confront each other with prepared allegations at the cost of open deliberation (Interview #3, Greminger 2021: 25ff.). Complementing the existing Security Days, Greminger therefore devised the Talking Points series with renowned experts to stimulate informal debate. To generate ideas about how to navigate the trade-off between demonstrating relevance and diluting core tasks inherent in Greminger's attempts to focus on islands of cooperation, he helped launch the Cooperative Security Initiative (Interview #11). Both of these initiatives did not require the consensus among participating states (Interview #3). Like Zannier before him, Greminger therefore used epistemic community-building to try legitimise the OSCE's functional role.

In sum, the OSCE hardly underwent any substantial institutional reforms since 2014 despite the deep structural changes engulfing it. SG Greminger did succeed in making technical changes to the workings of the secretariat but largely failed to enact any of the more political reforms that required support by the participating states with the exception of the creation of the SPSU. The only meaningful reform– the creation of the Structured Dialogue to revive arms control talks – was initiated by the German chairpersonship in 2016, not the secretariat. It is also noteworthy that both Zannier's and Greminger's proposals exclusively addressed functional rather than normative sources of legitimation – making the organisation work more effectively, echoing the findings on discursive legitimation practices. Given the weakness of both the secretariat and the office of the SG as well as the lack of political clout of SGs Zannier and Greminger, these weak legitimation attempts are hardly surprising. Without any agenda-setting, not to mention decision-making powers, the OSCE lacks, as one interviewee notes, "an institutional driving force for reforms" (Interview #6). Thus, the OSCE secretariat finds itself in a vicious cycle; to devise and drive necessary reforms, it needs reforming in the first place.

The OSCE in Decline

The OSCE has hitherto failed to legitimize its authority as a security community builder. The intensity of its legitimation practices has remained low. The SGs' public interventions have flown beneath the public radar and most substantial institutional reform efforts failed because of the minimal political clout and institutional levers of influence of senior officials to propel reforms. At the same time, the preferences among its participating states on the crisis and future of the OSCE are highly heterogeneous and hence very difficult to satisfy. As a result, the crisis of the organisation's normative and functional legitimacy has become manifest in several indicators of institutional decline (Debre and Dijkstra 2021a). First, the most evident expression of participating states' lack of diffuse support for the organisation is its loss of budget. Where in 2000, the nominal unified budget amounted to EUR 209 million, by 2020 it had reduced to EUR 138 million (though this excludes the budget of the SMM of around EUR 108 EUR million). OSCE officials note that the budgetary pressures on both the secretariat and ODIHR are "completely unsustainable" (Interviews #10, also #16, #18, #20). At ODIHR the staff to non-staff cost ratio has reached 80:20, with the result that the institution must selectively observe elections, thereby inviting criticism of a Western bias especially by participating states east of Vienna. In the secretariat, the budgetary pressures significantly limit regular trips to the field missions by senior officials, aggravating the fragmentation among OSCE institutions (Interview #18).

Second, the policy scope has *de facto* shrunk. While the OSCE is nominally charged with tasks reaching from arms control and military confidence building (1st dimension), economic and environmental issues (2nd dimension), and human rights policy and democracy promotion (3rd dimension), peripheral issues dominate its agenda as almost all sensitive files are blocked by participating states (Zellner 2020). The crownjewel of the OSCE – the SMM – was forced to close in April 2022. The OSCE has also struggled to adapt to emerging security threats arising from climate change or new technologies (Interview #14). Third, and accordingly, the policy output has reduced. No summit of heads of state and governments has taken place since 2010

and the annual ministerial councils rarely produce substantive decisions. In 2020, the combination of opposition by some member states and indifference by others culminated in the leadership crisis of 2020 and rendered the organisation rudderless and impotent for four months, when the four most senior institutional positions, including that of the SG, remained vacant. Moreover, the organisation's signature annual conferences – the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) and the Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) – are under pressure. Following postponement due to the pandemic in 2020, for the first time in its history, HDIM did not take place in 2021 after opposition from Russia. The ASRC, in turn, took place in 2021 later than envisaged by its mandate and in a pro-forma fashion after disputes over its agenda. And fourth, political attention among participating states toward the OSCE has been shifting to other IOs like the European Union and NATO, but also the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which have expanded their domains at the expense of the OSCE (Cooley and Nexon 2020: 118ff., Donno, 2021).

Critics might question whether even high intensity legitimation practices could have averted the OSCE's decline given the severe acrimony among participating states. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to suggest that a stronger OSCE alone could have thawed relations between Russia and the West, pacified the Nagorno-Karabagh conflicts, or resolved normative conflicts between liberal democratic and authoritarian participating states. But through stronger legitimation practices the institutional actors could have still made a number of practical steps toward protecting the organisation. Foremost, an OSCE with a reformed budgetary process and staffing rules could have been more strategic in positioning itself as an avant-garde in those transnational issues areas, in which participating states continue to share basic interests. From China's increasing advances into OSCE territory through the Belt and Road Initiative, to the security implications of climate change, to emerging technologies, the OSCE has largely failed to tackle key issues because it had been bogged down in internal matters (Interview #14; see Bayok and Wolff 2022). Demonstrating its added value on such transnational issues would have created incentives for Russia to compartmentalize the OSCE (to preserve those functions it values) rather than attack the organisation outright.

In addition, and as conceded by SG Greminger (2021: 41), a more effective public messaging and outreach campaigns could have created greater awareness among the public, drew more attention among experts, and most importantly generate much-needed interest in capitals. Budgetary reforms would have also improved the practical workings on conflict prevention that are currently under heavy financial pressure (Interview #18) and allow ODIHR to keep the pressure on authoritarian states by maintaining its comprehensive election observing missions and holding HDIM (Interview #10), thereby creating greater political buy-in from western states. In combination, these incremental reforms would have the potential to demonstrate sufficiently the practical relevance of the OSCE in European security to both sides of the divide to, at the very least, avert the terminal decline of the organisation.

Conclusion

The Russian attack on Ukraine and the concomitant closure of the SMM may be the final nail in the coffin of the OSCE's relevance in European security. This article set out to explain the OSCE's decline by analysing why it has failed to relegitmate its role as a security community-building institution. It theorized that the intensity of legitimation practices and the views among key stakeholders of the IO are the two key explanatory factors for failed or successful legitimation by institutional actors. Indeed, institutional weaknesses such as a powerless SG, fragmented institutions, or lack of autonomy have undermined the institutional actors' capacity to engage in effective public communications or propel necessary institutional reforms. Moreover, Russian efforts to revise the core principles of the OSCE and Western neglect together minimized the room for compromise. As a result, this combination of factors has led to the decline of the organisation as manifest in a loss of budget, policy output and scope, and political attention vis-à-vis competing IOs.

As a result, the OSCE is caught in a vicious cycle. Tensions and distrust among the participating states prevent meaningful reforms to the OSCE's institutions, which in turn prevents them from playing a meaningful role in overcoming lowest common denominator dynamics and effectively contributing to European security, thereby compounding the organisation's ills. It is difficult to envisage how the OSCE could escape this cycle. The need to lengthen the budgetary cycle, strengthen the position of the SG, or change the workings of the rotating chairpersonship are obvious, but the normative differences among the participating states are so profound and entrenched that any grand bargain seems unlikely. Indeed, the Russian attack on Ukraine is likely to signify the end of the cooperative security architecture in Europe that included Russia as well as NATO members.

