

NATO Burden Sharing: A New Research Agenda

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Current studies on NATO burden sharing only show some weak statistical trends between selective variables; they are unable to explain and show why this trend exists and why it occurred at particular times (or not). This is due to the dominant deductive and hypothesis testing research designs that prevent researchers from producing richer causal explanations or intersubjective understandings of how states, for example, construct and assign meaning to burdens or what forms of social representation, values, norms, and ideals influence the making of (national) burden-sharing decisions. Thus, the literature needs an interpretative turn and to open up to sociological approaches and methodologies highlighting the importance of intersubjective meanings and the role of social forces, norms, beliefs, and values. This article offers one example of how such a new research program might look.

Introduction¹

The issue of Atlantic burden sharing and how to achieve distributive justice in the alliance has been both contentious and constant since the birth of NATO in 1949 (Lundestad 1998, 2003). Ever since then, NATO's defense ministers have regularly—and often vociferously, uncompromisingly, and publicly—disagreed about how to reach distributional fairness in running and maintaining an alliance. Robert Gates's last speech as U.S. Secretary of Defense in June 2011 is no exception in this regard (Gates, 2011) and nicely joins the long history of grumbling about NATO's burden-sharing regime. What is at stake, Gates laments in his remarks, is no less than the future of the Atlantic alliance sliding into irrelevance unless the Europeans increase their willingness and ability to share more of the collective burden. The inequality stems from those countries, he charges, that are “willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership—be they security guarantees or headquarters billets—but don't want to share the risks and costs.”

Such extensive political disagreements on NATO burden sharing are also reflected, perhaps in a less heated way, in scholarly debates from across the disciplines, including economics, international political economy, and international relations. Each discipline, of course, has claimed to have the best theories at hand to study states' various behaviors of burden sharing, while quantitative political economists interested in statistical inferences and regression analysis using NATO's burden-sharing regime as a case study clearly seem to come out on top. Surprisingly, this literature does not cross-fertilize much with other studies on NATO burden sharing; for example, those in international relations and regimes, which has produced a plethora of studies discussing questions of alliance cooperation and conflict (Axelrod 1984; Barnett and Levy 1991; Bennett and Unger 1994; Betts 2003; Boyer 1993; Duffield 1996; Gilpin 1981; Grieco 1988; Keohane 1988; Kimball 2010; Kreps 2010; Kupchan 1988; March and Olsen 2004; Palmer 1990; Ringsmose 2010; Snyder 1997, 2002; Walt 1987). Current

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studies not only disregard an extensive body of literature on alliance politics and cooperation, they also miss an important opportunity to relate empirical findings to larger theoretical and methodological burden-sharing debates and, thus, to produce new explanatory values. It is not surprising that the latest proponents of such an approach only reveal that “burden sharing has changed since around 2002 and the start of the war on terror. [...] Evidence of this exploitation starts to show up around 2005 and is present in 2010” and that “this is indicative of a less cohesive alliance, where many allies have reduced interest in the outputs of NATO” (Sandler and Shimitzu 2014, 58–9). Put differently, current NATO burden-sharing studies are good at laying out some (weak) statistical trends, yet they are unable to explain and show *why* this trend exists and *why* it occurred at particular times (or not). This, I charge, is not surprising, given the dominant deductive and hypothesis-testing research designs that limit researchers to only make inferences from the statistical analysis (Ibid., 59). They are indeed unable to produce richer causal explanations or intersubjective understandings of, for example, how states construct and assign meaning to burden sharing, or what forms of social representation, values, norms, and ideals influence the making of (national) burden-sharing decisions. Put differently, I argue that what is striking is that rationalist models and theories, which are primarily based on deductive reasoning and methodological individualism, dominate the burden-sharing literature. Moreover, they treat burden sharing as an outcome rather than a practice—that is a practical knowledge of politics, negotiation, and political exchanges of national preference formations for (or against) burden sharing that are based on patterned social activities embodying shared meanings and understandings (Neumann 2002; Pouliot 2010; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny 2001). In other words, even though recent studies clearly have shown the explanatory weakness of such rationalist studies (Oma 2012), I charge that the literature on NATO burden sharing continues to neglect interpretative, sociological approaches and methodologies highlighting the importance of intersubjective meanings and the role of social forces, norms, beliefs, and values that are not derived from material interests and that reflexively inform behavior (Keck and Sikking 1998). Applied to NATO burden sharing, I argue that such a qualitative, interpretative perspective using a post-positivist methodology would offer an *understanding* of how states construct and perceive NATO burdens (Foucault and Merand 2012) and how they might be driven in their burden-sharing contributions, for example, by norms of solidarity or a sense of collective identity and thus following a logic of appropriateness rather than one of consequentiality. Again, rationalist studies on burden sharing assuming utility-maximizing states do not provide analytical space for such perspectives, are therefore analytically restrictive, and are missing an important analytical perspective of such a highly politicized subject.

