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NATO AND THE CSTO IN AFGHANISTAN AND SYRIA:

A NEO-REALIST AND CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In deze masterproef worden de drijfveren voor de betrokkenheid van de Noord-Atlantische Verdragsorganisatie (NAVO) en de Collectieve Veiligheidsverdragsorganisatie (CVVO) in Afghanistan en Syrië na 2001 geanalyseerd. Die analyse wordt uitgevoerd vanuit twee verschillende theoretische perspectieven: het neorealisme en het constructivisme. Uit de twee casestudies blijkt dat de betrokkenheid van de NAVO in de twee conflicten door zowel neorealistische als constructivistische drijfveren werd bepaald: de nood om het (voort)bestaan van het bondgenootschap te rechtvaardigen en om een collectieve identiteit te construeren, interne cohesie en Rusland, die de structuur van het internationale systeem tracht te wijzigen. Die drijfveren hebben de NAVO aangezet tot actieve militaire betrokkenheid in Afghanistan en weinig betrokkenheid in Syrië. Aan de andere kant ontbreekt het de CVVO aan effectiviteit, omdat de autoritaire lidstaten veel waarde hechten aan de principes van non-interventie en territoriale integriteit. Dat verklaart de passiviteit van de CVVO in Afghanistan en Syrië. Hoewel eerder onderzoek stelt dat de CVVO werd opgericht om de NAVO en het Westen te *counteren*, toont deze thesis echter aan dat dat niet het geval is.

Keywords: NATO, CSTO, neo-realism, constructivism, Afghanistan, Syria, regional security organisation

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List of abbreviations

ANDSF	Afghan National Defence and Security Forces
CAR	Central Asian Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRRF	Collective Rapid Reaction Force
CST	Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EU	European Union
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PfP	Partnership for Peace
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SCC	Syrian Constitutional Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States

Foreword

For the last couple of months, I have been working intensively on this master's thesis on regional security governance. What was once an unexplored domain for me, regional security governance has become a new interest of mine thanks to this thesis. I would not have been able to write this thesis without the following people.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my promotor dr. Antonio Calcara who provided me with useful and constructive feedback and eased my mind whenever I faced a problem. In addition to his profound knowledge of the topic, his kindness and relaxedness helped me to bring this thesis to a good end.

I would also like to thank my parents, who have given me life and love throughout the years, and my brothers. My family encouraged me to study the Master of International Relations and Diplomacy and to believe in myself. For that, I will always be grateful.

A great effort, such as this master's thesis, does not come without some relaxation from time to time. Thus, I would like to thank my friends that cleared my hand whenever it was full with NATO and the CSTO. Thanks to Marie, who often accompanied me in the library to work on our thesis together, after which we enjoyed some drinks in the sun. Also thank you to Margaux, Sieben, Rosalie, Dinara, Inne, and Stijn, who have been there for me during this year.

My last thanks go to the professors that taught me Russian at the Catholic University of Leuven during my bachelor's degree. They have further developed my interest and fascination for Russia and the former Soviet Union. In war times like these, I still believe that both diplomacy and insights into each other's culture can create a common language of peace. My ultimate professional goal is to speak that language of peace and eventually improve relations between Russia and the West.

1. Introduction

In January 2022, peacekeepers of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) were deployed to Kazakhstan at the request of Kazakh president Tokayev to help maintain order during anti-government mass protests against high energy prices (Vaal, 2022). After six days, the CSTO mission was said to be completed successfully and the troops had started to withdraw. This marks the very first time since the establishment of the CSTO in 1992 that the regional security organisation has deployed troops to a member state, albeit during a relatively short period of intervention (MackInnon, 2022). Also another regional security organisation is currently gaining widespread attention: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Long-standing tensions between NATO and Russia have culminated on 24 February 2022, when Russia launched a large-scale invasion in Ukraine as a reaction to NATO expansion towards the east. For years, Moscow has warned that integrating Ukraine into the Alliance would be crossing a red line, and thus, Russia wants a guarantee that Ukraine would never enter NATO (Bilefsky et al., 2022). In the following months, long-time neutral states Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership, upsetting Russia even more (Berlinger, 2022). Thus, as this master's thesis will examine both regional security organisations, this research contains a high relevance against the background of current events.

In order to deal with a wide variety of security threats, states develop regional security governance arrangements, i.e. a set of rules aiming at coordination, management, and regulation of security dossiers in a particular region (Adler & Greve, 2009). In the discipline of International Relations (IR), the realist and constructivist IR theories provide, among others, two different explanations for the creation of regional security governance. The realist school of thought is informed by balance-of-power mechanisms and constructivism by security communities. The balance-of-power theory argues that states create a regional security governance arrangement to prevent others from becoming the hegemon in a region, which would disturb the equilibrium of power in a specific region. According to constructivist theories, on the other hand, a group of states can have a sense of belonging to the same community because of a collective identity with shared norms, values, habits, etc. Moreover, if these states face the same security threats, the states have an incentive to create a regional security governance arrangement, thus creating a security community based on their collective identity (Adler & Barnett, 1998; Deutsch et al., 1957). However, there is not always a clear-cut distinction between these two different perspectives, as the creation and practices of regional

security organisations sometimes appear to be driven by both realist and constructivist factors (Adler & Greve, 2009).

Since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent power shift, the global security environment has drastically changed with regional security organisations gaining more importance. From a military point of view, the collapse of the Soviet Union changed the existing bipolar world order into a unipolar world dominated by the United States (US). However, the increasing influence of China and emerging countries, such as Brazil and India, and the decreasing legitimacy of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), have challenged that unipolar world order (Weiffen et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). In addition to the changed polarity structure, Buzan & Wæver (2003, p. 19) consider the decolonisation process as another factor that explains the increasing scope of regional security organisations. After the Cold War, these newly independent states could organise themselves more freely in security matters because of the changed intensity and nature of the great powers' penetration into regional security governance arrangements. At the same time, the security agenda of regional security organisations changed in nature and scope, including now also a wide range of non-military and transnational issues (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp. 17-18). According to Wallander (2000), the adaptability of a regional security organisation to a changed security environment depends on both its general assets (e.g. decision-making and implementation procedures) and its specific assets (e.g. procedures of assurance, mediation, conflict prevention, and cooperative intervention). In addition to these differences in a regional security organisation's nature, also (mis)perceptions of the external world explain differences in the practices between regional security organisations (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020, p. 287).

Logically, regional security organisations are usually involved in security matters within their own geographical space. But which driving factors account for their involvement outside their geographical space? This master's thesis aims to shed light on which driving factors explain the extent of NATO's and the CSTO's involvement outside their sphere of influence. Previous research has predominantly focused on NATO, while little academic research outside the post-Soviet space has been conducted on the CSTO. Only Guliyev & Gawrich (2020) have made a systematic comparison between NATO's and CSTO's reactions to secessionist conflicts in the post-Soviet space, but no one has done a comparative analysis of their involvement in conflicts outside the post-Soviet space. Thus, comparing the involvement of both organisations in conflicts out of the post-Soviet space is interesting. I will study the cases of Afghanistan and

Syria because no comparative analysis of these cases has been conducted yet. From the theoretical point of view, I will apply both the neo-realist and the constructivist perspective in both case studies.

This leads to the following research question: what are the driving factors for the extent of NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria after 2001? Both neo-realist and constructivist factors are expected to account for their involvement in the conflicts, and thus this research aims to compare the policy of NATO and CSTO in the two cases of Afghanistan and Syria from a neo-realist and constructivist perspective.

It is crucial to note that no comparative analysis between NATO and the CSTO in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria has been made thus far. Moreover, an explicit application of neo-realism and constructivism to the CSTO is also absent in the existing literature. Thus, this master's thesis aspires to fill these theoretical gaps, as it proceeds as follows. The introduction of this master's thesis has introduced the topic and the objective of this thesis. Second, I will present an overview of the two regional security organisations – NATO and the CSTO. Third, the theoretical framework of this thesis, i.e. neo-realism and constructivism, will be provided. The fourth and fifth sections, the comparative analyses, will examine the involvement of the two regional security organisations in the two cases of Afghanistan and Syria. Finally, the conclusion discusses the findings and limitations of this thesis and suggests some avenues for future research.

2. Regional security organisations: NATO and CSTO

Before comparing the driving factors for both organisations' extent of involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, an overview of previous literature on NATO and the CSTO will be given.

2.1 The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization[1] was founded in 1949 to deal with the external communist threat coming from the Soviet Union (Herd et al., 2013, p. 17). In addition to the provision of military assistance to member states, were NATO's collective defence to be threatened, the military alliance also guarantees peace and security among its democratic member states. During the Cold War, NATO raised its organisational capacity by developing procedures for effective policymaking, military planning, and transparent information-sharing to favour mutual trust among member states (Wallander, 2000). Not only its high levels of organisational capacity and internal cohesion but also the high levels of political and economic development of NATO member states allowed NATO to become one of the most effective regional security organisations (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020; Kirchner & Dominguez, 2013, p. 175).

Essentially, NATO is a collective defence organisation, expounded in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Article 5 is based on Article 51 of the UN Charter, which acknowledges states' inherent right of individual or collective self-defence. When one NATO member is attacked, the armed attack is considered as an attack against all members, and thus, the treaty enables all member states to assist the attacked state to restore peace and security, including with the use of force (NATO, 1949). Such an armed reaction must be necessary, in that non-forceful measures have proven insufficient, and proportional to the initial attack (Schmitt, 2019, p. 115). Article 5 has been crucial for NATO members in East and Central Europe to guarantee their security and territorial integrity under the US nuclear umbrella against the USSR and Russia (Herd & Kriendler, 2013, p. 6). Since the terror attacks of 9/11, Article 5 holds for both states and non-state actors, such as terrorist organisations, and takes into account the unpredictability

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[1] In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization originally consisted of "Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States" (Herd et al., 2013, p. 17). Since then new members have joined NATO, such as "Greece and Turkey (1952), Germany (1955), Spain (1982), Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020)" (NATO, 2020a, para. 1).

of an attack, which has sparked a debate on NATO's right of anticipatory self-defence (Schmitt, 2019, pp. 107-109). As such, measures of collective defence and deterrence against extra-regional aggressors are taken. Whereas collective defence organisations act against aggressors, collective security organisations include and integrate potential aggressors to maintain peace and security among member states (Weiffen et al., 2020, p. 6). For example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is a collective security organisation, since it includes all NATO member states and post-Soviet states.