These findings should advance scholarly understanding of the crisis of the OSCE and with of the European security architecture. Moreover, the article also nuances wider theoretical debates on IOs, legitimacy crises, and legitimation. As the analysis shows, the very ability to engage in legitimation practices is more contingent than widely presumed and depends on institutional features, leadership, and the stakeholder context within which the IO operates. With its institutional weaknesses and diverse membership, the OSCE should be a hard case for successful legitimation. But amid increasing ideological diversity (e.g. Voeten 2020), many other institutionally weak IOs will likely face similar difficulties when facing legitimacy crises (see Hooghe et al. 2017: 150ff.). Future research could buttress the findings by applying the theoretical framework to other cases of failed and successful legitimation efforts.

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Appendix 1: List of interviews

1. National official, 9 June 2021
2. OSCE official, 23 June 2021
3. Former national official, 28 June 2021
4. National official, 29 June 2021
5. Former OSCE official, 22 July 2021
6. National official, 26 July 2021
7. Former national official, 6 August 2021
8. OSCE official, 25 August 2021
9. National official, 30 August 2021
10. Former OSCE official, 31 August 2021

11. Former OSCE official, 1 September 2021
12. Former national official, 6 September 2021
13. OSCE official, 6 September 2021
14. National official, 6 September
15. OSCE official, 7 September 2021
16. OSCE official, 7 September 2021
17. OSCE official, 8 September 2021
18. OSCE official, 8 September 2021
19. Former OSCE official, 9 September 2021
20. Former OSCE official, 17 September 2021

Appendix 2: Speeches by SG Zannier

Source	Date	Number
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/6/124557.pdf	18/9/14	1
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/0/129601.pdf	4/12/14	2
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/7/142011.pdf	19/2/15	3
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/1/152186.pdf	20/4/15	4
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/b/154866.pdf	29/4/15	5
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/f/163706.pdf	1/6/15	6
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/e/166661.pdf	10/6/15	7
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/1/166246.pdf	23/6/15	8
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/8/174236.pdf	10/7/15	9
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/d/185751.pdf	26/9/15	10
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/9/188921.pdf	1/10/15	11
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/6/198771.pdf	10/11/15	12
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/9/216796.pdf	13/1/16	13
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/3/218226.pdf	25/1/16	14
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/3/240351.pdf	28/4/16	15
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/f/245036.pdf	6/6/16	16
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/249086.pdf	28/6/16	17
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/8/256906.pdf	22/7/16	18
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/d/267631.pdf	19/9/16	19
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/5/268331.pdf	22/9/16	20
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/5/267596.pdf	23/9/16	21
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/a/299461.pdf	25/1/17	22
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/e/301116.pdf	21/2/17	23
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/6/305226.pdf	14/3/17	24
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/2/314206.pdf	26/4/17	25
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/7/320652.pdf	16/5/17	26
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/0/323361.pdf	5/6/17	27
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/1/323356.pdf	9/6/17	28

Appendix 3: Speeches by SG Greminger

Source	Date	Number
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/2/340191.pdf	8/9/17	1
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/5/342031.pdf	11/9/17	2
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/7/346386.pdf	22/9/17	3
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/b/351076.pdf	29/9/17	4
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/3/348326.pdf	2/10/17	5
https://www.osce.org/secretary-general/353951	13/10/17	6
https://www.osce.org/secretary-general/353381	24/10/17	7
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/e/361486.pdf	7/12/17	8
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/c/371446_0.pdf	7/2/18	9
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/2/373753.pdf	17/2/18	10
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/e/375694.pdf	2/3/18	11
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/c/377560.pdf	4/4/18	12
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/b/379111.pdf	24/4/18	13
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/8/380341.pdf	4/5/18	14
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/c/380353.pdf	4/5/18	15
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/2/385218.pdf	16/5/18	16
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/d/385224.pdf	24/5/18	17
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/0/386208.pdf	22/6/18	18
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/0/385998.pdf	26/6/18	19
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/5/387194.pdf	5/7/18	20
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/3/387629.pdf	11/7/18	21
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/9/403424.pdf	22/10/18	22
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/a/402824.pdf	19/10/18	23
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/2/403694.pdf	9/11/18	24
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/6/405653.pdf	6/12/18	25
https://www.osce.org/files/18.01.2019%20SG%20keynote%20Basel%20Peace%20Forum.pdf		26
https://www.osce.org/files/secgal0027%20sg%20opening%20remarks%20anti-semitism%20bratislava.pdf	5/2/19	27
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/e/412430.pdf	21/2/19	28
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/9/416414.pdf	6/3/19	29
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/7/415007.pdf	11/3/19	30
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/0/414938.pdf	15/3/19	31
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/3/415286_0.pdf	20/3/19	32
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/7/415616.pdf	26/3/19	33
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/c/418592.pdf	11/4/19	34
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/a/418898.pdf	17/4/19	35
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/418793.pdf	24/4/19	36

https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/2/420953.pdf	13/5/19	37
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/b/420956.pdf	17/5/19	38
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/9/423839.pdf	5/6/19	39
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/423338.pdf	17/6/19	40
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/2/424214.pdf	20/6/19	41
https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/8/429758.pdf	2/9/19	42

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

In February 2022, on the advent of the Russian attack on Ukraine, Russian President Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping issued a joint statement. In thinly concealed diplomatic language, the two heads of state launched an assault on the existing international order, challenging the universality of human rights, desirability of democracy, and Western leadership. The document notes that both Russia and China are 'world powers' and calls for a new polycentric world order (Kremlin 2022). In doing so, the declaration implies consigning multilateral principles to the dustbin of history and replacing them by a concert of great powers, an objective manifest in both Russia's brutal attempt to revise the European security order and China's new Global Security Initiative, launched in April 2022. Meanwhile in the US, the Russian attack has done little to quell the fervent anti-multilateral rhetoric by the former US President Trump and his disciples. The spectre of an America-First ideologue returning to the White House in 2024 looms large over US politics. After a short reprieve following the election of Joe Biden and momentary easing of US-China tensions, IOs will therefore continue to face significant, multi-front threats. Survival Politics is likely to remain a necessary type of IO behaviour for some time to come.

This dissertation has identified a distinct logic of IO Survival Politics born out of dialectic conditions that are specific to the 21st century: the intense and widespread threats to various organisations and the increases in delegated powers and intrusiveness of IOs. Paraphrasing Waltz, IOs seek to ensure their survival, and do so by resorting to extraordinary degrees and kinds of behaviours. Guided by the research question *How do IOs respond to existential crises?*, the dissertation analysed five existential crises experienced by three IOs: the EU, NATO, and the OSCE. Across four of the five cases, the analysis found that as a result of extraordinary patterns of behaviour, institutional actors exhibited unexpected agency in shaping the outcomes of the respective crises. IOs resorting to Survival Politics can even shape most consequential periods in recent history that would have otherwise likely produced fundamentally different policy outcomes.

These core findings challenge the prevailing view in the literature that structural forces largely determine the fate of IOs in crises (e.g. Abbott et al. 2016; Boerzel and Risse 2021; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2021; Mearsheimer 2019). Indeed, the crisis of multilateralism cannot be understood without accounting for the responses by IOs themselves. These central insights should advance the literature on IOs by demonstrating the distinct ways and the unexpected degree of influence institutional actors possess. The findings also extend the burgeoning research agenda on bureaucratic politics by applying and developing their insights in a new context, pointing to conditions under which institutional actors matter, and identifying a distinct behavioural logic that opens up avenues for future research. And the case-specific empirical insights should further scholarly but also wider public understanding of crucial political episodes of our time. This final chapter summarises the findings of the dissertation. It then derives a typology of survival strategies, before discussing the varieties of IO Survival Politics. After discussing future avenues for research, it reflects on the political and normative implications of the dissertation's findings.

