NATO: Building A Security Community in the Face of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Purpose: NATO has been built upon political, economic, and military issues. Over the years, due to the intensive development of medicine, public debate has marginalised public health threats as aspect of international security. Our goal was to find out whether the transatlantic security community will rise to the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Design/Methodology/Approach: This article attempts to answer the above question through theoretical analysis of the functioning of NATO as a security community as well as through the analysis of actions taken by the Alliance to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.
Findings: The hypothesis we were able to confirm is, that the current pandemic is a chance for the Alliance – it can play a greater role in the community than it has done so far.
Practical Implications: Our research shows gaps in NATO's crisis management system and the areas that need to be improved.
Originality/value: We see our paper as an innovative one, because no one has researched NATO's crisis management mechanisms on the example of a specific, non-military crisis.

Keywords: NATO, COVID-19, pandemic, security community, international security, crisis management.

JEL Classification: H12, F52, F53, F55.

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1. Introduction

As it paralyzed the world in the early 2020, the coronavirus pandemic taxed supranational security institutions, the North Atlantic alliance being one of them. As of 23 July 2020, more than 600,000 deaths had been attributed to COVID-19. The world we knew has been changed by the crisis almost overnight, which poses a challenge to the international security system; thus, it seems justified to analyse NATO's reaction to this critical situation as since its beginnings, the North Atlantic Alliance has set its sights on developing a system of mutual defence (also against new threats) and building up a security community. NATO works towards this goal through the fulfilment of three basic tasks, collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. In the effective 2010 NATO's Strategic Concept, health risk is found at the bottom of the list of threats, thus the current situation is a serious test for the Alliance's mechanisms of crisis management.

The aim of this article is to analyse the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Euro-Atlantic community, particularly regarding building a security community. The main research problem is to answer the question: to what extent does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the process of building NATO's security community? The article is divided into three parts. The first two present theoretical analysis of the functioning of security communities and investigate whether NATO can be considered such a community. The third part is the key element of the article as it analyses the actions taken by the Alliance to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the successes and failures of the Euro-Atlantic model of crisis management.

2. The Concept of Security Community

In its long tradition, security of social communities has been defined discretionarily, according to various social, religious, political, economic, and other interpretations. The tradition of community security is already present in the thought of Aristotle, Cicero and Kant (Gryz, 2015). However, it is Karl Deutsch who is considered to have popularized the concept, which has been developed further by Emanuel Adler, Michael Barnett and Andrej Tusicisny.

Karl Deutsch in his work *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (1957) defined a security community as "a group of people" who believe *"that they have come to agreement on at least this one point: that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of 'peaceful change".* This "peaceful change" was understood as "the resolution of social problems, normally by institutionalized procedures, without resort to large-scale physical force". People who are members of a security community have the "sense of community", which is characterized by mutual trust and common interests. Deutsch divided security communities into two types: the amalgamated and the pluralistic ones. Amalgamated security communities are created when two or more previously independent states form a common government, which

is a rare situation. In the pluralistic model, states retain their sovereignty; however, they renounce violence as a method of resolving disputes. Deutsch mentioned as many as eight conditions that should be met to form a security community, but only two of them apply to pluralistic communities:

- mutual "compatibility of major values relevant to political decision-making". Such a value may be e.g., unattractiveness / renouncement of war (it is also worth emphasizing that although the existence of security communities was often associated with liberal democratic values, there may be security communities based on other values, e.g., totalitarian and autocratic ones, as in the case of the Warsaw Pact);
- "the capacity of the participating political units or governments to respond to each other's needs, messages, and actions quickly, adequately, and without resort to violence". It also means creating favourable conditions for multilateral consultation and communication (Deutsch, 1957).

Despite its great theoretical and practical potential, Deutsch's concept had not been developed until the end of the Cold War. In the work *Security Communities* (1998), Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett said that a security community can exist thanks to the following elements, a community of identities and values, multilateral direct interactions, and mutual long-term interests. They also presented three stages of community development. Their mature (most advanced) form includes the aspect of "mutual aid" and "a system of rule that lies somewhere between a sovereign state and a regional, centralized government; that is, it is something of a post-sovereign system, endowed with common supranational, transnational, and national institutions and some form of a collective security system". The authors also specified the meaning of "peaceful change" – a concept introduced by Deutsch. They understood it as a renouncement of preparations to use organized violence (Adler and Barnett, 1998).