Despite the Alliance's effective policymaking, the existence of NATO became to be questioned after the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union since it initially intended to deal with the Soviet threat (Herd & Kriendler, 2013, p. 7; Lippert, 2019, p. 50). Thus, the Alliance needed to adapt to the post-Soviet security environment to maintain its relevance and legitimacy (Holmberg, 2011; Lippert, 2019, p. 50). Relying on its organisational capabilities developed during the Cold War, NATO has undertaken several actions to deal with post-Soviet security challenges, such as weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons, international terrorism, unstable regimes in the Middle East, the power shift to East Asia, and cyber-attacks (Herd et al., 2013, p. 31; Herd & Kriendler, 2013, p. 10; Wallander, 2000). First, NATO started to focus more on the non-military dimension by installing diplomatic ties with post-Soviet states through the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace[2] (PfP) programme (Wallander, 2000). The former serves as a multilateral political forum, whereas the latter deals with military practices, such as common military exercises, education and training, and military cooperation with partner countries, including all the former Soviet states (Pop, 2009; Wallander, 2000). Additionally, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was established to improve relations and enhance cooperation between NATO and Russia (Herd et al., 2013, p. 29). Second, the post-Cold War policy of NATO was characterised by enlargement to East and Central Europe, as the Cold War era indicates that integration reduces security risks (Wallander, 2000, p. 728). Gibler & Sewell (2006, p. 429) argue that the eastward expansion favoured the survival of the democracy in the new member states, but that the enlargement is perceived as a threat by Russia, stimulating an increase in military capacity and a centralisation of authority. Moreover, Guliyev & Gawrich (2020) argue that "membership aspirations of countries involved in conflicts was a driving factor for NATO's response" (p. 298) to outbreaks of war, as the Alliance provided support for aspiring members Georgia and Ukraine but not for Armenia

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[2] The Partnership for Peace programme include all post-Soviet states, Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Sweden, and Switzerland (NATO, 2020b).

during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan. Third, NATO expanded its operational area to manage and prevent crises, and stabilise post-conflict situations outside NATO's geographical space, motivated by their threat to the security organisation's own security (Herd et al., 2013). Crisis management and prevention operations range "from combat and peacekeeping, to training and logistics support, to surveillance and humanitarian relief in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Mediterranean, off the Horn of Africa and in Somalia" (Kirchner & Dominguez, 2013, p. 166).

The trans-Atlantic collective defence organisation has faced several challenges over the years. A major challenge for NATO was the exhaustive military operation in Afghanistan, which aimed to ensure political stability with the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and develop local Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) (Lindley-French, 2013, p. 120). However, due to NATO's low-quality performance and campaign planning, a lack of cooperation with key civilian actors, and a lack of internal cohesion, NATO has failed to create a stable and sustainable end-state after its definite withdrawal in 2021 (Lindley-French, 2013; Politi & Manson, 2021). In addition, NATO's ambition was to implement a Western democratic political model in Afghan traditional society, but the Alliance ignored the fact that the Soviet Union tried in vain to reform Afghan society in the 1980s (Vestenskov & Wille-Jørgensen, 2014, p. 137). Another challenge for NATO are the internal disagreements between the US and the other member states. For example, there have been internal disagreements about burden-sharing: the US accuses the other members of not spending enough on defence (Herd et al., 2013, p. 31). Lindley-French (2013) states that "the political ambition of many NATO allies seemed to be *[sic]* to do *just enough* to keep the U.S. paying for much of Europe's parochial security and defense" (p. 121). European allies also doubt US commitment to NATO, especially under US President Donald Trump, as the US has shifted its policy towards the Indo-Pacific region (Herd et al., 2013, p. 31; Schmitt, 2019). Consequently, European leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, have expressed the urgency for Europe to guarantee its own security because Europe can no longer solely rely on the US (Schnaufer II, 2021). Another factor that undermines the internal cohesion of NATO is member state Turkey. Chappell & Terlikowski (2012) list several instances when Turkey threatened to or effectively blocked consensus when its interests were not respected. The appointment of the new Secretary-General, the Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen, was initially opposed by Turkey because he was compromised by

the cartoon controversy[3] in Denmark. However, Turkey conceded in the end. Turkey has also been strongly opposed to a close EU-NATO partnership, as agreed on in the Berlin Plus agreement in 2002, since Cyprus, which is not recognised by Turkey, is an EU member. More recently, Turkey has opposed NATO membership for Finland and Sweden, unless the two Scandinavian states would extradite a group of alleged Kurdish terrorists (Yackley, 2022). Other challenges include NATO's image to the international community as an extension of US foreign policy, and different threat perceptions among the members (Herd et al., 2013, p. 31). Additionally, Holmberg (2011) suggests that NATO should take into account the values and opinions of local actors during interventions in a non-member state instead of mainly focusing on the efficiency of the operation to increase the organisation's legitimacy.

2.2 The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)

After the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact[4] no longer existed, hence the absence of a regional security organisation in the Commonwealth of Independent States[5] (CIS). In 1992, the Collective Security Treaty[6] (CST) was signed to foster unity among the post-Soviet states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, so the original purpose of the treaty was not to create a new collective security organisation, hence the CST's initial term of five years, but to face security and identity challenges in the region (Gleason & Dunay, 2022). Regional identity challenges relate to the fact that the newly independent post-Soviet states have always been under the rule of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, thus lacking any experience of political, economic and social independence and autonomous governance (Ballegeer, 2018). Moreover, the CST enabled Russia to secure its backyard against other states which tried to benefit from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite their shared Article 4 of collective defence in their founding treaties, Ballegeer (2018, p. 91) argues that it is crucial to note that the CSTO is not a

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[3] The then Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen defended the freedom of speech of the cartoonist who depicted the Prophet Muhammed with a bomb. Additionally, Denmark allowed a Kurdish TV station to broadcast in the country, which was opposed by Turkey. These events caused Turkey to initially block Rasmussen's appointment of NATO Secretary General (Chappell & Terlikowksi, 2012, p. 146).

[4] The Warsaw Pact (1955-1991) was a military alliance of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, encompassing Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. Some member states withdrew during this period (US Department of State, n.d.).

[5] The Commonwealth of Independent States (°1991) is a regional organisation in the post-Soviet space which aims for economic, military and political integration. Currently, member states include "Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan" (Czerewacz-Filipowicz, 2017, p. 23). Although Turkmenistan and Ukraine were founding members in 1991, these states never ratified the treaty, and thus never became formal members of the organisation. Georgia withdrew from the organisation after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 (Czerewacz-Filipowicz, 2017, pp. 19-23).

[6] The Collective Security Treaty was initially signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but later withdrawn from by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan (Pop, 2009, p. 282).

"Warsaw Pact 2.0". Whereas the Warsaw Pact was driven by a unifying communist ideology and by member states that had a high level of self-confidence and belief in their own capabilities, the CST was established out of necessity to react to the crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, from one view, the CST member states also have a common vision, which contains the authoritarian nature of their regimes, the principles of non-intervention and respect for territorial sovereignty.

Although the CST did not intend to create a permanent security organisation, the CST formed the base of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which was founded in 2002. Current CSTO member states include "Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan" (Weitz, 2018, p. xi). According to many scholars, it is no coincidence that the CSTO was established in 2002: it was a reaction to the US-NATO operation in Afghanistan, which increased Western presence in the whole Central Asian region (Jackson, 2014, pp. 181-182). The CSTO strives to deal with transnational security challenges, such as drug trafficking, religious extremism, illegal migration, and ethnic unrest (Kornilenko, 2020; Weitz, 2018, p. xi) and to maintain order and regional security by using military means, such as the organisation's Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) (Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1533; Weitz, 2018, p. xi). To balance Russia to some extent, the Western-oriented regional organisation GUAM was founded in 1997 by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova[7] (Allison, 2004, pp. 475-477). GUAM aimed to develop security strategies, including military and technical cooperation, and even a partnership with NATO. In practice, GUAM served mainly as a consultation forum and talks on military-technical cooperation were held bilaterally instead of within the multilateral framework of GUAM. Nevertheless, the regional grouping succeeded in achieving multilateral cooperation in energy and defence coordination matters (Allison, 2004, p. 477).

Although the CSTO's main mission is to provide security for its members, the CSTO's passivity towards the 2010 Kyrgyz crisis and the 2016 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan illustrates the organisation's lack of legitimacy and effectivity in decision- and policymaking, even when the security of a member state was at risk (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020; Kropatcheva, 2016; Norberg, 2013, p. 35). Previous research has shed light on why the CSTO lacks legitimacy and efficiency. First, the organisational capacity of the CSTO is low, indicated

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[7] Between 1999 and 2002, GUAM was joined by Uzbekistan, changing the name to GUUAM. Uzbekistan left the organisation due to scepticism about multilateralism and the lack of any concrete security governance arrangements (Allison, 2004, p. 475).

by its low budget and personnel shortage (Allison, 2004, pp. 471; Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020, p. 298). Second, low levels of political and economic development of the member states are unfavourable for the organisation's efficiency (Kirchner & Dominguez, 2013, p. 174). Third, the authoritarian nature of the region's regimes and distrust among the member states inhibit security cooperation, since each member state looks after its own national interests (Kirchner & Dominguez, 2013, pp. 172-173; Kropatcheva, 2016, pp. 1547-1548; Norberg, 2013, p. 35). Consequently, the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs are considered of paramount importance by the CSTO member states, explaining their restraint to intervene in other member states' domestic affairs (Kirchner & Dominguez, 2013, pp. 175-176). Fourth, it is argued that the CSTO merely legitimises Russian military actions, and thus increases Russian influence in the region, undermining the organisation's legitimacy on the international level (Norberg, 2013, p. 34; Weitz, 2018, p. xii). Finally, key players in the Central Asian region, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, are absent from the CSTO (Kornilenko, 2020).

