NATO and Environmental Security

Understanding the Limits of the Alliance`s Transformation during Détente

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Abstract *The article explores the founding of NATO's Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS). The founding of CCMS made NATO—an organisation which was established mainly for territorial defence—deal with the issue of environmental protection. Thus, NATO received, for the first time, a task that was global in its nature and unrelated to its primary traditional concern: the security of its member states. Earlier research has emphasised opposition to the US proposal to establish the committee, which was mounted by the other organisation's members. Détente is often portrayed as a time when the issues of military confrontation and arms race between two superpowers, the US and the USSR, became less salient, and competition between the two socioeconomic systems became more peaceful. Détente was also a unique period in the Cold War when NATO was the most permissive to large-scale change in order to adapt to new realities of international affairs. At the same time, environmental protection had to essentially be redefined and rebranded in order for NATO to consider it a subject worthy and applicable to its own mission. The architects of CCMS narrowed the concept of environmental security to encompass only the environmental concerns of advanced capitalist societies, which stemmed from their high levels of technological and industrial development; they drew a line between these issues and the ecological problems of the rest of the world. The formation of CCMS was also an element of the broader process of the development of political consultations in NATO. The understanding of the organisation's mission and tasks in*

détente limited the amount of change in NATO brought about by introducing the discourse of environmental security.

Keywords: NATO, Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS), détente, Cold War, environmental protection, environmental security

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Introduction

In November 1969, the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) was established in the structure of NATO. This marked the introduction of NATO`s 'third' societal dimension, intended to administer, *inter alia*, the environmental problems of the member states. In the late 1960s, the establishment of a new agency was nothing new for NATO. At its start in 1949, NATO was little more than a treaty of alliance based on *casus foederis* provision, but over the span of two decades it acquired an elaborate structure, comprising a wide set of different bodies, dealing with military and economic issues, inter-allied political consultations and scientific research.[1] Soviet scholars viewed the setup of CCMS as a move intended to make a contribution to the alliance's military activities, to constitute the essence of NATO's existence and to camouflage NATO's "true" purpose and deflect attention from it.[2] However, the somewhat mixed reaction that this institutional innovation met in member states make it an issue that deserves further analysis.

For some, the launch of CCMS constituted a revolutionary change in NATO's activities. Some scholars consider it to be a progressive large-scale change in NATO`s mission and structure, as indicated by this appraisal: 'From the start, it was understood that CCMS would be a new kind of organization, revolutionary in mission and operational methodology.'[3] On the other hand, critics of the development tended to point out the gap between the requirements of international cooperation in the provision of national security—as it is understood in traditional terms—and the environmentalist approach. It was often questioned whether NATO was a suitable organisation to carry out environmental protection activities. Some critics argued that these activities were a distraction from the alliance's main task of providing for the collective defence of its member states, supporting the view that 'the machinery and purposes of military security are incompatible

with environmental values.' [4]

Scholarship suggests that change in international organisations is more likely to be the result of an incremental broadening of purview than revolutionary change brought about by visionary leaders. Haas argues that change in international organisations often occurs in the form of incremental expansion of an organisation's purview and the range of tasks it performs; cases of radical adjustments requiring reconsideration of organisation`s mission are extremely rare. [5] The very concept of environmental security—having the whole of humanity as its reference point and favouring broad international cooperation[6] regardless of regional, ideological or economic differences between states—makes it a difficult concept to embrace, particularly for an exclusive international organisation centred on the territorial defence of its members.

NATO's evolution in times of détente deserves attention given the fact that the alliance's post-Cold War 'transformation'—a catch-all word used to describe all kinds of change NATO underwent after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization[7]—is more often than not hailed as a highly successful development. There is a predictable predisposition to regard the establishment of CCMS as just one more example of NATO's earlier 'transformation.' However, inflated praise of this institutional innovation can lead to an overestimation of NATO's adaptability.

The US is known for having spearheaded the movement to have NATO's purview expanded to encompass environmental issues.[8] Sober analysis of the scale and general characteristics of this change of purview further contributes to the understanding of US's role in NATO during this time.