Empirical findings: IO Survival Politics in practice

This dissertation has analysed how IOs behave when they come under such existential pressure that threatens their continued survival. The introductory chapter conceptualised IO Survival Politics as a distinct mode of IO behaviour which can arise from the dual conditions of IOs facing unprecedentedly intense threats at a time when their powers had never been more pronounced. As such, it differs both in degree and kind from the widely acknowledged bureaucratic politics IOs regularly engage in. Premised on key institutional actors developing survival instincts, IO Survival Politics operationally consists of a two-stage mechanism: the intellectual development of a survival strategy and the subsequent implementation thereof. To understand how IOs behave in existential crises, each of the five cases therefore examined the perceptions of key institutional actors and their role in developing and implementing a survival strategy.

The first case analysed how the European Commission, in form of its Task Force 50, responded to the UK public's decision to withdraw from the EU. It found that among senior officials such as Commission President Juncker, there was a distinct fear that Brexit could serve as an example for other Eurosceptic parties in Europe to follow and thus bring down the very edifice of the EU. The election of Trump in November 2016 aggravated such fears. In response, senior officials developed survival instincts; rather than pursuing distinct policy or institutional interests like the Commission tends to do in negotiations with third parties, Juncker and Barnier set out to protect the EU polity. Unity among the EU27 became the overriding negotiation objective. Implementing this survival strategy involved more intense uses of traditional means of exerting influence such as strategically using the Commission's expertise to shape negotiations. But is also involved distinct kinds of behaviour such as unprecedented transparency toward EU-stakeholders and direct political decision-making to shape the negotiation agenda. In the end, Survival Politics by the Commission proved causally significant in keeping the EU together throughout the Brexit negotiations.

The second case examined how the EU responded to the crisis of the multilateral order from 2016 onward. While it took until mid-2018 for senior EU officials to recognise the existential nature of the crisis, survival instincts then kicked in and the EU agreed on several key documents that signalled a strategic change in its behaviour. Indeed, the EU subsequently intensified its efforts as well as used extraordinary means to defend existing IOs, and to a lesser extent reform them and extend multilateral cooperation to new areas. The most pronounced manifestations of EU Survival Politics came in the form of not only emancipating itself from the US but actively confronting it in the cases of the WTO and JCPOA. Notwithstanding the limits imposed by internal disagreements as well as legal and institutional constraints, the EU's behaviour was important in stabilising the multilateral order and helping the EU weather this perilous episode.

The dissertation then moved to NATO. The third case investigated the role of Secretary-General Stoltenberg in helping the Alliance survive the Presidency of Donald Trump. Trump's

aversion toward NATO was pronounced; he not only repeatedly criticised it and called its very purpose into question, but the President also almost announced the US withdrawal from NATO in the summer of 2018. NATO officials therefore almost inevitably developed survival instincts from the beginning of Trump's term. The survival strategy Stoltenberg and other key officials crafted was to exploit the idiosyncrasies of Trump by overtly and enthusiastically supporting those of his demands considered least threatening to the alliance, while subtly resisting those considered dangerous. Implementing this strategy involved an array of unprecedented tactics such as actively circumventing the White House, framing statistics in a favourable manner, and setting the agenda by appearing on Fox News, a partisan channel. NATO Survival Politics was a crucial factor in ensuring its endurance of the Trump Presidency.

NATO also faced a significant challenge from the other side of the Atlantic. The fourth case therefore studied how NATO actors perceived and responded to the EU's quest for a greater role in European security and defence from 2014 onward. While survival instincts among officials were not unequivocal, most viewed the implicit political ambition of replacing NATO as the incumbent security provider as a potentially existential challenge. NATO's room for manoeuvre was constrained by institutional barriers of exerting influence and the pronounced role of member states. Nonetheless, NATO officials pushed the boundaries by once again engaging in unprecedented behaviour of openly criticising EU policies, shielding negotiations with the EU from member states, and driving own initiatives to set the agenda. While more limited, NATO Survival Politics was consequential in helping to recast the relationship with the EU and maintain its primary position in the European security landscape.

The final case study zoomed in on a negative example of Survival Politics: the case of the OSCE. Engulfed by a polycrisis consisting of, on the one hand, Russian systematic violation of key norms and challenges to its purpose, and, on the other hand, neglect by Western member states and competition from the EU and NATO, senior officials were aware of the precarity of the OSCE's position. In response, Secretary-General Greminger tried to revive the OSCE's legitimacy via institutional reforms. And while he tried to push the legal and political limits of the position of the OSCE secretary-general, these efforts did not to materialise. In other words, despite the development of survival instincts, OSCE actors' efforts to craft a survival strategy were limited and the implementation thereof failed almost entirely. As a result, OSCE officials could not halt the organisation's descent into what now appears as a zombie-state of practical irrelevance in European security.

In sum, the empirical cases demonstrate that, indeed, IO Survival Politics occurs in a variety of IOs facing a variety of threats. EU and NATO actors engaged in different types of extraordinary political behaviour that were distinct in both degree and kind compared to bureaucratic political behaviour under conditions of normal policymaking. From creating new institutional set-ups, confronting erstwhile patrons, playing the US President, to using assertive public rhetoric, institutional actors went beyond what was hitherto accepted behaviour. And despite the OSCE's failure to engage in Survival Politics, the cases buttress agential perspectives on international relations. In particular, the cases of the EU's handling of the

Brexit negotiations and NATO's management of Trump showcase the extraordinary agency, even in high-stakes realms of foreign and security policy, institutional actors can exercise.

Types of Survival Strategies

The five case studies each illustrate a different type of survival strategy. Each survival strategy follows a distinct logic of IO behaviour. While the overarching objective is common – the ultimate survival of the IO – the specific ends, means, and ways differ. It is the nature of the threat that determines the ends of the respective survival strategy. For example, when member states withdraw, the natural end of the IO's survival strategy is to prevent both further exits and the withdrawing member state from sabotaging the IO in the process. It can therefore be expected that other IOs facing the same type of threats would develop survival strategies with the same ends. The ways and means through which IOs implement these survival strategies, however, are context-dependent on the IO's institutional design, levers of influence, and leadership.

Based on these case studies, five general types of survival strategies can be identified: 1) managing member state withdrawal; 2) sustaining the IO's environment; 3) navigating hegemonic member state threats; 4) shaping institutional overlap; and 5) relegitimising the IO's authority. These types are neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor is the typology exhaustive as it is only based on the five types of threats under analysis in this dissertation. Three of the types are based on threats from without the IO, be it by a de facto former member state leaving the IO, external powers contesting the order that the IO relies on, or other institutions competing with the IO. In turn, two types refer to threats from within: the threats of withdrawal by a (hegemonic) member and a widespread legitimacy crisis.

Survival strategies for external threats

This dissertation has analysed three types of threats emanating from outside the IO, which prompted three types of survival strategies. *Managing member state withdrawal* occurs when an important member state leaves the IO. The natural objective of survival-seeking institutional actors is to prevent the withdrawal from unleashing a domino effect of further exits. To do so, they must ensure that the cost-benefit perceptions of existing members remain in favour of membership and that the ideational basis for cooperation stays intact. Using available institutional levers of influence in the negotiations, institutional actors can work to emphasise the material and ideational costs of leaving the IO by exploiting favourable negotiation positions to drive a hard bargaining. They also need to forge unity to avoid the leaving member states from dividing-and-ruling the existent membership. And finally, institutional actors can embark upon new initiatives or create new narratives to justify the continued existence of the IO.