The purpose of this article is to critically engage with what is called the “conventional” thinking on Atlantic burden sharing. This is done by reviewing and critiquing the extensive theoretical literature on NATO burden sharing. Such critical reflection will identify gaps and suggests to increase the explanatory value of burden-sharing practices by focusing on new (qualitative) variables to better understand the sociological formation of state motivations for sharing collective burdens in very specific yet distinct situational environments. Those motivations are not independent from states’ definitions of burden sharing and are analytically prior to measuring burden sharing as an outcome (which is the current practice). This article then offers suggestions of how to include post-positivist theories and methodologies into current burden-sharing debates.

The article proceeds in three steps. First, there is a review of the relevant literature on NATO burden sharing in the field of international relations, especially the one on international regimes, and reminds the reader of its richness as well as its theoretical finesses. It thereby shows that current burden-sharing studies are disconnected from other relevant literatures in the field of international relations. Second, the article provides theoretical critiques of that dominantly rationalist body of literature. The third step is aimed at deducing possible future

avenues of research and an entirely redesigned research program on NATO burden sharing. Due to space limitations, this last step can only be exploratory rather than comprehensive.²

Conventional Thinking on Burden Sharing

The literature on Atlantic burden sharing is primarily dominated by rationalist theories and explanations assuming utility-maximizing states. It can broadly be subdivided into power-based and interest-based theories of international regimes (Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1997). The latter are associated primarily with neoliberal theories of international cooperation, and the former with realist theories of international relations, which have been extremely influential in the NATO burden-sharing literature (Donnelly 1992; Gilpin 1981; Grieco 1988; Snidal 1986; Snyder 1984, 1997, 2002).

Alliance Alignment and Management

Ontologically speaking, power-based theories often suggest system-level perspectives that are state centered and are concerned with traditional concepts of statecraft (e.g., the balance of power or balance of threat regimes), the nature of the international structure of states, and the polarity of the international system (Claude 1962; Gulick 1955; Haas 1953; Morgenthau 1948).³ They charge that the distribution of power resources among allies strongly affects the effectiveness and persistence of regimes,⁴ because in a balance of power regime, states either rival each other (balance) or bandwagon with a power block in the system (Jones 2003; Kaufman 1992; Walt 1987).⁵ While operating under conditions of anarchy and without the presence of an international political authority (Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller 1995; Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993; Oye 1986), the distribution and alignment of material power capabilities in the system establishes the motivations for revisionist states to challenge the existing order, which in turn affects burden-sharing decisions in alliance contexts. For neo-realists, the distribution of power is the key independent variable to understand international outcomes such as war, peace, alliance politics, and the balance of power. Balancing refers to a social act in which weaker states join either a stronger power or a coalition of powers (e.g., alliances). It also prescribes a hierarchy of international politics whereby a limited number of great powers dominate the structure of the international system while a larger number of middle and small powers⁶ engage in either balancing or bandwagoning behaviors. Stephen Walt reminds us that states usually balance and rarely bandwagon (Walt 1987), and the reason states wage war or challenge an alliance is because they are concerned about their own security and survival, and power is conceived of as a means to achieve greater national security (Waltz 1979).

In terms of alliance management (Snyder 1997) (e.g., inter-alliance bargaining over military planning, costs and financing, preparedness, and coordination in the event of crisis), this power-based logic suggests that an ally with large military capabilities can provide a surplus of security to the alliance and is likely to dominate it, while less militarily capable states are expected to enjoy the public goods the alliance provides without paying for it, which equals a behavior of free riding. Phrased differently, the distribution of alliance benefits, as

2. A comprehensive assessment would require a book-length investigation.

3. On the debate of the polarity of the international system after the fall of the Berlin Wall, see Hyde-Price 2007; Ikenberry 1996, 2002; Krauthammer 1990/1991; Layne 1993; Mastanduno 1997; Oudenaren 2005.

4. For liberal accounts, see Barnett & Levy 1991; Bennett, Leggold, and Unger 1994, 1997; Betts 2003, 2009; Boyer 1993; C.A. Cooper and Zycher 1989; Davidson 2011; Dorussen, Kirchner, and Sperling 2009; Kreps 2010; Kupchan 1988; Oma 2012; Palmer 1990; Thielemann 2003.

5. A critique of the bandwagon approach relying on the domestic-sources school of alliances is found in David 1991, 1992/1993; Larson 1991; Levy and Barnett 1991.

