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“What about history for institutional change? – the impact of the 2008 Georgia-Russia Conflict on NATO’s Command Structure Adaptation and role as a Defence and Security Organization”.

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Abstract

NATO has repeatedly recognized since 2008 that Russia is “challenging the rules-based international order”, by destabilizing nations through illegal and illegitimate meddling in national politics, conducting provocative military actions and attempting to undermine institutions and “sow instability” (NATO, 2018a; GLOBSEC, 2016, 10). While a majority of documents, scholarly and news articles pinpoint the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 as the point where NATO’s approach to Russia changed significantly, this article will demonstrate that the “critical juncture” in NATO’s Command Structure Adaptation is in fact the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. At this point in history, NATO was faced with a set of decisions required to ensure the Alliance’s ability to address the needs of a rapidly changing and evolving security environment (NATO, 2010a; Steinmo, 2008, 165), in which Russia is not only more willing to violate international norms, but is increasingly challenging NATO and Allies across traditional and hybrid domains (GLOBSEC, 2016, 10, 15). Indeed, a 2010 analysis by a Group of Experts found that “one of the major failures of NATO’s partnership structure was the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia” (NATO, 2010b) - after which, in 2009, the Alliance was quick to agree the Declaration of Alliance Security and implement the Comprehensive Political Guidance, and reinforce Multinational Headquarters (ibid). Through the lens of Historical Institutionalism, the article will explore the impact of the 2008 conflict by reviewing and evaluating the evolution of NATO’s Strategic Concepts, changes in the Command Structure and NATO’s overall posture in subsequent years.

Chapter 1 - Introduction.

With the end of the Cold War, the *raison d'être* for NATO seemed to have disappeared and as such, scholars and politicians alike questioned whether the Alliance could survive without a clear adversary in the form of the Soviet Union (Mearshimer, 1994, 7-14). Evidence suggests that even 28 years later, NATO remains relevant and has a significant role to play as both a territorial defence and global security organization, despite the continually changing security environment (Duffield, 1994; McCalla, 1996; Wallander, 2000; Giegerich, 2016). The new-found role of NATO in global security matters after the Cold War seems to directly coincide with the transformation of NATO's Command Structure and stated purpose, from conventional territorial collective defence to humanitarian interventions and conflict stabilization/management, as part of its effort to assert itself as a global security actor (Pérez-Formés and Cuenca, 2001; Millen, 2004; Klein, 1990; Sandier and Murdoch, 2000; Sandier and Hartley, 1999). By looking at the history of NATO since then, it is possible to discern a pattern – NATO adapts following events that alter the security environment of its constituent parts.

The necessity of institutional adaptation to address and respond to potential 'short notice, fast-burning crisis' on the periphery of the Alliance - which require credible territorial deterrence and defence measures, while maintaining commitments made during previous phases of adaptation (Buzan, 1991, Ehrhart et al, 2013; Giegerich, 2016, 62, 65, 68) - therefore became evident. As such, answering "*What impact has the 2008 Georgia-Russia Conflict had on NATO's Command Structure Adaptation and its role as a defence and security organization?*" will be the core aim of this paper.

Jens Stoltenberg's assessment of NATO's security environment in 2015 – “the tectonic plates of Euro-Atlantic security have shifted both in the East and the South” (Stoltenberg, 2015) – seems to illustrate that the Alliance has to face an onslaught of new and old security challenges, where hybrid threats coexist with those posed by traditional peer-state-actors. NATO remains a collective defence organization at its core, holding Article 3 and 5 responsibilities as its main mission, however with the functional scope of new activities, tasks and interactions with international partners, new and old, its role as a defence and security organizations remains open to further scrutiny (Holmberg, 2011, 536).

The 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict can be seen as a critical point in time where NATO's security environment was fundamentally altered in a way that its then current strategy, Command Structure and role as a security and defence organization no longer fit the requirements of the context. The reintroduction of a “revanchist Russia” (Breedlove, April 2015; Burton, 2015; NATO 2010) on Europe's borders with aggressive territorial and political ambitions was a catalyst for institutional adaptation – whereby threats could no longer be externalized and the external focus of the Alliance in providing regional stability (“Projecting Stability” pillar) were no longer sufficient. Russia's actions since August 2008 “brought warfare and zero-sum power rivalry back to a continent that thought it had regulated and legislated such issues away” (Giegerich, 2016, 61; Burton, 2015, 297-298), as evidenced by consequent aggression, in different forms and to varying degrees, against sovereign states - i.e. Ukraine and the Baltic States. The series of events that took place in the five day period in mid-August 2008, can be considered a turning point - or critical juncture - for NATO's new wave of adaptation, as it highlighted critical shortcomings of the then-current institutional and posture arrangements.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review.

The evolving role of NATO's role since the end of the Cold War has generally been divided along three theoretical approaches. As expected, (neo)Realists have emphasized US interests and ambitions to control and influence smaller Allies, and the continuity of external threats (Walt, 1997; Waltz, 2001; Burton, 2015). Constructivists, by contrast, focus on the construction of 'democratic and security communities' by the Alliance (Risse-Kappen, 1996; Schimmelfennig 1999, Burton, 2015). Finally, and most promisingly for the purposes of this thesis, institutionalists have "emphasized the adaptability of NATO to new security challenges and emphasized such concepts as path dependence and institutional "stickiness" as explaining NATO's perpetuation, which is to say that the adaptation of NATO structures has been seen as preferable to the reinvention/reestablishment of the Alliance" (Burton, 2015, 304; Wallander, 2000; Thies, 2009).

