

Explaining NATO

Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and the Atlantic Alliance After the Cold War

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Theoretical Background.....	6
1.2 Research Question.....	8
1.2.1 Justification.....	8
1.2.2 Hypotheses.....	10
1.2.3 Definitions.....	12
1.2.4 Limitation of the Thesis.....	13
1.3 Research Strategy and Outline.....	13
2. Theoretical Framework.....	15
2.1 Background.....	15
2.2 Neorealism.....	16
2.2.1 Intellectual Roots.....	16
2.2.2 Waltzian Neorealism.....	17
2.2.3 Balance of Power.....	19
2.2.4 Cooperation in a Realist World.....	21
2.2.5 Neorealism and Alliances.....	21
2.3 Neoliberal Institutionalism.....	22
2.3.1 Intellectual Roots.....	22
2.3.2 Keohane's Synthesis.....	23
2.3.3 Cooperation in the Neoliberal Paradigm.....	24
2.3.4 Neoliberalism and Alliances.....	26
2.4 Methodological Approach.....	27
2.4.1 Data Sources.....	29
2.5 Operationalizations.....	30
2.5.1 Predictions and System-level Theories.....	30

2.5.2 <i>Expected Empirical Findings</i>	33
3. NATO: From Washington to Kabul	37
3.1 1949-2001: The Cold War and After.....	37
3.2 After September 11.....	38
4. Analysis in a Neorealist Perspective	40
4.1 The Evolution of the Alliance, 1991-2003: Survival – So Far.....	41
4.2 Evidence of Neorealist Predictions.....	43
4.2.1 <i>General Predictions</i>	40
4.2.2 <i>Specific Predictions</i>	47
4.3 Assessment.....	52
4.3.1 <i>General Predictions</i>	52
4.3.2 <i>Specific Predictions</i>	55
5. Analysis in a Neoliberal Perspective	59
5.1 The Evolution of the Alliance, 1991-2003: Survival – As Expected.....	59
5.2 Evidence of Neoliberal Predictions.....	61
5.2.1 <i>General Predictions</i>	61
5.2.2 <i>Specific Predictions</i>	66
5.3 Assessment.....	68
5.3.1 <i>General Predictions</i>	68
5.3.2 <i>Specific Predictions</i>	70
6. Conclusion	73
6.1 Comparison.....	73
6.2 Theories, Predictions, and their Limits.....	75
6.3 Final Thoughts.....	78
Sources	80

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to evaluate two of the leading theories in international relations – neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism² – by assessing their usefulness when applied to the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Unlike the great majority of successful military alliances in the past, NATO survived the demise of its major adversary in 1991, and has continued to play a role in international politics. However, many realist scholars have argued that although the institution remains in its outward forms, it is facing a slow decline into irrelevance; thus echoing the argument of the Greek historian Thucydides, who wrote more than two millennia ago that “mutual fear is the only band of faith in leagues”.

NATO has been the premier security institution of the West European and North American countries since the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949. Glued together by an integrated military command structure, regularized political cooperation, and a strong mutual security guarantee, NATO proved credible enough to deter Soviet aggression throughout the Cold War. And, in the two years from November 1989 to December 1991, the Berlin Wall fell, the Warsaw Pact dissolved, and the Soviet Union imploded. Soviet arms and Soviet ideology, identified by both academics and policy-makers as existential threats to the West for more than a generation, were no more.

These events left the NATO alliance in a novel position, as its enemy in the shape of the Soviet military threat had disappeared. The end of the Cold War was of course seen as a fortunate turn of events in Western capitals, but many academics assumed that the Alliance itself was about to become a victim of the changing nature of international politics. It is common for military alliances, almost always formed to

² When using “neorealism” I am referring to Waltz’s structural realism unless otherwise specified. I will throughout refer to “neoliberal institutionalism” simply as “neoliberalism”.

deter specific threats, to dissolve as soon as that threat has been removed – as for instance after both world wars, when wartime coalitions collapsed in a matter of months.

This course of events has not been borne out. Soon two decades will have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and NATO is apparently very much still a factor in world affairs. Since 1991, NATO has fought two wars in the Balkans, activated its all-for-one Article V for the first time in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, and is currently heavily involved in Afghanistan. In addition to this it is or has been involved in several smaller missions, such as peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and the training of Iraqi security forces. Perhaps equally important, the Alliance has expanded its membership to include former Warsaw Pact members, and even former Soviet Republics, in Eastern Europe.

However, there are also clear signs that all is not well in the Alliance. The most high-profile rift came in the run-up to the Iraq war, when Germany and France resisted American and British attempts to use NATO's institutional assets and prestige during invasion in Iraq. On a less obvious level, diverging interests, diverging strategic viewpoints, diverging capabilities, and the twin developments of a common European Security and Defense Policy and American foreign policy unilateralism may continue until the Atlantic Alliance exists in name only.

1.1 Theoretical Background

The evolution and future of NATO is important not only from the perspective of policy-makers, but also for international relations theory. According to Charles Kegley (1993: 141), the end of the Cold War “changes all the answers and all the questions” in the study of international politics; the defining features of the world order that had prevailed since the end of World War II – bipolarity, ideological struggle, and superpower competition between the United States and the Soviet Union – disappeared. Similarly, the theories that had been developed under these

conditions would have to change. A competing view to Kegley's, however, would be that the events of 1989-91 created an unique opportunity for scholars to test their theories and prove their enduring relevance in spite of a changing environment; as John Mearsheimer argued in a 1990 article, social scientists should use the world "as a laboratory to decide which theories best explain international politics" (Mearsheimer 1990: 9).

This is particularly relevant for neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism . Neorealism had been the dominant theoretical perspective the last decade of the Cold War. Formulated by Kenneth Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* (1979), its aim was to bring international relations theory in a more scientific direction by focusing on the systemic level of analysis, and formulate a theory which could be more rigorously tested than earlier realist theories. In the debate that followed Robert O. Keohane and others (see especially Keohane 1986a; Baldwin 1993a; Kegley 1995), using some of the theoretical insights pioneered by Waltz but mainly working within the Liberal tradition of the study of international politics, formulated neoliberal institutionalism. This school focused less on conflict and had a greater emphasis on the possibility of institutions to mitigate the effects of the international anarchy and facilitate cooperation. The debate between these two schools of thought – termed the "paradigm war" by Michael Mastanduno (1997: 49n) – was at its most intense during the early 1990s (see particularly Mearsheimer 1990; Baldwin 1993a; Waltz 1993; Mearsheimer 1994/1995; Keohane and Martin 1995; Kegley 1995).

At the time, the two theories produced opposite expectations of the viability of NATO in a post-Cold War world. As Gunther Hellman and Reinhart Wolf noted in a widely cited 1993 overview, neorealist theory would lead one to predict the break-up or gradual dissolution of the alliance, while neoliberal institutionalist theory would lead one to expect the persistence of the status quo or transformation. From the vantage point of 2007, it is clear that neither the break-up nor the status quo scenario has been borne out; however, it is less clear *how* the alliance has changed, and

whether this change represent the continued vitality of the Atlantic Alliance or its decline.

1.2 Research question

This leads me to ask the following question:

What theory, neorealism or neoliberal institutionalism, best explains the evolution of NATO since the end of the Cold War?

There is thus a dual purpose to this thesis. The primary one is to evaluate the relative explanatory power of the two theories; a secondary one will be to assess the state of NATO after the Cold War.

This is a very broad question, and to answer it I will use a two-pronged approach. The first part will consist of analyzing the theories in light of the predictions they made at the end of the Cold War, and how the broad picture has played out since then. How well do the respective theories' predictions hold up in light of the events of the last 16 years? Which predictions failed, and why? The second part will look at the Alliance's military response to the 9/11 attacks, specifically NATO's role in Afghanistan. Does NATO's role in Afghanistan conform to the expectations of the neorealist school or the neoliberal school?

1.2.1 Justification

The choice of theories. I have chosen to test these two theories specifically because of their leading status within international relations theory. Neorealism is still arguably the dominant school within the field, and neoliberal institutionalism is generally regarded as its strongest challenger from the liberal tradition. Both are systemic theories that assume that regularities of international behavior are best explained by the nature of the international system. Both are in the positivist school, and are more amendable to theorizing and prediction than theories in other theoretical traditions.

And, as I will explain in further detail in chapter 2, both theories claim to offer a better explanation for international outcomes than the other. Finally, both are clearly and consistently articulated by their respective proponents, and therefore their competing explanations for the same set of events can be fruitfully compared to each other (Hellmann and Wolf 1993: 4-7).

Given all this, it becomes imperative to conduct empirical research such as this present study to contribute to the progression of the field through strengthening or weakening the theories. As Imre Lakatos writes (1970: 119), a theory is overthrown only by a better theory; and progression is therefore attained primarily through the identification of the stronger theory. In a similar vein, Kenneth Waltz writes that the question is not whether a theory is more or less true than another, but which is more *useful* in the sense of having the greater explanatory and predictive powers (Waltz 1979: 8). I don't, of course, hope to arrive at a definite answer, but rather strengthen one theory at the expense of the other, or at least indicate under which conditions one is more useful. Additionally, I hope to be able to say something about the limits of the explanatory power of system-level theories in general.

*The choice of case.*³ NATO has been chosen because it should be an excellent case for both theories to explain. First, alliances are products of processes at the systemic level and these are both system-level theories. Second, because the NATO alliance is highly institutionalized it should be an ideal case for neoliberalism to explain; since it is a military alliance, equally so for neorealism. Third, the theories make diverging predictions about the case. Fourth, rich sources of data are readily available. And, finally and most importantly, NATO is a case of *intrinsic* importance. As the great realist scholar Hans Morgenthau once observed, the inquiries of political scientists often disappear into “the trivial, the formal, the methodological, the purely theoretical, the remotely historical – in short, the politically irrelevant” (Morgenthau 1966: 73). NATO is central to the foreign policy of more than two dozen nations,

³ I have used the case selection criteria of Stephen van Evera (1997: 77)

who between them control a very substantial part of the world's economic and military resources – and is thus important in its own right.

I have chosen to look at Afghanistan in particular because it represents an important test for NATO. That is, it can help to answer the question of to what extent NATO still is a functioning military alliance. As I will argue under *Definitions* below, NATO was founded as, and can reasonably be judged on the basis of its effectiveness as, a military alliance – and Afghanistan is critical in this regard. As is stated in a recent report from the Congress Research Service, the “mission of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan is seen as a test of the alliance’s political will and military capabilities” (Gallis 2007). Former US ambassador to NATO Robert Hunter has gone so far as to say that the allies have “bet the alliance” in Afghanistan (Hunter 2007). I wouldn’t necessarily subscribe to that view entirely, but for the purposes of this thesis, suffice to say that the fate of NATO in Central Asia is critical for its relevance as an out-of-area military actor.

In sum, I am using the arguably most important theories in international relations to explain what is arguably the most important organization in international politics. Despite difficulties involved in the study, I believe this is amply compensated for by the importance of its substance.

1.2.2 Hypotheses

This thesis will, then, once again in the words of Imre Lakatos (1970: 115), take the form a “three cornered fight” between the theories and the experiment, where the theories are measured against each other rather than against a null hypothesis. In other words, the objective will be to see what theory has *more* explanatory power and which is *more* fruitful, not examine whether they have *any* explanatory power at all.

As I noted above, neorealism and neoliberalism have diverging and to some extent mutually exclusive expectations about the viability of NATO after the demise of its adversary. Neorealist theory point to the costs alliances incur on its members – loss of

freedom of action as well as the possibility of being dragged into conflicts not of a country's own choosing – and therefore assume that only a vital common interest in the form of a concrete threat can hold it together. The neorealist hypothesis would therefore be:

H1: The end of the Cold War removed the condition for NATO's existence, and the alliance is bound to dissolve as a result.

This doesn't necessarily imply NATO's immediate formal demise, but that Western policy-makers are, in the words of Lord Salisbury, "sticking to the carcass of dead policies" with regard to the Alliance. NATO is a relic of a bygone era, and it's only a question of time before it will disappear entirely.

The neoliberal perspective focuses more on the institutional framework and its utility for the member states in spite of changing conditions. Because the already existing institutional structures may be better than any politically feasible alternative, and it is easier to adapt an existing institution rather than create a new one, states tend to hang on to the existing arrangements. Applied to NATO, the neoliberal hypothesis would therefore be:

H2: Its highly institutionalized nature enables NATO to adapt and remain important to its members in spite of the changing structural conditions after 1991.⁴

In sum, neorealism would expect the breakdown of the institution, while neoliberalism would expect it to adapt and persist. These are in theory mutually exclusive predictions; however, as I intend to describe in detail in chapter 2, there are substantial operational challenges involved. The most obvious one is the lack of a specified time frame in the neorealist hypothesis; NATO has not dissolved yet, so the question of *when* is central to the usefulness of the hypothesis. Another is the specific developments that can be said to constitute a breakdown of the alliance. I will attempt

⁴ Both of these hypotheses are based on the discussion in Hellmann 2006.

to overcome these problems by developing as precise definitions and operationalizations as possible.

1.2.3 Definitions

It is, of course, clear that NATO still exists, but political scientists as far back as Machiavelli have realized institutions may retain the same name and outward aspect while changing their substance entirely (Hart 2005). The question we need to answer is, What exactly would constitute a breakdown of the Alliance?

To answer that question, we first need a definition of NATO. As I've indicated above, I will define it narrowly, as a *military* alliance and evaluate it as such. It is clear, as for instance Wallander (2002) has asserted, that NATO is *both* military and political in nature. I don't dispute that. I have decided to use a narrow military definition here because 1), the term "alliance" would have no meaning if it didn't include a military component; and 2), the definition of an alliance in military terms is not disallowed in either theory. In realist theory an alliance is defined primarily if not wholly by its military component. This is not so in neoliberal theory; Keohane and Wallander, for instance, define post-Cold war NATO broadly as a "security management institution" (Keohane and Wallander 1999: 27). This definition, however, clearly includes a military component as well as a political one. Without a military component, a security management institution would be a purely political alignment and a forum for cooperation, not an alliance in any practical sense of the term.

