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Forthcoming in the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*

To cite:

Baciu, Cornelia (Forthcoming, 2021) 'Beyond the Emergency *Problematique*. How Do Security IOs Respond to Crises – A Case Study of NATO Response to COVID-19', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 19 (3).

Beyond the Emergency *Problematique*. How Do Security IOs Respond to Crises – A Case Study of NATO Response to COVID-19

Cornelia Baci^{a*}

^a Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

Dr. Cornelia Baci
Postdoctoral Fellow in ‘European Security’
Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg
Beim Schlump 83
20144 Hamburg
Germany

E-mail: Cornelia.Baci@jhu.edu; Cornelia.Baci@uni-konstanz.de

Orcid: 0000-0003-2425-7647

Dr. Cornelia Baci is Postdoctoral Researcher in ‘European Security’ at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, Germany, and was 2019-2020 DAAD-Postdoctoral Fellow in the programme “United States, Europe, and World Order” at the Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. She researches US and EU security and foreign policy, international organisations (UN, EU, NATO), civil-military relations, risk management, and comparative peace strategy. Dr. Baci published two books: *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe. Risks and Opportunities* (co-edited with John Doyle, Springer, 2019), and *Civil-Military Relations and Global Security Governance: Strategy, Hybrid Orders and the Case of Pakistan* (Routledge 2021). She is Deputy Convenor of the BISA Foreign Policy Working Group and founding Director of the Research Network “European Security and Strategy”. She was awarded with BISA, LSRS and VEUK prizes for her research and teaching.

Abstract:

This article explores security international organisations (IOs) discourse and strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic, applying NATO as a case study. To build the argument, the article analyses speeches and public interventions by the SG and DSG coded in NVivo. First, the results of the empirical analysis suggest that during crises NATO discourse focuses on its ability to perform core functions or constructing identity, generating ‘positive’ legitimacy or increasing the relevance of military capital. Second, the findings show that the main elements of the organisation’s discourse on its crisis management strategy are: pro-activeness, continuous review and planning ahead, stepping-up activities and efficiency, lessons learned, adaptability, solidarity and civil-military cooperation. Third, a logic of IO exceptionalism and ‘emergency *problematique*’, underpinned by mission creep, could not be conclusively confirmed based on the analysed sample.

Keywords: Crisis Management; IOs; Legitimacy; COVID-19; NATO; Emergency *Problematique*

Introduction

“Can we talk about the Corona virus?” was one of the questions asked by a journalist to Jens Stoltenberg during the doorstep statement one day before the Munich Security Conference 2020. The question was lost in the multitude of voices and remained unanswered. While preventive COVID-19 measures started to be implemented by NATO already in January¹, it was on 06 March 2020 when NATO took an official position towards COVID-19. To find out what has NATO been doing during the pandemic, why has it been doing this, and how has it been faring in the doing of it, I examined all public interventions by the NATO SG and SDG, in the period 06 March – 06 May 2020², capturing the immediate NATO response to the COVID-19 crisis. The statements and public intervention data are complemented by press releases and other relevant strategic documents, announcements and reports. I coded the transcripts of statements or talks in NVivo, applying an inductive methodological approach and

¹ As mentioned by the SG during the launch of the Annual Report 2019.

² The approx. size of the analysed sample was over 25,000 words.

emerging coding³. This involved a two-step analysis. First, paragraphs or sentences (units) were coded, one by one, to themes, i. e. meaningful categories, which emerged during the coding process. Throughout the analysis, coding units were assigned to those themes, and new categories were established as needed. In a second step, after having coded the entire material, the categories that emerged were classified into meta-themes, and these are reflected in the next two sections.

The next two sections present the major thematic clusters, as they emerged from the data, and I then turn to critically discuss the results from the perspective of the emergency *problematique* and international organisations' (IOs) exceptionalism⁴ in times of crises, and compare it to NATO responses to previous crises, such as in Ukraine or Kosovo.

NATO as Crisis Manager. Ensuring Continuity of Operative Core Responsibilities and Performing Emergency-Specific Tasks

One main meta-theme to emerge from the analysis of speeches and transcripts is the dimension of NATO as a crisis manager, while simultaneously continuing the implementation of core tasks, such as deterrence and collective defence and existing missions. During public interventions and statements, both the Secretary General (SG) Jens Stoltenberg and Deputy Secretary General (DSG) Mircea Geoana emphasized crisis management as ontological purpose of NATO. The also underscored the Alliance's track-record, in terms of institutional shared command, control structure and

³ Michael Laver, Kenneth Benoit and John Garry, 'Extracting Policy Positions from Political Texts Using Words as Data,' *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev. (American Political Science Review)* 97, no. 2 (2003): 311-331.

⁴ Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, 'International authority and the emergency *problematique*: IO empowerment through crises,' *International Theory* 11, no. 2 (2019): 182-210.

operational capacity, to support, coordinate and mobilise civilian efforts. “NATO was created to deal with crises” was stated during a press conference⁵ and reiterated on many other occasions. NATO as crisis manager was central in the analysed discourse, therefore, the IO’s crisis management mandate deserves a closer look. Crisis management is not mentioned *per se* in the Washington Treaty of 04 April 1949, however, Art. 3 of the Treaty stipulates that NATO states shall “separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, ... maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity”⁶. Crisis management is a core task of NATO, along collective defence (Art. 5) and cooperative security, as defined in the 2010 Strategic Concept, the question being how, whether and to what extent pandemic response fits within that framework. Art. 5 is a central pillar of NATO founding Treaty, however, it was not invoked during the pandemic. Public mentions of the scenario of invoking Art. 5 to “combat the pandemic” were rather isolated⁷ and the analysed transcripts do not show a serious debate by NATO member states, e. g. during the Defence Ministers meeting on 15 April, on the endeavour to trigger Art. 5 in the context of the pandemic. In the press conference following the virtual meeting of the NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 03 April and the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ session on 15 April 2020, SG Jens Stoltenberg provided a summary of the content discussed during those meetings. Art. 5 was not mentioned in his remarks delivered to the press. Similarly, Art. 4 (the consultation procedure) providing member states with the possibility to bring an item on the agenda of the North Atlantic Council

⁵ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174772.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁶ See Washington Treaty 1949.