Maintaining the IO's environment occurs when major states external to the IO threaten the system – global or regional – within which the IO is embedded and relies on. For its own survival, the IO needs to intervene in other IOs to defend or reform them so to sustain the

overarching order. Not all IOs will be directly threatened by challenges to the order and even fewer will be able to even try to support the system. Indeed, only the survival of those IOs that are deeply enmeshed with and dependent on the generalised principles of the respective order will be threatened. Hence, general-purpose IOs should be at greater risk than task-specific ones given that they tend to embody wider principles. In addition, only the most powerful IOs, such as the EU, may possess the resources and influence to even try prop up the system.

Shaping institutional overlap is pertinent when either the task expansion of another IO or the creation of a new IO increase the functional overlap with the incumbent IO. In other words, shaping institutional overlap is a natural response to the spectre of institutional competition between two or more IOs. The incumbent IO will seek to protect its position by embracing overlap when inter-organisational cooperation is considered beneficial to its survival and resisting overlap when the other IO is perceived as threatening. The extent to which institutional actors can shape overlap will depend on their diplomatic, institutional, and communicative strengths.

Survival strategies for internal threats

In addition, the dissertation has also examined two instances of internal threats to IOs, which gave rise to two analytical distinct, though potentially complementary, survival strategies.

Navigating hegemonic member state threats is a suitable strategy to address the tangible threats of hegemonic members to withdraw from an IO. Such threats pose a dilemma for institutional actors. On the one hand, given the likely indispensability of the hegemonic member, officials need to accommodate the hegemon sufficiently to avert a potentially fatal withdrawal. On the other hand, hegemonic threats are likely to address foundational principles of the IO, as hegemons should have the power to reform technical matters, and thus threatens to erode the very purpose of the IO. Navigating this dilemma requires institutional actors walking a fine line of sufficiently placating the hegemon while protecting certain prioritised organisational features. Strategic actors may be able to over-emphasise concessions on some demands while shielding its resistance to others to shape the hegemon's perceptions. When ordinary member states, rather than hegemons, threaten to withdraw, the trade-off differs. While not addressed in this dissertation, in such cases, institutional actors need to weigh up the risk of the state from exiting the IO if its demands are not satisfied with the danger of alienating other member states if making concessions (see Jurado et al. 2022).

Relegitimising the IO's authority by institutional actors can be expected when at the root of the threat to the IO lies a profound legitimacy crisis rather than, for instance, threats by a single member state for idiosyncratic reasons. Legitimacy crises arise when the core organisational features no longer correspond to the normative expectations of its constituents or when the IO's output no longer legitimises the IO. In response, institutional actors need to enact widespread reforms of the substantive functioning and ideational basis of the IO, or at least alter the perception of stakeholders thereof. As such, legitimation may well overlap with survival

strategies of managing member state withdrawal or navigating hegemonic member state threats.

Varieties of IO Survival Politics

The five case studies not only illustrate the empirical manifestations of IO Survival Politics and different general types of survival strategies but also begin to shed light onto underlying factors that render successful Survival Politics more or less likely. Indicators for success consist of both the degree of extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors and the causal impact of IO Survival Politics on the outcome of the respective crisis. While distinct, the premise of this dissertation is that, due to the specific nature of existential crises, officials need to behave in extraordinary ways to shape the outcome of the crisis. The more extraordinarily they behave, the greater the impact. Hence, the two indicators should be considered as flipsides of the same coin. One of the distinguishing properties of this dissertation lies in its comparative perspective. While cases were not selected in a structured comparative manner to isolate variables, the five empirical studies nonetheless yield wider insights that should be applicable in contexts beyond the chosen cases. This section therefore reflects on the commonalities and differences across the cases, paying particular attention to the extreme cases on the spectrum of IO Survival Politics.

The Commission's handling of the Brexit negotiations and NATO's Trump management are the two cases that represent almost ideal types of IO Survival Politics given both the degree of extraordinary behaviour by senior officials and the causal impact on the outcome of the respective crises. Two differences across the cases stand out. First, the nature of the threat differed. Where Brexit involved a de facto, though not de jure, external threat to the Union, which required institutional actors to forge a common front among member states against the outsider, the challenge to NATO originated within the Alliance. Uniting against the adversary was hence not a viable option for NATO actors. Second, the two IOs vary significantly in terms of their formal powers, which tends to be the principal explanation of IO behaviour in the institutionalist literature (e.g. Koremenos et al. 2001). While the Commission under President Juncker generally enjoyed substantial delegated powers and the Task Force 50 had key negotiation competences, NATO is in formal terms a much weaker institution, with the secretary-general's powers limited to some agenda-setting functions. Neither the type of threat nor significant formal powers thus appear to be necessary factors for IO Survival Politics.

In turn, the two case studies share three characteristics. First, instead of formal powers, the informal leadership, or the entrepreneurial style (Knill et al. 2019), by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and the Commission leadership couple of Barnier and Juncker proved essential. Both astutely exploited and pushed their room for manoeuvre by acting in unscripted ways rather than merely using their formal powers. In addition to the discernible importance of informal leadership, a second commonality of the two cases is that crises were acutely and coherently perceived as existential across the institutions. Unlike in the other cases, where it took time for officials to acknowledge the existential nature of the crisis, officials instantly switched into survival mode after Brexit and the election of Trump. The tangibility of crises

appears to have shortened the time horizons of officials, which encouraged prioritisation of survival above all else, and created uncertainty among member states, which provided greater leeway to Stoltenberg, Barnier, and Juncker. Third, and as a corollary, the constellation of member state preferences was diffuse and permissive, though not predetermined. While many member states needed persuasion, none categorically opposed the leadership by Commission or NATO officials. This also allowed for institutional actors to build coalitions with external actors. Indeed, the relationship between institutional actors and member states were characterised by complex, positive sum interactions.

The case of the OSCE lies at the other end of the spectrum. Despite an awareness among key officials of the existential nature of the crisis and some attempts to formulate a survival strategy, OSCE actors almost completely failed at implementing it. Thus, the case demonstrates that survival instincts do not automatically produce extraordinary political behaviour. The negative case of the OSCE can therefore qualify insights on when successful IO Survival Politics occurs (see Mahoney and Goertz 2004). First, it shows that, while an IO need not possess high formal powers, a minimum level is necessary. Even compared to NATO, the OSCE officials possessed hardly any institutional levers of influence. Second, the case also buttresses that, indeed, informal leadership appears crucial for successful Survival Politics, as Secretary-General Zannier never tried to act in an entrepreneurial, extraordinary fashion, while Greminger's attempts were considered clumsy and ineffective. A third distinguishing factor concerns the constellation of preferences among member states, which in the case of the OSCE were much more polarised and solidified. While it is difficult to evaluate the causal importance of each of these three factors – i.e. would strong informal leadership by OSCE officials have made a discernible difference in the context of the east-west polarisation among the participating states and weak formal powers? – these observations imply that a minimum level of formal levers is necessary, reinforce the importance of informal leadership, and show that opposition by key member states to the IO's survival strategy is prohibitive. Thus, the negative case of the OSCE pleads for a nuanced view on the agency of institutional actors in existential crisis rather than succumbing to simplistic generalisations on either their influence or feebleness.