This article explores the evolution of the issue of environmental security within NATO, which culminated in the establishment of CCMS. First, I briefly introduce the theoretical lenses through which I weigh and analyse the major events of NATO`s organisational evolution. Second, I explain what kind of processes in international politics made possible an uneasy alliance between environmental security and a Cold War alliance focused on the issue of collective defence. Third, I outline the modifications that the discourse of environmental security, introduced by the US, underwent during the formation of CCMS. I conclude with some observations on the evolution of NATO in détente and the role the US played in this process.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of organisational change receives much attention in organisation studies and business literature. However, scholars do not treat all changes in organisational strategy and structure as equivalent. Typically, they differentiate between evolutionary and revolutionary patterns of change, depending on the extent to which an organisation rejects habitual ways of performance or existing institutions in the field of activity.[9] Nadler and Tushman define discontinuous change as one requiring 'a complete break with the past' and amounting almost to the creation of a new organisation.[10] It occurs 'in response to destabilizing events and periods of major disequilibrium'[11] in industry. In their typology, discontinuous change is opposed to incremental change, which involves focused and bounded improvements carried out routinely on a continuous basis in order to gain competitive advantage in periods of equilibrium.[12]

Nadler and Tushman hold that 'effective organizations are always implementing some form of improvement or modification.'[13] Although business literature often strongly encourages managers to bring about necessary changes intended to improve an organisation's efficiency, the organisational ecology approach does not support the claim that 'selection in organizational populations invariably favours efficient producers.'[14] Hannah and Freeman describe selection as a more complex and multidimensional process, where 'in many circumstances, political ties are more important to survival than efficiency.'[15] The organisations do change and the strategic leadership by individuals plays a significant role in the process of transformation. However, the change is constrained by a set of external and internal factors, such as the distribution of sunk costs, inadequacy of information, intra-organisational politics, predisposition to loss-aversion that prevails over any ambition to gain additional benefits, legal and fiscal barriers, a need to maintain the organisation's legitimacy,[16] etc. An organisation's identity can also affect the pace of change and its outcomes[17] as well as set standards of procedure and allocation of task and authority that have become the subject of normative agreement.[18]

Although some knowledge of organisation studies is applicable when researching international governmental organisations (IGOs), IGOs possess some peculiar features that distinguish them from their cousins in political and socioeconomic domains. These differences

gain even more significance when considering the issues of their adaptation to new environments. Thus, there is a popular view that IGOs as meta-bureaucracies are 'even further removed from citizens' calls for accountability and efficiency.'[19] Since they tend to assure their survival by 'seeking to please their clients,'[20] as Haas puts it, adaptive change by IGOs is often constrained by the preferences of their clients, which are at the same time the masters.[21] Thus, the decision-making process in periods of adaptive change too often takes the form of bargaining between various coalitions of states rather than an exercise in technical rationality in order to improve the organisation's performance.

In his account of change in international organisations, Haas stresses the role of ideology. He defines this as 'the kind of knowledge that is the property of actors who do not subject their beliefs to systematic verification tests.'[22] Accordingly, 'some guidance from an ideology is required even for minor changes of the means of action.'[23]

Haas treats organisational evolution as a process spurred first and foremost by a 'change in the definition of the problem to be solved by a given organization.'[24] Defining the problem is often based on what Haas calls 'consensual knowledge,' which he explains as 'generally accepted understandings about cause-and-effect linkages about any set of phenomenon.'[25] He is primarily concerned with modifications of consensual knowledge in the process of organisational change. Unlike the established approaches in biology and cultural studies, Haas distinguishes between 'adaptation' and 'learning.' 'Adaptation' is the ability to change in order to meet new demands without having to re-evaluate the core beliefs about the causes and effects on which an organisation's performance and legitimacy are based.[26] He applies the term 'learning' to 'situations in which an organization is induced to question the basic beliefs underlying the selection of ends.'[27] Following this distinction, Haas proposes three models of change in international organisations: 1) incremental growth, involving 'adaptation' to develop new tasks; 2) turbulent non-growth, when an organisation is being inundated with a wide variety of tasks introduced by actors with divergent understanding of the organisation's problems and goals; and 3) managed interdependence based on 'learning,' which requires a modified understanding of problems and the development of new mechanisms to solve them.[28]

This work deals with the situation that occurs when an organisation undergoes change based on a new discourse that largely diverges from

the general understanding of its goals, tasks and standards of procedure. It is to be expected that these kinds of change will face some resistance due to reasonable constraints imposed on any attempt to transform an organisation's structure and mode of operation. Therefore, this paper focuses on the question of what happens to the new discourse when states use it as an agent of organisational change.

Haas has also developed three possible outcomes largely corresponding to the models of change: 1) The new discourse is incorporated into the traditional narrative about the organisation`s mission, providing for incremental growth in tasks that organisation already performs; 2) the new discourse coexists (peacefully, or with some degree of conflict) with the traditional narrative about the organisation's mission; or 3) the new discourse gradually overtakes the traditional narrative of the organisation's mission, restructuring the organisation's identity

I view the models of the possible outcomes outlined above as 'ideal types' in the Weberian sense. In considering individual cases of organisational change invoked by introducing a new discourse, one is most likely to observe the elements of several models.

