THE RHETORIC OF RELATIONAL POWER IN NATO'S EVOLUTION FROM COMMUNITY TO PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract: Historically, discussions about the notion of power have typically dealt with various forms of government, war and diplomacy, military structure and operations etc. Power has traditionally been viewed as an attribute of large social entities and/or of the relations between or inside them.
The power relations theories that inform this paper constitute the basic framework for the analysis of the conceptual changes experienced by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization during its journey to becoming a formal international institution. In this study, I argue that the rhetoric of NATO's evolution from community to partnership in the early days of the organization's crystallization as an Alliance is one of the most relevant loci for the discursive analysis of institutionalized expressions of relational power.

Keywords: NATO, rhetoric, power relations, community, partnership

Introduction

For the military organization of the present, the notion of power has always been the buzzword that has kept the institution coherent and its individual elements linked under the umbrella of common objectives and shared values. During its strategic evolution between 1949 and 1966, the rhetoric of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was sprinkled with discursive references to the notions of community, interdependence and partnership. The tripartite relation between these concepts fundaments the analytical framework which fosters investigative forays into the dynamics of power relations and their relevance for the developments that laid the basis of what has become the most important security organization of the 21st century.

No other definition of power as related to the context of the military, seen a collective entity, seems to be more illustrative for its relational dimension than Talcott Parsons's (1963). His elaboration of the concept of power ties it to authority, consensus and the pursuit of collective goals. According to his explanation, power "is generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals" (p. 237). Relational power therefore is linked to the institutionalization of authority and "conceived as a generalized medium of mobilizing commitments or obligation for effective collective action" (Parsons, 1963, p. 250). Following the same line of thought, Hannah Arendt (1970) considers relational power the ability of the humans to act in concert: "Power is never the property of the individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (p. 44). A correlation of these definitions results in the identification of several theoretical frameworks of relational power that have nonetheless been conceptualized numerous times under various forms in the existing literature dealing with theories of power. The most prevalent concepts associated with relational power are the notions of authority, agency and structure.

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Frameworks of relational power

As early as 1947, Max Weber's *A Theory of Social and Economic Organization* approaches power in direct relation to the concepts of authority and rule, defining it as a factor of domination, legitimately activated by formal authority. Although Weber's definition is rooted in his interests related to the mechanisms of bureaucracy and organizational thinking, it might be easily inserted within a military framework, especially when the institution of the armed forces is perceived in its formal authoritative dimension. Weber's discussion of power in the context of organization and its structures is continued by Robert Dahl (1961), who locates the concept of power within the boundaries of a community. In the context of our theorization of power, the military can be seen as one of the most coherent social communities, defined, in line with Elisheva Sadan's view (1997), as "a single unit, ordered according to a uniform principle, possessing a continuity of time and place, from which the power stems" (p. 34).

Steven Lukes (1977) offers an explicit formulation of the linkage between power and structure, on the premise that the relational dimension of power is indelibly knotted into human agency. He notes:

> Power presupposes human agency. To use the vocabulary of power (and its cognates) in application to social relationships is to speak of human agents separately or together, in groups or organizations, through actions or inactions, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others. (p. 6)

NATO is not only an alliance among states, but also a highly organized international institution. From this approach results the view that, institutionally, NATO is a collection of agents whose actions (or inactions, as Lukes puts it) definitely impact on the actors involved in the interactions, where power, authority, control, and influence are some of the leveraging elements underpinning the dynamics of inter and intra relations and, implicitly, of institutional communication.

Any discussion that acknowledges the importance of social actors and recognizes the different varieties of relationships that configure their interaction must also take into account the importance of the dialectical connection between agency and structure. Drawing from Anthony Giddens's (1979) duality of structure, I can put forward a structuration theory of power as related to the military institution, where the concept of power is central to a circuit involving agency (individual actors or entities), rules (regulated interactions between actors, founded on values, principles and ideologies) and resources. In constructing this model, I shall start form the premise that power is essentially a structural concept, which organizes the central aspects of the functioning arrangement of any social system. The military makes no exception. The structural properties of power are typically reified as the crystallization, institutionalization, or stabilization of interaction patterns. Power becomes an interactive process which defines the dynamics of the relations established between the actors involved in the organization, and at the same time, functions as one of its structural attributes.