Despite these shortcomings, the CSTO has the potential to become a crucial player in the region. Kornilenko (2020) argues that CSTO would be able to cooperate with the UN and even with the EU if it made a shift from military to humanitarian operations. Moreover, the CSTO's knowledge and experience in the Central Asian region make it a useful partner for NATO to interact with, but that is only possible when relations between NATO and Russia improve (Norberg, 2013, p. 36; Weitz, 2018, p. xiii). Kropatcheva (2016) states that Russia's desire for unilateralism – through "geopolitical power projection, constraining/binding others, and legitimating its regional role vis-à-vis other external actors" (p. 1545) – undermines the organisation's legitimacy, hence the need for a stronger multilateral framework.

3. Theoretical framework: neo-realism and constructivism

This master's thesis applies the neo-realist and constructivist theories to the driving factors for NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan and Syria after 2001. This section will first give a brief account of neo-realism in general, after which the theory will be applied to NATO and the CSTO. Then, the same will be done for constructivism. It should be mentioned that none of the theories on their own can explain the organisations' practices by themselves, but should be complemented with each other to construct a complete overview. Moreover, other IR theories, such as liberalism and institutionalism, could be chosen, but this thesis has chosen

neo-realism and constructivism since they provide two distinct and conceptually cohesive explanations for the degree of involvement of NATO and the CSTO in Afghanistan and Syria.

3.1 Neo-realism

Before elaborating on neo-realism, an overview of realism in general is provided. The realist theory consists of four key assumptions, which are accepted by all the different schools within realism: statism, anarchy in the international system, survival, and self-help (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014, p. 107; Hyde-Price, 2016). First, statism relates to the idea that unitary states are the main actors in the international system and act rationally to guarantee their power and security in the anarchic international system. According to Levy (2002), in such an international system there is an "absence of a legitimate governmental authority to regulate disputes and enforce agreements between states or other actors" (pp. 352-353). Because there is no overarching authority over the states, the survival of a state is always at risk, and thus, the survival of the state is the most important national interest of every state, either achieved through power or security maximisation. By relying on themselves and their own resources, states can guarantee their survival and engage in the practice of self-help.

Classical realists, such as Morgenthau, argue that human nature and the domestic organisation of states mainly account for the importance of accumulating power in international politics, and explain instances of fear, war, and competition among states (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014, p. 104; Hyde-Price, 2016, p. 44). On the other hand, neo-realists claim that the structure of the international system explains international politics. Waltz (1979) has developed a threefold definition of an international structure, consisting of the organising principle, the functions of differentiated units, and the distribution of capabilities. For one, he postulates that anarchy is the organising principle of the structure since an overarching authority remains absent. Second, states are considered as like units, hence their functional equality. Third, whereas states are functionally equal, the distribution of capabilities among states is asymmetric, which determines the distribution of power in the international system. Thus, especially a change in the distribution of material power can alter the structure of the international system. For example, the decline of a great power can change a bipolar international system into a unipolar system. Although neo-realists agree that the structure of the international system explains states' behaviour, there is disagreement between defensive realists and offensive realists about whether states seek power or security. Both defensive and offensive realists share the

abovementioned realist assumptions, but they provide different explanations for great powers' behaviour. Defensive realists argue that states are security maximisers, in that they do not challenge the status quo as long as their own security is guaranteed (Levy, 2002, p. 354). To ensure their survival, states need a certain amount of power, but they do not aspire to maximise their relative power in order to become hegemons. Such power-maximising behaviour would create a security dilemma among states: the more one state invests in military means for defensive purposes, the more this military build-up will be perceived as a security threat by other states due to distrust among states. As a reaction, the other states will also increase their military expenses, which, paradoxically, leads to a cycle of insecurity: "one's state quest for security is often another state's source of insecurity" (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014, p. 109). On the other hand, offensive realists rather believe that states handle their own interests and are cautious of other states' actions. Thus, in this system of constant competition, states are prepared to take every opportunity to maximise their power at the expense of other states in order to ensure their survival, thus challenging the status quo (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014, pp. 105-106).

Concerning cooperation, realists argue that the problem of relative gains impedes cooperation between states since one state is concerned that the other state could gain more from the cooperation, thus gaining power (Müller, 2002, p. 371). However, realists argue that states can overcome the problem of relative gains by forming alliances and coalitions, only if two or more states face a common security threat (Ratti, 2009, pp. 411-412). As such, defensive realists draw on the balance of power theory, which posits that cooperation is possible when a group of states "build up their arms and form alliances to balance against those who constitute the primary threats to their interests and particularly against any state which threatens to secure a hegemonic position over the system" (Levy, 2002, pp. 354-355). For example, NATO was established to balance the Soviets, who responded in their turn by forming the Warsaw Pact to balance NATO. Thus, both military alliances aimed to prevent the other from acquiring a hegemonic status in the European continent (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014, p. 101). Alternatively, states can also enter a hegemon-led alliance to guarantee their security, i.e. bandwagoning, thus gaining from cooperation with the hegemon (Müller, 2002, p. 371).

3.1.1 NATO: a neo-realist perspective

This section applies the neo-realist theory to the development of NATO in the context of a changing international structure since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the bipolar international security structure with the US and the Soviet Union competing against each other gave West European countries the incentive to form NATO with the US as hegemon to face the common threat of the Soviet Union. The two rivalling blocs conducted a containment policy to prevent the other from expanding its sphere of influence and achieving a hegemonic status. Thus, neo-realists argue that the existence of NATO is justified by the bipolar international structure (Herd & Kriendler, 2013, pp. 4-5).

However, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union changed the bipolar international structure into a US-dominated unipolar world order. Whereas the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist, NATO was kept in place despite the absence of a common external security threat. This sparked a debate on whether NATO should cease to exist or not. Neo-realists argued that the absence of a common security threat makes balancing unnecessary, and thus would eventually cause the break-up or irrelevance of the Alliance (Ratti, 2009, p. 412). Yet, NATO continued to exist because the Alliance's survival was in the best interest of the most powerful member states since it helped to maximise their power and influence in the global unipolar world order (Hyde-Price, 2016; Spassov, 2014). For the US, NATO serves as a platform to maintain good relations with US allies in Europe and to consolidate US leadership, while NATO guarantees security and protection for the European member states (Spassov, 2014).

In his neo-realist analysis of NATO, Hyde-Price (2016) distinguishes two tendencies in the distribution of power in post-Cold War Europe: the continuing dominance of the US and the weakening transatlantic relations. First, he argues that the US considers NATO as an "important instrument with which it can exert influence in Europe, set limits to the emergence of an independent and autonomous EU security and defence policy and build alliances around American leadership for addressing shared security concerns" (p. 42). In addition, the changed international structure after the collapse of the Soviet Union gives the US and its allies the possibility to expand its influence in post-communist states and beyond without high costs and risks. According to this view, the Clinton administration took this possibility and developed a twofold power maximisation policy for NATO: first, NATO enlargement in post-communist East European states, and second, non-Article 5 military crisis management operations beyond NATO's geographical space. NATO enlargement to include former Soviet states and allies is

perceived by Moscow as a loss of influence and a disrupted balance of power, especially after the Bucharest summit of 2008, during which also Georgia and Ukraine were offered NATO membership (Ratti, 2009, p. 413). Hyde-Price (2016) states that not only NATO enlargement but also the crisis management operations outside NATO space have caused frictions since they are perceived as NATO's intention to alter the status quo. For example, NATO's mission in the Balkan during the 1990s has been considered by Russia as "an offensive military operation against a sovereign state" (Hyde-Price, 2016, p. 42). According to several academics, this twofold power maximisation policy has undermined NATO-Russia relations and has contributed to an unstable peace in Europe, exacerbated by aggressive Russian reactions to regain power and influence, such as the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic as independent, and the subsequent invasion in Ukraine in 2022 (Hopkins & Kramer, 2022; Sauer, 2016, p. 7). However, the re-emergence of Russia and the subsequent shifting power balance repurposed NATO because it provided an international structure, in which the collective defence under Article 5 against Russia became relevant again, and thus justified the existence and survival of NATO (Hyde-Price, 2016). Second, Hyde-Price (2016) observes weakening transatlantic relations between the US and its European allies. After the Cold War, not all NATO members were keen on the American aspirations to engage in crisis management operations beyond NATO territory and they attached more importance to the principle of collective defence under Article 5. For example, the war in Iraq in 2003 divided NATO into two camps with countries, such as Denmark, the United Kingdom (UK), Spain, and Portugal supporting the US invasion and others, such as France and Germany, opposing it. This reluctance by some European allies spurred aspirations to develop an autonomous European defence pillar: on the one hand, the US conceived this as a threat to US leadership in NATO, but on the other hand, a European defence pillar could enhance the burden-sharing problem.

In sum, neo-realism postulates that NATO has been shaped by structural factors of the international system, such as the decline and re-emergence of Russia. The post-Cold War era has shown that NATO's internal cohesion is weakened when a common security threat is absent and that cost-benefit analyses of powerful NATO member states have determined NATO's development (Hyde-Price, 2016). From a neo-realist perspective, I formulate the following hypothesis for NATO's involvement in the conflicts of Afghanistan and Syria after 2001: NATO is driven by its objectives to maintain its relative power in the anarchic international

system and to ensure the survival of the Alliance by facing a new common security threat, to become actively involved in Afghanistan and Syria (H1).