What then, would constitute a breakdown of NATO as a military alliance? Keohane (1989: 3) defines institutions as "persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations". So, if the underlying principles and expectations of an institution are no longer adhered to, it is reasonable to assume, the basic defining characteristic of the institution is undermined (Hellmann and Wolf 1993: 14). The decisive criterion in determining whether the principles and norms are maintained becomes whether or not

all states concerned perceive them to be in effect (ibid.). If interest, capabilities and strategic viewpoints have diverged to the point where member states can no longer rely on each other when shaping their military and security policy, this must be considered an institutional breakdown. More specifically, we can conclude that an institutional breakdown has taken place if there is (1) a fundamental disagreement over what one side believes to be its core interest, (2) an institutional breakdown in norms and rules, or (3) a breakdown in the sense of community (Hellmann 2006: 19).

1.2.4 Limitations of the thesis

An underlying assumption of this study is that the international system went through a profound transformation when the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union dissolved, and that this transformation has had important implications for NATO. I take this to be uncontroversial. Furthermore, I will concentrate entirely on the theories neorealism and neoliberalism. Much interesting work has been done in other theoretical traditions, especially within the constructivist school (see for instance Risse 1996 and Schimmelfennig 1998), but these theories do not easily lend themselves to prediction in the same manner as the positivist, systemic theories I have chosen. I will therefore not assess theoretical literature other than that concerning neorealist and neoliberalist theories directly.

1.3 Research Strategy and Outline for the Thesis

I will follow Kenneth Waltz's criteria for testing theories. In *Theory of International Politics*, he lists them as being as following:

1. State the theory being tested.
2. Infer hypotheses from it.
3. Subject the hypotheses to experimental or observational tests.
4. In taking steps two and three, use the definition of terms found in the theory being tested.

5. Eliminate or control perturbing variables not included in the theory under test.
6. Devise a number of distinct and demanding tests.
7. If a test is not passed, ask whether the theory flunks completely, needs repair and restatement, or requires a narrowing of the scope of its explanatory claims.

(Waltz 1979: 13)

These criteria are fairly straightforward, and they also correspond with the somewhat shorter list of Stephen van Evera (1997). I have already dealt with point four, and, as I will reflect on below, points five and six present some distinct challenges, but I hope to be able to overcome them.

The thesis will be organized as follows: After this introductory chapter in which I have presented the background and research question of the thesis, I will in chapter two go through the theoretical framework that I will use in my analysis, and present my methodology. First, I will discuss both neorealism and neoliberalism, outline the main theoretical disagreements between them, corresponding to point one, above; and then infer predictions from the theories with regards to NATO, corresponding with point two. This chapter will also contain a discussion of methodological issues relevant for the thesis. The third chapter will be devoted to a brief overview of NATO's history and structure. In chapter four, I will analyze the post-Cold War change in NATO using neorealist theory; chapter five will do the same using neoliberal theory. These two chapters thus correspond to point three in Waltz's list. Finally, in chapter 6, I will summarize and evaluate the explanations and arrive at an answer to my research question. This roughly corresponds with point seven, although I will assess the theories' relative explanatory power rather than flunk or pass them in isolation of each other.

2. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce in detail the two theories that I will be using in this thesis, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. After presenting their intellectual origins, main assumptions and claims, and the major points of disagreement between them, I will identify some problems inherent in systemic theories when applying them to actual cases. Finally, I will infer precise hypotheses from the theories, and make some methodological reflections.

2.1 Background

Realism and liberalism have been the dominant paradigms within international relations since it became an independent academic discipline in the first half of the 20th century. The great majority of intellectual debates have taken place either between or within these two paradigms (Mearsheimer 2001: 14). The liberal tradition, which traces its roots back to the enlightenment, often focuses on themes such as interdependence, democracy, and the prospects for substantially reducing war. It is generally regarded as optimistic, and is sometimes labeled utopian or idealist. The realist tradition, conversely, generally regards conflict as inevitable, focuses on balance-of-power politics and the effects of international anarchy, and is usually seen as pessimistic (ibid: 15, 17).

The theories that I will concentrate on here, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism, fit nicely into this framework. However, it is important to note that even though both realism/liberalism and neorealism/neoliberal institutionalism is sometimes regarded as opposites, they share not only many theoretical assumptions, but also a common ontological and epistemological basis. In the words of the critical theorist Robert Cox (1986), they are “problem-solving” theories, in the sense that they take the prevailing world order as given and look to describe and “solve” the problems that arise from their perspectives. In this sense, they are both in the

positivist tradition of the social sciences, and assume that the social world is amenable to the kinds of regularities that can be explained in an objective manner.

2.2 Neorealism

2.2.1 Intellectual Roots

The realist tradition is the oldest within international relations, and has its roots in the writings of Greek historian Thucydides, the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, and the Indian statesman Kautilya, all of whom wrote their works more than two thousand years ago. In the modern age, influences include Italian Renaissance writer Niccolò Machiavelli, and 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who translated Thucydides into English and whose own work *Leviathan* sums up Realism's bleak view of man (Owen 1998/1999: 147-78). The inevitability of conflict and war and the necessity of dealing with that reality in the best way possible is a common theme of all these authors, as it is with modern realists. The continuity of the realist tradition is often underscored by its proponents: Robert Gilpin (1986: 227) has written that "one must inquire whether or not twentieth-century students of international relations know anything that Thucydides and his fifth-century [BC] compatriots did not know about the behavior of states". Similarly, both Thomas Hobbes and Kenneth Waltz (1979: 66), as well as this author, have been struck by the contemporaneity of the events described in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*.⁵

Realism's establishment as a school within international relations came in the wake of World War II. The disappointments of the interwar years – best described by the British diplomat E. H. Carr in his classic 1939 book *The Twenty Years' Crisis* – led to a reaction against what was seen as the misguided idealism of that era. Hans Morgenthau's seminal 1948 book *Politics Among Nations* systematized the Realist

⁵ For instance: "Now it were madness to invade such, whom conquering you cannot keep" (Book V, paragraph 13)

tradition into a coherent discipline, formulating what has become the core of realist thought. This core, which those who identify themselves as realists generally accept, includes the following assumptions: 1) States, operating under conditions of anarchy, are the principal actors in international politics; 2) states invariably have some offensive capability, and thus the tools to hurt one another; 3) they can never be certain about the intention of other states; 4) their most basic motive is the wish to survive; and 5) they behave rationally (Mearsheimer 1994/1995: 10).

2.2.2 Waltzian Neorealism

The publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* became a landmark in international relations theory. Waltz's intention with this work was to develop "a more rigorous theory of international politics than earlier realists had done" and to show "how one can distinguish unit-level from structural elements and then make connections between them" (Waltz 1986: 322).

To achieve these goals, he continued and refined an argument he had begun in his 1959 *Man, the State, and War*, where he emphasized the importance of what he called *third-image* explanations in international politics. First-image explanations locate the causes of international outcomes in the individual; the primary causes of war and peace are rooted in human nature and in the perceptions, choices and actions of decision-makers (Waltz [1959] 2001:16-17). Earlier realists, such as Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr placed the ultimate explanation for war in the power-seeking nature of man – a first-image viewpoint. At the state, or second-image, level-of-analysis, the causes of war and peace are found in the nature of the state; in its internal organization, ethnic composition, or ideology (Waltz 2001: 80-82). Democratic Peace Theory and Lenin's theory of imperialism are well-known examples of second-image explanations in world politics. Finally, in the third image, the state *system* – the strategic setting in which the states interact and the constraints they face – is the focus. For instance, international insecurity is caused by the lack of an authority higher than that of the state, which in turn causes war (Waltz 2001: 159-

160). Thucydides famous explanation for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War – the real cause of which he considered to be Sparta’s fear of the growing power of Athens (Book I, paragraph 23) – is a systemic one.⁶

Borrowing from the systems theory developed by the sociologist Emile Durkheim in the late 19th century, Waltz defines a system as consisting of *structure* and of *interacting units* (Waltz 1979: 79). The structure of a system varies along three dimensions: 1) the principle by which the units are ordered; 2) the specification of function of formally differentiated parts; and 3) the relative capability of the units themselves (Waltz 1979: 88). Given that the international system is characterized by the absence of an overarching authority, the ordering principle of the international realm is *anarchy*. Formally, each state is equal to another: none is entitled to command, none duty-bound to obey. Furthermore, in anarchic systems the units of the system – the states – are not formally differentiated by the functions they perform; each must provide for its own security, and each has the responsibility to provide a minimum of welfare for its own citizens.

This means that the units in the international system are “distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser *capacity* for performing similar tasks” (ibid: 97, emphasis mine). Waltz abstracts from every attribute of states except their capabilities, and we arrive at a purely positional picture of international politics. Since a system is dominated by its principal parts, the key changes that we are to look for in international politics are the changes in the relative distribution of capabilities – power – among the great powers (Keohane 1986b: 15).

Waltz’s level of abstraction is great, and he has been widely criticized for leaving out important aspects of international politics (cf. Ruggie 1986). However, it is important to note that Waltz does not claim his theory explains *everything*; rather, he claims it

⁶ Similarly, E. H. Carr suggested that “the most serious wars are fought in order to ... prevent another [state] from becoming militarily stronger.”

explains “a small number of big and important things”, and that “not all that is important goes into the definition of structure” (Waltz 1986: 328). Nor does he claim that the assumptions he makes, such as the state being unitary actor, correspond with reality. As he argued in *Theory of International Politics*:

Explanatory power ... is gained by moving away from ‘reality’, not by staying close to it. A full description would be of least explanatory power; an elegant theory, of most ... The question, as ever with theories, is not whether the isolation of a realm is realistic, but whether it is useful. And useful is judged by the explanatory and predictive powers of the theory that may be fashioned. (Waltz 1979: 8-9)

Waltz’s preference for a definition of structure based on the distribution of capabilities across units rather than on the distribution of something else rests on his belief that “behavior varies more with differences of power than with differences in ideology, in internal structure of property relations, or in governmental form”. Furthermore, by arriving at a positional picture of international politics, the system can be seen as transposable to other domains (Waltz 1986: 330). Systems can be seen as similar regardless of the particular substantive context; for instance, firms facing a risk of bankruptcy in an oligopolistic market may be viewed in much the same way as great powers facing war in the international system. Analogies, and thus new insights, can be gathered from comparing the world of states to other fields, economics in particular.

2.2.3 Balance of Power

The most important implication of Waltz’s definition of system is that balances of power will inevitably emerge – at least as long as the system is anarchic and populated by units wishing to survive. Under conditions of anarchy, security is the highest end, and power is a means to that end. Since one state can never be certain of the intentions of other states, they will struggle for relative advantage in the system. No state wants another to become dominant, and no great power wants another to emerge as supreme; consequently, states will balance against any of their number

which appears to be growing too strong. For the same reason, states will – all other things being equal – prefer to join the weaker of two coalitions rather than bandwagon with the strong. Bandwagoning – that is, ganging up with a great power in the hopes of getting a good deal – is a risky strategy that is pursued only by weak states that have little choice. Balancing, not bandwagoning is the behavior generally induced by the system (Waltz 1979: 126).

With the structure of the system dependent on the distribution of power among the great powers, the system is largely defined by the *number* of these at any given time. Drawing analogies to oligopoly-theory in economics, Waltz concludes that in general, the fewer the great powers the better, with bipolarity being the most stable system of all (ibid: 135). The main reasons for this is that the fewer the competitors, the less chances there will be of misunderstandings and miscalculations. Furthermore, in a bipolar system, balancing will be done mainly by internal means – that is, by mobilizing one’s resources – rather than through the more unpredictable external way of attracting allies (cf. Waltz 1964).

Conversely, a unipolar system is considered to be the least durable international configuration because equilibrium is unreachable when the system is composed of only one great power. A dominant power is likely to “take on too many tasks beyond their own borders, thus weakening themselves in the long run ... even if a dominant power behaves with moderation, restraint, and forbearance, weaker states will worry about its future behavior” and therefore balance against it (Waltz 2000: 27-28). A unipolar power is thus initially only faced with weak systemic constraints, and is therefore likely to undermine its own position through imprudent policies that both sap its own strength while at the same time creating new enemies (Waltz 1979: 205). This again means that a balanced system – either a multipolar or bipolar one – will be restored fairly quickly. The system is not always *in*, but will generally *tend toward*, balance.

2.2.4 Cooperation in a Realist World

According to John Mearsheimer⁷ (1994/1995: 12), two factors inhibit cooperation between states: relative gains-considerations and concern about cheating. On the former, he explains:

States contemplating cooperation must consider how the profits or gains will be distributed among them ... Because states in a realist world are concerned about the balance of power, they must be motivated primarily by relative gains concerns when considering cooperation. While each state wants to maximize its absolute gains, it is more important to make sure that it does better, or at least no worse, than the other state in any agreement. (ibid)

Similarly, states are concerned about cheating because this may lead to loss of relative position and even military defeat in the case of alliances. Since it can be difficult create fool-proof control-mechanisms, states often refrain from cooperation even when it would have been in their interest to do so (ibid: 13). Still, cooperation does take place. States create alliances to balance against common enemies, and they often strike deals that “roughly reflect the distribution of power” (ibid). At the extremes, moreover, when states are either very secure or very insecure, the quest for absolute gains may prevail over the quest for relative ones. Very weak states cannot make themselves secure alone, and whatever the risks, the best strategy available may be to jump on a bandwagon pulled by stronger states (Waltz 1997: 915). However, they remain what Joseph Grieco (1988) has called “defensive positionalists” whose prime motivation is to prevent a decline in their relative capabilities.

2.2.5 Neorealism and Alliances

Institutions are not critical in the realist perspective, but rather fronts for the prevailing distribution of power. The most powerful states in the system create and

⁷ Mearsheimer is an offensive realist, while Waltz is generally regarded as a defensive one. However, their views on cooperation and institutions are similar (see Waltz 2000: 24).

maintain institutions for their own purposes, and are regarded as mere arenas for acting out power relationships rather than important in their own right (ibid). In this view, NATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War were little more than the manifestation of the bipolar order; similarly, the extensive cooperation between the West European countries after 1945 was only possible because the overarching superpower conflict had all but suspended the effects of anarchy between the countries in the European Community.

Under conditions of anarchy, states have to provide for their own security, and alliances are a means to security against adversaries. When faced with capabilities they perceive as threatening, states align with other states that are in the same position, thus enhancing the security of both. Neorealists assume that states make alliance decisions by comparing the benefits of alliance to its cost, and focus on the effects the alliance has on its security. Among the benefits are decreased likelihood of being attacked or threatened and help in case of attack, while costs include the chance of being pulled into a conflict not of your own making and the general constraints membership puts on a state's freedom of action (Hellmann and Wolf 1993: 10-11).