However, to evaluate the significance of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict with regards to its impact on NATO Command Structure Adaptation and NATO's role as a defence and security organization, it is imperative to have a detailed understanding of the context, institutional constraints and strategies chosen to address changes in the security environment. For this reason, the overall goal of Historical Institutionalism (HI) - "*to build and test midrange theoretical arguments that address the question of the origin or the reform of important political institutions*" (Capoccia, 163 in Mahoney & Thelen, 2015) - provides significant insights and sound theoretical underpinnings for evaluating the impact of this conflict. The micro-foundational focus on specific historical events, along with tracing their long-term implications of previous phases of adaptation, do not necessarily require grand theoretical explanations to capture the drivers for adaptation and their respective impact on

organizations (Capoccia, 2016, 1097). Evaluating historical events and crises according to the merits of “critical junctures theory” requires the identification of specific moments in history that affect institutions in a particular way - this level of detail and understanding cannot be accounted for with more deterministic views of principles and behaviors that govern the international system and international organizations. The intent of HI is not to produce grand theory and all encompassing explanations for institutional change, but rather to analyze process that can lead to institutions changing gradually (Capoccia, 2016, 1097). With this in mind, the following section will review mainstream approaches to international organizations and institutional adaptation that follow grand theoretical explanations. The chapter will conclude with a brief review of current applications of historical institutionalism, and demonstrate why this approach is better suited for understanding the evolution of NATO through detailed and critical analyses of specific ‘flashpoints’ in history, rather than through overarching theoretical explanations.

i. (Neo)realism:

While asking the right questions and considering the historically rooted motivations for institutions to be formed - the main unit of analysis remains the state for many Neorealist scholars. As Barany and Rauchhaus highlight, NATO’s expansion and consequent transformation from a territorial defence organization to a pan-European institution underpinned and directed by the United States, was the result of US national interests being played out through an international organization (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011, 301; Krebs, 1999, 343-4). Strategic advantage and relative gains offered to Allies by the extension of NATO membership to former Warsaw pact nations is part of a zero-sum conception of world politics - where Western territorial and political gains are at the expense of Russia’s. According to Mearheimer's logic, NATO’s expansion was traditionally based on opportunism

and power maximizing tendencies of states (ibid; Mearshimer, 1995). Neorealism fails to consider collective action through NATO after the Cold War, and the shift of focus to out of area operations is justified more as a function, once again, of US foreign and security policy interests, rather than a result of the fundamental shifts in the Alliance's security environment (Burton, 2015, 304, 307; Krebs, 1999, 346; Ratti, 2009, 400; Mearsheimer, 1995, 7). Historical context is recognized, yet actions and transformation by NATO are reduced to simple power-maximization strategies employed by powerful Allies (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011, 303; Krebs, 1999, 346; Ratti, 2009, 400), leaving little room for context specific and institutionalized choices and strategies *chosen by institutions themselves*. In addition, Neorealists would contend that NATO would at best become an empty shell, "preserved for its public relations and symbolic value, in which members no longer fulfill core treaty commitments" (Krebs, 1999, 346-347; Waltz, 1993, 76; Mearsheimer, 1995, 7-14) in the absence of its principal threat. What Neorealist academics seem to have failed to account for was the reemergence of Russia, the added value of structured cooperation, and the notion of 'options' for strategies during crises based on previous experiences and current realities.

ii. Constructivism:

Constructivist approaches to NATO's persistence, adaptation and authority to speak of itself as a collective and capable actor tend to focus on the image and narrative built around NATO - that is, the embodiment of the 'West' (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011). Explanations revolve largely around the question of identity, in terms of their re-productive practices and structures of signification that are able to change based on their employment (Schlag, 2009, 2; Flockhart, 2010a; Hay, 1999). The broad research field concerning NATO within constructivism - especially when considering narrative and discourse analysis - focuses on

the projection of NATO into the former Soviet satellite states as part of an overall logic of expanding a “community of democracies... [with] a desire to expand that community to Central and Eastern Europe” (Risse-Kappen, 1996; Schimmelfenning, 1999; Burton, 2015). The strong representational and discursive link between NATO and “the West” has also been cited as one of the main factors for the Alliance’s survival following the end of the Cold War (Schlag, 2009, 6; Behnke, 2007). The general framework suggests a schism between NATO’s role as a defence and security actor, its self-representation, and the external security environment. Without an adequate account of the contextual changes, analysis of the constructions and representation of NATO’s role and capacity to act in its mandated sphere, would fall short for explaining the practical implications of conflicts, crises and even wars.

iii. Institutionalism(s):

‘Historical, sociological and rational choice institutionalism have significantly grown in their empirical scope and analytical sophistication’ (Fioretos *et al*, 2016, 1; Fioretos, 2011, 368). The logic of institutionalized interactions, distribution of costs and reduction of uncertainty played a key role in neoliberal explanations of why institutions would persist, and even adapt from their original mandate to a limited extent to meet collective needs of changing requirements (Kribs, 1999, 347; McCalla, 1996; Duffield, 1994; Keohane, 1984). The degree of institutionalization is key for understanding NATO’s persistence, and Allies’ willingness to continue to act through NATO even in changed circumstances. As Kribs notes, the lock-in effect of institutional commitment in the past by nations have to some extent determined the necessity of their continued involvement, as, for example “joint force structures and planning reshape each member’s military posture to reflect alliance interests, reducing the fear of attack and obviating security dilemma dynamics. Force specialization

constrains members' abilities to use their forces for exclusively national objectives" (1999, 349). Nonetheless, the logic of functionality and purposive action remain key drivers for institutional change in both neorealist and neoliberal institutionalist explanations of institutional adaptation for NATO - albeit neoliberal institutionalism recognizes a greater degree of institutional influence in creating a 'lock-in' effect based on continued interaction (Kribs, 1999, 348; Ratti, 2009, 404-6). The limitation lies largely in the non-consideration of actual requirements of the international security environment, and the impact of a previous decisions/events in history that have shaped NATO's role as a defence and security organization. Beyond the practicalities and functions of cooperation for nations, there is little room for the analysis and granular explanation of specific events that push cooperation and adaptation forward, and their long-term effects on NATO's adaptation and transformation.

