

Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca Facultatea de Studii Europene Școala Doctorală "Paradigma europeană"

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

A Narrative Deconstruction of NATO in the 21st Century

- summary -

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Executive summary

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization represents one of the most popular and enduring international organizations of our time. Its versatility and expansion have triggered constant interest within political sciences and other related fields, especially since, after the Cold War, the Organization transformed dramatically, becoming something much more than a simple defensive military Alliance (the conventional image attributed to it). This revealed the fact that power and interests might not just be the essential elements that define an international entity such as NATO, with identity, values or beliefs playing an equally, if not a more important role. Consequently, as NATO began a new journey, slowly expanding beyond the North Atlantic arena, it became increasingly clear that the Organization holds a very important identity component, which enables it to play a multitude of roles in the international environment. This idea became certified along with the 21st century, when NATO actually transformed into a global entity, capable of handling a wide variety of missions and operations. In this sense, the present thesis plans to investigate the way in which the Alliance reached this global level, with a particular focus on the identity component attached to this rise. More specifically, the starting premise of this research is NATO's "pluri-identitarian" nature, governed by the alternation of two main identities which have been with the Alliance

ever since its inception: military organization (predominant throughout the Cold War) and security community (employed after the fall of the Berlin Wall). Naturally, these formative identities would overlap from time to time, but the argument that this research brings forth is that the Alliance usually employed them in response to international events, promoting the image that it considered would best aid the Organization in securing its interests. Under this logic, the two identities (one more aggressive and the other more retained) would rarely have the chance to intersect as far as their projection was concerned, since they were either directed towards different audiences (usually internal versus external) or one of them was simply left somewhere in the background, as it did not serve the Organization in a meaningful way with regard to a certain time period or a certain context.

However, in the 21st century, these two identities actually clashed, being subsequently used in parallel, as they were both seen as serving important purposes for the Alliance at the same time. The interesting thing about this parallel projection is that NATO actually employed one identity in order to satisfy the interests attached to the other, simply because the former was preferred by international audiences. In more clear terms, the wager of this thesis is actually to demonstrate that, in the 21st century, NATO pursued its material interests (the military image) through a normative, identity-related tactic (the communitarian/altruistic image) in an attempt to gain global legitimacy for its actions and behavior (the communitarian/altruistic image), so that it could better defend its members (the military image).

Consequently, when it comes to identifying such underlining motives, one would require an intricate analytical apparatus, reason for which, the present thesis proposes an equally complex theoretical and methodological approach, aimed at uncovering, not only the shift between one identity projection to the other, but also the factors that determined this shift and the overall context that made it possible. As a result, the thesis builds on two approaches, realism and constructivism, which were thought to best fit NATO's dual imagery. In this sense, the theories are used in order to construct NATO's identity and intentions, revealing the Alliance's two dominant historical selves (defensive alliance and security community). However, since the thesis also plans to unearth the 21^{st} century struggles between these two

images, discourse theory is employed as well, being aimed at pointing out the exact motivations of the Alliance when opting for an identity or another, while at the same time scrutinizing what NATO is delivering and presenting to both internal and external audiences. This unusual theoretical approach represents the second wager of the thesis, which is also aimed at revealing how various, even antithetic theories may be used in a complementary manner in order to provide a more profound understanding of a subject matter. In short, the secondary purpose of the thesis is that of proving that political theories are not mutually exclusive, but mutually constitutive.

Obviously, in order to support such an ambitious theoretical endeavor, one would need to benefit from an equally ambitious methodological structure which could best reflect the practical applicability of this pluri-theoretical approach. In this regard, the thesis would require a clear definition of the appropriate methods that would deliver such a result and therefore would need to employ an overarching methodology aimed at tying these methods together and connecting them to the theoretical underpinnings of the study as a whole. Thus, due to the context-based nature of the thesis, analyticism was selected as the most suitable methodological variant (based on a methodological categorization by Peter Thadeus Jackson¹), which eased the way into selecting the appropriate research methods. In this regard, the contextuality of the thesis also revealed that an already existent analytical framework was difficult to employ, reason for which I built the study's own methodological outline, using narrative analysis, genealogy and discourse analysis, all methods fitting in with both the reasoning of the paper and its theoretical postulates. In practical terms, narrative analysis is employed in order to reveal NATO's inception and the reasons behind its identity-related development, the genealogical method focuses on explaining the Alliance's inherent nature all the way through to the 21st century, generally designating contextual attributes and other potential courses of action which did not materialize, while discourse analysis is aimed at revealing the Organization's post-9/11 identity projection and struggles.