6. The term second-tier powers has gone through distinct cycles of popularity (Ravenhill 1998). It is used to refer to a group of states that rank below the great powers in terms of their material capabilities and ability to project their powers internationally. They have an impact either in specific regions or issue areas, as well as the “tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems;” “to embrace compromise positions in international disputes;” and “to embrace notions of ‘good international citizenship’ to guide diplomacy” through international institutions (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 1993; Holbraad 1972, 1984; Keohane 1969).

the sociological-psychological literature on coalition theories charges, are the result of relative capabilities of states (Caplow 1968). Moreover, allies that value the alliance the least or have better alternatives will be more inclined to lobby other allies for stronger alliance commitments or offer some side payments in alliance negotiations in exchange for sharing more of the collective burden. There are two principal sources of conflict in alliance politics (or bargaining): alliance entrapment and alliance abandonment (Mastanduno 1981; Snyder 1984), which have been labeled the “alliance security dilemma,” even though they may better be referred to as “trade-offs” (Snyder 2002). Both can be subsumed under the alliance dependence literature on NATO burden sharing.

At the same time, such a view provides scholars and analysts of international politics with a clear idea of what units of analysis are worth examining (or not). From a conceptual point of view, the focus of these power-based theories rests on major powers, and unless middle powers are engaged in serious balancing activities or show revisionist ambitions in the international system, they are irrelevant (Wight 1973, 1977; Wight, Bull, and Holbraad 1978). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that middle or small powers were not the primary units of analysis of burden-sharing studies during the Cold War.

Collective Action Model

Relying on public-choice theories in the field of rational institutionalism (Ostrom 1998, 1; Shepsle 2008), the seminal study of Olson and Zeckhauser conceives alliances as institutions that provide the common public good of collective defense. A public good is defined as the common interest of a group of individual actors (Olson 1965; Olson and Zeckhauser 1966). They charge that “[w]hen a nation decides how large a military force to provide in an alliance, it must consider the value it places in collective defense and the other nondefense goods that must be sacrificed to obtain additional military forces” (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966). Following a deductive logic of analysis, public-good theorists argue that if collective defense is assumed to be a purely public good, then the benefits of that public good are expected to be non-rival and non-excludable (Samuelson 1954). The former denotes a condition whereby a unit of the public good could be consumed by a member state without diminishing the availability of the good (and thus its benefits) for consumption by others. Benefits of a public good are non-excludable “if they cannot be withheld at an affordable cost by the good’s provider”—that is, no member can effectively be excluded from enjoying the good (Sandler and Hartley 1999). In short, the non-rival and non-excludability assumptions mean that the exclusion of one member of the group from consuming the good is not feasible economically and that unless side payments or coercion are applied, large groups are less likely to produce collective goods. The opposite applies as well: The smaller the group, according to Olson, the greater are prospects to find sponsors, because at least one member of the group is expected to have sufficient interests in the good to provide payments towards it (1965, 49f).

The model provided two insights for the NATO burden-sharing debate.⁷ First, theorists noted that the more powerful states shoulder disproportionately higher contributions insofar as their share of the collective burden is concerned. This is also known as the “exploitation hypothesis” (McGuire 1990; Sandler and Hartley 1995). In 1970, for example, the United States accounted for more than 70 percent of NATO’s defense spending while Germany, France, and the UK each assumed less than 6 percent of the burden.⁸ Analysts used this opportunity to make a causal link between the level of national defense spending and the issue of burden sharing (Oneal 1990a, 1990b; Oneal and Elrod 1989), and calculated states’ level of defense spending against their ability to pay (GDP) to measure national burden shares (Chalmers 2000).

7. Since Olson, the model has been further developed by Hansen, Murdoch, and Sandler 1990; McGuire 1990; Murdoch and Sandler 1982, 1984; Russett 1970; Sandler and Murdoch 1986; van Ypersele de Strihou 1967.

8. The primary data of NATO’s defense spending is published in various reports and press releases: for example, by the Defense Planning Committee. A full list of the available data could be found here: www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49198.htm, accessed 8 April 2010.

Second, because of the imbalance of power in an alliance, there is a systematic tendency among middle powers to contribute less to the collective benefit of the public goods than they receive from it. This free riding or exploitation occurs when non-payers of the good continue to enjoy it despite their lack of payments. In such cases, the benefits of the public good were received regardless of whether payments toward it were made, which has negative effects for the collective welfare of the alliance. Nonetheless, theorists argued that the public good can be provided under two conditions (Olson 1965): First, those allies who value it the most are expected to contribute to providing it while those that did not are assumed to engage in free riding. Olson calls this the “privileged group.” In that case, individual states have an incentive to not reveal their demand for the good and conceal the value they attach to the good. Second, the public good can be provided in cases where the group of states is relatively small.

