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**Understanding Hybrid Warfare Constructivism
and Ontological (in) Security.**

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Abstract

This thesis aim is to investigate the propagation of the term 'Hybrid Warfare' in world politics, more specifically on NATO's discourses and official texts. Granted the argument that the term is unable to convey a concrete strategic doctrine or strategy due to its lack of conceptual fecundity, we argue that nonetheless, the usage of the term serves NATO as an Ontological Security exercise. The reasoning behind this argument is that Hybrid Threats (or war) have the capacity to make NATO ontologically (in)secure due to the latter's inability to respond efficiently. Thus, disrupting the alliance strategy of 'being' - that is a collective defense alliance in charge of security of all members via the Article V of the treaty - and at the same time its strategy of 'doing' which is the ability of the alliance to provide a peaceful and safe Euro-Atlantic region, inside and out. Following our attempted bridging on Hybrid War and NATO's Ontological Security, we then proceed to explicate policy changes influenced by the former. In order to do so, we chose to employ a three-layered model created by Jakub Eberle and Vladimir Handl which conceptualizes Ontological Security through narratives about the *self*, the *other*, and the overall international *system*. The argument is that when actors are threatened by a crisis,

narratives are adjusted in a way that they express continuity in some levels, while enabling change in other levels. Given the argument that NATO's Ontological Security is based on its three core tasks of security, consultation, deterrence and defense, plus partnership and crisis management, we use the model to reconstruct NATO's response to the wars in Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2014).

Keywords

hybrid warfare, constructivism, ontological security

Range of thesis:

55 pages, approximately 32,854 characters (with spaces)

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, July 27, 2021

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Master thesis proposal

Abstract

This work will follow a chronological evolution regarding the concept of Hybrid warfare from the early 90's, to post 9/11, and finally to the latest events on Eastern Ukraine and the Crimean annexation. Since the definition of the concept itself is undoubtedly ambiguous, we will mainly focus on the conditions and events that brought this concept to life. Next, we will try to analyze the reactions and responses of the two main actors involved on these dynamics, the Russian Federation and NATO. Lastly, this work will try to explain that the term has been used by the west as a securitizing keyword, in order to respond to an emerging threat which has been tailored to attack western allies and their expanding hegemony.

Choice of the topic

The current debate around topics of contemporary conflicts and the security environment has witnessed a surge around the usage of the concept of Hybrid warfare. The term seems to emerge frequently as a buzzword in defense circles, on topics such as the Ukraine crisis, NATO's need for a strategic revamp, non-state actors - including here but not limited to - the Islamic State, cyber capabilities and energy security. Moreover, the terms hybrid warfare, war, and threats are being used constantly and interchangeably despite the clear vagueness that the terminology contains. Voluminous works concerned with the concept of Hybridity have

already started to deliver some fruitful insights, yet the literature is still lacking a comprehensive approach, making the matters even more perplexing.

What makes the matter worse, is the fact that various states and defense conglomerates are carrying out strategic and doctrinal revisions to adequately respond to Hybrid threats. These responses, on the other hand, can lead to slippery diplomatic and strategic outcomes mainly because objectively speaking these decision-making processes are being set into motion from a concept of which we are currently unable to fully grasp. While there is a substantial necessity for further breakthroughs regarding the concept of Hybridity the question of how different actors perceive and react to it has been often overlooked.

Consequently, the aim of this work will not be that of scrutinizing the concept of Hybridity itself but instead, it will try to explore and further analyze the reason why the NATO not only welcomed the concept with open arms regardless of its opaque nature but went as far as to enact policy changes. Current trends concerning the applicability of the term have exponentially increased to the point where its usage has become merely a routine. In contrast to this, the progress regarding the metaphysical aspects of the concept have been idle and often retroactive due to its fragile foundations.

Research questions

The primary objective of this work is to analyze how actors react to the rising concept rather than focusing on the concept itself. The question arises naturally, mainly because Hybrid threats are attracting a great amount of attention. A considerable amount of research on Hybrid wars has so far embarked on an odyssey of finding a common and comprehensible definition of the concept, this has sometimes resulted in an unintentional overlook of classic IR theories for analyzing contemporary global conflicts. This work will tend to overlook the aspects of the metaphysical composition of the concept, instead, it will mainly focus on the

events that prompted the major stakeholders such as NATO and the West in appointing the Russian Federation as a threat, although this time of a 'hybrid' nature.

The research questions are as following:

1. How did the concept evolve to the point of becoming the mainstream term directed at Russian revisionism/expansionism?
2. What prompted NATO decision in (re)securitizing Russia as a threat for the alliance and the west?
3. Under what circumstances are hybrid threats capable of achieving strategic goals?

Methodology

This paper will start by analyzing the terms of hybrid war, hybrid threats, and warfare by bypassing the semantics features of the three. Therefore, to not inundate on an already scrutinized topic, which is that of the metaphysical properties of the terms, this paper will mainly focus on the evolution of the term vis a vis with a timeline of its applicability in contemporary conflict studies. This, in turn, will hopefully serve to better understand the evolving relationship between NATO and Russia beginning from the end of the cold war to today's conflict in Ukraine. Constructing this parallel timeline might give us some insights concerning the complex relationship between the two antagonists. In the third part of this paper, I will try to explain that while academic research has reached a bottleneck, the actors involved have already adjusted their policies for adapting to this new domain. This, in turn, makes us think that the actors involved seem to be more concerned in responding to the challenges, even though, technically blindfolded. Furthermore, I propose that hybrid warfare is being used as a securitizing term to solely respond to the challenges coming eastward and

more importantly to adjust the focus back on Russia, which during the early 2000s has been under the alliances' radar. Hybrid wars bring something new to the table, that is a political warfare which challenges NATO and its allies to change the modus operandi to its core.

A preliminary outline of the thesis

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: Origins and development of the Hybrid warfare concept
 - Literature review throughout the phases
 - Hybrid threats from the Middle East to Eastern Europe
 - The Atlanticist and EUs' understanding of threats
- Chapter 2: NATO and Russia relations post-Cold War
 - The 90's short honeymoon and first cracks
 - Kosovo and Bosnia
 - Post 9/11 NATO's
 - Post Crimea and Ukraine
 - Old nemesis
 - Enhanced Forward Presence
- Chapter 3: Enter the Critical Security Studies Theories
 - Security Dilemma and Securitization theory approach
 - Collective securitization, the case of NATO: (re)securitizing Russia
 - Ontological (in)security
 - The case of a missing deterrent
 - Below the conflict threshold
 - Possible Article V failure. Exploiting vulnerabilities

- Socio-politic direct attack on liberal values and institutions
- Chapter 4: Conclusion

Preliminary core literature

HUYSMANS, J. (1998). Security! What Do You Mean?: From Concept to Thick Signifier. *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(2), 226–255.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066198004002004>

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Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1992, pp. 391–425. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2706858. Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.

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Introduction

A Brief Review of Hybrid Warfare

In 2007 Hoffman published what will turn out to be one of the most influential works on hybrid warfare. Inspired by the experiences of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Lebanon against Hezbollah, Hoffman's work titled 'Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars' describes the new emerging wars as a blurring of modes, combatants, and technologies used, therefore producing a wide range of variety and complexity called hybrid warfare".¹ As stated by the author however, previous work had been done on the subject and that although considered the pioneer he was not the first one to approach this theory. In fact, authors like Liang and Xiangsui², and William Lind³ had previously speculated on the concept, however it is only with Hoffman that hybrid warfare gains a more concise definition where it becomes a tool that both state and non-state actors can employ. According to the author hybrid warfare qualifies as "*A range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder*".⁴ Fast forwarding to the Crimean peninsula annexation and the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, the term rapidly diffused inside security circles and international relations alike. Hybrid warfare has been continuously disputed by some, and nonchalantly used by others. On the next section we will review some of the most quoted military theories that existed before the concept of Hybrid war. What we will notice is that the resemblance with the concept of Hybrid Warfare is very noticeable. Next, we will talk about Frank G. Hoffman an

1 Hoffman, F. (2007). Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. Pp.14

2 Lind, W., Nightengale, K., Schmitt, J.F., Sutton, J.W., & Wilson, G.I. (1989). The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation. Marine Corps Gazette.

3 Ibid.

4 Hoffman, F. (2009). Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. Small Wars Journal.

ardent advocate of the term and the debate that followed. Finally, we will discuss over the origins and evolution of the term.

1.1 The theory of unrestricted warfare

The theory of unrestricted warfare derives from a book written by two Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, in 1999 in which the authors discuss the nature of war in the late twentieth century and make some predictions on what future wars will look like. Their dissertation focuses on how the principle of "*combining two or more battlefield*".⁵

In other words, the victorious will be the strategist who skillfully combines different technologies, means and methods, operations and concepts that offer considerable advantages. Moreover, the authors also point out that due to globalization and technology there is now a higher demand in combining different elements. For example, when analyzing the influence of globalization in the age of information technology, Qian and Wang observed that irregular fighters and non-state actors have increasingly posed a threat to sovereign nations due to the availability of existing technologies both military and civilian (dual use) at low price.⁶ Thus, the advances of globalization - and with it the access to new technology - created these elements of non-military means perceived by the authors.

⁵ Liang, Q., Xiangsui, W. (1999). *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Masterplan to Destroy America*. Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House. Pp.137

⁶ Liang, Q., Xiangsui, W. (1999). *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Masterplan to Destroy America*. Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House. Pp.38

On this line of thought the book then proceeds to advance eight principles⁷ that apply to current and future battlefields that will inspire Hoffman to enunciate the three principle of hybrid warfare: omni-directionality, synchrony, and asymmetry. The principle of omnidirectionality derives directly from Qiao and Wang theory and refers to the idea that future warfare will be fought on a multitude of scenarios, from more traditional kinetic ones to unconventional ones where political, economic and emotional factors are integrated. This will require a simultaneous use of actions from different domains – synchrony- as future objectives will be accomplished ‘under conditions of simultaneous occurrence, simultaneous action, and simultaneous completion’.⁸

Whereas the asymmetric dimension is rendered by one’s exploitation of the enemy’s weaknesses. Despite Hoffman’s third concept – asymmetry- is not a novelty in warfare, the literature agrees that the use of non-military means will offer more opportunities to weaker actors.