3.1.2 CSTO: a neo-realist perspective

In the IR literature, little attention has been devoted to an explicit application of IR theories to the CSTO. Thus, this section will explicitly apply the neo-realist theory to the CSTO, drawing on existing research. In general, neo-realism distinguishes two tendencies for the CSTO's existence: external and internal factors. Externally, it is often assumed that the CSTO was founded because of balance of power dynamics, namely to balance NATO and its enlargement (Greene, 2012, p. 9; Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020). After the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost its relative power in the international system, while NATO started expanding east towards the borders of Russia. By founding the CSTO in 2002, Russia sought to restore its sphere of influence and "to mark a new red line for Russia's vital interests and to counterbalance the second round of NATO enlargement" (Greene, 2012, p. 9). Moreover, the transformation of the CST into a formal organisation came after 9/11 and the subsequent Western arrival in Afghanistan, and thus aimed to balance the Western military presence in the region (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020, p. 290).

Internally, the CSTO is dominated by Russian hegemony, since Russia considers the CSTO as a foreign policy tool to pursue its interests, namely to exert power and influence in its direct neighbourhood and to balance NATO. On the other hand, the smaller CSTO states bandwagon with Russia for two reasons. First, they are afraid to lose sovereignty to Russia, and thus, the CSTO provides legitimacy for the survival of the state in the anarchic international system and of their authoritarian regime (Allison, 2004, p. 469; Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020, p. 290). Second, they profit from public goods, such as security and economic advantages, which the regional hegemon Russia provides to them (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020, p. 290). However, this does not mean that the other CSTO member states always support Russia's unilateral actions. In fact, except for Belarus, they rarely fully support Russia's actions, such as the Russo-Georgian War and the annexation of Crimea (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020). More recently, most Central Asian Republics (CARs) have remained silent on the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Sukhankin, 2022).

From a neo-realist perspective, the driving factors for CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan and Syria can be hypothesised as follows: the CSTO is driven by the bloc's objective to balance

Western military presence and Russia's aim to increase its influence through the CSTO, to become involved in the conflict in Afghanistan but not in Syria since Syria has never belonged to Russia's sphere of influence (H2).

3.2 Constructivism

During the Cold War, the study of IR was mainly dominated by realist and liberalist theories. Despite some differences, both theories are based on common assumptions: rational states are the main actors and act in their own interest in the anarchic international structure, which urges states to engage in self-help practices, and the interests and identities of states are exogenously determined (Mansbach & Taylor, 2018, pp. 27-28; Wendt, 1992, pp. 391-392). Dissatisfied with realist and liberalist accounts, a new IR theory, namely constructivism, emerged around the end of the Cold War. Constructivism argues that reality, including actors' identities and interests, is not exogenously given, which realists and liberalists claim, but socially constructed as a result of an ongoing intersubjective process of interaction between actors (Flockhart, 2016). During this social process, actors' interests, identities, norms, and beliefs evolve, thus also refuting the realist and liberal focus on the nondynamic structure of the international system (Mansbach & Taylor, 2018, p. 21). In this view, the socially constructed reality forms actors' perceptions, which determine actors' behaviour and interests in the international structure (Flockhart, 2016). Relatedly, this structure is not only defined in the material sense but also in the ideational sense, taking into account norms, rules, ideas, history, culture, and identity (Acharya, 2008, p. 73; Mansbach & Taylor, 2018, p. 21). Research by Wendt (1992) counters the argument that the self-help system is the result of the anarchic structure of the international system. In the following excerpt, Flockhart (2016) provides the constructivist definition of the self-help system based on Wendt's research:

> Self-help and power politics do not follow logically from anarchy because self-help is not a structural feature as suggested by Waltz (1979: 111), but an institution based on particular inter-subjective understandings about Self and Other that are reinforced through the practice of agents. This argument stresses, above all, the importance of shared knowledge: people act towards objects (including other people) on the basis of the meanings the object (or person) has for them. (p. 143)

Therefore, enemies are treated differently than friends since enemies are perceived as a security threat (Flockhart, 2016, p. 143). For example, the US will behave differently towards North Korea and the UK, both owning nuclear weapons, because the UK is a US ally, whereas North Korea is an enemy.

Constructivism postulates that a group of actors can constitute a collective identity, based on common ideational factors, which fosters a stable peace and can overcome the security dilemma (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Through shared symbols, norms, values, institutions, and myths, actors develop their collective identity (Barnett & Adler, 1998). A collective identity builds such trust among actors, that they will not fight each other with military means to resolve a conflict, but will use peaceful means (Barnett & Adler, 1998). This creates the base for a security community, which Deutsch et al. (1957) define as a community "in which there is real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way" (p. 5). Yet, Barnett & Adler (1998) identify some main concerns about a security community. First, although states in a security community no longer use military means, they can still settle their disputes through non-military means, such as economic or judicial means. Second, some states in the security community may not be able to uphold the collective identity of the community. For example, Poland ruled in 2021 that some EU laws were incompatible with Poland's constitution, thereby breaking away from the collective identity of the European Union (Henley & Rankin, 2021).

3.2.1 NATO: a constructivist perspective

This section depicts NATO from a constructivist perspective, providing an alternative explanation for the Alliance's existence to the above-given neo-realist account of NATO. From a constructivist point of view, NATO can be defined as "a specialized organization—the "military branch"—of the Euro-Atlantic or Western community of liberal-democratic and multilateralist values and norms" (Schimmelfennig, 1998, p. 198). As explained above, these values and norms construct a group's collective identity, which strengthens the incentive for cooperation. Flockhart (2016, pp. 143-144) finds that NATO's primary collective identity during the Cold War was constructed by a common security threat, i.e. the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, thus constituting a 'defence alliance identity'. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent removal of the shared security threat, the defence alliance went through an identity crisis, making the former collective 'defence alliance identity' difficult to uphold. Thus, NATO had to construct a new collective identity to justify its survival: the 'partner identity' with a focus on cooperative practices, such as partnerships, enlargement, and crisis management operations (Flockhart, 2016, p. 144). At the same time, NATO aimed to handle a broader range of security challenges originating from social, economic, and political conflicts, such as ethnic and territorial disputes (NATO, 1991). By 2010, NATO had developed

the narrative of a threefold identity, consisting of "a provider of collective defence, a socialising agent of democratic norms and an agent of multilateral [crisis management] operations" (Flockhart, 2016, p. 148). Therefore, it is argued that the survival of NATO after the Cold War was possible because of its easily adaptable collective identity based on a cohesive narrative of common values and democratic practices, and a sense of shared history and destiny (Flockhart, 2016; Sjursen, 2004; Williams & Neumann, 2000). Relatedly, Böller (2018, pp. 223-224) finds that NATO has faced difficulties in defining its collective identity after the Cold War because of various threat perceptions and opinions on NATO's core tasks. On the one hand, a member state's threat perception depends on, inter alia, historical experiences and geographical proximity to Russia. Thus, new Central and East European member states perceive Russia's threat as imminent, while others do not. On the other hand, when defining NATO, the Alliance balances between collective defence and collective security as its core tasks, although newer members prefer to focus on regional collective defence against Russia to global collective security operations (Böller, 2018). As such, Central and East European member states considered the Ukraine crisis in 2014 as an opportunity to make NATO a pure regional collective defence alliance again.

Although it is often proclaimed that the Alliance is based on democratic and liberal values, as stated in the preamble of the Alliance's founding document, the Washington Treaty of 1949, Sjursen (2004) rejects this notion of NATO as a democratic community since the Alliance prioritise security over democratic governance within the Alliance. This argument is enforced by the absence of a democratic mandate and a cosmopolitan law to justify NATO's practices. Thus, she refutes the assumption that NATO's alleged democratic collective identity strengthened democracy in Central and East European member states and postulates that values linked to shared experiences and history rather account for this political evolution in Central and Eastern Europe.

With regard to NATO's eastward enlargement, Schimmelfennig (1998) argues that Central and East European countries have sought NATO membership because they want to identify themselves with the West by sharing NATO's norms and values. At the same time, NATO's incentive to expand into Central and East Europe was the Alliance's objective to reinforce liberal democracy and multilateralism and to provide sustainable peace in the region. Crucial in this enlargement process has been the PfP programme, as it provides a platform to cooperate with aspiring member states and other partners, including all the post-Soviet states.

Consequently, NATO obtained the power to offer former communist countries a security community as an alternative to Russia, to the latter's great dissatisfaction (Williams & Neumann, 2000). NATO's evolution presented Russia with a policy dilemma between either tolerating or contesting NATO enlargement. Based on "fears of being overtaken by Western economic and political models, and its historical experience of military and political intervention" (Williams & Neumann, 2000, p. 386), Russia has perceived the enlargement as a security threat and thus has chosen the policy of contesting NATO enlargement to protect the country's self-constructed national interests.

Therefore, the constructivist theory can formulate the following hypothesis for the research question: NATO is driven by its objective to spread liberal norms and values and the need to construct a collective identity for the Alliance, to become actively involved in Afghanistan and Syria (H3).

3.2.2 CSTO: a constructivist perspective

Just as with the neo-realist analysis of the CSTO, research that explicitly applies the constructivist theory to the CSTO is scarce. Therefore, based on existing literature on the CSTO, this section will make constructivist elements of the organisation more explicit. From a constructivist perspective, the CSTO builds on the historical legacies of the Soviet Union and shared norms and values (Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020; Jackson, 2014; Nikitina, 2012), such as "priority to regime security, desire to preserve distinct political and cultural values, and comparatively strong support of non-intervention and traditional Westphalian sovereignty" (Jackson, 2014, p. 200). These norms are widespread in the post-Soviet member states, but CSTO membership is also open to any other country that shares the CSTO's principles as stated in the CSTO Charter. As such, Iran has been invited to join the CSTO because of the country's common norms and values, even though the country has never been in the Soviet sphere of influence (Jackson, 2014, p. 188).

