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Chapter 8

Democratic Backsliding and Contested Values Within the Alliance

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The publication of the report NATO 2030: United for a New Era sends the message that one of the major challenges for the Alliance in the new and more challenging security environment is for the Alliance to remain united in its commitment to the values outlined in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty: “democracy, individual liberty and rule of law.” The authors of the NATO 2030 Report left no doubt about the value of NATO’s values by emphasizing that NATO’s “shared democratic identity is what distinguishes the Alliance from the principal threats and challenges it faces” and that remaining “wedded to these foundational values is the single most important factor in ensuring the durability of the Alliance.” The NATO 2030 Report is rare in its explicit focus on NATO’s values, but that NATO is more than just a defensive arrangement was clear already from the very beginning when the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, declared that the North Atlantic Treaty was “an affirmation of the moral and spiritual values which we hold in common.” Since then, the importance of NATO’s value foundations has been emphasized at all NATO gatherings and in the practice of always seeking a united position in all decisions. The June 2021 NATO Brussels Summit is no exception. Not only does the Communiqué, as usual, repeat the importance of NATO’s foundational values, and the importance of unity and cohesion, but the commitment to NATO’s foundational values was further emphasized in the publication of a new “Strengthening Resilience Commitment,” published as one of the official Summit documents, which states clearly that “the foundation of our resilience lies in our shared commitment to the principles of individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.” The publication of the new document and the NATO 2030 Report indicate that the time has come for NATO to take its values seriously—not just rhetorically but also in practice.
The authors of the 2030 report are correct in emphasizing the importance of NATO’s commitment to shared values, but it must also be recognized that in the current political environment, agreement about those values can no longer be taken for granted—this is the case both within the Alliance, but it is also a wider problem reflecting that there is now a broadly shared consensus that the basic norms underpinning the overall liberal international order are under pressure and that global politics will be shaped by open disagreements about its basic values. The very same challenging international security environment that makes the commitment essential has also stirred political sentiments within the Alliance that may make it difficult—perhaps even impossible—for the Alliance to live up to the commitment. Democracy today is in crisis and NATO’s foundational values are contested in several member states such as Hungary, Turkey, and even Poland. In these member states, the possibility of democratic backsliding is today no longer unthinkable—it is already taking place. Even some of the oldest democracies—the United States, Britain, and France—face diminishing confidence in their democratic institutions and significant disruptions in their domestic politics. The rise of right-wing, authoritarian-style populism and an apparent mainstreaming of national(ist) politics is no longer just an abstract threat but a reality that is currently in the process of altering long established cleavage structures in party politics. These changes seem likely to result in new political divisions within the Alliance between liberal internationalism and illiberal nationalism. Clearly such a situation will have profound ramifications for cohesion within the Alliance and for the continued shared commitment to NATO’s foundational values.

This chapter asks if the Alliance can continue to live up to its commitment to “democracy, individual liberty and rule of law” and asks how democratic backsliding may constitute an existential threat to NATO. The chapter consists of four sections. The first section outlines how NATO has historically been able to adapt to a frequently changing external strategic environment to meet a seemingly never-ending stream of crises—qualities that arguably made NATO a resilient institution. In the second section, the chapter attributes NATO’s resilience to the ability of the Alliance to balance between two different, but intertwined identities—an identity as a defense alliance and an identity as a com-
The chapter demonstrates that historically, NATO’s crises, tensions, and contradictions have primarily been associated with the identity as a defense alliance, whereas the value foundation of the Alliance has been continuously reinforced and reified through deeply embedded practices associated with NATO’s identity as a community of values. In the third section, the chapter shows that today, the situation has changed fundamentally as the Alliance is doing well in areas that have historically caused the most concern such as its military capabilities, whereas NATO’s assumed bedrock of strength—its stable identity, deeply embedded practices, and shared values—is now contested from within its own ranks. In the final section, the chapter turns to contemplating NATO’s future and the prospects for NATO not only to return to long-established practices to reinforce the shared values of the Alliance, but also the prospects for the Alliance to reorient itself towards a very different and challenging strategic environment.