Because of the importance of straightforward cost/benefit calculation and the considerable costs of membership, the cohesion of any given alliance will vary with the level of threat its member states face. When the power or threat it is intended to balance against disappears so will the alliance, and a new balance of power will emerge (ibid: 11).

2.3 Neoliberal Institutionalism

2.3.1 Intellectual roots

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, neoliberal institutionalism has its intellectual roots in the liberalism of the enlightenment era. Like domestic liberals, early liberalist thinkers believed that human reason and economic and cultural

progress could overcome war and create a better and more peaceful world. They rejected military alliances and disputed the realist assertion that balance-of-power politics was the best way to ensure peace (Baldwin 1993b:12). Instead, they advocated free trade or, like Kant, domestic reforms intended to make states “better”, in the sense of more peaceful. The classical liberalist project culminated in Woodrow Wilson’s attempt to “make the world safe for democracy” with the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War I.

After the abysmal failure of the League and the grim reality of world politics in the wake of World War II, it was, according to Fox (1989, quoted in *ibid*), difficult to find any political scientist who subscribed to the idealist worldview. Realism dominated both the academic discourse and the policy debates in international relations. However, by the 1970s liberal theories stressing international interdependence, asserting the importance of domestic politics, or questioning basic realist tenets such as the assumption of the state-as-actor, appeared.

2.3.2 Keohane’s Synthesis

Neoliberal institutionalism was to a large extent formulated as a response to neorealism. Robert Keohane, perhaps the most prominent theorist within the neoliberal school, asserts that he “borrows as much from realism as from liberalism” and that it can’t “be encapsulated as simply a ‘liberal’ theory opposed at all points to realism” (1993: 272). In his first critique of Waltz in 1982, Keohane accepts the primacy of systemic explanations, but finds Waltz’s definition of structure too constraining. The challenge for student of international politics, then, becomes to “construct theories that draw on Realism’s strengths without partaking fully in its weaknesses” (Keohane [1982] 1986c: 191).

As the above paragraph suggests, neoliberalism is to a certain extent a modification of neorealism rather than a wholesale alternative to it. Much of the early debate in particular (see Keohane 1986c and Waltz 1986) seemed to hinge on the definitions and specifications of key terms such as power and its fungibility – that is, on

operationalizations rather than on substantive theoretical issues. Unlike Waltz (1979: 8-9), who wanted to gain explanatory power “by moving away from ‘reality’, not by staying close to it”, Keohane (1986c: 191) wanted to modify the theory “to attain closer correspondence with reality”. Particularly central in the neoliberal research program was to explain the great increase in international cooperation in general and in the number of international institution in particular, and much of the debate has revolved around the neoliberal claim that institutions and regimes have become significant in world politics.

2.3.3 Cooperation in the Neoliberal Paradigm

His 1984 book *After Hegemony* reflects Keohane’s goal of proving the importance of international institutionalization. While adopting the realist model of the state as a rational egoist and acknowledging the importance of anarchy, he claimed that.

the characteristic pessimism of realism does not necessarily follow. I seek to demonstrate that realist assumptions about world politics are consistent with the formation of institutionalized arrangements . . . which promote cooperation.
(Keohane 1984: 67)

As the title of his book implies, Keohane’s subject is the possibility for stable cooperative arrangements in a world characterized by declining American hegemony. The conventional realist explanation for the increase in international cooperation after 1945 was that it was facilitated by the overwhelming dominance of American economic and military power. Following this logic, one would expect international cooperation to decline as the relative power of the US declined. However, Keohane argued that the international institutional framework created and nurtured by the Western nations after World War II had become a significant factor in itself, and that it would enable international cooperation even in the absence of a hegemon.

Like realists, neoliberal institutionalists identify *cheating* and the importance of *relative gains* as the main factors inhibiting international cooperation. However, true to the liberal tradition, they believe that these factors can be overcome rationally, and

that institutions – defined by Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallander (1999:2) as “persistent and connected sets of rules, often affiliated with organizations, that operate across international boundaries” – can change a state’s calculation about how to maximize gains, and indeed the fundamental strategies they use to achieve security in an anarchic world.

Cheating. Working within an institutional framework inhibits cheating in three principal ways: through providing information, through issue linkages, and through raising the cost of cheating by creating the prospect of future gain. Adding this up amounts to substantially reducing the transaction costs of individual agreements, thus lowering the bar to yet more cooperation further.

On the first point, providing information, Keohane (1984: 83-84) explains that:

If egoists monitor each other’s behavior and if enough of them are willing to cooperate on condition that others cooperate as well, they may be able to adjust their behavior to reduce discord ... Properly designed institutions can help egoists to cooperate even in the absence of a hegemonic power.

Information provided through institutions both reduce overall uncertainty and opportunities for cheating, and increases the likelihood of cheaters getting caught earlier rather than later, thereby limiting the losses that would occur. Second, comprehensive institutions create the possibility for issue linkages, where otherwise unrelated policy-issues can be combined and negotiation can proceed more smoothly. Third, by cooperating within a larger framework, the costs of cheating are raised both by inviting retaliation against the cheater and by reducing the offending state’s possibility of gains from cooperation in the future. Cooperation becomes a *repeated* prisoners-dilemma game; while the rational strategy in a single game is to not cooperate, in repeated games reciprocity is the key to mutual gain while the non-cooperation strategy becomes self-defeating.

Relative gains. For neoliberal institutionalists the question of relative gains is not dealt with through referring to institutions, but rather by directly challenging the

realist assumption of their primacy over absolute gains. While Grieco assumes that “*the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is to prevent others from achieving advances in their relative capabilities*” (1988: 498, emphasis in original), Keohane claims the concern over relative gains is conditional of the kind of relationship that prevails between the states in question (Keohane 1993: 276). While relative gains may be important in some relationship, its importance depends on the likelihood of those gains altering the balance of power, and on the perceived intention of the other state. A further critique of the concept of relative gains is that it becomes fundamentally ambiguous when the number of actors involved in the calculation is greater than two. If states were to focus solely on the relative aspects of relationships, they would “behave like paranoids, to their great cost” (ibid: 282). In sum, while some relationships, such as the one between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, are almost completely adversarial, most relationships are not. The question of relative versus absolute gains becomes an empirical question rather than a theoretical one.

2.3.4 Neoliberalism and Alliances

Neoliberalism have no quarrel with realist explanations as to why alliances form in the first place; like neorealists, they believe that alliances form primarily as responses to threats and to create and maintain a balance of power between states in the system (Keohane and Wallander 1999:40). However, unlike neorealists, they assume that states have an incentive to maintain an already existing alliance even when circumstances change. While neorealism tends to emphasize the cost of maintaining alliances – the loss of freedom of action, for instance – neoliberals emphasizes the cost and difficulty of creating them. In this view, then, it may be rational for states to continue to support imperfect institutions, since that may very well be a better than any politically feasible alternative (Keohane 1984: 100). However, the theory does not specify *when* we might expect alliances to dissolve, other than the generic prediction that alliances will end when their members no longer see them in their interest.

2.4 Methodological Approach

This thesis will take the form of a theory-testing case study (van Evera 1997: 90). The case study approach is often considered to be the poor cousin among social science methods, and has often been criticized for being less scientific than experiments or large-n observational tests (van Evera 1997: 50-53). However, the case study, like other research strategies, is a way of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of prespecified procedures (Yin 2001: 15). The prejudice against the case study-method has often been based on the misunderstanding that one case is analogous to one sample in a large-n study. It is not. Rather, a case study is analogous to an experiment, and, like the experiment, is not meant to provide a basis for statistical generalizations. Instead of being generalizable to populations or universes, it is generalizable to theoretical propositions – that is, our aim is to make generalizations that are analytical rather than statistical (ibid: 10). This study should be well suited to contribute to that type of generalization. As Harry Eckstein (quoted in McCalla 1996: 448) has observed, “a [single] case can impugn established theories if theories ought to fit but do not”.

It is easy to agree with Stephen van Evera (1997: 29-30) that we should favor *strong* tests that generate *certain* predictions⁸ *unique* to the theory. However, like most social science tests, this thesis can not aspire to be able to do that. It therefore qualifies as a *straw-in-the-wind* test (ibid: 32):

Most predictions have low uniqueness and low certitude, and hence provide tests that are indecisive both ways: passed and flunked tests are both “straws in the wind”. Such tests can weigh in the total balance of evidence but are themselves indecisive.

The results will confirm or infirm the theories only weakly, not definitely refute or confirm one or the other. King, Keohane and Verba (1994) have argued that we should use theories and concepts that are easy to measure; which, to the extent that it

⁸ I use “prediction” in a wide sense, to include expectations about phenomena in the past as well as in the future.

is possible, is obviously true. However, we can't stop ourselves from studying important topics simply because they do not lend themselves to easy measurement or clear-cut answers. Then we would, in van Evera's words, confine ourselves to "looking under the light" and end up studying only the easily observable and hence trivial. As I've indicated above, the importance of the subject matter will – hopefully, and to a certain degree – make up for these deficiencies.

The same applies to my decision to use only one case. I could have used two or more cases and thus enhanced the internal validity of the test by being better able to control for perturbing variables. However, NATO is in many ways a unique organization; it would be difficult to find a somewhat similar case to evaluate, thus precluding the use of a method-of-difference approach.⁹ The upside to using NATO, on the other hand, is as I've indicated that it is a case both theories should be well suited to explain. Furthermore, it should be possible to increase the internal validity by the development of rival operational predictions. And, as Waltz (1986: 335) has commented, a "small number of cases well studied may be worth hundreds cursorily treated".

The question of reliability is a more serious one. The goal in any research strategy must be to minimize errors and biases (Yin 1994: 36). This is a difficult challenge when faced with this type of research strategy, especially since it involves making predictions retroactively. Waltz has written that "[t]esting theories is difficult; interpreting the results of a test is a subtle task." This is more than just a banal statement. It implies the importance of the researcher to the results of a test, and his background, biases, and theoretical preferences are therefore far from being irrelevant when assessing the reliability of the results of a test. It is all too easy to create theoretical straw men to knock down, thus favoring one theory over the other. This could very well happen unintentionally. Yin proposes as a solution to possible bias to make as many steps as operational as possible, and to conduct research "as if

⁹ Method-of-agreement would not be very useful either.

someone were always looking over your shoulder” (Yin 1994: 37). To the extent that it is possible, I will follow that advice. I will also phrase my inferred predictions as precisely as I can, and cross-check them with predictions made in similar studies.

2.4.1 Data Sources

The bulk of data in this study will be gathered from secondary sources. Concretely, this means that my sources for understanding the subject at hand comes from books, articles and reports dealing with the topics under discussion. The only primary sources I will use are official statements and white papers stemming from NATO itself and from governments of member states. Primarily, however, I will rely on academic books and journals discussing the theories and case I am studying. The person behind each source is, as of course we all are, under conceptual lenses that impair perfect, objective understanding. Additionally, official documents in particular may be misleading, as diplomatic language often is; as Stephen Walt wrote in *Origin of Alliances* (1987), declarations of intra-alliance solidarity may very well be inversely related with the actual vitality of an alliance. This means that I will have to consult as broad a range of sources as possible to get a complete picture of the processes that I study (Kristiansen 2006: 23).

I have decided not to use interviews. A strong argument that could be made to the effect that interviews with key decision-makers would have enhanced the validity of the study through data triangulation (Yin 1994: 92). However, the practical difficulties of reaching such key people are obviously very extensive. Furthermore, considering my level of analysis it is doubtful whether such interviews would have been of much value. Forces at the systemic level often operate silently and policy-makers may only be dimly aware of them, if at all, in their day-to-day decision-making. Structure is the framework within which national leaders make decisions, rather than concrete, discrete factors they have to deal with directly. Moreover, the aim of this thesis is not to gather or find new data, but rather to interpret existing data in a novel way.

Perfect validity is an ideal and is in practice unattainable. The question in any study is whether the validity of the research strategy is good *enough* to answer the research question in a useful way. I believe that is the case in this instance.

2.5 Operationalizations

The purpose of this section is to generate testable hypotheses, or predictions, from the theories under study. If the theoretical assumptions of neorealism are correct, what empirical evidence can we expect to find? And similarly, if the assumptions of neoliberalism hold, what evidence will we find? H1 and H2 represent the main expectations of the theories *ceteris paribus*. All other things are never equal in the real world however; so we must attempt to define what we would expect to find if a theory is *generally* correct.

As I indicated in chapter one, I will use a two-pronged approach, and generate two sets of predictions for each theory. The first set for each theory will deal with the larger picture: Given the events of the last 16 years overall, which theory has the most explanatory power with regards to NATO? The second sets of predictions will deal with the Alliance's military response to the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. Because of its importance, I will focus my efforts on NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Important as Operations *Active Endeavour* and *Eagle Assist*¹⁰ may have been, they have not posed the cost, risk, or political will that the Alliance's operations in Afghanistan have, and are therefore not decisive to NATO in the same way as the ISAF mission is.

¹⁰ These operations were commenced in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the first to protect the sea lanes of the Mediterranean and the second to monitor US airspace. Incidentally, I took part in *Active Endeavour* in 2001-2002 aboard the Norwegian frigate *KNM Narvik*.

2.5.1 Predictions and System-level Theories

There are some specific problems involved with testing systemic or structural theories in political science, as well as similar theories in other social science fields. Although, as Hellmann and Wolf (1993: 4) observed, neorealism and neoliberalism are positivist theories concerned with outcomes, there are some problems associated with using systemic theories to explain particular events. I will concentrate here on three problems:

- Imprecise predictions
- The difficulty of separating systemic from unit-level factors
- That the theories operate under a *ceteris paribus* clause

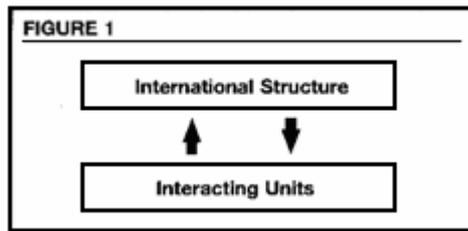
Waltz wrote in *Theory of International Politics* that:

Structures are causes, but they are not causes in the sense meant by saying that A causes X and B causes Y ... In contrast, structures limit and mold agents and agencies and point them in ways that *tend toward* a common quality of outcomes even though the efforts and aims of agents and agencies vary ... Structurally we can describe and understand the pressures states are subject to. *We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures* without knowledge of their internal dispositions. (1979: 74, 71, emphasis mine)

There is, in other words, no necessary *direct* causation involved. Even if one accepts the assumptions and the underlying logic of the theory, given its systemic nature and its parsimony, its predictions tend to be gross and not specific enough to be easily tested (Keohane 1986c: 188). As Keohane writes, systems theory is important because we must “understand the context of the action before we can understand the action itself” (ibid: 193), but arriving at falsifiable propositions can be difficult.