⁷ See: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/why-trump-should-trigger-natos-article-5-vs-covid-19/>.

for debate has not been invoked in the context of the pandemic. Interestingly, Art. 4 was invoked during the pandemic, on 28 February 2020 by Turkey, but this was not causally linked to COVID-19, but to developments on Syria. Thus, as the analysed transcripts demonstrated, Art. 3 emerged to be central to the NATO narrative during the pandemic, in the studied period. Article 3 was cited several times in the context of NATO mandate to ensure resilience and civil preparedness in times of crises⁸.

A major message conveyed by the SG and DSG during the pandemic was NATO's ability to exercise operative 'core' missions and operations in order to ensure the continuity of ongoing operations and take on new, crisis-related, emergent tasks, such as the transport of medical equipment, putting medical resources together (coordination) and rapid mobility. In nearly every studied public statement, reassurance was provided about NATO's operational readiness, capacity to defend and perform its core responsibilities: "our operational readiness remains undiminished. And our forces remain ready, vigilant and prepared to respond to any threat... we can deploy troops, forces if needed", declared the SG⁹ on one occasion. Delivery of operative core responsibilities was perceived as a basic premise to maintain NATO posture but also as a pre-condition for assuming additional tasks (emergency-specific) in a credible manner. The delivery of operative core tasks was usually operationalized as "to make sure that we deliver credible deterrence and defence every day and that our forces stay ready and that we are able to act if needed"¹⁰. Other recurrent expressions attributed to

⁸ See, for example, the remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 02 April 2020:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174772.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁹ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹⁰ See NATO SG statement on 19 March 2020:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174389.htm?selectedLocale=en.

NATO core responsibilities were “to make sure that this health crisis does not become a security crisis” and “protect and preserve security for almost one billion people” (mentioned by both SG and DSG).

During speeches, public interventions and Q&A sessions in the studied period, eight tasks were estimated to be referred to as core NATO responsibilities that were ongoing at the time of the crisis outbreak, as the speeches showed: providing re-assurance in relation to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan; maintenance of the NATO counterterrorism training operations in Iraq; re-assurance, support and commitment to Turkey, in response to the consultation procedure (Art. 4) that Turkey activated in the aftermath of the Idlib escalation; commitment towards partners Georgia and Ukraine, which both benefitted of international assistance after they requested support under the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC); upholding operational readiness and vigilance, through air policing, patrolling, maritime operations or increased “presence in the Black Sea Region on land with the Tailored Presence in Romania“, which included a training exercise with the five Standing NATO Maritime Group Two ships on 30 March¹¹; maintaining the four multinational battlegroups on the Eastern flank in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; countering hybrid warfare – that was intensified in response to an exponential surge in disinformation and cyber attacks since the commencing of the pandemic in Europe; and continuation of the NATO missions in Kosovo, while some preventive measures were implemented for the troops and staff on the ground. It was explained that all operative core tasks continued and were successfully fulfilled during the crisis, although with

¹¹ See: <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2020/standing-nato-maritime-group-2-exercise-with-romania-in-the-black-sea->.

some limitations or at lower intensities. Arguably, a position of non-fulfilment of the mandate could have had dramatic effects for NATO's future existence. The maintenance of all elements of the mandate was perceived as a pre-condition for resilience and effectiveness projection – as the DSG related, a “proof of the capability of NATO to withstand any pressure, any stress, and even in such a complicated moment like this”¹².

Emergency-Specific Tasks: Strategic Airlift, Crisis Preparedness and Countering Disinformation

In addition to the eight operative core tasks ongoing at the time of the crisis outbreak, the pandemic discourse also pertained to NATO performing other two major emergency-specific tasks during the pandemic, both part of the North-Atlantic Alliance's mandate of maintaining readiness to respond to crises: strategic airlift and transport of essential medical equipment or patients and assistance to member states to enhance preparedness at whole-governmental level aka resilience. Resilience was perceived to be essential for the continuity of government and essential works, especially in the context of an unfolding geostrategic environment. Art. 3 of the 1949 Washington Treaty was invoked as pertaining to NATO's responsibility to maintain national resilience of members. When NATO was established, in the context of the World War II, the major threat was that of an “armed attack”, i.e. by the USSR. As NATO continues to function on the legal foundation of the 1949 Treaty, Art. 3 does not mention the word ‘national resilience’ *per se*, but refers to the “continuous and effective

¹² Mircea Geoana, ‘NATO Deputy Secretary General to speak on Allied response to COVID-19,’ Atlantic Council, April 16, 2020, <https://atlanticcouncil.org/event/allied-response-to-covid-19-a-conversation-with-mircea-geoana/>.

self-help and mutual aid” and maintenance and development of the collective capacity of members. In concrete terms, as it was explained during the statements, this meant providing member states with baseline requirements guidelines that NATO “developed over decades”¹³, related to infrastructure, health, mass casualties, the ability to move, communication, decision making and other critical areas. Resilience constitutes an area in which NATO demonstrated to have many years of experience and training. As it was specified by the SG in relation to the newest NATO member, North Macedonia: “over the last few years, NATO has trained more than 500 first responders in North Macedonia to improve their ability to respond to major incidents such as this”¹⁴. In the past, NATO has conducted major multinational medical exercises, for instance Vigorous Warrior organised by the NATO Military Medicine Centre of Excellence in 2019. In a context of a large-scale shock and rapidly evolving geostrategic environment, resilience needs to be permanently evaluated and updated. One dimension that was often mentioned in relation to ensuring Allies’ resilience was the necessity for permanent review, as well as updating and incorporating new dimensions linked to anticipated and evolving risks, such as the need of protection and assurance of critical infrastructure and supply chains. Thus, resilience also pertained to the collective capacity to prevent cyber attacks and disinformation carried out by actors aiming to destabilize and enhance their competitive advantage.