Andrej Tusicisny distinguished interstate security communities (where war between states is unthinkable, but large-scale use of violence to solve internal problems of states is not ruled out) and comprehensive security communities (which follow the idea of "peaceful change").While studying contemporary security communities, Tusiciny drew attention to two important values, mutual trust and tolerance of external groups (higher tolerance of ethnic, religious and political minorities indicates lower tension between groups living within the state). The lack of tolerance towards various external groups correlates (to some extent) with the tendency to social conflict (Tusicisny, 2007).

A contemporary, full-fledged security community is therefore a system of state entities in which the parties strive to resolve disputes peacefully. They renounce the use of (and preparation to use) force against each other and in domestic politics. These communities have supranational bodies to run discussions and facilitate cooperation. They can create collective security systems. These entities share values that correlate with the political decision-making process (e.g., liberalism, freedom, equality). Citizens and representatives of government trust other members of the community and

are characterized by tolerance towards other social groups. The following are the most common security communities:

- the European security community – there are disputes regarding the boundaries of this area. Some researchers (e.g., Emmanuel Adler) extend it to the Euro-Atlantic area, others exclude the area of Eastern Europe. Most often, it coincides with the area of EU + Norway and Switzerland;
- NAFTA area, particularly US-Canada and US-Mexico relations;
- MERCOSUR – it should be noted that in this case the level of violence between non-state actors (e.g., criminal groups) is very high;
- ASEAN – in this case, the problems include violence and different values which guide the individual governments.

3. NATO as a Security Community

Undoubtedly, NATO is a type of security community based on the principle of collective security. This means that members of this community will come to the aid of other member states, even if their own territory or assets remain secure. This is different from military alliances, as the latter are usually time dependent and can be dissolved when they are no longer useful or needed. From its beginning, the role of the North Atlantic Alliance was more than just to counterbalance the Warsaw Pact. Over the years, NATO has transformed into a community of states that share similar views and are united not only by their opposition to Soviet communism, but also by determination (as stated in the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949) "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law". NATO in the 21st century is a sort of institutional expression of the transatlantic community of states and Western values. The economies, foreign and security policy and armed forces of the member states have been highly integrated through institutionalized and less formal mechanisms of cooperation (Cottey, 2014).

Although the North Atlantic Alliance fulfils many essential criteria laid down for security communities (the principle of democratic peace; introduction of liberal democratic values; cooperation in the field of security and defence; increased communication; aid programs; joint participation in peacekeeping operations), its ambitions in this area encounter many obstacles. In the last decade, NATO faced new threats which led to re-evaluation of its aims and strategy, and further deepened integration within the Alliance. The security issues which recently have affected the Western world are becoming increasingly complex and regard not only the military sphere but – first – the economy (migration crisis, climate change, cross-border crime, and now the COVID-19 pandemic). The complexity of the problems causes fundamental differences in views among NATO members. Moreover, the integration of the US and Europe is difficult due to geographical reasons. Greek-Turkish relations are openly hostile, and there have been armed incidents between these states. Also, both Turkey and some Central European countries do not follow or depart from

Western democratic standards. Thus, it should be emphasized that the North Atlantic Alliance is not a full-fledged security community in the light of the definition presented in this article. Nevertheless, the process of creating such a community is at an advanced stage.

NATO countries build a security community by establishing cooperative security ties with neighbouring territories and by participating in international resolution of crises (Mölder, 2006). The 2010 Strategic Concept focused on the expansion of the crisis management mechanism so that it would undertake not only stabilization but also reconstruction tasks, which is a clear entry into the domain of civil activities. This is to be an element of improving cooperation with partners and improving NATO's ability to fulfil stabilization and reconstruction tasks. Moreover, the issues of international crises were thenceforth to become the subject of even more intensive consultations between the allies and partners. An important issue in building a security community is gaining the support of partners – states, institutions and organizations (e.g., the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, as well as the NATO-Russia Council) – to ensure security more effectively. NATO is thus striving for intensification of its ties with the EU and the UN.

