Research Article

Evolutionary Stable Global Orders: Co-Relational Power and Multilateral Security Organisations

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Abstract

Drawing on a Foucauldian philosophy of thought, this article proposes a novel concept in the study of evolutionary stable global orders: co-relational power. Co-relational power is substantively understood as a form of non-zero sum power. Non-zero sum or positive power is defined as the situation in which the power of one actor is not detrimental to the power of another actor, but it is instead a sum of asymptotic interactions between actors. We argue that, in a context of competitive multipolarity, multilateral security organisations, such as NATO and the EU, seek to adapt and to develop progressive and evolutionary grand strategies that can remain stable over time. This becomes a prerequisite for institutional survival. Our analysis shows that both NATO and the EU face geopolitical dilemmas while they seek to adapt to novel international orders and constellations of threats. The contribution of this article is twofold. First, it produces new knowledge about the conceptual underpinnings and practical implications of the concept of co-relational power. Second, it generates new insights on the design and foundations of progressive strategies and evolutionary stable global environments.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION

In an era of multipolarity and great power competition, understanding the underpinnings of an evolutionary stable global order and the impact of international organisations is both academically challenging and a timely endeavour. Intergovernmental organisations constitute potential 'building blocks of order' (Mearsheimer 2019: 9), with authority to set redlines, guide the behaviour of states, but also to shape international politics. While intergovernmental organisations[1] seek to have a stabilising role on societies, they inevitably become players in the international system themselves. Seeking to address this puzzle, the line of inquiry that guides this article is: *How to gain relevance and 'power' without entering the spiral of great power competition?* Existing literature on organisational change and adaptation (MacBryde *et al.* 2014; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Keijzer 2020; Pettigrew and Whipp 1993) has to a large extent focused on the dynamics of change in institutions and organisations in the political or business domains in general, while the strategies and determinants of adaptation of international security organisations, such as the EU and NATO, especially in a multipolar context of competition have received less scholarly attention hitherto. Specifically, the concept of power is not sufficiently examined. Notions of power are crucial to understand in a complex matrix in which several orders compete for relevance and influence, because the outcome of this competition is anticipated to depend on the distributional power balances. Drawing on a Foucauldian philosophy of thought, we propose a new conceptualisation of power, which we call *co-relational power*, underpinned by a positive, non-zero sum understanding of power – 'power with'. We argue that co-relational power can ensure evolutionary stable global order strategies, i.e. strategies that remain stable over time. Evolutionary stability refers to the enablement of *progressive* grand strategies that can lead to promoting conditions of well-being, an improvement of human security, and global progress.

While an *evolutionary stable strategy* and a *progressive strategy* might seem to represent an ontological contradiction at a first sight, this is not the case. Conceptually, an evolutionary stable strategy is assumed to lead to a progressive strategy, in the sense that it aims at contributing to a stabilisation of the multilateral world order. Nonlinear behaviours and complexity associated with multipolarity, crises and the intersection of multiple interdependent dynamics make prediction in the international security order a major source of instability and uncertainty. An evolutionary stable grand strategy refers to a strategy that enables asymptotic stability (Bukuwski and Miekisz 2004) rooted in the convergence on a common trajectory. The two case studies of this research, NATO and the EU, are expected to feature heterogeneity and even friction due to divergences among their members. Even though NATO and EU policy, specifically the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)/Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), is enacted mostly at intergovernmental level, the two international organisations can ensure evolutionary stable equilibriums in the absence of a central authority because they are reciprocity-based systems in which interactions and prisoners dilemmas are infinitely repeated (Axelrod 1981). This article argues, first, that, through leadership, relations and capacity, international organisations can have agency in international relations. Second, and key to our argument, we claim that international organisations envision evolution and progress, in order to survive. In the context of an evolving world order and a proliferation of crises, maintaining system stability (resilience) and efficiency, i.e. the system's ability to maintain its power and ensure that participants comply with the rules of a specific institutional order, are two major objectives of international organisations (Hasenclever et al. 1997). The more resilient a regime is, the more uncertainty and instability it can handle. Convergence is assumed to emerge at the point of asymptotic stability, which is per definition a stable equilibrium point (Bukuwski and Miekisz 2004). Convergence is premised by a common root