NATO—A Model Resilient Institution

It is widely believed that NATO’s longevity and resilience can be attributed to both its remarkable ability to ‘bounce back’ after the many crises that have occurred throughout NATO’s history and its ability to adapt to a constantly evolving strategic environment by changing strategic direction and expanding its membership, operational scope, and area of operations. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s Secretary General, is in no doubt that “NATO is the most successful alliance in history because we have been able to change when the world is changing.” However, this reading of NATO’s endurance and resilience does not tell the full story, and it does not alert us to why democratic backsliding and contestation of NATO’s foundational values should worry us as much—if not more so—than more traditional crises such as those related to burden sharing issues and capability gaps. To fully understand why democratic backsliding and the decreasing salience of NATO’s foundational values present an existential threat to NATO, we need to expand our understanding of resilience.

Resilience is often understood in the policy literature as the ability to withstand pressure and adversity and to ‘bounce back’ to the original position after a crisis, thereby remaining robust in the face of change.
This understanding of resilience originates in ecology and engineering\textsuperscript{15} and has entered the social sciences through disaster management studies and the indisputable need to ensure that critical infrastructures would be able to withstand pressure and to quickly return to normal after a crisis. It seems that this is the understanding of resilience used by NATO in its new document from the 2021 Brussels Summit expressing a commitment to strengthening resilience. However, whilst being able to return to the original position is important for an organization to endure, organizations in a changing strategic environment need to do more than simply endure, they need to remain “fit for purpose” by continuously adapting to a constantly changing and highly challenging environment.\textsuperscript{16} From this perspective, NATO’s resilience should be conceived as a practice of self-governance, in which NATO should be willing and able to embrace change through reflective self-governance strategies to continuously cope with and adapt to change. While some situations may indeed require ‘bouncing back’ to the original position before a crisis, others will necessitate ‘jumping ahead’ through adaptation or transformation to remain “fit for purpose” within the new situation.

Throughout NATO’s history, the stable point of departure to which the Alliance could always return to has been a reiteration of its fundamental values. These values have routinely been expressed through NATO’s official documents, narrative, and actions as a shared vision for the future that contains a shared understanding of what it means to be “fit for purpose.” All social domains, including an organization such as NATO—have fundamental values that express their deep social fabric which is further specified through a collection of rules and norms to define what constitutes appropriate behavior by the members of the community. However, the deep social fabric of an organization or community is not suitable for continuous or far-reaching change and adaptation because such change will alter its fundamental character. Resilience from this position is therefore a form of meta-stability which is the “sweet spot” between necessary adaptation and preservation of the values that define the deep social fabric of a community.\textsuperscript{17} Importantly, meta-stability allows for adaptation of practices, norms, and rules, provided that these changes can be aligned with the deeper social fabric by being “narratable”—that is possible to be incorporated into the narrative of the community without contradicting or in any
other way compromising its identity. In other words, the foundational values that are closely tied to an organization’s identity need to remain fixed or the organization must undertake a considerable effort to ensure that any such changes can be successfully incorporated into the organization’s narrative. As will be demonstrated later, this is especially true for NATO, as the Alliance has a particular need for showing cohesion and unity and that all members support its value foundations.

From the perspective outlined here, NATO has been a model of a resilient entity with an impressive level of meta-stability throughout its history. While it has undertaken extensive adaptation over the years through changes to its strategic concepts and operational guidance documents, as well as expansion of its membership and operational scope, the Alliance has made no changes to its treaty base since its foundation in 1949. NATO has, however, not always acted in accordance with its original values, as the Alliance was not always characterized by an “unshakable commitment to democracy.” The fact that Portugal under the Salazar regime was a founding member and that Greece and Turkey, despite their ups and downs of democratic commitment, have been NATO members for nearly sixty years, was a clear misalignment between the declared values of the Alliance and its actual practice. However, the misalignment was narratable in the tense environment of the Cold War, which enabled a narrative that emphasized freedom rather than democracy. With the end of the Cold War, the identity of the Alliance was firmly anchored in democracy and liberal values, which has been expressed in official documents and practice since. Today, NATO’s narrative is inextricably linked with the narrative about the liberal international order, and it would neither be possible, nor desirable, for the Alliance to return to its Cold War position where democracy was a secondary, ‘nice to have’ form of domestic governance. For that reason alone, democratic backsliding represents a major problem for the Alliance.

NATO as a Defense Alliance and as a Community of Values

The resilience literature can shed light on the importance of NATO’s ability to adapt and it can show why changes and contestations that go to the heart of the deeper social fabric constitute a serious threat to the Alliance. However, to fully understand the impact of democratic back-
sliding and contestation of NATO’s values, I turn to the importance attached to NATO’s internal cohesion and NATO’s dual-track approach involving both a military and a political component as outlined in the Atlantic Treaty and expressed most clearly in Article 5 and Article 2.