The majority of institutionalist literature tends to look at why institutions exist, how they shape preferences/available actions of members, and why they persists despite contextual, preference and institutional changes (see Mahoney, 2002; Peters *et al*, 2005; Pierson, 2000; Menon & Welsh, 2011). However, early institutionalist work seems to disregard the importance of history. NATO's adaptation is constant and determined to a large extent by context, punctuated by critical points in history (Johnston, 2017; Marrone *et al*, 2015; Holmberg, 2011). How do specific phenomena, or junctures, in history affect institutional change in any particular direction? How did previous decisions, or adaptation measures, determine the extent to which NATO is able to adapt? How have the aggregate of these phases affected its role as a defence, and now security, organization? These questions remain largely unanswered, most studies do not consider historical contexts of previous institutional changes that to some extent determine the impact of consequent changes – i.e.

path dependency (Capoccia, 2016). While this thesis will not attempt to answer all these questions directly, they are worth noting for further research. These questions also highlight the logic of the thesis - what impact has a seemingly small conflict had on the overall adaptation and role of NATO and what about this conflict made adaptation necessary?

Historical Institutionalism (HI) is an increasingly influential framework for research in comparative politics (see Capoccia, 2016; Fioretos, 2011; Fioretos *et al*, 2016; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010a; Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 1999; & Thelen & Steinmo, 1992), largely due to the shift of early HI focus from “how political and social behavior is structured by institutions and public policies” to “the analysis of institutional change” (Capoccia, 2016, 1095) and evolution (Lustick, 2011). While increasingly applied to the context of the European Union and EU policy analysis (see Fioretos, 2010; Pierson, 2004; Bulmer, 2009) and topic/context specific phenomena (e.g. Pollitt, 2008; Bulmer, 2009, on the impact of history on EU policy dynamics; Roberts & Geels, 2019: transport and agriculture; Mischke, 2014: institutions and welfare attitudes; Pierson, 2004 & Campbell, 2003: the welfare state; Mahoney, 2002: path dependence and political regime development in Central America; Skocpol, 1979: sources/patterns of great revolutions), it has not been applied to studies of NATO extensively. This is surprising, considering the 70 year history of the organization, which has survived several significant historical events that have changed the geopolitical/security landscape - in other words, NATO has experienced and reacted to a series of ‘critical junctures’ (more on this in the next section).

Overall, the shortfall of traditional IR theories is their inability to predict NATO’s rapid enlargement and adaptation to changing security contexts and requirements - remaining

pessimistic to varying degrees (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011, 299-300). “All three approaches were directionally incorrect: neorealists expected real decline; neo-liberal institutionalists expected relative decline; constructivists expected mere persistence” (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011, 299-300). The value added by HI lies in its consideration of the ways in which history itself shapes and affects outcomes for institutions and individual actors within specific contexts (Steinmo, 2008,177). It is puzzling that this approach has not been applied more readily to explain the ways in which specific events that change the security landscape in which NATO operates - such as the 2008 Georgia-Russia Conflict - affect its institutional adaptation and consequently its role, assumed through previous episodes of adaptation as a defence and security organization.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework.

A pattern in NATO's continuous adaptation efforts since its inception is visible. These have been accelerated by critical moments/shocks in history when fundamental shifts occurred in its strategic policy documents, structure and stated focus (Pedersen, 2011; Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011) – such as the end of the Cold War, Breakup of Yugoslavia (1990); 9/11 (2001); and 2008 rising tensions with Russia. Indeed the choices by NATO during these periods, punctuated by shocks, have had lasting impacts on the way it conducts business, its structural adaptation and perceived requirements, and consequently on the role it assumes in the international arena. In the words of Capoccia and Kelemen, the concept of critical junctures is “an essential building block of historical institutionalism” that punctuate relatively long-periods of path-dependent institutional stability and reproduction, during which more significant institutional change is possible (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, 341; Bulmer, 2009, 308; Krasner, 1984, 241-243; Steinmo et al, 1992, 15). Understanding critical junctures – or ‘punctuated equilibria’ (Thelen, 2004; Lustick, 2011, 203) –, in this case the 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict, frames the discussion of NATO's latest sequence of adaptation to a new security landscape, while anchoring such changes in a long sequence of adaptation measures and decisions from previous periods where institutional change was necessitated (Karásek, 2018, 48).

The objective of HI is to understand the conditions/contexts in which institutions, such as NATO, can become themselves “the object[s] of strategic action” (Hall, 2010, p. 204; Capoccia, 2016, 1096). It does so by “explaining real world outcomes, using history as an analytic tool...” (Steinmo, 2008, 157; Fioretos, 2011, 369; Pierson, 2004, 178). The intent of

this paper is similar - to pinpoint the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict as the critical juncture during which a series of adaptation measures were made viable to NATO, due to the upset in the post-Cold War security order in and around Europe.

Historical institutionalism can consider ‘gradual institutional change’ – or evolution – to complement periods of rapid change emphasizing how institutions themselves can structure responses to exogenous shocks and the social and political interactions that transform the institutions themselves (Capoccia, 2016, 1095-96; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). These developments mitigate restrictive conceptions of institutional ‘stickiness’¹ and stasis of early HI literature, by allowing for a broader scope of analysis – permitting equal consideration of the importance of critical junctures, and more evolutionary, pro-active and “managed change and organisational learning... through reflexive, strategic and decisive self-transformation” (Hay, 199, 320; see Lustick, 2011; Steinmo, 2008). The logic follows a degree functionalism - as long as NATO “carries out additional functions, there exists a clear rationale for institutional reform” (Dijkstra, 2015, 129; referencing Wallander & Keohane, 1999), as organizations “feel continuous pressure to adjust their functions and designs to environmental demands” (Dijkstra, 2015, 134; Dijkstra, 2012; Koremenos et al, 2001). This approach sees NATO's adaptation accordingly: “the environment has changed since the end of the Cold War. NATO has expanded its functions to survive. This has affected its institutional design as well” (Dijkstra, 2015, 134). Using a HI approach to understand and evaluate the impact of the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict on NATO’s Command Structure

¹ Defined as “Inertial and *re*-active systems, which tend, by contrast, to evolve, if at all, through iterative and unreflexive adaptation to systemic failure” (Hay, 1999, 320).