However, the CSTO lacks a clear collective identity to give purpose to its existence and operations. Kornilenko (2020) argues that the CSTO is going through an identity crisis because the organisation is unable to identify its place and role in the global security system. Additionally, member states, especially the CARs, have distinct perceptions of their role in the vast region, which undermines a common feeling of belonging to the same geographical space

(Jackson, 2014, pp. 182-183). These different national identities are related to religion and pre-Soviet history, since the CARs have Islamic, Christian, and Confucian influences, and have had ties with India, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. For example, Kazakhstan perceives itself as the leader of Central Asia, whereas Islamic Tajikistan has more interests in South Asia, and Christian Russia and Belarus are more oriented towards Europe. Thus, the CSTO fails to create a unifying ideology that could provide an incentive for the member states to participate in CSTO activities and to further institutionalise the security organisation (Nikitina, 2012, p. 51). This explains the ineffectiveness of and disunity within the CSTO. Therefore, the lack of a clear collective identity and ideology contrasts with Western organisations, as Nikitina (2012) states: "NATO and the EU have what the CSTO does not: a *mission*" (p. 51).

From a constructivist perspective, I expect that the CSTO is driven by the lack of a clear-cut collective identity to give purpose to the organisation's operations and by the bloc's principle of non-intervention, not to be involved in both Afghanistan and Syria (H4).

4. Methodology

With regards to the data analysis, this master's thesis uses process tracing. This qualitative research method explains the intermediate steps of a causal process over time, i.e. causal mechanisms, by describing the dependent, independent, and intervening variables which have led to the outcome (Checkel, 2008; Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). In this thesis, the outcome is the involvement of NATO and the CSTO. To carry out process tracing adequately, a thorough description of the sequence of events, prior knowledge and well-formulated hypotheses are crucial (Collier, 2011, pp. 823-824). This prior knowledge has already been provided in the sections on NATO and the CSTO and more background information on Afghanistan and Syria will be given in the following sections. Data gathered from primary sources, such as official statements and resolutions, and secondary sources, such as newspaper articles and academic papers, is examined in the light of the hypotheses for the following research question:

What are the driving factors for the extent of NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria after 2001?

To answer this question, it is important to have a clear understanding of what 'involvement' means. In this thesis, 'involvement' ranges from non-action and political statements of (non-)support to material supplies and large-scale military assistance. In the previous paragraphs on neo-realism and constructivism, I have formulated four hypotheses for the involvement of NATO and the CSTO from each theoretical perspective. For convenience sake, I will list these hypotheses below.

<u>Neo-realist hypotheses</u>

H1. NATO is driven by its objectives to maintain its relative power in the anarchic international system and to ensure the survival of the organisation by facing a new common security threat, to become actively involved in Afghanistan and Syria.

H2. The CSTO is driven by the bloc's objective to balance Western military presence and Russia's aim to increase its influence through the CSTO, to become involved in the conflict in Afghanistan but to a lesser extent in Syria since Syria has never belonged to Russia's sphere of influence.

<u>Constructivist hypotheses</u>

H3. NATO is driven by its objective to spread liberal norms and values and the need to construct a collective identity for the Alliance, to become actively involved in Afghanistan and Syria.

H4. The CSTO is driven by the lack of a clear-cut collective identity to give purpose to the organisation's operations and by the bloc's principle of non-intervention, not to be involved in both Afghanistan and Syria.

As the research will be carried out from two distinct theoretical perspectives, one can speak of theoretical triangulation, which increases the internal validity of this thesis. Concerning the data collection, I use academic databases, such as Limo, Google Scholar, and UAntwerp Library, databases from NATO, the CSTO, and the UN, and search results of Google and Yandex, a Russian web browser. It is important to note that finding relevant research on the CSTO is challenging since the existing literature on the CSTO is already scarce and most sources are in Russian. However, one should not be biased about these Russian sources since coloured sources have been avoided. Thanks to my academic background in studying the Russian language, I have used Russian sources and can now thus be consulted in this master's thesis. By consulting academic literature, official statements and high-quality newspaper articles, this research can

thus be considered credible and reliable. In addition, this data triangulation also increases the validity of this thesis.

In a comparative case-study research design, I will test the realist and constructivist perspectives on the driving factors for the extent of NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan and Syria. Due to a small-N case design, the results of this thesis should not be generalised groundlessly, because every conflict has its own unique variables.

5. Case studies: Afghanistan and Syria

5.1 Afghanistan

Before NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan is elaborated on, I will first provide an overview of the key events in the Afghan War since 2001. For this overview, I mainly draw upon a timeline of the Afghan War (1999-2021) created by the independent organisation, the Council on Foreign Relations (n.d.), unless another source is cited.

The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 ended the decade-long Soviet-Afghan War and was succeeded by a period of anarchy, which culminated in the Taliban regime coming into power in 1996. Moreover, the radical Islamist fundamentalism of Al-Qaeda gained influence throughout the post-Cold War period and aimed to install a global jihad (Garey, 2020). Although both Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were already before 2001 treated with scrutiny by the international community because of their terrorist nature, the situation fundamentally changed after the US terror attacks on 9/11, which caused the death of almost three thousand people. This marks the most deadly terror attack in history (FBI, 2016) and incentivised the US to militarily topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan because the Taliban refused to extradite the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, who resided in the country. From the US perspective, regimes that create a safe haven for terrorists are terrorists themselves (Katzman & Thomas, 2017). Consequently on 7 October 2001, former US President George W. Bush started Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan by launching airstrikes on Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in collaboration with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. By December 2001, the Taliban was defeated and various Afghan factions, except for the Taliban, signed the Bonn Agreement, which installed an interim Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai and outlined the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for peacekeeping operations. Now that the Taliban had been overthrown, the US started engaging in state-building practices, providing

humanitarian aid, and focusing on the economic and democratic reconstruction of the country. In August 2003, the leadership of ISAF was transferred from the UN to NATO, marking it the organisation's first extra-European operation, and overall responsibility for ISAF was attributed to NATO in 2006 (Garey, 2020, p. 108). ISAF was provided with troops from 42 countries, including all NATO member states, to maintain state security and to train Afghan security forces. However, as violence resurged across Afghanistan in 2006, NATO member states disagreed on burden-sharing, in that the US reproached other allies for not being enough committed to sharing in costs and risks. Meanwhile, the war on terror had divided US focus and resources between Afghanistan and Iraq, making the US transfer military capacity to the new front.

Under the influence of newly elected US President Obama, international commitment to Afghanistan was reinforced in 2009, as the US and its NATO allies increased troops deployment to assist and train the Afghan forces and to counter the resurging violence. At the same time, Obama set a timeframe for a withdrawal of all US combat troops by 2014 and NATO announced the end of ISAF by the same year, urging the Afghan authorities to become more independent for the provision of national security. This marked the end of ISAF, while NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to train and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) (NATO, 2021). However, it was doubted whether the Afghan forces were able to provide national security amid rising tensions, and thus, the US extended its military presence in the country. In the following years, not only the Taliban regained influence but also the Islamic State, which invoked a new violent period with bombings and terror attacks in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, diplomatic peace talks between the US and the Taliban reached in 2020 an agreement, which consists of the drawdown of US troops and the Taliban's promise not to use Afghanistan for terrorist activities. In addition, intra-Afghan talks between the ruling Afghan authorities and the Taliban had to be held to discuss a peaceful post-US Afghanistan. Consequently, US President Biden announced in 2021 a complete withdrawal of all US troops by 11 September 2021. As US troops were withdrawing, the Taliban rapidly advanced across the country after the ruling president Ghani had left the country, which allowed the Taliban regime to take over control of the country. At the end of August 2021, the last US forces left Afghanistan, marking the end of the two-decades-long war, while the Taliban ruled Afghanistan both at the start and the end of the war. Since the new Taliban regime, women's rights have been violated (Zucchino & Akbary, 2022) and the humanitarian and economic situation has worsened partly due to US sanctions (Goldbaum, 2021).

5.1.1 NATO in Afghanistan

To explain the extent of NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, it is crucial to trace the variables which affected the evolution of the Alliance's presence in the country. Three phases of involvement can be distinguished in NATO's mission to Afghanistan: support for US actions (2001-2003), growing involvement (2003-2009), and gradual drawdown (2009-2021).

Immediately after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US received widespread support from the international community. The UN Security Council (UNSC) condemned the attacks and reaffirmed the US's "inherent right of individual or collective self-defence" (UNSC, 2001, para. 4), and even Russia, the rival of the US during the Cold War, offered cooperation in intelligence-sharing and allowed the US access to Russian airspace and military facilities in Tajikistan (Glasser, 2001). In addition, NATO invoked for the first time since its foundation Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" (NATO, 1949). Despite this international political support, the US was during this first phase not eager for NATO to be involved in its military campaign in Afghanistan and thus preferred unilateral action by launching OEF. Three plausible driving factors can be discerned for the US reluctance to involve NATO. First, the US aimed to take immediate action to meet short-term military goals, such as the collapse of the Taliban regime and combatting Al-Qaeda. In the case of a multilateral coalition with NATO, the US mission would have been constrained in time and efficiency (Kreps, 2011, p. 112; Sipress & Finn, 2001). Second, the US did not want to repeat NATO's 1999 mission to Kosovo, which exposed the Alliance's lack of internal cohesion and capability to protect the local population (Garey, 2020, p. 96; Human Rights Watch, 2004). Third, most NATO members would have been unable to provide the necessary military capabilities for the mission because many NATO member states cut back on the defence budget after the Cold War (Simon, 2009, p. 53). Therefore, the US kept the Alliance on the sidelines during the first phase, while only the UK directly assisted the US in combat against the Taliban and other allies bilaterally supplied the US with military material (Garey, 2020, p. 96). As such, the US initially benefited from the widespread international support to legitimise OEF. However, as the Taliban regime was overthrown in December 2001, the US had achieved its short-term security goals but had thus far not considered the long-term state-building practices after the Taliban (Kreps, 2011, p. 112). By 2003, Afghanistan's national security had deteriorated despite US military presence and the legitimacy of the OEF had decreased, especially after the invasion of Iraq (Berdal, 2016).