trajectory, thus generating the possibility of development of an evolutionary stable strategy that remains stable over time (a robust Nash equilibrium) (Bendor and Swistak 1997). While existing IR literature on grand strategy in international relations (Silove 2018; Layton 2018; Lissner 2018; Mykleby *et al.* 2016) focused on the generic definition of strategy as integrating ends, means and ways, the normative underpinnings of a grand strategy that *upholds power without entering in the spiral of great power competition* remained largely unaddressed. The notion of grand strategy that we put forward in this article distinguishes from the understandings of strategy in the military and strategic domain in that it concerns all the means at government's disposal to ensure security of the state. This includes not only material power (economy, demography, defence budget), but also foreign policy choices – alliances, membership in international organisations, etc. Here, the problem with the EU and NATO is which one is the constituency and in whose competence security and foreign policy decisions will ultimately fall. Only very few studies (Fiott and Simon 2019; Biscop 2012) explored whether international organisations can have a grand strategy. Aiming to pre-empt this imminent scientific gap, this article proposes a conceptualisation of an evolutionary grand strategy by exploring the concept of *co-relational power* underpinned by a Foucauldian paradigm. It does so by employing NATO and the EU as case studies. While NATO and the EU's CSDP/CFSP are arguably different institutions, with distinct organisational structures, the intergovernmental decision-making procedure requiring unanimity, increasing military cooperation in the framework of EU mechanisms such as PESCO, and EU's striving for more military agency makes these two institutions comparable. While NATO is more focused on deterrence and territorial defence and CSDP is more aimed to enable expeditionary force, both organisations rely on multilateral security and participate in crisis management operations. In addition, through taking on new operational domains, such as cyber and space, or adopting a policy towards China, NATO displays increased global reach and foreign policy agency to become a player in a context of great power competition, similar to the EU CFSP.

In this article, we seek to increase our conceptual understanding of key elements of progressive grand strategies in a context of global power re-configurations and eroding multilateralism, and how *co-relational power* relates to these dynamics. To this end, the remainder of this article is structured as follows: the following two sections assess the future geopolitical dilemmas of the two multilateral security organisations from the perspective of power dynamics in the global order; the fourth section elaborates on the concept of *co-relational power* as a form of progressive grand strategy that can enable an evolutionary stable global order; fifth, we empirically examine processes of change and adaptation in our two cases, NATO and the EU across time and in the last decade in particular; in the sixth section we discuss the findings from the perspective of the proposed concept of *co-relational power*. The article concludes by discussing limitations of our method and proposing avenues for future research.

NATO'S GEOPOLITICAL DILEMMAS IN A CONTEXT OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION

In a context of great power competition, geopolitical dilemmas arise for state and non-state actors, such as inter-governmental organisations. In the case of NATO, one of its main contemporary challenges is to be able to prioritise its growing portfolio of tasks vis-à-vis Russia. NATO cannot move forward and maintain its relevance in the future without rethinking its geopolitical engagements, especially with the main contester of international order, China. Adjusting the Alliance's geopolitical compass must translate into striking the right balance 'between power and purpose, global and regional interests, and policies of restraint and affirmation' (Rynning 2019: 2).

Crucially, addressing the global shifts of power and the changing world order would require a concerted political leadership in the capitals of NATO member countries, particularly the US, France, Germany and the UK, in order to overcome the global vs Euro-centric conceptions of the Alliance's purpose.

After Russia's invasion in Ukraine, any future NATO strategic engagement with Russia is likely to be premised by a combination of even stronger commitment to collective self-defence and intensified hostilities. The new NATO 2022 Strategic Concept calls Russia the most significant and direct security threat in the Euro-Atlantic area. To strengthen the protection of its eastern members, and the shared border with Russia which doubled with the accession of Sweden and Finland, the Atlantic Alliance returned to the Cold-War era forward defence plans, abandoning the tripwire concept. The new concept also prioritizes risk reduction and crisis prevention, at the expense of arms control. Prior to the war in Ukraine, engaging diplomatically with Russia seems to be able to prevent in the long run a closer alliance between Russia and China (Rynning 2019: xiv). To this end, the NATO-Russia Council could have liaised as a conspicuous focal point of NATO's diplomatic engagement and constructive dialogue with Russia, for instance through reviving the traditional agenda of confidence building measures and arms control. This is nonetheless imperilled by Russia's actions in Ukraine.

While NATO as a regional actor has been strengthening the defence and deterrence posture on its Eastern flank, NATO has been cultivating partnerships spreading beyond Europe across the globe to project stability through cooperation (see also Böller 2018). For NATO to remain a central pillar of American national security thinking, the Alliance will most likely have to consider how to strategically engage with China's global presence. While China does not seem to pose a direct military threat to most NATO allies, closer attention needs to be dedicated to the Chinese expansionism and its broader strategic consequences. NATO's new Strategic Concept recognizes China as an emerging global challenge with increasing military, economic, and technological power and is Washington's main geo-political competitor in the long run. To keep the US interested in NATO, and by extension in European security, NATO might be exposed to the ensuing task of addressing the question of a raising role of China and to prevent closer Sino-Russian alignment. As an official from the US State Department related, on China, NATO will likely focus on those aspects which have a clear security nexus (e. g. cyber, 5G) (Interview with Senior Official, US State Department, 2020, Washington DC). It might prove challenging to forge a common NATO policies on China, yet the Alliance, operating on a consensus-based decision-making procedure, has experience with overcoming major discords among its members using footnotes in its documents, such as the conundrum of complicated relations among Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, or North Macedonia.