A second crisis-specific dimension that emerged from the data related to strategic airlift

¹³ Mircea Geoana, ‘Strategic conversation with Dan Mircea Geoană, Deputy Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO),’ *Friends of Europe*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/events/strategic-conversation-with-dan-mircea-geoana-deputy-secretary-general-of-the-north-atlantic-treaty-organisation-nato/>

¹⁴ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174616.htm.

of essential medical equipment, such as masks, protective equipment and other medical supplies, which, during public speeches was presented as an utility and value-added of NATO. More than 100 missions of strategic airlift and transport of essential medical equipment or patients, e. g. from Italy to Germany, were conducted based on requests by NATO member states or partners – NATO has 42 partners – during the studied period. This demonstrates the members and partners’ readiness to participate in this solidarity and mutual help mechanism. As of 02 July 2020, seven NATO members (Spain, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Italy, Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia and Slovenia) and nine partner countries (Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Colombia, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Iraq) requested international assistance via NATO Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC)¹⁵. In addition to strategic airlift, NATO also provided assistance in helping build more than 25 field hospitals and 4,000 military medical personnel joined the efforts of civilian medical staff. In the public communication and speeches, it was emphasized that COVID-19 was in the top of the NATO agenda and the focus was “to help the civilian authorities, the health care systems to combat the virus, to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis”¹⁶. ‘Saving lives’ was a commonly mentioned expression during public statements by both SG and DSG, and there is also one reference to this overarching goal in the NATO Foreign Ministers Declaration adopted on 02 April 2020. Strategic airlift, coordinated in conjunction with the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC), was identified as a concrete solution to address specific needs

¹⁵ See: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/7/pdf/200702-EADRCC-0107_sitrep19.pdf.

¹⁶ See, for example, the mentions by NATO SG Jens Stoltenberg at the pre-ministerial press conference on 02 April 2020: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174770.htm?selectedLocale=ru.

on the ground, and this task was highly prioritized. The NATO SAC was established in 2008 to fill a defence capability gap and comprises an operational unit, the Heavy Airlift Wing, which is not under NATO Force Structure – operations are coordinated via the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) – and the NATO Airlift Management Programme, with the base in Hungary. Operationally, it relies on three Boeing C-17 Globemaster III (under Hungarian flag) and 150 military, 60 civilian and 60 Boeing maintenance contractors¹⁷. One caveat of the SAC is that it relies on commercial suppliers, raising the question of dependence and whether NATO states shall acquire more self-owned C-17 aircrafts. SAC already completed over 2,500 missions, with past missions including strategic airlift to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, to Pakistan during the 2010 flooding or logistic support in relation to the search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370¹⁸.

To sum up, in its public pandemic discourse, NATO highlighted the endurance of core tasks ongoing at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak and the fulfilment of two additional, emergency-specific tasks: assisting states to maintain resilience by providing crisis preparedness guidelines and countering disinformation, also in conjunction with the EU, and strategic airlift. NATO proved utility during the crisis by providing strategic assets that were urgently needed by member states and partners, filling thus a vacuum that other actors or IOs would not have had the capabilities to fill to the same extent. NATO's past experience in crises and crisis-specific tasks, such as strategic airlift, proved beneficial. The following section discusses the main elements of NATO's approach to the pandemic, as they emerged from the data.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.nspa.nato.int/en/news/news-20190627-3.htm>.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.nspa.nato.int/en/news/news-20190627-3.htm>.

The Main Elements of NATO's Discourse on Crisis Management Strategy

The analysis of the NATO discourse unveiled seven major elements in the organisation's pandemic strategy: pro-activeness, continuous review and planning ahead, stepping-up activities and efficiency, lessons learned, adaptability, solidarity and civil-military cooperation.

Being Pro-Active

As the public statements revealed, to enhance its effectiveness during the crisis, NATO embraced a pro-active approach. It was explained in numerous interventions that the IO facilitated the identification of states that had a surplus of medical equipment or capacity and matched the surplus stocks with existing requests by members or partners via EADRCC. To better mobilise and coordinate this demand and supply framework, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Tod Wolters, was tasked with coordinating the resources and “to step up and speed up the way NATO Allies are supporting each other: mobilise more resources, utilise NATO structures, mechanisms, even more, to continue to provide critical support“, as the SG explained¹⁹. For this purpose, states were asked to notify the SACEUR in case they had available resources. This transfer of resources based on a supply-demand logic worked well also due to the variation in the degree to which European states and the US were impacted by the pandemic. The NATO capacity in place, through the SAC and the NSPA, trained for this purpose, facilitated a speedy response to allies' and partners' requests. NATO has also been pro-active in boosting innovation. This was demonstrated by NATO's pro-active activation of mechanisms involving private actors or experts, associated with the

¹⁹ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174925.htm?selectedLocale=en.

NATO Industry Forum (comprising 3,000 companies), NATO Innovation Board or NATO Science and Technology Organisation, all mentioned in the public communication. In this framework, start-ups, established companies, academia and think tanks in the NATO databases were pro-actively asked for comments, contributions or criticism “in order to do things even better in the future”²⁰. Another concrete example of NATO boosting innovation during the crisis was the cooperation between the NSPA and ISINNOVA, a start-up firm from Italy, to produce 3D-printed connectors that can convert snorkelling masks into emergency ventilators masks, which were donated to the Italian Civil Protection Department for distribution and use in hospitals²¹, or the scientific project in the framework of NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme “to develop new tools for a rapid and accurate diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection”²².

Continuous Review and Planning Ahead

Continuous review of the NATO response to the crisis and the actions taken, as well as planning ahead, were identified as further important components of the crisis approach as revealed by the data. The transatlantic organisation started to look into the middle- and long-term consequences and set up a mechanism of constant review of its actions, lessons learned and planning ahead. It was highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis “will have far-reaching consequences for how we think about security, and about national resilience”²³. Moreover, it was stressed that the pandemic will have “severe shocks to

²⁰ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

²¹ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174797.htm?selectedLocale=en.

²² See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_175619.htm?selectedLocale=en.

