

TRANSWORLD

THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND THE FUTURE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

ISSN 2281-5252

WORKING PAPER 45 | OCTOBER 2014

Social constructivists have always thought of NATO as the institutionalization of the transatlantic security community, based on a collective identity of a community of liberal democracies. Unfortunately, most researchers have just postulated this collective identity without studying its content and contestation in detail. An analysis of the speeches given at the annual Munich Security Conference, often dubbed the “transatlantic family meeting”, since

Transatlantic Collective Identity in a Nutshell. Debating Security Policy at the Munich Security Conference (2002-2014)

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September 11, 2001, reveals that the representatives of NATO member states often voice quite different understandings of their collective identity. While there is still a lot of agreement among the speakers, the debates also reflect a heterogeneous “identity terrain”, shaped by diverging conceptions of constitutive norms, different interpretations of NATO’s purpose, various interpretations of its relationship with other actors, and diverse cognitive models concerning diplomacy and the use of force.



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Introduction

Social constructivists have long argued that the transatlantic security partnership and its institutional embodiment, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), are more than just another military alliance based on common interests. Instead, it should be considered as a “security community” built on a shared collective identity (Risse-Kappen 1996, Gheciu 2005). In contrast to realists and some rational institutionalists, social constructivists have been quite optimistic about NATO’s future development after the end of the Cold War.¹ From their perspective, NATO did not depend on a common threat, nor would it turn into a mere tool for the pursuit of member states’ interests. Rather, given that the Atlantic Alliance was based on a stable collective identity of a community of liberal democracies, they expected NATO to continue to play a crucial role for the security policies of the transatlantic partners. The first decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union by and large confirmed their expectations. Not only did NATO continue to exist; it also considerably enlarged and engaged in its first out-of-area operations in the Balkans.

However, transatlantic disagreements in the post-9/11 era have renewed doubts whether the transatlantic security community is as stable as constructivists have usually assumed. In general, most constructivist scholars have just declared that such a collective identity exists without actually investigating it empirically (Neumann 2010:100). While some constructivists suspected that this collective identity has been weakened in recent years (Risse 2008:89), this hunch has not been followed by empirical studies paying attention to the ongoing identity construction within the transatlantic security community.² In general, however, there is no reason why security communities should persevere forever. Social constructivism, although often expressing a certain stability bias,

1 In the 1990s, the question whether NATO would continue to exist or slowly fade away was seen as an interesting test case for different IR theories and thus discussed by a variety of scholars (Mearshimer 1990, Waltz 1993 and 2000, Walt 1997, Hellmann and Wolf 1993, McCalla 1996, Lepgold 1998, Risse-Kappen 1996).

2 It should be noted that there are a few studies that pay attention to the security discourse within NATO. However, both Behnke (2013) and Wagnsson (2011) only investigate speeches by NATO officials, notably by the Secretary General, not by representatives of its member states. In this paper, I focus on the different interpretations of NATO’s collective identity voiced by representatives of its member states.

* **Tobias Bunde is a doctoral candidate at the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies and based at the Freie Universität Berlin. Since 2009, the author has been a policy advisor to the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger. The author would like to thank Thomas Risse and Nelli Babayan for helpful comments on an earlier draft.**

can in principle explain both the continued existence and the disintegration of social structures. In the end, it depends on empirical data whether social constructivist predictions for the future of the transatlantic security partnership are gloomy or not. Is the collective identity slowly eroding and thus making cohesion less likely and cooperation harder to achieve?

The remainder of this paper aims to shed light on the discursive reconstruction of the transatlantic collective identity, one of the four “I” (besides interests, institutions, and interdependencies) that, according to Thomas Risse, can be used for assessing the state of the transatlantic partnership (Risse 2012:3-4). It rests on an in-depth analysis of a unique dataset consisting of about 80 speeches given at the Munich Security Conference, often referred to as the “transatlantic family meeting”, in the period from 2002 to 2014. A closer look at NATO’s collective identity as a social group reveals different interpretations among the security elites of the transatlantic community. While the specific characteristics of NATO’s “identity terrain” (Hopf 2012:19) cannot explain specific decisions taken by NATO, a rudimentary typology of different conceptualizations of NATO’s identity can help us better understand the patterns of cooperation and conflict between the transatlantic partners of the past decade as well as make predictions on which topics or in which geographical areas cooperation is more or less likely in the years to come.

1. The Munich Security Conference as a Meeting of the “Transatlantic Family”

In order to investigate the collective identity of the transatlantic security community, I use the annual Munich Security Conference (MSC)³ as a “window” into the overall transatlantic security discourse. Although the text corpus of course only represents a small part of the security debate, the significance and character of the event make it an excellent choice for analyzing the transnational discourse at the elite level.⁴ Established in 1963 as the *Internationale Wehrkunde-Begegnung*, the Munich Security Conference has become an important date and not-to-be-missed event in the international security calendar. Usually held on the first weekend of February, it brings together a mix of political leaders, government officials, military officers, academics, think tankers and journalists who focus on security issues. As Ivo Daalder, then US Ambassador to NATO, quipped in 2012: The MSC is “the Oscars for security policy wonks; everyone is here” (Daalder 2012). Although the participants nowadays hail from more countries than during the Cold War, the meeting is still called a “transatlantic family meeting” that serves as a main forum for the transatlantic strategic community. Often, politicians use the forum to announce important policy proposals. Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, for instance, announced major initiatives for NATO in Munich, from the Smart Defence program to the Connected Forces Initiative.⁵ In 2009, US Vice President Joseph R. Biden gave the first foreign policy speech of the new Obama administration, in which he argued that it was “time to press the reset button” in NATO-Russia relations. In his contribution to

3 All efforts were undertaken to track down citable sources supporting the statements contained in this paper. In case this was not possible, the judgments are based on the author’s first-hand experience and confidential background discussions. In any case, the paper only reflects the author’s personal opinion.

4 Needless to say, it would be desirable to have in-depth studies of the domestic debates or transnational non-elite discussions. For a major proponent of an explicit bottom-up approach see Ted Hopf’s work (2002 and 2012). However, since my aim is to investigate the debate about NATO and the collective identity of the transatlantic community as a whole, the focus on elites is a necessary analytical “short-cut”. Other scholars agree that a focus on elite discourse is justified (Duffield 1999:793-4, Kitchen 2009:101, Gheciu 2005:28-9).

5 While the Secretary General has a certain repertoire that is often recycled in different speeches, his appearances in Munich have usually not drawn on it, but offered a new initiative or idea that then shaped further debate. In 2010, for instance, he spoke of “NATO as a hub of a network of security partnerships”; in 2012, he announced the “Smart Defence” program; in 2013, he launched the Connected Forces Initiative. For his own reflections see Rasmussen 2014.

the volume celebrating the 50th anniversary of the conference in 2014, Biden wrote:

Today, Munich is the place to go to hear bold policies announced, new ideas and approaches tested, old partnerships reaffirmed, and new ones formed. Like no other forum, today's Munich connects European leaders and thinkers with their peers from across the world to have an open and frank exchange of ideas on the most pressing issues we currently face – from the crisis in Syria to the global financial crisis and its impact on security, as well as cyber security. [...] That's why I chose Munich as the place to outline the Obama administration's new approach toward foreign policy (Biden 2014:20).

While the atmosphere has become more official due to the increasing number of high-level participants and rising international attention,⁶ the MSC still has the reputation to allow for an open and frank exchange of views. Thus, although clearly a closed shop in relation to outsiders, it is quite non-hierarchical when it comes to the participants. Those allowed to enter the venue, the Hotel *Bayerischer Hof* in Munich, often use the meeting to talk about the current difficulties between the allies or to openly confront the prevailing orthodoxy. Thus, the event, a “good indicator for the atmosphere in the Atlantic Alliance and global security policy in general”, as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* once put it (2002), not only brings to the fore what unites the transatlantic partners, but also demonstrates where they disagree. In contrast to other high-level meetings such as official summits, the character of the MSC does not force political leaders to demonstrate unity (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 2002). On purpose, the MSC neither produces a final communiqué nor aims to formulate concrete policy. Rather, as a long-time participant put it: “while the conference allow[s] for grandstanding and well-worn formulas, it also [makes] for deliberation in tough times” (Joffe 2014:408). Sometimes, the debate can become quite tense as a result.⁷ The open confrontation between German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in the run-up to the Iraq intervention – “Excuse me, I am not convinced!” – remains the most famous example.⁸

If understood as a “transatlantic family meeting”, the Munich Security Conference indeed provides a forum where the “family members” not only celebrate their family, but usually also discuss their internal conflicts and debate what they should do together. While this may sound trivial, the vast majority of speeches in Munich can be considered “identity talk”, following a specific script. Speakers usually try to (re-)define the “we” in their speeches, linking the past to a contemporary challenge and deriving specific policy proposals from this “narrative”. Typically, the speeches serve the purpose of community building or self-assurance (strengthening or stabilizing a coherent collective identity), but also debate the meaning of this community (contesting a fragile collective identity).⁹ In most cases, the speakers reiterate some parts as well as question other parts of the “collective identity” that constructivists see as the basis of the transatlantic security community. I argue that disagreements concerning some crucial, but elementary issues among the transatlantic partners actually derive from different conceptualizations of the underlying but (partly) contested collective identity. Debating and defining what this community is about is thus not just “cheap talk”, but rather a very fundamental sort of power

6 In recent years, the MSC has usually welcomed about 60-80 foreign and defense ministers, about 10-20 heads of state and government, and numerous heads of international organizations. Typically, more than 700 journalists travel to Munich to cover the conference. At the margins of the 2014 conference, more than 260 bilateral meetings between different government or IO officials took place. See internal MSC files.