EU'S GEOPOLITICAL DILEMMAS IN A SETTING OF COMPETITIVE MULTIPOLARITY

In the case of the EU, defining the central elements of a grand strategy for international peace and prosperity is likely to constitute one of the organisation's most important geopolitical dilemmas in the 21st century. Traditionally, the EU was perceived to have embraced the approach 'normative power Europe' (Manners 2002) in its foreign policy and vision for international security, notwithstanding the controversies around this term (Hamilton 2008: 43; see also Steglich 2021)[2]. Specialist literature argues that the EU has pursued 'a distinctive European grand strategy and a positive agenda for world politics', different than that of other great powers, and had a rather non-interventionist role in providing global security and social justice given its focus on facilitating the bottom-up emergence of procedures,

processes and implementation plans (Biscop 2019: 145). The question is, however, whether the EU pursued a non-interventionary approach in international politics by refraining from power politics – which involves exerting agency to refrain from intervening – or was unable to do otherwise? Lack of capabilities and consensus has often impeded the EU to take greater responsibility in the world.

One future normative predicament of the future EU global strategy will likely be finding a way to achieve multipolar stability (Martill and ten Brinke 2019) while simultaneously avoiding great power competition. One possibility to escape this dilemma is to seek to 'shift arenas of international relations from power-based outcomes to rule-based outcomes' (Drezner 2009: 65). Promoting great power *cooperation* would imply a strategy of relationship-building, inclusion, engagement and interdependence with all great powers, while simultaneously building incentives and conditionality for them not to defect from international cooperative regimes and multilateral systems. Exclusion of any great power would be hazardous, as it would prompt the excluded power to ally with other actors and engage in counterbalancing, which is per default a less cooperative strategy.

If the EU envisions to become a collective security actor and be perceived as such by the international community, the EU needs to pursue a 'power Europe' agenda and become a pole of power in international politics. The concept of *co-relational power* can help answering the question of how this could be achieved in the field of security, without entering the spiral of great power competition. In a recent book focusing on boundaries and European security, Kamil Zwolski (2018) pleads that international federalism and functionalism theories could be useful for studying contemporary dilemmas of European security, maintaining that there is a continuity between federalism and functionalism and the more recent research programmes of Europe as a 'power/global actor' and European security governance, respectively. Functionalism (Mitrany 1966) was a precursor of the European security governance agenda. Functionalism is underpinned by a process-oriented logic, it is needs-driven and based on flexibility, and thus, linked to an understanding of positive peace (non-zero sum). Through processes of spill-over, 'security without boundaries' and a 'progressive view of human development' (Zwolski 2018) can be achieved.

In a context of perpetual changes in the strategic environment, 'genuine multipolarity' (Kagan 1998) and great power competition, international organisations such as NATO and the EU are facing new geopolitical dilemmas: how to develop a grand strategy that ensures progressivity in global affairs? In this article, progressive grand strategy is understood as a strategy that is collective and evolutionary stable, in the sense that it remains stable over time and leads progressively to a stabilisation of the multilateral security order, improvement of human security and global advancement. For conceptualising the underpinnings of an evolutionary stable grand strategy, we propose the concept of *co-relational power*.

A STARTING POINT FOR A PROGRESSIVE GRAND STRATEGY: CO-RELATIONAL POWER

One shortcoming of traditional grand theories (realism, liberalism or constructivism) to explain predicaments in the Euro-Atlantic security policy is their normative and thus prescriptive nature. In order to enable international stability, realists prescribe the balance of power; liberalists predicate the promotion of cooperation and liberal values, while constructivists focus on meanings (Zwolski 2018). The end of American hegemony and retreat from the global order, demonstrated by the US gradual withdrawal from several international agreements and conflicts (e.g. Syria and Afghanistan), can be attributed to a realist paradigm. During the Trump mandate,