The view of power as a mode of interaction unquestionably encompasses agency, rules and resources. Against the setting of the current investigation that situates the concept of power within the notional boundaries of the military as an organization, some clarifications of this structural triangle must be brought.

First and foremost, agency in the military is the legitimate entity that acts as a stabilizer of power across a specific field of action. From a relational perspective, it is fundamentally contingent upon the subordination of the constitutive individual parts. The variable achievement of this subordination is regularly marked by the implication of power with a dialectic of

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resistance, stemming from the realistic view that power necessarily involves reciprocity "because it is always constituted within a relational universe of meaning" (Clegg, 1989, p. 189). One document that locates the agency dimension assumed by NATO is the *Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) Study #46*, published in 1974, after the NPG Ministers, assembled in Ankara 1973, had tasked the Permanent Representatives of the NPG with the initiation of a study on the implications of communicating NATO's intentions to the enemy, to other countries and to the public. The document created the framework which gives NATO the possibility – and not the obligation – to communicate its intention of using nuclear weapons before actually engaging in it. The essential issues identified in the study are indicative of NATO's commitment to act as a legitimate power which assumes the agency of communicating its intentions to the other actors involved in a nuclear scenario.

Secondly, in the classical Webberian sense, the whole concept of power and its subordinator value directs the analysis towards a tap-root reaching back into the notion of discipline and hierarchy, two fundamental pillars that regulate organizational structure. Materializations of institutionalized forms of power are reinforced by a number of laws, regulations and circulars, that control and manage all actions and behavior of the military, and anchor command in terms of rank and authority, allowing it to flow vertically between different reference groups (those to which one would like to belong and to which one is identified) within the hierarchy. Perceived from the standpoint of the resources involved in its materialization, power manifests as a form of social control based on relevant socially valued yet unequally distributed resources, such as status, position, rank, authority, expertise or affiliation to a dominant group. Discipline and hierarchical structure are indispensable relation-anchoring pillars of the armed forces institution because they allow an immediate recognition of the agency – holder of power. Acknowledging the hierarchical organization translates as an official recognition of the agent who is the holder of power, and who exercises power in an individualized and exclusive manner.

David Calleo (1987) has written that, in assuming NATO leadership, the United States established a hierarchy in NATO and a global *Pax Americana* with NATO at its centerpiece. In forging transatlantic security, the assumed task of the U.S. was to ensure European security, by assisting the long-term effort of the Europeans to build a coherent identity framework that would be allied to and receptive to American leadership. The hierarchical power attributed to the United States in the context of this endeavor was materialized by the post-war presence of American troops on the territory on Western Europe, tasked with the mission of defending this area against the Soviet threat. Through the application of the Marshall Plan, the U.S. was also to provide economic and military aid that would create enduring democratic political systems supported by a strong Western European defense. It basically meant that the Unites States would be the counter-power to balance Soviet power while Western Europe recuperated from its war-inflicted losses.

Sources of relational power rhetoric

Thinking about power in unitary terms to which all theorization must be subjected is a too limited approach to be taken by anyone who investigates the notion of power from the perspective of its multi-layered structure. Against such a view, this section will argue for several dimensions of relational power, analyzed in terms of their dynamics and relevance in the context of the discursive and conceptual transformations NATO has experienced during its transition from community to partnership.

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The relational dimension of power is regarded as one of the most significant aspects of organizational power. To some extent, it might find itself embedded in other various definition ascribed to power in terms of referent power, expert power or legitimate power, at least in that the dynamics of these diverse manifestations inherently presuppose some kind of relationing. Albeit this blurred theoretical delineation, I will define the relational dimension of power as a separate concept, first and foremost because it appears to be constructed based on the imbrication of multiple layers, of which notions such as "unity", "community", "dependence", "interdependence", "partnership" or "exchange" emerge as the most noteworthy.

One of the fundamental political axioms of the Cold War was that a united community of North Atlantic nations would be a strong organization tasked with promoting and preserving peace. In an address to the Congress on June 12, 1950, Dean Acheson, the United States Secretary of Defense during the Truman administration and one of the key players in the Creation of the North Atlantic Organization, remarked: "In our unity, there is strength. And in our strength, there is unity" (Department of State Bulletin, 1950, p. 931). His axiomatic reasoning is a clear indication of the Alliance's first envisaged objectives, focusing on creating a community organized around the basic principle of power.