The EU's attempts to sustain the multilateral order and NATO's efforts to shape the EU's security and defence initiatives illuminate another important insight: IO Survival Politics vis-à-vis other institutions is possible but more difficult than toward threats that emanate from states. Both cases demonstrate that IOs can 'intervene' (Margulis 2021) in the workings of another IO to shape the latter's decisions or trajectory. But doing so involves forging consensuses not only among the IO's own member states but also among those of the targeted IO, which increases the number of actors and veto players involved and thus the complexity of policy processes. IOs have less direct influence over other institutions and must thus rely on indirect and creative means to achieve their desired outcomes. Since 'contested multilateralism' (Morse and Keohane 2014) in form of inter-IO competition is an increasingly frequent phenomenon, such intervention efforts are also likely to become prominent features of global governance.

Finally, across the cases, IO Survival Politics is more consequential when addressing acute rather than creeping threats. The cases of NATO's Trump management and the Commission's Brexit management testify that the immediacy of the threat allowed institutional actors to create rooms for manoeuvre. Vice versa, the deeper-rooted nature of both the OSCE's malaise and transatlantic defence relationship contributed to rendering it more difficult for institutional actors to shape proceedings. Perhaps the most illustrative example, however, is the case of the EU's responses to the crisis of multilateralism. Here, the EU was rather successful in defending IOs against acute threats but much less able to reform those IOs that faced creeping legitimacy crises. It follows that IO Survival Politics is best understood as an effective short-term response to specific threats.

The cases at hand are of course not perfectly representative and hence the generalisation of the results warrants caution. Rather than providing a definitive theory, this dissertation therefore offers tentative theoretical propositions on when IO Survival Politics occurs, which can form the base for further research. Nonetheless, given the diversity of both IOs and types of threats as well as the inclusion of hard cases for IO agency, the following five insights should possess meaningful external validity:

1. While IOs do not require significant formal powers to engage in IO Survival Politics, some minimum formal levers of influence are necessary; otherwise, institutional actors are little more than impotent administrative bodies.
2. Above that minimum level of formal powers, informal leadership by senior officials is crucial for IO Survival Politics.
3. IO Survival Politics is more likely to be pronounced when the addressee is a state rather than another international institution.
4. Survival strategies that contravene core preferences of key member states are destined to fail.
5. IO Survival Politics is most consequential when addressing acute, rather than creeping crises.

Further avenues for research

This dissertation demonstrates the inherent logic and existence of IO Survival Politics. It develops this new concept to grasp empirical realities and provides a framework of analysis as well as theoretical propositions that can guide research beyond the chosen cases. In doing so, the dissertation seeks to both advance the literatures on institutionalism as well as the crisis of multilateralism and initiate a promising new agenda for future research. Threats to IOs are unlikely to recede any time soon and hence IO Survival Politics may become a central phenomenon that shapes the dynamics of the crisis of multilateralism.

The dissertation thus opens ample room for further research. First, there is scope to analyse more cases to buttress the findings and refine the scholarly understanding of the dynamics of IO Survival Politics. In particular, future works should go beyond Western regional IOs to include both global IOs – the UN and its agencies appear the most intuitive choice – and

regional IOs from the Global South, such as the African Union. While Western regional IOs tend to be more authoritative, IOs elsewhere also suffer from threats (e.g. Agostinis and Nolte 2021). And as this dissertation shows, formal powers are no prerequisite for IO Survival Politics. There are no inherent reasons why other IOs may not engage in IO Survival Politics, especially since the cases analysed in this dissertation represent hard cases (e.g. Gwatiwa 2022).

Second, to move from a tentative to a more robust, testable theory of successful IO Survival Politics, further research should select cases in a structured comparative manner to examine the influence of the five underlying factors noted above, understand how their interact, and potentially identify additional explanations. Two episodes of existential crisis experienced by the same IO could be compared, for instance, to hold the factor formal powers constant. The UN secretariat's responses to the US contestation under President W Bush during the Iraq War and its responses to President Trump's contestation may be suitable. Alternatively, comparing the WHO's responses to severe criticisms during the Ebola Crisis and Covid pandemic may yield instructive insights. If those episodes fall within the tenure of the same institutional leadership, the factor informal leadership could equally be constant. In addition, more cases of different IOs facing the same type of threat, such as threats of hegemonic withdrawal or institutional competition, could be analysed.

Third, future research should also address types of threats that could not be included in the analysis in order to distil potentially other survival strategies. For instance, member states increasingly circumvent IOs and resort to either informal institutions or ad-hoc coalitions (Karlsrud and Reykers 2020; Roger 2021; Vabulas and Snidal 2013; Westerwinter et al. 2021), which is likely to negatively impact existing IOs. In addition, other cases could include threats from ordinary member states, i.e. non-hegemons, to complement the analysis of hegemonic threats. And finally, cases of external powers directly contesting an IO, not indirectly via undermining the overarching order, would be worthwhile additions. Extending the analysis to these hitherto omitted types of threats would allow systematically developing a typology of survival strategies. Fourth, the concept and analytical framework could be applied to other institutions, not just IOs. The logic and manifestations of IO Survival Politics could also be discernible when national agencies, for example, come under existential threat.

And fifth, the dissertation makes a case for systematically assessing the relationship between institutional actors and member states in the context of crises. The Principal Agent (PA) theory has long been the dominant paradigm to understand delegation relationships between states and IOs (see Jankauskas 2022). Mirroring prevalent perspectives in EU studies, PA theory assumes a hierarchical, adversarial relationship between principals and agents due to goal conflicts, and thus the danger of agents diverging from the principals' preferences (e.g. Hawkins et al. 2006). However, the case studies challenge this zero-sum conception by showcasing the entire range of relationships with examples of close cooperation between institutional actors and member states in the Brexit negotiations; member states' acquiescence of NATO actors' agency when handling Trump; limited leeway granted by member states to officials in the case of NATO-EU relations; and outright resistance toward OSCE officials.

Short off institutional actors openly contravening core interests of veto players, relationships between the agent and principals can therefore assume a range of forms. Indeed, survival instincts imply the relegation of institutional actors' private interests, which tend to diminish goal conflicts over the fundamental objective of survival, even if goal conflicts over the specific means and ways of achieving the objective may remain. Existential crises generally appear to have a convergent effect and therefore give rise to more complex, potentially positive-sum relations between institutional actors and member-states. Future research could therefore explain the conditions under which the various types of relationships between member states and institutional actors emerge.

Political and normative implications

The dissertation allows for a better understanding of most salient processes of the crisis of multilateralism. As such, the insights are not just of academic value but also carry important political and normative implications. On the one hand, the findings of several cases of IO Survival Politics constitute a cause for optimism for those who believe that multilateralism is the most effective and legitimate approach to address the manifold transnational public policy challenges. Notwithstanding the plethora of challenges, IOs with a certain degree of formal powers and strong leadership are unlikely to terminally decline as institutional actors can represent strong countervailing forces. Indeed, IOs appear more resilient in face of threats than commonly assumed and it is certainly too early to sound the death knell for the multilateral order. As a corollary, policymakers should pay much closer attention to the appointments of senior IO officials. As the examples of Jens Stoltenberg and Michel Barnier underline, individual leaders can tip the scales in highly contingent moments. But contemporary appointment practices often resemble horse-trading exercises, whereby national background often plays the most important role. Policymakers should heed the lessons of recent episodes of contestation to shore up IOs resilience by appointing senior officials based on merit, not parochial concerns.

On the other hand, the dissertation also sounds a note of great caution. For one, the outsized role played by agents within the respective IOs emphasises the contingency of the crises. With different personnel, NATO and the EU would have likely acted less effectively with potentially significant repercussions for the specific organisation and the multilateral order generally. The EU leaders seriously considered appointing a Belgian career diplomat, Didier Seeuws, to lead the Brexit negotiations, who would not have had the same clout and experience as Barnier. It is doubtful that Seeuws could have forged unity among the member states. In a similar vein, Stoltenberg's predecessor Rasmussen was less diplomatic, less consultative, and more egocentric. Several interviewees argued that he could have never managed Trump in the way Stoltenberg did.