realist underpinnings of the American grand strategy were also indicated by the American disengagement from the international rules-based, multilateral system (and return to bilateralism). Diminishing American primacy creates a vacuum in the international system, with novel disruptions and geopolitical shifts emerging (Mérand 2020). Against the background of competitive multipolarity, accompanied by an inward-looking US, this paper assumes that security organisations, such as NATO and the EU, will seek to become important players as 'building blocks' of regional or global orders (Mearsheimer 2019).The concept of power is central to 21st century strategies of peace, security and evolutionary stable international order, however, the traditional understanding of power needs to be re-considered to better grasp the role that multilateral security organisations can assume in the international order. Our proposed concept of *co-relational power* seeks to address these limitations by integrating three levels of power struggles: international, national and daily life (Richmond 2017: 637). Co-relational power can lead to a progressive grand strategy in the case of security organisations such as NATO and the EU. Developing own progressive grand strategies, based on an asymptotic logic of evolutionary stability, could eventually lead to finding common grounds and arriving at the same destination. An asymptotic logic of evolutionary, multipolar stability at the grand strategic level of international organisations means similar positionality towards great and emerging powers, embodied in the proposed paradigm of co-relational power, to avoid friction and enable a convergence around a common trajectory.[3] Notwithstanding, this should not be equated with the EU and NATO developing the same progressive grand strategy.

At a conceptual level, *co-relational power* transcends the Weberian notion of power understood as 'power over' something or someone in the sense of domination, to a notion of co-relational power, 'power with', in which power is horizontally performed in processes of action and acting. 'Power with' stems from relationships, interactions and cooperation, at different levels of interaction and governance. It builds on Foucault's philosophy of power, inspired by the Kantian, Nietzschean and surprisingly Machiavellian (Paolucci *et al.* 2005), paradigms of thought. Foucault argues that 'power in the substantive sense, *Ie pouvoir*, doesn't exist' (Foucault cited in Gordon 1980, pp. 236-237). It follows that 'power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society' (Ibid). This type of strategic relationship is central to the co-relational concept of power. Subjective manifestations of power allow us to transcend the traditional understanding of power as domination (power of A over B) to a concept of positive power, which has a multiplicity effect (*power with*) rather than exclusionary (zero sum). In a multi-polar world order, 'positive' power is rooted in relationships and cooperation at inter-organisational, inter-agency, inter-government and inter-personal level. Positive power might help overcoming the 'paradox between peace and power' (Richmond 2017: 637). It can have multiple sources of legitimacy, including stemming from regulatory power and core competences in new domains such as such as unmanned and cyber technologies, autonomous robotics or artificial intelligence (Csernatoni 2019).

At institutional-organisational level, positive, *co-relational power* (power with), could correspond to a type of deliberative democratic security governance (Pollack 2005: 357) in which actors are involved in a way or another in decision-making, e. g. in the form of common declarations, parliamentary hearings or international cooperative agreements. A co-relational type of power would not *impose* agency, but rather *enable*, by sustaining the conditions permitting the emergence of local agency, knowledge and power. Capabilities become thus a premise for this type of enabling and 'empowering' power. Contrasting Foucault's thoughts, which claim that power should not be equated with the exercise of agency[4], co-relational power is *not* antithetical with agency and leadership, quite the opposite, it requires competent leadership with diplomatic abilities and a solution-oriented vision for global affairs.

In sum, there are three pivotal elements that relate to the concept of co-relationality: (i) capabilities to enable and empower; (ii) relations, cooperation and interactions among players; and (iii) leadership as a source of positive constraint towards progressive visions of the international order. While the theoretical elaboration of these elements can be the subject of another paper, for the parsimony of the current analysis, we now proceed with the discussion of the practical application of our proposed conceptual approach, around the concept of 'positive', co-relational power for the two security organisations examined in this article, NATO and the EU.

STRENGTHENING THE RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER: ADAPTATION AND POWER

Not only capabilities, but also relations, interactions and cooperation with partners and allies can feed into new sources of power and legitimacy. Future NATO and EU efforts at strengthening the rules-based order might depend on the capacity to develop adequate competencies and on the correspondent budget allocations for investments in international peace and security, as well as on how efficient mechanisms on the peace-security-defence-space continuum will be operationalised and linked. In this context, the US role, the meaning of strategic autonomy and the implications of crises such as Brexit or COVID-19, on both EU and NATO, necessitate closer discussion. In the following two sub-sections we discuss how the EU, respectively NATO, have responded and adapted to some of these (and other) anomalous sequences in the international order, and how these processes relate to the proposed concept of *co-relational power*.