4. COVID-19 as a Factor Building a Security Community?

Elena Alekseenkova, a researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences, has expressed a view that "the coronavirus has confirmed what the world has been afraid to admit for several years: there are no global responses to global challenges" (Alekseenkova, 2020). Even just a brief overview on the international situation shows that this opinion is justified. Numerous political, economic, and military tensions – those between key international players and between less important participants of international relations – are sufficient evidence of this. However, there are also opinions, particularly among supporters of the close Euro-Atlantic partnership, that in such an unstable world NATO could, thanks to its potential and resources, play a more important role in counteracting the ongoing pandemic. While there is no doubt that NATO is not and will never be a humanitarian organisation, COVID-19 is one of the most serious security challenges for the member states since the Alliance was established.

Security is understood in art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty almost exclusively in the military context as NATO was established to counterbalance the militarisation and sovietisation of the Eastern Bloc and to protect the Western countries against armed aggression. Meanwhile, the world did not stand still, and the scale and types of threats have evolved, leading to almost constant changes in perceiving the problem of security, the last manifestation of which is the focus on public health. The Alliance also recognizes such challenges and is adapting to them; however, very cautiously and with a certain delay.

Already in May 2002, during the Meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Reykjavik, foreign ministers of NATO member states agreed that the Alliance should respond to threats, regardless of their nature and origins. However, the decision-makers did not treat those declarations seriously in the following years. For example, in 2009 the CIA prepared a report "State of the World 2025", which said that "if a pandemic disease breaks out, it will be in a densely populated area, with proximity between humans and animals, such as exists in some markets in China or Southeast Asia, where people live close to livestock". The geographic region in which the threat would arise was not precisely identified but concerns about the emergence of a new highly contagious (and deadly) virus were correctly highlighted (Duclos, 2020). In 2015 Bill Gates said in an interview available on one of the Internet portals, that the world was not prepared for new epidemic threats, which would cost many lives and seriously harm the global economy. While recalling the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, he stated explicitly that "this time we were lucky".

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a new and serious threat to the states and societies of the Euro-Atlantic community. It would also dust off NATO's mechanisms of crisis management. However, the Alliance's first and almost only action was aimed at maintaining its deterrence and defence capabilities. On 2 April 2020, the Secretary General publicly assured that: "Our ability to conduct operations has not been undermined, our forces remain ready, and our crucial work goes on". Meanwhile, the ongoing pandemic should force the Alliance to change the way it perceives security and to act earlier and more adequately than during the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, cyber-attacks on Estonia in 2007, and hybrid threats after the attack on Ukraine in 2014 – as the next pandemic can take a far more deadly toll.

4.1 NATO vs COVID-19: What Worked

When it became evident that the COVID-19 threat was more than a local outbreak, NATO undertook several activities aimed at limiting the spread of the virus and minimizing the risk to its own personnel (military and civilian) in order to build trust for NATO's actions among the Alliance's personnel and their families, and to eliminate the risk of decreasing its own capability to deter and react. It was also important for the forces responsible for implementation of military missions to ensure that the pandemic would not affect their efficiency and that local communities would feel no negative impact of the presence of foreign military forces in their territories. Moreover, as the knowledge on the virus was fragmentary, NATO became a platform for exchanging information and good practices related to countering this threat (Anon, 2020). While sharing intelligence information had not always worked as intended, in the case of the coronavirus pandemic the platform operated efficiently, and the states shared their findings.

Learning to function during a pandemic, NATO for the first time held a teleconference meeting of ministers of foreign affairs from the member states (2 April 2020). Another meeting of this kind was organized for ministers of defence. While this may seem a

small detail, it is significant as it meant a break from the tradition of meeting face-to-face and established the proper technical protocols to secure such meetings from external interference and stop unauthorised entities from gaining access. Such meetings could (and should) significantly shorten the time needed by NATO to decide, which is of great importance in facing the current security threats as well as for practical implementation of the provisions of art. 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty (GMF Experts, 2020).

The governments of member states to a different degree used military forces to support civilian health workers in the fight against the pandemic. For example, a field hospital was established in France, and two hospital ships of the US forces (the USNS *Comfort* and the USNS *Mercy*) sailed to New York and Los Angeles, where they became floating medical facilities for civilian patients, relieving the overburdened local networks of hospitals. It should be noted that if those actions of NATO were sufficiently publicised, this would assuage some recurring doubts as to the sense of NATO or its internal coherence. Also, NATO's experience regarding logistics, coordination of actions or establishing airlifts can significantly contribute to the fight with the pandemic by utilizing hardly known capabilities and resources, such as:

- NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA), which ensures logistical support and organizes transport of key resources and equipment to the participating states and organisations;
- the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), which is a key mechanism of civilian assistance activities of NATO, operates 24/7 all year round for 70 participating states, and is tasked with coordinating help in case of natural and man-made disasters;
- the Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC), established in 2008 as an initiative providing 12 participating countries with assured access to military airlift capability;
- the Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS), a programme which enables the participants to charter commercial transport planes;
- NATO's Rapid Air Mobility (NRAM), an initiative aimed at simplifying procedures related to military flights providing support in case of natural or man-made disasters, including epidemics; it uses a NATO call sign and expedites Air Traffic Control clearances;
- Movements Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE), which is coordinating and optimizing the use of all types of military means of transport from the 28 participating states.