This marks the beginning of the second phase of NATO's involvement in the Afghan War, namely a period of the Alliance's increasing involvement. To involve NATO in Afghanistan became more useful for the US because the Alliance could ensure continued legitimacy for the OEF at a moment when the mission's legitimacy was decreasing, engage in state-building practices, and contribute resources to the US, such as intelligence and troops (Berdal, 2016). In August 2003, the command of ISAF was handed over from the UN to NATO to overcome disagreement over ISAF leadership. Initially, ISAF was tasked with security provision in and around the capital Kabul, but ISAF's mandate was extended by the UNSC to cover the whole territory of Afghanistan, which was ultimately achieved by 2006 (NATO, 2021). Having deployed 36,000 troops by the same time, the NATO-led ISAF took command over 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (Garey, 2020, p. 107), i.e. multinational groupings with both civilian and military actors that "are designed to assist the host nation in developing its governance capacity, improve its security sector and cooperate in reconstruction and development of the infrastructure" (Bebber, 2008, p. 16). This implied that the US could attribute more resources to its combat operations, whereas NATO focused more on long-term humanitarian and state-building objectives. This is also reflected in the memoirs of former US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates: "The approach favored by the Europeans, however, looked a lot like nation-building, the work of decades in Afghanistan and not the kind of mission accomplished in the middle of war" (Gates, 2014, p. 203). In addition, NATO developed the post of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan in 2003, whose task was to stimulate the political development of Afghanistan (NATO, 2022). At the 2006 NATO summit in Riga, NATO pledged to continue its reconstruction and development efforts, focusing on democratic institutions, security provision, and training of the Afghan National Army (NATO, 2009). Moreover, the Alliance's unity and solidarity with the Afghan people were highlighted in the closing press conference at the Riga summit by NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer: "There was a clear commitment by all twenty-six NATO Allies that in an emergency […], they will support each other" (de Hoop Scheffer, 2006, para. 8).

Four driving factors for NATO's increasing involvement can be traced. First, NATO's assumption that the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001 did not suffice to provide and maintain security in Afghanistan enabled the Alliance to increase its involvement (Stapleton & Keating, 2015). Thus, NATO assumed that long-term operations, such as reconstruction, development, and democratic state-building practices, would favour long-term stability in the country. Second, the US wanted to involve NATO more in Afghanistan for burden-sharing

purposes because the US had to divide its resources between Afghanistan and Iraq after the latter was invaded by the US in 2003 (Berdal, 2016, p. 164). In contrast with the Afghan War, the US could not rely on NATO for military assistance in Iraq since key US allies, such as France and Germany opposed the Iraq war (BBC News, 2003). In addition, the US could devote its military capacity in Afghanistan to combat operations instead of state-building and humanitarian operations, which were NATO's core missions. Relatedly, another driving factor is that the Alliance could enhance the legitimacy of the mission in Afghanistan, which had decreased since the invasion of Iraq (Garey, 2020, pp. 110-111). Fourth, NATO's first out-of-area mission in Afghanistan was aimed to prove the Alliance's relevance after the Cold War and to ensure the Alliance's survival. Already in 2002 at the Prague summit, NATO identified new security threats, such as "terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (NATO, 2003, p. 29). Berdal (2016) explains this driving factor for NATO's increasing involvement as follows:

> No longer held together by the unifying perception of a common Cold War threat, and with a more recent patchy record of operations in the Balkans to show for its efforts, NATO needed to prove its credibility. Assuming a greater role in Afghanistan came to be seen as the test of NATO's transformation in the face of changing security threats and risks that transcended the Euro-Atlantic area. (p. 175)

Despite NATO's increased involvement and troop deployment, the Alliance could not overcome key issues, which resulted in resurging violence across Afghanistan from 2006 on (Berdal, 2016, p. 165). In addition to burden-sharing issues, conflicting objectives between the US and the other NATO members were also a key issue: the former aimed to combat terrorism and the latter to engage in the state- and peacebuilding practices, which implicitly led to tensions within NATO (Gates, 2014, p. 203). Another issue was NATO's assumption that the resurgent Taliban regime was the main source of instability and security threats while ignoring deep-rooted ethnic, and tribal rivalries and corruption (Berdal, 2016, p. 174). It can be considered that these issues have contributed to the war-weariness among NATO members and the ultimate troop withdrawal in 2014, but also another factor cannot be ignored: the return of the Russian threat (Berdal, 2016, pp. 176-177). For example, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 reintroduced Russia as a common security threat to the Alliance, so out-of-area operations in Afghanistan would no longer be needed to justify NATO's continued existence (Dempsey, 2008).

When Obama took office in 2009, the new US president recognised the war-weary public and the need for renewed commitment to end the Afghan War. The US president announced that

troop deployment would be increased by 30,000 extra troops and that the transition of the responsibility for Afghanistan's national security to the ANDSF would begin in 2011 (Obama, 2009). Consequently, also NATO increased its number of troops and additionally established the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan to make Afghan forces autonomously responsible for national security (NATO, 2021). In 2010 at the Lisbon summit, NATO announced that it would withdraw its troops by the end of 2014, marking the end of the ISAF mission and the beginning of the ANDSF's "full responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan" (NATO, 2010, para. 4). After ISAF's completion in 2014, NATO stayed present in Afghanistan during the Resolute Support Mission from 2015 until 2021. During this period, NATO deployed around 16,000 troops to provide continued training and assistance to the ANDSF, which were eventually defeated by the Taliban regime in 2021. The NATO-led evacuation in August 2021 marked the end of the Alliance's involvement in the country (NATO, 2021).

5.1.2 CSTO in Afghanistan

In contrast with NATO, the CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan has been low since 2001. Through the years, the Russian-led security organisation has expressed support for NATO's mission but also concerns over the probably unstable post-NATO security situation in the country, which may spill over to the broader Central Asian region. Thus, the CSTO has been focussing on the security of the Afghan-Tajik border, counterterrorist and antinarcotic operations without direct involvement on Afghan territory. The drivers for the CSTO's little involvement will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Before the CSTO became an established regional organisation in 2002, CST member states had provided assistance to the Northern Alliance, which fought alongside the US to combat the Taliban in 2001 (Rozanov & Dovgan, 2010, pp. 13-14). This CST assistance enabled the anti-Taliban grouping to defeat the Taliban relatively rapidly, but the CST lacked the military and financial resources and the political will to make a large-scale contribution to the US military campaign. Nevertheless, CST member states permitted NATO to set up military bases on their territory and approved the ISAF mission (Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1542). However, the extensive US military presence in Central Asia created division within the CSTO in the long term. Whereas Russia and Belarus considered the US to be increasing its power and influence in the region, the CARs welcomed the US since Russia could not give an alternative to the US to provide security in Afghanistan (Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1543). As such, Russia's low

engagement in the Afghan conflict can be explained by the historical memory of the exhaustive Soviet-Afghan war, simultaneous military missions in Syria and Ukraine, and Russia's unstable economy (Weitz, 2018, p. 69).

Yet, from 2004 on, the CSTO has repeatedly proposed NATO to formally cooperate "in exchanging data of counter terrorism [*sic*] and drug trafficking in the post-Soviet space and conducting joint operations to suppress the activities of drug cartels" (Rozanov & Dovgan, 2010, p. 60). Cooperation between NATO and the CSTO could have increased the CSTO's power and legitimacy in the region since the Alliance would consider the CTSO as an equal actor in the international system. In addition, NATO-CSTO cooperation could have restricted the bilateral relations between NATO and CARs in the PfP-framework (Pop, 2009, p. 285). However, NATO has been reluctant to accept the proposal of the CSTO because the Alliance is more interested in its mission's effectiveness instead of the CSTO's desire for more legitimacy (Nikitina, 2012, p. 46). Ivo Daalder, US Permanent Representative to NATO, expressed this stance as follows:

> it would be counterproductive for NATO to engage with the CSTO, an organization initiated by Moscow to counter potential NATO and U.S. influence in the former Soviet space. To date, the CSTO has proven ineffective in most areas of activity and has been politically divided. NATO engagement with the CSTO could enhance the legitimacy of what may be a waning organization. (Laumulin, 2012, para. 21)

Another driving factor for the CSTO's little involvement are the bloc's fundamental principles of respect for sovereignty and non-intervention in other states' domestic affairs (Jackson, 2014, p. 198; Karimov, 2021). Therefore, CSTO officials, such as former Secretary General of the CSTO Nikolay Bordyuzha, have explicitly stated that the organisation has no prospects for a military intervention in Afghanistan (Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1543; Norberg, 2013, p. 32; Weitz, 2018, p. 68). Instead, the CSTO has focused on counternarcotics and counterterrorism operations to prevent drug traffickers and extremists from moving from Afghanistan to CSTO territory. Especially the vulnerable Afghan-Tajik border has urged the CSTO to take border security measures since Tajikistan is the only CSTO member state neighbouring Afghanistan (Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1544; Rauf & Saud, 2020, p. 38; Weitz, 2018, p. 69). For example, the annual Operation Channel has been countering drug trafficking and terrorism from Afghanistan (Weitz, 2018, pp. 68-69). Between 2003 and 2019, Operation Channel stopped "385 tons of drugs, 14 thousand firearms and 392 ammunition" from crossing the Afghan border (Karimov,

2021). Because of the successful Operation Channel, the UN adopted a resolution that strengthens the formal ties with the CSTO by outlining UN-CSTO cooperation in countering terrorism and drug trafficking and referring to potential CSTO peacekeeping capacity for Afghanistan (Rozanov & Dovgan, 2010, p. 54).