The dual approach to security means that NATO is structured around two different identities that can be summarized as ‘NATO the defense alliance’ and ‘NATO the community of values.’ The former primarily reflects NATO’s performative role in terms of ‘what NATO does.’ The latter primarily reflects NATO’s identity and deeper social fabric in terms of its shared knowledge and values, i.e., ‘what NATO is.’ The two roles are, however, closely interconnected and must always be aligned with each other. NATO cannot act in ways that contradicts its values, because if it does, it will find itself in an identity crisis or it will appear inconsistent and hypocritical. The two parts of NATO have existed side by side since NATO’s formation, with the community of values role serving a primarily internal function with a less public profile, and the defense alliance role being the more up-front public raison d’être of the Alliance. Most of NATO’s many crises over the course of its history have been associated with the defense alliance role, including crises about nuclear strategy, extended deterrence, conventional capability gaps, burden sharing, crisis management operations, exercises and interoperability, enlargement, and partnerships, and much more.

Crises associated with NATO’s role as a community of values have also occurred, although they have been less frequent. When such crises have occurred, they have been deep and long-lasting with no obvious politically feasible solutions. Crises affecting NATO’s role as a community of values—for example concerns about the cohesion of the value community and NATO’s pernicious worry about the credibility of the US nuclear guarantee—have been a problem of trust rather than capability, yet solutions have been sought by addressing capability issues through military, so-called hardware solutions rather than addressing the trust issue through political, so-called software solutions. The problem was that the credibility of the United States professed willingness to sacrifice New York for Paris cannot be proven politically. NATO therefore spent the entire Cold War seeking military solutions that would not only demonstrate NATO’s unity and resolve, but which would also involve strategic planning and procedures that would make
crossing the nuclear threshold and bringing the American nuclear arsenal into the conflict seem very likely, or even inescapable. NATO’s decision in 1977 to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe was the last of a long row of such military moves to prove that the promise articulated in Article 5 was credible and that NATO remained cohesive. Yet, paradoxically, the attempt at proving cohesion through military solutions exposed deep divisions and on each occasion launched the Alliance into deep crisis.

The need for unity led to the expectation among members to always sing from the same hymn sheet and to do everything they could to display unity and resolve and to demonstrate that the Alliance rested on shared values. This logic led to ingrained alliance practices of (often long-winded) processes of negotiation to achieve consensus and an unspoken rule to never do anything that could bring the unity of the Alliance in doubt and thereby undermine the cohesion of the Alliance. These processes were informal and intended for internal use as necessary measures to mitigate, and perhaps cover, the structural fragility and inconsistencies of an alliance that relied on extended nuclear deterrence underpinned by fundamentally different interests between the European and North American parts of the Alliance on how and when to use the nuclear deterrent. Even though the strategic environment today is quite different, NATO still places very high value on being able to demonstrate cohesion through a strong and unwavering commitment to its fundamental values as expressed in the pre-amble of the Washington Treaty. Unity is still alpha and omega in the Alliance.

The importance of values and unity for NATO is often emphasized rhetorically and by routine, but precisely why unity around NATO’s values is of such importance is rarely specified. This traditional vagueness around the importance of values was abandoned in the NATO 2030 Report as the authors very clearly ascribed NATO’s longevity after the demise of its common enemy to NATO having developed into a community of values. There is little doubt that the dual structure of NATO has meant that the Alliance could maintain a political role and raison d’être despite the absence of a concrete military threat. Today, as democratic backsliding is taking place in some member states and as NATO’s foundational values appear to be either contested or of fading salience, the question is whether NATO can remain resilient in the
absence of clarity and consensus about what NATO is and what NATO should and could be in a fundamentally altered, highly dynamic, and complex strategic environment.

**The Politics of Threat and the Crisis of Democracy**

It is widely believed that we live in a transformational moment in history comparable to the scale and magnitude of transformations following the industrial revolution and with shared characteristics to the long-drawn collapse of the multipolar system of the 19th and first half of the 20th century. The foreign policy establishments have long been interested in instability arising from shifting power patterns among the great powers, the decline of the West, and the crisis of the liberal order, but they have been less keenly aware of the consequences of other change processes and challenges, such as climate change, rapid technological and scientific advancement, demographic shifts, digitalization, globalization, and more. Each process of change is singularly significant, but together they interact in complex and unpredictable ways to become key drivers of additional emergent change bringing new challenges to the political, economic, social, and even psychological domains. The current strategic context has aptly been labelled as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous—also known as the VUCA World. Unsurprisingly, the VUCA World has had both political and emotional consequences, which have manifested themselves in (amongst other things) the rise of the “politics of threat” and in a creeping “crisis of democracy” that many worry are signs of a global democratic retreat, or in Samuel Huntington’s terms, a “reverse wave of democratization.”