1.2 The theory of fourth-generation warfare (4GW)

The concept was first introduced by the military strategist William Lind, in a 1989 article entitled “*The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*”.⁹ The theory argued that since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia – that ended a thirty-year war and established the state’s monopoly on war- the nature of warfare has undergone three main revolutions:

⁷ Ibid. Pp. 206. The eight principles are: Omnidirectionality, Synchrony, Limited objectives, Unlimited measures, Asymmetry, Minimal consumption, Multidimensional coordination, Adjustment and control of the entire process

⁸ Ibid. Pp.207

⁹ Lind, W., Nightengale, K., Schmitt, J.F., Sutton, J.W., & Wilson, G.I. (1989). *The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*. Marine Corps Gazette.

manpower, firepower and maneuver.¹⁰ However in the article, Lind argues that a fourth one is underway, and describes it as a more evolved form of insurgency where political, economic, social and military elements are employed to convince the enemy's power and decision-making structures that either the costs of pursuing war outweigh the benefits or that their strategic goals are unachievable.¹¹ To sustain his theory, Lind observes the contemporary social, political, economic, and technological changes that have influenced the development of 4GW and forecasts the latter by extrapolating characteristics from previous warfare generations.¹² In other words, like Liang, Xiangsui, and Hoffman, Lind links the evolution of warfare to the globalization process, the proliferation of international organizations, new ways of communication, and technology. Advocates of the 4GW theory also emphasize on three main characteristics of future wars; first, that by following the trend of dispersion of the forces on the battlefield – Hoffman's omni-directionality-, future wars will be widely dispersed and largely undefined – the distinction between war and peace will be blurry.¹³ Second, that tactical and strategic levels 'will blend as the opponent's political infrastructure and civilians, will become part of the battlefield'.¹⁴ And third, that the 4GW theory is centered around the idea of impacting the enemy's will to fight and therefore that all the available means (economic, social, military, etc.), can be used to convince the enemy decision-makers that their strategic goals can be more costly than initially perceived.¹⁵

10 For a detailed description of the three generations read 'Lind, William, 'Understanding Fourth Generation War', *Military Review* (September–October 2004)', and 'Echevarria, Fourth Generation War and Other Myths' for the theories' critique.

11 Echevarria II, J. Antullio (2005). *Fourth Generation War and Other Myths*. Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College (SSI). Pp.V.

12 Lind, W., Nightengale, K., Schmitt, J.F., Sutton, J.W., & Wilson, G.I. (1989). *The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*.

13 Ibid.

14 Lind, W., Nightengale, K., Schmitt, J.F., Sutton, J.W., & Wilson, G.I. (1989). *The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*.

15 Hammes, T. (2005). War Evolves into the Fourth generation, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26:2, 189-221

1.3 The theory of compound warfare

The concept of “compound warfare” was developed in the late 1990s by Thomas Huber. Unlike the above theories, compound warfare is used as a conceptual framework that offers a *‘new way of approaching troublesome cases where regular and irregular forces have been used synergistically’*.¹⁶ The author explains that this type of warfare envisions the simultaneous use of regular and irregular forces against an enemy. On one hand the irregular force enhances the efforts of the regular force by offering information, goods, troops, and logistic support while denying them to the enemy, while the regular force would provide the other with a relief of the enemy's presence, with training and supplies, local political leverage, and strategic information. Following this line of thought, the author concludes that compound warfare is *“one in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”*¹⁷ When defining compound warfare Huber identifies two characteristics: asymmetry, and occupation that allow compound warfare to happen when a portion or the entirety of an actor's territory is occupied by *“an intervening major power”*¹⁸ enabling the lesser power to distribute its forces on the ground.¹⁹ In addition to compound warfare, Huber argues that the presence of an allied force that grants safe haven to the occupying force to the regular and irregular elements of compound warfare shifts the concept towards what he calls the “fortified compound warfare”.²⁰ This is important because when a fortified compound warfare actor has a ‘safe haven’ for its main forces, it will also enjoy the ability to withdraw the main forces to a place that is inaccessible to the enemy due to i.e. geography, political, diplomatic factors. At the same time, the *fortified* actor will also enjoy

16 Huber, M. Thomas (2002). Compound Warfare: The Fatal Knot. U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Pp.1.

17 Ibid.

18 Huber, M. Thomas (2002). Compound Warfare: The Fatal Knot. U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

the support from a major ally of which help the main force to ‘keep their ground’ and at the same time protecting the guerrilla forces.²¹ Examples of fortified warfare are found in the Vietnam War and in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan where actors with inferior conventional forces have prevailed over significantly superior forces. At this point it’s important to highlight that neither Hubber or other advocates of the concept have not at any point suggested that this is a new phenomenon in warfare, rather have tried to find a similar pattern of which the irregular and regular forces have been used simultaneously in modern warfare. However, they argue that “*in almost every historical case*”²² the fortified modality has allowed actors to compete and win against otherwise superior conventional actors, and that this is likely to be case for future wars.²³

1.4 Summary of the concepts

The three theories above describe asymmetric warfare differently. However, an attentive eye is able to notice some resemblance between them. First, almost all of them mention ‘globalization’ as a fertile environment for these battlefields to take place. The latter has created the interconnectedness between what once were seen as different dimensions of political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII). Second, the literature of asymmetric warfare is globally researched, however, the Western literature that we have discussed and will discuss in the next chapters is Western dominated (especially American). Third, almost all of them talk about the blurring of war and its evolving nature of

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

ambiguity. On the next chapter we will talk about the origins of the usage of Hybrid War, its main proponent, and the debate that followed.

1.5 Frank G. Hoffman and the Hybrid War Influence

*“America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few”.*²⁴

These remarks were the opening paragraph of the 2005 National Defense Strategy of the United States which in turn is a reiteration of the 2002 document. The work highlighted what at that time was perceived as rising threats and challenges to America’s interests and national security. The emerging challenges are recognized and narrowed down into four categories: traditional, disruptive, catastrophic, and irregular. By traditional, the article refers to challenges posed by states employing recognized military capabilities. Irregular stands for actors of which employ unconventional methods to counter traditional advantages; whereas Catastrophic is considered to be a challenge that involves the possession and usage of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).²⁵ Lastly, disruptive challenges are those that originate from adversaries that develop breakthrough technologies capable of negating US advantages in operational domains. The article then emphasizes that future challenges will overlap with one another, and sometimes merge.²⁶ The same year the NDS stressed the above implications of future warfare, the ‘Military Balance’ which is an annual assessment of the global military power edited by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) published similar notes in regards to the

24 “The National Defense Strategy of The United States of America,” March 2005.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

US strategic thinking. The main takeaway from the article was the idea that while the US had achieved “*unprecedented dominance*” in conventional military strength thus making it invincible in traditional force-on-force conflict, potential enemies had taken notes and were most likely respond with asymmetric methods of warfare, allowing them to sidestep the overwhelming American power.²⁷ As a consequence, US planners recognized the need of adapting to new threats although conceptually, for the immense inertia of the US military-industrial complex was focused on conventional spending and acquisition.

Soon after the 2005 NDS publication, Lt. Colonel Frank Hoffman and Lt. General James Mattis published their work titled ‘*Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*’ in Autumn for the US Naval Institute.²⁸ The (now) U.S marine veteran explicitly supported the NDS by pointing out the four emerging challenges recognized by it and welcomed Washington's decision on having fewer talks solely focused on technological RMAs. Moreover, on their article the authors mentioned Gen. Krulak’s three-block war concept which predicted that the US would find itself simultaneously fighting, peacekeeping, and handling humanitarian tasks on the same battlefield, adding complexity to their assessment/prediction.²⁹ In addition to the three-block war, Mattis and Hoffman proceeded to add a new dimension that is, the psychological or information operations. The latter is an extended component focused on influencing populations to reject misshaped ideologies offered by insurgents.

So far, the discourse somehow paints a picture of the US strategic thinking post 9/11. It is important to note here that the writings of Hoffman, Mattis, and the defense community at that time were heavily inclined towards counter-insurgency operations (COIN).³⁰ This is also evident in the 2005 article in which the two authors point out that operations in Afghanistan

27 “North America.” *The Military Balance* 105, no. 1 (2005): 13–44.

28 Mattis, N. James, Hoffman, G. Frank (2000). *Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. *Proceedings Magazine*.

29 *Ibid*

30 *Ibid*.

and Iraq served as ‘lessons learned’, and consequently shifted American strategic towards the “human” dimension of warfare.³¹

The first mention of Hybrid warfare emerged as a revision of the four challenges raised by the NDS. However, different from the latter's report, the authors claim that future challengers will most likely choose a combination of the four means instead of choosing between them. Therefore, it is the simultaneous combination, or *merging*, of these means that will make warfare ‘*Hybrid*’. Hoffman’s 2007 work presents us with the first detailed prescription of what hybrid threats are:

*“Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”*³²

Reading through the definition one would notice that such methods have consistently been around since the early days of warfare. However, Hoffman's’ novelty regarding the concept is that while regular and irregular warfare before had been considered separate parts/elements of two different theaters, today they are blended into one unique force.

An important partake from the previous works on hybrid war worth mentioning, is the addition of the *criminal disorder* as a force.³³ Hoffman’s idea of adding criminality as an irregular force steams from the previous British and American experience in the Middle East³⁴ According to him, “the disruptive component of hybrid wars does not come from the high end or revolutionary technology but criminality. Criminal activity is used to sustain the hybrid force or to facilitate the disorder and disruption of the target nation”.³⁵ According to him, criminality

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Mattis, N. James, Hoffman, G. Frank (2000). Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Proceedings Magazine.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

helps in undermining the legitimacy of the targeted state creating way more instability and uncertainty. Criminality will soon turn out to be an existing force in the Crimean annexation, and with the breakdown of the Ukraine conflict on the eastern breakaway regions (Luhansk and Donetsk), with gangs such as the ‘Night wolves’ which continuously compromise the region’s internal security.³⁶

1.6 The debate over the concept

In 2009 the author of the NDS (2005) Nathan Freier, called for the security community to pay more attention to the usage of the term hybrid warfare. He argues that the narrow usage and meaning of ‘hybrid warfare’ and ‘hybrid threats’ are not necessarily reducible to a doctrine ready definition.³⁷ According to him, if the term hybrid is accepted as “*composed as elements of different or indigenous kinds*”³⁸, then the ‘hybrid’ defense would encapsulate all the Department of Defense (DOD) demands. Differently from Hoffman, Freier sees the four challenges of the NDS (traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive) combined, while Hoffman tends to look at them in a state of pure singular form.³⁹ Moreover, the author rightly points out that the concept is actually part of the strategic environment and not its force, therefore the correct way of referring to hybridity would be by calling them *hybrid challenges*. Freier argues that the experiences of irregular warfare are not entirely new and like Huber, he mentions the war in Vietnam referring to it as a hybrid experience. He furthers his reasoning

36 The Guardian (2016). Putin’s Angels: The Bikers Battling for Russia in Ukraine. Guardian News and Media, January 29, 2016.

37 Freier, N. (2007). Strategic Competition and Resistance in the 21st Century: Irregular, Catastrophic, Traditional, and Hybrid challenges in Context. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle.