This work analyses a single case—the establishment of NATO's CCMS. Thus, its findings do not permit us to make any generalisations about the ways IGOs embrace new ideas that shape the understanding of their missions. It seeks rather to understand what made possible the uneasy alliance between environmental security and territorial defence in the structure and scope of tasks performed by a single organisation and how the discourse of environmental security changed due to NATO's input during the Cold War.

Setting the Stage for Environmentalism in NATO

According to conventional wisdom, the concept of environmentalism in the US began in 1962 with the publication of Rachel Carson's seminal book *Silent Spring*, which made concerns about the quality of the environment a widespread public concern. Amidst this raised public awareness, Richard Nixon, who served as US President from 1969 until his resignation in 1974, made environmental protection a priority of both his home and foreign policies. Nixon's biographers have taken a rather sceptical view of the President's commitment to environmentalism. Based on certain noted characteristics—Stephen Ambrose called Nixon a 'supreme pragmatist' and Jonathan Aitken wrote that he was 'obsessed' with politics and his diplomatic legacy—Brooks Flippen,

the historian of Nixon's environmental diplomacy, contends that the President's embrace of environmental issues was mainly tactical, due to the fact that it 'polled well.'[29] Being an environmentalist at home meant imposing restrictions on industries and being at loggerheads with business. In this respect, international environmental diplomacy was a safer and 'cheaper' option.[30]

Nixon provided much support to NATO, regarding the alliance as the 'blue chip'[31] for US foreign policy, ensuring strong ties to the vibrant economies of Western Europe. Though he accepted that the Soviet threat might have decreased since the time of NATO's founding, the alliance, in his view, remained vital in preserving stability in Europe. It was especially important in managing relations with Germany, a state having a serious Eastern problem.[32] For Nixon, NATO also appeared to be an indispensable means with which to negotiate détente on favourable terms with the Soviet Union by sharing the burden more equitably with West European governments.[33]

The notion of the Atlantic Community—encompassing different projects aimed at the integration and federalisation of West Europe and North America—still had some influence on US policy towards Europe during Nixon's presidency, though this influence was limited. In an intelligence memorandum prepared by the CIA in January 1969, analysts depicted NATO as being beneficial to the US and its ever-expanding project of cooperation with the growing economies of Western Europe.[34] The analysts stated that collaboration should extend far beyond the military realm. They cheered the development of inter-allied consultations, viewed as a means to expand NATO's traditional purview, although they expressed some dissatisfaction over the pace of progress in this area, stating that 'after 20 years, NATO's consultative process on political and economic affairs still could not match the cooperation that existed in the military sphere.'[35] The CIA analysts had to admit that 'anything like an Atlantic community [had] remained distant, and was probably impracticable'[36] and warned against setting the objectives of inter-allied consultations too high.

The overall approach towards the expansion of inter-allied cooperation was rather pragmatic. Given the impracticability of the Atlantic Community in the short run, the authors of the memorandum still urged the US government to action. The report was prepared shortly after Soviet troops entered Czechoslovakia in August 1968, defeating the hopes of the Czechoslovak people to build a more 'humanistic'

communism. The CIA analysts viewed the tragic events in the 'socialist camp' as an international crisis that caused heightened inter-allied cohesion in NATO. The memorandum's authors considered the aftermath of the crisis to be a moment of opportunity for the US government to come up with new initiatives.[37]

Though the memorandum's authors considered the impact of the Czechoslovak crisis on inter-allied relationship in NATO 'uncertain,' it is worth further consideration. The authors claimed that the invasion of Czechoslovakia caused Western Europe to re-examine the concept of détente. Previously, there had been some optimism about the evolution of the Soviet regime and that it might possibly begin to loosen its grip on East European states.[38] Gradual rapprochement with the Soviet Union in détente could significantly improve the political atmosphere in Europe and facilitate meaningful agreements with the East in the security realm.[39] The Czechoslovak crisis reportedly altered this view, bringing in a new understanding of détente as merely an 'interim accommodation to the existing order.'[40] It became a reminder to West European governments that the Soviet Union would maintain its control over its perceived sphere of influence. Some US officials availed the opportunity to portray the USSR as an unpredictable state predisposed to use force and destabilise Europe.[41] Thus, the CIA analysts believed that the Czechoslovak crisis undermined NATO's role in seeking détente.[42]