Until recently, it was widely assumed that Western societies would be governed by moderate political parties committed to democracy and liberal personal freedoms, free trade, and international cooperation based on multilateralism. Yet, the emergence of professed illiberal forms of governments in a growing number of European countries and not least with the election in 2016 of Donald Trump in the United States, it has become clear that such assumptions are no longer valid and that democracy may be a much more fragile condition than pre-
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Previously thought. Moreover, it is now clear that the politics of threat and the crisis of democracy exacerbate and reinforce each other. Populists have been remarkably adept in arousing segments of the electorate that, in many cases, may not have been politically active before. They have done this by presenting issues such as globalization, migration (both irregular and legal), technological change, and climate change as threats to the North American, European, and Western ways of life and by fully exploiting these issues politically through targeted forms of internet-based (dis-)information that are highly effective in spreading extreme views and outright lies amongst their followers. These followers are, in surprising numbers, willing to use their electoral clout and to engage in direct forms of political action—in some cases by violent means such as the storming of the US Capitol in January 2021. The new form of politics is a form of radicalization, which seeks to undermine the trust in, and legitimacy of, established structures of political power through anti-establishment appeals, simplistic slogans and sweeping promises. The process constitutes a major crisis of liberal democracy on both sides of the Atlantic, which, once in motion, may be extremely difficult to reverse. As a result, the political center in industrial democracies is in peril today and the trust in established domestic and international institutions is damaged with grave implications for institutions such as NATO.

Analysts and practitioners have been slow to realize the extent and importance of these political changes. The delay was partly a function of an extremely full political agenda, with analysts and decision-makers simply too busy with other, seemingly more important, concerns related to global order, the financial crisis, and regional conflicts requiring demanding stabilization operations. The delay in recognizing the importance and interconnectivity between classic security issues and what has traditionally been regarded as ‘low politics’ may also have been an outcome of long-standing distinctions between what is viewed as relevant and not relevant issues for security organizations such as NATO. It cannot be denied that both foreign and security policy practitioners and the International Relations discipline long has seen the domestic level as a separate political sphere of lesser importance to the international level, which by implication has also excluded many of the processes of change referred to above because they lie outside the scope of
traditional security concerns. The distinction between domestic and international politics has been costly because it has contributed to the belated realization of the importance of domestic political shifts and of the consequences of the uncertainty flowing from the VUCA World on domestic politics. The problem is that the shared concern of the policy and scholarly community of the crisis of the liberal international order and other liberal internationalist concerns has detracted attention from the negative impacts on individuals and local communities and how the changes of the VUCA World were perceived as a source of loss of status, income, and influence by a large segment of the electorates in Western liberal democracies. The anger felt by those whose livelihoods have been negatively affected by technological change, climate change mitigation, migration, globalization, and neoliberal economics has provided a fertile base for populists to develop counter-narratives to the traditional liberal internationalist narrative. The new narratives emphasize a variety of threats to the Western, European, and North American way of life. The result has been that while the primary concern of the foreign and security establishments were issues such as the crisis in the liberal international order, popular politics saw the liberal international order, its institutions, and decision-makers as not only having failed to protect their livelihoods, status, and way of life, but to have contributed directly—and intentionally—to their loss.