For another, IO Survival Politics is only a temporary remedy to IOs in crisis. While some examples of threats to IOs are specific to individual administrations and thus disappear with a change in government, most have deeper roots. What officials can do is to help the IO survive the threat in the short term to buy time for more substantial reforms to address the causes of

the malaise. But institutional actors cannot be expected to enact such reforms required to address, for instance, decades-long debates about transatlantic burden-sharing, greater representation of stakeholders from the Global South in multilateral institutions, or the future principles of the European security order. In other words, at a time when there is no longer a consensus on the 'generalized principles' (Ruggie 1992) underlying multilateral cooperation, it requires the political ownership and leadership, resources, influence, and above all legitimacy of states and civil society actors to implement wholesale reforms.

Indeed, it is therefore for normative as much as functional reasons that reforms of multilateralism be driven by accountable and legitimate actors. Any permanent changes to the social contract between IOs and its constituents require the latter's consent. The rule by unelected senior officials of IOs would only exacerbate abounding democratic deficits in global governance. Recent trends of emergency politics by IOs (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019), de-institutionalisations of power (White 2022), and informal governance (Roger 2020; Vabulas and Snidal 2013) have increased executive discretions of a selected group of powerful individuals and insulated decision-making from public scrutiny at the expense of accountability and participation, even 'shad[ing] into arbitrary rule' (White 2022: 188).

But for the multilateral order to survive, it needs greater inclusivity and ownership by actors beyond the West, not unaccountable exclusivity. This is particularly relevant since China, with the support by Russia, advances a competing vision of global governance. The EU, for example, realised this and has embarked upon what it calls strategic partnering to reach out beyond its traditional allies and forge multilateral coalitions. But the substantial opposition, or abstentions, from states across the Global South toward the West's sanctions regime imposed upon Russia in the wake of its attack on Ukraine is only the latest reminder that swathes of the global population feel little ownership of existing rules and institutions, or at least have diverging priorities. The multilateral order continues to suffer from severe legitimacy deficits and the US-Sino rivalry is only likely to put a greater strain on the system. Substantial reform is therefore imperative to address the manifold transnational challenges societies face. IO Survival Politics can create the conditions within which reform of multilateralism is possible but implementing them requires democratically accountable forces to finally step up.

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Summary

The multilateral order is in crisis. Generalised principles of conduct that have underpinned the order since the end of the Cold War – such as open trade, cooperative security, and universal human rights and international law – face severe contestation from multiple fronts. As a consequence, international organisations (IOs) as the stalwarts and embodiments of multilateralism have suffered from membership withdrawals, systematic violation of key rules, or funding cuts. The continued existence of a wide range of IOs is in jeopardy. Most scholarly accounts, however, only focus on the causes of the crisis of multilateralism. This dissertation fills this relevant lacuna by zooming in on the consequences of the crisis of multilateralism for IOs and their responses to it. It is guided by the research question: How do IOs respond to existential crises?

Threats to the survival of IOs are not new of course. Since the early 19th century, IOs experienced crises and many have ceased to exist or operate in a meaningful way. Yet, two antithetical conditions distinguish contemporary from past crises for IOs. On the one hand, the contemporary crisis of multilateralism appears unprecedentedly intense and widespread. Threats emanate not only from dissatisfied rising powers, but also the US hegemon, Western electorates, and civil society actors. On the other hand, IOs have historically never been more powerful in terms of their authority, binding powers, and policy influence. The premise of this dissertation is that these two dialectic conditions give rise to distinct forms of IO behaviour.

Conceptual contribution: IO Survival Politics

The dissertation offers a conceptual answer to the research question, which emerged inductively from the individual empirical contributions. Most scholars still consider IOs epiphenomena, functional instruments, or arenas for state bargaining. While more constrained than other units in the system, IOs are, however, potentially political actors. Some IOs have powerful resources, political levers of influence, and external supporters with stakes in the IO's continued existence. They are composed of individuals who likely identify with the mission of the IO and whose career prospects may be dependent on the organisation's survival. IOs, like other actors, therefore seek to survive. Indeed, the completion of several case studies crystallised a common and distinct logic of IO behaviour in diverse settings, which is conceived as *IO Survival Politics*.

IO Survival Politics is defined as the extraordinary political behaviour, both in degree and kind, by institutional actors to ensure the survival of the international organisation in existential crisis. The scope condition for IO Survival Politics is that IOs need to come under existential crisis, which put IOs at risk of no longer being able to effectively carry out some of their core functions. It is in the context of existential crises that IO may engage in Survival Politics. Crises contexts not only tend to enhance the role of key decision-makers as uncertainty and time pressure often privilege informal agency over institutional procedures. They should also alter the underlying behavioural logics of IOs as official develop survival instincts. When their

survival is at stake, they are likely to resort to exceptional behaviour because following the normal playbook is likely be insufficient. They will probably intensify the strategies with which institutional actors exert influence during normal times. But senior officials may also go above and beyond the strategies used under conditions of normal policymaking and likely act with particular assertion and employ unprecedented measures as the short-term logic of survival overshadows long-term concerns over reputation or backlashes from member states. That is, the difference between the crisis and normal policymaking contexts is likely both in degree and kind.

IO Survival Politics consists of two distinct analytical stages. First, senior officials intellectually develop a survival strategy. While survival strategies will rarely appear as formalized master plans, to amount to a survival strategy there need to be clear indications that officials' responses were not of an ad-hoc nature but followed a discernible plan. The second stage of IO Survival Politics entails the implementation of the survival strategy. That is, institutional actors use their varying levers of influence to achieve their objective of survival. To amount to IO Survival Politics, these tactics need to be implemented with greater intensity and through distinct and extraordinary ways compared to conditions of normal policymaking. Unlike the first stage of Survival Politics, however, the implementation of survival strategy is not solely in the hands of institutional actors. IOs are rarely the most powerful actors and face significant legal and institutional constraints as well as structurally dominating member states.

IO Survival Politics draws on but goes beyond burgeoning research in the discipline of international relations on bureaucratic politics. Like bureaucratic politics, Survival Politics also emphasises the ways in which institutional actors wield influence in and over IOs. Both approaches thus share the same ontological foundation. But there are three reasons to assume that IO Survival Politics nonetheless logically differs in degree and kind from bureaucratic politics. First, institutional actors are likely to be more cohesive during existential crises than normal policymaking because preferences for a single outcome – survival – will be unified and strong. Second, institutional actors will likely have a shorter time horizon during existential crisis. With survival at stake, medium- and long-term reputational concerns should give way to the overriding objective of survival and thus remove obstacles to bold behaviour. And third, the nature of existential crises implies greater uncertainty among crucial actors about preferences and strategies and, potentially, the relaxation of some structural constraints, which should allow institutional actors greater room for manoeuvre.

In sum, the dissertation develops the concept of IO Survival Politics to grasp empirical realities and provides a framework of analysis as well as theoretical propositions that can guide research beyond the chosen cases. By providing a distinctly agential account on the crises of IOs, it challenges prevalent structural accounts. In doing so, the dissertation seeks to both advance the literatures on institutionalism as well as the crisis of multilateralism and initiate a promising new agenda for future research.