Joint Product Model

A variant of this public-choice theory—called the joint product model—expands on Olson’s economic theory of collective action. Yet it retained a heavily rationalist flavor using primarily a comparative static methodology yielding a testable hypothesis, namely that states do not only contribute to the public good exclusively for public but also for private benefits (Hansen et al. 1990; McGuire 1990; Murdoch and Sandler 1982, 1984; Russett 1970; Sandler and Murdoch 1986; van Ypersele de Strihou 1967). Private benefits provided in collective action situations are not equally available to all members of a group; they can only be enjoyed by a few selected states. Moreover, some analysts have shown that as private benefits increase in importance, the likelihood of free riding declines (Sandler and Forbes 1980). Those private benefits could be subdivided into strategic or nonstrategic components or weapon types (Hansen et al. 1990). Following this logic, one could hypothesize that some states contribute to the public good, because they are striving to receive private goods (or benefits) from the major powers while avoiding being perceived as free riders (Betts 2003; Hartley and Sandler 1999). However, the possibility of receiving private benefits makes the good impure. Moreover, the model suggests that there are degrees of purity in collective goods (Murdoch and Sandler 1982; Sandler 1977; Sandler and Cauley 1975; Sandler, Cauley, and Forbes 1980), or that a public good can be public within a country but private between countries, or impure both within and between countries (Pauly 1970).

Hegemonic Stability Theory

Following these (rationalist) lines of argument suggests that the internal asymmetry of an alliance can work to its advantage in a way that only an outstanding economic and political power has the ability to lead an alliance, to force payments upon allies, and to ensure the alliance’s effectiveness and robustness (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966, 134–35; Fröhlich, Oppenheimer, and Young 1971; Gilpin and Gilpin 1987; Thies 2003). Scholars in the field of international political economy (and subsequently international relations) made use of these insights and maintained that a so-called hegemonic stability theory can be considered an application of Olson’s theory of collective action and a specific theoretical account of international regimes (Hasenclever et al. 1997; Oneal and Elrod 1989).⁹ Like collective action theory, hegemonic stability theory also originated in the discipline of economics and was then imported into the field of international political economy (Kindelberger 1973). It also belongs to the family of power-based theories of international regimes (van Ham 1992) and charges that the effectiveness of international regimes is dependent on the unipolar configuration of power in particular issue areas (e.g., burden sharing). More specifically, hegemonic stability theory argues that international stability could be considered an international public good (Kindelberger 1973)

9. However, this assumption that all regimes are quasi-automatically public goods has been contested in the literature, noting that there exists the possibility that regimes are attributed to a particular group of actors only.

and seeks to explain under which conditions as well as when and why states pursue cooperation (or confrontation) in international regimes. Regarding the *robustness* of international regimes—that is, their resilience or “staying power” (Hasenclever et al. 1997)—it finds that when conditions of a unipolar power structure in a given regime disappear, the regime itself is likely to become ineffective or even break down. Regimes are established and maintained by actors who hold outstanding power resources (or a preponderance of power) that are relevant to the particular issue area. In turn, regimes decline or decrease their *effectiveness*—that is, when members stop abiding by their norms and rules (Underdal 1992; Young 1994)—when the power resources become more equally distributed across the group (Keohane 1980).

Duncan Snidal introduced two new variants to hegemonic stability theory—both of which had implications for NATO burden sharing. The first was that of a “benevolent leader” who provides the public good unilaterally while other members of the alliance are alleviated from sharing the burden of this public good or maintaining the regime (Snidal 1985). However, this “exploitation of the great by the small,” Snidal notes, does not necessarily mean that the hegemon’s net gains—that is, benefits received from the good minus its provisions—from providing this good is smaller than those received by the free-riding countries. In other words, the hegemon’s net benefits may well exceed those of the free-riders, which pay rents to the hegemon. This logic, however, does not denote that states would not cooperate at all; they do so, for example, by adjusting their policies in order to achieve common goals in the context of agreed-upon rules or regimes (“first-order cooperation” in specific issue areas that are mutually beneficial) (Keohane 1980). When costs to provide these rules are provided by two or more states, the literature speaks of “second-order cooperation” (Axelrod and Keohane 1986; Zangl 1994), which is logically impossible for hegemonic stability theorists, especially when it comes to questions of rulemaking and enforcement.

The second variant is the “coercive leadership model.” In line with Robert Gilpin’s work on war and peace, Snidal charges that the global hegemon is compelled to produce international public goods (Gilpin 1981). What distinguishes Snidal’s two variants of the hegemonic stability theory is that in the latter version the hegemon is not assumed to necessarily bear the costs for providing the public good simply because the interests in the good are so high that it bears the costs itself. Rather, because of its superior power predispositions, the global hegemon forces other states within the group to contribute to the supply of the good. This effectively means that the hegemon can “tax” or sanction other states for their inability or unwillingness to share the burden. While some analysts have asserted that the exploitation hypothesis may be inconsistent with the realist’s assumptions that states generally have a low tolerance for relative losses (which brings realism and especially neoliberal theories in close contact), it should be noted that contrary to neoliberal assumptions, the distribution of interests in the benevolent leadership model is based on power and resources and, thus, the distribution thereof. Second, the exploitation hypothesis does not imply that the hegemon necessarily experiences a relative loss to other states (even though this may be the case). To be sure, this form of taxation can occur at different degrees and levels of coercion (i.e., persuasion, bribes), and these two models are not necessarily mutually exclusive; a combination of coercive and benevolent hegemony is possible (Yarbrough and Yarbrough 1987).¹⁰

Theoretical Limitations of These Rationalist Theories of NATO Burden Sharing

The end of the Cold War problematized these static models of collective action, regimes, and order at the political level. This has been much overlooked in the literature on burden sharing. Some allies took the opportunity to complain about the imbalance of sharing the Atlantic burden (New York Times 1988a, 1988b; United States Committee on Armed Services 1988).