The drawdown of NATO forces created a pessimist forecast within the CSTO for the situation in Afghanistan after 2014. Even though Afghanistan obtained the status of an observer state in the CSTO in 2013 in order to anticipate the drawdown of foreign forces, the CSTO stated that there had been little improvement in the combat against drug production, terrorism, and corruption and that the ANDSF was not capable yet to provide national security (CSTO, 2012; RIA Novosti, 2013). However, the CSTO has remained little engaged to improve this situation: since 2014, the bloc has mainly expressed concerns over the security threats coming from Afghanistan and support for multilateral and intra-Afghan peace talks (CSTO, 2014; CSTO, 2018; CSTO, 2020a; CSTO, 2020b). Since the US withdrawal in August 2021, the CSTO has reiterated its concerns over drugs trafficking, extremism, and the Afghan-Tajik border security (CSTO, 2021; Reuters, 2021; RFE/RL, 2021). In addition, the bloc has prohibited the presence of the US, NATO and Afghans that had cooperated with foreign forces on the bloc's territory (CSTO, 2021). Weitz (2018) summarises the CSTO's policy toward Afghanistan as follows: "the CSTO has focused on containing Afghan threats rather than solving them" (p. 68).

In sum, the driving factors for the CSTO's little involvement in Afghanistan are NATO's already existing large-scale military operation in the country, Russia's low engagement, NATO's reluctance to cooperate with the CSTO, and the highly-respected principle of non-intervention.

5.1.3 Theories in practice

The case study of Afghanistan confirms both hypotheses for NATO (H1 & H3). After the Cold War, the security threat from the Soviet Union disappeared, making NATO's continued existence hard to justify. Thus, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 creating a new common security threat scenario for NATO, drove the Alliance to become actively militarily involved in Afghanistan after 2001, and thus justified NATO's survival and relevance in the international system. However, as the international balance of power altered with the resurgence of a more assertive Russia, NATO shifted its focus from out-of-area operations back to its original

collective defence mission to face closer security threats, so the Alliance no longer needed out-of-area operations to justify its survival in the anarchic international system. This driving factor explains the end of ISAF's mission in 2014 from a neo-realist perspective. Therefore, this case study confirms the neo-realist hypothesis (H1). The constructivist hypothesis (H3) can also be confirmed, as the Afghanistan case shows that NATO aimed at establishing democratic institutions and spreading liberal norms and values to improve the humanitarian situation and the state-building process since these liberal principles are believed to foster security. At the beginning of its mission, NATO upheld a narrative of unity and a collective identity, which explains NATO's active involvement in Afghanistan. However, as internal tensions and war-weariness within the Alliance rose during the war, NATO became less involved by 2014.

With regard to the driving factors for the CSTO's involvement in Afghanistan, the neo-realist hypothesis (H2) can be rejected, whereas the constructivist hypothesis can be confirmed (H4). The case study has proven that the CSTO was not driven by the neo-realist assumption that the CSTO aimed to balance NATO and US military presence in Central Asia. Instead, the bloc has repeatedly expressed its support for the ISAF mission and has called for NATO-CSTO cooperation. The constructivist hypothesis, on the other hand, can be confirmed since the lack of a collective identity and the principle of non-intervention have driven the CSTO to be passive during the Afghan War, despite efforts to counter terrorism and drug trafficking on CSTO territory. Moreover, the historical memory of the Soviet-Afghan war still lingers on in Russia, which, among other factors, explains Russia's little engagement in the conflict.

5.2 Syria

As in the case study of Afghanistan, I will first provide an outline of the key events of the Syrian Civil War before I shed light on NATO's and the CSTO's involvement in the conflict. This outline is mainly based on 'Syria's Civil War: The Descent Into Horror' by Laub et al. (2021) on the website of the Council on Foreign Relations, unless cited otherwise.

Since 1970, Syria has been governed by the Shia-rooted al-Assad family. Hafez Assad was succeeded in 2000 by his son Bashar, who continued his father's autocratic and kleptocratic rule over the country. Through a transformation from a socialist economic system to a privatised liberal system, Bashar reformed the country's economy at the cost of the lower classes while benefitting those supporting the autocratic regime. The gap between the rich and the poor

widened, partly due to high rates of unemployment and the extreme drought between 2006 and 2010 (Baczko et al., 2017, p. 49). In addition, the US-imposed economic sanctions on Syria in 2004 as part of the war on terror, driven by suspicions that Syria supported terrorists, weakened the country's economy (BBC News, 2019). Together with ethnic clashes and an oppressive police force, these factors created the breeding ground for dissent and discontent among the Syrian population (Baczko et al., 2017). In March 2011, these domestic tensions culminated in a pro-democratic uprising in the city of Deraa, triggered by the Arab Spring which had started four months earlier in Tunisia and brought about pro-democratic protests across North Africa and the Middle East. Although the anti-regime protests in Syria were turned down violently by the police forces, the protests rapidly spread across the whole country. Dissatisfied with Assad's rule as well, former military officials defected from Assad's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and established the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to counter the SAA, but the FSA lacked a centralised command structure to combat Assad effectively. This divide in the Syrian military apparatus and the subsequent civil war created ideal circumstances for other regional actors to become operational in Syria. For example, Islamist-jihadist groupings, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), emerged in the country and conducted brutal attacks on civilians. The emergence of these terrorist groups was stimulated by Assad, as he "wanted to present to the world a stark choice between his secular rule and a jihadi alternative" (Laub et al., 2021, para. 12). Another regional actor meddling in the Syrian civil war were the Kurds, which considered the war as an opportunity to establish an independent Kurdish state (Moodrick-Even Khen et al., 2019, pp. 7-8). In 2013, an attack with chemical weapons on the suburb of Ghouta was allegedly conducted by Assad's regime, which incentivised the US and its allies to launch a military intervention. However, there was a lack of evidence that the attack was carried out by the Syrian government, so the UNSC, blocked by Russia and China, did not approve a Western military intervention (Vukasovich & Dejanovich-Vukasovich, 2016, p. 314).

By 2013, the conflict became increasingly internationalised, as both Assad's side and the opposition received backing from foreign powers. On the one hand, Assad was supported by Shiite Iran and its allied Lebanese militant group Hezbollah because Iran aimed to prevent Syria from possibly becoming closer to the country's rival Saudi Arabia. As Sunni Islamist-jihadist groupings emerged, Tehran feared that the state of anarchy in Syria could create ideal circumstances for these groups to seize power (Laub, 2017). Assad was also supported by Russia, but Russia's interests and involvement will be further elaborated on in the section on the CSTO below. On the other hand, opposition forces were backed by the West, which will be

discussed in detail in the following section on NATO. By 2019, Assad's SAA succeeded in re-establishing control over most of the country with the help of Russia and Iran, as ISIS had lost its power and the US had announced a gradual drawdown of troops.

After the UN-led Geneva Conference on Syria had failed to come to a peaceful agreement, peace talks between Iran, Russia, Turkey, and Syria started during the 2017 Astana talks, thus excluding the US and the UN, but the outcome also turned out to be ineffective. Another diplomatic initiative to settle the conflict has been the UN-led Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC), but the SCC has not agreed on a settlement yet, partly because of delays due to the coronavirus pandemic. Thus far, none of these diplomatic efforts has come to a sustainable political settlement of the conflict, while President Assad has extended his presidency with a fourth term in 2021.

5.2.1 NATO in Syria

In contrast with the conflict in Afghanistan, NATO has not been actively involved in the Syrian Civil War. Although some NATO allies had incentives to intervene in the country, it never came this far because the Alliance lacked international support and internal cohesion.

As the anti-regime protests became more violent and deadly, the US, France, and the UK, supported by Germany and Portugal, proposed in October 2011 sanctions against the Assad regime to the UNSC based on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which had been used before during the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 (Bandeira, 2018a, p. 119). The R2P doctrine means that states are not only responsible for the protection of their own population, but that they are also collectively responsible to protect other states' populations against mass atrocities, such as "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" (UN General Assembly, 2005, p. 30). NATO's intervention in Libya, however, left the country after the autocratic Gaddafi regime in a disastrous state, which made non-Western states doubtful of the R2P doctrine's effectiveness (Nuruzzaman, 2013, p. 65). Thus, Russia and China vetoed the UNSC resolution proposed by the West. Due to having no UN permission to intervene, the US, France and the UK provided military aid to anti-Assad jihadist rebels in secret (Ahmed, 2013; Bandeira, 2018b). The US created a 'rat line', i.e. "a channel to bring weapons and ammunition originating from Libya to Syria […] in order to supply the *moderate rebels*, many of which […] Jihadists and even al-Qa'ida militants" and trained the rebels to use antitank and

anti-aircraft weapons (Bandeira, 2018b, pp. 130-131). Together with the UK and France, the US provided military and logistical assistance and training to the opposition forces and conducted counterterrorism operations in collaboration with Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Loft et al., 2021, p. 4).

Two years later, in August 2013, a chemical weapons attack was conducted in Ghouta, which the US and its allies believed was carried out by the Assad regime. This incentivised the US to intervene in Syria in order to overthrow Assad and improve the humanitarian situation in the country, which would halt the ongoing refugee crisis, whereas some argue that continued access to oil and gas resources and the containment of Iran's power in the Middle East would be the real reasons behind a Western intervention (Ahmed, 2013; Bandeira, 2018b, p. 128; Laub, 2017). The investigators, however, never found evidence that Assad was responsible for the attack, which made the UNSC reluctant to approve a proposal for military intervention (Bandeira, 2018b, p. 127). Thus, the US and its allies had no UN support for its intervention and also domestic public support was small, partly because of 'intervention fatigue' after the costly military mission in Afghanistan (Kamp, 2014; Shea, 2014). Even within NATO, there was no support for an intervention without UNSC authorisation (Bandeira, 2018b, p. 134). Dingott Alkopher (2016, p. 64) has identified four main drivers for NATO's non-intervention in Syria in addition to the high costs of a military mission. First, legal and geopolitical reasons, such as the lack of UN authorisation, regional support and internal NATO support, hindered NATO to intervene. Second, Syria's refined air defence, chemical weapons, strong army, and challenging geography make the military-strategic situation of a potential intervention more complex than the intervention in Libya. Third, Assad is still supported by major powers, such as Russia and Iran, whereas Gaddafi did not receive international support. This further complicates the geopolitical situation and the regional balance of power. At last, no political alternative to Assad among the opposition has been presented since the Syrian opposition kept struggling in maintaining control. This also raised concerns about a potential post-intervention situation in Syria, by analogy with the 2011 intervention in Libya and its aftermath. Furthermore, President Assad accepted a Russian-brokered deal that allowed the inspection and elimination of Syrian chemical weapons by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). This further discouraged NATO to intervene in Syria since the imminent threat of chemical weapons had formally disappeared (Bandeira, 2018b, p. 135). However, the US launched airstrikes in 2018 as a reaction to the alleged use of chemical weapons by Assad's regime in Douma (Loft et al., 2021, p. 5). To conclude, instead of a military intervention, NATO

called for a diplomatic solution to the conflict and underlined Syria's own responsibility to its population to solve the crisis (Dingott Alkopher, 2018, p. 62; Joyner, 2013).