Adaptation, and its role as a defence and security organization, allows the thesis to measure this event against two core concepts: *path dependence* and *critical junctures*.

Path Dependence and Critical Junctures:

The concept of *critical junctures* refers to “relatively short periods of time during which there is a substantially heightened probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of interest” (Capoccia, 153 in Mahoney & Thelen, 2015; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, 348) and *path dependence* refers to a “process in which the structure that prevails after a specific moment in time (often a critical juncture) shapes the subsequent trajectory in ways that make alternative institutional designs substantially less likely to triumph, including those that would be more efficient according to a standard expected utility model” (Fioretos, 2011, 376) - in short, *history matters*. Path dependence is an important causal mechanism and critical junctures often punctuate the starting point for many path dependent processes/ behaviors (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, 342). This is because during crises “decisions and choices of key actors are freer and more influential in steering institutional development than during “settled” times” due to their political uncertainty (Capoccia, 153 in Mahoney & Thelen, 2015; Swidler, 1986). In essence, an event or series of exogenous events may lead to a period of “political uncertainty in which different options for radical institutional change are viable, antecedent conditions define the range of institutional alternatives available to decision makers but do not determine the alternative chosen; one of these options is selected; and its selection generates a long-lasting institutional legacy” (Capoccia, 153-154 in Mahoney & Thelen, 2015). Uncertainty over the outcome of such decisions is also important - choices made during these periods trigger a set of processes among those deemed possible, but do not ensure a particular outcome - nothing is determined (ibid). This leaves significant room for intentionality, interpretation and unintended consequences, resulting from the

various pressures on political actors during these periods. Detailed analysis of an event as well as a focus on ‘when something happens, in order to establish whether and how much causal force it exercises over their subject’ is therefore needed (Capoccia, 153-154 in Mahoney & Thelen, 2015).

Conditions under which institutions and policies structure social behavior or become themselves “the object of strategic action” could constitute a critical juncture (Hall, 2010, 204; Capoccia, 2016, 1096). This requires an understanding and identification of the “ways in which an institutional configuration at a certain point in time influences the interaction of social and political actors so that institutional change, of varying scope and intensity, or institutional stability is achieved at a later point in time” (Capoccia, 2016, 1096). The analysis of critical junctures is not only focused on small events, but instead on decisions by actors and how these decisions steer outcomes during periods of uncertainty toward “a new equilibrium” (Kelemen & Capoccia, 2007, 354). This text will consider NATO’s Strategic Concepts as key indicators of critical junctures in the Alliance’s history.

HI’s evolutionary explanation of institutional change can be used to understand changes in the environment in which any institution acts, whereby previous strategies and institutional structures, functions, or identities no longer meet the requirements of their strategic/security environments (Lustick, 2011, 197). Decisions leading to transformation or change are seen as neither choice nor a function of preference, but rather a ‘result of the transformation of the political environment’ (ibid). This focuses analysis on ‘implications of institutional change that shifts the structure’ of incentives/identities/scope of capabilities resulting from external environmental changes (ibid). It captures the assumption that NATO’s

continuous adaptation is down to the changing external environment, which impacts/shifts its role within it. Leading from the assumptions that institutions frame collective visions for how the world operates, NATO's adaptation is seen as a direct result of a point in history where change was deemed necessary. Taking the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict as a starting point – the “critical juncture” – for the analysis requires a theoretical framework that can account for both revolutionary and evolutionary transformation; recognizing institutional intricacies, but avoiding the granularity of individual state preferences.

Lustick's evolutionary approach contributes to understanding historical institutionalism, where ‘critical junctures’ serve as points of reference for particular forms of institutional change, without completely breaking institutional patterns and fundamentally changing the institution itself (Lustick, 2011; Steinmo, 2008, 175). Employing a degree of evolutionary theory overcomes HI's over-reliance on full-blown crises² for change, and will largely underpin the logic underlying this thesis – it shifts emphasis to strategies through which institutions choose *per se*, while still taking into account exogenous environments that constrain choices (security environment) and the entity that chooses (NATO).

While Historical Institutionalism has been increasingly used in various disciplines of social science, it has not been applied effectively to the context of NATO and its adaptation to the changing security environment (Fioretos, 2011, 368; Capoccia, 2016). Interestingly, HI provides important insights into understanding how relatively stable institutions, often created with a clear purpose, change and adapt to their environment (Capoccia, 2016, 1096).

² Crises in this context are defined as ‘temporary moments or phases... that are generally deviations from the normal course of events.. that are generally capable of resolution’ (Hay, 1999, 318).

This has been recognized, and a new wave of HI research has aimed to refocus the theory on explaining and understanding institutional change (Conran & Thelen, 2016; Thelen, 2004). The object of HI is then to understand under the condition/environment in which institutions, such as NATO, become themselves “the object of strategic action” (Hall, 2010, p. 204; Capoccia, 2016, 1096). This is critical for contextualizing and considering adaptation of the NATO Command Structure as a strategy aimed at ensuring that the Alliance remains capable of addressing the challenges of a changed environment where previous strategies are no longer adequate (Fioretos, 2011, 375; Dijkstra, 2015).

Chapter 4 - Methodology.