This problem is closely linked with the second one, which concerns the challenge of separating system-level causes from unit-level ones. The causation between units and

structure run both ways, as illustrated by Figure 1, below (reproduced from Waltz 1997: 914):



Structures “shape and shove” and the system thus acts as a disciplining force, but it doesn’t determine specific outcomes (Waltz 1979: 172-3; 1986: 343). While he maintains the primacy of system-level causes, Waltz concedes that the

bothersome limitations of systemic explanations arise from the problem of weighing unit-level and structural causes. To what extent is an effect to be ascribed to one level or the other? ... The difficulty of sorting causes out is a serious, and seemingly inescapable, limitation of systems theories of international politics. (Waltz 1986: 343)

He has since added:

Of necessity, realist theory is better at saying *what* will happen than in saying *when* it will happen. Theory cannot say when ‘tomorrow’ will come because international political theory deals with the pressures of structure on states and not with how states will respond to the pressures. (Waltz 2000: 27)

Although this seems reasonable enough at face value, it appears to imply that all empirical deviation from the theory can be explained away either by referring to unit-level causes – which are not part of the theory – or by assuring us that the predicted outcome just hasn’t happened *yet*, but that it surely will. Needless to say, this is not very satisfying from a scientific point of view.

Finally, systemic theory, like microeconomic and most other kind of theory, comes with an implied *ceteris paribus*-clause (Waltz 1997: 914). That is, *all other things being equal*, the theory’s predictions will hold. As Waltz writes when he discusses

the testing of theories, we must “eliminate or control perturbing variables not included in the theory under test”. Given that international politics as a field of inquiry is not very amenable to experimentation or large-n statistical analysis, controlling for and eliminating variables is to some extent a question of judgment and intuition, and again, clear prediction that offer opportunities for falsification becomes very difficult.

It is important to be aware of these limitations, because they represent clear limits to the theories’ predictive and explanatory value. However, as I outlined above, these limits are inherent in much of social science research. The future is unknown and to a large extent unknowable; and these theories, for all their limitations, arguably represent the best we’ve got within international relations. They certainly make sweeping claims to their relevance, and these claims deserve to be studied to the best of our ability. The fruitfulness with which they can be applied to a case such as NATO will also indicate to what extent systemic theories are useful in general. How influential is structure relative to units? What does focus on structure clarify, and what does it obscure? Are systemic theories useful or misleading?

2.5.2 Expected Empirical Findings

General neorealist predictions. Given that the neorealist hypothesis – H1 above – is the correct one, how might we have expected NATO to evolve after 1991? Based on neorealist theory as presented above – and recognizing that the regime has not outright collapsed, as expected by some in the early 1990s – how should we expect alliance members to act? First, we would expect that NATO members to be less willing to sacrifice advantages for the greater good of the alliance; states are defensive positionalists, and in the absence of a common enemy these concerns will come to the fore also in relations between allies. This will also mean that they will engage in more disputes, since the common, overriding threat the alliance was based on no longer exists. Finally, given the cost of a membership in an alliance, we should

expect to see them move to new types of cooperative arrangements.¹¹ To sum up, we can expect member states to:

1. Bargain harder to secure a greater share of the benefits, and cut military expenditures to bring their cost-benefit ratios back in to balance following the loss of the threat
2. Engage in more disputes over common alliance policy and take more independent directions in their foreign and defense policies
3. Move away from NATO to less costly forms of international cooperation¹²

Specific neorealist predictions with regards to Afghanistan. When applied to Afghanistan, what would neorealism expect? If it is true that, as stated above, states will want to hold their cost-benefit ratios in check, one would expect the European members to contribute as little as possible to what is likely to be seen in European capitals as America's problem. If the Alliance is seen as less valuable than during the Cold War, members should be more willing to buck-pass and thereby risk failure and the future of the alliance. Finally, given that the overall cost of membership has risen, one would expect allies to increasingly explore alternatives to NATO. More specifically, we can expect:

- a. Buck-passing – relying on others to provide the bulk of military support and take military risks
- b. Lack of concern for the success or failure of the mission
- c. Accelerating the processes of points R-2¹³ and R-3 above; taking a more independent direction in foreign and security policy and moving away from NATO to less costly forms of cooperation

¹¹ I should note that these are not the predictions one would get from a “strong” realism, which would predict an outright break-up in a relatively short time-frame. These are the weaker predictions given the absence of an outright break.

¹² These predictions (or perhaps more accurately *postdictions*) are in line with, and indeed to a great extent based on, Hellmann and Wolf 1993 and McCalla 1996. This greatly increases their internal validity; since the greater part of my empirical material is from after 1996, these are to some extent genuine predictions rather than retroactive ones.

¹³ I will refer to the neorealist predictions by prefixing R, and to the neoliberal ones by prefixing L.

General neoliberalist predictions. The task then becomes to generate similar predictions from a neoliberalist perspective based on H2. Given the neoliberalist assumptions presented above, and keeping in mind NATO's deeply institutionalized nature in 1991, we should expect members to modify and adapt the existing framework rather than start anew. Given the sunk costs invested in the Alliance institutions and the institutional assets it maintains, we would expect it to be useful despite changes in the international system. We would also expect it to be used by its members as a platform for cooperating with other actors, since it is useful for coordinating policies and providing information. In sum, members should:

1. Use NATO's existing institutional framework to deal with new problems rather than create a new framework.
2. Modify NATO to deal with problems that existing structures can't
3. Use the regime as the basis for ties to other actors¹⁴

Specific neoliberalist predictions with regards to Afghanistan. Based on the general neoliberalist predictions above, we would expect members to react to the situation by adapting the institutional framework already in place to deal with the war against terrorism, especially the situation in Afghanistan. We would also expect an acceleration of military reform towards a greater emphasis on expeditionary warfare. Finally, we would expect to see problems associated with common action dealt with by using institutional structures. In sum, what we expect to see is members:

- a. Modifying NATO's institutional structures to enable it to deal effectively with terrorism in general and Afghanistan in particular
- b. Reforming their military forces to make them more useful in expeditionary-type missions
- c. Using institutional assets to deal with free-riding, provide information

¹⁴ See note under neorealist predictions.

It is worth repeating that none of these predictions can be classified as *certain* in the sense that van Evera classifies it. That is, the failure of a prediction does not lead directly to the falsification of the theory, although it would lead to its weakening. The predictions' *uniqueness* varies. R-a and b, and L-a and b can not strictly be described as mutually exclusive and it can't be ruled out that both can be reasonably described as true at the same point in time. However, the sets could *overall* be described as mutually exclusive, in the sense that it is unlikely that both sets can be reasonably be described as *equally true* simultaneously.

This state of affairs may leave something to be desired, of course, but it is difficult to arrive at more precise prediction without sacrificing a significant degree of the theoretical validity of the operationalizations. The strength of the conclusion will to a large extent hinge on whether or not one theory is *consistently* proved to have more explanatory power than the other. Similarly, if we find that there are no signs of the predicted behavior, or that behavior contrary to the predictions is observed, the hypothesis will be weakened (McCalla 1996: 448).

3. NATO: From the Washington to Kabul

The history of NATO is well known, and the intention of this chapter is only to provide a brief outline to serve as a background for the analysis that will be presented in the next two chapters. It will be divided into two sections. The first will deal with the origins and history of the Alliance from the end of World War II up to 2001. The second part will look at the history of the Alliance as it has unfolded since the events on September 11 2001 and up to today, especially with regards to Afghanistan.

3.1 1949-2001: The Cold War and After

When the Treaty of Washington that established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was signed in April 1949, it was for highly tangible reasons. On the other side of what Winston Churchill had termed the Iron Curtain just three years previously, Stalin was estimated to be in command of some 175 active army divisions. The new alliance's strength in Western Europe was the equivalent of 12 divisions. Needless to say, a Western Europe still trying to rebuild after the most devastating war in its history needed what allies it could get. The point was, in the pithy but overused quote attributed to Lord Ismay, the Alliance's first Secretary General, to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". The German question – that is, the fear of Germany once again posing a threat to its neighbors – was at the time almost as pressing as the fear of Russia. The answer to both threats was an enduring American presence in Europe, and the creation of an institutionalized structure under whose umbrella Germany was eventually allowed to rearm. The presence of several hundred thousand US soldiers on European soil – not to mention hundreds, and later thousands, of nuclear weapons – served as guarantors against both German *revaunchism* and Soviet aggression.

The history of the Alliance since its inception to the end of the Cold War has been described as an almost continuous series of crises (Lindley-French 2007: 20). From

the rearmament of Germany to the Suez crisis, and from the withdrawal of France from the military command structure to the placement of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe, the Alliance seemed to continually be on the brink. However, the common threat remained and NATO endured.

The demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War fundamentally altered the strategic environment of NATO and its member states. Although, as then-Secretary General Manfred Wörner noted, that the “treaty of Washington of 1949 nowhere mentions the Soviet Union” (quoted in McCalla 1996: 446), it was not clear what role, if any, the Alliance would play in a world without the need to deter the Soviet threat. However, the relevance of a continued American presence in Europe quickly became apparent. The European Community became the European Union, but proved unable to deal effectively with the wars following the break-up of Yugoslavia. Only after an American-led NATO bombing-campaign was the war in Bosnia finally brought to an end. This scenario was repeated on a larger scale four years later, when disagreements over the Serb province Kosovo led to an eventually successful 11-week bombing campaign by NATO against Serbia.

By the time NATO adopted a new strategic concept while celebrating its 50th anniversary in 1999, it was clear that the future of the Alliance would not be that of classic territorial defense. It was affirmed that the threat of general war had all but disappeared, and that political instability, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and terrorism were likely to be the most pressing security challenges in the new era (NATO 1999). If the Alliance were to remain relevant, it would have to develop the capacity to meet these threats.

3.2 After September 11

The terrorist attacks against the United States in September 2001 fundamentally changed NATO’s strategic environment for the second time in just over a decade. On the morning of September 12, the Alliance invoked its collective defense Article V

over the attacks, declaring them the equivalent of an attack upon all. However, the United States decided to bypass NATO structures in its invasion of Afghanistan; and the alliance seemed to be on the brink of a break-up two years later, when France and Germany opposed the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.

This proved to be a low-point for the Alliance, but not its end. In August 2003, NATO took on its first-ever mission outside of Europe when it assumed control over the ISAF force in Afghanistan. This force, set up under a UN mandate by the international community in 2002, was charged with stabilizing the country in the aftermath of the American invasion. Although confined to Kabul for the first two years, ISAF has since then gradually expanded its mission to include the whole country by October 2006. It has taken over substantial responsibilities from the American-led Operation *Enduring Freedom*, the combat operation which is charged with fighting Al-Qaeda forces, and by July 2007 consisted of 35,000 troops from 35 countries – including all 26 NATO members (Gallis 2007: 1).

Its mission is to support the Afghan government to extend and exercise its authority across the country, and create the conditions necessary for the stabilization and reconstruction of the country (NATO 2007a). NATO's effort in Afghanistan is by far the most ambitious project it has embarked on in the post-9/11 era. It has, however, been complicated by the resurgence of the Taliban since late 2005, and ISAF forces in the south and east of the country have been engaged in heavy fighting since expanding into that part of the country in mid-2006.

4. Analysis in a Neorealist Perspective

This chapter will provide an explanation of NATO's development in the post-Cold War era from a neorealist perspective. The first part of the chapter will analyze the macro-picture, the general evolution of the Alliance since 1991, where the point of departure will be the expectations the theory had for the organization in the early 1990s. The second part of the chapter will analyze the Alliance's military response to 9/11, with emphasis on NATO's role in Afghanistan. Finally the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations will be assessed.

4.1 The Evolution of the Alliance, 1991-2003: Survival – So Far

The main expectation of neorealist theory is that an alliance will dissolve when the threat it was created to counter has disappeared. As George Liska (1962: 12) has written, "alliances are against, and only derivatively for, someone or something". This is consistent with both theoretical expectations and historical experience; the only grand alliance in previous ages to outlast a conflict was the second coalition that defeated Napoleon, and that one only for the seven years from 1815 to 1822¹⁵.

The break-up scenario appeared to be the consensus prediction at the time among the leading realist scholars. Kenneth Waltz said before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1990 that "NATO is a disappearing thing"; Mearsheimer predicted in 1990 that a reunited Germany would not accept a continued American presence on its soil after Soviet forces were removed from Central Europe (1990: 5-6n). Waltz in particular, though, qualified his answer by stating that "[i]t is a question of how long it is going to remain a significant institution even though its name may linger on"

¹⁵ For a brilliant account of this period, see Henry Kissinger's *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (1957).

(quoted in Hellmann 2006: 4). Similarly, Walt wrote in his introduction to the 1990 edition of *Origins of Alliances* that

without a clear and present threat, neither European politicians nor U.S. taxpayers are likely to support a large U.S. military presence in Europe. Although NATO's elaborate institutional structure will slow the pace of devolution, only a resurgence of the Soviet threat is likely to preserve NATO in anything like its present form. (1987: vii)

The reason for these doubts is to be found in the basic expectations of neorealist theory; namely, that power balances power, and that a new balance will inevitably emerge when an old balance breaks down. Victories in major conflicts leave the balance of power badly skewed, and the international system will encourage moves back towards equilibrium (Waltz 2000: 30). And the balance certainly was skewed at the end of the Cold War. Since 1991, NATO members have between them controlled a commanding fraction of the world's economic and military resources. Although military spending and force levels were cut substantially in the early 1990s, the Alliance did not break up. The nations in the European pillar of NATO chose, at least in the short term, to bandwagon with rather than balance against US power (Waltz 2000; Posen 2004; Hellmann 2006). Most realists agree that the main reason for this is the fact that US power does not present a direct threat to its European allies; and bandwagoning therefore becomes a viable as well as a cost-effective alternative to balancing, especially as long as the smaller states believe that they have some influence with the hegemon (Hellmann 2006: 8). For the European allies to provide for their own security, let alone try to balance US power, would be extremely expensive; free-riding on the American security guarantee, on the other hand, would allow European states to focus their resources on popular social programs.¹⁶ America,

¹⁶ An additional argument could be made to the effect that both Americans and Europeans are afraid of the latter lapsing back into security competition in the absence of American hegemony and military might on the continent (cf. Waltz 2001: 36). Space will not allow me to explore this argument fully here, however.

for its part, had an interest in preserving NATO because it provided a tool by which it could maintain a decisive role in European affairs (Waltz 2000: 20).

