

NATO Now and Then: Alliance Agents and Structures in Anarchical International Society

Written by Francis A. Beer

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Anarchy, Society, and Alliances

Anarchy and society are major themes of current international relations. Like other similar couples – agents and structures, conflict and cooperation, disintegration and integration, war and peace – the two are often opposed in the literature. This article uses NATO as an example to suggest that these theoretical binary pairs are not mutually exclusive, but rather coexist in the real world. They are densely braided in different levels and sectors of the global system, coexisting in parallel, tracking each other through space and time. (See, for example Beer, 1981, 1969; Buchan, 1977; Hall, 2012; Little, 2013; Murray, 2013).

The 20th century was branded as the anarchic century of total war by Raymond Aron. It contained two World Wars separated only by the comma of a generation. Immediately following the end of World War II, the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe signaled the arrival of the Cold War. These sequential hot and cold wars marked the anarchic disintegration and collapse of the international social order that had followed the Napoleonic wars in 1815.

At the same time, the 20th century hosted the continuing growth of international society. The League of Nations followed the First World War and the United Nations was a bookend to the Second. When major international violence occurred, it was socially organized. In both World Wars, the world was neatly divided into opposing camps, with some scattered neutrals. Within these armed camps, particularly among the Allies during World War II, there emerged highly institutionalized forms of cooperation. Military forces remained under national control, but, there was an Allied chain of command on the Western front, at the top of which stood General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

The Cold War and the political instability following a harsh winter in 1947 motivated Western leaders to build on this organization and to create other institutions of international society, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which was established in 1949. Article 51 of the United Nations Charter legitimated individual or collective self-defence against an armed attack. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty made very clear that NATO self defence was to operate within the context of the new United Nations system where the United Nations Security Council was (in principle) the custodian of international peace and security.

NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay succinctly combined the anarchic and social realities when he stated that NATO's tasks were to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in.[Move hyperlink from purple to red text]

Alliances are anarchy's children, but they are also particular forms of international society. They are war communities; born of war, preparing for war, waging war. NATO is, paradoxically, an international community whose reason for being is international conflict.

Alliance Agents and Structures

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In the context of mixed international anarchy and society, NATO also blended agents and structures. (See Royo, 2012; Pickworth, 2011; Giddens, 1984). Among the agents present at the creation were American leaders – US President Harry S. Truman; Secretaries of State George Marshall and Dean Acheson; General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

European military and political leaders also played major roles. NATO's initial political leaders were highly distinguished. Lord Hastings "Pug" Ismay had been Winston Churchill's chief military aide during World War II and he represented both Britain and the Commonwealth. NATO's second Secretary General, from 1957-1961, Paul Henri Charles Spaak, had been Belgian Prime Minister in the 1930s and 1940s, the first President of the UN General Assembly and one of the founders of the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the European Union. These leaders built on the structures that they had helped to create during the preceding war. Allied cooperation during World War II had laid the basis for preserving physical and institutional forms of Allied cooperation.

In Paris, the most fundamental structures were the buildings that NATO occupied. The Palais de Chaillot, had been a German headquarters. After the war, it was converted to Allied use, becoming the site of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary forces (SHAEP) and then of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. This headquarters building was succeeded by others at the Porte Dauphine in Paris and then at Mons in Belgium. These structures are architectural. But other structures are organizational. The NATO civilian organizational structure includes about 50 separate units, and the military structure about 100 administrative units.

If one looks at NATO's creation and historical evolution, it is hard to say that agents do not matter. NATO institutions were and are full of people, all of whom have contributed to its development and mission. Agents and structures are different magnifications of the same process. Individuals are obviously important actors. At the same time, if one looks at the mind-numbing organization charts, it is also hard to say that structure doesn't matter. The dense, concrete physical and organizational facticity of NATO on the ground today is overwhelming. Yet, it is also difficult to avoid the impression of bureaucratic drift. One does not know if the founding agents, viewing the results of their handiwork more than half a century later, would be elated or dismayed at what they had wrought.

Alliance Dynamics

Alliance dynamics look both outward and inward. NATO agents and structures, at different levels, participate *symmetrically* in both anarchic and social elements of the international system. They prepare to fight, if necessary, in an anarchic international system – the Cold War or the Global War on Terror. At the same time, they create and take advantage of the cooperative elements of international society – the United Nations or the European Union, for example, to achieve that task.

NATO agents and structures also participate *asymmetrically* in both anarchic and social elements of the international system. During chaotic international time periods, when external anarchy increases- like the Cold War – we see movement toward tighter, stronger internal NATO relations. Other more peaceful time periods – after the fall of the Berlin Wall and before 9/11 – where international anarchy appears to abate and society gains ground, can imply an internal loss of mission; weaker, looser cooperation; and less constraint of the alliance's national actors. Simmering conflicts—Greece and Turkey—may have more room to grow.

NATO, as an international political-military regional organization, seamlessly moves between international anarchy and international society. The Cold War is over, but relations with Russia and the newly independent central and Eastern European republics need to be managed. New members are admitted to NATO—Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia. Military operations are conducted: Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq, Libya. There are crisis and defense planning and coordination and many other tasks under the umbrella of collective defense.

Agents and structures interact. Individuals, acting the name of sovereign nation states, create international structures; and these structures, in turn, link states together. This evolutionary, path dependent, process can work over time to create historical and emerging alliances. The outcome is heavily contingent, depending on contextual

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mixes of anarchy and society, agents and structures. Other alliances such as the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization followed different trajectories in a changing global environment, disbanding following the end of the Cold War and Vietnam. However, NATO, now and then, still thrives.

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