NATO ADAPTATION

NATO faces its own internal challenges, which test the organisation's purpose and cohesion. Despite the absence of a clear existential threat in the post-Cold War security environment until February 2022[5], converging national security interests, a strong sense of community and US leadership have kept NATO together (Jakobsen and Ringsmose 2018: 38). However, cohesion of the already 73-year-old Alliance based on liberal-democratic values has been eroding due to the twin-crises of democracy and leadership (Lute and Burns 2019). Recent democratic backsliding in several member states pose challenges to both the EU and NATO, yet only the EU has the tools to address the authoritarian tendencies under the current leadership in Poland and Hungary. Even though NATO included non-democratic members from its onset, the recent rise of illiberal democracies is particularly worrisome as the Alliance does not have the tools to address challenges coming from within its members. The very logic of collective defence action and consensual decision-making is undermined by the variety of threats affecting NATO member countries in different ways. While NATO's cornerstone of the right of collective self-defence has been its clear mission statement elaborated in Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty of 1949, the Alliance has since become a complex politico-military community seeking to shape the wider international order. NATO has evolved from a single purpose alliance (collective defence of its member countries' territory) to a multi-purpose security institution: it is simultaneously a collective defence organisation, a crisis management tool and a coordinator of partner relationships (Williams 2018).

The 2017-2021 absence of traditionally strong American presidential leadership within NATO was unprecedented, raising questions about NATO's political health. The White House rhetoric and ambivalence during the Trump mandate about NATO's value to US security undermined NATO's cohesion and created doubts about the US

commitment to defend its NATO allies. This has been coupled with US criticism of unfair burden-sharing and a transactional approach towards America's traditional partners. On the other hand, US commitments to its European allies remain strong, as the European Deterrence Initiative and the deployment of further US troops on the Alliance's Eastern flank demonstrate. While coalition building and alliances have become again one of the pillars of the US foreign policy under Joe Biden, the return of the great power competition shifts the US attention away from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region.

While NATO (and the US in particular) does not discourage the EU's initiatives for more robust European defence union and investments into EU capabilities, provided that these would complement and not duplicate or compete with NATO's existing structures and capabilities, the alliance membership itself has failed to generate the political will in European capitals to spend more on defence. However, this has changed with the war in Ukraine, with more NATO members reaching, and even surpassing, the 2 percent defence spending pledge. Paradoxically, even though the US has been consistently asking the European countries to do more to correct the transatlantic bargain, the US defence industry usually opposed the EU's ideas for how to do it.

At times, Washington has been concerned about the EU's strategic autonomy narrative and, eventually, greater military integration. The EU must manage misperceptions of its new defence investment tools, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), European Defence Fund (EDF) or Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD), especially to dismiss the US claims about the EU's protectionism. Washington has already taken countermeasures to secure the position of American defence contractors on the EU market as it aims to subsidize US weapons sales to former Eastern bloc countries that still operate Soviet equipment through its new European Recapitalization Incentive Program (Mehta and Sprenger 2019). The US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear accord, climate change negotiations, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Open Skies Treaty were yet another demonstration of strained transatlantic relations. Importantly, the Trump Administration has been viewing the EU as an economic competitor rather than a partner (Lute and Burns 2019: 29). This has changed with the mandate of Joe Biden, who is a known transatlanticist and adept of a rules-based international order.

From a military perspective, there will be no viable alternative to NATO, or a US-less NATO as long as Europe is not able to defend itself – and the EU-led collective defence is yet still far from materialising (Kunertova 2021). Institutions in general are easier and cheaper to keep and adapt, rather than establish new ones (Wallander 2000). In the event of the US retreat from its commitments to defend its European partners – e.g., similar to Trump's blitz withdrawal decision of one third of the US troops in Germany in 2020 – improving the military capabilities of European countries would require much greater political and financial will than spending 2 per cent on defence (for which national governments are not prepared, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic aftermath) and extending France's nuclear capabilities to provide extended deterrence on the European continent given that the UK has left the EU, not mentioning the need to replicate NATO's integrated command structure.

Brexit can mean a major turning point for the EU, but not so much for NATO itself. On the one hand, Brexit would result in less defence capabilities and expertise for the EU. On the other hand, the importance of NATO would grow as after Brexit, 80 percent of NATO's defence expenditure, as well as its three out of four battalions in Eastern Europe, will come from non-EU members. The UK would step up its efforts in NATO to demonstrate its commitment to security in Europe and use the Alliance as a platform for international cooperation and power projection. At the same time, the UK may become less valuable to the US since it would no longer be able to use

that channel to influence EU security and defence policy from the inside and its capacity to play the role of strategic bridge between the EU and the US will be reduced. Its bridging function would depend on how vital its 'special relationship' with the US will continue to be, given that the UK was protecting NATO from duplicative and competing EU initiatives since the St Malo declaration in 1998. The EU, even in terms of future defence union, would need allies and a continuing strong transatlantic partnership that has come with the US extended nuclear deterrent against the nuclear-armed Russia. Perhaps Lord Ismay's depiction of the Alliance's purpose need to be reformulated as to keep Russians out, Americans in, and – in resonance with the proposed concept of co-relational power – 'Europeans engaged'.