This arrangement is unlikely to prove as firm as when the Atlantic community was bound together by the Soviet threat. Echoing Walt's balance-of-threat theory, Michael Mastanduno in the article "Preserving the Unipolar Moment" (1997), argued that this state of affairs could be extended for as long as American power did not appear too threatening. Most realists, such as Waltz and Walt, however, maintained that the basic expectation – i.e. that a balance would inevitably form, and that it was only a question of time before the pressures building up would manifest themselves – remained. This expectation can be illustrated by Figure 2, below:

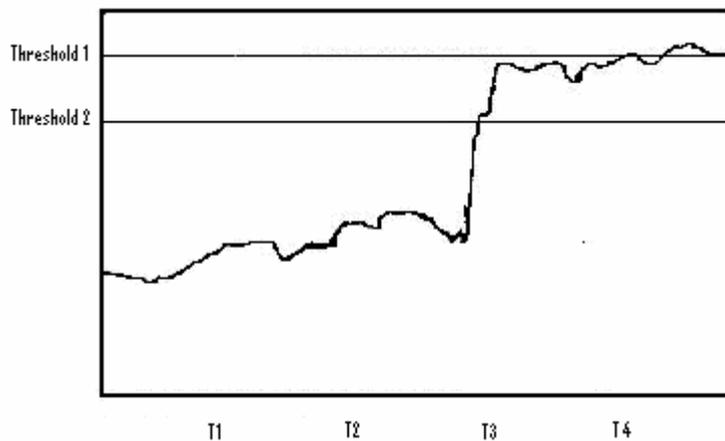


Figure 2: A threshold model with a structural cause (adapted from Hellmann 2006: 18).

If T3 in the figure represents 1991, and if threshold 2 represents where neorealists such as Mearsheimer (1990) originally expected NATO to dissolve, threshold 1 would represent the point at which realists such as Walt (cf. 2004) now claim NATO will dissolve when reaching. This will happen at T4, which is at some unspecified point in the future. In short, the US will only accept the burdens of providing European security as long as NATO serves America's purpose; and the Europeans will only accept US hegemony as long as the benefits outweigh the costs.

4.2 Evidence of Neorealist Predictions

4.2.1 General Predictions

Specifically, as I outlined in chapter 2, looking at post-Cold War NATO using neorealist theory would lead us to expect that member states will:

1. Bargain harder to secure a greater share of the benefits, and cut military expenditures to bring their cost-benefit ratios back in to balance following the loss of the threat
2. Engage in more disputes over common alliance policy and take more independent directions in their foreign and defense policies
3. Move away from NATO to less costly forms of international cooperation

A detailed history of NATO and the transatlantic partnership more generally since 1991 is beyond the scope of this thesis. I will therefore focus on some key issues. Given that institutions in the realist perspective are dominated by their strongest members, particular focus will be placed on the role of the United States as the driving force within the alliance. I will also analyze whether the developments of “coalitions of the willing” and the ESDP represent competing frameworks for international cooperation.

Enlargement. The 1990s were for NATO as an institution dominated by the discussion about what NATO was going to be. Would it remain a narrowly defined alliance with its focus on collective defense or be willing to go “out-of-area”? Would it focus on its present members or should it go expand its membership into Eastern Europe? The US firmly came down on the side of the latter alternatives. As Senator Richard Lugar said at the time, NATO had to “go out of area or out of business”. I will focus here on the decision to enlarge the Alliance.

Enlargement of NATO – enshrined in Article X in the Washington treaty – has so far taken place in two stages. In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined the Alliance, and in 2004, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, and the three Baltic countries followed.

In the early 1990s, there was at first little enthusiasm for NATO enlargement (Rauchhaus 2001: 174). Not only would it be expensive both politically – by extending security guarantees to new members – and economically – by having to help pay for upgrading new members’ defense capabilities. In addition, it was widely believed in European capitals as well as in Moscow that enlargement was out of the question because of agreements made with the Soviet Union during the so-called “two plus four”¹⁷ talks that led to German reunification (*New York Times* 1997a). This turned out to be a misunderstanding, however – or at least that was claimed by the American participants, Secretary of State James Baker most prominently (ibid). Either way, NATO’s European members had little interest in enlargement, fearing that this would dilute the security guarantee and needlessly provoke Russia.

The decision to enlarge NATO was, according to the *New York Times*, made wholly in the United States. Although it was the perhaps most significant foreign policy initiative since the end of the Cold War,

it was made, early in 1995, in characteristic Clinton Administration style, without a formal policy review, without a structured evaluation of competing viewpoints, without political debate and over the initial objections of senior military officers. (*New York Times*, 1997b)

This policy was opposed by a significant portion of the foreign policy community in the US. George Kennan (1997), author of the containment doctrine in the mid-1940s termed it “the most fateful error” of post-Cold War American policy, and all the allies except Germany were initially opposed to it. However, when it became clear that the

¹⁷ That is, the two Germanys plus the four victors from 1945 (France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States).

US was pushing the policy regardless of allied or Russian opposition, the Europeans fell into line (Rauchhaus 2001: 175). As one British diplomat, quoted by the New York Times (1997b), said at the time, the Europeans “had no choice ... [the] highest priority is keeping the United States engaged in Europe, and if the expansion of NATO [is] the price for that”, they had no choice but to pay.

The story of the second round of enlargement in 2004 is somewhat similar, even if the strategic circumstances were very different. Although Russian opposition was much more muted, and several European nations supportive of enlargement, the US once again played a dominant role. After the transatlantic quarrels between the US and many of the continental allies in the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003, the US was keen to see the Alliance enlarged by states from what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had famously termed “New Europe”. These states had supported the invasion of Iraq, at least partly if not wholly to curry favour with the US, and their membership would tilt the balance within the alliance further in the direction of America and away from France and Germany. That a state like Romania had not fulfilled the criteria for membership that was decided upon just two years earlier was conveniently forgotten.

American Unilateralism and the Development of the ESDP. The attacks on September 11 2001 were followed by a significant shift in US policy with regards to NATO. As explained above, the Americans decided not to take advantage of NATO’s invocation of Article V when invading Afghanistan. This was partly for practical reasons; the American military did not want to repeat the experience of Kosovo, where they claimed to have been forced to make “war by committee” (Kirkpatrick 2002). However, it also seemed like the NATO alliance was simply not seen as very important in Washington. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, when reflecting on the coming conflict in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, said that the US would lean on “revolving coalitions that will evolve and change over time depending on the activity and the circumstances of the country” (*Washington Post* 2001). Similarly, in the 2002 National Security Strategy, it was made clear that NATO’s

usefulness to the United States was dependent on its ability to provide the US with additional military capacity (NSS 2002: 25-26).

The future, it appeared, lay in ad-hoc “coalitions of the willing” rather than in the cumbersome process of consultation with allies and working through a multinational military command structure. This was underscored by the Iraq War in 2003, when the US and France in particular appeared to treat each other more as enemies than friends, and the transatlantic relationship reached a low point. In George Bush’s State of the Union address the following year, NATO was not mentioned – the first time this had happened since the Alliance was founded in 1949. Since then, however, the rhetoric has been toned down substantially, and the importance of the Alliance is again strongly affirmed – at least in word. Still, it is reasonable to assume that for the US, coalitions of the willing as a concept remains a viable alternative framework for international cooperation.

The development of a common security and defense policy for Europe has been on the table throughout the period since the end of World War II. Even though the plans for a European Defense Community and a European Army quickly fell apart and were replaced by cooperation within NATO, the idea remained popular, especially in France (Lindley-French 2007: 25). The problem, from 1947 onwards, was the diverging views of the two principal military powers in Europe – France and Britain – about what a European community was supposed to do. The British had always been concerned that a strong European defense identity would lead to an American withdrawal from Europe, and have therefore resisted the creation of strong European defense institutions. However, the European inability to deal effectively with the crises in the Balkans changed this, and in December of 1998 British and French leaders agreed on the framework for establishing a European Security and Defense Policy (Howorth 2000: 34).

It has been suggested that it was British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s frustration about being dependent on the United States to take militarily action in the unfolding Kosovo crisis that convinced him of a need for independent European capabilities

(Posen 2004: 13). Whatever the reason, the apparently serious ambition of developing independent European capabilities worried Washington, which responded to Saint-Malo by insisting that there should be no duplication of NATO assets, no decoupling from NATO structures, and no discrimination of non-EU NATO members (Howorth 2000: 45).

This reflected Washington's deep ambivalence about common European defense structures; even while complaining about the lack of European capabilities, the US did not want Europe to become *too* capable or independent. In the so-called Berlin Plus-agreement of 2002, NATO and the EU agreed on a basic framework for cooperation. This included the stipulation that even though the EU could draw on NATO assets in its peacekeeping operations, there would be no EU equivalent of NATO's operational command (NATO 2006a). When France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg set up what could be seen as a small standing operational headquarters in the Spring of 2003 – just as the invasion of Iraq was underway – US ambassador Nick Burns warned that it represented the “most serious threat to NATO” (quoted in Posen 2004: 11). Agreement on this was eventually reached in June 2004, however; and, concurrently with this crisis, the Alliance took on its most significant task yet in the Global War against Terrorism. In April of 2003, foreign ministers decided to plan for a major Alliance-wide mission to Afghanistan.

4.2.2 Specific Predictions

As I explained under “Predictions” above, when applying neorealist theory on NATO's situation in Afghanistan, one would expect to find:

- a. Buck-passing – relying on others to provide the bulk of military support and take military risks
- b. Lack of concern for the success or failure of the mission
- c. Acceleration in the processes of more disputes over policy and the search for alternatives

To provide a basis to answer these questions, I will analyze the situation in Afghanistan as it has developed since the American-led invasion in 2001. Since NATO is my subject, my focus will be on the reactions of the organization and its member states to the challenges the commitment in Afghanistan represents.

Afghanistan has been more or less continually at war since 1973. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989, the country descended into anarchy and remained in that state until the Taliban – a religiously motivated organization armed and trained by neighboring Pakistan – took control over most of the country in 1996. After the September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001, the Taliban rules refused to extradite the man responsible, Osama bin Laden. American forces invaded Afghanistan the following month, duly routed Taliban forces, and forced them into guerilla warfare.

In December 2001, following the collapse of the Taliban government, the international community met in Bonn, Germany to discuss the future of Afghanistan. The Bonn agreement established an interim government led by Hamid Karzai – who has since been elected president – and set up guidelines for elections and the writing of a constitution. On December 20th, the United Nations Security Council established ISAF, a primarily European force with a mandate to provide security and aid in and around Kabul (Rupp 2006: 155).

Early years: 2001-2005. During its first two years, the ISAF mission was confined to Kabul and its surrounding areas, and it comprised just 5,000 soldiers – 90 percent of whom were from NATO member states, though not yet under NATO command. Although several thousand soldiers of the American-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) were also stationed there, these were primarily active in the southern and eastern parts of the country and did not contribute significantly in peacekeeping operations. As a report from Care International (2003) pointed out at the time, Afghanistan only had one peacekeeper per 5,380 inhabitants – while Kosovo and Bosnia at the time had one per 48 and 58 persons, respectively.

When NATO formally took over the mission in August of 2003, the organization's deputy Secretary General, Minuto Rizzo, said that "the level of commitment and capability NATO provides" would rise significantly (quoted in Rupp 2006: 161). However, member countries were slow to respond, in spite of the fact that in October the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorized the expansion of ISAF's mandate to the whole country (UNSC 2003). In December, NATO announced its intention to establish five Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the following month; yet the first one to be established, in Konduz province, became known for the so-called "Helicopter Fiasco":

When NATO was preparing to assume command of the PRT in Konduz, [Secretary General Lord] Robertson was knocking on the doors of NATO members and even nonmembers such as Austria and Switzerland for three helicopters to enable the German team's deployment. After many declined, Turkey finally agreed to provide the helicopters ... It took direct involvement from three NATO members -- Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Turkey -- and seven months of haggling until the three Blackhawk helicopters were finally delivered to Afghanistan in May (Tarzi 2004)

Given that NATO on paper commands close to 1,000 helicopters, this came to symbolize the lack of will among the European allies to make meaningful contributions in Afghanistan. In January 2004, NATO's top commander, General James Jones, would vent his frustration before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee:

The political will has been stated ... The alliance has agreed, the donor countries have been identified, and yet we find ourselves mired in the administrative details of who's going to pay for it, who's going to transport it, how's it going to be maintained (quoted in the *New York Times*, 2004)

Although both Secretary General Lord Roberson, and from January 2004 his successor Jaap de Hoop Scheffer spoke of Afghanistan as the Alliance's "top priority", little actual support was forthcoming until the Istanbul summit in June

2004, when the Alliance decided to increase its troop presence by 3,500, to a total of 10,000 (Rupp 2006: 165). After the Afghan elections in October 2004, United States continued to press for greater European contributions, and suggested merging ISAF with Operation Enduring Freedom, placing them both under NATO command. This was rejected by the Europeans; German defense minister Peter Struck stated that the “German government sees its mandate as protecting and helping, not fighting” (cited in Sieff 2004), a view which seemed to be the prevailing one among NATO governments.

However, by mid-2004, it had become obvious that the Taliban was staging a serious comeback and that more resources were needed to stabilize the country. Although both ISAF and OEF forces had been engaged in training Afghan soldiers and police officers from 2002, it was clear that the Afghan government needed help if it were to extend its authority beyond Kabul.

Escalation: 2005-2007. ISAF expanded out of Kabul in four stages. Stages one and two, taking place in 2004 and 2005 respectively, covered the relatively peaceful northern and western parts of the country. In stage three, which came into force in July of 2006 after several postponements, NATO forces took over from American OEF-forces in the unstable southern provinces. The fourth stage saw ISAF expand into the equally volatile eastern region (NATO 2006b). Most of the US OEF forces were transferred to the ISAF command, and reinforced by primarily British, Canadian and Dutch troops the mission grew to comprise more than 35,000 soldiers by early 2007, 15,000 of whom were Americans (ibid).