²³ Mentions by NATO SG during the pre-ministerial press conference on 14 April 2020:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175085.htm?selectedLocale=fr.

the global world order, there will be geo-political and geo-economic consequences”²⁴. The quicker the implications can be identified, the better it is from an anticipatory governance perspective, as it can be planned to deal with the shocks and ensure continuity of government, which includes endurance of telecommunications, energy supplies and other essential infrastructure, but also insurance that “civilian and military cooperation is in place”²⁵. One example of thinking and planning ahead was getting ready for a second wave of the pandemic and starting to plan a longer-term Pandemic Response Contingency Plan. An important implication identified by NATO in relation to the pandemic concerned the allies’ capability to maintain possession of critical infrastructure in the conditions of anticipated (post-pandemic) economic downturn, with repercussions on long-term security and the Alliance’s ability to manage crises, as the SG related: “Some may seek to use the economic downturn as an opening to invest in our critical industries and infrastructure”²⁶. The pandemic revealed a series of dependencies both by European countries and the US on Chinese production that can rapidly lead to shortages, e. g. in essential medical equipment, as it was mentioned by the SG and DSG during public communication engagements. This can have far-reaching strategic consequences. In a counterfactual exercise, if China would acquire stocks and subsequently decision-making agency on the civil and military firms that are part of the NATO strategic airlift program, it follows that China could have an influence on future NATO operations in times of crises.

²⁴ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ NATO SG following the virtual meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers’ session, 15 April 2020: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm?selectedLocale=en.

Step-Up Activities and Efficiency and Provide Help “Upon Demand”

As the analysed statements revealed, NATO has vigorously looked into how to enhance efficiency and coordination. Stepping up activities usually referred to increasing the quantity of the provided assistance (“do more”) and efficiency (“with higher speed”) through “identifying the airlift capacity”, coordinate surplus capacity or stocks, “better matching requests for support with offers from Allies and partners” and, for example, implementing “simplified procedures for Rapid Air Mobility, in coordination with Eurocontrol” to speed-up the provided assistance²⁷. Pro-active leadership also concerned the reassurance to Turkey after the activation of Art. 4, as the SG related: “I’m in constant dialogue with the Allied capitals to see whether we can further step up our assurance measures for Turkey...I will continue to also work with Allies on how we can further step up our support to Turkey”²⁸. The vision of ‘doing more’ was also expressed in relation to NATO efforts in the wider Middle East region and North Africa, for example, how to step-up training activities in Iraq, or do more for partners such as Tunisia or Mauritania. Leadership and mission clarity were identified by the DSG as important determinants of NATO efficiency. Precision in the mission and command structure and the absence of “fuzziness” proved to be important in the transfer of tasks and implementation²⁹, which in substantive terms meant providing assistance at a speedy level.

While NATO leaders aimed to increase their value-added and utility by doing more and increase efficiency, it was concomitantly stressed that help and assistance was premised

²⁷ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174772.htm?selectedLocale=en.

²⁸ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175085.htm.

²⁹ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

by formal requests by member states or partners. In relation to the vision for Middle East and North Africa it was specified that the concrete activities of possible future assistance were not yet known, and that assistance would only be provided upon request: “we only do that if we are requested, or there’s a demand for NATO activities in different forms”³⁰. Similarly, in relation to the strategic airlift and other types of assistance in the COVID-19 context, it was underscored that the NATO response is based on national requests and needs³¹.

Lessons Learned – Harnessing Accumulated Knowledge

Commitment to lessons learned emerged as another key element in the NATO approach during the pandemic, based on the public statements in the analysed sample. NATO maintains a database of lessons learned through the Joint Analysis & Lessons Learned Centre, which coordinates and provides systematic assessments and trainings, and shares newly produced knowledge. The process to integrate lessons learned pertaining to the pandemic commenced already on 01 April, prior to the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting.

One lesson learned was on resilience. During the Defence Minister Meeting on 15 April 2020, it was agreed to integrate the identified lessons learned into the baseline resilience requirements and maintain regular updates³². Moreover, an initiative was started to assess the medium- and long-term implications of the crisis, including on how to strengthen resilience and enhance preparedness for future crises. Other lessons learned

³⁰ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175085.htm?selectedLocale=fr.

³¹ See NATO SG statement on 01 April 2020:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174770.htm?selectedLocale=en.

³² Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

outlined in the public interventions were in relation to the need to re-think dependencies on essential supplies: “ask questions whether we are too dependent on production coming from outside, whether we need to produce more of this equipment in our own countries”, emphasized the SG during a pre-ministerial press conference³³. Another highlighted lesson learned was about the “close link between the civilian efforts to fight a health crisis and the ability of the military to support those efforts”, as the SG related³⁴.

A “Culture of Permanent Adaptability”

A fifth theme that emerged from the analysis was the focus on the continuity of government as well as of the IO’s own operations and core responsibilities, and adaptability – as a premise for the former. One way to enhance adaptability was through partnerships and “opening”³⁵ towards thousands of private actors, think tanks and academic experts via a series of mechanisms in place. These processes constitute a substantial pool of exchange, new ideas and innovation potential. It was elaborated that part of this ‘ecosystem’ was also the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) in Norfolk, Virginia, currently French General André Lanata. The Allied Command Transformation plays a key role in processes of strategic adaptation, being responsible for finding innovative solutions and making recommendations for adjustments to the NATO posture. To keep pace with the strategic evolutions, NATO has “a vast network of military and civilian professionals from Centres of Excellence,

³³ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175085.htm.

³⁴ See: <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2151837/nato-defense-ministers-discuss-alliances-covid-19-response/>.

³⁵ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

nations, scientists, medical professionals and military experts”, explained General Lanata during the Defence Ministers Meeting on 15 April³⁶. Adaptability is perceived as inherent to NATO continuity as a security alliance, able to provide working solutions to emerging threats in an evolving strategic environment and hybridisation and unpredictability of threats. NATO has adapted after each critical juncture, explained Jens Stoltenberg: “NATO has adapted after the end of the Cold War and ... after 2014 when Russia illegally annexed Crimea”³⁷. Continuous adaptation is seen to be part of the NATO *raison d’être*. Referring to NATO continuous adaptation, the DSG mentioned that “the culture of permanent adaptation...is in our DNA” and that “the culture of adaptation and lessons learned” is the third dimension of NATO in addition to the “culture of solidarity” and “culture of vigilance”³⁸.

The NATO Reflection Group launched to coordinate the reflection processes agreed during the 2019 NATO Leaders Meeting in London is also linked to adaptability³⁹. The Alphen Group was mandated to assess how to strengthen NATO’s political unity, cohesiveness, solidarity and “responsiveness to new challenges”⁴⁰. The Group presented their first findings to the SG at the end of 2020. Although the Reflection Group, as it was mentioned in public communication, was not mandated with reviewing the Strategic Concept, it will nonetheless play a crucial role in NATO future adaptability

³⁶ See: <http://www.act.nato.int/articles/nato-defence-ministers-agree-next-steps-fight-against-coronavirus>.