The importance of the relational dimension of power as a pillar for the interactions that typify the dynamics of a group resides in the acknowledgement of the organic character of a community, defined as an evolving entity composed of individuals who lead a common existence under some organized form of shared social and political principles. A community acquires the dimension of identity only based on the dynamics of the inherent relations that manifest inside it. What made the North Atlantic Community a successful concept was the fact that it did not emerge through force (as opposed to the Soviet-dominated community), but based on shared values, cultural legacy and consensus. In 1951, referring to the importance and nature of the relations established within NATO, Acheson observes that "The North Atlantic Treaty is far more than a defensive arrangement. It is an affirmation of the moral and spiritual values which we hold in common" (Department of State Bulletin, 1950, p. 527). The power of the relations that were built among nations in the Alliance has proven to be more far-reaching in its implications, testifying for the value and significance of community-based actions and shared intentions. Besides acting as a unified entity toward collective defense, the North Atlantic Community has been engaged in pursuing an active role in the attainment of political and social objectives of NATO. One of the early acknowledgements of this phenomenon can be traced back in the final declarations of the North Atlantic Council Meeting in February 1952 in Lisbon:

> The partnership between the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty is not just for defense alone but for enduring progress. The members of the Council look forward to the time when the main energies of their association can be less concentrated on defense and more fully devoted to cooperation in other fields, for the well-being of their peoples and for the advancement of human progress. (para. 5)

The symbiotic bond between NATO and the concept of an Atlantic Community was in time transformed into a synonymous relationship. NATO's raison d'être was to defend the Atlantic Community, a term that conjured up a group of nations with shared values, interests and objectives and whose power exponentially grows as it is fueled by the strength of the relations that are being created and nurtured within the organization.

Against this backdrop, social exchange and dependence are two interrelated concepts at the intersection of which we can find, once again, the notion of power. Dependence and interdependence constitute the departing point in analyzing power, in that exchange cannot occur

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without these two relations, and parties could not operate and obtain an outcome in isolation. John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (2008) observe that dependence exists when an actor's outcome are contingent not only on his own behavior, but also on what others do simultaneously or/and in response to the actor's behavior. What makes the dependence dimension of power relevant in this context is its inconsistent dynamics. The mechanism of dependence varies across relationships and settings and is considered to be one of the most resourceful aspects of power dynamics in organizations.

Similar to any other relational structure, NATO, founded its early conceptions on the sense of dependence, grounding it on principles such as outcome alternatives and outcome value. The main impetus that drove the very notion of alliance, back in the days when the Washington Treaty was signed, in 1949, and even before that, during the Washington Talks, the previous year, was the belief that better outcomes are more likely to be obtained by joining a network than in isolation. By the same token, outcome value is what leads different actors to attach values or priorities to the various effects of a given relationship. The greater the value attached to the outcome, the greater the power. And since outcome alternatives and outcome values are considered essential for the collective security of the modern world, NATO has imposed itself as one of the greatest and most powerful organizations of the present and the highest institutional embodiment of the Western humanist concepts of unity.