To answer the question “*What impact has the 2008 Georgia-Russia Conflict had on NATO’s Command Structure Adaptation and its role as a defence and security organization?*” through the lens of Historical Institutionalism, a clear methodology is required that can capture the spatial, temporal and contextual boundaries of the object of this study. A majority of studies in HI have employed case studies (see Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Thelen, 2004; Lustick, 2011; Krasner, 1984; Capoccia, 2016), that have provided qualitative data required to draw causal inferences about the importance of ‘critical junctures’. Qualitative case studies provide the tools required to study relatively complex events in within their context (Baxter & Jack, 2008, 544). HI focuses on specific events (*critical junctures*), traits (*path dependence*) and historical contexts to explain what impact certain phenomena have institutions, possible responses to changed environments, and in turn how these affect their design.

For the purposes of this thesis, answering the question of affect requires an understanding of the ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions – i.e. how has the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict impacted NATO and the security environment, and what adaptation did it result in? A case study of the conflict in consideration is the appropriate methodological design when “the behavior of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated; contextual conditions believed to be relevant to the phenomenon considered need to be covered; the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context” (Yin, 2003 in Baxter & Jack, 2008, 545). Having a historical view of choices and decisions made in the past to adapt the Alliance to the then current security environment, allows the study to understand and contextualize NATO’s

role in security and defence, and the impact of structural adaptation to exogenous events that have constituted periods of path dependent behavior (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, 342). As such, NATO's retained war-fighting capabilities that have been reinforced, continued involvement in crisis management missions, and development of capabilities to address hybrid threats (cyber, intelligence, etc.), can be tethered to specific decisions throughout NATO's historical contexts. These are now encapsulated in a "360 Degree approach" to defence and security, pulling heavily on the concepts of deterrence, defence and projecting stability, which requires a posture and Command Structure that is fit for purpose (SHAPE, 2018).

Applying HI requires an understanding of specific events, therefore using a single explanatory case study is expected to help explain the 'presumed causal links' highlighted in the theoretical framework that are bound by context, by drawing on a number of historical, archival and document data sources to provide data for qualitative analysis. A single case study approach allows for the study of contexts where both independent and dependent variables are present, and by employing the methods highlighted above, allows for testing theoretical assumptions about the causal mechanisms between the two (*changes in the security environment – institutional adaptation/change*) within a specific context (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, 11). As Reuschemeyer argues, "[c]ase studies can do more than generate theoretical ideas. They can test theoretical prepositions, and they can offer persuasive causal explanations" (Mahoney & Reuschemeyer, 2003, 318), "thereby confronting explanatory propositions with multiple data points" (Steinmo, 2008, 176).

Data sources include official *public* NATO documents and press-releases on its Command Structure Adaptation, Russia, Georgia, the Georgia-Russia conflict, and broader statements of intent, priorities and objectives (e.g. updates/reports from Defence and Foreign Ministerial meetings between 2008-2018). NATO's Strategic Concepts highlight the evolution of the Euro-Atlantic security environment, and document the Alliance's efforts to ensure that its structure, focus, and strategy meet those requirements and are fit for purpose (Zapolskis, 2013, 36). By looking at official NATO Strategic Concepts between 1991 and 2010, its core tasks and principles, values, understanding of the evolving security environment and its strategic objectives can be clearly discerned³ (Posen, 1991, 13), and adaptation in response to particular critical junctures pinpointed. These Strategic Concepts are not hollow political declarations, but "the key NATO defence planning document, defining guidelines and the level of ambition, which is subsequently transformed into real capabilities, initiatives, reforms and operations" (Zapolskis, 2013, 35). If operationalized well, patterns of institutional change through evolutionary adaptation, rather than complete breaks in institutional patterns or fundamental changes in the institution itself, should be visible (Lustick, 2011).

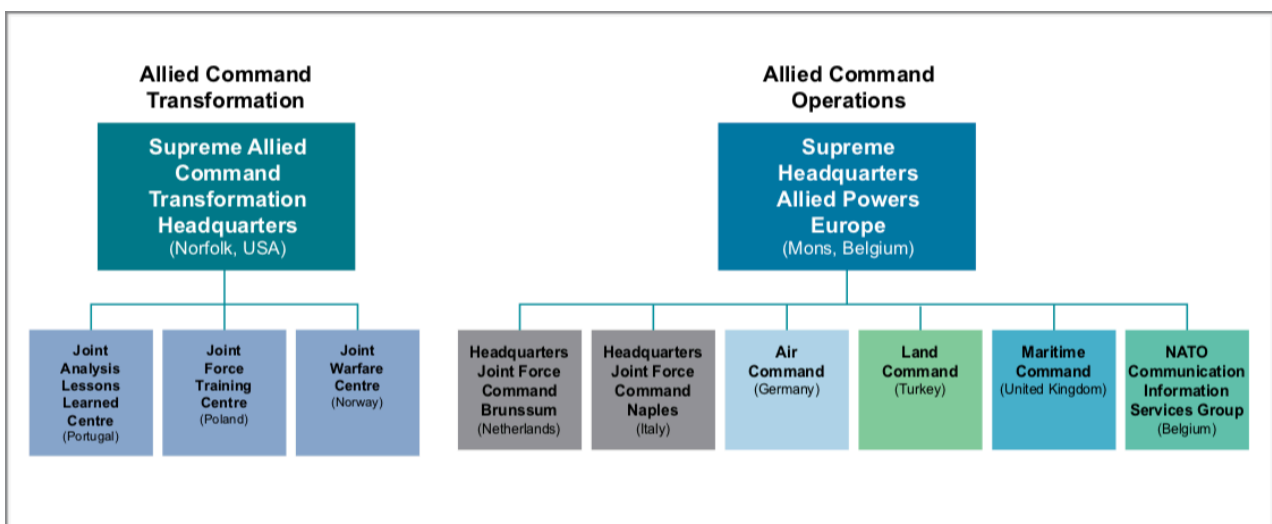
Detailed engagement with various sources of data highlighted above for the case study, together with the theoretical assumptions of HI, should allow for discerning the significance of this conflict in the sequencing of institutional adaptation (i.e. following a 'critical juncture' that alters the security environment), and of decisions at previous points in

³ Military doctrines refer to the "subcomponent of grand strategy [that] deals with military means" that define what the Alliance's goals are and how they could be attained, and as such "are critical components of... security policy and grand strategy" (Posen, 1991, 13).

time (path dependence) that affect the Alliance's adaptation strategies and its role as a defence and security organization.