³⁷ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm?selectedLocale=en.

³⁸ Geoana, ‘Strategic Conversion.’

³⁹ For example, to adapt to a new constellation of threats, NATO declared space as one of its core domains, see: Cornelia Baci, ‘Collective Security and Art. 5 in Space: Jus Gentium, Oversight, Resilience and the Role of NATO,’ *Atlantic Forum*, December 01, 2020, <https://www.atlantic-forum.com/content/collective-security-and-art-5-space-jus-gentium-oversight-resilience-and-role-nato>.

⁴⁰ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

and innovation.

Culture of Solidarity Embedded in Art. 5

The culture of solidarity, embedded in the Washington Treaty, was identified as a further major element of NATO's discourse during the pandemic. The DSG stated that "Art. 5 is the ultimate expression of solidarity and also in these very difficult months and weeks of this pandemic, allies have shown solidarity"⁴¹. The word "solidarity" was mentioned approximately 27 times during public interventions by the SG and DSG in the studied period. Solidarity among allies was demonstrated in the crisis by the over 100 strategic airlift missions, which involved deliberate will in the capitals to share some of their medical stocks and other types of essential crisis assistance. Even in the absence of a common identity, the missions had implications at the affect level – which, it will be elaborated in the discussion section of this article, can be an important source of legitimacy⁴². This was linked to assistance dynamics that have not been seen before. Some of the examples include Turkey delivering medical equipment to the UK, US and Italy, or the US providing additional flying hours to Romania in the framework of the strategic airlift programme. Solidarity was enabled and stimulated by the pro-active approach and coordination, and by simultaneously seeking to streamline and speed up coordination and deliveries. The value-added of cooperation, mutual help and support in the context of increasing unpredictability and uncertainty, especially in times of crises,

⁴¹ Geoana, 'Strategic Conversation.'

⁴² Jan Aart Scholte and Jonas Tallberg, 'Theorizing the Institutional Sources of Global Governance Legitimacy,' in *Legitimacy in global governance*, ed. Jonas Tallberg, Karin Bäckstrand and Jan Aart Scholte. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 56–74. See also Allen Buchanan and Robert O. Keohane, 'The Legitimacy of Global Governance Institutions,' in *Legitimacy in International Law*, ed. Rüdiger Wolfrum and Volker Rübén (Berlin, Heidelberg: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften e.V, 2008), 25–62.

was also often highlighted in the context of NATO solidarity.

The Importance of Civil-Military Cooperation and the Role of Militaries in Assisting Civilians

The importance of strong civil-military partnerships and the utility of the military in the crisis was a seventh major element underscored in the NATO discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic in the studied period. For example, the SG stated that “by investing in our military, we also provide a capacity which has proven useful in supporting the civil society, dealing with crises like the corona crisis”⁴³. The role of militaries in assisting civilians in NATO countries to deal with the crisis, beyond military threats, was often mentioned. Nonetheless, the role of militaries was perceived as a supporting one to boost civilian efforts. When asked whether global health risks should be considered when planning the defence posture, the SG emphasized that NATO should not change its core responsibilities to integrate pandemics, but that reviewing the possibilities of strengthening civil-military cooperation and how military capabilities could be helpful to sustain civilian efforts (in non-military operations) is worth looking into⁴⁴.

To sum up, the current and previous section presented the immediate results from the inductive analysis. I now move on to critically discuss the findings from the emergency *problematique* and IO exceptionalism conceptual perspective.

⁴³ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_174389.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁴⁴ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm?selectedLocale=en.

Discussion of the Conceptual Implications. Beyond the ‘Emergency *Problematique*’

Seeking to add to the literature on the emergency *problematique* and IO exceptionalism, this section assesses the results of this research from the perspective of legitimacy practices in IOs and global governance. Six major conceptual implications can be derived from the results.

First, as previous literature on global governance⁴⁵ implied, considerable references during the COVID-19 crisis were linked to participation, fairness, expertise, effectiveness and tradition. Although broader NATO dynamics, including disputes on burden sharing and disruptive antagonisms, were not abandoned during the pandemic, all NATO states and partners were invited to the pooling and sharing ad-hoc initiative for strategic airlift of essential equipment. Participation also involved *accountability* and transparency, as all strategic airlift missions and crisis-related operations were documented on the NATO website. The ad-hoc pooling and sharing procedure also revealed a certain degree of *fairness*, as all members were invited and could participate in the missions, either on the supply or the demand side, as per their needs and requests. There was no evidence of requests that could not be considered. While some NATO member states are assumed to have higher agency and leverage than others despite NATO being an intergovernmental organisation requiring consensus, no particular discrimination of states was found to be reflected in NATO statements or actions. The NATO strategic airlift operations based on a supply-demand logic and shared coordination and command, optimized under the guidance of the SACEUR and SACT,

⁴⁵ Michael Zürn, *A Theory of global governance. Authority, legitimacy, and contestation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

have revealed a further dimension related to fairness, even though, the literature argues that in the global governance system, “authorities that have the capacity to significantly redistribute opportunities and wealth...hardly exist”⁴⁶. The NATO normative narrative during the COVID-19 crisis also pertained to the IO’s *expertise* and knowledge. Crisis management was presented as NATO’s *raison d’être*, and many references were related to its previous experience in crises, including in strategic airlift missions. NATO’s previous crises experience as well as experience in decision making and trainings relevant to crisis management allowed the transatlantic organisation to quickly adapt to the situation, put mechanisms in place to coordinate tangible help and implement it at a speedy level in a situation in which every minute and every mask counted. This experience has proved valuable, for example, to provide states with baseline crisis pre-preparedness guidelines and employ a lessons learned mechanism, which, in the case of NATO, was found to be highly institutionalised, as the existence of a Lessons Learned department or the performing of systematic assessments, reviews and updates, demonstrated.

Second, the endogenous normative projection was less about “international responsibility”⁴⁷ as in previous crises⁴⁸, e. g. in the Ukraine⁴⁹, but rather about *crisis responsibility*, i.e. the obligation and authority to provide help during crises as one of

⁴⁶ Zürn, *A Theory of Global Governance*, 74.