If the above structures were efficiently used (with their successes broadly publicized) and then reformed based on the current experiences, this could lay foundations for NATO gaining a larger and more significant role within the Euro-Atlantic community or perhaps even on the global level (Skaluba and Brzezinski, 2020; Braw, 2020; Congressional Research Service, 2020.

The pandemic also stimulated the Alliance members to undertake some actions in the name of solidarity. The governments of the member states of the transatlantic community help each other not only within the mentioned NATO mechanisms but also bilaterally. Poland and Albania sent doctors to Italy; German air forces transported to German hospitals some of the infected patients form Italy and France; the US delivered medicinal products to Italy, Estonia sent face masks and disinfectants to Spain and Italy, and the Czech Republic sent face masks to North Macedonia. These are by no means all cases of mutual help, but they represent the response to the coronavirus pandemic.

4.2 NATO vs COVID-19: What Did Not Work

It is likely that the current pandemic crisis will change the perception of threats among the member countries as the citizens of the community are no longer satisfied with the mere fact of belonging to NATO, they want and need to see that this organization is actively involved in current events, providing help, and reacting to any and all threats. This is what NATO is going to be held accountable for with increasing frequency. No reaction – or a delayed or inadequate one – can leave the Alliance open to the accusation that although it has appropriate crisis management mechanisms at its disposal, it does not use them and remains passive, while the societies of the member states feel increasingly threatened.

Thus, it is difficult to contest a statement that NATO should apply its strategic communication tools more extensively to publicize positive examples of how its structures and resources are used to combat the pandemic. In this area, much remains to be done. The pandemic also highlighted another weakness of the transatlantic community, insufficient capabilities to deal with disinformation, manipulation, fake news, and propaganda. Such actions originate from Russia and China, and their aim is to fuel anti-American moods in Europe as well as to construct a negative image of the Alliance in the eyes of the member states' citizens. Both Russia and China promote the theory that it is the US that is responsible for the outbreak of the epidemic in China.

The Russians suggest also that NATO intentionally spreads the virus in the EU countries that want to cooperate with Moscow, while help sent by Russia and China to some European countries (personal protective equipment and medical equipment) is presented to the international public opinion as a proof that both countries are trustworthy and dependable. The fact that the delivered equipment had little medical value is mentioned. Considering the above, it should be concluded that also in the cases of manipulation, disinformation etc., strategic communication tools should be used more extensively to warn the community against such threats (Kochis and Coffey, 2020).

Solidarity and mutual help sometimes have been turning out to be a problem during the current crisis, as illustrated by numerous tensions between the allies from both sides of the Atlantic (more on this in section 3.3). Also, in Europe there occurred

situations when international solidarity was replaced by focusing on a strictly national point of view, or when such solidarity was limited to a symbolic gesture that had no real impact. To exemplify, Poland (where the scale of the pandemic has been manageable so far) sent merely 15 doctors to Italy, which faced a much more serious situation, and 9 doctors to the US, where the crisis reached dramatic proportions. Nikolas Gvosdev rightly noted that "[s]olidarity is easy when there is no perceived cost or major sacrifice entailed. Even when a disaster may hit one part of the community, if others have not been affected, it is politically easier to send help or share aid. The true test of solidarity comes when the requirement to show solidarity carries with it real costs" (Gvosdev, 2020). Human psyche generally finds it easier to remember negative and questionable examples than positive ones, even if the latter are more numerous.

4.3 The Impact of the Pandemic on the Euro-Atlantic Community

The COVID-19 pandemic had also certain negative impact on the Euro-Atlantic community and highlighted some of its flaws. Firstly, it influenced the European-American relations, yet again causing unnecessary tension. European decision-makers were taken aback when on 11 March 2020 – one-sidedly and without consultations – President Trump's administration banned travellers from Schengen Area from entering US territory. As the other side had not been warned beforehand, that decision resulted in chaos and overcrowded airports. American explanations that the decision was based on WHO data convinced no one on the other side of the Atlantic.