7 As Joffe (2014:405) remarks: “More important is the fairly free-floating discussion, which will occasionally transcend the ‘let’s keep it civil’ confines of the conference choreography. As in a real family, familiarity does not necessarily breed consent. Often enough, it is ‘let the brickbats fly!’”

8 A short video clip is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl1CgTmgnCo>. See also Fischer (2012:210-2) and Müller (2014).

9 Since the focus of this working paper is on the empirical data, I do not discuss the theoretical foundations here. My PhD thesis focuses on the MSC debates as an ongoing debate about the “collective identity” of the transatlantic security community and investigates how the changing “identity terrain” affects NATO’s ability to serve as an enabler of collective action.

politics. Those actors who are able to shape the dominant narrative linking the identity of the community, as framed in the past, to new challenges define the agenda for NATO. Although the distribution of these broad ideational currents among its member states cannot explain particular decisions taken by the Alliance, let alone all allies, they can illuminate the broad realm of what is possible for the Alliance and thus even allow us to predict the likelihood of whether specific policy proposals will be successful or not. At the very least, an analysis of these very fundamental identity constructions is an important addition to rationalist theories of cooperation. Even proponents of rationalist institutionalist approaches have admitted that the modes of conflict and cooperation within the Alliance can hardly be understood without recourse to the underlying identities (Menon and Welsh 2011:88, Schimmelfennig 2008).¹⁰

The degree of cooperation among NATO members, I argue, depends – to a large degree – on the content, contestation and distribution of the fundamental conceptualizations of the community itself. Put differently, the overlap of the prevailing understandings of “collective identity” held by the security elites of the transatlantic security community defines the possible room for collective action of NATO, an international organization still based on decision-making by consensus. Victoria M. Kitchen nicely phrased the underlying logic: “the question of ‘who we are together’ defines the question of what we do together” (Kitchen 2009:97).

As a consequence, the speeches and debates at this “focal point of the international security debate” (Rasmussen 2014:229) offer the opportunity for an analysis of the development and adaptation of the transatlantic relationship – just “in a nutshell”. The following sections discuss a number of topics that have been crucial issues at the Munich Security Conference in the period after 9/11 and highlight how the transatlantic partners have debated how they had to adjust to a changing security environment.

2. The MSC Agenda and the Changing Notion of “Security”

Over the years, the agenda of the Munich Security Conference has reflected the ongoing broadening of the notion of “security”. In its early days, under the leadership of Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist, the editor of the German journal *Wehrkunde*, an old-fashioned German term that roughly translates as “defense studies”, the conference focused on “hard security”. Its main topic was the evolution of NATO strategy in the context of the Cold War, mostly nuclear strategy.¹¹ The participants – almost all of them male (McArdle Kelleher 2014) – tried to build consensus on some of the issues that initially divided the Western partners. There were, for instance, heated debates about the change in US strategy from “massive retaliation” to “flexible response” because Europeans wondered whether this would make them more vulnerable. Similarly, German *Ostpolitik* raised concerns among Bonn’s allies who feared that it could undermine Western unity. In any case, the *Wehrkunde* meetings had a clear focus on military challenges and thus invited a select group of military officers, politicians, academics and strategists who built their careers within the framework of terms such as “mutual assured destruction”, “containment”, “deterrence”, and later “arms control”. In sum, the understanding of “security” guiding the first decades of the conference was state-centric, military-focused, technology-driven and understood within the framework of the bipolar international system (Buzan and Hansen 2009:68 et seq.) – just as NATO, the institutional embodiment of the transatlantic security community, at the time was a military alliance with a

¹⁰ I would go even further and argue that a constructivist approach that takes these identity constructions seriously is much better at making predictions about the future development of NATO than a rationalist one which takes identities and interests as given. See, for instance, the predictions made by Sandler (1999:742-3) that turned out to be almost completely wrong.

¹¹ For this period of the conference see the contributions by Lothar Rühl, Uwe Nerlich, Egon Bahr, Karl Kaiser, Richard Burt, and Sam Nunn in the MSC anniversary volume (Ischinger et al. 2014).

clear purpose: the territorial defense of its allies against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact within the Euro-Atlantic area. The so-called “Fulda Gap”¹² became the synonym for the defining security threat for the “West” at that time. NATO knew what the threat was, how it looked like, and what it could do to deter it. Of course, *Wehrkunde* participants nonetheless did disagree about the specific strategies or the intensity of the threat, which at times made for tense discussions. The meeting thus served the clear purpose of letting its participants voice different views, but finally pave the way for consensus within the Alliance. Disagreements about particular policies notwithstanding, the members of the strategic community did not question the nature of the military threat posed by the Soviet Union.

When the Cold War came to an end, Kleist was quick to realize that the conference needed an overhaul, beginning with a new name: *Münchener Konferenz für Sicherheitspolitik*.¹³ More importantly than just the change in name, the agenda reflected the overall development of Western security policy in the 1990s. Participants now debated NATO enlargement and the interventions in the Balkans, but also the relationship with Russia, their former “enemy” (Hughes and Sandwith 2014:63). At the end of the 1990s, the first Russian speakers were invited to the conference. Although the majority of participants nowadays still come from NATO member states, the conference regularly attracts people from all continents. It has also become much more diverse in terms of professional backgrounds, gender equality and political views.¹⁴ While “hard security” topics such as military spending, multilateral interventions, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are still a central part of the conference, the participants have also begun to discuss the security implications of climate change, the security-development nexus in areas of limited statehood, the financial crisis – “banks, not tanks” (Ischinger 2014:34) –, or the impact of the digital revolution (including cyber security and mass surveillance). It has thus mirrored the “broadening” and “deepening” of the international security agenda (cf. Irondelle 2013:4). Today, the mission of the MSC is explicitly based on the idea of “comprehensive security.”¹⁵ From a more critical perspective, the conference can be considered a forum of ongoing “securitization”, i.e. a venue that actively contributes to the reconstruction of certain policy fields as security challenges or risks (Buzan et al. 1998). The notion of risk – in contrast to threat – has thus become the new buzzword in security discourse.¹⁶

Yet, the rather diffuse and complex character of these risks makes a common transatlantic position for dealing with them more difficult. NATO itself has stated this problem quite clearly when in 2009 the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) delivered the final report of the *Multiple Futures Project*. One of its key conclusions was

12 This notion referred to the territory close to the German town of Fulda where Allied forces expected a Soviet attack because it provided favourable geological conditions for large tank units heading towards Frankfurt and the Rhineland.

13 The English translation used was Munich Conference on Security Policy. Most US participants have refused to use the new name and still call the conference *Wehrkunde*. See in detail Hughes and Sandwith (2014:66-7).

14 Lists of participants and observers are available on the MSC website (<https://www.securityconference.de/en>). Long-time chairman Ewald von Kleist, for instance, refused to invite members of the Green party to the conference. They were first invited to the conference in 1999 when Horst Teltschik took over (and Joschka Fischer had just become foreign minister). Today, members of the Green party are among the most loyal participants. For a few years now, members of *Die Linke* parliamentary group have come to Munich. In addition, since Wolfgang Ischinger took over as chairman, the organizers have often confronted the participants with “challengers” from the NGO community, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman, Greenpeace director Kumi Naidoo, or Ken Roth of Human Rights Watch “lecturing” the “strategic community” from the podium.

15 The German government often (inaptly) speaks of *vernetzte Sicherheit* (“networked security”). See Merkel (2014:16): “The Munich Security Conference has [...] further developed its areas of focus in the spirit of networked security.” While “networked security” emphasizes the need for institutional cooperation among different actors, the term *erweiterter Sicherheitsbegriff* comes closer to the meaning of comprehensive security or a broadened and deepened understanding of security. For an overview of the discipline of International Security Studies and a discussion of the changing understanding of “security” within the field see Buzan and Hansen (2009).

16 For the thesis of the “risk society” see, in general, Beck (1992). Some researchers have applied the concept to NATO (Rasmussen 2001, Coker 2002, Williams 2008 and 2009).

that “the unpredictability and complexity of the future security environment will strain the Alliance’s most powerful tools: strategic unity of values and ideas, solidarity among Allies, burden-sharing, and commitment to its decisions” (ACT 2009:66). Sticking to the metaphor used above, NATO just does not know what the “Fulda Gaps” of today and tomorrow look like or where they will be located. Rather, politicians and strategists are anxious not to miss the emergence and manifestation of new “Fulda Gaps”. Likewise, there is no functional equivalent to allied brigades at the inner-German border serving as “human trip wires” that not only signalled allied commitment to the defense of Germany, but would also have ensured the immediate entry into war in case the Soviet Union had attacked. In contrast to this era when opt-outs were deemed implausible, “current trip wires trigger political solidarity but no automatic military reaction” (Tuschhoff 2005:150). In the contemporary security environment, NATO is busier than ever before. Yet, “collective action” or its ability to act “as one” is not automatic, but rather depends on shared assessments of the security challenges at hand.