⁴⁷ Tal Dingott Alkopher, ‘From Kosovo to Syria: the transformation of NATO Secretaries General’s discourse on military humanitarian intervention,’ *European Security* 25, no. 1 (2016): 49-71.

⁴⁸ While acknowledging that crises are in principle genuinely different and can be driven by various dynamics.

⁴⁹ Florian Böller, “‘Guardian of the international order’? NATO’s contested identity, the discourses of Secretaries General, and the Ukraine crisis,’ *East European Politics* 34, no. 2 (2018): 217-237.

NATO's core tasks, as agreed by members in the 2010 Strategic Concept⁵⁰. As the pandemic narrative demonstrated, specific attention has been dedicated to the crisis preparedness requirements, which have been made available to states and were continually reviewed and updated. In contrast to the NATO discourses during previous crises, no reference was found to be made that explicitly stated NATO as a "legitimate authority" to deal with the crisis. As the Alliance came under stress in recent time, in relation to burden-sharing, Trump's or Macron's declarations⁵¹, the pandemic constituted a situation for NATO to illustrate its utility and thus legitimacy. By proactively identifying areas in which it can have a value-added in the context of the pandemic, and seeking to increase efficiency in providing speedy assistance in emergency-specific tasks, NATO has made use of its strategic airlift capabilities and shared command and control coordination structure, two areas in which NATO has longstanding experience and training in. The perception of a global alliance, with missions in different parts of the world, persisted only to a certain extent. The definition of a global NATO in contemporary times is quite different from early 2000s, not least because of the "dynamics in the transatlantic relationship"⁵².

Third, existing crisis management protocols and lessons learned database allowed the

⁵⁰ In addition, a recent study shows that crisis management constitutes one area of strategic overlap in the national security strategies of most NATO and EU countries, see Cornelia Baciú, 'Collaborative security regimes post-Brexit – estimating the potential for convergence based on the overlap in national strategic documents. A comparative study of EU27 + 1 and the US,' *Comparative Strategy* 39, no. 6 (2020): 549-564.

⁵¹ US President Donald Trump upended the July 2018 Brussels Summit, requesting an increase in defence budgets by European allies and threatening that contrary, he "will do its own thing". In 2019, ahead of the NATO London High-Level Meeting, French President Emmanuel Macron stated twice that NATO is "brain-death", prompted the allies to become indignant.

⁵² Personal communication, 04 October 2020, Magdeburg.

Euro-Atlantic alliance to respond in a speedy manner. The pandemic has surprised the entire globe and even most advanced states, such as the US, Germany or the UK. To cope with the pandemic, most states refocused inwardly and declared states of emergency, which amplified the lack of leadership at both IOs and global level. This might have initially weakened supranational responses, for example, by the EU. Overall, the EU effort to cope with the pandemic was huge. After lengthy negotiations, overshadowed by the initial Frugals' position, the European Central Bank has handed out 1.3 trillion EUR in a historical bond-buying package, deemed to relief the European economy. The EU has also coordinated the joint re-patriation of EU citizens abroad and, under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and other relevant institutional structures, the IO has coordinated and financed the delivery of medical equipment in Europe and internationally⁵³. The question is not about who has helped first, however, in times of emergencies, the speed of the first response might play a significant role. Initial help requests by Italy could not be appropriately followed-up on due to lack of crisis capacity, and the President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen has publicly apologised to Italy in a speech, "admitting that it had not been by its side since the beginning of the crisis"⁵⁴. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also performed a substantial role in managing the pandemic, although its actions were overshadowed by massive contestation and the US notification of withdrawal. A comprehensive comparison of the responses of the three IOs (NATO, EU, WHO) is, due to parsimony reasons, not possible, but shall make the subject of a future paper. From a pragmatic perspective, a corollary of this discussion is the delicate normative puzzle pertaining to

⁵³ For an overview on the EU response to COVID-19, see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/crisis-management-and-solidarity_en.

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/16/eu-commission-president-offers-heartfelt-apology-to-italy>.

the question of who *has legitimacy* to help, and who *can* help in times of a global shock. In times of emergencies, NATO proved to have the capacity to speedily coordinate and take action and be a first-responder – although its overall response was materially significantly lower than that of the EU – while other intergovernmental organisations might have needed some time to organise and react. One possible explanation for the speedy NATO response might be the IO’s assets in terms of crisis SOPs and protocols and a lesson learned database that enabled it to quickly respond to the crisis.

Fourth, no strong evidence was found for the ‘relative gains’ legitimisation narrative – i. e. the attempt to legitimise (mandate-exceeding) action by building “on gains relative to others”⁵⁵. Instead, references to IO-inner dynamics of cooperation and solidarity, identity, efficiency and “collective gains”⁵⁶ were found to be central in SG and DSG public statements. The evidence presented corroborated previous studies that pointed out the “discursive construction of NATO’s identity” in times of crisis⁵⁷. During the pandemic, many references pertained to NATO’s “culture of solidarity”, embedded in Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty. Mentions of solidarity, need of cooperation during the pandemic and in the future, as well as binding hedging towards allies and partners in relation to NATO’s vigilance and ability to perform core responsibilities and missions and efficiently take on additional, emergency-specific tasks, can be interpreted as sources of “positive” legitimacy at organisational level⁵⁸. Positive legitimacy can

⁵⁵ Zürn, *A Theory of Global Governance*.

⁵⁶ Scholte and Tallberg, ‘Theorizing the Institutional Sources.’

⁵⁷ Böller, “‘Guardian of the international order’?”