Although it clearly emerged as a reaction to the Soviet threat in the context of postwar dynamics (Soviet Union was the "villain" who was at that time perceived as holding the ideological power that needed counteraction), the rationale behind the creation of a North Atlantic Community was elucidated by the need to preserve unity and promote the higher ideals of Western civilization. In the mid-1950, there was a shift in conception which, in John Foster Dulles's words, placed more emphasis on "cooperation *for* something rather than merely *against* something" (Department of State Bulletin, 1956, p. 708). Dulles's use of the indefinite pronoun may refer to a quite ambiguous task, but in the context in which he gave the address at the annual luncheon for the Associated Press in April 1953, the notion prompted directly to a change in conception which was basically a smooth transition from dependence to interdependence. In his speech, the U.S. Secretary of State referred to NATO's earlier potential to act as a counteraction to communism being complemented by the newly-envisaged task of reflecting the spirit of Western civilization. This serves as an example of one of the earliest manifestations of NATO's relational power, put at use in an effort to heal disunity in Western Europe. The goal of promoting relations of interdependence between the nations of Western Europe was justified by the need for organizations such as NATO to act as permanent guardians of long-range peace and not only provide emergency ties in times of crisis. The search for permanency in transatlantic relations tilted the balance towards the intra-Western political purposes which were no longer tied to the Soviet threat. This new focus would urge the transformation of a military alliance into a stronger political reality. To this purpose, as stipulated in the *Report of the Committee of Three on Nonmilitary Cooperation in NATO* (1956), member countries were encouraged "to make consultation in NATO an integral part of the making of national policy" (para. 44). With the example of the Suez crisis in mind, allied leaders were prompted to combat the acrimonious forces that might manifest in organizations such as the Alliance. In truth, as Ian Thomas (1997) points out, "the intent of this rhetoric was to restrain the members of NATO form embarking on future military adventures without consulting the other allies, and especially the United States" (p. 59). And in doing so, the rhetoric of community that underpinned the essence of the relations within the Alliance became deeply anchored in and justified by institutional practice.

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Political implications aside, this new orientation in NATO's strategy stands witness to the importance of relational power and the dynamics of dependence and interdependence. Ties within the Alliance became stronger and the concept of interdependence also implied that the member countries shared the responsibilities of interaction. This vision made the need for joint action become imperative, stemming from the axiomatic rationale that the security of North America and Western Europe were inseparably linked. Ideologically, the notion carried further meaning, and helped give more contour to the U.S.-Soviet polarization. It embedded a contrastive appreciation of the two antagonistic powers: while the Soviets and their allies had attained strength and unity through dependence and domination, NATO pursued the same objective through interdependence.

Nonetheless, one downside of the interdependence theory can be observed in situations where the shared power may acquire subjective relevance for the actors involved. This aspect becomes critical because it implies the cognitive factor of power relationships. Since actors often lack complete information on the dimension of interdependence or available resources, the use of power is based not only on the objective conditions of the relationship but also, and more importantly, on the judgement actors make about these conditions. The manifestation of interdependence is the framework in which different actors interpret and synthetize the wide array of conditions underlying power relations. This argument is relevant in the context of the decision-sharing principle NATO decisions are taken on, which offers participants a proper context for their subjective, interest-driven assessment of different issues at stake, in virtue of the dynamics of their status and access to resources within the organization. One particularly illustrative example of a situation where actors used their subjective evaluation of position and made independent judgements about the power in use could be found in the dynamics of the discussions during the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Athens of May 1962, when the United States and the United Kingdom, as the most powerful members of the Alliance, called in the non-nuclear Allies for consultations regarding the role of nuclear weapons and the procedures relating to their usage. The Final Communiqué reads:

> So that all member states may play their full part in consultation on nuclear defence policy, it has been decided to set up special procedures which will enable all members of the Alliance to exchange information concerning the role of nuclear weapons in NATO defence. (para. 6)

In this particular case, negotiating interpretations of the policies associated with the use of nuclear weapons was an exercise of power dynamics with a positive outcome. Reaching a common ground during the Athens Talks created a relational framework which provided a basis for the actors' perception of their own power, of the likelihood of other actors' making use of theirs and for the common evaluation and selection of multiple tactical and strategic options. This example is indicative of the assumption that power-interdependence theory is grounded on dual-role parameters, which are simultaneously a source of integration and of conflict. The negotiation of the dimension of interdependence ultimately determines whether parties wish to be part or stay in a given relationship, if they can change it by discourse or action or if they consciously accept to position themselves to a certain distance in the relationship.

The concept of power as exchange is another dimension embedded in the relational approach. Drawing on Kenneth Boulding's (1989) theory, we may assert that in so far as it defines formal or contractual agreement and reciprocity, the relations established at the level of the Alliance are based on exchange. In the simple form of trade, Boulding informs, "A gives B something and B gives A something" (p. 27). But exchange goes beyond the mere definition that

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relates it to trade, and the wider conceptualization of exchange involves other mechanisms such as discursive negotiations, conversation and debates, reciprocal services etc.