Yet, one NATO member has been engaged in carrying out military operations in Syria, namely Turkey. Turkey backs the opposition, aiming to prevent the Kurds from establishing autonomy and to overthrow Assad's regime (Laub, 2017). Despite several calls to NATO for military assistance from its allies, Turkey has not received substantial military backing because other NATO members are reluctant to cooperate with President Erdogan because of his autocratic nature, his friendly ties with Russia's President Putin and Turkey's combat against the US-supported Kurds (The Economist, 2020). Within NATO, there is also no consensus on whether to normalise relations with the Assad regime or not (The Middle East Institute & ETANA Syria, 2020, p. 6). For example, former Soviet states are willing to improve their relations with Syria because of decade-long economic and political ties with the country.

5.2.2 CSTO in Syria

Whereas Russia has been actively involved in the Syrian Civil War, the Russian-led CSTO only expressed support for Russia's actions without deploying troops to Syria. As in Afghanistan, the regional security organisation values the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity highly and lacks the organisational capacity to intervene, which explains the CSTO's non-intervention.

Assad was initially supported by Russia with diplomatic means and later with military assistance. At the beginning of the conflict, Moscow vetoed a UNSC resolution with punishing measures for Assad, claiming that Western intervention would worsen the situation in Syria as illustrated by NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya (Laub et al., 2021). After Russia's diplomatic support to Assad, Moscow militarily entered the conflict in September 2015 with the deployment of its air forces to combat Islamist-jihadist groupings (Ibryamova, 2021, p. 264). The intervention in Syria was the first military intervention outside the post-Soviet space after the implosion of the Soviet Union (Ibryamova, 2021, p. 264). Officially, the air operations targeted ISIS terrorists, but in fact, Russia's focus was also on bombing the anti-Assad forces and the airstrikes hit civilian targets too (Laub et al., 2021; Souleimanov & Dzutsati, 2018, p. 44). There are several drivers for Russia's involvement. First, material interests, such as the arms trade with Syria and the continued access to Russia's naval base in Tartus – Russia's only

military base in the Mediterranean Sea – can explain Moscow's involvement, although they are not sufficient (Allison, 2013; Ibryamova, 2021, p. 265; Rezvani, 2020, p. 894). Second, the naval base on the Mediterranean Sea can be considered a Russian geopolitical interest in the region. Moreover, the advancement of Russia's energy politics serves Moscow's geopolitical interests as well (Bandeira, 2018b, p. 135; Ibryamova, 2021, p. 263). As US power in the Middle East is eroding, the increased Russian military presence is in line with Moscow's objective of creating a multipolar international system, in which Russia acts as an equal international power (Allison, 2013; Freire & Heller, 2018, p. 1207; Ibryamova, 2021, p. 271). That is possible when the anti-Western Assad regime stays in power. Third, a potential regime toppling by the West might make Moscow anxious about potential "future external pressures which foreign states may exert for political change in Russia [itself] on the basis of claims that Putin and his entourage lack political legitimacy" (Allison, 2013, p. 819). Thus, balancing a Western intervention is another driver for Russia's active involvement. Finally, another crucial factor is the timing of Russia's increased involvement, namely after the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent international isolation by the West. It might be possible that Russia's involvement in Syria was aimed to divert international attention from the situation in Crimea and to partly break away from its international isolation since the West would have to cooperate with Russia about Syria (Freire & Heller, 2018, p. 1207; Souleimanov & Dzutsati, 2018, p. 43).

Despite Russia's active involvement, the CSTO has remained on the sidelines in the Syrian conflict. In general, the CSTO has supported Russia's actions in the civil war politically, which enhances the legitimacy of Russia's intervention, and has emphasised the importance of respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity (CSTO, 2017; Kropatcheva, 2016, p. 1532). On the military front, the CSTO did not assist Russia despite a 2017 alleged proposal to deploy Kazakh and Kyrgyz forces to Syria. Since Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are "a Muslim country, not involved in the conflict and amenable to Moscow and Damascus' position", these two CSTO members would be suitable for monitoring the de-escalation zones in the country despite their small military capacity (Putz, 2017, para. 5). However, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz presidents later denied this proposal (Radio Azattyk, 2017).

5.2.3 Theories in practice

The two hypotheses on NATO (H1 & H3) can be rejected since NATO has not been driven by the hypothesised neo-realist and constructivist driving factors to become actively involved in

Syria. Other factors, such as the lack of international support after NATO's intervention in Libya and the context of the exhaustive ISAF mission in Afghanistan, explain NATO's reluctance to become actively involved in the Syrian Civil War, although some NATO members unilaterally provided assistance to opposition forces and wanted to intervene. For example, it is argued that the US had incentives to intervene in order to contain Iranian influence in Syria and to guarantee continued access to energy sources. These are neo-realist driving factors, but they do not apply to NATO and it never came to an intervention. The neo-realist hypothesis (H1) can be countered by the fact that NATO did not need to search for a common security threat to justify the Alliance's survival because it had already found one in Afghanistan and more recently in Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Moreover, the balance of power in Syria was complicated by Russia's and Iran's support for the Assad regime. From a constructivist perspective, the lack of internal cohesion and a lacking collective identity with regard to the Syrian Civil War have driven NATO not to become involved in the Syrian Civil War because some NATO members were more reluctant to intervene than others. This reluctance was related to the memory of NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya and its disastrous post-intervention situation. This memory has also been the reason why the international community did not authorise a NATO intervention in Syria. Therefore, also the constructivist hypothesis (H3) can be rejected.

With regards to Russia, both neo-realist and constructivist driving factors account for the country's political and military involvement in Syria. Driven by balance of power politics and the structure of the international system, Russia aims to increase its influence in the Middle East and to counter the West in order to create a multipolar world order, in which Russia would play an equal role to the US. In addition to this neo-realist explanation, also constructivism explains Russia's intervention, in that Moscow desires to reassert its image and identity as a key player in the international system, as it was during the Cold War. However, this thesis aimed to explain the CSTO's involvement in Syria. As in the case study of Afghanistan, the constructivist hypothesis (H4) can be confirmed because the CSTO values the principle of non-intervention very highly and lacks internal cohesion, illustrated by the aforementioned proposal to deploy CSTO monitoring forces. On the other hand, the neo-realist hypothesis (H2) can be rejected since the CSTO was not driven by the objective to balance Western military presence, whereas Russia was. Therefore, the CSTO was not involved in Syria; it only supported Russia's intervention politically, thus making Russia's mission more legitimate.

6. Conclusion

This master's thesis aimed to analyse the driving factors explaining the extent of NATO's and the CSTO's involvement during the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria after 2001. These driving factors have been interpreted from both a neo-realist and a constructivist perspective. This thesis has filled a theoretical gap by applying the neo-realist and constructivist theories to the two regional security organisations, which has been rare for the CSTO in particular.

After the Cold War, NATO's relevance became to be questioned since it no longer faced the Soviet security threat. The analysis has shown that the new terrorist threat after 9/11 united NATO and drove the Alliance to prove the relevance of its survival and thus became actively involved in Afghanistan conducting a large-scale military operation and spreading liberal norms and values with state-building purposes. As Russia challenged the European balance of power and the internal cohesion and collective identity of the Alliance came under pressure, NATO reduced its involvement in Afghanistan by 2014. These findings confirm existing literature on NATO (Flockhart, 2016; Hyde-Price, 2016). On the other hand, NATO did not become involved in Syria for the same reasons as for its drawdown in Afghanistan: Russia's support for Assad complicated the balance of power in Syria and NATO lacked internal cohesion because of disagreements on whether to intervene or not. In addition, the memory of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya and its disastrous aftermath left the international community unwilling to authorise a NATO intervention in Syria.

In both Afghanistan and Syria, the CSTO remained passive because the bloc values the principles of non-intervention and respect for territorial integrity highly, partly due to the authoritarian nature of the member states' domestic regime. Contrary to prior research that asserted that the CSTO was established to balance the West (Greene, 2012; Guliyev & Gawrich, 2020), this thesis has found that the CSTO did not intend to balance the West, illustrated by the CSTO's support for NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan and repeated calls for NATO-CSTO cooperation. In Syria, the bloc expressed political support for Russia's intervention, but did not deploy troops to also militarily support Russia.

Concerning the limitations of this thesis, the two cases have been analysed from a neo-realist and constructivist perspective, but it is crucial to note that neither theory can solely account for NATO's and the CSTO's involvement, nor can a combination of the two provide a full

explanation of the outcome. Also situational, geopolitical, historical, organisational, and other driving factors should be taken into account to fully trace the process of the involvement of NATO and the CSTO in Afghanistan and Syria. However, due to time and place constraints, this was not possible. In addition, academic literature on the CSTO has been limited, which complicated the research process.

As significant events, such as the deployment of CSTO troops to Kazakhstan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have unfolded in the course of 2022, it is interesting for future research to examine these events and their implications for NATO and the CSTO. Because research about the CSTO in English is scarce, the CSTO requires more research since the bloc could become an increasingly important regional security organisation in the future.

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