In this section, I summarize the explanatory weaknesses of rationalist theories of NATO burden sharing at the conceptual level; I have discussed them elsewhere in greater detail (Zyla 2015b, Chapter 2). The next section then discusses what a new research design on NATO burden sharing might look like to overcome some of the gaps identified here. First, with the end of the Cold War, NATO’s public good of collective defense received a new meaning, and crisis management in fragile and failed states became a new public good (Dorussen et al. 2009). Above all, it required NATO to have expeditionary force capabilities (rather than conventional forces) that were able to deploy to those new crisis-management missions and at the same time engage in state-building activities in war-torn societies (Farrell, Rynning, and Terriff 2013). NATO public-choice theorists recognized this but could not include this in their models by way of intervening variables. Naturally, they can only make inferences about those geopolitical changes; they are unable, however, to gain access to the new meanings that the new public good provided for each ally and how it defined their role, identity, and willingness to share collective burdens in the alliance.

Second, the public-choice model provides limited value for *understanding* state behavior in the post-Cold War era because, ontologically speaking, it focuses nearly exclusively on the material aspects of power. It clearly neglects nonmaterialist or social factors (causally) influencing states’ motivations for sharing collective burdens (March and Olsen 1998; Risse 2004).¹¹ In other words, while power-based theories of international regimes focus exclusively on major wars and the balancing behavior of states, they deny an analytical perspective below the surface of the state, as well as an unpacking of the value and instrumentally rational motivations and interests of social agents within states and their definitions of burden sharing. Excluded from the analysis are variables such as status, prestige, recognition, values of freedom and democracy, the rule of law, and international justice in states’ burden-sharing decision-making processes. This is to underline that NATO burden sharing indeed is not an outcome but a social behavior showing agency. An interpretative research approach, I charge, would allow such perspective and enrich the debate.

Third, states do not exclusively seek relative but also absolute gains in their burden-sharing, decision-making process, following a logic of appropriateness. In turn, those practices must be contextualized in the explanations, in addition to what domestic variable analyses are able to offer (Bennett, Lepgold, and Unger 1994).

Fourth, Olson and Zeckhauser’s rationalist theory and logic of collective-action employs are ontologically overly restrictive and make it hardly applicable to a real world setting: the defense of the alliance is not *exclusively* a pure public good—that is, fully joint and non-excludable; alliances are also known to produce more than one single public good (i.e., collective defense).

Fifth, the collective action models presume that allies decide on the size of their contributions in isolation (Russett 1970; Sandler 1977)—that is, without consulting with their allies and partners (Cornes and Sandler 1984a, 1984b)—and that they are engaged in only one activity at a time (Strange 1987). This is an oversimplification of reality that distorts the analysis of burden sharing (Oma 2012; Zyla 2015b). These assumptions are also unrealistic and analytically restrictive as allies regularly engage in both behaviors through, for example, negotiations in the North Atlantic Council etc. (Asmus, Kugler, and Larrabee 1993; Duffield 1994–95). Alliances are by nature cooperative, and their national preferences determine the extent to which they contribute to the Atlantic burden-sharing regime (Boyer 1993; Kimball 2010; Sandler and Forbes 1980).

Sixth, it is assumed that alliance defense is equally and efficiently produced among all allies and that those costs are exclusively of an economic rather than a political nature (e.g., Sandler and Shimitzu 2014). However, this oversimplification actually ignores the potential benefits of multinational cost variation and the comparative advantage that states may

10. For a critique of Snidal’s models, see Alt, Calvert, and Humes 1988; Lake 1993.

11. To be fair, rationalist collective action theorists are aware of this point (Sandler 2004, 260).

have in producing or contributing to collective goods. It also disregards, as Mark Boyer (1993) shows, the possibility of trading between smaller and major powers in providing the public good. Smaller allies may find themselves unable to devote a sizable amount of their armed forces or military equipment to a particular collective good. At the same time, they may make sizeable contributions in related issue areas (e.g., nonmilitary assistance for rebuilding war-torn states) and may indirectly contribute to the collective good. Put simply, collective-action theorists' assumption is unidimensional; it excludes the possibility that allies produce more than one public good, that they trade those goods amongst themselves (Ibid., 32), and fails to explain why.