38 Freier, N. (2009). The Defense Identity Crisis: it’s a Hybrid World. Parameters. 39(3).

39 Freier, Nathan, 2007. Strategic competition and resistance in the 21st century: irregular, catastrophic, traditional, and hybrid challenges in context. Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle. ISBN 1584872969.

by arguing that warfare always had the high-low hybrid components in which “hostile actors have sought to play depending on their capabilities and level of sophistication”.⁴⁰ Therefore, they have done so continuously by generating asymmetries.⁴¹ Freier considers hybrid challenges to be a combination of the military and the civil domain together. He defines these hybrid threats as “defense-relevant challenges whose origin, character, mode, and principal domain of conflict and/or competition are difficult to identify or classify”⁴² However, while he does agree with Hoffman’s approach to hybrid warfare, he argues that too much emphasis has been given to the military dimension, this shifting the DOD’s attention toward the military challenges that *hybridity* raises overshadowing the non-military and civil domain.⁴³

Another academic review worth mentioning is one proposed by Dr. Russell W. Glenn. In his paper titled ‘*Thoughts on hybrid conflict*’⁴⁴ Glenn considers hybrid warfare inconsistent in its applicability of the security challenges of today and tomorrow, ultimately raising the concern that the proposed concept does not meet the necessary criteria for reaching the status of a separate form of warfare vis a vis doctrine.⁴⁵ What the author suggests instead, is a more comprehensive approach to the hybrid warfare debate since the latter “*suffers the restriction of applying only to circumstances involving a threat.*”⁴⁶ Glenn further argues that while the issues brought forth from hybrid warfare are relevant, they, however, seem to lack the ability to move the doctrine (and the security thinking) forward than the alternative comprehensive approach.⁴⁷

Other authors such as Dan G. Cox, Thomas Brusino, and Dr. Alex Ryan have expressed their doubts concerning the utility of the concept. In their co-written article titled

40 Freier, N. (2009). Hybrid Threats and Challenges: Describe... Don’t Define. Small Wars Journal.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Glenn, W. Russel (2009). Thoughts on Hybrid Conflict. Small Wars Journal.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

*“Why Hybrid Warfare is Tactics, not Strategy”*⁴⁸ the authors state that although hybrid warfare might sound promising, its conceptual weaknesses serve as an impediment to a clear and productive strategy. According to the authors “the fundamental problem with hybrid warfare analysis is that it ignores the role of interaction in strategy”.⁴⁹ In other words, they raise concerns regarding the concept’s lack of guiding principles for policymakers heading towards a strategic decision.

As a rule of thumb, critics of hybrid warfare see the concept as a *“repacking of any number of older concepts that described an enemy or scenarios switch between ways of fighting, including compound warfare, three-block war, and fourth-generation warfare.”*⁵⁰ In reply to this, Hoffman counterargued that what makes hybrid warfare stand out is the fact that the latter is characterized by *“...more blurring and blending of wars in combinations of increasing frequency and lethality.”*⁵¹ The authors of the text see two problems in this line of thinking. First, hybrid threats imagine an adversary with ‘mystical’ powers. Second, the concept is almost entirely tactically focused on its analysis and prescriptions.⁵²

The *mystical status* of the enemy is created with Hoffman's claim of the ability of the former to simultaneously conduct (and also to switch back and forth) between conventional, irregular, and criminal activities. Putting Hoffman’s vision into perspective:

“One comes away with the image of a single hybrid warrior simultaneously targeting and firing artillery, setting an ambush with an IED, hiding among the population to which he is selling drugs and setting up protection rackets, developing and deploying biological and/or nuclear weapons, and hacking into the Pentagon mainframe to insert a computer virus, all

48 Cox, G. Dan, Brusolino, T., Ryan, A. (2012). Why Hybrid warfare is tactics not Strategy: A Rejoinder to “Future Threats and Strategic thinking”. US Army School of Advanced Military. US Army School of Advanced Military.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Hoffman, F. (2009). Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. Small Wars Journal.

52 Ibid.

while conducting an interview on Al Jazeera specifically targeted to destroy morale among the civilian population in the American heartland.”⁵³

1.7 Final Remarks

In conclusion from what we have discussed so far, we can say that the concept of hybrid warfare is not new in terms of its function and goals. The concept was conceived from American military thinkers, especially from their experiences with asymmetric adversaries e.g. the Israel-Lebanese conflict of 2006, which was also used as a poster case from Hoffman. We agree with Cox et al. remarks that the concept lack the necessary attributes to become a strategy, i.e. the complication of responding to the problem with a clear and accurate policy.⁵⁴ We also agree with Freier’s point who emphasizes on the point that giving too much attention to the military domain, there is a risk of neglecting the civil-military domain (CIMIC).⁵⁵ Apparently, NATO and the EU took notes on this, as they actually put a lot of emphasis of the CIMIC dimension of countering hybrid threats.

53 Cox, G. Dan, Brusino, T., Ryan, A. (2012). Why Hybrid warfare is tactics not Strategy: A Rejoinder to “Future Threats and Strategic thinking”. US Army School of Advanced Military.

54 Cox, G. Dan, Brusino, T., Ryan, A. (2012). Why Hybrid warfare is tactics not Strategy: A Rejoinder to “Future Threats and Strategic thinking”. US Army School of Advanced Military.

55 Freier, N. (2009). Hybrid Threats and Challenges: Describe... Don’t Define. Small Wars Journal.

Ontological security in IR

2.1 Introduction

On the following, we will review the theory of Ontological Security which has its roots from the field of psychology. The term was first coined by the psychologist R.D. Laing to then be brought into the IR mainstream by Anthony Giddens in 1991, Huysmans in 1998, and McSweeney, 1999.⁵⁶ The theory is mainly concerned with the non-physical insecurities of states. Thus, where mainstream IR theory sees ‘security as survival’, ontological security sees ‘security of being’. We suggest that in order to fully grasp the effects of hybrid threats, we need to employ ontological security especially because of the former’s ability of non-kinetic engagement. The argument goes that, hybrid war (or threats) have the capacity to jeopardize NATO’s sense of the ‘self’ and its ‘routines’, thus causing anxiety for the organization.^{57 58} This ontological insecurity started taking shape inside NATO during the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine, which in turn coincides with the period when the keyword ‘hybrid war’ and ‘hybrid threats’ started propagating on the web.⁵⁹

56 Gustafsson, K., Nina C. Krickel-Choi (2020). Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security: Insights from the Existentialist Anxiety Literature. *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (September 2020): 875–95.

57 Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70.

58 Steele, J Brent (2008). *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR state*. Routledge.

59 <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=hybrid%20warfare,Hybrid%20threats>

2.2 *Moving beyond physical security*

Anarchy in international relations renders states insecure, therefore realists believe that the main task for states is to maximize security. Similarly, structural realists share the same belief, and those are divided in two camps. The two are known as offensive and defensive realists. The former believes that states seek relative power to offset insecurity consequently driving states to conflict⁶⁰, whilst the latter claims that states seek security driven only by their own sense of insecurity, and therefore building up the means to defend themselves.⁶¹ The departure from offensive realisms is the rejection of the ‘relative power’ argument and the replacement of it with the ambiguous outcome that it may or may not cause a conflict. For these strand correlate conflict with variables such as state perceptions, offensive and defensive postures distinguishability, and on the state of offense/defense balance.⁶²

The dominating assumption in IR is that states seek physical security to fend off security dilemmas and that the main goal of the latter is survival. Activities such as protection of the territories and government structures from material harms are of vital interest for a state. While these assumptions are indeed convincing and commonsensical, they can also be parsimonious on analyzing the wide range of the circumstances that lead to conflict. Alexander Wend for example, argues that states sometimes sacrifice physical security in order to maintain a constant sense of the self.⁶³ Thus, the need to go beyond physical security arises, and in order to escape this theoretical blockade, we will try to interpret it from the lenses of ontological security.

60 Mearsheimer, J. John (1994). The False Promise of International Institutions. *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5-49.

61 Beate, N. (1979). Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York 1979. In *Schlüsselwerke der Politikwissenschaft*, pp. 481-485. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

62 Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma, *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-2.

63 Wendt, A. (1994). Collective Identity Formation and the International State. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2), 384-396.

Building from the early works of Anthony Giddens we understand ontological security as the need to “experience oneself as a whole and continuous person in time – in order to realize a sense of agency”.⁶⁴ Also, “a sense of confidence and trust that the world is what it appears to be” where trust of other people is “a protection against future threat and dangers which allow the individual to sustain hope and courage in the face of whatever debilitating circumstances she or he might later confront.”⁶⁵

From the earliest literature of ontological security, Brent J. Steele for example identified historical instances in which states jeopardized their physical security with the intention of restoring (or preserving) a sense of the self. The author identified three forms of social actions which are often referred to as motives: moral, humanitarian, and honor driven. These social actions would sometimes interfere with the strategic calculation of states. Thus, the argument goes, there are indeed some instances in which states neglect on what would be called a rationalist approach to threats in order to satisfy the above. His finding suggest that the three actions above satisfy the self-identity needs of states, and that the need for a stable self-identity is as much important as the physical security of the self.⁶⁶

For example, in July 1914 Germany issued an ultimatum to Belgium requesting free access through their territories. Taking into consideration the evident German superiority, the Belgians chose to fight them nonetheless, the result was a catastrophic defeat for the latter. What will turn out to be remembered as the “Rape of Belgium” left an estimated 30,000 civilians dead, over a million displaced, and more than 100,000 Belgians deported to German or occupied French labor camps. From the Belgian army 13,716 were listed dead, 44,686 wounded, and

64 Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford university press, 1991.

65 Ibid.

66 Steele, Brent J. *Ontological security in international relations: Self-identity and the IR state*. Routledge, 2008.

34,659 declared prisoners of war or missing. During the conflict 20,000 Belgian structures were destroyed.⁶⁷ The insights that we extract from the case are threefold: First, opposite to the mainstream survival behavior of states and that of just war, the case of Belgium shows us that actors don't necessarily abide to the above paradigms when calculating the risk of conflict, at least, not strictly. Second, it provides us a "modern example of honor-driven behavior" which in turn challenges some assumptions of structural realists and rationalists alike.⁶⁸ And finally, the Belgian case demonstrates how small powers have the ability to influence the communities' social structure, in other words how "the actions of such small states also have important societal consequences".⁶⁹ In his seminal work, Steele used ontological security theory to demonstrate how the case of "Belgian honor was based on the internal need to confront threats to self-identity and the external need to reinforce a social (or collective) identity to the greater European community."⁷⁰ By using historical evidence and transcripts of the Belgian government and European leaders, Steele tries to give explanatory power to the apparent irrational choice of Belgium military engagement with Germany in the eve of WWI.

Another prominent author that applies ontological security theory for studying threats is Jennifer Mitzen. On her article from the *European Journal of International Relations* Mitzen examines the nexus between ontological security and the security dilemma.⁷¹ Similarly to Steele she argues that states are not exclusively concerned with their physical security, but part of their concern is also their ability for agency and a stable cognitive environment.⁷² In other words, "Since ends are constitutive of identity – Individuals are therefore motivated to create

67 Steele, Brent J. *Ontological security in international relations: Self-identity and the IR state*. Routledge, 2008.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Mitzen, J. (2006). *Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70.

72 Mitzen, J. (2006). *Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70.

cognitive and behavioral certainty, which they do by establishing routines.”⁷³ Moreover, the ontologically secured identity is also formed (and preserved) through relationships. Part of the attachment to these relationships are due to the fact of their ability to offer cognitive and behavioral certainty.⁷⁴ Mitzen argues that sometimes agents get attached even to ‘bad’ relationships, more explicitly in cases when being attached to conflict. This in turn adds another layer to the security dilemma which runs parallel to the classical one, ultimately opening new avenue of analysis on the contemporary research of conflict. According to Mitzen we understand ontological (in)security as “*the deep, incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore*”. Therefore, when an agent is ontologically insecure, “*she cannot relate ends systematically to means in the present, much less plan ahead*” – in short, the agent is unable to have a sense of agency.⁷⁵

One of the most important take away from the work of Mitzen is the discussion of *Routines and Basic Trust*. According to the author, agents engage in ontological security seeking by imposing cognitive order. Such exercises are important because they minimize hard uncertainties, and since agents are unable to respond to every danger at once, the capacity for agency is highly reliant on systems which in turn take some questions out of the frame.⁷⁶ Moreover, automatic responses to stimuli (systems) have the ability to stabilize the cognitive environment. In sum, routines provide the agent with ways of “*knowing the world and how to act*”, and they also serve as a cocoon against the “*paralytic, deep fear of chaos*”.⁷⁷

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70.