Chapter 5 - NATO Command Structure.

The NATO Command Structure (henceforth NCS) is the backbone of NATO, which includes the permanent international headquarters at the strategic, operation and component levels of command, across the geographical scope of the Alliance. The call for a new Strategic Concept at the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit in 2009 by Heads of State and Government, reflects a new strategic context, in which Russia is intent on protecting post-Soviet territories (as in Georgia, Ukraine, Afghanistan) - a stark shift from an understanding that ‘the monolithic, massive, and potentially immediate threat which was the principal concern of the Alliance in its first forty years has disappeared’ that prevailed in the 1991 Strategic Concept (NATO, 1991). This also meant that the stated mission of the Alliance required different capabilities and civilian-military structures to meet its mission and objectives - “European and transatlantic actors thus had to rediscover and relearn how to cope with a hostile regional power in the near neighborhood” (Karásek, 2018, 45). While at the end of the Cold War, NATO had 33 commands, Allies decided at the 2010 Lisbon Summit to reform the NCS to create a more robust, agile, and efficient command system aimed at improving NATO’s capacity to address its full scope of core tasks (Paragraph 2 & 48-49, NATO 2010c).



Current NATO Command Structure (SHAPE, 2018).

Chapter 6 - NATO's Strategic Concepts: From Russia as no longer a threat, to the need for comprehensive posture reinforcement.

Following the end of the Cold War, NATO was faced with a different security environment than what it was founded in. The 1991 Strategic Concept reorganized NATO for these new “diverse and multidirectional risks” that European Allies faced (NATO, 1991). It signaled the creation of a different military structure that had “limited but ‘militarily significant’ proportion of ground, air, and sea immediate and rapid reaction elements (Deni, 2008, 32-33) and a civilian structure suited to addressing new challenges. This resulted in the drastic reduction of military forces across Europe and cuts in European defence budgets (on average 15%). The significant reduction of US military presence required the restructuring of the NATO Command structure into “three separate force types: rapid response, in which the Immediate Reaction Force (Land)... acted first, the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Forces... reinforced the IRF(L); the main defense forces, which were multinational in their command structure; and the augmentation forces, which would only be used to reinforce the other levels” (Deni, 2007, 65). The aim was twofold - enable rapid reaction to disturbances and conflict on Europe's borders as a result of former Soviet satellite state independence, and for the greater integration of the Alliance through multinational corps (ibid). This became increasingly pressing with the conflict in Kosovo developing rapidly - which highlighted significant shortcomings in European defence capabilities and division in political will and threat perception.

The move to out-of-area operations and crisis management was reinforced by the 1999 NATO Strategic Concept, as Paragraph 12 highlights the growing political role of the Alliance in strengthening political and military partnerships and dialogue, continued

commitment to conflict prevention and crisis management in the Balkans, openness to new state accession, and determination to “shape its security environment and enhance the peace and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area” (NATO, 1999). In addition, paragraph 13 notes that “NATO has successfully adapted to enhance its ability to contribute to Euro-Atlantic peace and stability. Internal reform has included a new command structure, including the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept, the creation of arrangements to permit the rapid deployment of forces for the full range of the Alliance's missions...” (NATO, 1999). NATO Summits between Madrid 1997 and Bucharest 2008 focused on Alliance membership expansion, NATO’s mission in Afghanistan (International Security Assistance Force), crisis management in Kosovo, and development of military capabilities to respond to instability beyond its borders (Pedersen, 2011, 34-50; NATO, 2018b).

By contrast, the 2010 Summit in Lisbon introduced the most recent Strategic Concept (albeit still emphasizing crisis management and response, but recognizing the need for a reform of NATO’s military command structure) (NATO, 2010); the 2012 Chicago Summit already hinted at transferring responsibility for security beyond its borders (especially Afghanistan); and the Summits between 2014 Wales and 2018 Brussels clearly highlighted the need to address a resurgent Russia, by adopting the Readiness Action Plan, positioning multinational battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in 2017, and reinforcing the Alliance’s overall deterrence and defence posture (NATO, 2018a, 2018b).

Previous adaptation measures have however not changed the mission and role of the Alliance as either a security and defence organization, but has rather shifted the emphasis back to its primary role - the “Defence of member states’ territories and sovereignty, primarily through deterrence of would be aggressors” (Karásek, 2018, 48). NATO’s assumed

responsibility for regional security and stability outside its borders since 1999 did not replace Article 3 and 5 obligations enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty, but rather added a layer of activities on top of them based on the then current security requirements (NATO, 2019).

Chapter 7 - The 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict. A Small, but Significant Flashpoint in NATO's History.

The five day conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 has been described and analyzed as “a classical power political war with a major power attacking a small one in the context of a more general power political contest” (Joenniemi, 2010, 7; see Allison, 2008; Fedorov, 2008; Friedman, 2008). By contrast, this same conflict has been considered “hardly a ‘war’ at all, when measured against the standards of a modern war (Bolcu, 2012, 34-35). It is “the little war that shook the world” (Asmus, 2010), and the indication of the systemic breakdown necessitating a reparation not Europe’s deficient architecture of security (Lavrov, 2008 in Joenniemi, 2010, 7), and an ‘unintended conflict destined to fade into oblivion’. This chapter will attempt to highlight the characteristics and outcomes of this conflict in the context of NATO’s adaptation, that make this event a ‘critical juncture’.