⁵⁸ Jennifer, Gronau and Henning Schmidtke, ‘The quest for legitimacy in world politics – international institutions’ legitimisation strategies,’ *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016): 535-557. See also Jonas Tallberg and Michael Zürn. ‘The legitimacy and legitimisation of international organizations: introduction and framework,’ *The Review of International Organizations* 14, no. 4

optimize IOs' internal structures and affect power relations but also energise implementation and thus institutional performance and identity. Recognition and support by allies are essential in the light⁵⁹ of the anticipated post-crisis economic downturn that might shrink domestic defence budgets, which were already low pre-crisis. The economic repercussions were acknowledged on many occasions during NATO's public interventions. Simultaneously, the need for security continuity, as a precondition of trade, stability and peace, was also underscored. The crisis turned into an anchor point for the Alliance to show relevance, utility and ability to meet the presumed normative expectations of their member states and 42 partners and the larger public from a collective defence organisation during a health crisis. The crisis management capacity, commitment and professionalism demonstrated during the pandemic will be beneficial to boost the IO's legitimacy perceptions and support and avoid a potential legitimacy crisis. Some might have even wondered about the high NATO commitment during a health crisis. A "shape-shifting" NATO was also seen during the Kosovo crisis, when the Alliance turned into a humanitarian agency and articulated a more value-orientated strategy, in which "military capital" was "made directly politically relevant"⁶⁰. Nonetheless, 'active engagement' and 'modern defence' are addressed in the 2010 Strategic Concept and while the current Concept might be seen due for

(2019): 581–606, and Hideaki Shinoda, 'The Politics of Legitimacy in International Relations: A Critical Examination of NATO's Intervention in Kosovo,' *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 25, no. 4 (2000): 515–36.

⁵⁹ Sungjoon Cho, 'Toward an Identity Theory of International Organizations,' *American Society of International Law* 101, (2007): 157-160. See also Andrea Oelsner, 'The Institutional Identity of Regional Organizations, Or Mercosur's Identity Crisis,' *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2013): 115-127.

⁶⁰ Jef Huysmans, 'Shape-Shifting NATO: Humanitarian Action and the Kosovo Refugee Crisis,' *Review of International Studies*, 28, no. 3 (2002): 599-618.

renewal, allies were for a long time partly nervous about opening up the discussion for fears of what Trump might do⁶¹. Moreover, military capital and professionalism in assisting civilians can be expected to continue to remain central to NATO's political identity in the future.

Fifth, the rhetoric in the studied timeframe did not seem to seek to justify decisions based on a “state of exception which requires quick decision which are without alternative”⁶², but rather to deliver support for shared goods and speedy outcomes (output legitimacy) based on procedural patterns (input legitimacy) established on the foundation of accumulated experience – as the DSG related: “our DNA is crisis management, our DNA is command and control, is efficiency in logistics and putting together in critical moments the pieces that can make in this stress a nation and alliance work”⁶³. NATO's supporting role, under civilian oversight and democratic control, was often underscored: “together with the civilian one [*command*] we are here with decades of experience”⁶⁴. Health crises do not make the specific object of NATO mandate as defined in the Washington Treaty, although, under Art. 3, resilience and civil preparedness, including in a health context, was included in NATO portfolio more recently⁶⁵. If we were to apply the “IO exceptionalism” argument, one possible

⁶¹ Personal Communication, June 2020, Washington DC.

⁶² Zürn, *A Theory of Global Governance*.

⁶³ Geoana, ‘Allied response to COVID-19.’

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ NATO leaders agreed to enhance national resilience and develop capacity to boost civil preparedness, “including in the health sector”, drawing on the Commitment to enhance resilience issued by Heads of State and Government at the 2016 Summit in Warsaw:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49158.htm. See also:

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

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133180.htm?selectedLocale=en.

interpretation might be to see NATO practice during the pandemic as a source of “authority leap”⁶⁶. However, the logic of exceptionalism could not be confirmed based on the data employed in this article: the examined IO has neither sought to lower checks and balances (horizontal dimension) nor to reduce the legal protection of the subjects (vertical dimension). To expedite delivery of medical equipment, a NATO call sign was used to simplify the standard procedure for military relief and speed up the Air Traffic Control clearances⁶⁷, in conjunction with the Eurocontrol, but this is rather an example of cooperation and pragmatism, and it did not endanger subjects, as most passenger flights were on hold during the pandemic. After the end of the Cold War, as the strategic and threat environment evolved, NATO steadily adapted and became a multi-domain IO. Nonetheless, when asked by a reporter whether pandemics should receive more attention when “calculating defensive posture”, the SG replied that NATO should not become “the first responder” or change its core responsibilities, but that “there are good reasons for looking into how we can further strengthen the cooperation between the civilian society combating a health crisis and military capabilities, providing support to those civilian efforts”⁶⁸.

This seems to rather refute the ‘normalization’ thesis⁶⁹ when applied to security IOs in times of pandemics, which seems rather counter-intuitively, especially in the light of the securitisation literature⁷⁰ and notwithstanding that crisis management is part of NATO

⁶⁶ Kreuder-Sonnen, ‘International authority and the emergency *problematique*.’

⁶⁷ See: <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2020/nato-expedites-delivery-of-covid19-supplies-between-allies>.

⁶⁸ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁶⁹ Kreuder-Sonnen, ‘International authority and the emergency *problematique*.’

⁷⁰ James Sperling and Mark Webber, ‘NATO and the Ukraine crisis: Collective securitisation,’ *European Journal of International Security* 2, no. 1 (2017): 19-46.

core mandate. While ongoing and anticipated risks were pro-actively assessed and communicated, based on the analysed public interventions, there was no significant tangible evidence for “strategic reorientation”⁷¹. From a procedural perspective, the SG could not have made that determination, as member states would have to agree to expand NATO’s remit, and this is usually done at head of state level, but there have been no meetings at that level during the studied time frame⁷². Ordinarily, such questions would be discussed during the review of the Strategic Concept, which had been put off until after the US elections⁷³. The SG has nonetheless agreed upon the possibility of reviewing the role of NATO in such crises, especially in the perspective of strengthening civil-military cooperation.

Sixth, taken together, the findings reveal interesting insights about the interplay between input and output legitimacy and how they relate to the emergency *problematique*. As it was pointed out numerous times in the public interventions, help and assistance to both Allies and partners was premised by formal demands or requests and needs on the ground. The expertise and knowledge (output legitimacy) aspect fed to a certain extent into the dimension of invoking tradition and the status quo⁷⁴ as a legitimization practice. Past experience and tradition (sources of input legitimacy) in crisis management were emphasized in the statements. However, opposite to expectations derived from propositions in the specialist literature on legitimization practices in global governance, this did not involve arguments such as sticking to “something that has worked for a long

⁷¹ Sperling and Webber, ‘NATO and the Ukraine crisis.’