Lastly, the influential work of Catarina Kinnvall. On her 2004 paper titled "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security.", the author analyzes security as a *thick signifier*, meaning that she puts much attention on the language used in the narrations about the 'self' vis a vis the 'other'.⁷⁸ The point here is to investigate the structural reasons of why individuals experience ontological insecurity and existential anxiety alike. According to the author, "*Individuals define themselves in relation to others, according to their structural basis of power*", therefore a thick signifier approach helps to highlight the intersubjective order of relations.⁷⁹ Kinnvall uses the case of nationality and religion to illustrate her analysis. These two structures for example provide actors with a powerful story and discourse, thus creating in them a sense of security from the outsiders. In this way, she argues, nationalism and religion are able to provide ontological security because of the protective cocoon (in the words of Giddens), the feeling of home, and the decrease of anxiety. Another takeaway from her work is the securitization of subjectivity. Kinnvall believes that the latter is an intersubjective process which includes the 'other' as well.

Above we mentioned the concept of thick signifier, first coined in 1998 from Jef Huysmans on his paper titled "Security! What do you mean?".⁸⁰ Basically, in a thick signifier analysis "...one tries to understand how security language implies a specific metaphysics of life. The interpretation does not just explain how a security story requires the definition of threats, a referent object, etc. but also how it defines our relations to nature, to other human beings and to the self."⁸¹ In other words, the thick signifier approach "*unmasks the structural relations*

78 Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security. *Political psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-767.

79 Ibid.

80 Huysmans, J. (1998). Security! What do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier. *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 226-255.

81 Huysmans, J. (1998). Security! What do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier. *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998): 226-255.

through which security discourses are framed".⁸² This line of thinking is in line with Foucault's idea of the structures that have the power to make discourses 'true'. The overall assumption of Kinnvall is that increases on ontological insecurity and anxiety are linked to a rise of politics of resistance and of local identities and that we need to understand identity not as a fixed attribute, but as a "process of becoming".⁸³

2.3 Discussion

Mitzen and Steele, both security studies scholars are the most involved authors on the research of ontological security. Their starting positions are alike, meaning that they both believe that state motivations are not solely pivoting towards physical security, but also to an intersubjective domain, that of the self. Both the authors have also scaled up their level of analysis from individuals to states as well. The authors depart from each other when discussing the formation of self-identity. While Steele believes that 'biographical narratives' are built individually via narratives of the self, Mitzen puts more attention to social interactions vis a vis, the 'other'. Mitzen believes that state identities are tightly connected to social interaction, and more precisely with the type of role that these actors play on these social relationships.⁸⁴ The author connects this to the security dilemma dynamic and argues that both the actors (that are interacting) need acknowledgment from each other in order to fulfill their roles. In other words, "states do not have the final word in determining whether they are security-seekers or power-seekers but need acknowledgment from the others who

82 Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security. *Political psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-767.

83 Ibid.

84 Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341-70.

infer a state's type from its behavior and see it as a fulfillment of a particular role.”⁸⁵ Unlike Steele, Mitzen opts for ‘routinization’, ‘attachment’, ‘stable cognitive environment’ and ‘capacity for agency’.⁸⁶

This chapter's intention was to present the reader with an overall idea around the theory of ontological security in IR. On the subsequent chapters we will first apply the theory to NATO and discuss the evidence that support this application, and finally on chapter 3.1 we will use the three-layered model to capture ontological security narratives in the events of Georgia and Ukraine, 2008 and 2014 respectively.

85 Cupać, J. (2012). Ontological Security of International Organizations: NATO's Post-Cold War Identity Crisis and ‘Out-of-Area’ Interventions.

86 Ibid.

Hybrid Warfare: NATO's Ontological (in)Security

On the first chapter of this work, we went through the origins and evolution of the concept of hybrid warfare. Through our review we concluded that even though it is a popular term often mentioned in different strategic communications documents and speeches, it evidently lacks empirical usefulness.⁸⁷ Consequently, one might ask itself why does the term continue to propagate on foreign policy narratives (especially in NATO and EU communications), although its apparent vagueness in explaining contemporary politics and conflict doesn't bring anything new to the table.

Maria Malksoo argues that irrespective of the term's flawed fecundity, the usage of the latter serves as an ontological security exercise for NATO. This is because, given their covert nature and their ability to stay below the threshold of open conflict, hybrid threats create a serious problem for an alliance that operates on the basis of collective defense – Article V - that can lead the organization into a comatose state. In other words, we can imply that given their nature, hybrid threats have the capacity of making NATO (and Member States) anxious, because it will not be able to trigger an efficient response.⁸⁸

Flockhart argues that organizations can adopt two strategies for the maximalization of “ontological security” – that to ensure the continuity and consistency of their identity -: *strategy of being* and *strategy of doing*. With the former Flockhart refers to practices that self-enhance

87 NATO. “Countering Hybrid Threats: Lessons Learned from Ukraine.” NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_142012.htm.

88 Malksoo, M. (2018). Countering Hybrid Warfare as Ontological Security Management: The Emerging Practices of the EU and NATO. *European Security* 27 (2018): 374-392

the actor's strong narrative; whereas the latter refers to routinized practices that contribute to a sense of integrity and belonging.⁸⁹

If we apply Flockhart's reasoning on the case above, we could argue that NATO is unable to have either a 'strategy of being' - which is equal to a stable identity accompanied with a strong narrative, and a 'strategy of doing' - which ensures cognitive consistency that can be achieved through routinized practices.⁹⁰ Not having a 'strategy of being' translates to the alliance not being able to deliver collective defense to its members, and not being able to respond to crisis emanating from hybrid threats inevitably impact the alliance's 'strategy of doing'.

NATO's response to hybrid threats so far has been mainly that adapting to a fast-changing security environment. For example, in the post-Cold War era, the keyword 'resilience' can be found in many documents and speeches of the alliance.⁹¹ Similarly, NATO's article III resembles the concept of resilience for it reads:

“In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.”⁹²

For the alliance, resilience is primarily the responsibility and priority of each and every member state that by assessing their country's vulnerabilities and amending any fertile ground for disruption, collectively benefits the organization as a whole.⁹³

⁸⁹ Flockhart, T. (2016). The Problem of Change in Constructivist Theory: Ontological Security Seeking and Agent Motivation. *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 5 (2016): 799–820.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ For example, see: Nato. “Resilience and Article 3.” NATO, June 14, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

⁹² Nato. “The North Atlantic Treaty.” NATO, April 1, 2009. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

⁹³ Ibid.

Maria Malksoo for example, interprets the keyword ‘resilience’ as “*a claim on a sense of institutional self-worth and relevance amidst deep uncertainty*”.⁹⁴ NATO’s emphasis on this specific keyword can be seen as the alliance’s struggle to manage the emergent change by coming up with new or improved routinized practices. Therefore, in this context, ‘resilience’ “*functions as a symbolic codename for the EU and NATO’s institutional responses to the deeply unsettling ontological insecurity condition evoked by hybrid threats/warfare*.”⁹⁵

At the 2016 Warsaw summit the allies committed to enhance their resilience “*against the full spectrum of threats, including hybrid threats, from any direction*”⁹⁶ where the allies agreed that while building resilience is the main responsibility of Member States, NATO would act as a supervisor. The operationalization of this decision was the creation of The European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) established on April 2017 in Helsinki, Finland, tasked to conduct trainings, exercises, workshops, and publishing white papers on the topic of hybrid threats. Today, Hybrid CoE is an independent network-based organization and it currently welcomes 29 members that are also part of the EU and NATO.⁹⁷

However, the reaction of NATO and EU to hybrid threats - and most importantly to the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas - has not been exclusively political in nature. Already in 2014 at the Wales summit, NATO had begun what came to be known as “*the most significant reinforcement of NATO’s collective defense since the end of the Cold War*”, that is the ‘Readiness Action Plan’.⁹⁸ That same year Member states re-committed to the 2%

94 Malksoo, M. (2018). Countering Hybrid Warfare as Ontological Security Management: The Emerging Practices of the EU and NATO. *European Security* 27 (2018): 374-392.

95 Ibid.

96 NATO. “Commitment to Enhance Resilience - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016.” NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133180.htm.

97 “About Us.” Hybrid CoE - The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/about-us/>.

98 NATO. “Readiness Action Plan.” NATO, April 20, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm.

spending, extended the role of the NATO Response Force (NRF) role, and agreed on the creation of Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). And, in 2016 in Poland, the Alliance reinvigorated the 2014 plan by further enhancing the organization deterrence and defensive posture by creating the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP). Today the EFP is a NATO-deployed defense and deterrence military formation, made up of forward-deployed battalions based in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland on a rotational basis.⁹⁹

However, does deterrence really work in the Baltics?

Deterrence can be defined as the element that shapes the opponent's cost-benefit calculations in a way that the only outcome emanating from aggressive actions will be that of a counterproductive (or unfavorable) outcome.¹⁰⁰ In his analysis Matus Halas uses Boolean logic – a form of algebra in which values are either *true* or *false* - to analyze the efficiency of the alliance's posture in the region. Halas findings suggests that while there is an absence of a military confrontation in the region, this is not to be attribute to NATO successful posture, rather to Russia disinterest in replicating the Crimean scenario in the Baltics.¹⁰¹ According to the author, the credibility of NATO's conventional deterrence in communicating the threat to the other side is severely distorted by the lack of capabilities in both conventional and sub-conventional domains. Similarly, Gustav Gressel - a senior policy fellow of the European Council on Foreign Relations – refers to NATO's presence in the Baltics as a “tripwire”¹⁰² and sees the Eastern flank as a “reassurance” tool for the members, and not one for deterrence

99 Ibid.

100 Stein, J. Gross. (1991). Reassurance in International Conflict Management. *Political Science Quarterly* 106(3):431–51.

101 Halas, M. (2019). Proving a Negative: Why Deterrence Does Not Work in the Baltics, *European Security*, 28:4, 431-448.

102 Gressel, G. (2019). After Crimea: Does NATO Have the Means to Defend Europe? *ECFR*, April 2, 2019.

While the conventional domain has improved since 2018 with more forces allocated in the Baltics like *'the three-thirties'* and the goal of the 2% GDP military spending being taken more seriously from member states, the sub-conventional domain still remains problematic.¹⁰³ Once again this because hybrid threats have the inherent capacity to *"stay beyond the reach of traditional military capabilities"*, and *"allows players to achieve their goals and shape the environment indirectly while avoiding open force on force engagements"*.¹⁰⁴ In the Baltic region this seems to be exponential because of the region's complex socio-economic and political spheres, and this makes an escalation on the sub-conventional sphere more problematic because it has the potential to lead the alliance of the brink of confrontation.