Empirical contributions: 3 IOs, 5 cases, 87 interviews

The primary objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the behaviour of diverse IOs during periods of existential crises tends to follow a distinct pattern. Rather than aberrative incidences of political agency, it illustrates that IO Survival Politics is a logical response undertaken by a variety of IOs faced with diverse existential threats. To do, it analyses three IOs: the EU, NATO, and OSCE. This initial case selection follows four logics. First, with the exception of the EU, international security organisations are a comparably understudied population of IOs. Second, and as a corollary, international security organisations should be hard cases for exhibiting political agency. Third, there were also practical concerns due to the need to conduct dozens of interviews with officials. All three IOs are headquartered in Europe and the author possessed some pre-existing contacts in these organisations. And fourth, the political salience of cases, the author's previous expertise on the EU and NATO, as well as intellectual interests in European security served as motivation to focus on these organisations.

Crucially, there is substantial diversity among the chosen sample of IOs to buttress the claim that IO Survival Politics is not idiosyncratic but appears in a variety of contexts. The EU, NATO, and OSCE vary in their authority, institutional design, functions, size, and resources. In addition, the selected episodes of existential crises also display varieties of threats. This dissertation relies on five empirical cases to illustrate its core arguments: the EU's responses to the 1) Brexit referendum and 2) the crisis of multilateralism; NATO's responses to 3) the Presidency of Donald Trump and 4) recent EU's security and defence initiatives; and 5) the OSCE's responses to its legitimacy crises since 2014. In order to understand the micro-mechanisms of IO Survival Politics specifically and IO behaviour in crises generally, this dissertation therefore relies on 87 elite interviews with those key officials present in crucial meetings.

The empirical analysis yields three major overarching findings on the role of IOs amid the crisis of multilateralism. First, IO Survival Politics is a real-world phenomenon and occurs across a range of diverse IOs in face of diverse threats. To a varying degree, four of the five chapters represent cases of extraordinary political behaviour by EU and NATO institutional actors to weather what were perceived as existential crises. Unprecedentedly intense and extraordinary forms of behaviour abound; officials used innovative institutional designs of negotiation teams, emancipated themselves from and even opposed previous patrons, engaged in previously unthinkable forms of overt and political agenda-setting, or publicly confronted perceived challenger IOs. Thus, the dissertation shows that institutional actors can exhibit greater agency than even acknowledged in the bureaucratic politics literature. Indeed, in the cases of EU and Brexit and NATO and Trump, the influence of officials was arguably history-making.

Second, however, not all existential crises cause IO Survival Politics to the same extent. Notwithstanding common awareness of the existential nature of the respective crises, the empirical cases exhibit varying degrees of extraordinary political behaviour by institutional actors and, as a corollary, varying degrees of causal impact on the crisis outcomes. The EU's

handling of the Brexit negotiations and NATO's management of Trump are prime examples for IO Survival Politics in terms of both crafting a cunning survival strategy and successfully implementing it. In the cases of the EU's response to the crises of multilateralism as well as NATO's reaction to EU security and defence initiatives, the implementation of survival strategies was constrained by the role of member state preferences and complexity of shaping the actions of another IO. In turn, the OSCE actors' efforts to craft a survival strategy were limited and the implementation thereof failed almost entirely. Five factors are relevant in explaining the varied occurrence of IO Survival Politics: the degree of formal powers, informal leadership, the source of the threat, the constellation of member state preferences, and the temporal dimension of the crisis.

Third, IO Survival Politics is only a temporary remedy to the crisis of multilateralism. IO Survival Politics is a short-term response to specific threats. It focusses on symptoms, not roots of the crisis of multilateralism. NATO officials may have prevented President Trump from withdrawing the US from NATO, but they cannot resolve fundamental questions over burden-sharing or transatlanticism at a time of great power competition; Commission officials may prevent Brexit from causing a domino effect, but they alone cannot rectify the underlying flaws of the EU system of governance that contribute to Euroscepticism across the continent; EU officials can prevent the momentary collapse of multilateral organisations, but they cannot substantially reform IOs that suffer from a profound legitimacy deficit in the eyes of emerging powers; and OSCE leaders cannot bridge the fundamental geopolitical divide between Russia and the West to devise new common principles for the European security architecture. By weathering specific threats, what IO Survival Politics can achieve is to create the conditions in which fundamental reforms of the multilateral system become possible. IO Survival Politics, in other words, is more a painkiller than panacea for the crisis of multilateralism.

Implications of IO Survival Politics

The dissertation shows that that the contemporary dialectic conditions of both unprecedented authority and crises give rise to distinct forms of extraordinary behaviour by institutional actors to save their IO in existential crises. IO Survival Politics is not an aberration but logical response by a variety of IOs to diverse threats. By directing attention to hitherto largely neglected agential qualities and types of behaviour by institutional actors, the dissertation revises scholarly understanding of IOs in crisis and thus seeks to fill crucial lacunae in the literature on the consequences of the crisis of multilateralism for IOs and their responses. The conceptualisation of IO Survival Politics should also advance institutional theory and provide the foundation for a new research agenda.

In addition to these scholarly contributions, the findings also bear important political and normative consequences. The dissertation allows for a better understanding of hugely salient processes of the crisis of multilateralism. Appreciating that individual agents carry much responsibility for helping key IOs like NATO and the EU survive recent crises should caution policymakers against any sense of complacency. These episodes were contingent and could have ended differently, which would have likely had drastic consequences for the shape of the

European order. Indeed, the cases showcase that institutional actors can only provide temporary relief but not permanent remedy for the malaise of the multilateral order. By helping IOs survive, they provided the context within which democratically accountable policymakers and civil society actors could set out to address the roots of the crisis and recast the multilateral order. Without substantial reform, however, the multilateral order will continue to be in a state of peril.

Impact paragraph

This dissertation analyses how IOs behave when they face existential crises. IOs are the backbone of societies' efforts to address global transnational issues, including climate change, human rights, conflict, or migration and refugee movements. Since the end of the Cold War, IOs from across the policy spectrum have become more authoritative and intrusive in domestic politics. In parallel, however, both states and civil society actors increasingly contest the authority of IOs and the very principles underlying multilateral cooperation. Amid this crisis of multilateralism, the dissertation seeks to understand how IOs themselves respond when their continued existence comes under threat. Most scholarly accounts focus on external factors in explaining whether IOs decline, die, or prosper. The findings of this dissertation on the outsized influence of IOs themselves not only challenge this prevalent view but also carry significant wider scientific and social consequences.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to understand how and with what consequences IOs behave in existential crises. Accounts on the *causes* of the crisis of the multilateral order abound, but scholars have paid strikingly little attention to the *consequences* for and *responses* by IOs themselves. This omission reflects a persistent trend in the discipline of international relations of considering IOs as largely irrelevant actors in their own right. But some IOs have powerful resources, levers of influence, external supporters, and officials who identify with the organisation and whose career depends on the IO's continued existence. Hence, there is no inherent reason why IOs, just like other actors, would not actively seek to survive. Indeed, the empirical findings suggest that IOs go above and beyond existing scripts in existential crises. Senior officials regularly engaged in extraordinary behaviour both in degree and kind. They used innovative institutional designs of negotiation teams, emancipated themselves from and even opposed previous patrons, engaged in previously unthinkable forms of overt and political agenda-setting, or publicly confronted perceived challenger IOs. The dissertation shows that due to this extraordinary behaviour, officials had a much greater than widely expected impact on the outcomes of the crises. In two cases – the Commission's handling of the Brexit negotiations and NATO officials' Trump management – officials decisively shaped what were history-making events of enormous political consequence.