In what concerns the power exchanges at the level of the North Atlantic Organization, the notion of exchange is an integrative positive-sum relationship, in which all parties benefit while having the feeling of belonging to a structured mechanism that not only asks but also gives back. One application of the earlier discussed notion of interdependence as a dimension of power dynamics can be located in the concept of burden share. The concept translated into task sharing in defense, greater specialization of the functions of different members of the Alliance and a division of labor to overcome the rising costs and complexities of the armament. In his first message to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), on February 15, 1961, President J.F. Kennedy referred to the importance of burden sharing, stressing the need for the allies to "establish principles…on which burden-sharing can be based" (Department of State Bulletin, 1961, p. 333). This is an indication of the political endorsement of the concept of interdependence, whose applicability invoked the extension of the American global leadership in partnership with the European allies. From this point on, interdependence became the conceptual and practical linkage between economic, political and military policies. Even more so, this relation suggested that the United States would attempt to use trade and arms agreements as bargaining chips to win allied support for the burden sharing in Europe and Asia. In its crudest form, the promotion of this link allowed Washington to exert its sanctional power while fashioning a framework of incentives and penalties aimed at convincing the allies to embrace its vision and actions. Such a strategy was discursively motivated by the belief that an economic, political and military partnership between Western Europe and the US "will further shift the world balance of power to the side of freedom" (Kennedy, 1962, p.71).

This tripartite integration was the pillar of the transition from interdependence to partnership, anchoring the relational power of the Alliance even deeper within an increasingly dynamic framework. When applied at the intersection between economic, political and military interests, the concept of interdependence not only designates this tendency, but also helps promote its growth. The idea of partnership envisioned a partial decline in the relative responsibility and implicitly influence of the United States, translated as a cognizant encouragement by a major world power of the growth and expansion of a co-equal power. The strategic concept of flexible response adopted in 1967 encouraged the European allies to bring increased contributions to the defense of their territories, thus placing their participation within the Alliance under the conceptual umbrella of the term partnership.

The rhetoric of partnership employed the already validated wartime language of total war, which called for mobilization of total resources in order to maintain an unstable peace. In 1962, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, William Tyler, remarks: "What we are talking about, after all, is not how to feather our nests, but how to mobilize our total resources in the interest of survival and prosperity" (Department of State Bulletin, 1962, p. 1008). This conception demanded great and small nations to unite in common cause, in virtue of relations of common interests and cooperation. It was a call that carried all the implications and benefits of partnership. It related back to Kennedy's 1961 address that called for a new chapter in the evolution of the Atlantic community.

Kennedy's promotion of an Atlantic Partnership was not new, and it was interpreted as being a revival of the pluralist vision of the postwar world envisaged by George Kennan's late 1940s dumbbell concept which promoted the view that an economic and political alliance is stronger if it has been agreed to by partners of equal weight on both sides. It was a clear

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indication that the United States was willing to share power among the members of an alliance assembled around the core notion of equal rights and responsibilities. Such a vision was to announce the long-enduring a partnership between great and smaller powers united in common cause – collective security.

Conclusion

In 1948, the Washington Talks announced an intention to create a powerful Alliance to serve as the main organizational manifestation of a unified Western response to the Soviet threat. In the following years, until 1966, the principal aim of the organization's leaders and their speech was to build an Atlantic Community based on a transatlantic partnership. The essence of the relational power embedded in the very notion of a Transatlantic Alliance is expressed and explained throughout NATO's journey from community to interdependence and finally to the strong partnership it represents today.

The early history of the Alliance set the basis for most of its more lasting conceptions, among which the notions of community, interdependence and partnership have proven the most enduring. The role of rhetoric in the early years of NATO was particularly essential so as to galvanize the efforts of different state actors, which at the time had more particular than general interests, under the umbrella of shared common values. Localizing the discursive expression of the power relations that have solidified the interaction between the members of the Alliance in the period between 1949 and 1966 is instrumental in analyzing the function and nature of NATO over time. The results of the analysis of the rhetoric in this period induce the conclusion that discourse was powerful and effective enough so as to forge an abstract promise of partnership into what was to become, in Robert Keohane's (1988) words, "the most successful multilateral alliance in modern history" (p. 169). The relations established in this early period of NATO's history were the foundation of the power mechanisms that have propelled the Alliance forward throughout its often wrangled journey, helping it adapt, grow and ultimately endure.

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