The growing perception that the institutions and the existing order has failed to live up to promises made about prosperity and opportunity has understandably led to political grievances and contestations. Such contestations have traditionally been found on the left of the political spectrum where, for example, the anti-globalization movement has made their view about liberal institutions extremely clear in a number of disruptive events around the world. However, where left-wing contestations against the establishment were expressed in transnational (global) social movements with many turning their backs on the democratic electoral processes, right-wing populism, whose grievances are actually quite similar, embraced the electoral process and used it to awaken the ‘silent majority’ and to express the will of what they considered ordinary people. Although the contestations against the established order from right-wing populism were less noisy than, for example, the contestations of the anti-globalization movement, Occupy
Wall Street, or Extinction Rebellion, they were no less damaging and they have been on a steady development curve for the past 30 years or so as right-wing contestations against the establishment and the existing order came to the surface gradually in the rise of illiberal forms of nationalism from the 1980s onwards, seen in the growing popularity of parties such as the National Front in the United Kingdom, Front National in France, the Danish People’s Party, the Northern League in Italy, and the Austrian Freedom Party. Newcomers have since added to a growing list of right-wing authoritarian and avowedly illiberal parties such as the Law and Justice Party in Poland, Jobbik and Fidesz in Hungary, the Dutch Freedom Party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Alternative for Germany, the Sweden Democrats, True Finns, and many more. The relatively silent rise of these parties produced surprising electoral results. In Hungary, the combination of Victor Orbán’s electoral victory in 2010 with the support of Jobbik and a highly disproportional electoral system facilitated a super-majority that allowed Orbán to prompt constitutional changes and a major assault on civil society and liberal freedoms. Although shocking, Hungary was initially assumed to be an isolated case. However, with the Polish election in 2015, the British referendum on leaving the EU in June 2016, the push-back against the attempted coup d’état in Turkey in 2016, the US presidential election in November 2016, the French presidential election in May 2017, and the German parliamentary elections in September 2017, it was clear that a new trend towards populism had entered Western democratic politics and that the concerns of ‘the people’ were not the same as the concerns of ‘the establishment.’

The emergence and combination of “politics of threat” and the “crisis of democracy” that has been outlined above has given rise to a new situation in which the Alliance—and the party systems of several member states—is increasingly divided between member states whose political positions now fall into two emerging camps that can be summarized as liberal internationalism and illiberal nationalism. The former advocates open societies, free trade, and multilateralism, while the latter promotes tightly controlled borders, trade restrictions coupled with a preference for unilateralist action, and transactional forms of bilateralism or coalitions of the willing. During the Trump presidency the latter view was clearly the official position of
the US government, advocated by not just the President, but also by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, emphasizing the virtues of nationalism and criticizing multilateralism, the EU, and arguing that “international bodies” which constrain national sovereignty “must be reformed or eliminated.” Astonishingly, NATO during the Trump years found itself in a position where the leading state of the Alliance appeared to be more closely aligned with professed illiberal leaders such as Hungary’s Victor Orbán, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or even Russia’s Vladimir Putin. Even with a professed liberal internationalist and supporter of multilateralism in the White House, there is still a real danger that a new cleavage is emerging within the Alliance between defenders and adversaries of the liberal international order and of multilateral diplomacy.

The rise of illiberal nationalism as a potent force in European and US electoral politics, as well as a marked decline in the trust in political and international institutions and widespread contestations against the traditional foundations of foreign policy, is bound to have significant agenda-setting and constraining consequences for the formulation of foreign policy objectives in general and vis-à-vis the transatlantic relationship and NATO in particular. Today, NATO finds itself in the situation where some members of the Alliance hold views that are essentially incompatible with the values and practices underpinning it. This is an entirely new situation, which contains a worrying potential for undermining cohesion in NATO in a way that has not previously been experienced or contemplated and which will be very difficult to incorporate into a coherent narrative based on NATO’s fundamental values, unity, and actions.

Towards NATO’s Future

The big question is, as always, how should NATO move forward from the current situation. Especially important are questions of how the Alliance may be able to renew itself to remain ‘fit for purpose’ within a rapidly changing strategic context, how NATO might be able to ‘bounce back’ after the Trump induced crisis of leadership, and how NATO might be able to ‘reflect on and adapt to’ the new forms of politics within its member states. Ironically, despite the enormi-
ty of the ongoing changes and transformation in the wider strategic environment, adapting to the VUCA World will be the ‘easiest’ task because adapting to a changing strategic context is a process that takes place within NATO as the defense alliance, and this is a competence which NATO has excelled at in the past. Moreover, NATO agreed at its June 2021 Brussels Summit to start the process for preparing an updated strategic concept, which should be ready by the planned Madrid Summit in 2022. However, a new changing global strategic environment also brings with it an increased need to develop a common approach for dealing not just with Russia, as the Alliance has been used to for more than 70 years, but also to have a common approach towards China. The June 2021 NATO Summit showed clearly NATO’s aspirations to develop a common strategy on China, but the diverging positions on liberal internationalism and illiberal nationalism may well prove to be significant hurdles for achieving such a common position.