Moreover, a lack of consensus in regards to what would be the appropriate response towards a hybrid crisis it is also a case of concern for all stakeholders.¹⁰⁵ To amend this vacuum, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) needs to reach a consensus on whether a local national level crisis should be treated as such, or if it falls under the protective umbrella of collective defense.¹⁰⁶

In conclusion, if we have to summarize NATO's response after the crisis in Georgia and Ukraine in one word, that would be 'resilience'. The physical manifestation of this keyword is the creation of Hybrid CoE - the network-based center that conducts research on hybrid threats-, and the Joint Intelligence and Security Division (JISD) tasked with monitoring and analyzing hybrid threats.

103 Ibid.

104 Halas, M. (2019). Proving a Negative: Why Deterrence Does Not Work in the Baltics, *European Security*, 28:4, 431-448.

105 Halas, M. (2019). Proving a Negative: Why Deterrence Does Not Work in the Baltics, *European Security*, 28:4, 431-448.

106 Ibid.

The organizations of both the EU and NATO have designated continuous learning and situational awareness as a priority given that Hybrid CoE and JISD are a product of closer cooperation between NATO and its main partner. The current nature of the cooperation is set to informal staff-to-staff levels with both the organizations developing ‘playbooks’, operational protocols (Hybrid CoE), and intelligence sharing protocols (JISD).¹⁰⁷

Two main reasons are behind the push for closer cooperation: First, because as we mentioned above the efficiency of responding to hybrid threats lies in the domain of situational awareness, the exchange of practices and intelligence between member states. Second, because the Alliance agrees that the most important goal of hybrid operations emanating from Russia is to cause discord and division between NATO and EU members. Disunited members equal to weak organizations, it’s a perfect que for every challenger that wants to change the status quo.

3.1 A Three-Layered Model to Explain Policy Change

The three-layered model argues that actors need a consistent story of themselves to be ontological secure, and that they do this by constructing stories about themselves using narrations then narratives are a great tool to analyze actor’s ontological security. The model argues that narratives play an important role as they allow for “biographical continuity” of actors to subsist in a context of “social” life¹⁰⁸ because through narratives, states are able to have a sense of the self and this in turn guides their normative guidance.¹⁰⁹ However, being that actors are not isolated from exogenous actions and entities,

107 Rühle, M., Roberts. C. (2021). Enlarging NATO's Toolbox to Counter Hybrid Threats. NATO Review. NATO Review, March 19, 2021.

108 Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security. Political psychology 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-767.

109 Steele, J Brent (2008). Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR state. Routledge.

the narratives of the self are not entirely theirs, and are tangled with the representations of the others.¹¹⁰ Therefore, it is not only narratives of the self that produce ontological security, but part of the process is also how the *self* is perceived by the *other*, with both of these entities being part of a broader international order.¹¹¹

To understand how these narratives come about and interact, Jakub Eberle and Vladimir Handl have developed a three-layered model of how states seek ontological security through narratives that are simultaneously about:¹¹²

- The self – where the identity of is negotiated internally within the society (or its members), which in turn contributes to the formation of the *self* and is linked to shared norms and expectations.
- Significant other – where the identity is intersubjectively defined by narrative the *self* vis a vis *other* state.
- International order – The notion of the overall order to which one depends and contributes to.

The three divisions above should be seen as heuristic for they are tightly interconnected. Furthermore, there should be a logical link between the three “*for a narrative to sustain a basic degree of coherence.*”¹¹³ For example, a narrative inspired by a realist reading of IR would have the ‘*self*’ se as security maximizer (survival oriented), the ‘*others*’ as competitors or enemies, and ‘*the international order*’ as anarchy and competition for relative gains. Consequently, the construction of one layer directly influences the other.¹¹⁴

110 Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security. *Political psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 741-767.

111 Berenskoetter, F., Giegerich, B, (2010). From NATO to ESDP: A Social Constructivist Analysis of German Strategic Adjustment after the End of the Cold War. *Security Studies* 19 (3): 407–52. (3): 407–52.

112 Eberle, J., Handl, V. (2018). Ontological Security, Civilian Power, and German Foreign Policy Toward Russia1. *Foreign Policy Analysis*.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

While the desire for stability explains why states are not prone to changing their foreign policy unexpectedly - that is not the case when an unexpected event happens (a crisis) - when confronted with disrupting events, states autobiographical narratives are shaken, and their foreign policy questioned.¹¹⁵ Foreign policy in this case should then be understood as “*a complex process of responding to a crisis by recalibrating the autobiographical narrative so that it becomes realigned with policy actions under new conditions.*”¹¹⁶

According to the three-layered model, a state can respond to a crisis by adjusting narratives in any of the three layers. How and whether this happens, is dependent on *the “content, shape, and broader cultural context of each particular narrative and, as such, defies theory-driven predictions.”*¹¹⁷ However, to understand the extent of this shift, we also need to look at what glues the layers together: the autobiographical narrative.

In the next sections we will try to extract NATO autobiographical narrative by analyzing the alliances’ strategic documents. We will start our review from the first one published in 1991, to enquire and give an idea on how it has changed over time.

3.2 Extracting Autobiographical Narratives from Strategic Concepts

NATO’s strategic concept is the official document that the Alliance “enduring purpose and nature, and its fundamental security tasks”.¹¹⁸ These documents are central in identifying what aspects of a given security environment are given priority to and provide the guidelines needed for the adaptation of the military forces.¹¹⁹ Simultaneously, the documents are also

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

useful for raising support at home while preparing for future engagements that cannot be predicted. In short, the strategic concept function is that of *conveying purpose* to the Alliance.¹²⁰ The purpose of NATO's existence has been raised many times, and often the alliance has been regarded as being a victim of its own success¹²¹, and as a consequence the Alliance has navigated through different stages of "*re-defining itself and its role, re-explain its contribution to international peace, and re-commit its member states to the common cause*".¹²² However, some core characteristics are consistent throughout the stages and that hold a degree of theoretical usefulness. The main characteristics of the alliance are the following:¹²³

- NATO is an intergovernmental organization of states, which retains a core competence for security (over and above territorial defense as such) involving the deployment of military instruments.
- NATO has developed a diverse and sophisticated array of institutions and has well-established institutionalized procedures for the formulation and conduct of its actions.
- NATO is the self-declared carrier of Euro-Atlantic values and on this basis embodies a community identity. (Individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – also part of every strategic document reaffirmation)

120 Ringsmose, J., Rynning, S. (2009). Come Home, NATO? The Atlantic Alliance's New Strategic Concept.

121 Jakobsen, P. Viggo, Ringsmose, J. (2018), Victim of its Own Success: how NATO's Difficulties are Caused by the Absence of a Unifying Existential Threat. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 16:1, 38-58.

122 Wittmann, K. (2009). Towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO. In NATO Defense College.

123 Webber, M., Sperling, J., Smith, M. (2012). Essay. In *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory: Decline or Regeneration*, 49. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Each of these characteristics conceptualize NATO differently: as an alliance, as an institution, and as a community organizer. The Character of the Alliance itself stem from the mainstream IR frameworks of neo-realism, neo-liberal institutionalism and social constructivism.¹²⁴

The three characteristics above correspond also with the three-core value of the alliance which have been reiterated since the first Strategic Concepts: international norm-based, multilateral security and defense organization.

3.2.1 Post-Cold War NATO

Following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and end of the Warsaw pact, it was a common expectation that NATO would also follow its opponent. During the Cold War the alliance had been successful in ensuring the freedom and peace in Europe. However, the collapse of the bipolar order simultaneously opened new venues of diverse risks and challenges. Indeed, most of the literature studying the post-Cold War NATO reiterates on the “identity crisis” that the alliance witnessed after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, contrary to the above statements, Flockhart argues that during that time the alliance was experiencing a period of “high level of self-esteem”.¹²⁶ According to the author, the had successfully intervened and settled the Bosnian conflict with the 1995 Dayton Agreement, and was setting the ground for better ‘socializing structures’ such as the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), Membership Action Plan (MAP), Partnership for Peace (PfP), and the Membership Action Plan (MAP).¹²⁷

124 Ibid.

125 Eckhard Lübke (1990) Nato's Identity Crisis, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 46:8, 30-33, DOI: 10.1080/00963402.1990.11459889

126 Flockhart, T. (2011). After the Strategic Concept. Danish Institute for International Studies.

127 Ibid.

Moreover, the enlargement of the Alliance with the addition of Central European countries such the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland also served as a boost of confidence for NATO. As it shows, the first decade of the 21st century was a period mainly concerned with cooperation, dialogue, democratization, and security. In other words, during the 90's NATO had a coherent narrative that “comfortably backed up the identity construction process”¹²⁸ and “was reinforced through both rhetorical and functional action”.¹²⁹ NATO's dilemma after the cold war was that of “going out of area, or going out of business”.¹³⁰ Klaus Wittmann refers to the second period as one contributing to a “*free and peaceful Europe*” with the help of tools such as that of Partnership for Peace (PfP) and enlargement.¹³¹ Similarly, Karolina Libront sees a shift in NATO's identity after 1989. Libront argues that the alliance changed from one concerned with collective defense to one concerned mainly with collective security.¹³² Starting from the first strategic document of 1991, the author argues that the organization's mission is not entirely concerned with “keeping the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down” anymore.¹³³

On April 1999, the Heads of State and Government approved the Alliance's new Strategic Concept in Washington. The documents listed these fundamental security tasks:

- **Security:** To provide one of the indispensable foundations for a stable Euro-Atlantic security environment, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in which no country would be able to intimidate or coerce any other through the threat or use of force.
- **Consultation:** To serve, as provided for in Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, as an essential transatlantic forum for Allied consultations on any issues that affect their

¹²⁸ Ibid. Pp.35

¹²⁹ Ibid. Pp.35

¹³⁰Lübckemeier, E. (1990). Nato's Identity Crisis. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 46:8, 30-33.

¹³¹ Wittmann, K. (2009). Towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO. In NATO Defense College.

¹³² Libront, K. (2013). Evolution of NATO's Identity in the 21st Century.

¹³³ Ismay, H. (1960). Memoirs of General Lord Ismay

vital interests, including possible developments posing risks for members' security, and for appropriate co-ordination of their efforts in fields of common concern.

- **Deterrence and Defense:** To deter and defend against any threat of aggression against any NATO member state as provided for in Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty.¹³⁴

And in order to enhance the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area:

- **Crisis Management:** To stand ready, case-by-case and by consensus, in conformity with Article 7 of the Washington Treaty, to contribute to effective conflict prevention and to engage actively in crisis management, including crisis response operations
- **Partnership:** To promote wide-ranging partnership, cooperation, and dialogue with other countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, with the aim of increasing transparency, mutual confidence and the capacity for joint action with the Alliance.¹³⁵

In conceptualizing security, the strategic concept didn't depart from the famous 'Harmel Report' – a 1967 NATO report of the council that outlined the organization deterrence and détente stance.¹³⁶ The proposed dual approach of deterrence and defense - including here but not limited to consultations – can be read as an iteration of the Cold War era thinking.