Reportedly, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia 'generated a new impulse toward united action [in NATO . . .] symbolised by expanded consultation and postponement of troop reduction,'[43] but did not alter the view held by West European governments that the 'danger of Soviet assault remained low.'[44] In the US, despite détente, foreign policy officials and analysts considered military containment of the USSR a lesser priority than political containment. Some argued that the possibility of a military clash in Europe had not disappeared, but had diminished considerably. For example, George F. Kennan, a distinguished American diplomat, wrote in a 1972 article for Foreign Affairs: 'There are today no political issues between the Soviet Union and the United States which could conceivably be susceptible of solution by war, even if the state of weaponry had not made any major military conflict between the two powers unthinkable.'[45] This indicated that conflict between the US and the USSR was now seen more as a political rivalry than a military threat.[46] The perception of being engaged in

political rivalry compelled both parties to search for new ideas in order to gain competitive advantage.

The Establishment of CCMS and the Discourse of Environmental Security

Researchers studying the establishment of NATO's CCMS emphasise 'an unusual degree of US imposition on reluctant allies'[47] that continued even after the committee started its operation.[48] Anticipation of resistance to the institutional innovation probably had a role to play when it came to making certain modifications to the discourse of environmental security in order to reconcile it with the traditional narrative of NATO's mission.

On 24 February 1969, during his first presidential trip to Europe, Nixon gave a speech at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) where he outlined his vision for NATO as 'a bulwark of peace, the architect of new means of partnership, and an invigorated forum for new ideas and new technologies to enrich the lives of our peoples.'[49] He confirmed the US commitment to the security of West European states and endorsed the development of inter-allied consultations as a means of sharing wisdom and jointly producing workable solutions to common problems. 'A modern alliance must be a living thing, capable for growth, able to adapt to changing circumstances,'[50] he noted, implying that NATO should become something more than just an institution based on a security guarantee pact with a fixed set of tasks. Moreover, Nixon stressed the alliance's capacity for change[51] in order to provide additional legitimacy to its persistence. Nixon also mentioned the rising challenges of environmental pollution, which he believed deserved attention within the context of transatlantic cooperation.[52] However, he mentioned only environmental problems that were the by-products of advanced technologies—in other words, the problems of industrialised societies.[53]

Nixon then expanded on these ideas during a private meeting of the NAC. Ultimately, a proposal was made to conduct regular meetings of deputy foreign ministers and to create a special planning group. Both institutional arrangements provided opportunities for inter-alliance discussions on long-range problems. Nixon proposed to broaden the agenda for transatlantic cooperation with an additional focus on environmental protection so that it would encompass the problems of technically advanced societies. This proposal developed into the initia-

tive to establish the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society. By linking CCMS to the issue of encouraging inter-allied consultation, the founding of CCMS came in line with the general trajectory of NATO's organisational evolution.

By reading the circular of the Department of State from 19 March 1969, we can observe how the discourse of environmental security was incorporated into the traditional narrative of NATO's mission. Protecting the environment appeared as one of the challenges of modern society. 'The premise of NATO engagement in this sphere could be described as a contribution to the strengthening of Western society, as a bulwark against a hostile ideology, and as an example for other societies…'[54] Thus, the provision of environmental security was depicted as an important means to assure the resistance of the Western societies to the incursion of 'hostile ideology'—a task that was probably far more important in early days of the Cold War than in late 1960s—and to gain competitive advantage in political rivalry.

The use of the phrase 'challenges of modern society' emphasised the perceived exclusiveness of states with advanced economies. In contrast, the term 'environmental security' is more global and democratic, as it implies the need for multilateral efforts without dividing states into groups based on their level of economic development. The former discourse prevailed in NATO.

The views expressed in the National Intelligence Estimate, prepared in December 1969, testified for the viability of Nixon's approach. The report stated: 'There does seem to be emerging […] a growing belief, particularly among younger people, that the established ideologies, the traditional patterns of political activity, and the historic rivalries among nations are obsolete, artificial, and irrelevant to the real concerns of the individual and the major goals of society.'[55] The environmental initiatives launched by NATO were apparently meant to give the alliance a new appeal, especially among the younger generation in Europe. They were also, to some extent, an attempt to deflect public attention from US involvement in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the US intelligence community had rather low expectations about the impact that the new CCMS would have on transatlantic cooperation in general. 'The effort to give NATO a social role through the creation of a Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society has met with a polite response, but it will not materially tighten the already strong bonds between Western Europe and the US,'[56] stated the authors of the

estimate.