The far-reaching changes in the agenda of the conference notwithstanding, it is probably fair to say that the MSC has not been part of the avant-garde in reflecting a progressive understanding of security. Critics have repeatedly claimed that the conference has not gone far enough in adapting to a changing international environment, whereas traditionalists have voiced the opposite view, namely that the conference has moved too far away from its roots and risks neglecting its “core” topics. In this sense, the conference agenda itself has become the object of political debate since it is usually seen to represent the dominating understanding of security and security policy. But it is precisely for this reason that the MSC is an ideal venue for the analysis of the views held by the “elite mainstream” of the transatlantic strategic community.

3. The Transatlantic Partners and NATO’s Geographical Focus: Going Global, Coming Home?

Globalization, “the most important feature in transforming the international security landscape” (Irondelle 2013:4), has had a number of fundamental consequences for the transatlantic partnership. Above all, the assumption that the security environment is “globalized” poses a challenge to a “regional” alliance such as NATO.

Although the “out of area” dispute is older than common wisdom has it,¹⁷ the real debate about NATO’s area of operation and level of ambition only began after the end of the Cold War, mainly triggered by the events in the Balkans, which resulted in a far-reaching transformation of NATO from a defensive alliance focusing on territorial defense of its members into a security management institution dealing with security threats outside its territory (Haftendorn et al. 1999). Yet, the newly found “out of area” consensus of the 1990s, exemplified by the NATO missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, only referred to Europe. The terrorist attacks on New York, Pennsylvania and Washington on September 11, 2001 directly challenged this consensus. At the Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik in May 2002, still under the impression of the attacks that had been conceived in Afghanistan and Pakistan and prepared in Hamburg and the United States, NATO members agreed for the first time that “NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to *wherever they are needed*” (NATO 2002a, emphasis added). The following summit in Prague reiterated this statement and called for investments in expeditionary forces that could execute those missions everywhere in the world (NATO 2002b). However, the developments of recent years have shown that this formula has not become a stable consensus. On the contrary, the questions to which regions NATO could and should be deployed or which regions should be the focus of its forces have been a

¹⁷ Rather, it has played a role in the transatlantic security debate time and again since the end of World War II (Stuart and Tow 1990, Lemke 2009).

main topic in the transatlantic security debate – not least at the Munich Security Conference. While both US and European security elites agreed that they had to adapt to a different security environment epitomized by 9/11, they disagreed about what this would mean for their common defense organization.

At the first Munich Security Conference after the terrorist attacks, speakers from the United States made clear that the Alliance had to fundamentally alter its perspective of looking at its security environment. Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, said that “our old assumptions, our old plans, and our old capabilities are out-of-date. Article V threats can come from anywhere, in many forms” (Wolfowitz 2002 P91). Senator Joseph Lieberman claimed:

Technology has collapsed geographical distinctions to the point that today, a plot conceived in North Africa, South America or Southeast Asia can pose just as serious a threat to NATO members’ security as an aggressive military movement by a nearby nation. NATO must accept this new reality and embrace a more expansive geographical understanding of its mission (Lieberman 2002 P89).

In the following years, the great majority of the participants supported the principal assessment that NATO had to assume a global perspective. In 2004, for instance, German Defense Minister Peter Struck boldly stated: “The decidedly global orientation of the Alliance [...], in keeping with the new security situation, is right. [...] The Alliance must be able to defend the security interests of its members wherever they are endangered” (Struck 2004 P76; see also Passy 2004 P78, Hoon 2004 P79). However, over time and with the experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, new disagreements appeared within the transatlantic security elite. Representatives from a number of countries, especially the United Kingdom and Canada, shared the US position that NATO had to develop into an “expeditionary alliance” (McCain 2006 P60) and acquire the necessary capabilities needed for the respective missions, i.e. “modern, deployable, high-readiness, expeditionary and sustainable forces” (Reid 2006 P58, similarly Rumsfeld 2006 P61, Gates 2008 P43, Jones 2009 P20, MacKay 2010 P24). For these “globalizers” (Ringsmose and Rynning 2009), NATO’s clear focus had to be on expeditionary missions, spreading stability far beyond NATO’s borders. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, too, although limited by his position as head of a consensus-based organization, tried to push for a more global orientation of the Alliance. As other speakers sharing the vision of a globally active NATO, he proposed a new definition of territorial defense: “in an age of globalised insecurity, our territorial defence must begin beyond our borders” (Rasmussen 2010 P29). These speakers shared a commitment – albeit to different degrees – to a certain “historical mission” of the Alliance whose political and military power was said to represent “the shield behind which the ideas and values we share are spreading around the globe” (Gates 2007 P51). Some speakers even argued that this mission could legitimize the use of force:

The most compelling defense of war is the moral claim that it allows the victors to define a stronger and more enduring basis for peace. Just as September 11th revolutionized our resolve to defeat our enemies, so has it brought into focus the opportunities we now have to secure and expand freedom (McCain 2002 P90; see also Wolfowitz 2002 P91).

However, this view of NATO’s purpose in a globalizing security environment did not convince all participants. Another group of speakers, which one might call “collective defenders” (Jonson 2010) or “neo-traditionalists,”¹⁸ was skeptical whether the “globalizers” were right in their dismissal of regional threats for NATO. During the whole period under investigation, and especially after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Polish speakers time and again emphasized that territorial defense in the traditional sense was not outdated. Prime Minister Donald Tusk,

18 The term “neo-traditionalists” was probably used first in an article published in *The Economist* (2010), and nicely captures the intention to return to NATO’s traditional roots. See also Noetzel and Schreer (2009).

for instance, apparently feeling that others had forgotten about the original purpose of NATO, underlined in 2009: “We would like to share our belief that there is a defense alliance” (Tusk 2009 P13), clearly different from the expeditionary intervention force acting in Afghanistan and other places far away from NATO territory. His foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski, captured the core of this view of NATO’s purpose: “Poland views NATO traditionally. We joined the Alliance in 1999 convinced that it would offer us security through collective defence, which for us is the essence of the NATO” (Sikorski 2008 P42). Other speakers from the Czech Republic or the Baltic States also feared that NATO would not guarantee that all allies “enjoy the same level of protection” and insisted that “we must return NATO in the area and in business” (Vondra 2009 P4) and “to the core mission of NATO, the defense of the alliance” (Ilves 2009 P5). For them, too much “out of area” could endanger NATO “in area”.

A third group disagreed with the views voiced by the other two camps. For them, NATO was still a Euro-Atlantic community that might sometimes be compelled to act outside its traditional area of operation, but that should not become a global alliance. Neither would it make sense to ramp up its collective defense. Rather, NATO, “an embodiment of the transatlantic link” (Moratinos 2010 P30), should be understood as a “bridge” across the Atlantic Ocean, serving as a consultation forum for the transatlantic partners (Merkel 2005 P64, Merkel 2006 P55, Jung 2006 P54, Merkel 2009 P9). In contrast to the “globalizers”, these speakers, mostly from Germany, France, Italy and Spain,¹⁹ did not want too much reform of the status quo²⁰ and repeatedly underlined that – even if borders were less important for security policy nowadays today – “NATO will never be able to become a truly global alliance because in its essence it is [a] Euro-atlantic community” (Jung 2007 P47). Speakers of this group repeatedly voiced their opposition to NATO slowly assuming the role of a global policeman (Steinmeier 2006 P56, Jung 2007 P47, Moratinos 2010 P30) and potentially even undermining the UN (Guttenberg 2010 P26).

In contrast to the “collective defenders”, representatives of this status-quo group every now and then affirmed their principal commitment to Art. 5, but made clear that they did not believe that an attack on NATO territory was a realistic scenario. As German Defense Minister Struck remarked, reading out the speech prepared for Chancellor Schröder,²¹ America and Europe “need[ed] no longer fear a military attack on its borders today” (Schröder 2005 P65). Germany’s Defense Minister Franz-Josef Jung even summarized: “The old defense alliance NATO used to be does no longer exists” (Jung 2007 P47).

These different interpretations of NATO’s fundamental focus shaped the transformation of the Alliance in important ways.²² In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, NATO member states followed the vision outlined by the “globalizers”, at least on the declaratory level. At the Prague Summit in 2002, the allies emphasized the need for the development of deployable and expeditionary forces. However, over time it became clear that not all allies really bought into the idea of turning NATO into a global intervention force. While a number of

19 It should be noted that the Spanish and Italian positions were less consistent over time. In Germany and France, both conservative and progressive governments shared the status quo view. In Spain, however, the government of José María Aznar was much closer to the “globalizers”, while Spain under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero clearly fell in line with France and Germany. After leaving office, Aznar became one of the main advocates for a NATO with global membership (Aznar 2006, Bardají 2009). Silvio Berlusconi’s government, to a lesser degree, was also more supportive of the US agenda.