Initial Russian advances into South Ossetia at the dawn of the outbreak of large-scale violence between 7-8 August 2008, can be seen as a direct result of ambitions by Georgian leadership to restore control over conflict regions dominated by ethnic tensions - by declaring their intent of restoring "constitutional order," deploying Georgia military forces and launching an offensive starting on 7 August (Europe Report n.195, 2008, 3-5). Further advances against Abkhazia were apparently anticipated by Russia, as several ‘advisers and military offers’ were redeployed to the regions between March and May 2008, as “peacekeepers” for the region under the justification of their concern for potential “humanitarian” crises and the protection of its ‘citizens’ (Europe Report n.195, 2008, 2). Around 9000 Russian troops were stationed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia at the time (ibid). As fighting continued, it was conventionally recognized in the West that “Russia’s

disproportionate counter-attack, with movement of large forces into Abkhazia and deep into Georgia, accompanied by the widespread destruction of economic infrastructure, damage to the economy and disruption of communications and movement between different regions of the country, constitutes a dramatic shift in Russian-Western relations” (Europe Report n.195, 2008, ii-2). Political tensions heightened exponentially in part due to the continued deployment of Russian forces across the administrative border to enter western Georgia and violation of Georgian airspace by Russian military planes, and in part due to the continued violence and confrontation between break-away militia, Russian forces and the Georgian military on the ground and at naval⁴ and air bases in Georgia (ibid, 3).

Europe Report n.195 suggests that “Russian actions reflected deeper factors, including pushback against the decade-long eastward expansion of... NATO... anger over issues ranging from the independence of Kosovo to the placement of missile defence systems in Europe... [and] an assertion of a concept of limited sovereignty for former Soviet states” (2008, 2). This assertiveness and aggression in Russia’s foreign policy seemingly also coincided with the vision of Putin. Russia’s invasion in Georgia effectively altered NATO’s hopes to expand membership further across former Soviet states and sparked the re-evaluation of its relationship with Russia and its strategic posture (Asmus, 2010). This alone allows for the categorizations of the conflict as a critical juncture - it halted previous practices and strategic ambitions, and posed a series of strategic questions regarding the NATO’s institutional structure/posture.

⁴ “They occupied Georgian military bases and systematically destroyed infrastructure. On the first day (8 August) of the Russian incursion... Georgians claim, their airspace was violated 22 times; airfields were a frequent target, but Russian SU-25 planes also struck a police post as well as residential areas in Gori. There is evidence that Russian planes dropped cluster bombs on Gori’s central square” (Europe Report n. 195, 2008, 3).

Impact on NATO's adaptation and role:

At the time NATO was ill-equipped to effectively deter and defend against territorial infringements and disputes. The shortcomings of NATO were severely exposed as Allies failed to adequately address Russian aggression in the breakaway regions of Ossetia and Abkhazia. Decisions at the Wales Summit in 2014, Warsaw in 2016 and Brussels in 2018 demonstrate a reversal in NATO's approach to the region, and an increased willingness to enact deterrence measures directly against Russian activities on NATO's immediate borders. NATO recognized this conflict as a turning point, and a return to strategic competition with a regional adversary - a dynamic that is ingrained in the organization's historical foundations (Karásek, 2018, 48-49; NATO, 2010a, 2019). Nonetheless, post-Cold War developments shifted NATO's strategic focus away from confrontation in Europe, which meant that it had to 'revive' "previous modes of strategic thinking and operation while at the same time adapting [it] to a unique political and security setting" (Karásek, 2018, 48-49). This demonstrates a degree of path dependence - at its foundation NATO is a defence Alliance, however, a series of adaptation measures since 1991 have transformed its structure to address the requirements of external threats. Nonetheless, none of the adaptation measures at previous critical junctures resulted in the fundamental uprooting of NATO tasks; rather, they layered and diverted attention as needed.

NATO's response to the conflict did not result in immediate institutional changes, which can be attributed to a degree of internal 'stickiness' - rather, it prompted the adoption of a familiar territorial deterrence and defence posture, and the development of new capabilities to counter the potential aggression within Alliance territory (Karásek, 2018, 45). 2008 first signaled Russia's willingness to reopen territorial disputes, break international

norms, and destabilize NATO Allies and partners. Similarly to NATO's response to previous critical junctures, as highlighted by Johnston, the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict encouraged a series of triggered early measures to adapt the NCS to changes in the security environment, while maintaining to previous commitments (2017, 28)⁵. Once again, static war fighting commands gained prominence (ACO, ACT, and tactical component commands), along with the establishment of deterrent forces along the eastern flank of the Alliance (in the form of enhanced and tailored Forward Presence forces in the Baltic States), increased focus on countering hybrid threats (e.g. terrorism, cyber defense, disinformation), and emphasis on burden sharing (Defence Investment Pledge - 2% of GDP, and 20% of the 2% on new capability development). The unprecedented scope of NATO's involvement global and regional security challenges have affected the organizational, structural and strategic behavior of the Alliance, shifting focus at various stages of NATO's adaptation; while not changing the Alliance's core mission of deterrence and defence, they have instead built on and expanded its original tasks (NATO, 1991, 1999, 2010; Karásek, 2018; Siedeschlag, 1999; Larrabee, 1999; Pedersen, 2011).