EU ADAPTATION

'Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus' were the introductory words from Robert Kagan's book 2003 *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* in relation to the EU and US foreign policy. While Europe resembled a 'political paradise' similar to the order of eternal peace proposed by Immanuel Kant, the US was the only superpower to invest a great amount of money in defence and which could have been at war on many fronts at the same time in almost any environment in a 'violent, anarchic Hobbesian world' (Turner 2003). While these contrasting worldviews largely preserved, crises and anomalous sequences in the international security order, such as the war in Ukraine, Brexit, transformations in transatlantic relations, the rise of China or the COVID-19 global pandemic, have shown that Europe's responsibilities have changed. Multiple crises and the urgent need for future stability impelled on the EU to adapt. Adaptation is demonstrated by an increasing concern with actorness, strategy and capacity, both perceived to be necessary to promote the core values of EU foreign policy identity and strategy, i. e. democracy, human rights and the rule of law, but also the EU interests.

EU adaptation in response to endogenous and exogenous crises materialised in a series of advancements in the CSDP/CFSP. A series of notable developments followed gradually after the Brexit referendum in June 2016: the adoption of PESCO, EDF and CARD, the planned extension of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) to non-executive missions, the adoption of a more ambitious global strategy with the new European institutions that commenced their mandate in 2019, and a strategic implementation plan that will complement the EU Strategic Compass (Interview with European Parliament representative in Brussels, 2019). In addition, debates on strategic autonomy have intensified, also in response to uncertainty and non-linearities in the US policy. These debates have revealed some crucial challenges related to this objective, such as its unclear meaning, despite the mentions to this term in the EU Global Strategy paper of 2016. For example, does strategic autonomy mean the ability to act independently from other actors (powers), does it imply the EU to act independently from its member states or does it involve unanimity of EU27? Depending on where in Europe one is, if in Germany, France, Denmark, Romania, Ireland or other European state, strategic autonomy can have different meanings, making it thus provoking to operationalise this term. Assuming that strategic autonomy would involve the development of independent capacities entreats further questions: for example, whether new initiatives such as the European Intervention Initiative, outside the EU structure would constitute an addition to independent capacity or whether, for example, strategic autonomy would involve energy autonomy, as well. A consolidated vision of strategic autonomy requires answers to these (and other) questions, and foremost defining the identity that the EU wants to project in the world. The Strategic Compass adopted in 2020 and the assessment of the potential for convergence (Baciu 2020) might constitute an important step towards a clearer operationalisation of future cooperation. From a regime complexity

perspective, strategic autonomy could theoretically take the form of institutional overlap or merger between CSDP and NATO (Hofmann 2009; Howorth 2017) or an Europeanisation of NATO (Rynning 2019), and while elaborating on these endeavours might beseech the length of another article, we now turn to discuss the implications relating to the proposed concept of co-relational power. The next section discusses the Foucauldian-based concept of *co-relational power* applying it to the two security organisations and beacons the three main findings that can be traced from this analysis.

DISCUSSION: CO-RELATIONAL POWER AND EU'S FUTURE STRATEGIC RELATION WITH NATO

In the conceptual section of this article we argued that there are three sources of *co-relational power*: (i) capabilities to enable and empower; (ii) relations, cooperation and interactions among players; and (iii) leadership as a source of positive constraint towards progressive visions of the international order.

First, capabilities and the capacity to act constitute crucial elements of the proposed notion of co-relational power. Drawing on a Foucauldian philosophy of thought, power does not equate with an institution, a structure, or a certain force, but it is a rather a matter of perception. It follows that, to be perceived as a power requires first defining and operationalising how an organisation needs to act and behave, at internal and global level. While the EU has been doing significant work in promoting multi-domain cooperation (single market, CSDP missions, technology, environment, etc.) it is not being unequivocally perceived as a global power, particularly in the military domain. One main impediment is the lack of unity in security and foreign policy. Even close partners and important CSDP/CFSP policy entrepreneurs, such as France and Germany, often do not agree – for example, regarding the production of a European advanced drone, whether it shall be armed or unarmed. If France and Germany (and Spain) will jointly develop a weapon system, for example the Future Combat Air System or a next-generation tank, it remains to be seen whether the EU will be perceived as a global security actor and how these new endogenously-developed capabilities will be integrated into its overall global strategy. In the last years, we have seen a synergy of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism in European security and defence, in the form of EDF or at operational level, in the form of the Athena mechanism (Terpan 2015) or the European Peace Facility, and there have been debates on complementing decision making in security and foreign policy with qualified majority voting procedures. As recent interviews by one of the authors with EU officials in Brussels in 2019 revealed, QMV has been on the table of the new HRVP Josep Borrell and his mandate might see an increased debate in this direction. While the CSDP/CFSP are constitutionally intergovernmental and likely to largely remain so, any substantive change would most likely require a treaty change – which, Brexit or the war in Ukraine might set incentives for – or a creative institutional mechanism.