Nevertheless, on the 1999 text there is a noticeable departure from the older strategic documents (including here that of 1991), that argues that “*none of the Alliance's weapons will ever be used except in self-defense*”¹³⁷ and that it “*does not consider itself to be anyone's adversary*”.¹³⁸

134 NATO. (1999, April 24). The Alliance's Strategic Concept [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en

135 NATO. (1999, April 24). The Alliance's Strategic Concept [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en

136 Also known as “Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance” written by Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel in 1967. The report is known for being the first one to introduce the dual track approach of deterrence and détente.

137 NATO. (1991, November 07). The Alliance's New Strategic Concept [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm?selectedLocale=en

138 Ibid.

The 1991 and 1999 strategic concepts widen the security concerns and with it encompasses “military and non-military which are multi-directional and often difficult to predict”.¹³⁹ Such irregular threats can be regional crises on the periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area that might stem from countries facing serious economic, social and political difficulties. In addition, other sources of instability can as well be ethnic and religious rivalries, territorial disputes, abuse of human rights such as terrorism, acts of sabotage, criminality, disruptions of energy sources and vital resources and uncontrolled movement of large groups of people escaping from conflict.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in 1999 part of the security concerns for the alliance was also the proliferations of NBC weaponry (nuclear biological or chemical), especially in cases in which the latter would have fallen in the hands of a non-state actors.¹⁴¹

In conclusion, the 1999 NATO – or the second strategic concept – sought to perform the following security tasks: 1) Deterrence and defense as provided in Article V and VI of the Washington treaty, 2) consultation on any issues that might affect the security of any of the members granted by Article IV and the coordination of such activities 3) commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and growth of democratic institutions.¹⁴²

Moreover, the Kosovo and Bosnia experience added a fourth task to the Alliance: *Crisis Management and Crisis Response Operations*. Operation Allied Force (OAF) and the Bosnian experience heavily influenced the addition of new language to the document like “*the significance of new missions, NATO’s relationship with the UN, reform of command and*

139 NATO. (1999, April 24). The Alliance's Strategic Concept [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en

140 Ibid.

141 Hoffman, F. (2007). Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

142 NATO. (1999, April 24). The Alliance's Strategic Concept [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm?selectedLocale=en

force structures, and the containment of risks and crises in service of maintaining the security and stability of the Euro- Atlantic area.”¹⁴³

3.2.2 Early 2000’s: A Troubled Alliance

During this period the Alliance witnessed a steady decline in comparison with the previous version of itself – that being the post-cold war alliance.¹⁴⁴ According to Flockhart, the alliance witnessed some decrease in “self-esteem” due to 1) the negative effects in the war in Kosovo that highlighted operational and organizational incompatibilities with the European counterpart, 2) the lack of multilateralism with the Bush administration, and 3) the “near death experience” when in February 2003, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg refused an authorization for a NATO advanced military planning to help Turkey in the event of a war in Iraq.¹⁴⁵ The event also showed the fissures between the members i.e., the French and the Germans resisting to the so-called “Anglo-American march to war”¹⁴⁶

The attacks of 9/11 were another historical milestone for the alliance. For the first time since its creation, Article V of the treaty was invoked. NATO had no other choice but to embark on the next out of area operation, crossing for the first time the borders of the traditional Atlantic area. By the mid 2000’s the debate of NATO’s future pivoted towards the issue of Afghanistan.

On August 2003, NATO took over the command of UN-authorized International Security

143 Webber, M., J. Sperling, Smith, M. (2021). *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory - Decline or Regeneration*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

144 Flockhart, T. (2011). *After the Strategic Concept*. Danish Institute for International Studies.

145 Flockhart, T. (2011). *After the Strategic Concept*. Danish Institute for International Studies.

146 Webber, M., J. Sperling, Smith, M. (2021). *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory - Decline or Regeneration*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Assistance Force (ISAF) showing its continuous vitality.¹⁴⁷ However, the alliance was missing a clear and consistent narrative on why it was there on the first place. Not being able to point out the goals and achievements in a hostile environment adds more difficulty to the process of constructing narration.¹⁴⁸ The complexity of action in the region and the different perceptions of individual European allies further undermined the *functional* actions that needed to be taken.¹⁴⁹ The campaign in Afghanistan proved to be very different and more complex than the ones previously fought in the Balkans. ISAF came under a lot of pressure from internal debates among Member States. For example, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates commented that: *“If an alliance of the world’s greatest democracies cannot summon the will to get the job done in a mission that we agree is morally just and vital to our security, then our citizens may begin to question [...] the utility of the 60- year- old transatlantic security project itself.”*¹⁵⁰

Likewise, NATO’s mission in Libya in 2011 lasted longer than it was expected and along the way the alliance again witnessed some fissures among Member States, this time coming mainly from Germany and Poland.¹⁵¹

2006 comprehensive political guidance

The Comprehensive Approach (CA) was adopted in 2006 at the Riga Summit. The CA document emphasizes on an integrated civil-military approach to crisis management. The lessons learned in Bosnia and Kosovo showed that crisis management, but more importantly

147 Ibid.

148 Flockhart, T. (2011). After the Strategic Concept. Danish Institute for International Studies.

149 Ibid.

150 Speech at the Conference of European Armies, Heidelberg, Germany, October 2007, cited in Senlis Afghanistan, *Stumbling into Chaos: Afghanistan on the Brink* (London: MF Publishing, 2007), p. 12.

151 Webber, M., J. Sperling, Smith, M. (2021). *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory - Decline or Regeneration*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

stabilization operations, depend a lot on civilian instruments.¹⁵² However, as Peter Viggo pointed out the gap between rhetoric and practice became visible during the mission in Afghanistan¹⁵³ and issues regarding the vagueness of the document, especially on responsibility sharing with the UN, EU and NGOs was also raised by Flockhart.¹⁵⁴

The 2006 CA was released as an affirmation of the previous responsibilities delivered from the previous Strategic Documents (1991,1999), but had a more concise focus on CIMIC operations and its organizational structures. Today, CIMIC teams are military personnel tasked to serve as a liaison between the military presence and the local authorities (and civilians). The CIMIC approach complement Counter Insurgency (COIN) operations in combining military operations with local forces to build strong institutions. The goal is to make a gradual transfer or responsibilities to local authorities e.g., like in Afghanistan and Kosovo.¹⁵⁵

3.2.3 2010 Strategic Concept: NATO 3.0

On November 2010 the new strategic document was introduced in Lisbon, Portugal. The new document was a renewal of the 1999 Washington summit, and was expected to set the alliances' trajectory for the following ten years. In comparison with the previous one, the new document remained devoted to the Alliance core tasks: that of collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security, mentioning elements such the enlargement process and partnership plan with its main partner EU, and the extend of a renewed relationship with

152 Ringsmose, J., Rynning, S. (2011). NATO's New Strategic Concept: A Comprehensive Assessment. DIIS Report (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)). Pp. 84

153 Ibid. Pp.89

154 Flockhart, T. (2011). After the Strategic Concept. Danish Institute for International Studies. Pp.45

155 Ringsmose, J., Rynning, S. (2011). NATO's New Strategic Concept: A Comprehensive Assessment. DIIS Report (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)). Pp 79

Russia.¹⁵⁶ The 2010 strategic document does not prioritize between defense and crisis management, what is laid out instead is a focus on *conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict support*. Moreover, monitoring and analyzing the international environment is leading the alliance towards an all-hand approach with all the stages of the crisis, wherever that is.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, at the Lisbon summit the Alliance decided to enhance the contribution to the 2006 CA by implementing these changes:

- By better predicting crises with improved early warning systems, orderly planning, and of course early engagement to prevent deterioration
- Development of doctrines and capabilities for expeditionary ops including here COIN, stabilization and reconstructions. This in turn will influence NATO's defense planning
- Building on the lessons learned from previous crisis (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan) NATO will develop crisis management capabilities to interface more effectively with civilian partners. Such activities entail planning and coordination with the civil domain until the latter is ready to take over
- Further enhancement of CIMIC planning under the auspices of the crisis spectrum
- NATO will develop capabilities for training and development of local forces so that these forces can take care of the crisis without the need of an external (international) intervention

156 Nato. "Strategic Concept 2010." NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm.

157 Ringsmose, J., Rynning, S. (2011). NATO's New Strategic Concept: A Comprehensive Assessment. DIIS Report (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)).

- NATO will train specialists from member states, made available for rapid deployment and to enable them to work with NATO personnel and other specialists from other member countries.
- Finally, NATO will intensify political consultations among members both on the beginning, continuation and the end of the crisis.

What is noticeable in this strategic concept is the shift of the alliance from an organization concerned with collective defense, towards an actor that prefers a more comprehensive approach that entails a broader domain of crisis management.

3.3 Discussion

In the previous paragraph we went through what are known today as the *three periods* (or versions) of NATO strategic stance. In the post- Cold War period we see a NATO that from a purely defensive focus, with a clear enemy – the URSS and the Warsaw pact – becomes mainly concerned with the consolidation of peace and democracy throughout Europe, with the process of enlargement, and focuses promoting dialogue and conducting successful operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. In Flockhart’s words, following the end of the Communist block the alliance was enjoying a period of high self esteem in terms of ontological security. Between 1991 and 1999 period NATO released two strategic concepts which reinforced and reaffirmed the core tasks of the organization, at the same time also broadening the security area from a Euro-Atlantic centered one, to an all encompassing ‘borders’ crisis management. Finally, in

2001 with NATO version 3.0 (or 2.5 in Flockhart's eyes) we noticed the first cracks of the alliance and its ontological security. With the attack in the World Trade Center, the noticeable rift between the US and the European counterparts started to show its first signs when the alliance started to question the importance of out of area mission, with the most contested one being that of engaging Iraq in 2003, Afghanistan in 2001, and Libya in 2011. The post 9/11 (early 2000) NATO was an organization that was having difficulties in reconciling member's strategic interests with the Alliance goal, while differences between American agenda that was pushing a more globalist approach towards crisis management.¹⁵⁸

158 Ringsmose, J., Rynning, S. (2011). NATO's New Strategic Concept: A Comprehensive Assessment. DIIS Report (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)). Pp. 102

NATO's Reaction: The Georgian and Ukrainian War

In this chapter I will apply three-layered model to analyze NATO's response to Russia in the context of the 2008 Georgian and the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. In order do so, I will adopt a comparative case study approach.¹⁵⁹ He reason I choose to adopt this methodology is because both the cases are similar in terms of being an attack on a neighboring country, disregard for international law, and the status quo of borders. However, still display substantial differences for the case study to have internal validity. This empirical search is primarily grounded on transcripts from NATO speeches, official memos, interviews from top level officials, and Summit reports. The materials will be subjected to narrative analysis to see how the identities of NATO, Russia, and the international order are narrated across the two periods, and whether the key elements of NATO – security and deterrence provider, partnership and consultation organization, and shared community values of human rights, rule of law and democracy – have undergone any adjustment.