Although the mission statement of the third stage reflected the European view that ISAF should concentrate on stabilization and reconstruction tasks, it became clear even before the deployment in July that NATO forces would have to take on substantial counter-insurgency duties as well (Gallis 2007: 7). The Taliban had been relatively quiet the previous winter, but came out in force during the summer and fall of 2006 causing the deadliest spate of violence since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001. The increase in violence continued through the year and into

2007, with substantial allied casualties throughout the summer (*Defense and the National Interest* 2007). It appeared that the insurgents were becoming more competent, possibly by learning from the examples of the insurgents in Iraq. Meanwhile, the Afghan government was not able to operate effectively in most of the country, and the coalition was starting to fear that the Afghan people were losing faith in President Karzai (Godges 2007: 14). ISAF offensives during the winter and summer of 2007 caused, according to ISAF commander Dan McNeill, “thousands” of Taliban dead, but warned that “Afghan security forces might not be able to retain security” and that ISAF might have to do the same thing over again next year (BBC 2007). Similarly, a report from the British House of Commons Defence Committee (2007) offered a pessimistic assessment, saying that “[v]iolence is increasing and spreading to the relatively peaceful Kabul and the northern provinces”.

The increase in violence and the risk to NATO troops fell disproportionately on the soldiers of a few member states. By 2007, all NATO countries – in addition to nine others – had troops in Afghanistan, but the troops in the volatile southern and eastern Afghanistan was drawn almost wholly from Britain, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands, in addition to the United States. The primary reason for this is that several of the other NATO members imposed restrictions – so-called “national caveats” – on what kind of missions their troops may take part in. Additionally, several governments refused their troops to be transferred to other parts of Afghanistan (Gallis 2007: 3).

This state of affairs was not, to say the least, very satisfactory from a military point of view, since this limited ISAF’s flexibility and effectiveness. Politically, it was perhaps even more damaging. As the report from the House of Commons (2007) concluded, the “reluctance of some NATO countries to provide troops for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is undermining NATO's credibility”. And worse, it was undermining Alliance solidarity. During the debate preceding the Dutch decision to send forces to the south in 2006, Dutch parliamentarians voiced concerns about the mission, questioning European solidarity and fearing that they would end up “alone”,

and that they would be more vulnerable to terrorist attacks because of their prominent role relative to their allies (European Institute 2006). These fears seem at least partly justified. Although some of the caveats were lifted after the Riga summit, and Italian and Spanish governments would let their forces to assist in an “urgent” situation, most allies refused to transfer their forces to the south (Gallis 2007: 4). Furthermore, Turkey continued to refuse to let their forces be used in combat at all, and the substantial German force of almost 3,000 soldiers remain mostly within their bases in the relatively peaceful north (ibid: 12). This state of affairs has continued into 2007.

4.3 Assessments

4.3.1 General predictions

The narrative presented here lends significant support to the neorealist predictions as they have been formulated above, but also point us to some shortcomings.

First, while it is true that all NATO members cut their military expenditures substantially after the end of the cold war “to bring their cost-benefit ratio back into balance” as we predicted, and that they partly did this outside of the agreed framework (Waltz 2000: 19), the US did not withdraw all its forces from Europe or cut as much as one might have expected given the magnitude of the change when the Soviet Union fell. Additionally, it should be added that a prediction stating that forces will be reduced when a country’s potential enemy disintegrates is hardly a prediction unique to neorealism, and can only be said to confirm the theory very weakly, if at all.

The second prediction, stating that members will engage in more disputes and take more independent directions in their foreign policies than they did during the Cold War, seems to corroborate the theory more strongly. Although there were plenty of crises during the first forty years of the history of the Alliance, the organization itself

was usually kept out of the discussion;¹⁸ the Soviet threat loomed over Europe, and it was in the West's vital interest not to damage the Alliance. However, NATO almost fell apart when the great crisis over the war in Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003; a formerly loyal ally of the US, Germany, and (less surprisingly) France not only refused to help, but actively opposed US policy. The point here is not who was right or wrong, but the apparent disregard for the Alliance showed by the US and France especially. The crisis over Turkey's invocation of Article IV in early 2003 seemed particularly irresponsible. Still, this can equally be seen as a manifestation of diverging interests and perspectives. Even before 2002, it was clear that Germany was moving closer to France in the geopolitical landscape, and even Britain was taking a stronger interest in developing the EU as an actor on the international stage. Meanwhile, the US ignored NATO in its initial response to the 9/11 attacks, both militarily and politically.

The story of enlargement also lends significant support to neorealist assumptions, specifically that organizations are dominated by its principal members and used for their own purposes. The decision was made by the US government alone, for its own reasons, and it managed to push it through the organization with relative ease in spite of European misgivings. The story of the conflicts in the Balkans is more complex, but can be described in a similar manner (cf. Rupp 2006: 64-70): the Alliance acted when the US decided it would act. The National Security Strategy, especially the 2002 version of the document, also makes it abundantly clear that NATO is important to the United States to the extent that it is militarily and politically *useful* to it.

The question of whether NATO members are moving away from NATO to "less costly" forms of international cooperation is more ambiguous. I discussed two possible signs of this above: America's apparent preference for co-called "coalitions of the willing", and Europe's development of the ESDP. The former of these must be said to be the most immediate competitor to NATO; its form of international

¹⁸ The great exception is of course when de Gaulle withdrew France from the military structures of the Alliance.

cooperation was used both in *Operation Enduring Freedom* as well as in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. If this becomes a rule and NATO becomes just one form of American cooperation with “revolving coalitions” then the Alliance certainly will be very much weaker than it has been. However, it might seem like this principle for cooperation may have floundered along with the expedition to Iraq, at least as a first choice, but it is too early to conclude decisively.

Haugsdal (2005) has argued that the development of the ESDP can at least partly be explained by Europe’s wish to balance US power. This may be the case from a French point of view, but if it is, it is balancing in a very weak form. The ESDP was declared operational in December 2001 – just as American foreign policy was becoming more assertive – but it is highly unlikely that it was intended to be directed against the United States and in direct competition with NATO. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has spoken out against the concept of balancing several times, and has indeed highly praised the virtues of a unipolar world.¹⁹ The ESDP can, however, be reasonably interpreted as a sign that Europe wishes to develop more autonomous capabilities, and thus have the opportunity to act without the United States; but it is as yet underdeveloped, and the EU nations has not committed nearly the resources necessary if it was to make the EU a serious security policy actor in world affairs (cf. Posen 2004). Indeed, many have remarked that the goals the EU has set for itself are remarkably unambitious (Yost 2003: 98). In sum, then, both the US and the EU are showing willingness to move beyond NATO to forms of cooperation are not contingent on the other’s support, but that the extent to which they are serious about serious alternatives to NATO as a primary framework for military cooperation is yet to be seen.

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that to the extent to which the empirical record supports neorealist predictions, it does so in a fairly *weak* form. Although the

¹⁹ Although, I should note, Waltz’s theory doesn’t require statesmen to actively pursue a balance of power for a balance to appear. See Waltz 1997: 914-915.

allies cut their defense expenditures at the end of the Cold War; although there have been serious disputes over Alliance policy; and although the Europeans and Americans have been exploring alternative ways of international cooperation, NATO has remained the primary framework for cooperation within the security sphere. The story of Afghanistan provides an important clue as to what degree it will remain important.

4.3.2 Specific Predictions

The story of Afghanistan as told above seem to be a story of continued buck-passing; but it also demonstrates the US's clout in the Alliance.

Buck-passing. Although NATO invoked Article V on the morning of September 12th 2001, Alliance offers of help were ignored during the following invasion of Afghanistan. NATO allies have since been called upon to contribute to the peacekeeping mission in the country in the aftermath of the invasion. To date, all members of NATO have contributed forces and NATO is in overall charge of the ISAF mission. However, all have not contributed equally, and the developments in Afghanistan possibly represent the most serious threat the organization has faced. The countries with significant forces in the south of Afghanistan feel that they've been left hanging out to dry by their more cautious allies. As the insurgency has gathered strength in the south it seemed, in the words of Julian Lindley-French (quoted in Cohen 2007), that "[i]n Afghanistan, NATO solidarity collapses at the point of danger". Although the mission has been described as a crucial test of the Alliance by many policymakers and academics, most continental European members – France and Germany most prominently, but also most of the smaller Western European countries – seem willing to lay low and hope for the best, in spite of the risk to Alliance unity and solidarity, if not its existence.

Early in the game, this might have been explained by the lingering resentment for having been snubbed in 2001. As one European diplomat quoted by Rupp (2006: 162) said in 2004, "[i]t's quite something for Washington to criticize NATO for its

troop levels in Afghanistan ... when Washington scorned NATO's genuine offers of assistance in September 2001". By 2006, however, it was primarily countries such as the UK, Canada and the Netherlands that were asking for assistance, and it was clear that NATO's reputation as an effective organization was at stake. As then-Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Richard Lugar said during the NATO summit in Riga in 2006:

If the most prominent alliance in modern history were to fail in its first operation outside of Europe due to a lack of will by its members, the efficacy of NATO and the ability to take joint action against a terrorist threat would be called into question (*Radio Europe/Radio Liberty* 2006)

Part of the explanation can be found in the domestic policies of member states.²⁰ Risking soldiers in something that is by many seen as an "American adventure" is not politically popular. Even the countries that are sending troops into harms way are struggling on the domestic front. In Canada, the decision to provide troops through 2009 was passed by a razor-thin majority in Parliament, and the Dutch are unlikely to extend their presence past 2008 unless the situation improves (Gallis 2007: 16). In Denmark and (non-NATO member) Australia elections in late 2007 could produce new governments that may not be as supportive of the US as the current ones. Only in Britain does political support seem to remain firm.

Still, the role of domestic politics cannot be the whole explanation. If the member states in question believed that alliance cohesion and solidarity were in the vital interest of their countries to maintain, they would find a way to abolish the national caveats, and send or transfer more troops regardless of domestic opposition. As Rupp (2006: 177) put it, "[i]f the Alliance's operations in Afghanistan today ... reflects NATO's best effort, then NATO's top priority is clearly not prioritized by the organization's member-governments". The reactions of European governments therefore strongly corroborates predictions R-a and R-b above.

American influence. The narrative also confirms the decisive influence the United States has in determining what role NATO should take. As late as the fall of 2005, Britain, France and Germany, along with most other European allies, said they strongly opposed an American plan for NATO to become involved in counterinsurgency operations (*International Herald Tribune* 2005). Then-Defense Minister of Germany Peter Struck claimed that “NATO is not equipped for counter-terrorism operations. That is not what it is supposed to do”²¹ (ibid). Furthermore, and speaking for many, he opposed merging the ISAF and OEF commands, claiming it would “make the situation for our soldiers doubly dangerous and worsen the current climate in Afghanistan” (quoted in Gallis 2007: 12).

However, by the summer of 2007, ISAF was conducting just that type of counter-terrorism operations, and the ISAF and OEF commands were, if not merged, then cooperating in a much closer fashion. Consistent American pressure had forced NATO to take a more active role, which to a large extent confirms the primarily instrumental value NATO has for the US. By having the organization take on a more challenging role, it presumably knew that it was raising the stakes for the Alliance and was risking its credibility. Overstating the case just a little, it seems like both the US and key European members are playing a game of chicken, and what’s at stake is the credibility of NATO. The one nation taking responsibility for NATO – and playing the role of “buck-catcher” – is predictably enough the UK, the traditionally atlanticist country which has the most to lose from a transatlantic rift.

In sum, then, it appears that the events in Afghanistan correlate strongly with the expectations of neorealist theory. The solidarity and cohesion of the Alliance has started to falter when faced with serious military opposition, and the different priorities of the member countries have become more visible. Furthermore, even

²⁰ Norway being one of the most straightforward examples.

²¹ Despite the fact that, as Gallis (2007: 7) notes, the 1999 NATO Strategic Concept clearly states that counter-terrorism is one of the Alliance’s new tasks.

though the mission in Afghanistan has been described as critical to NATO, most of its members have so far not shown the concern one would expect if they perceived the Alliance to be vital to their security.

5. Analysis in a Neoliberal Institutional Perspective

This chapter will be organized as the previous one, but this time applying neoliberal institutionalist theory to the case. The first part will analyze the evolution of the Alliance since 1991, once again using the early expectations inferred from the theory. The second part will analyze the Alliance's response to the mission in Afghanistan.

5.1 The Evolution of the Alliance, 1991-2003: Survival – As Expected

Unlike neorealists, neoliberals didn't assume that NATO would necessarily dissolve in the wake of the Cold War. The basic expectation of neoliberalist theory with regards to institutions are, as Keohane (1989: 5-6) has written, that they "should persist as long as, and only as long as, their members have incentive to maintain them". Whether or not this is the case is determined by whether or not the institution in question is seen as an effective instrument for the realization of member states' interest. Consequently, institutions break down when the states in question no longer perceive them to be effective (Hellmann and Wolf 1993: 14).

The question with regards to NATO therefore became whether or not members would continue to see the Alliance as an effective instrument of state power. Robert Keohane was in the early 1990s unwilling to make a specific prediction because

it is not clear that both the United States and Europe will regard NATO as continuing to be in their interest ... Europe could provide for its own defense if it chose to do so; the United States has decreasing interest in providing a costly security guarantee (Keohane 1993: 300).

As the discerning reader would observe, there is no fundamental disagreement here between neoliberalism and neorealism. However, neoliberals assume that, all other

things being equal, states have a greater interest in maintaining institutions than neorealists admit. Their starting point is that institutions are much harder to create than to maintain; and as I explained in chapter two, even in the case of imperfect institutions this may very well make it “rational to obey their rules if the alternative is their breakdown” (Keohane 1984: 100).