The second task of ‘bouncing back’ after the four disruptive years with Trump in the White House may seem a relatively easy one given that the Trump years are now over. However, the Trump years interrupted the long-established practice of negotiation and dialogue which has been the main vehicle for ensuring unity and cohesion in all NATO’s decisions. Despite the determination of NATO’s Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg and the leaders of many member states to ‘ride out’ the Trump presidency, this experience may have caused lasting damage by having opened up the for the possibility of questioning the foundational values of the Alliance—most notably the unshakable commitment to liberal values and liberal internationalism and NATO’s role as an essential support structure in the liberal international order. The damage done may not be easy to repair—once established practices have been disturbed, they can be difficult to re-establish. Moreover, it seems likely that European Allies will continue to worry that Trump, or someone like him, could return to power in a United States where political institutions seem weakened and dysfunctional. The trust in American political institutions is clearly at a low-point, not just among right-wing populists—but among the liberal internationalist within NATO. A renewed impetus for European independence in security matters may therefore have been initiated—which although welcomed
in many ways, is not a welcomed development if it is caused by doubts about the stability of American political institutions or by diminishing trust in the US leadership of the Alliance.

The third task, to reflect on and adapt to the new political landscape in NATO’s member states, is the most challenging task of all. The crisis of democracy and the politics of threat are issues that, on the one hand, are squarely located in the community of values part of NATO rather than being located as substantive issues within NATO as the defense alliance. Moreover, these are national issues and thus not something NATO would comment on or expect to have an influence on. Although the new political dynamics within NATO clearly hold a potential for more widespread democratic backsliding, NATO’s available tools for influencing these processes are very limited. Given the uncertainty surrounding future elections, NATO is therefore entering a perilous period as “political divergences within NATO are dangerous because they enable external actors, in particular Russia and China, to exploit intra-Alliance differences and take advantage of individual Allies in ways that endanger their collective interests and security.”\(^3^2\) The authors of the NATO 2030 Report are clearly aware of the problem, because they underline that NATO should reassert its core identity as an Alliance rooted in the principles of democracy and they reiterate that NATO’s political cohesion is strongest when its members adhere to these principles.\(^3^3\) They therefore recommend that NATO should draw a clear political and moral distinction between democracy and the autocratic forms of government that characterize NATO’s systemic rivals. Unfortunately, the reality is that NATO’s influence as a socializing agent of democratic norms and of established alliance practices extends only to member states that wish to gain status and acceptance within the community of values. If such status is no longer sought, NATO has little influence on the path taken by individual member states.

The distinction between a defense alliance and a community of values is important because the two operate in different ways and offer NATO different options for dealing with crises and for maintaining its resilience. Allies need to be aware that where defense alliances are evaluated according to their capacity to defend against a common threat,
communities of values are sustained through the salience of, and commitment to, shared values. Defense alliances die when they lose their common enemy or their capability to defend against it—communities of value die when their values are no longer salient or shared. Democratic backsliding in NATO’s member states is therefore an existential threat to NATO.

Notes


2. The Preamble to the Atlantic Treaty states: “The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security. They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty.” Preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949 (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_89597.htm).


10. I am here thinking not only of the Trumpian policy of “America First” and Britain’s national(ist) inspired decision to leave the European Union and “take back control,” but also the many (lasting) initiatives following the 2015 migration crisis of restricting the Schengen freedoms and more recent COVID-related “vaccine nationalism.”


12. See, for example, Stanley R. Sloan, Transatlantic Traumas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).


14. Resilience in the think tank literature is often seen as the ability of an entity to “bounce back” after a crisis. However, my understanding of resilience is based on the resilience-thinking literature, which sees resilience as not only being able to “bounce back,” but also as the ability to reflect on change and adapt in ways that are more akin to “bouncing forward” through adaptation and renewal to remain fit for purpose. See, for example, David Chandler, “Beyond Neo-liberalism: Resilience, the new art of governing complexity,” Resilience, vol. 2, no. 1 (2014), pp. 47-63; Elena Korosteleva and Trine Flockhart, Resilience in EU and International Institutions—Redefining Local Ownership in a New Global Governance Agenda (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).


19. Article 2 is sometimes overlooked compared to the more famous Article 5. Article 2 states that: “The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles
upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.”

20. As explained by David N. Schwartz, *NATO’s Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1983), unity in the Alliance is essential to cover or counter the fact that the Alliance has a fragile construction due to its geography (being geographically connected to its main adversary, whilst only being connected to its main defender by treaty) and its unequal distribution of capabilities and resting on the incredible promise to use US strategic nuclear forces in defense of Europe. NATO’s nuclear dilemmas mean that Americans and Europeans inevitably have different interests in nuclear arrangements, yet for the nuclear guarantee to appear credible they must at all times appear united.