4.1 Georgia 2008

On August 8, 2008 a long-lasting simmering conflict between Georgia and Russia escalated into an active confrontation between Moscow and Tbilisi.¹⁶⁰

With the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, in a referendum the Caucasian nation declared its independence from the Union of Socialist Republics. However, the decision did not sit well

¹⁵⁹ Hansen, L. (2006). *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

¹⁶⁰ History.com Editors (2020) 5-Days Long Russo-Georgian War Begins. HISTORY. A&E Television Networks.

with the Russian minority in South Ossetia and Abkhazia – that make up for nearly 20% of the country’s territory- who started seizing territory and called for a referendum to be held to decide the future of the region.¹⁶¹ In fact, South Ossetians have sided with Russia as early as the 1920s when the Russian Army invaded Georgia and declared it a Socialist republic with North Ossetia – on the other side of the mountains- as part of Russia.¹⁶² Similarly, Abkhazians had declared independence following the fall of the URSS, and have held close relations with Russia since then.¹⁶³

As a stalemate ensued relations between Russia and Georgia in 2004 the situation further heightened after the US expressed its support for Georgia’s and Ukraine’s NATO membership in April 2008.¹⁶⁴

After some border skirmishes between Georgia and the pro-Russian separatists in South Ossetia, on August 1 separatist troops shelled Georgian villages which lead the Georgia president Saakashvili to declare a ceasefire on August 7. Acknowledging that the rebels would not in fact engage in light of the new ceasefire, on August 8 Georgian troops launched an attack on the city of Tskhinvali in South Ossetia. However, given that Russian troops had already entered South Ossetia – with the pretext of coming to the aid of its citizens- the Georgian advanced was repulse within a few days and a new ceasefire declared on August 13.

With the new ceasefire negotiate, Russia pulled out of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but recognized their independence from Georgia, and diplomatic ties between Moscow and Tbilisi cut.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Harris, C. (2018). Europe’s Forgotten War: The Georgia-Russia Conflict Explained a Decade On. Euronews.

¹⁶³ IWPR Georgia (2013). August 2008: Russian-Georgian War: Timeline. Institute for War & peace Reporting.

¹⁶⁴ Harris, C. (2018). Europe’s Forgotten War: The Georgia-Russia Conflict Explained a Decade On. Euronews.

¹⁶⁵ IWPR Georgia (2013). August 2008: Russian-Georgian War: Timeline. Institute for War & peace Reporting.

When analyzing the speeches in their *internal* dimension the narratives adopted by the actors focus around reconfirmation of article five commitment, therefore there were no evident changes on this domain. NATO reaffirmed the commitment of the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, to continue the intensive engagement with Georgia and Ukraine via the Membership Action Plan (MAP) application.¹⁶⁶ However, on December of the same year the decision to continue with the MAP was forfeited and a one-to-one dialogue was initiated with both the countries with the goal of encouraging military and political reforms.¹⁶⁷ Not only did the alliance express the continuous commitment to the enlargement process but it also reiterated collective assurance, in line with Article V of NATO. This statement was prompted due to some members calling for “*a reappraisal of the balance between an expeditionary NATO and our core task of collective defense.*”¹⁶⁸ The reassurance in this case can be seen as a necessary step to de-escalate member’s worries toward the shocking event that happened in Georgia. Member countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland and the Baltic countries were among those that expressed great concern.¹⁶⁹

In its *intersubjective* dimension the narrative for constructing the *other*, Russia, was evident and employed strong tones. In an emergency meeting on August 12th NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer positioned Russia as a country that had no consideration on the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia.¹⁷⁰ Next, it was communicated that NAC had also condemned the “*disproportionate use of force by the Russians*” and reiterating the

166 Nato. “Statement - Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels.” NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_29950.htm.

167 De Haas, M. (2009). NATO-Russia Relations after the Georgian Conflict.

168 Nato. “Speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer at the Royal United Service Institute.” NATO.int, September 18, 2008. <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080918a.html>.

169 ‘Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held at NATO Headquarters’, 19 August 2008, www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-104e.html; N. Busse, ‘Krieg gegen Russland’, *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 November 2008.

170 Nato. “Press Point by NATO Secretary General.” Meeting of the North Atlantic Council on the situation in Georgia. <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080812e.html>.

need for an “*immediate cessation of hostilities*” as the most important thing on the agenda.¹⁷¹. In short, the construction of the Russian *other* was taking shape as a country that was going against international recognized norms because of 1) the lack of respect of the sovereignty of Georgia, 2) the destabilizing effect it was having in the region, 3) and because of its indifference for the humanitarian crisis stemming from the renewed conflict. In other words, Russia was portrayed as a country with a visible disregard for international rules. However, the narrative adjustment regarding the Russian other was kept with an *open-door* approach, meaning that if Russia would have agreed to sit at the negotiation table and take a proactive role in ceasing the clashes in Georgia, assurances would have been granted to Russia to resume the role of a partner again.

In its *systemic* dimension the alliance went through a brief readjustment on the *multilateral* dimension. NATO was accusing Russia of compromising regional stability. However, the alliance was calling for a non-military resolution to the conflict in Georgia reiterating that “*peaceful conflict resolution is a key principle of the Partnership for Peace Framework Document.*”¹⁷². On a speech delivered in September, NATO Secretary General questioned the role of Russia in the international system, however the goal was not only that of antagonizing the latter (to somehow pressure it), but also that of keeping an open door for further cooperation and dialogue. In relation to Russia, it was said that there was no need for making a “*U-turn in NATO’s policy vis-à-vis Russia. You need to make a U-turn when you’ve gone totally wrong.*”¹⁷³ When discussing about the challenges in Afghanistan the overall

171 Nato. “Press Point by NATO Secretary General.” Meeting of the North Atlantic Council on the situation in Georgia. <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080812e.html>.

172 Nato. “Statement - Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels.” NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_29950.htm.

173 Nato. “Speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer at the Royal United Service Institute.” NATO.int, September 18, 2008. <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080918a.html>.

sentiment was that *“both NATO and Russia face a number of common challenges – and both NATO and Russia will be better off by facing them together. That is the reason why we invested so much in the NATO-Russia partnership.”*¹⁷⁴

Nonetheless, NATO still continued to reinstate dialogue and cooperation with Russia even though the latter had disregarded the August 12th armistice plan and had recognized the partition of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia despite of international laments. The reason for this dual-track diplomacy was primarily due to NATO’s interest in keeping Russia at the negotiation table in regards to counter-terrorism operations, non/proliferation and arms control in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵

4.2 Ukraine 2014

The Ukrainian war started as a domestic crisis in November 2013 sparked by the rejection of President Viktor Yanukovich of an EU proposal for a greater economic integration within the Union. When on December 1st mass protests broke out in the Independence Square in Kiev, the initial response of the government was that of a violent crackdown by the Russian-backed Yanukovich of the mass protests supported by both the US and Europe.¹⁷⁶

To salvage the Russian influence over the peninsula, in April pro-Russian separatist began seizing territory in eastern Ukraine after the mass-protests had overthrown the government forcing Yanukovich to flee the country.¹⁷⁷ Since then, clashes between rebels and the Ukrainian military have escalated and intensified, with Russian troops seizing the Ukrainian

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ De Haas, M. (2009). NATO-Russia Relations after the Georgian Conflict.

¹⁷⁶ Fisher, M. (2014) Everything You Need to Know About the Ukraine Crisis. Vox, September 3, 2014.

¹⁷⁷ Amadeo, K. (2020) Ukraine Crisis Summary and Explanation. Foreign Policy Institute.

navy in Sevastopol on March 3rd, Crimea's independent government voting in favor of an annexation on March 6th, and Russia recognizing the new borders on March 18.¹⁷⁸

While Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected the "annexation" label, the Crimean crisis has brought relations between Russia and the West to its lowest point since the end of the Cold War.¹⁷⁹ To understand the conflict a lot comes down to the country's long history of Russian domination, that more recently, between 1917 and 1999 Crimea had been an agricultural and strategic outpost for the URSS and had seen an increase of ethnic-Russian migration favored by the Soviets to strengthen their hold of the sea.¹⁸⁰ For this reason, between 1991 and 2014 Crimea was a Ukrainian region that enjoyed special autonomy- due to the large minority of Russian Inhabiting the peninsula- and hosted a Russian military base. After the ousting of Yanukovich, in late February what initially seemed like pro-Russian rebels, turned out to be unmarked Russian special forces (*little green men*) that had started seizing territory in the Donbas area in Eastern Ukraine again highlighting the feeling of disenfranchisement between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine.¹⁸¹

Relations between Russia and the West further deteriorated after the Malaysian Airline Flight incident on July 17, after which the Russian army intervened by invading eastern Ukraine in support of the rebels.¹⁸²

Although Russia denies that a hostile invasion is taking place, Russian tanks, soldiers and artillery has been crossing the border regularly since August 2014.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Aljazeera (2014) Timeline: Ukraine Political Crisis. September 20, 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Fisher, M. (2014) Everything You Need to Know About the Ukraine Crisis. Vox, September 3, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Amadeo, K. (2020) Ukraine Crisis Summary and Explanation. Foreign Policy Institute.

¹⁸¹ Fisher, M. (2014) Everything You Need to Know About the Ukraine Crisis. Vox, September 3, 2014.

¹⁸² Aljazeera (2014) Timeline: Ukraine Political Crisis. September 20, 2014.

¹⁸³ Amadeo, K. (2020) Ukraine Crisis Summary and Explanation. Foreign Policy Institute.

In its *internal* dimension the Alliance reiterated that despite of the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, Crimea and Georgia, NATO would be the main actor when it came to a strong collective defense, and would serve as an essential forum for consultation and decision between the Member States.¹⁸⁴ On the 2014 Wales Summit NATO gave the impression of being unwavering on the topic of collective defense and as a guarantor of Transatlantic stabilization. The three core tasks of the alliance were explicitly mentioned on the Wales declaration i.e., collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.¹⁸⁵ However, changes on the *intersubjective* and *systemic* domain, consequently drove NATO to engineer some amount of narrative adjustment of the *self*. As we mentioned before, the three layers are tightly interconnected, thus this outcome is no surprise.

In both the 2014 and 2016 Summit the Alliance had emphasized on the principle of deterrence against Russia; and by 2016 the political language at this point has also been translated to concrete steps such as the enhancement of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) with immediate effect.¹⁸⁶

In its *intersubjective* dimension the alliance stepped up the negative tone in referring to their Russian counterpart. On a speech delivered on April 4th 2014 by the then Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow in Krakow, the Russian side is constructed as a revanchist state whose “...goal is to create a sphere of influence in Eurasia and to prevent the emergence of stable democracies that could call into question the legitimacy of Russia’s

184 Nato. “Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales.” NATO.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?selectedLocale=en.