Seventh, based on the above, the public-good model can be characterized as rather static and unreceptive to processes of socialization that are undoubtedly taking place in an alliance (cf. logic of socialization and internalization; Christiansen, Jørgensen, and Wiener 2001; Gheciu 2005). In short, the new world order was *not* about increasing power capabilities, the balance of power, or bandwagoning and renders the old story of challenging existing orders obsolete. It is here where rationalist theories reach their explanatory limits.

Seventh, as numerous studies have shown, the collective-action model does not withstand empirical analysis, especially the strong free riding or the no provision of the public-good hypothesis (Alfano and Marwell 1981; Marwell and Ames 1979, 1980; Sweeney 1973). The free-riding hypothesis also does not hold in *other* issue areas beyond NATO, as Eiko Thielemann (2003) very convincingly shows. More recently, others argued that in the context of the European security governance regime, poorer European states have not exploited the richer ones (Dorussen, Kirchner, and Sperling 2009).

In sum, against this backdrop, we can conclude that rationalist models of burden sharing clearly hit their explanatory ceiling. What is needed to push the explanatory envelope are studies that can explain and understand the social actions of burden sharing and the preference formation of states for or against sharing collective burdens. Above all, the power lust and zero-sum game argument of rationalist burden-sharing theories whose main tenets rest on power and interests that determine the degree of states' material capabilities and influence abroad is too restrictive. Indeed, rationalists' static assumptions about states' power and interests portray a corset-like picture of international behavior that states are bound to follow. Above all, they assume that social actors' preferences are stable over time, which helps theorists to construct epistemologically motivated theories of international relations (Hasenclever et al. 1997). Such ontology, however, denies an analytical perspective on the processes and ways in which national preferences (or interests) are formed, and how they (can) change over time.¹² Therefore, it prevents a deeper explanation of social behavior.¹³

Implications and New Directions

Due to the limitations outlined above, one must conclude that the ontological and epistemological assumptions of rationalist theories of NATO burden sharing are overly reductionist, parsimonious, simplified, and static. They clearly lack a post-positivist perspective that produces much richer and deeper causal explanations of state motivations for (or against) sharing NATO burdens—that is, to *understand* states' intersubjective social structures and definitions of and motivations for (or against) sharing collective burdens. As Checkel (2007) reminds us, it is not merely the cost-benefit analysis that determines states' motivations for collective action but also societal norms, values, and beliefs. Indeed, an interpretive approach to understanding the influence of social representation and power structures on states' notions of distributive fairness in alliance is entirely missing from the burden-sharing literature. One could hypothesize, for example, that states might be motivated in their burden-sharing decisions by

a logic of appropriateness (rather than consequentiality), suggesting that they are following institutional (NATO) rules, because they are seen as natural, expected, and legitimate or as fulfilling their obligations or living up to a specific identity in a security community (March and Olson 1998). Put differently, I suggest, a qualitative, interpretative research design of questions of NATO burden sharing informed by a nonmaterialistic (or social) ontology and qualitative methods (e.g., discourse analysis or process tracing) would help us to understand 1) how each ally defines NATO's public good domestically; 2) how and why collective burdens are constructed, and what burden sharing means for stakeholders; 3) what meaning states assign to NATO's public goods and in what particular institutional and geopolitical contexts (Geertz 1973, 5); 4) what *value-rational* (rather than instrumentally rational) motivation drives states' burden-sharing behavior (e.g., traditions, trust, reciprocity, responsibility, status) (Weber 1947); and 5) how national burden-sharing values are negotiated and potentially traded in NATO's political marketplace of ideas and meanings.

How would such a research design look? The strategic culture research program, I charge, has much to offer to NATO burden-sharing studies in order to push its explanatory values and fill some of the gaps identified above. Strategic culture research is a relatively young body of literature and has attracted some significant interest over the past few years (cf. Berenskoetter 2005; Farrell et al. 2002; Giegerich 2006). To start with, it has shown, for example, how states' deep-seated shared norms, beliefs, and ideas regarding the means and ends of national security have affected states' behavior and constructed national identities (Lock 2010, 692). This could be relevant to understand NATO members' burden-sharing practices and the values they hold vis-à-vis burden sharing in general.

Second, strategic cultures have been conceptualized as deeply ingrained, identity-derived collective expectations of what is appropriate behavior, which could be relevant, for example, to understand what things pay for when NATO is asking for funding or troops for military operations.

Third, strategic cultures are the "property of collectivities" (Duffield 1998) rather than individuals; they are held and shared by most (if not all) members of society or its political elite rather than by individuals or dominant stakeholders. This is an important insight in the sense that it allows us to bridge the agent-structure debate in the context of alliances and explain member states' behavior. It would provide a strong understanding of how ideational variables (intervening or independent) affect alliance behavior(s).