Decisions at Leaders' meetings since 2008, suggest a retreat from the post-Cold War consideration of Russia as a strategic partner (NATO, 1991, 2002), and a shift in NATO's focus on counterbalancing against a seeming resurgent Russia (NATO, 2010a, 2010b, 2018; GLOBSEC, 2016, 10-15). NATO's external strategic focus was unsettled, and European security destabilized by the blatant defiance of international norms of non-aggression and

⁵ i.e. Emphasis on the expeditionary transformation of the integrated military structure (NATO Force and Command Structures), readiness to conduct operations on the global scale (i.e. ISAF as first ground War in Afghanistan for NATO, involvement in the Libyan civil war and its aftermath, and the establishment of the training mission in Iraq, among others), and increased willingness to cooperate with partner nations (i.e. Finland, Sweden, and Georgia most prominently) (Karásek, 2018, 45).

territorial integrity by Russia's actions, first in Georgia in 2008, and again in Ukraine in 2014 (Karásek, 2018, 45). Since then, four Multinational Battlegroups have been deployed to the eastern flank of the Alliance, and its presence in the Black Sea region has been significantly reinforced as well. In this period, NATO also tripled the size of its Response Force, with a Spearhead Force of 5,000 troops at its core. At the 2018 Brussels Summit, Allied leaders decided on a number of measures, aimed directly at strengthening the deterrence and defence posture of the Alliance - including the augmentation of force readiness, enabling and facilitating troop movement across the Atlantic and within Europe. These all support the Alliance's Military Command Structure modernization and adaptation, with the aim of producing adequate operational capabilities to quickly respond to potential emerging crises, provide analysis, options and planning for informed political and military decision-making, and maximize the deterrent effects of Allied forces (SHAPE, 2018). At the 2019 April Foreign Ministerial, leaders agreed a new package of measures to improve situational awareness in the Black Sea region, and strengthen support for Georgia and Ukraine (NATO, 2019). NATO is also responding to security challenges emanating from the South, including through enhanced planning and exercises. NATO's deterrence and defence posture remains based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities (NATO, 2010a).

The Russia-Georgia conflict has transformed the contemporary geopolitical landscape, with far reaching consequences for peace and security in Europe and its immediate regions (Europe Report n.195, 2008, i; Castle, 1 May 2008). "The speed and scale of the Russian offensive in the name of 'coercing Georgia to peace' the largest Russian military incursion into a foreign state since the collapse of Soviet power, have also prompted

fundamental questions about the motivations and objectives of the Russian leadership" (Allison, 2008, 1145), and NATO could not answer these questions, which meant that the Alliance's then current strategy and Command Structure no longer fit the environment in which it found itself. Whereas the 1991 Strategic Concept declared that "the monolithic, massive, and potentially immediate threat which was the principal concern of the Alliance... has disappeared..." (NATO, 1991), Paragraphs 7 & 8 of the 2010 Strategic Concept directly address conventional threats posed by the acquisition of "substantial, modern military capabilities with consequences for international stability and Euro-Atlantic security... includ[ing] the proliferation of ballistic missiles, which poses a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area" (NATO, 2010a). According to HI, the changes apparent in the NCS since 2008 are seen as conscious, purposive, and the result of changes in the security environment. The 2010 Strategic Concept recognizes the Alliance's three core tasks: Collective Defence, Crisis Management and Cooperative security, however, it notes that in order "to carry out the full range of... missions as effectively and efficiently as possible, Allies will engage in a continuous process of reform, modernization and transformation" (NATO, 2010a). A return to emphasis on capabilities essential for credible deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area is a significant departure from an externally focused, flexible, and 'slim' Command Structure necessitated by strategic concepts prior to 2010.

Conclusion.

The 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict signaled the next phase of NATO's adaptation. Roles and responsibilities assumed at previous phases of adaptation - resulting from critical junctures at the end of the Cold War, the Kosovo Crisis, 9/11 - and now the reemergence of Russia as a regional security threat, has meant that NATO's role has expanded exponentially since its inception in 1949. It is the most complex security and defence organization, with a broad-scope of activities undertaken in both the East and the South - regions that require different solutions to security threats and measures for ensuring the security and defence of NATO Allies (NATO, 2019). Russia initially demonstrated its willingness to break rules and norms of the international order in Georgia, which presented NATO with a strategic dilemma - its choices would largely determine its relevance and role in providing security and defence for the next decades. Previous decisions to involve itself in regional security issues beyond its borders has meant that it could no longer abandon those responsibilities due to the shift in the security and defence requirements in its immediate periphery to favor one dimension of its roles, despite the resurgence of Russia. Far reaching changes and evolution in the structure and modus-operandi of the Alliance have developed its role as an international security and defence organization engaged in a multitude activities aimed at addressing the requirements of an increasingly complex and interlinked security environment.

Since 2008, NATO has reiterated the necessity and scale of institutional adaptation at Summits from Bucharest in 2008, Lisbon in 2010, Wales in 2014, Warsaw in 2016, and most recently in Brussels in 2018, to meet the evolving security environment and ensure that it is 'fit for purpose'. Seemingly up until 2008, NATO's adaptation was focused on regional

security and stability in its periphery (Johnston, 2017, 31; Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011, 286-287; Siedeschlag, 1999, 4-7; Karásek, 2018, 48), while following the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, the 2014 Annexation of Crimea, and consequent targeted annual large-scale Russian military exercises (ZAPAD series) on the borders of the Alliance, NATO has expressly focused its attention on reinforcing the deterrence and defence posture (NATO, 2010). Doing so, while maintaining responsibilities in projecting stability taskings (Northern Africa and the Middle East) and addressing growing hybrid threats (Flockhart, 2010a, 2010b; Schlag, 2009; Burton, 2015; Giegerich, 2016; NATO, 2010; Karásek, 2018, 48; Johnston, 2017, 31). The overall impact of the 2008 conflict has been a renewed emphasis on territorial defence and regional security (i.e. enhancement of NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture), together with decisions taken at previous critical junctures, which has allowed NATO to become a significant player in regional crisis management beyond its borders. This new series of adaptation measures starting in 2008 means that today, NATO is one of the most complex and diverse security and defence actors in the international arena. The Alliance's 360 Degree approach to defence and security means that commitments to all core tasks is now a reality, rather than a goal.

“So Ladies and Gentlemen,
NATO is the most successful Alliance in history.
Because we have always been able to change when the world is changing.
And that is precisely what we are doing now.”

- Jens Stoltenberg, 23 May 2019.

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