According to a memorandum from Elliot Richardson, the Under Secretary of State to President Nixon, US allies expressed interest in CCMS. West Germany and Denmark were enthusiastic about discussions on the problems of modern society.[57] Nevertheless, Richardson noted that there was resistance from some states. Reportedly, some of the allies had reservations about the expansion of NATO's structure, while others were sceptical about the expediency of broadening the scope of consultations inside the politico-military alliance to include environmental issues.[58] Seemingly, Richardson provided an overly optimistic view, downplaying the allied resistance to the establishment of CCMS. Most notably the UK, with the reputation of the most loyal US ally, opposed the institutional innovation, considering the idea of making CCMS responsible to the Deputy Foreign Ministers Committee (with the exception of NAC) a provision of supranationality and an attempt at 'empire building.'[59] However, once established, CCMS became a body responsible directly to NAC and with functions not exceeding those of providing a forum for inter-allied discussion and the exchange of views.

In a separate memorandum, Henry Kissinger, Nixon's Assistant for Security Affairs, downplayed political resistance to CCMS while stressing the bureaucratic aversion to the change of established rules of operation and distribution of authority. According to Kissinger, the reaction of US allies to the idea of CCMS was positive yet cautious, while their reaction to the development of Deputy Foreign Minister meetings and the establishment of a special planning group was generally negative.[60] Kissinger listed primarily bureaucratic reasons for the allies' slowness and scepticism. First and most important, in his view, the US had mistakenly advanced the proposal through NAC. The NAC's Permanent Representatives viewed the creation of alternative structures in NATO as a challenge to their prerogative and an insinuation that they were not doing their jobs properly. Second, the initiatives suggested a NATO role for Agencies of Allied Governments outside Foreign Ministries. Third, the allies were suspicious about the new structures as there was no clarity on their purpose and use.[61] However, Kissinger's analysis could be regarded as an attempt to conceal from Nixon the political opposition to his proposal.

The Committee on Challenges of Modern Society began operation in December 1969. Patrick Moynihan, Nixon's Assistant for Urban Af-

fairs, gave his assessment of its work. In his memorandum to President Nixon dated 01 July 1970, he highly praised the work of the committee. Given that Moynihan was probably the person who had contributed the most to its establishment, it is not surprising that he was very positive on its progress, calling it 'probably now the most active and productive activity of that kind.'[62] According to Moynihan, the committee largely derived its success from the fact that NATO generally united technologically advanced countries who shared similar views on pollution, setting it apart from other nations dealing with the same issues. He testified that the exclusivity provided by NATO's CCMS gave much advantage.

While noting that almost all NATO countries participated in different projects, Moynihan admitted that CCMS 'was sustained by American energy and initiatives.'[63] In his view, it would probably take a long time for the program to become self-sustaining. 'Any relaxation of American effort during that interval is likely to be fatal,'[64] he warned. Thus, while gaining momentum the new committee would still be heavily dependent on a US investment of time and energy.

The establishment of a new body in the structure of NATO provoked much criticism in the US.[65] Critics considered CCMS to be something foreign to NATO and functionally detached from the organisation's major activities. An observation made by Zbigniew Brzezinski is very telling in this respect:

> The Nixon administration has moved to focus NATO's attention on some of the latter concerns but, in my judgment, that is a mistake. NATO should concentrate on the central political issues confronting the West: having served constructively as an alliance to prevent war, it can now seek to create a new structure of East-West security. That task is big enough, and loading new problems on NATO will not increase NATO's political popularity or effectiveness.[66]

Concluding Remarks.

Because the US plays a significant role in NATO, there is a tendency to view NATO's policies as mainly the outcome of a US compromise with its allies or unilateral imposition of its will on them. However, there are situations when the organisational dimension of the alliance matters.

As in the case analysed in this paper, the traditional narrative about

NATO's mission put limits on the possibilities of change, complicated the process of innovating and brought about the modification of the initial discourse on environmental security. This modified discourse was incorporated into the established narrative about the organisation's mission, though there remained some perceived discrepancy between the tasks performed by CCMS and NATO's mission in détente.

The Cold War, understood to be an era of bipolar confrontation, was a historic period when IGOs in the realm of security had very few incentives and opportunities for change. In this respect, the period of détente—when tensions between the two superpowers did not disappear, but became more relaxed and latent—was more permissive to innovations in organisational development. Further examples of organisational changes in the post-Cold War period support this interpretation.

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