Fourth, because of their complex and interrelated integral components, strategic cultures are resistant toward change (Berger 1996; Eckstein 1988; Legro 1995; Lijphart 1980). They are unique to states, not transferrable, stable, and heavily depend upon specific societal contexts (Elkins and Simeon 1979).¹⁴ This is relevant with regards to NATO burden sharing as it would mean that cultural predispositions vis-à-vis NATO burden sharing do not change easily within states. One would thus expect a longitudinal cultural continuity, which could be studied.

Fifth, the strategic-culture literature allows analysts of NATO burden sharing to focus on the individual level of analysis (rather than the state). As John Duffield reminds us, institutional sources of national predispositions of alliances are "likely to reside in the central government organs charged with the formulation and execution of policy" (Duffield 1998). Indeed, they represent a "negotiated reality" of those societal predispositions, because political elites are not only the primary holders but also the gatekeepers of societal norms, beliefs and ideas regarding national security issues ("spokesperson"). Elites function as an aggregate panel that accumulates diverse sets of norms, beliefs, and values of civil society and processes and translates these norms in a publicly accessible language (e.g., through security strategies, policy white papers, or policy memos). Since (political) elites in the respective

12. Here I build on an argument by Allison (1971) saying that to assume states are rational utility maximizers is to say that states have achieved a Pareto-optimal result at the national level, which is a claim that simply cannot be supported empirically.

13. To be sure, this is the weaker form of assumptions held by rational-choice theorists. Some neorealist and well as neoliberal scholars go so far as to argue that national preferences are not only stable over time but also across actors (Powell 1991; Waltz 1979).

14. Only dramatic historical events or traumatic national experiences, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 or national disasters, can catalyze change in nationally held beliefs, ideas, and norms. However, even in those exceptional circumstances, states are most likely to rely on pre-existing national world-views as guidance for their security behavior(s).

parliaments and bureaucracies of NATO member states primarily make decisions on NATO burden sharing in a very specific social context, they become an essential focus of analysis for an interpretative research design on burden sharing as elites “homogenize” norms that are vaguely expressed and shared by members of society and weigh them up against one another. To understand how this process works, which social actors learn from their peers and how (e.g., through speech acts; see Barnes 2001; Neumann and Heikka 2005) and establish the “other” in their own strategic identity (e.g., through discourses; see Freedman 2006) as well as how certain strategic values, beliefs and ideas are internalized and processed, is important to understand for burden-sharing researchers.

In sum, insights from the strategic culture literature might help us to better understand the normative continuity/discontinuity of burden-sharing norms in alliances and strategic behavior in alliances more generally, also over time (see Meyer 2005; Norheim-Martinsen 2011, 2013; Zyla 2015a). Moreover, an empirical analysis of burden-sharing norms and beliefs could predict (at least to a certain degree) whether the “strategic behavior of collective actor ‘a’ is possible on the grounds of defending a norm ‘y’ against violation” (Meyer 2005), which makes it therefore at least partially causal (Johnston 1995, 35). That is to say that cultural dispositions *can* guide foreign policy decisions on burden sharing, reveal state intentions of or against sharing those burdens, and outline expectations and regulations of those burden-sharing policies and practices (Dannreuther and Peterson 2013, 2). Strategic culture can be seen/interpreted as a cause of strategic policy (e.g., how much to spend on NATO) and behavior (how much to share NATO’s various burdens). It also assumes agency, as well as social representation, which is analytically prior to considering burden sharing as a static outcome (the way the literature currently conceptualizes burden sharing). Indeed, the rationalist literature on Atlantic burden sharing, as discussed in the previous sections above, cannot account for cultural variables; this is due to their quest for parsimony (Bloomfield 2012, 437; see also Glenn 2009, 523).

Yet, as Bloomfield (2012) reminds us, while the strategic culture literature has achieved significant progress in understanding the influence of cultural variables in foreign policy decisions, there remain a number of gaps in that literature. This could be a treasure trove for burden-sharing researchers. To start with, there is the claim that strategic culture is conceptualized as being “too coherent” and “too continuous.” The former excuses the strategic culture literature having difficulties explaining abnormal strategic behaviors of states that are, perhaps, rooted in their deep cultural dispositions, their societies, or individuals. Some analysts speak of subcultures (Ibid.; Massie 2008) that compete for influence over strategic decision-making and influence the respective national strategic culture of states; they are also less stable than the strategic cultures. All this needs further explanation, especially how, for example, political parties, ethnic groups, or national institutions affect these subcultures and determine how NATO burdens should be constructed in the domestic policy as well as what (military) operation and ally needs attention. The “too continuous” gap suggests that certain models of strategic culture do not allow for changes in strategic behavior suggesting strategic-cultural continuity and remain overly descriptive rather than analytical.

Second, while the positivist literature on burden sharing cherishes the quantitative measuring of variables (e.g., percentage of GDP spent on NATO etc.), the constructivist literature on alliances has yet to find an answer to the question whether ideas can be measured and ranked vis-à-vis competing ideas as well as how they can be compared to those material variables.