Overall, the theory would lead us to expect persistence to be the case with NATO. Following Hellmann and Wolf (1993: 20-21), we can identify four main reasons for this. First, the organization was by the early 1990s highly institutionalized; by the end of the Cold War, several thousand people worked either in NATO’s political headquarters in Brussels or in the military headquarters (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, or SHAPE) at Mons. These people would presumably have an interest in proving the organization’s enduring relevance. Second, as neoliberals are quick to point out, successful organizations are less likely to be abandoned. Success reinforces institutions, particularly during times of change and uncertainty, and the period following the break-up of the Soviet Union can certainly be categorized as such a time. Third, NATO could be seen as the primary institutional framework of transatlantic relations. As Secretary General Manfred Wörner said at the time, NATO was not just a military alliance but in addition “a political instrument with which the West can influence a historic process ... Clearly the political side of this alliance comes more and more to the forefront,” allowing it to serve as a platform for “harmonizing political views” (quoted in McCalla 1996: 465). Finally, since Alliance members were dependent on one another on issues beyond NATO, it would be reasonable to expect that they would be wary of risking Alliance links because this could have negative repercussion in other parts of their relationship. Even if a member would have preferred to weaken or dissolve the Alliance, it would be careful in doing so if other, more powerful members opposed such a development.

Additionally, Wallander (2000) has pointed out that the assets of the Alliance can be divided into two: *specific* assets created to handle the Soviet threat directly – that is, the nuclear posture, most of the forces that were stationed in Germany, et cetera – and

general assets – interoperability, organizational procedures for reaching consensus, shared understanding of problems, and so on. While the specific assets were not likely to be very useful in a post-Cold War world, the general ones were likely to remain relevant to meeting new challenges if the allies decided to meet these together.

5.2 Evidence of Neoliberal Predictions

5.2.1 General Predictions

The question then moves from *why* the Alliance would survive to *how* neoliberals would expect NATO to change. To recap the specific predictions arrived at in chapter two, neoliberal theory expected member states to:

1. Use NATO's existing institutional framework to deal with new problems rather than create a new framework
2. Modify NATO to deal with problems that existing structures can't
3. Use the regime as the basis for ties to other actors

As in the discussion of neorealist theory, I will focus on some key issues. First I will analyze the adaptation of the organization to the new realities in the post-Cold War era. Then I will explain how the framework of the Alliance was used as a point of departure for cooperation with other actors.

Adaptation and transformation. The London Declaration, issued by NATO in July of 1990, stated that "Europe has entered a new, promising era", and that as a consequence, "this Alliance must and will adapt" (NATO 1990). This was reiterated more specifically in the 1991 Strategic Concept, which, after noting that a primary task of the Alliance was still to deter conventional attacks on members, stated:

In contrast with the predominant threat of the past, the risks to Allied security that remain are multi-faceted in nature and multi-directional, which makes them hard to

predict and assess. NATO must be capable of responding to such risks if stability in Europe and the security of Alliance members are to be preserved...

Risks to Allied security are less likely to result from calculated aggression against the territory of the Allies, but rather from the adverse consequences of instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries...

However, Alliance security must also take account of the global context. Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disruption of the flow of vital resources and actions of terrorism and sabotage (NATO 1991).

It thus seems apparent that the organization quickly realized that NATO had to change if it were to remain relevant. However, even though the prevailing wisdom was that NATO should remain the central pillar of military cooperation and all agreed it had to change, there was little shared understanding of what exactly the Alliance was supposed to do. From the 1991 Strategic Concept, it was clear that NATO had ceased planning for operations against an adversary and had taken as a new purpose crisis management and international stability. The question was how this was going to play out – and whether the Alliance as it existed was suitable for that purpose. Many members wanted to maintain an organization whose primary task remained collective defense, but its Secretary General Manfred Wörner took the lead in pushing for new roles. Prior to the Rome Summit in 1991, he strongly expressed his conviction that NATO had to move out of area and take more responsibility for the stability of Eastern Europe, especially in the emerging conflict in the Balkans (McCalla 1996: 460).

The transformation of NATO was both military and political. In political terms, its members had to show the willingness to deal with the problems of the day through the alliance rather than unilaterally; militarily, they had to show the ability to do so.

Although apparently unsure and unsteady to begin with, the political adaptation to the new principles of the Alliance slowly got underway. The unwillingness of the first

Bush administration to view the conflict in the former Yugoslavia as anything more than a European concern and Europe's inability to take effective action there, was gradually replaced by a concerted NATO response, culminating with the air strikes in 1995 that brought on the Dayton peace accords. To paraphrase Dick Lugar, the Alliance had gone out of area rather than out of business.

Militarily, the Alliance started the process of dismantling the assets that had been specific to the Soviet threat. Two thirds of the Alliance's forces were removed from Germany, nuclear forces were cut by four fifths, spending was reduced, and bases were closed down (NATO 1997; Wallander 2000: 719). The military bureaucracy was reformed as well, with the establishment of combined joint task forces and mission-specific mobile command structures, and new offices were created to adapt alliance practices to new missions (ibid).

Politically, this process was more or less complete by the end of the decade: its 1999 Strategic Concept embraces an even wider definition of security than its 1991 predecessor, stating:

Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including acts of terrorism, sabotage and organised crime, and by the disruption of the flow of vital resources. The uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, particularly as a consequence of armed conflicts, can also pose problems for security and stability affecting the Alliance (NATO 1999).

The expansion of NATO was also part of this picture. In the early 1990s there was a growing sense that the alliance was falling into disuse. Expansion was the best available alternative, since widening the alliance seemed cheaper than deepening it, and, in addition to giving the alliance a new sense of purpose, it might address some of the needs of eastern European countries (Rauchaus 2001).

Militarily, however, the Kosovo conflict underlined the ever increasing divergence between the United States and the rest of the alliance members. Throughout the 1990s, Europeans spent much less on procurement and technology than did the

Americans, with the result that the gap in capabilities grew ever larger. By the time of the Kosovo-intervention in 1999, this gap had grown so large and so obvious that it could no longer be ignored (Yost 2003:81). With the aging state of European communications systems and the rapid modernization of American systems, the US was even forced to use suboptimal, so-called 'legacy' systems to be able to communicate with its allies (ibid: 89-90). With the boost the Pentagon has received in the aftermath of September 11 2001, this gap has become even wider. Furthermore, the Americans spend their resources much more efficiently; according to former US Secretary of Defense William Cohen, the European NATO members "spend roughly 60 percent of what the United States does and they get about 10 percent of the capability" (quoted in Yost 2003:83).

This problem has been dealt with through a series of agreements on the restructuring of Europe's forces. Most important of these was the Defense Capabilities Initiative that was launched in 1999, where the member states pledged to improve both their interoperability and expeditionary capabilities (NATO 2001: 53). This process was accelerated with the 2002 Prague Capabilities Commitment which established a NATO Response Force. This was intended to be a "coherent, high readiness, joint, multinational force package" of 25,000 men which could be deployed in just a few days (NATO 2007b).

NATO as basis for cooperation with other actors. As I have explained, neoliberal theory would lead us to expect that NATO-members would use the framework of the Alliance to deal with other actors. Because of the Alliance's prestige, as well as its mechanisms for reaching consensus and the ready-made platform it provided, it would be reasonable to expect it to be used as a starting point in relations to others, and that it would gain a role among the broader set of multilateral security-related regimes (McCalla 1996: 465).

Even before the break-up of the Soviet Union, NATO created the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which included all of the former Warsaw Treaty Organization states and eventually all former Soviet republics as well (NATO 2001). The Alliance

also called for greater efforts in working together with the OSCE to further improve relations between the two formerly opposing blocs. Furthermore, during the war in Bosnia the Alliance participated in carrying out UN mandates and cooperated with the EU over peacekeeping missions.

This proved to be only the beginning of a web of overlapping cooperative arrangements tying NATO to other actors, its former adversaries in particular. When pressures from Central and Eastern European countries to join the Alliance mounted in the mid-1990s, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) was established. As the *New York Times* (1993) reported at the time, it was “a half-way house of joint exercises and meetings cobbled together to try to placate East Europeans who want to join NATO, while not enraging the Russians”. Also in 1994, the Mediterranean Dialogue was established between NATO and eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa. After the decision to enlarge the Alliance into Central and Eastern Europe was taken in 1997, NATO and Russia established a Permanent Joint Council – later renamed the NATO-Russia Council – to “work together to build a stable, secure and undivided continent on the basis of partnership and common interest” (NATO 2007c). This was done primarily to assuage Russian fears about the enlargement, as well as to give it a voice in Alliance affairs. It also provided a basis for joint military action in the Balkans and a forum for cooperation on other security issues.

NATO’s relationship with the European Union has also been further developed. As I noted above, the disagreement over whether the EU should have an operational headquarters separate from NATO’s was dealt with through a somewhat complex compromise, under which the EU is allowed to use Alliance capabilities in its operations. The relationship between NATO’s Rapid Response Force and the EU’s Battlegroups is also not entirely clear, with most of the member states’ forces being “double-hatted” and rotating between the two every six months (Mölling 2007: 3). The goal of both parties, however, is to develop complimentary and mutually reinforcing rather than competing capabilities (ibid).

5.2.2 Specific Predictions

As will be remembered, when applying neoliberal theory to the situation in Afghanistan, we could expect the member states to:

- a. Modify NATO's institutional structures to enable it to deal effectively with terrorism in general and Afghanistan in particular
- b. Reform their military forces to make them more useful in expeditionary-type missions
- c. Use institutional assets to deal with free-riding and provide information

Because of the different emphasis of the predictions, the description here will be somewhat more general and focus more on the larger picture in the post-September 11 environment as well as the developments in Afghanistan.

Accelerating transformation. The events of September 11 2001 ended the “strategic holiday” that had characterized the 1990s. Since the end of the Cold War, the West had had no obvious enemy that could compare to the Soviet Union. After the attacks that day, this changed: the US in particular prepared for what Bush called a “generational struggle” against terrorism (*Washington Post* 2005), and expected its allies to follow suit. The North Atlantic Council had invoked article V on the day after the attack, and thus irrevocably made the Alliance a part of the coming conflict. And although NATO was not part of the invasion of Afghanistan, it would become part in the broader campaign against terrorism.

Although, as described above, terrorism had long been recognized as a potential threat to the Alliance, there had been “little or no sustained discussion of the nature of terrorism, of its sources, or its implications for Alliance concepts, policies, structures, or capabilities”; However, “by agreeing that a terrorist attack by a non-state actor should trigger NATO's collective self-defence obligation” NATO had, in effect, mandated itself to make combating terrorism an enduring Alliance mission (Bennett 2003).

On the political side, the North Atlantic Council decided that NATO should be ready to help deter and defend against terrorism. Militarily, then, it had to follow suit. After a ministerial conference in Reykjavik in June in 2002, the final communiqué stated that:

To carry out the full range of its missions, NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives (NATO 2002)

This was followed by the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) agreed at the Prague Summit later that year. As I described above, this included the establishment of a NATO Response Force, as well as unprecedented commitments to improve the interoperability and deployability of member states' armed forces. For the first time, this commitment included firm, country-specific deadlines for improving existing and new capabilities in specific areas (NATO 2007d). As summed by President Bush:

To meet all of this century's emerging threats from terror camps in remote regions to hidden laboratories of outlaw regimes, NATO must develop new military capabilities. NATO forces must become better able to fight side by side. Those forces must be more mobile and more swiftly deployed. The allies need more special operations forces, better precision strike capabilities, and more modern command structures....

Ours is a military alliance, and every member must make a military contribution to that alliance. For some allies, this will require higher defense spending. For all of us, it will require more effective defense spending, with each nation adding the tools and technologies to fight and win a new kind of war (Bush 2002).

The focus of the new initiative was narrower than that of the original Defense Capabilities Initiative, and concentrated on the development of “niche” responsibilities for smaller nations, dependent on each countries “comparative advantage” (Meyer 2003/2004: 93). This has resulted in the NRF noted above, which was declared operational in at the Summit in Riga in 2006.

Afghanistan. When ISAF was established in late 2001, NATO members contributed the bulk of the forces. As I pointed out in chapter 4, ISAF was for its first two years a small force of only 5-6,000 soldiers, whose mandate was confined to Kabul and its immediate environs. Through the first eighteen months, the mission was led, for six months each, by Britain, Turkey, and finally jointly by Germany and the Netherlands. However, as Gallis (2007) notes, NATO's take-over of overall command of the force allowed smaller member nations who were unable to command the whole mission contribute by pooling their resources. NATO's SHAPE headquarters had the resources, knowledge and skills needed to do the job effectively for a long stretch of time, lending continuity and stability to the operation.

In some ways, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan should be an ideal mission for the non-US NATO members. The Alliance had gotten significant experience of peacekeeping operations in the Balkans during the 1990s, and members were used to working alongside each other in that type of mission. Furthermore, ISAF had a clear and robust UN mandate, and the internationally recognized Afghan government in Kabul was on good terms with both the Alliance itself as well as its member states.

5.3 Assessment

5.3.1 General Predictions

The first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall were kind to neoliberal institutionalism. Its main prediction – that NATO would weather the loss of its rival and adapt its organizational resources for a new age – seems to a great extent confirmed. As with neorealism, however, neoliberalism too has some serious shortcomings, which have come into light particularly during the last half decade.

It is clear that NATO members decided that the existing framework that had been developed during the struggle with the Soviet Union would be useful also in the coming era. Just a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall the organization was,

as the London Declaration made clear, looking for, if not new monsters to destroy, then at least new challenges and continued relevance. These challenges could hardly be compared to the Soviet Union in the level of threat they posed, but were important enough nonetheless. NATO members in the immediate post-Cold War era seemed to decide that it was useful to face such challenges together in NATO rather than one by one or within a new cooperative framework, exactly as our theory would predict.

As Wallander (2000) and many others have argued, including then-Secretary General Wörner, this is likely to have been caused at least in part because the Alliance was more than just a classic military alignment. A large part of its military and political assets were useful even without the Soviet threat, which the instability in the Balkans soon made obvious. The framework of the alliance made it possible to deal with these problems together, in a transparent and effective way. Specific assets that were meant to counter the Soviet Union was more or less quickly shed, and a leaner, more expeditionary oriented force structures was, if slowly and belatedly, created. Concurrently, while maintaining a military component, the political side of the Alliance was coming more to the fore, as Wörner had hoped. NATO, as predicted by the theory, became the center of a web of security-management institutions. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council – which later became the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council – the Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the NATO Russia Cooperation Council all evolved directly out of the Alliance. The member states also used NATO as a basis for further cooperation with other institutions, most notably the OSCE, the UN and the EU.