20 Some authors have therefore labeled the countries whose governments mainly represented this view of NATO the “status quo tier” within NATO (Bunde and Noetzel 2010, Keller 2012).

21 Due to a flu Schröder had to cancel his participation at short notice. Struck who read out Schröder’s speech instead did not know the speech and could not elaborate on its content, which caused some trouble because one sentence, in which Schröder stated that NATO was not the “primary venue” for the transatlantic partners to discuss security issues anymore, was misunderstood. Schröder did not want to argue against NATO; the intention was rather to deplore this state of affairs. However, many still use this speech and quote from it in order to prove that Schröder wanted to move away from NATO, an interpretation that is – at the very least – highly misleading. See e.g. Joffe (2014:406)

22 The following section just gives a very brief overview and only serves to illustrate that these very basic understandings of NATO’s purpose have tremendous consequences “on the ground”.

countries whose governments clearly felt the need to fundamentally transform the Alliance in this direction invested enormously, others were much more reluctant to adapt their military forces (Ek 2007). Quite strikingly, the discursive formations identified in the debates at the MSC can also be found when looking at the ISAF map (Ringsmose 2010:332). NATO members whose representatives supported the vision of the “globalizers” contributed more troops, were present in the high-risk environments in the South of Afghanistan and engaged in intensive campaigns, while others went to more quiet regions and refrained from offensive operations (although this changed when the security situation deteriorated). For some of the “collective defenders”, however, Afghanistan was a classical *quid pro quo*. By showing that they were ready to contribute to tough missions, they expected a clear commitment (esp. by the US) to the defense of their own territory (Ringsmose 2010:330-1). When the skepticism concerning a resurgent Russia heightened, these members underlined that the second part of this exchange had to be honored and called for the development of defense planning for the Baltic States, which did not exist at the time since most allies thought that this might provoke the Russian Federation. In the run-up to the new Strategic Concept, the Norwegian government, in some ways sympathetic to both groups, made the case for the equal importance of NATO’s mission at home and away (e.g. Eide 2009). During the intensive consultation process, politicians and experts tried to reconcile the two visions and argued, for instance, that the same kinds of forces were needed for both missions. If NATO had to defend Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, it would also need expeditionary forces. The report written by the Group of Experts led by Madeleine Albright (NATO Group of Experts 2010) clearly showed the possible compromise between these two groups. However, while the final document adopted in Lisbon in 2010 kept much of these recommendations, it was clearly influenced by the skepticism of the “*status quo*” group, which neither wanted NATO to turn into a globally active intervention force nor to refocus on collective defense against Russia. The final result thus came close to the lowest common denominator, in this case mainly shaped by the proponents of the status quo who were thus able to define NATO’s red lines.

4. The Transatlantic Partners and Relationships With Other Actors: Partners, Challengers, Enemies?

Usually, an in-group defines itself against an out-group, an important “other” who helps the members to recognize what makes them distinct. The vast majority of researchers working on identity relations share this assumption (Berenskoetter 2010, Benhabib 1996, Rumelili 2008, Morozov and Rumelili 2012), whereas a few maintain that there is little evidence that positive identity building requires “others” (Lebow 2008:479). Be that as it may, for the relations of a group towards its environment it is of paramount importance how its members view the nature of their relationships with other relevant actors.²³

For the transatlantic security community, the defining “other” during the period of the Cold War was the Soviet Union, which clearly provided a sharp contrast and thus highlighted the shared values within the transatlantic security community. After the end of the bipolar era, the looming uncertainty concerning Russia or China notwithstanding, there was no self-evident “other” for the transatlantic partners who could take the Soviet Union’s position as the clear “enemy” and anti-thesis to the transatlantic self-understanding.

However, in the debates at the MSC, participants have spent much time defining their relations to other actors they deemed of importance in the contemporary security environment. The most important “others” after 9/11 were a resurgent Russia (as the successor of the Soviet Union), rising powers such as China, “rogue states”

23 In their framework for “measuring identity”, Abdelal et al. (2009) speak of “relational comparisons”.

or “troublemakers” in the international community like Iran, and finally non-state actors such as Al Qaida – sometimes personified by terrorist leaders like Osama bin Laden, but often referred to in the abstract as “Islamist terrorists” or just “international terrorism”. In addition to these more or less adversarial relations, the members of the transatlantic security community also had to define its relations with those actors who became important partners in the new security environment, shared NATO’s fundamental values and thus raised the question in which way they were at all “different”.

In contrast to the Cold War period (and also to the first decade of the post-Cold War era), members of the transatlantic security elites have found it quite difficult to agree on a common understanding of the nature of all these relations – not the least due to the complexity of the contemporary international system. In the beginning of the period under investigation, the discussions took place under the impression that the international system had moved from a bipolar era to a world defined by unipolarity (Ikenberry et al. 2009). Following the US response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, notably the Iraq intervention, unipolarity was sometimes identified with the advent of an “American empire”. However, after the disappointing results of the interventions and state building projects in Afghanistan and Iraq, the financial crisis and the economic rise of other states, the idea of a US empire looked outdated.²⁴ Soon, a number of observers even predicted the ongoing decline of the United States (Schweller and Pu 2011, but see Beckley 2011). In order to recall how much the debate has changed within this rather short period of time, it is helpful to remember that just some years ago a number of MSC participants openly worried about too much US power. At the conference in 2014, in contrast, many speakers expressed their concern that the US might disengage from the world. The French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius called for European support to help the emergence of “organized multipolarity” in the currently non-polar world.²⁵ In any case, the international system has, according to the representatives of its major actors, changed quite dramatically – as have the relations between the relevant actors.

4.1. The Transatlantic Partners and Liberal Democracies Outside the Euro-Atlantic Area: Friends or Family?

The widening of NATO’s area of operation in the aftermath of 9/11 also brought to the fore another issue: the Alliance’s relations with partner countries outside the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO had hitherto made use of partnerships, but only within its neighborhood and mostly as a first step towards membership for applicant countries. Yet, when NATO took over the command of ISAF in Afghanistan, it was supported by a whole range of countries from different parts of the world. Thus, if only for practical reasons, the Alliance had to debate how it would relate to these countries, how they could be part of NATO’s consultation process or even contribute to its decision-making.

The “globalizers” not only argued for NATO acting globally, they also pushed for a strengthening of NATO’s partnerships across the globe, especially with those partner countries that shared their values and supported the work of the Alliance in Afghanistan and elsewhere. For them, geography had ceased to be an argument for defining NATO’s level of ambition and thus also for defining the range of possible partners; some pundits and politicians even called for a global membership of NATO. From this perspective, the defining element that linked NATO members was not a specific region, but rather the liberal-democratic values shared by its members. The

²⁴ Due to these experiences and financial constraints, the domestic debate in the United States has clearly changed in recent years. The clear majority of citizens now favors a focus on “nation-building at home” as President Obama often phrased it. For accounts of the trend towards a US foreign policy driven mainly by domestic concerns see Mandelbaum (2010) and Haass (2013).

²⁵ Unfortunately, there is no official transcript available. Yet, a video is available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZadlaAKJR8>. For the notion of an emerging “G-Zero world” see Bremmer (2012).

radical version of this understanding of NATO as a “global force for good” also envisioned the abandonment of Art. 10, which states that every European nation can become a member of NATO, and called for the establishment of a “Global NATO”, a “Concert” or a “League of Democracies” (Daalder and Goldgeier 2006, Asmus 2007, McCain 2007, Kagan 2008, Bardají 2009). The more modest version, present in a number of official speeches at the *Bayerischer Hof*, did not make the case for global membership, but at least for stronger partnerships with liberal democracies such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea (de Hoop Scheffer 2006 P57, Gates 2007 P51). Canadian Defense Minister Peter MacKay was among those who pressed for building a network with like-minded countries:

We must continue to build meaningful partnerships with those who are like-minded. NATO is much more than just 28 allies. It is a broader family of nations who are willing to fuse their political and military strengths in the interest of our common security (MacKay 2010 P24).

NATO Secretary Generals de Hoop Scheffer and Rasmussen, taking into account the skepticism of other governments, were more reluctant concerning the value-based globalization of the Alliance, but consistently made the case for strengthening NATO’s partnerships across the globe. At the MSC in 2010, Rasmussen outlined his personal vision for the Alliance:

[NATO] should become the hub of a network of security partnerships and a centre for consultation on international security issues [...]. To me, transforming NATO into a globally connected security institution is not a matter of choice – it is a matter of necessity. Globalisation has become an irreversible fact of life. Our institutions must not only acknowledge this fact, they must also adapt to it and provide security under radically different circumstances (Rasmussen 2010 P29).