Third and related, it is far from clear at this point what kind of variables ideas are: intervening or independent variables? While earlier constructivist scholarship seems to suggest the latter (Wendt 1999), some strategic culture studies appear to suggest the former (Gray 1999).

Fourth, the literature on norms might also be a fruitful avenue to inform the post-positivist analysis of NATO burden sharing. Generally speaking, norms are defined as “intersubjective beliefs about the social and natural world that define actors, their situations, and the possibilities of action” (Wendt 1995). Norms, according to Katzenstein, are social facts, which

set standards of appropriate behavior and express the agents’ identities (see also Finnemore 2003; Katzenstein 1996; Klotz 1995). Thus, norms have an “oughtness” character—that is, a prescriptive element describing how things ought to be in the world (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). With regards to NATO burden sharing, can we, for example, conceptualize NATO’s current 2 percent benchmark that states ought to spend on common defence as an institutional norm? If so, how is that norm informed by state’s knowledge of their social and political relations (e.g., symbols, rules, concepts, categories, and meanings) that shape the way in which individuals construct and interpret the world? More generally, how do norms help those actors to situate themselves in relation to other social actors, to interpret their interests and actions, and to foster group identification inside the alliance?

Conclusion

The work of Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser has been extremely influential in studying NATO burden sharing and continues to be the starting point for almost any study on that subject. At the same time, as this article has shown, this scholarship left a significant gap in the literature, because it is heavily influenced by a rationalist epistemology that has transcended into other fields of study (e.g., international relations). It is particularly inspired by scholars belonging to the family of power- and interest-based regime theories and is primarily informed by deductive reasoning and methodological individualism. Above all, burden sharing is conceived as a static outcome rather than a social process where norms, values, beliefs, and culture can be considered a variable explaining states’ burden-sharing decisions and behavior. However, analytically speaking, these processes and especially states’ motivations or preferences for (or against) sharing NATO burdens are not only analytically prior to studying burden-sharing outcomes, they also require scientific explanations, contextualization, and intersubjective understandings, because they influence states’ foreign policy decision-making processes to the extent that states want to contribute to NATO’s public good. After having listed and discussed eight theoretical and conceptual limitations of the dominant rationalist scholarship on NATO burden sharing, the article suggested that we need a post-positivist turn in the NATO burden-sharing literature (Keohane 1988; Foucault and Merand 2012) in order to push the explanatory envelope and provide new insights into, for example, what normative predispositions states hold vis-à-vis NATO burden sharing, what forms of social representation are at play and in what particular situational contexts they unfold (or not). In short, the NATO burden-sharing literature needs a qualitative turn with a new epistemology that can push the analytical boundaries beyond quantifications of state contributions. I outlined in the last section an example of how the NATO burden-sharing research design could be pushed to new explanatory heights by leaning on the (constructivist) strategic culture literature.

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Success after Stalemate? Persistence, Reiteration, and Windows of Opportunity in Multilateral Negotiations¹

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Counter to conventional wisdom, stalemates in multilateral negotiations occasionally contribute to productive future negotiations. With evidence from the history of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), this article demonstrates significant and often overlooked processes within international organizations with large, heterogeneous compositions which have contributed to successful negotiations after stalemates, including reconsideration of failed proposals, reiteration of norms, and a special relationship to windows of opportunity. The article builds on scholarship on international negotiations, international organizations, and policy development. Despite large international organizations' appearance of ineffectiveness during contentious periods, their role in laying constructive groundwork can prove catalytic even during short windows of opportunity.

Introduction

The productive potential of stalemates in multilateral negotiations is often overlooked. Scholarship on international negotiation suggests a wide range of factors that facilitate reaching multilateral agreements, such as leadership qualities, unequal power distribution among parties, commonalities among negotiating parties, issue characteristics, or conducive institutional arrangements (e.g., absence of consensus decision-making rules, distance from media, effective secretariats or working groups) (Narlikar 2010; Faure 2012; Druckman 2001; Zartman and Rubin 2000; Prantl 2010; Bercovitch and Lutmar 2010; Boyer 2012). Despite their obvious drawbacks, stalemates also merit attention for the foundations they sometimes provide for future negotiations. Under what conditions might failures in multilateral negotiations serve as opportunities and through which processes might stalemates contribute constructively to successful negotiations? With evidence from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)/Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)² and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), this article counter-intuitively argues that stalemates can, in fact, serve a useful purpose.

Typically, stalemates are viewed negatively for reinforcing disagreements and for undermining the efficiency and reputation of an international organization (IO). However, a few scholars note that failure to reach agreement may sometimes be a temporary dynamic with

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2. The CSCE refers to a series of conferences among thirty-five states (the United States, European states, the USSR and Canada) that were launched in 1973. After developing a secretariat and permanent organs in the early 1990s, the CSCE became the OSCE in January 1995.