An evolutionary stable regional or global order based on a conceptual understanding of co-relational power would imply *evolving* from a reactive organisation, which has to adapt to the developments in the international environment into an actor with a collective strategy and *agency* in global affairs. How to embody agency without entering the spiral of power competition was the research question guiding this article. Especially for multilateral security organisations, such as the EU and NATO, their agency as 'building blocks of order' can stem from the cumulative acceptance by member states and partners, and thus legitimacy. For both NATO and the EU, 'power with' needs first to work at internal level, i.e. power with the member states. This would involve a detailed assessment of the member states' potential in

mediation, peace, defence, diplomacy and problem-solving in the world. For example, for mediating in the conflict in Syria, the embassy of Romania, which at the time of the high escalations in the region was among the very few EU/NATO countries which had an ambassador and consular services in Damascus, and had traditionally a good relationship with Syrian governments (Baciu and Friede 2020), could be used as a diplomatic channel of negotiation. Sharing the burden, e.g. in defence spending and capabilities development, and enabling all member states (and their citizens, via citizens dialogues) to participate and have a stake, while managing their expectations, will be key for the future of 'power with' endeavours. This might imply exploring a role-player model (see Baciu and Ewers Peters forthcoming) based on an adequate level of responsibility and power, to enable member states to become part of a collective strategy and normative order. The ultimate goal of both organizations is the same: protection of liberal-democratic values, strengthening free institutions, and promoting friendly international relations. In the case of NATO, this underlying purpose enshrined in its foundation treaty, the "why" of the organisation, sometimes gets side-lined in the narrow discussions about how to keep the alliance's military-technological edge in the changing international balance of power and where the scope of NATO's mandate ends vis-à-vis the EU (Tardy 2019).

To translate into a 'positive' agenda in international affairs and a globally resilient strategy, a vision of progressive power would require, for both NATO and the EU, more complex and sophisticated checks and balances to strengthen democracy and to ensure that legitimacy is built in the context of global justice. This might be achieved through a fair distribution of resources and empowerment of local communities and implies a departure from a fixed architecture to broader conceptions of intervention such as mobility, network, transversality, as well as mutual and entangled intervention (top down and bottom up) (Richmond 2017: 637). A resilient strategy here refers to a strategy that enables international security organisations to uphold their values and contribute to a stabilisation of the multilateral world order. As mentioned elsewhere in this article, we do not call for NATO and the EU to embrace a common grand strategy. A grand strategy underpinned by the concept of co-relational power (*power with*) would involve a degree of commonality and convergence pertaining to the three pivotal elements of co-relational power, i. e. capabilities, relations and leadership. The latter two are canvassed in the following.

Relations, partnerships, cooperation and interactions were argued to be a *second* major source of 'co-relational' power. To become more relevant, multilateral security institutions might need to have a stronger engagement with big powers, such as the US or China, but also with each other as well as to other security organisations such as the UN, African Union or OSCE. Paradoxically, 'saving' NATO (see Deutch et al. 1999) might translate into strengthening the European Union. The evidence presented in this article invites us to anticipate that EU-NATO cooperation is likely to be enhanced by future common declarations and strategic papers. The cooperation between the two organisations in defence and security reached unprecedented levels since 2016 as the two organisations adopted the Joint Declaration to address the poor state of practical security and defence cooperation within Europe. This has already changed the status quo in NATO-EU relations as their respective organisational cultures have been adapting to the new NATO-EU cooperation 2.0. One notable example of the reinforced cooperation between the two organisations is constituted by the practical attempts at synchronising their respective lists of capability priorities and defence planning processes as well as the joint work program on military mobility in Europe.

Yet complementarity-competition dynamics continue to characterise NATO-EU relations as they still need to overcome one philosophical and one political factor: the Eurocentric-Atlanticist divide and the tensions between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus (Sloan 2016: 320), which prevent more comprehensive information sharing between

NATO and the EU. Due to the steep increase in the number and frequency of contacts, both NATO and EU staffs now face numerous practical issues. The underlying problem remains: it is difficult to get a sense of what the other organisation is doing, identify complementary efforts, and implement them. Effective operational output requires more than high-profile declarations of intent or multiplication of cooperative defence initiatives. More tangible results should include acquiring superior defence capabilities, making better use of states' contributions, and assuring interoperability across all domains.