All this fits very well with neoliberal predictions. However, neoliberal theory seems only to take us so far. After the relatively tranquil period of the 1990s, a more classic situation of conflict and discord came to the fore. American unilateralism became the order of the day, and the Atlantic Alliance suddenly didn't seem that important any longer to its most important and powerful member. Rather than work through tried-and-true mechanisms in NATO, and rather than using the political and military cover the Alliance could provide, it chose to go it alone. At first, from the perspective of

American policymakers in the Bush-administration, the Atlantic Alliance didn't appear to seem very important in dealing with what was termed the challenge of our generation. In spite of some small-scale operations and intelligence-sharing agreements, NATO was clearly sidelined and was not critical to American policy.

5.3.2 Specific Predictions

All was not lost, of course. The transatlantic relationship survived the quarrel over Iraq and NATO soon went into Afghanistan – using its organizational assets and skills in what was and is seen as a critical battleground in the War against Terrorism. And, as predicted by the theory, NATO members started the process of further reforming the Alliance to have it remain relevant to the problems of the day. The Prague Capabilities Initiative and the establishment of the NRF were the culmination of this.

Still, here the neoliberal predictions start running into trouble – in parallel with the Alliance itself. The Defense Capabilities Initiative, and later the Prague Capabilities Commitment, was to a large extent not met. Although much of the material relating to the PCC is classified, Lindley-French (2007: 96) recently estimated that very few of the specific targets had been met, and that the majority showed no improvement at all. Furthermore, the NATO Response Force, declared operational in less than 12 months previously, will in late 2007 be reduced in size due to the stress of simultaneous operations in the Balkans and in Afghanistan, apparently proving that the European pillar of NATO cannot even maintain a rapid response capability of 25,000 men (Jane's 2007).

Regardless of the specifics, the European pillar of the Alliance is still very manpower heavy, yet incapable of fielding significant forces for expeditionary missions – with almost 2 million men in their armed forces, they find it difficult to reinforce Afghanistan with even a few thousand. NATO members have informally committed themselves to spending 2 percent of Gross National Product on defense, but

according to the *CIA World Factbook*, as of 2007 only 8 of the Alliance's 26 members actually do so. The problem is clearly a lack of will rather than resources.

A lack of spending or unfulfilled pledges would not necessarily weaken neoliberal assumptions, were it not for the fact that the Alliance is in the middle of a critical period in its history. Neoliberals freely admit that NATO needs to remain useful to its members if it is to survive – especially to its most important member, the United States. However, the organization has so far been unable to deal with the free-riding and buck-passing that is the hallmark of the current situation in Afghanistan, and which represents a pressing threat to Alliance solidarity. As Secretary General Scheffer (quoted in Rupp 2006: 164) exasperatedly said “I don't mind taking out my begging bowl once in a while. But as a standard operating procedure, this is simply intolerable”. NATO's Secretary General and its Supreme Commander used the only real coercive tool they possessed towards member governments – public shaming – but apparently with little effect. An October 2007 report from Chatham House stated the obvious: “A large gap exists between the coalition's ambitious stability and reconstruction objectives on the one hand and its limited willingness to devote resources on the other” (Noetzel and Scheipers 2007: 4). NATO itself can hardly be blamed for this state of affairs, but its structures and organizational assets have been of very little use in improving this situation. From the very beginning, its efforts to create a common, overarching legal framework for the operations in the country has failed. For instance, when the Alliance tried to agree on joint rules for the treatment and status of prisoners, this proved impossible; ISAF has since had to rely on bilateral agreements between the US or Afghan governments on the one hand and the European NATO governments on the other (ibid: 5).

None of the above falsifies the neoliberal predictions, and it might be unfair to infirm the theory on the basis of this. However, we can conclude that while the theory's predictions were quite accurate during the 1990s, it has not been equally useful when trying to explain what has happened since then. Even though its predictions seem borne out in the rhetoric of NATO members, the actions of the member states tell a

different story through the lack of follow-up of its stated objectives. Nor have the institutional mechanisms in NATO been very useful to deal with the problems that have arisen out of the Alliance's involvement in Afghanistan, as we might have expected; institutional elements seem almost irrelevant when its members don't pull in the same direction.

6. Conclusion

Which theory – neorealism or neoliberalism – best explains NATO’s post-Cold War evolution? It appears that the two preceding chapters have left us with a very ambiguous picture, which means that it would be difficult to conclude decisively one way or the other. The sets of neorealist predictions have not been consistently more accurate than the neoliberal ones, or vice versa. However, if we systematically compare the strengths and weaknesses of the respective explanations, it should be possible to arrive at a useful conclusion. Furthermore, I should be able to say something about the theories’ explanatory power and about the limits of systemic theories in general. Those are the goals of this concluding chapter.

6.1 Comparison

There are some fundamental problems involved when comparing these two sets of explanations. First, I am trying to pin down a “moving target”. NATO as an organization is, as my analysis has indicated, facing one of its most difficult challenges yet in its mission in Afghanistan, the outcome of which has yet to be decided. Second, because the explanations of the theories are not in practice mutually exclusive, but rather emphasize different aspects of the Alliance and its history.

Most of both theories’ predictions were met to a larger or smaller degree. Neoliberal predictions were very accurate during the “strategic holiday” or “unipolar moment” of the 1990s and up until 2001, more so than its neorealist opposites. While maintaining its military component, NATO members used the organization as a platform for military and political cooperation both between themselves and as a forum to deal with other states and organizations. However, as I’ve described, the neoliberal theory did not seem as fruitful for the period after 2001, when the international system became more conflictual. The United States started to seriously worry about its security again in the aftermath of the attacks, and the NATO

framework was all but ignored because it was not immediately useful. When the US demanded to use the resources and the legitimizing cloak of the Alliance in the invasion of Iraq, it didn't show much concern for it other than as an amplifier of US power.

The harsh language was soon toned down, but America's view of NATO as a military and political toolbox seemed to endure. Through a mix of mission creep and American pressure, the Alliance's commitment in Afghanistan has grown. The Alliance's transformation towards more expeditionary-type operations has also picked up pace, but it seems that much of this has not been followed up in practice. In sum, it appears that the gap between rhetoric and action is growing steadily with regards to both Afghanistan and the transformation process. What is the cause of this? Whether European refusal to assist in Afghanistan in a meaningful fashion and the Americans' willingness to up the ante are caused by diverging fundamental interests, differing views on tactics and strategy, or whatever, the fact remains that the Alliance's credibility is on the line, and member governments don't seem too worried. This indicates that the neorealist predictions about the decline of the organization's importance may have had more to them than was apparent during the 1990s, but that they have been slow in manifesting themselves. Even though we have not yet seen the indications of institutional breakdown as I described them under 1.2.3, it is not far fetched to see the risk of the mission in Afghanistan ending with both a fundamental disagreement over what one side – the US – believes to be its core interest, and with a breakdown or near-breakdown in the sense of community among the Europeans, due to the uneven burden-sharing and lack of solidarity. As soon as it is put to the test, cracks appear in the Alliance.

Of course, NATO's sojourn into Afghanistan may or may not be successful, and even if unsuccessful, that may not lead to an institutional breakdown. As the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad (2006) has commented, no matter what happens the organization will remain – the formal dissolution of organizations as prestigious as NATO is “just not done” in international politics. Furthermore, the Alliance may very

well simply declare victory and leave at some point, and carry on as before. NATO's demise has been prematurely announced for decades. It is reasonable to assume, though, that its effectiveness as a military alliance will suffer grievously if it fails to reach its widely publicized objectives due to a lack of will and solidarity. And it is reasonable to assume that the foot-dragging and unwillingness of important member states to follow up stated goals have already weakened it severely. If NATO cannot function effectively as an out-of-area military alliance, then all that remains of it militarily is an American security guarantee in which the US underwrites European security but receives very little in return. This state of affairs is unlikely to be deemed satisfactory by Washington for very long.

6.2 Theories, Predictions and their Limits

When reviewing the debate – soon two decades old – between neorealism and neoliberalism with regards to NATO, Gunther Hellmann (2006: 20) observed that their predictions are “seldom accompanied by sufficiently precise delineations of thresholds, causal mechanisms, and potentially falsifying indicators”, and criticized the field for moving to one extreme or the other, either “inevitable decline” or “everlasting stability”. To some extent, however, this shows the limitation that is inherent in systemic theories. Systems theories only seek to identify broad forces that shape and mould actors' preferences and choices. These forces are important to identify and understand, but they can only give us vague pointers in any specific explanation.

As I discussed at some length in chapter two, systemic theories suffer from the difficulty of separating unit-level and system-level causes. To take an example from Keohane, understanding the structural constraints states operate under is as important as European history is to understanding the history of Germany. But structures only “shape and shove”, as Waltz has written many times, and do not determine specific outcomes. Are structural theories useful at all then? I would argue that they are. But, if predictions are to be useful and not misleading, it is important to understand and

tentatively identify the limits of their explanatory and predictive power. The problem with the main hypotheses for each theory is that they are, as I noted, what the theories would expect *ceteris paribus*. But we cannot make predictions about the real world without taking other, non-systemic factors into account *if those factors can reasonably be expected to alter the outcome*. In short, neorealist predictions in the early 1990s suffered from an overestimation of the influence of systemic forces encouraging the dissolution of the alliance. Some systemic forces indeed moved in that direction, but many non-systemic factors pushed in the opposite direction. Assuming neorealist theory is correct, we can expect systemic forces to manifest themselves eventually, but as I've already noted, predicting that something will "eventually" happen isn't of much use unless it is possible to indicate roughly *when* that is. Of course NATO will "eventually" disappear – nothing lasts forever, and we don't need international relations theory to tell us that. Neorealists need to specify which conditions the theory needs to operate. Does the logic of balancing apply to all states, or primarily to great powers and proto-great powers? When is security so abundant or scarce that the pursuit of absolute gains takes precedence over the pursuit of relative ones? How can the relationship and interaction between structure and units be usefully described, and when does one take precedence over the other? Waltz's goal was to formulate a more rigorous theory of international relations, but his theory has in many respects not lived up to its original promise.

Neoliberal institutionalist theory, on the other hand, is helpful in identifying some of the causes why institutions are "sticky" in the sense that they remain even after the causes for which they were created has disappeared. The explanation it provides seems plausible and supported by the facts. But this also represents something of a limit to what it can explain. Neoliberal theory doesn't claim that institutions will persist if that contradicts its members' interests; in Keohane's words (1993: 300), it doesn't "mindlessly predict the continuation of all international institutions" but posits that "[i]nterest in cooperation must persist". Unfortunately, neoliberal thinkers have not specified very well when they *do* expect institutions to break down. If neoliberal theory is reduced to saying that institutional arrangement will persist until

they no longer are in their dominating members' interest, then it becomes very difficult to separate it from realism. Furthermore, while neoliberals convincingly argue that institutions can facilitate cooperation between states, they remain vulnerable to Mearsheimer's (1995: 85-86) accusation that while institutions may have *some* effects, they do not have an independent effect on matters of war and peace; in other words, while neoliberal theory may be able to explain *something*, what they explain is not very important. They don't, or at least not in the case studied here, seem to change member states' fundamental strategies in the way that Keohane and others (Haftendorn, Keohane and Wallander 1999: 327) have suggested institutions might. Little in the preceding analysis suggests that NATO has had a strong independent effect on the relationship between member states – i.e. that without NATO the relationship between Europe and the US would have been more adversarial. One might even venture to suggest that NATO might sometimes be counterproductive in this sense, since the fact of an alliance leads the United States to expect more support for its policies than the Europeans are willing to deliver. NATO appears useful to the extent that its members pull in the same direction, but it doesn't, again in this instance, seem to have any effect on *which way* they pull. This is mostly in line with neorealist thinking.

However, that might not be entirely fair to neoliberal institutionalism. What institutions *can* do is, as I've noted, to facilitate cooperation between nations by providing them with information and control mechanisms; but they can't change the underlying cooperative or adversarial relationship between them. But to say that they can't change underlying factors is not to say that institutions can't matter at all.

To illustrate my point, I will outline a brief historical counterfactual: When studying the events leading up to World War I (cf. Barbara Tuchman's 1962 book *Guns of August*), and the misunderstandings, misconceptions, and miscalculations leading up to the declaration of War on August 1 of 1914, one cannot help but wonder whether or not some sort of institutional mechanism designed to deal with such crises between the Great Powers might have averted the outbreak of war. It can at any rate be argued

plausibly that that is possible. Such institutions, of course, would not have addressed the underlying causes of the war – its *real* causes, which we could, following Thucydides, have identified as Germany's fear of the growing power of Russia – but we might expect them to have been able to prevent the *specific* causes – i.e. the train of events following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of June of 1914 – from leading to an all-out war *at that specific time*.²² A realist would argue that it was only a question of time and that war would have happened anyway. That may certainly be true. However, had the Cold War culminated with a nuclear exchange, which it very well might have, in retrospect that would undoubtedly have been seen as inevitable too.²³

The point of my historical analogy is that the theories, as Hellmann (2006) complains, lead us to think in extremes – either institutions are *critical* to international cooperation or they don't matter *at all* – and that is not necessarily very useful when trying to explain or predict real-world events. At least in the case of NATO, that institution seems to be important enough for the European states involved to send the men and women of their armed forces into Central Asia, even if it is for most of them not important enough to risk very much beyond a symbolic commitment.

6.3 Final Thoughts

The events as they have been taking place in Afghanistan are what we would expect from a weak Alliance whose form remains but whose substance is increasingly fragile. In sum, then, it seems that neorealist theory provides a good explanation for why NATO formed in the first place during the start of the Cold War. Neoliberal institutionalism helps us understand why the Alliance survived the demise of the

²² The debate of the underlying and specific causes of World War I, and the relationship between them, is a classic and complex one, and I don't claim any particular expertise in that field; I am only using these events to illustrate a point.

²³ Near the end of his life the inevitability of nuclear war was Hans Morgenthau's pessimistic assessment.

Soviet Union. And neorealism helps us make sense of why its efforts in Afghanistan are floundering. When trying to identify the broad forces of history and their effect on states, neorealism looks more useful; while when our focus is on specific institutional arrangements and their consequences, neoliberalism will be preferred. In short, if we want to understand why NATO has persisted and probably will for a while yet, we look to neoliberal institutionalist theory; if we want to understand why the Alliance is likely to get weaker and eventually disappear, we turn to neorealism. Systems theories are so broad that they can fit to explain almost anything, and must therefore be used cautiously. The point must be that if the theories are to be useful in a practical sense, their predictions and explanations must be supplemented by non-structural factors. Dogmatically or mechanically applying structural theories to specific cases will be at best of little use and misleading at worst.

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