⁷² Personal Communication, June 2020, Washington, DC.

⁷³ Personal Communication, June 2020, Washington, DC.

⁷⁴ Glen Herald Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). See also Zürn, *A Theory of Global Governance*.

time is good” or that improvements can produce side-effects⁷⁵. Rather the opposite was the case. Through the lessons learned paradigm, continuous reviewing and active monitoring of possible new intervening factors and risks, the studied IO sought to permanently update guidelines, optimize procedures and relentlessly adapt, in a rather Kuhnian dynamic of transformation and innovation. Overall, it can be said that the IO rather sought to transcend the emergency *problematique*. The evidence could not conclusively demonstrate an active counterbalancing between functional “last resort” measures and loosening constitutionalism or democratic control for the examined case. Notwithstanding this finding, the expertise that NATO demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to prompt future debates on NATO’s role, given that, in the context of an evolving risk environment, “collective defence is being re-interpreted to mean solidarity in upholding domestic order and resilience rather than mainly protecting external borders”⁷⁶.

Conclusion

This article examined NATO’s discourse and strategy during the COVID-19 crisis. Drawing on all SG and DSG public interventions in the period March-May 2020 coded in NVivo as well as additional documentary sources, the article revealed a series of original findings that have significant implications for theory and policy. The findings showed that during the crisis, NATO actions were targeted towards continuity of

⁷⁵ Zürn, *A Theory of Global Governance*, 75.

⁷⁶ Jamie Shea, ‘Never waste a good crisis: are pandemics NATO’s new security challenge?’ Friends of Europe, April 06, 2020, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/never-waste-a-good-crisis-are-pandemics-natos-new-security-challenge/>. See also Gabrielle Marceau, ‘IGOs in Crisis? Or New Opportunities to Demonstrate Responsibility?’ *International Organizations Law Review* 8, no. 1 (2011): 1–13.

ongoing operative missions and taking on additional emergency-specific operations, such as strategic airlift of essential medical equipment. The IO's crisis management strategic approach during the pandemic comprised several key elements: pro-activeness; continuous review and planning ahead; stepping up activities and efficiency and providing assistance 'upon demand'; lessons learned logic; adaptability; projecting solidarity; and strengthening civil-military cooperation.

At policy level, the findings suggested a continuity in NATO discourse during pervasive shocks. The IO's strategy was found to be focused on core responsibilities, NATO identity and the importance of military capital. In contrast to the narrative during previous crises, the endogenous normative themes pertained to a lesser extent to 'international responsibility', but instead to crises responsibility. The results showed that, one lesson learned for NATO alludes to the NSPA and the Heavy Airlift Wing of the Strategic Airlift Capability. In the light of the enormous costs for the civilian and military contractors, as well as the risk that strategic players might aim to acquire military assets in Europe, the aspect of decreasing a possible dependency, by, for example, working with national assets⁷⁷, might be due for assessment.

The contribution of this article for the academic community is manifold. The results add a theoretical distinction to theories of global governance and IO legitimacy, specifically pertaining to sources and strategies of legitimation and the exceptionalism *problematique*. Effectiveness as a source of IO legitimation in times of shocks can conceptually consist of elements such as pro-active coordination and fair inclusion of member states, an institutional lessons learned logic, continuous review of processes

⁷⁷ See: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175087.htm.

and potential risks, and planning ahead. When IOs employ intensive adaptation, their ontological purpose transcends survival, and instead is concerned with developing evolutionary stable strategies⁷⁸, i. e. strategies that can remain stable over time. As rational actors, security IOs might not always seek explicit authority leaps through lowering checks and balance (horizontal) or reducing legal protection of subjects (vertical), due to risks of sanctioning – e. g. by member states principals, citizens or wider public opinion, including media and think tanks. In times of crises, IOs can transcend the emergency *problematique* by complying to procedural patterns and distributive justice principles (input legitimacy) and demonstrating value-added (output legitimacy). In order to avoid a legitimacy deficit, IOs might refrain from mission expansion beyond the scope of their mandate during the crisis. As the case under investigation demonstrated, all operations were premised by formal requests and demands by receivers of assistance or hosts of operations. The concrete response, steps and actions were accurately documented on the IO's official website, which can reinforce transparency and accountability. While deviation from procedural patterns might be possible, as the change in the flying procedure in coordination with Eurocontrol demonstrated, these shall not be automatically equated with horizontal or vertical authority leaps. Precisely, ad-hoc operational innovations might be meaningful and not harming the IO's authority boundaries or subjects.

Hitherto, little was known about the puzzle of strategy and legitimacy practices of security IOs, such as NATO, in times of large-scale health shocks. Thanks to the inductive approach, the article made a series of significant contributions in terms of

⁷⁸ See Cornelia-Adriana Baciu and Alexandra M Friede, 'The EU's CFSP/CSDP in 2030: Towards an alternative vision of power?' *New Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (2020): 398-412.

theoretical innovations and additions to existing literature on global governance legitimacy in disruptive times. Future research on IOs and legitimacy in times of crises and emerging geopolitical disruptions should take into account the importance of distinguishing between ongoing operative IOs responsibilities and emergency-specific operations. Strategies of legitimation in global governance in times of crises can be shaped by awareness of power relations and authority boundaries. Upcoming studies could apply a comparative design, by examining further cases such as the EU or the WHO. They could also seek to unpack the conceptual implications and possible overlap between different elements of the IOs' crisis discourse and how they help to maintain a good equilibrium between mandate limitations and genuine needs on the ground. In the view of the emergency *problematique*, the pragmatism factor as a source of normative legitimacy (morality) and boundaries of constitutionalism (legality) in relation to utility and demand needs further in-depth conceptual elaboration in the framework of future research.

Disclosure Statement

The author does not have any potential conflict of interests to report.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank to Dr. Daniel Hamilton, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Senior Fellow at the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University and Director of the Global Europe Program at the Wilson Center, Washington, DC, for substantive comments and ideas provided to a previous version of this article. The author would also like to extend her gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for the provided comments, which were extremely beneficial to advance the argument made in this article. Tremendous thanks to the Editor of the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, for the kind patience throughout the review process.

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