In doing so, the dissertation aspires to make several scientific contributions. The five case studies advance scholarly understanding of the respective crises, as extant accounts had overlooked the role of officials. Each of the studies demonstrate that without accounting for the responses by the IOs, the crises cannot be fully understood. But contributions are not limited to providing novel empirical insights. The findings should revise how scholars think about IOs generally; namely as potentially powerful agents in international relations rather than mere pawns. The findings should also further specific research agendas on bureaucratic politics, international crisis management, and the agency-structure debate. Above all, the dissertation seeks to open an entirely new research agenda by coining the concept of *IO Survival Politics*. It develops a general definition of the new concept, an analytical framework that is applicable

beyond the selected cases, and tentative theoretical propositions that can form the basis for future research.

These findings also carry at least three important implications for policymakers. First, the dissertation underlines the importance of selecting the most suited candidate for senior leadership positions in IOs. As the examples of Jens Stoltenberg and Michel Barnier underline, individual leaders can tip the scales in highly contingent moments. But contemporary appointment practices often resemble horse-trading exercises, whereby national background often plays the most important role. Policymakers should heed the lessons of recent episodes of contestation to shore up IOs resilience by appointing senior officials based on merit, not parochial concerns. Second, the analysis also emphasises that IO Survival Politics is only a temporary remedy for the crisis of multilateralism. What officials can do is to help the IO survive the threat in the short term to buy time for more substantial reforms to address the causes of the malaise. But institutional actors cannot be expected to enact such reforms required to address, for instance, decades-long debates about transatlantic burden-sharing, greater representation of stakeholders from the Global South in multilateral institutions, or the future principles of the European security order. Policymakers should not complacently infer that IOs are inherently resilient. And third, the findings of significant agency on part of officials raises concerns about democratic accountability and participation because the influence of senior officials exacerbates existing democratic deficits in global governance. But for the multilateral order to survive, it needs greater inclusivity and ownership by actors beyond the West, not unaccountable exclusivity. Policymakers should work to make IOs more inclusive and accountable to address some of the roots of the crisis of multilateralism.

My research results are relevant for three audiences. First, the findings speak to researchers who work on IOs, multilateralism, bureaucratic politics, and agency and structure, as well as scholars working on the EU, NATO, and the OSCE. The dissertation aims to fill important gaps in the scholarly literature and seeks to advance a new research agenda on IO Survival Politics. Second, the insights should also matter to policymakers inside and outside IOs. For IO officials as well as national policymakers, the dissertation should generate a better understanding of the factors shaping the crisis of multilateralism. IO officials could learn from the empirical cases on how to best help the IO to survive. National policymakers, in turn, are best positioned to heed the political and normative implications of IO Survival Politics. Finally, my dissertation speaks to interested citizens. The fate of IOs and the wider multilateral order has concrete consequences for public life as IOs are instrumental in addressing manifold societal challenges. A failure to reach a withdrawal agreement with the UK, to take just one example, would have had tangible economic and legal consequences for millions of EU (and UK) citizens. Moreover, the significant power exerted by key officials should also be a cause for citizens concerned about the democratic accountability of IOs.

The dissemination of my research results has been tailored to each of these three target groups. To engage with the scholarly community, I have published three of the case studies in peer-reviewed journals of international repute, with three more articles currently under review. Indeed, my article on NATO and Trump published in *International Affairs* already enjoys one

of the highest attention scores of all the journal's outputs. I have also presented my PhD research at thirteen international conferences and workshops. Moreover, I have given lectures on the Commission during the Brexit negotiations to Master students at Maastricht University and on Secretary-General Stoltenberg's Trump Management to Master students at Johns Hopkins University. Finally, I co-organised a workshop in May 2022 at the University of Oxford, which brought together academics, think tankers, and officials to discuss NATO's future trajectory.

To venture beyond the academy, I have also written several policy briefs and commentaries targeted at policymakers that spun off my research. The briefs all formulated policy recommendations for decision-makers and covered the Brexit negotiations (for the European Policy Centre), transatlantic relations (for the Centre for European Reform), EU-NATO relations (for *Atlantisch Perspectief),* and NATO reform (for the Egmont Institute). My commentaries related to among others the Brexit negotiations (published in *The Times*), transatlantic relations (*Tagesspiegel*), Trump's NATO legacy (*Internationale Politik Quarterly*), and NATO reform (*Encompass Europe*).

And finally, I have sought to communicate my research to interested citizens. I have spoken about my work on transatlantic relations at two public events hosted by the Centre for European Reform and the Danish Institute for International Studies. I have given interviews to German, Swiss, and Swedish radio broadcasters. I have recorded a podcast with Chatham House and written a blog for the widely read *Duck of Minerva*. Using my expertise on EU foreign policy, I also acted as external expert for a citizens' panel during the Conference on the Future of Europe. My work has been discussed in the Norwegian daily *Aftenposten*, the British magazine *New Statesman*, and the German daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, and is cited on two *Wikipedia* pages. Last, I actively use Twitter to communicate my findings to wider audiences. Through these various dissemination efforts, I hope to initiate scholarly, policy, and political debates about IO Survival Politics and the significant wider consequences of this distinct type of IO behaviour.

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In the late spring of 2019, I came across an open PhD position on Twitter. Until then, I had been set on staying in the United Kingdom for my doctoral research. But when Hylke invited me to Maastricht to share his exciting plans for the NestIOr project, I was quickly convinced that it was the right place for my own ambitions. I have never regretted that decision.

The pandemic hit only six months into the PhD. From being banished from our departmental offices and social spaces, to cancelling much anticipated team retreats, conferences, and field work across the world, the pandemic made the PhD journey even more solitary than it would have otherwise been. At the same time, it cleared my social calendar and drastically accelerated the interviewing processes. The pandemic was a boon for my productivity, even it proved miserable for virtually anything else.

My supervisors deserve great credit for the fact that I nonetheless managed to complete my research project in high spirits. Hylke Dijkstra was my ideal supervisor. He has been permanently supportive, responsive, interested in the political world beyond academia, and understanding of my pet projects that were only tangentially related to my dissertation. Yet, he never sought to micro-manage my project. I learned a lot from his industriousness, critical proclivities, eye for the sharp message, and ways to promote own's own research. After a decade in the UK, I appreciated his candour. Co-authoring two articles with him has been a pleasure. And his impressive culinary expertise rendered our 'working' lunches and dinners most enjoyable affairs.

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Leonard August Schuette
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About the author

Leonard August Schuette was born in Bottrop, Germany, on 15 September 1993.

He received his undergraduate degree (MA) in International Relations from the University of St Andrews in June 2017, where he graduated with distinction and as best student of his cohort. His MA dissertation analysed the influence of collective memory on German foreign policy and won the Howell Prize for the best undergraduate dissertation of the year. In 2015, he spent an exchange semester at Sciences Po in Paris.

Leonard completed his graduate degree (MPhil) in International Relations and Politics at the University of Cambridge, where he graduated in 2018 with a First-Class degree. In his dissertation, he examined the politicisation of the European Union during the Euro and Schengen Crises.

In a quest to gain research experience beyond the academy, Leonard was the Clara O'Donnell Fellow at the Centre for European Reform, a think tank in London, between 2018 and 2019, where he worked and published on EU foreign policy. Throughout his ensuing doctoral research, he continued to publish policy briefs and commentaries.

Between 2019 and 2022, Leonard completed his doctoral degree at Maastricht University in the NestIOr project under the supervision of Dr Hylke Dijkstra and Prof Sophie Vanhoonacker. He submitted the dissertation more than a year ahead of the funding deadline. Leonard spent the academic year 2021/2022 at the University of Oxford.

As of September 2022, Leonard is a senior researcher at the Munich Security Conference.