185 Ibid.

186 Nato. “Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales.” NATO.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?selectedLocale=en.

authoritarian system".¹⁸⁷ However, the most evident discrepancy from the previous construction is that during the Georgian crisis Russia begins to be designated less as partner and more as a country on track of becoming NATO's adversary.¹⁸⁸ Russia's apparent disregard of international law and proper conduct was interpreted as being at odds with NATO's core belief of shared democratic norms, and that Moscow's destabilization of the region was had actively undermined the alliance's task as a security provider. The narrative towards Russia went as far as labeling it as an "*reminiscent of Stalin's times*".¹⁸⁹ The framing of Russia as the main culprit of the deteriorating security in the Euro Atlantic region was facilitated also by other 'western' actions that acted in unison against Putin and the revanchist Russia i.e., the expulsion from the G8, the bilateral US and EU sanctions, the freezing of all civil and operations of NATO and Russia (leaving only a single window for political dialogue).¹⁹⁰

In its *systemic* dimension there were noticeable shifts towards a cold-war era posture vis a vis Russia, partly because of the construction of the Russian *other* after the annexation of Crimea and the incursion in Eastern Ukraine. The general feeling behind this posture and narrative change was that of losing Russia as a partner for cooperation and dialogue, thus the dual track approach was adjusted to resume a deterrence posture. The shift towards deterrence and containment was also partly as a result of the re-adjustment of the alliance's *self*. For example, NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow expressed the "*painful and necessary choice*" of positioning Russia as "*less of a partner and more as an adversary*" if the latter's path would have continued to be centered around aggression and

187 Nato. "A New Strategic Reality in Europe" - Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow." NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_108889.htm.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

190 Trenin, D. (2014) Report. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

confrontation.¹⁹¹ NATO's adjusting of the narrative in the systemic dimension switched from accusing Russia of being reckless and a destabilizing agent that disregards international law, to Russia as lost partner that had positioned itself as an adversary. However, changes in this dimension didn't cause a severe ontological (in)security because part of the alliance's autobiographical narrative was that of being a deterrent towards threats emanating from everywhere. It is also important to mention here that this is not a new position for NATO. After all, the alliance has been here before. Containment of Russia (then USSR) is a familiar approach for NATO, it will certainly not shock the alliance to its core.

4.3 Comparison of the Periods

The three-layered model helped us capture narrative adjustments of NATO right after the crises in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine. To do so I used official press releases, reports from NATO Headquarters and speeches from the Secretary Generals and NATO ministers. In justifying policy change via narratives, this thesis draws on the work of Hansen who believes that relationship between narrative and identity construction have a constituent rather than a causal link.¹⁹² Similarly, Subotic consider political figure inside the organization as bearing a higher changing power of narratives due to their position as "narrative entrepreneurs"¹⁹³.

The autobiographical narrative of NATO for this study has been set to international norm-based, multilateral security and defense organization. These features have been extracted from the core values of the Strategic concepts and have remained unchangeable for the past 30 years.

191 Ibid.

192 Hansen, L. (2006). *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

193 Subotic, J. (2016). Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12 (4): 610–27.

The three layers mentioned in the model need to be interpreted as interconnected, meaning that changes in one or more dimensions can also affect the others. Finally, by comparing both the periods, this research findings suggest that:

On the *internal* domain the narration of the ‘*self*’ experienced a salient increase during the Ukraine war. During the Georgian war NATO made no noticeable adjustments, and what was delivered through speeches was nothing more than the repetition of a still functional Article V, and the continuation of the enlargement process as ‘business as usual’. It has been sometimes argued that the reason towards such a lax stance, could have stemmed from the Alliance experience in Kosovo in its unilateral declaration of independence in 2008.¹⁹⁴ Some have regarded the Kosovo case as being NATO’s the “*original sin*”.¹⁹⁵ In regards to the adjustment of the *self* after (and during) the Ukrainian war, the language didn’t depart much from that adopted in the Georgian case. However, changes on the *intersubjective* and the *systematic domain* did affect policy choices at the time e.g., the creation of the NRF, VJTF, RAP. The *internal* domain on both the Georgian and the Ukrainian war was almost every time anchored around deterrence and collective security which in turn reinforced the ontological security of the alliance.

On the *intersubjective* domain the construction of the Russian ‘*other*’ was done with a strong and critical tone since the beginning of the conflict on S. Ossetia. NATO Secretary General often repeated keyword such as ‘worrying humanitarian situation’ and ‘disproportionate use of force’ adopted also in official texts. Meanwhile, following the Crimean

194 United Nations. “The Situation in Georgia.” Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council, 2014. https://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/2008-2009/08-09_Introduction.pdf.

195 DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG. 2008b. Plenarprotokoll 16/193, December 4.

annexation and the war in Eastern Ukraine, the narration of the Russian ‘*other*’ experienced an increase of negative tones. On certain speeches like the one of Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow, Russia was positioned not as a partner, but as an opponent to the Alliance. Unlike in the Georgian war, the cooperation between the two actors was put on a halt. Nevertheless, in practice NATO and Moscow maintained a channel of communication with each other. Placing Russia under the designation of an opponent during the Ukrainian war, reinforced NATO’s autobiography as a deterrent against threats (i.e., Article V). Literature agrees that this posture has been mostly welcomed by Eastern European members that have been under the USSR umbrella during the cold war.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, by anchoring itself on the deterrence posture, NATO satisfied one of his core tasks. Thus, ontological security was restored by making adjustments on the *intersubjective* dimension, which in turn, pivoted the alliance towards a familiar role that it had done since 1949.

On the *systemic* dimension during the Georgian war NATO was actively calling for restraint from both actors, while at the same time calling on Russia for dialogue through the NRC, and strongly pushing for the implementation of the ‘Six-Point Peace Plan’ brokered by France. For NATO, keeping Russia on the loop, despite its unacceptable role on the Georgian conflict looked promising. A great factor to this *détente* approach was the involvement of Russia in Afghanistan, with some arguing that the Kosovo independence played a role too.¹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, NATO’s narrative adjustment of the changing environment prompted the construction of the systemic dimension and the Russian ‘*other*’ as a breakaway from internationally recognized rules and norms. The positioning of Russia as closer to an opponent

¹⁹⁶ Trenin, D. (2014). The Ukraine Crisis and The Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry. Carnegie Moscow Center.

¹⁹⁷ Friedman, George. (2008). Georgia and Kosovo: A SINGLE INTERTWINED CRISIS. Stratfor. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/georgia-and-kosovo-single-intertwined-crisis>.

in comparison to a cooperative member of the international system, automatically adjusted the alliance's posture from a multilateral and normative agent towards a cold war era deterrent concerned with the deterioration of the Euro-Atlantic region because of Russia's actions. Therefore, the narrative adjustment of NATO was adjusted toward a more assertive alliance, leaving cooperation with Russia as a wishful thinking, not as the current reality. Nevertheless, NATO was still successful at keeping a sense of ontological security, no matter the difficulties.

Conclusion

The aim of this work has been that of investigating the propagation of the concept of Hybrid Warfare in the political discourse of major actors and organizations. My research interest has been mainly driven by the lack of the concept operability of a term – hybrid threats – that has been widely used by NATO and other international actors when issuing documents and implementing policies.

In the first chapter, we went through the concepts that share similarities with the concept of hybrid warfare. By consulting with the existing literature and by analyzing the evolution of the term, literature suggests that given the similarities between concepts, trying to define hybrid warfare as a new way to conduct war looks more like an attempt to reinvent the wheel. Moreover, the term originates from Western military and academic circles and has different meaning for different individuals. The term soon found itself to be an all-encompassing label for modern wars and conflicts.

In the second chapter, I have introduced the theory of Ontological Security in International Relations. The theory originates from Anthony Giddens work centered around

the idea that individuals need a sense of continuation of the self in order to be ontologically secure (not anxious). The first approach to Ontological Security in International Relations was introduced by authors such as Brent J. Steele, Jennifer Mitzen, Jef Huysmans, and Kinnvall in the late 90's. In this work I have reviewed the works of these authors and adopted Mitzen's argument in which identity (or the autobiography) of states and actors it's not inherited, rather constructed with an intersubjective other (interaction).

In the third chapter, I have then applied Flockhart's strategy of 'doing' and 'being' to NATO as an organization disrupted by the complexities of Hybrid Threats. Moreover, I have argued the inability of the alliance of responding to hybrid threats further disturbs the routinization process which plays an important role in the actor's ontological security. Following our attempted of bridging hybrid war to NATO's Ontological Security, we then proceed to explicate policy changes influenced by Ontological Security. Next, I have introduced the three-layered model by Eberle and Handl that conceptualize ontological security as the outcome of a particular interaction between narrative of the *self*, the *other* and the international *system*. I have then proceeded to extract NATO's autobiographical narrative from the Strategic Concept released from 1991 to 2010. Once I have extracted this narrative which is the core security tasks of the alliance i.e., security, consultation, deterrence and defense, plus partnership and crisis management, I adopted the model to reconstruct NATO's response to the wars in Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2014).

In the fourth chapter, I then applied the three-layered model and analyzed the narration adjustment of NATO. This research findings suggest that during the Georgian war, the alliance played a more passive role and the narration vis a vis the policy adjustments were constructed in a way in which NA|TO was calling for peaceful resolution of the conflict i.e., requesting restraint, de-escalation and humanitarian intervention. Whereas, in the Ukrainian conflict the Alliance narrative suggests a shift in line with Article V, where elements focusing on deterrence

and collective defense are a salient aspect of the discourses. Thus, the adjustment on the *internal* domain shifted from crisis management and stabilizing actor, to collective defense reiteration and deterrence. I agree with literature that argues that the passage at the time caused a level of ontological security dissatisfaction for the alliance, with some members questioning the functionality of the Article V, and the overall strategy of NATO's goal for enlargement and out of area operations.

In the *intersubjective* domain the Russian '*other*' was constructed as a country that disregarded international law, civil rights and democratic institutions, sovereignty and the principles of peaceful resolutions to conflicts. Here, the narrative adjustment was evident since the war in Georgia and continued to increase until the event that followed: the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine. During the Ukrainian conflict the language went as far as comparing the Russian federation to a state reminiscing Stalin's time. Moreover, in the Georgian conflict the approach was that of keeping bridges up, for example the NRC and CIMIC operations. This did not happen in the Ukrainian conflict. During and after the conflict in Ukraine, NATO suspended all activities and consultations with Russia, keeping only the informal meetings and political dialogue as the only open channel of communication. In other words, the narration adjustment of the Russian '*other*' went from a partner whose close ties and cooperation contribute to the stability of the region and further, to a destabilizing agent without any considerations of international law and proper conduct.

In the *systemic* domain the adjustment is closely linked with the construction of the NATO '*self*' and the Russian '*other*'. From a cooperative state actively engaged with NATO in regional (and global) stability – peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan - following the Ukrainian crisis, Russia became a destabilizing and disruptive actor. Since Russia was acting in total disregard for international rules and stability, NATO had to step in and adjust the narration. NATO went from being a multilateral and normative-driven

organization concerned with conflict prevention and institution building, to a defensive/deterrent actor. However, the adjustment was not easy because it was in-between these passages that ontological security was mostly shaken.

For the Alliance this is not a new thing, it has done it before: following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and end of the Warsaw pact, it was a common expectation that NATO would also follow its opponent. However, the collapse of the bipolar order simultaneously opened new venues of diverse risks and challenges.

The constant changing of the latter since the early days of the creation through the three stages discussed before, is what makes NATO more resilient to change. The Alliance has the capacity and the tendency to overcome ontological (in)securities by readjusting to the threats while keeping a constant story of the self, that partly due to the elastic attributes inherent of an alliance that has endured the tides of time.

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