The *third* dimension in our proposed concept of co-relational power is leadership. Based on our analysis we predict that overcoming future challenges in NATO-EU cooperation will require a good deal of political will in the capitals, notably France and Germany, since defence and security still pertain to the intergovernmental sphere of decision-making. The question does not stand (yet) as to which institutional structures, NATO or the EU, the European countries should prioritise in order to strengthen European security. Both NATO and the EU, together with the OSCE, continue to be the core security providers in Europe. Thus, the EU's ambition to improve its actorness in security and defence on the European continent should not result in deepening estrangement from NATO. Without a strong partnership between NATO and the EU, and presumably, a strong European leadership in NATO (premised by proportional capability contributions) to account for the vacuum left by the US ambivalence, there would be no winners, only losers.

CONCLUSION. EVOLUTIONARY STABLE GLOBAL ORDERS

The main novel contribution of this article was the notion of *co-relational power* and its practical application for order stability. Hitherto, little was known about the conceptualisation of the concept of co-relational power underpinned by a Foucauldian philosophy of thought. In this article, *co-relational power* was substantively understood as non-zero sum (positive) power, i.e. the power of one actor is not detrimental to the power of another actor, but it is instead a sum of cooperative interactions between actors. Applying empirical evidence from two cases of intergovernmental security organisations, NATO and the EU, this research revealed that co-relational power requires convergence pertaining to *relations*, *leadership* and *capabilities*. This normatively enables exponential stability through concurrence towards asymptotic trajectories and equilibrium points. Being exponentially stable, a grand strategy based on this logic can allow the two organisations to contribute to the stabilisation of the multilateral security order without entering the spiral of competition. If the two organisations incorporate this logic into their processes of adaptation, this might help them to address geopolitical dilemmas. This article has argued that, a future geopolitical dilemma of both the EU and NATO will be linked to defining a grand strategy that can enable evolutionary stable peace and multipolar stability. Strengthening the rules-based international order will depend not only on the fallout from the Ukraine war and Washington's European strategy, but also on the operationalisation of the vision of strategic autonomy, the post-Brexit Europe and post-pandemic level of ambition both in the EU and NATO. Overall, *co-relational power* might be conducive to increased linearity and evolutionary equilibria in organisations' agency, with anticipated reinforcing effects on system resilience (upholding values) and system effectiveness (ability to ensure compliance and maintain power).

This research has uncovered a series of new puzzles, which should be addressed by future research. First, future studies could investigate the precise positionality dynamics between intergovernmental security organisations such as the EU and NATO and great powers, for example, the US, but also BRICS. Specifically, future

work could address whether and how the once-again US-led NATO cooperating with great powers would add to a vision of multipolar stable global order. Second, while, in this analysis we revealed dynamics of Europeanisation within NATO, we do not argue for an international order based on NATO and the EU without US involvement, which would be, indeed, improbable. If divisions within NATO and the EU are overcome, this might be propitious for the evolution of an exponentially stable regional order, at a minimum. Third, while this article has demonstrated the usefulness of *co-relational power* (understood as positive, non-zero sum) for an evolutionary stable global order, one limitation pertains to the application of this concept from a supra-national perspective. Both NATO and the EU are frameworks that imply boundaries and non-members are treated differently than members. Future studies could explore whether and how great power consensus can be achieved, which was beyond the scope of this article. The article focused instead on the conditions that enable intergovernmental organisations to contribute to stabilising the multilateral security order. Therefore, more research is needed to better understand what a progressive international order substantively means given that ordering in itself might be equated with an illiberal process (Porter 2020).

To conclude, 'learning the language of power' might mean learning the language of 'positive' power in global affairs. As this article has demonstrated, positive power stems from autonomous capabilities (including military) and interactions with members states, on the side, and with global players and organisations, on the other side, to forge a multiplicity effect from cooperative relationships and advance an evolutionary stable global order in an era of competitive multipolarity.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ENDNOTES

[1] In this article, intergovernmental organisations, multilateral security organisations and international organisations are sometimes used intermittently.

[2] For a detailed discussion on the various aspects of the vision of 'normative power Europe', see Dan Hamilton, 2008. The EU ability to exert global projection and promote stability was to a considerable extent thanks to US security guarantee in Europe; this while a 'regulatory norm-setting' has been part of the US grand strategy and vision since a long time.

[3] For an in-depth discussion of the underpinnings of asymptotic stability, see Bukowski, M. and J. Miekisz (2004).

[4] Colin Gordon and Michel Foucault (eds), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972 - 1977* (Vintage Books, New York 1980).

[5] Despite the recent Russian military incursions in Ukraine, the seriousness of the Russian threat is not being perceived in the same way across the allied countries.

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