Unsurprisingly, those speakers who were critical of NATO’s global posture also raised doubts whether NATO should turn into a “global hub”. In his response to Rasmussen’s speech, German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg maintained that Germany wanted to preserve the “transatlantic core” of the Alliance, that the limits of Art. 10 would continue to apply and that his country did not want NATO to become a “global security agency” (Guttenberg 2010 P26). In a similar vein, French Defense Minister Hervé Morin expressed his skepticism that such a transformation could turn NATO into a rival or even a substitute to the United Nations: “Doit-elle devenir un outil de stabilisation global, une sorte de ‘gendarme du monde’ qui irait jusqu’à une concurrence avec l’ONU?” (Morin 2008 P39) Confronted with these doubts, proponents of stronger global partnerships such as Secretaries General de Hoop Scheffer and Rasmussen always had to underline that “NATO is not a global policeman, but we have increasingly global partnerships” (de Hoop Scheffer 2006 P57) or that these proposals were not aimed at “competing with the UN” (Rasmussen 2010 P29).

The most interesting aspect of this debate is that it directly cuts to two essential parts of NATO’s collective identity, which for a long time had been tied together, but were now measured differently by different member states: its character as an alliance of liberal democracies based on common values and its character as a Euro-Atlantic community. For the “globalizers”, the first aspect is clearly the decisive one. In their conception of NATO as a “broader family of like-minded nations”, the lines between membership and partnership are becoming increasingly blurred. According to them, this is only a minor concern because the collective defense clause, reserved to members, has ceased to be NATO’s primary concern. What counts instead is a commitment to shared values and the willingness to contribute to expeditionary missions. The proponents of the Euro-Atlantic character of NATO instead are highly skeptical of any development that might over time eat away at this regional focus of NATO and dilute the special transatlantic partnership. For them, the Alliance is a regional alliance that may act on a global scale but that should not turn into a global alliance of democracies. For most of NATO’s history, these two “essences” of the Alliance reinforced each other. Even after the end of the Cold War, they

inspired NATO's transformation: the idea of a "Europe, whole and free" and NATO enlargement was consistent with both constitutive norms, whereas the interventions in the Balkans were necessary precisely because the atrocities in NATO's direct neighborhood threatened both constitutive norms (Schimmelfennig 2008).²⁶ In the context of NATO's contested globalization, these two norms have sometimes conflicted and led to a number of stalemates in NATO's transformation.

Before the Riga Summit in 2006, a group of allies led by the United States wanted to elevate the status of NATO's partners who shared their values and contributed to its missions, especially to ISAF. While this reform would have had only minor consequences, such as improved consultation and access to some NATO formats, it met fierce resistance from those allies whose thinking was shaped by the conviction that the Alliance was first and foremost a Euro-Atlantic alliance (Moore 2010:225-6). They feared that a special status for liberal democracies such as Australia or South Korea could be seen as a first step towards global membership or a global "League of Democracies". As a result, NATO has worked with its partners on a very pragmatic basis, in which the adherence to liberal values plays a very limited role. For some time, Euro-Atlantic, but authoritarian countries such as Belarus had better access to NATO through the official partnership mechanisms than countries such as Japan and Australia who did not have a clear partnership status (Kamp 2011). The attempt to reform the system, the so-called Berlin Package of 2012, has, as some critics argue, made things only worse by trying to solve the underlying tensions with a "management reform" without tackling the political issues involved (Reisinger 2012). For the Chicago Summit in 2012, the US hosts had planned to not only invite NATO members, but also NATO partners and organize a joint meeting. Given the lack of consensus over whom to invite and for what purpose, what was devised as a historical meeting was watered down in the process and ended up in a short session with only a couple of allies of which nobody really knew what united them.²⁷ The reform which basically introduced a kind of à la carte or pick and choose element to the partnership agreements has thus only underlined the inherent tension in NATO's partnership policy that continues to this day and reflects the ongoing disagreements among its member states.

4.2. The Transatlantic Partners and Their Relationship With Russia: Partner, Threat or Spoiler?

Even more than two decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia is still by far the most important external actor for the transatlantic community as a whole. Unsurprisingly, NATO-Russia relations have been part and parcel of the debates at the *Bayerischer Hof* for the past fifteen years. In the discourse, one can distinguish at least three particular understandings of Russia and its relationship with the West: Russia as a (potential) strategic partner, Russia as a (potential) threat, and Russia as a declining power, often acting as a spoiler. The groups of MSC participants promoting these particular views were largely, but not completely identical with those groups identified in the sections above: the status quo group, the collective defenders and the globalizers, respectively. Importantly, speakers were also less clear and often made different arguments in the same speech, underlining that these conceptualizations were less clear-cut and more fluid.

The most common framing during the whole period follows the "Russia as a (potential) partner" narrative. The adherents of this view maintained that the West and Russia shared a number of common interests (e.g. Jung 2007 P47) and should work together on joint challenges. In principle, this was a formula that was shared by

²⁶ In contrast to Schimmelfennig (2008), I argue that both aspects (liberal values *and* geographical belonging) are actually identity-related and that these constitutive norms are evaluated differently by NATO member states.

²⁷ Author's interviews with a number of US officials.

the vast majority. Yet, while some were less committed to the idea of a “partnership” but rather thought that it depended on Russia’s behavior, the core of the proponents of this view always made clear that there was no alternative to “partnership” with the Russian Federation. In general, they believed that – even if they admitted that Russian behavior sometimes challenged their narrative – the intensification of dialogue and consultation was the only way forward (Merkel 2007 P48, Moratinos 2010 P30). As many German representatives put it, among them Chancellor Gerhard Schröder: “one of the fundamental truths of European politics is that security on our continent cannot be achieved without, and certainly not against, Russia” (Schröder 2005 P65). For proponents of this view, the idea that Russia itself could endanger European security did not make sense. As French President Sarkozy underlined: “I don’t believe that today’s Russia is a military threat to the European Union and to NATO” (Sarkozy 2009 P7). Adherent of this view regularly expressed their understanding of Russia feeling “humiliated” or insecure and tried to understand why Moscow sometimes acted “irrationally”. Javier Solana, for instance, said in 2009: “For us, the idea of Russia feeling threatened is absurd. But for Russia, apparently,” that is the case (Solana 2009 P6). In general, there was a readiness to try to accommodate the Russian mindset and avoid further provocation (by opposing additional rounds of NATO enlargement or defense planning for the Baltic member states), a position that was often dismissed by the other groupings who rather argued that one should not excuse someone who willingly broke the rules. Sometimes, the speakers calling for a true partnership with Russia drew on older conceptions such as Gorbachev’s “common European home”, in which Russia needed a place, too, or argued that Moscow needed to be trusted and must not be feared. Sometimes, more outspoken participants even criticized their Eastern allies for “being obsessed with the fear of Russia” and blockading the development of a healthy relationship with Russia (Weisser 2010:250).

In general, this view of the NATO-Russia relationship as a difficult partnership was mainly supported by speakers from Western Europe, especially German and French representatives, yet of course also depended on broader events in world politics. Their perspective always grew stronger when Russian cooperation on specific issues (counter-terrorism after 9/11 or sanctions against Iran) raised hopes that a new chapter in NATO-Russian relations was in reach. In 2002, Edmund Stoiber, then the Conservative candidate for Chancellor, expressed this view quite well:

But enlargement will only lead to more security if relations between NATO and Russia are simultaneously placed on a new footing. The hopes for establishing special institutionalized relations between NATO and Russia have so far only been inadequately fulfilled. Yet, I am convinced that much closer cooperation is vital to both sides. Today we see Russia as a partner – and all the more so since September 11 (Stoiber 2002 P85).

After the election of President Obama, US officials also put more emphasis on the potential added value of a strategic partnership with Russia, although their approach was more conditional and dependent on the actions of the Russian government, thus more focused on what the partnership could deliver rather than on principle (Biden 2009 P17). The NATO Secretary Generals, speaking in Munich, have usually stuck to the mainstream within NATO, reiterating that NATO and Russia should aim at developing a true partnership while not ignoring the concerns expressed by some allies (e.g. Robertson 2001 P92, de Hoop Scheffer 2009 P12). Yet, time and again, they have been more candid than representatives of the Western European states (Rasmussen 2014 P150).

The opposite view – Russia as a (potential) threat – was regularly expressed by speakers from Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States, while orators from other countries like Romania or Bulgaria that had also suffered from Soviet rule or domination were less blunt. Warnings of the remaining threat posed by the Russian Federation were present during the whole period, too, but overall represented only a minor, yet very visible,

position among the participants. Their intensity also varied with the overall development of Russia's foreign policy. After Russian President Vladimir Putin had given his now famous speech at the MSC in 2007, in which he expressed his anger at the Western treatment of Russia, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg replied: "I would like to thank President Putin, first for bringing all the media attention to this conference and second for spelling out all the reasons why NATO should enlarge" (Schwarzenberg 2007 P44).