Furthermore, Europe criticised Trump's decision to stop financing the WHO due to the latter's alleged mismanagement of the pandemic-related crisis. Some European leaders also complained about American sanctions imposed on e.g., Iran and Venezuela, which made it impossible to direct medical and humanitarian aid to those countries, severely afflicted by the pandemic. Another complaint was that during the period when ventilators and personal protective equipment were in short supply, the US attempted to overbid other countries and hoard those goods. Thus, it is difficult to describe this period of transatlantic relations as one of solidarity and harmonious cooperation.

Secondly, what will influence NATO negatively is the recession caused by the pandemic. It is already evident as many branches of economy are unable to function at pre-pandemic levels – numerous companies went bankrupt due to the lockdown, while others were forced to suspend or drastically limit their operations. This translates into growing unemployment, lower budget revenues, fewer government-funded projects and at the same time increased budget expenditures (support for people losing work and for companies, purchases for medical purposes etc.). Considering this situation, decision-makers are looking for budget cuts in other categories of public expenditures and investment. To prevent social discontent, the cuts to be made involve in the first place the expenditures on universally understood defence – and the majority of the community members even now are struggling to

meet their obligations as allies (2% of GDP on defence). So far there are no statistical data confirming this trend; however, considering the past, such scenario seems likely. If it comes true, cutting defence expenditures will have significant negative impact on NATO's political coherence and adaptability to new threats.

Thirdly, if defence expenditures fall below the planned and required level, then any tenders, purchases, new investments, as well as the number of new joint research projects and the speed of their implementation will be limited (a decline in stock prices of defence industry companies has already been observed, which in turn may force the governments to save the industry); the same will happen to the number of military expeditions, trainings and field exercises as well as to their effectiveness. Without the above elements, the Alliance will face problems in building mutual trust among the member states as well as in maintaining its defence and deterrence capabilities at the current level, not mentioning counteracting, and combating new types of threats (e.g., hybrid ones). This may negatively influence the US' military involvement in Europe or in NATO in general, which would be dangerous (Vanholme, 2020; Golby, 2020).

5. Concluding Remarks

It seems justified to expect the Alliance – as the strong arm of the transatlantic community – to involve itself more decisively in combating the current pandemic, and to prepare itself and its member countries for the potential future threats of this nature to avoid the plethora of negative repercussions such challenges may have for states and societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that within mere weeks such a threat can weaken societies, collapse economies, close borders or divide the transatlantic community. NATO has sufficient potential, resources (material and human) and structures to take the role of a civil activity coordinator, as foreseen by e.g., the mentioned art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This would strengthen the internal coherence of the Alliance and would send a clear signal both to the partners and the rest of the world that the Alliance remains strong, that it adapts to face new threats, and that it needs no external help to protect the community – also against falsified narratives, manipulation, disinformation, and propaganda (Brzozowski, 2020).

However, surprising this conclusion may be, the current pandemic is a chance for the Alliance. Firstly, by utilising the pre-established mechanisms of civilian cooperation, the Alliance can appear as an especially useful tool, necessary in the fight against the pandemic; however, NATO has to properly advertise the results of its actions to the society as such PR actions have not been very efficient so far. Secondly, the number and variety of the mentioned mechanisms leads to a conclusion that the Alliance has enough tools at its disposal, and the pandemic offers an opportunity to test them on a large scale, gain relevant experience and prepare the community for similar future threats. Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed how strongly the societies comprising the Alliance are integrated with each other, particularly considering the speed at which the virus was spreading and the economic results of the pandemic.

Thus, cooperation within NATO on the mechanisms of reacting to threats to the civilian population – an unobvious move due to the focus being defence and determent – would be beneficial on all accounts for the Alliance members. Although NATO at present is not (as President Macron put it) braindead, it needs a shock to the system, an impulse to break it from its current lethargic state, to better support the governments and societies of its member states, and thus to contribute more actively to building the transatlantic security community.

NATO will not be able to avoid such threats, which will appear with increasing frequency. Therefore, "[a]s the West starts to come to grips with building the post-pandemic world order, thinking big about NATO is the place to start" (Volker, 2020).

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