¹ See Jackson, Patrick-Thaddeus, (2011), *The Conduct of Inquiry: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*, Routledge, New York;

These methods also help explain why 9/11 may be considered such an important benchmark for the Alliance and how its unexpected and global nature determined NATO to engage in one of its most fundamental transformation processes in history. In this regard, the terrorist attacks revealed a new, unpredictable international threat to the Organization, somewhat inviting NATO to re-enter the power politics arena, an arena which the Alliance had decided to exit upon the Cold War and especially after the global waves of criticism received for its forceful Kosovo intervention. Therefore, properly responding to 9/11 was an extremely intricate task for the Alliance, since countering this new global threat meant that NATO would have to become global as well (so that it could deter any potential threat before it actually reaches Alliance territories). However, such a strategy would have entailed international legitimacy, which NATO did not have. Thus, as pressures were mounting from various sides (some NATO members supported an aggressive stance regardless of the consequences, while others were advocating for a more retained approach), the Alliance's two dominant selves clashed, producing a rift between Alliance members. With the help of discourse analysis I have identified this dispute as a discursive struggle between NATO's materialistic self and its normative/communitarian identity. Although each discourse had its moments, eventually, after the increasing public contestation and condemnation of forceful international interventions (see the U.S intervention in Afghanistan and subsequently Iraq), the Alliance realized that it would have been extremely difficult to achieve its goals if it acted as a military, interest-oriented entity, an approach not easily "legitimizable" on the international arena. Consequently, NATO understood that the only way it could secure its primordial material needs (survival and safety) was by taking on the widely accepted role of a normative institution, acting on behalf of the international community, an idea which may have provided the Organization with a certain possibility of actually fulfilling its material desiderates as well. The reasoning behind this strategy was very simple: if the Alliance was to acquire global legitimacy and influence, based on its altruistic conduct, it would be able or it would be better equipped in handling any potential peril, regardless of where they stemmed from (and thus counter terrorism, NATO's new found enemy of the 21st century, before it could threaten and reach Alliance borders).

Consequently, building on its constructivist, value and identity oriented self, NATO engaged in a discursive quest of forging a new global identity - that of a soft-core actor interested in protecting and serving the interests and needs of the international community. In order to construct this image NATO utilized various means, ranging from discursive portrayals (predominantly through summit declarations, which consistently perfected ties with an increasing number of countries from all across the globe, but also through the issuing of a special document – the Comprehensive Political Guidance - aimed at certifying the Alliance's global transformation), to practical actions aimed at asserting on one hand that NATO is able to conduct a broad range of missions and on second hand that these broad range of missions are primarily conceived in not in order to service not only the Alliance, but others as well: peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, in Iraq and civilian support in Germany (2006 World Cup), Pakistan (2005 earthquake) and the U.S.(2005 hurricane Katrina) among others.

In this sense, in spite of certain drawbacks on account of the unexpected lengthening of the Afghanistan mission, and also NATO's timid response to Russia's aggression in Georgia, NATO was balanced enough to not engage with its critics and to steadily pursue it purposes. As a result, NATO's successful Libya operation seemed to have sealed the Alliance's legitimacy (aided also by previous smaller scale missions highlighted above), revealing a level-headed organization, not only willing, but also capable of aiding those in need, regardless of their origin and culture. Since this achievement, NATO has been awfully quiet, contempt with its position, in spite of increasing global rumor in Syria, Bahrain and most recently Ukraine. However, unless the Alliance sees a potential threat to its integrity coming from such regions it is very unlikely to act (this is why so far the Ukraine crisis is the one to which NATO acted most vigorously, condemning and issuing measures against Russia, the identified aggressor - from suspending the NATO-Russia council to increasing its maritime, terrestrial and aerial presence in the Black Sea). If there is going to be another large scale operation performed by the Alliance, this needs to be very carefully prepared, as history revealed to NATO that a small erroneous move may dismantle its entire internal and/or international credibility within weeks or even days. As such, all the moves that the Alliance is going to make in the near future are likely to be small scale, probably in connection to a very accessible situation, one which would guarantee both success and lack of criticism. Until then, NATO is expected to act discursively in a quite bold manner, in an attempt to constantly reemphasize its global position and capabilities, as can already be seen from the post-Libya documents launched by the Alliance, namely the declarations from the Chicago summit (2012) and the Wales summit (2014) respectively. Both documents portray a confident Organization who presents itself as a gatekeeper of global security, insisting that the interests of the Alliance coincide with the interests of the international community and that reliance on NATO guarantees security and safety for all peace-loving entities. Thus, in summing up, we can argue that NATO might have just gone full circle since its formation, in becoming a military defendant of democracy freedom and peace, with the only amendment that it is now performing this role not only for a small group of western states in the face of communism (and the USSR), but for the entire planet, against any potential peril that might arise.

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