More participants expressed their concerns in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, while the position again lost ground after the rapprochement between the US and Russia before the Lisbon Summit in 2010 where the Alliance and Russia agreed to pursue a "strategic partnership" including the development of a joint ballistic missile defense (BMD) system.²⁸ While those thinking of Russia as a partner usually referred to "interests" (geopolitical necessity, economic interdependence) in order to make the case for a stronger cooperation with Russia, the skeptics pointed to "values" that made a trustful partnership with Russia impossible as long as the country did not develop into a stable liberal democracy. Their criticism of Moscow has become even stronger with the ongoing move towards a more authoritarian system in Russia. The main proponent of this view has probably been Senator John McCain who repeatedly argued that Russia could not be a full-fledged partner for NATO as a value-based alliance if it continued to curb the political freedoms and civil liberties of its citizens and to behave like a bully in its neighborhood: "Moscow must understand that it cannot enjoy a genuine partnership with the West so long as its actions, at home and abroad, conflict so fundamentally with the core values of the Euro-Atlantic democracies" (McCain 2007 P52; see also McCain 2006 P60). From this perspective, Russia remains a potential threat precisely because it poses a challenge to Western values. As a consequence, NATO as an alliance of liberal democracies has the responsibility to stand up against illiberal Russian behavior.²⁹ While the proponents of a strategic partnership with Russia argued that its domestic behavior was deplorable, but did not affect the need to cooperate, those speakers held that cooperation was not possible with a government that had become increasingly autocratic – and thus by definition a threat to its democratic neighbors and long-term stability in Europe. As a result, efforts to strengthen cooperation with Russia were seen rather skeptically, and adherents of this view always made clear that cooperation would not mean that Russia had a veto over NATO issues (e.g. Vondra 2009 P4). Russian initiatives such as President Medvedev's proposal to design a new European security architecture were greeted with a lot of mistrust. Whereas the advocates of partnership argued that the Russian views should be heard and at least discussed (e.g. Sarkozy 2009 P7, Merkel 2009 P9), this faction sensed that the only goal the Russians pursued with the initiative was to undermine Western unity and renegotiate the principal pillars of the European security rule-book such as the fundamental right of every country to independently choose its alliances. They also made clear that it was Moscow's responsibility to restore trust between NATO and Russia, not the other way around (e.g. Ilves 2009 P5, Tusk 2009 P13).³⁰

28 At the Munich Security Conference in 2014, the Ukraine crisis had only begun to gain international attention. While the atmosphere between NATO and Russian speakers was tense, there was no clear change in the overall discourse on Russia among the Western participants. This has clearly changed after the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the ongoing covert intervention in Eastern Ukraine.

29 A very good example is an extract from a speech by John McCain in 2004 where the clear dichotomy between liberal-democratic "friends" and the illiberal Russian government whose domestic character is reflected in its foreign policy becomes obvious: "We in the West should also hold Russia to the same standards of democracy and justice that we expect from Russia's neighbors. Friends, let me speak forthrightly, and with the best interests of the United States, Europe, and Russia in mind: President Putin's rule has lately been characterized by the dismantling of Russia's independent media, a fierce crackdown on the political opposition, the prosecution of a bloody war against Chechnya's civilian population, and a new assertiveness that challenges the democratic and territorial integrity of Russia's sovereign neighbors. [...] Russia's assertion of political control over its neighbors is the international dimension of rising state control at home. The dramatic deterioration of democracy in Russia calls into question the fundamental premises of our Russia policy since 1991." (McCain 2004 P81).

30 NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hopp Scheffer pointed out: "But I cannot see how we can have a serious discussion of such a new architecture, in which President Medvedev himself says 'territorial integrity' is a primary element, when Russia is building bases inside Georgia, which doesn't want them" (de Hoop Scheffer 2009 P5).

Finally, there was another motif popping up regularly in the Western discourse on NATO's relation to Russia – that of a declining power that wants to play a bigger role than it is able to, a country that often behaves “irrationally” and that for emotional reasons acts like a trouble-maker in the Euro-Atlantic area and as a spoiler in the global arena. From this perspective, NATO is foremost thought of as a “teacher” who needs to educate Russia and to socialize it into the Euro-Atlantic community, but sometimes also has to punish it for inappropriate behavior. This understanding is definitely not based on an understanding of a “partnership of equals” between the West and Russia, which has prompted Russian resentment over the years. Just as the adherents of the Russia-as-a-potential-threat narrative, these speakers repeatedly refused to give Russia a voice in NATO, often described as not giving Russia a veto over NATO affairs (Wolfowitz 2002 P91).

Another aspect of this particular view could be observed time and again when Western officials seemed to lose their patience with a Russian government whose actions they did not comprehend or simply regarded as too emotional and irrational. When Anders Fogh Rasmussen sat on the same podium with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at this year's MSC, he expressed his frustration with the Russian response to NATO proposals for a common BMD project the Alliance and Russia have been talking about for years. The NATO Secretary General complained that the Russians still thought of NATO's project as directed against their intercontinental nuclear forces (undermining its ability to retaliate a nuclear attack) and concluded, obviously quite frustrated: “But frankly, this ignores the facts and the laws of physics” (Rasmussen 2014 P150). Sometimes, Russia was even compared to an unruly child. At the MSC in 2009, about six months after the Russian intervention in Georgia, Estonian President Toomas Ilves asked rhetorically:

When a child purposefully breaks a toy in order to get a bigger and different one we have to decide do we reward this behaviour? When a party purposefully breaks a fundamental principle of European security and then uses this to argue for a new security architecture, one might be forgiven for finding it a bit disingenuous (Ilves 2009 P5).³¹

While these three conceptualizations are present in the discourse during the whole period, their salience varies over time. Sometimes, changes of government in important NATO member states were able to influence the overall debate about Russia within the Alliance. The best example was the change from the George W. Bush administration to the one led by Barack Obama. Yet, interestingly, most of the time the dominant “national” constructions remained quite stable over time. The French and German pronouncements in Munich, for instance, have been very consistent over time, no matter whether the government was conservative or progressive.

Specific developments occurring in NATO-Russia relations were usually seen through the lenses described above and often reinforced these particular framings. Yet, they sometimes triggered a reinterpretation of these understandings or even questioned them entirely. After the election of President Medvedev, for instance, many Western politicians hoped for a new era of cooperation with the Russian Federation and argued that a new strategic partnership with Russia was now on the horizon. During this period, only a limited number dissenters voiced concerns and warned of a relationship too close with Russia, but they did not try to actively undermine the cooperative approach. Most recently, however, the Russian annexation of the Crimea in March 2014, questioned the construction of Russia as a “partner” advocated by some and at the same time affirmed the threat perceptions held by others. While some NATO states, notably Germany and France, had for a long time used the “partner narrative” to justify arms sales to Russia, they were now under heavy pressure to reconsider

31 This discursive background also illuminates President Obama's comments on Putin after the annexation of the Crimea in March 2014, when he described Russia as a “regional power” (not a great power) and argued that it acted “not out of strength, but out of weakness” (Wilson 2014).

them. For others, above all the Baltic States, Russia should never have been able to sign a contract over helicopter carriers or training facilities because the use against NATO members was far from unrealistic. Their view of Russia as (at least) a potential threat has been vindicated by recent events. This may have far-reaching real-world consequences if Putin's action actually trigger what he had tried to successfully avoid for years: the development of a common NATO perspective on Russia. Yet, while Russia's recent foreign policy may make it easier for the allies to agree on their relationship with Russia, the different conceptualizations continue to inform the strategic thinking in NATO member states – for instance concerning the questions how specific reassurance measures for the Eastern allies should be implemented, whether NATO should conduct military maneuvers with its partner countries in its neighborhood, and if the Alliance should make plans for the admission of additional members from this region. Based on the development of the debate at the MSC over the past decade, it seems reasonable to speculate that the Alliance will put more emphasis on reassuring the Baltic States and Poland (mostly by symbolic actions), yet will not be able to agree on further enlargement steps or a clear demonstration of force at NATO's Eastern borders. In the case of an ongoing escalation provoked by Moscow, however, the partnership narrative would lose further influence, rendering possible some policy options that had been unthinkable so far.

4.3. The Transatlantic Partners and the “Rising Powers”: The Example of China

In recent years, notably after the economic repercussions of the financial crisis had hit the Western economies, the so-called “rising powers” have received increasing attention at the Munich Security Conference. The main question for the participants usually was which role those states – China, India, or Brazil – would play in the future and how the West should define its relations with them. Would the rising powers become “responsible stakeholders” in upholding the liberal world order built mainly by the Western countries after 1945, would they try to challenge these rules or would they come up with a parallel set of norms and institutions?³² And as a consequence, should the West try to embrace them and socialize them into these institutions or should it try to contain them and prepare for a more adversarial relationship?

Among the “emerging powers”, China has received the greatest attention in Munich. While representatives from India and Brazil have also participated in the debates at the MSC, Chinese speakers have been watched particularly carefully. Interestingly, this is a rather recent development. Before 2005, China did not play much of a role in Munich, it was only in the context of the financial crisis and the perception that the “centre of gravity of world affairs has left the Atlantic and moved to the Pacific and Indian Oceans” (Kissinger 2010:206) that the People's Republic began to attract increased attention. Over time, China has assumed a more prominent role in Munich with regular Chinese participants at the annual conference and even a MSC Core Group Meeting organized in Beijing in 2011 (Franke and Rolofs 2012).

In contrast to NATO's relationship with Russia, the Alliance has not much experience in dealing with China. The Allies are still figuring out how they should think about their relationship – and many have not yet made up their mind. Thus, among the strategic community, the understandings of China are much more fluid than the understandings of Russia. This fluidity notwithstanding, one can identify different approaches towards China. Interestingly again, MSC participants saw China differently depending on their understanding of NATO and their own identity.

32 These different scenarios have been discussed in the literature (Ikenberry 2008 and 2010, Buzan 2010, Johnston 2003, Paus et al. 2009, Foot and Walter 2011, Mearsheimer 2006).

For a minority of speakers who mainly define NATO as a liberal “force for good”, China’s rise as an increasingly capitalist, but autocratic power should be viewed with a lot of skepticism. Seeing NATO as the guardian of the liberal world order that has to defend liberal values across the globe they have been highly skeptical that China can be seen as a “responsible stakeholder” in that liberal international order. From this perspective, China’s autocratic political system makes it at least a challenger of the West if not a potential enemy. In 2013, US Senator John McCain got into a heated exchange with the Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun. When they disagreed about human rights issues, McCain told Zhang: “The Arab Spring is coming to China as well” (McCain 2013 P149). McCain’s colleague, Senator Lindsey Graham, had a similar exchange with Fu Ying, Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People’s Congress, a year later. After outlining why China’s multiple violations of human rights made more than limited pragmatic cooperation with China impossible, Graham did not mince words and snapped: “Your system of government is *antithetical* to what we stand for” (Graham 2014 P151).³³

On the other hand, most European participants who rather think of NATO as a Euro-Atlantic institution of liberal democracies, but without a global mission of spreading democracy, have used a much more friendly wording. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, called China and India “strategic partners” (Merkel 2007 P48) and pleaded for a “trustful and cooperative relationship with China, which will play an increasingly important role in the global order” (Merkel 2005 P64; similarly Hoon 2004 P79). Although she made clear that “we must be quite frank in talking about things on which we are not and cannot be of the same opinion”, she maintained that “inclusion rather than exclusion is the right approach in dealing with China” (Merkel 2007 P48). The last sentence summarizes the difference in the approach. While participants such as McCain and Graham understand China’s domestic order as a reason for wariness and a clear obstacle to intensive cooperation, those like Merkel prefer an inclusive liberalism³⁴ that perceives cooperation with non-democracies as necessary for securing peace and stability. As French President Nicolas Sarkozy maintained: “we need these new great powers to exert pressure on the belligerents and achieve peace” (Sarkozy 2009 P7). Those calling for developing sustainable partnership with China and other “emerging powers” also underlined that those countries had to assume more responsibility and actively contribute to the provision of global governance (Merkel 2006 P55, Merkel 2011 P33, Steinmeier 2008 P40). Nonetheless, there are limits to those partnerships that exclude certain behaviors, for instance selling arms to China (see Merkel 2005 P64).

Other speakers tried to seize a middle ground between the two positions. Notably, US officials from both the Bush and the Obama administration regularly underlined that they wanted China to assume more responsibility in global governance and become a responsible stakeholder (e.g. Zoellick 2006 P62). When US Vice President Joseph R. Biden spoke at the MSC in 2013, he underlined:

So when I visited China I made it absolutely clear that the United States does not view China with hostile intent and that we can cooperate and compete simultaneously. I’ve said many times, the rise of a peaceful and responsible China that contributes to global security and prosperity is in the interests of all nations (Biden 2013 P148).

At the same time, these speakers usually also voiced their concerns that China could choose a different path. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said: “All of us seek a constructive relationship with China, but we

33 In the broader debate, similar voices in the US have made a similar clear-cut distinction between “us” and “them”. Robert Kagan, for instance, writes about the coming confrontation between an “axis of democracy” and the “club of autocrats” which, according to him, will shape the international system in the 21st century (Kagan 2008:76).

34 This distinction between an inclusive and exclusive liberalism or a liberalism of imposition and liberalism of restraint is also discussed in the literature (Simpson 2001, Sørensen 2006).

also wonder about the strategic choices China may make. We note with concern its recent test of an anti-satellite weapon” (Gates 2007 P51). Given this uncertainty, US speakers called for more investment in military capabilities given that “nations such as China and Russia are rapidly modernizing their militaries and global defense industries, challenging our technological edge in defense partnerships around the world” (Hagel 2014 P152).

While some US speakers have called for more transatlantic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (Clinton 2012 P146, Panetta 2012 P147), NATO itself was not directly mentioned. So far, the Alliance as a whole has almost avoided to define its own role in relation to China. From the perspective adopted here, this is not surprising at all. Such a common policy requires a shared understanding of NATO’s role outside the Euro-Atlantic area and its relationship with non-democracies, especially with those (like China) who due to their size and impact could become a challenger to the West. Since this shared understanding does not exist, there has been no answer to the challenge German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg laid out in 2010: “We need an answer to the question how we want to shape the relationship of the Alliance with China” (Guttenberg 2010 P26).³⁵ After all, MSC participants continue to differ in their evaluation of what kind of cooperation with autocracies is compatible with the foreign policy of a Western democracy and whether it should be NATO that engages with actors outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Absent a major external shock, we should not expect a common NATO strategy for the Asia-Pacific nor a major involvement of European navies in the Pacific theatre.

4.4. The Transatlantic Partners and “Outlaws”: The Example of Iran

The speeches and panel discussion in Munich often deal with the question how the Western countries should deal with those states that – in one way or the other – have violated basic rules of international law and thus assumed a kind of pariah status within the international community. Examples include Iraq under Saddam Hussein violating the sanction regime established by the UN Security Council, North Korea developing nuclear weapons and repeatedly testing ballistic missiles, Syria under Bashar al-Assad using chemical weapons against its own population or Iran violating a number of norms laid down in the NPT and developing a nuclear capability. I will focus on the final example here since the confrontation between Iran and the West has been one of the most important topics in Munich over the past few years.

Interestingly, during the whole period under investigation, all speakers portrayed Iran as a state that had stepped outside of the confines of the international community and would be allowed to re-entry only if it accepted the requirements set by the UN Security Council. The disagreements that existed between the speakers pertained to the way Iran was addressed and the strategy that should be used to force Iran change its behavior. There was a joint understanding that Iran had challenged the international community as a whole, which made a strong response inevitable and transatlantic cooperation necessary. At the 2006 conference, John McCain stated:

The regime must understand that it cannot win a showdown with the world. Should diplomacy fail, the responsible members of the international community – and the transatlantic partners especially – need to stay unified to answer this grave challenge (McCain 2006 P60).

³⁵ It should be noted that Rasmussen tried to push for such a policy. At the MSC 2010, he asked: “What would be the harm if countries such as China, India, Pakistan and others were to develop closer ties with NATO? I think, in fact, there would only be a benefit, in terms of trust, confidence and cooperation” (Rasmussen 2010 P29).

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a similar distinction between the “international community” and the “outlaw” who has to fulfill specific requirements in order to regain its status as a responsible member of the international community in 2007:

Iran must fulfil the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council and the IAEA Board of Governors. There is no way around this demand, and it must be fulfilled without ifs or buts and without tricks. The technology involved is highly sensitive, and therefore Iran’s nuclear programme must be subject to a high degree of transparency; however, Tehran has not delivered on this. If things stay that way, Iran risks falling deeper into isolation. Let me repeat that the international community’s offer remains valid. We invited Iran to cooperate and to do what is right for its people, as Iran is a country with a proud history and a long cultural heritage. It would therefore be a good thing for Tehran to integrate into, and submit to, the international community (Merkel 2007 P48).

In general, European speakers were less confrontational in their rhetoric than their US counterparts,³⁶ hoping that the Iranian government would finally agree to negotiations. For many Americans, mainly Republicans, this expectation was futile given the nature of the Iranian regime. Instead, they called for tougher measures since only more international pressure, not incentives, would prod Tehran to change course. More specifically, they used harsh words for the Iranian regime, while making a clear distinction between the “Mullahs” and the Iranian population – something that did not feature very high in European accounts. US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld (2006 P61) for instance called the Iranian regime “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism”, while Senator Joe Lieberman (2006 P59) defined it as a “small, fanatical, corrupt leadership in Iran” and warned that “history teaches us this crucial lesson: that sometimes people advocating hate and violence do exactly what they say they are going to do. The evidence of this is as varied as the writings of Hitler in the thirties and the polemics of bin Laden in the nineties.” On the other hand, they praised the Iranian people: “We stand with the Iranian people [...] who want a peaceful and democratic future. They have no desire to see their country isolated from the rest of the civilized world” (Rumsfeld 2006 P61; see also Lieberman 2006 P59, McCain 2006 P60).

Both European and American speakers defined responding to the Iranian nuclear issue as a fundamental challenge for the transatlantic partners, in which the determination, credibility and unity of the West were severely tested (Merkel 2005 P64, Lieberman 2006 P59, Jung 2006 P54).

Concerning the strategy that should be applied, all participants made clear that they preferred a diplomatic solution. However, they disagreed whether – in addition to far-reaching economic sanctions – the West should threaten the use of military force. Europeans usually did not even address this issue, while US participants explicitly stated that force remained an option: Lieberman for example argued that the US and NATO “should make clear that military action to destroy or deter Iran’s nuclear arsenal is not an option we seek, but it is also not an option that we can eliminate” (Lieberman 2006 P59; see also McCain 2006 P60). With the Obama administration and its growing willingness to talk to Iran directly (Biden 2013 P148) a solution became possible. The official American wording became similar to the European one (see e.g. Jones 2010 P31), although the use of force was still openly discussed as a viable option. Yet, the Obama administration’s readiness to tone down

36 This can also be seen in relation to other “troublemakers”: Especially in the first years following 9/11, American speakers often used notions such as “enemies”, “rogue regimes” or “leaders [holding] their people hostage” (McCain 2002 P90, Lieberman 2002 P89, Wolfowitz 2002 P91, Rumsfeld 2005 P72, Gates 2007 P51). In general, Europeans attacked the same issues, but were less confrontational in their rhetoric, avoiding clear “friend-enemy” or “good-evil” distinctions. Over time, most US speakers toned down their rhetoric, especially with the Obama administration taking office. Yet, there is still an obvious difference in the vocabulary. President Obama, for instance, is not afraid of using the term “evil”. His phrase “Evil does exist in the world” was one of his core claims in his speech in Oslo when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Mann 2012:153-5).

the rhetoric gave the Iranian side another incentive to enter negotiations after the election of President Hassan Rohani, which produced an interim agreement in early 2014.

Given the stakes, the transatlantic partners were able to maintain their unity and present a common front to Iran. One can argue that this was easier than in other cases because the Iranian regime was in clear violation of basic international norms, had repeatedly cheated on the international community and did not show a willingness to negotiate at first. Thus, Iran represented a very clear “other” whom the transatlantic partners had to contain. Seen in this light, the fact that Europeans did not want the US to use force paved the way for crippling sanctions against Iran, which – in European statements – seemed to represent the final resort (cf. Miliband 2009 P16, Merkel 2009 P9, Steinmeier 2009 P11). In case the sanctions had not triggered a change of Iran’s position, transatlantic unity would have been much more difficult to uphold. An attack on Iran would have gone beyond the transatlantic consensus.

Conclusion

The transatlantic debates at the Munich Security Conferences between 2002 and 2014 have reflected a number of ups and down in the transatlantic partnership, from the confrontation in the run-up to the Iraq intervention to showcasing transatlantic unity in the face of the Iranian nuclear program. Yet, these changes of mood notwithstanding, the debates were shaped by quite different understandings of what the transatlantic partnership and NATO were all about. Diverging conceptions of constitutive norms (based on liberal-democratic values, or shaped by geographical belonging), different interpretations of NATO’s purpose (as an organization for collective defense, the core of a potentially global intervention force defending or spreading liberal values, or a bridge linking the United States and Canada to Europe), various interpretations of its relationship with other actors (with different degrees between partnership and enemy), and diverse cognitive models concerning diplomacy and the use of force (as a normal foreign policy instrument or only the last resort) made the agreement on, funding and implementation of certain policies less likely.³⁷

In general, an increasingly complex and global security environment has made transatlantic cooperation on security challenges much harder than during the Cold War. First, during the period under investigation, there was no new “enemy” that represented a clear “other” to the transatlantic partners against which they could define a new identity (possibly on a global scale). It may well be, however, that Russia’s actions in Ukraine in 2014 will in retrospect be seen as a turning point providing a new impetus for the transatlantic security community. A revisionist Russia, undermining civil liberties at home and neglecting the normative foundations of the normative *acquis communautaire* in its neighborhood, could serve as a unifying force for the transatlantic security community demonstrating quite clearly what distinguishes the transatlantic in-group from its “other”. Yet, the different responses to the crisis also suggest that the unifying force of Russian aggression should not be overestimated. If China or a group of countries do not decide to challenge the predominantly liberal international order, thus representing what pundit Robert Kagan called “the club of autocrats” (Kagan 2008:76), the transatlantic community will not be able to easily strengthen its own identity as “an axis of democracy” by pursuing a strategy of “othering.”³⁸

37 These categories stem from the framework developed by Abdelal et al. (2009).

38 It is, of course, a completely different question whether such a strategy would be desirable. As many American and European authors have argued such a confrontation should be avoided. Rather, the transatlantic partners should try to turn these potential challengers into real stakeholders and thus preserve the liberal order for a time in which the West will be less powerful (Ikenberry 2008, Flockhart et al. 2014).

Second, the globalization of the security environment has tremendous consequences for NATO since many members still think of the Alliance as an essentially Euro-Atlantic organization. This has not only hindered all attempts to transform NATO into a global institution, but also makes it appear less important and useful for all those allies who think that a regional NATO is out of sync with the times (House of Commons Defence Committee 2008:17). Even if the crisis in Ukraine highlights the ongoing importance of NATO in Europe and seems to counteract the widely accepted metaphor of the geopolitical center of gravity shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, the different assessments of NATO's role outside the Euro-Atlantic area will almost certainly reappear in future debates of the transatlantic partners. Given that the security elites in Europe, the United States and Canada have developed partly diverging understandings of NATO's purpose and level of ambition, it can be expected that efforts to strengthen transatlantic security cooperation outside the Euro-Atlantic area will remain *ad hoc* at best or lead to severe crises of the transatlantic security community at worst.

Overall, in the post-9/11 security environment, the security elites within the transatlantic security community have often struggled to find a meaningful common answer to the question of "who we are together" and link it to specific policy proposals. In the Q&A session after his speech at the MSC in 2010, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen made a similar observation from a politician's point of view. He argued that the Alliance had lost its common "strategic narrative" that would convey a clear sense of purpose to the domestic constituencies of its member states. According to Rasmussen, it was high time that the allies agreed on such a joint narrative, which he hoped the Strategic Concept would deliver.³⁹ Yet, the problem is that it is very hard to bind together the different narratives that have developed within NATO and are deeply embedded in very fundamental identity constructions.

The instances when NATO was actually able to act with a high degree of cohesion were characterized by circumstances that highlighted specific core aspects of the "collective identity" widely shared among its members. This was the case in NATO's enlargement rounds after 9/11 if the applicants were clearly considered "European" and had flawless democratic credentials. Equally, the attacks of 9/11 triggered the evocation of Article 5 as a demonstration of solidarity and community although the victim, the United States, did not even ask for it in the beginning. Yet, whenever policy proposals failed at binding together different interpretations of this collective identity or even violated specific aspects held dear by some of its members (as in the case of turning NATO into the core of a global alliance of democracies, shedding its geographical roots), these initiatives failed – or were pursued outside of NATO.

39 Author's notes.

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Primary Sources: The text corpus used here consists of about 80 speeches made at the Munich Security Conference between 2002 and 2014. They are quoted in the format "Author Year Primary Document". For example, (Merkel 2007 P48) refers to the speech that Angela Merkel gave at the MSC in 2007, which is the primary document No. 48 (P48) in the ATLAS.ti project belonging to the author's ongoing PhD work. If not marked otherwise, the quotes are taken from the official transcripts (available online or collected by the MSC office) or – if those were not available – transcribed from audio or video sources. Please contact the author if you have additional questions.

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THE PROJECT

In an era of global flux, emerging powers and growing interconnectedness, transatlantic relations appear to have lost their bearings. As the international system fragments into different constellations of state and non-state powers across different policy domains, the US and the EU can no longer claim exclusive leadership in global governance. Traditional paradigms to understand the transatlantic relationship are thus wanting. A new approach is needed to pinpoint the direction transatlantic relations are taking. TRANSWORLD provides such an approach by a) ascertaining, differentiating among four policy domains (economic, security, environment, and human rights/democracy), whether transatlantic relations are drifting apart, adapting along an ad hoc cooperation-based pattern, or evolving into a different but resilient special partnership; b) assessing the role of a re-defined transatlantic relationship in the global governance architecture; c) providing tested policy recommendations on how the US and the EU could best cooperate to enhance the viability, effectiveness, and accountability of governance structures.

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Mainly funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme, TRANSWORLD is carried out by a consortium of 13 academic and research centres from the EU, the US and Turkey:

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The Munich Security Conference is global in focus, but a central component has always been the dialogue between the United States and Europe about transatlantic security, and the role of the broader transatlantic community on the global stage. In light of what has happened since the last MSC, there will be no shortage of items to discuss. For starters, the administration of US President Donald J. Trump has recently released two key documents (the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy) which hint at a United States posturing itself for great power competition with China. The Munich Security Conference (MSC), one of the world's most prestigious geopolitical gatherings, convened from Feb. 17 to 19. The debates, as well as the diplomatic brokering behind the scenes, are considered crucial in terms of understanding the new parameters of global security architecture. Amid perhaps the most uncertain times in world politics, this year's conference has acquired the utmost significance. Even the title of the Munich Security Report 2017, "Post-truth, post-west, post-order" which was presented prior to the conference, reflected the complexity of the challenges confronting the international community.