NATO between Exclusivity and Inclusivity: Measuring NATO's Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Building on an original dataset, this article focuses on the interactions between NATO and its declared worldwide partners. It argues that the analysis of these interactions can reveal NATO's strategic approach to partnerships, but it can also provide a tool for its classification as an organisation that is either exclusive – defined by the focus on defence of its members, or inclusive – emphasising the global protection of democracies and human rights. The relationship between types of interactions and NATO categorisation is estimated using an unconditional negative binomial regression with fixed effects as well as a within-between (hybrid) model. Furthermore, they are illustrated on two brief case studies of Sweden and Japan. The results of the study suggest that NATO engages primarily with countries that are powerful relative to their neighbourhood, even though they are not the most powerful among the partners. The given country's level of democracy, integration into the international institutions, and stability, do not seem to play any overarching role here.

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Historically, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was established as an alliance with an accompanying political and military organisation focused on the defence of the member states' territories against the more or less explicit threat of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. However, after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, NATO was faced with the dilemma of how to alter its role in the world now that it was lacking a counterbalancing force or a unifying adversary. In order to manage the novel situation, there were many calls for updates to the Alliance's tasks and structures. Several new elements were introduced in an attempt to manage the post-Soviet and post-Warsaw Pact space. These were the changes to the Command Structure, the reframed political communication towards the international community and former adversaries, and also the introduction of the concept of partnerships – first with nations in its immediate vicinity under the umbrella of the Partnership for Peace (GORDON 1996). With these demands and changes, the question of what role NATO should play in the transformed circumstances appeared for the first time since its creation and has been present, even dominant after NATO's expansions, in one way or another. Academically speaking, the demands and arguments have been framed as debates on the nature of the Alliance. There were several proposed labels – for example the debate about NATO transforming into a security organisation or remaining a defence organisation (HOLMBERG 2011), or the debate on NATO's change to global outreach versus remaining European (WIDERBERG 2015: 185–186). What the debates had in common was their general framing of NATO as moving between two different ideal poles, both with different challenges, command structures, communication, and partner interaction.

The first approach argued for the return to the roots of the Alliance, which it understood as the responsibility for the territorial defence of its member states. NATO in this regard was supposed to be focused on large Article–5 operations, communicate with regard to immediate vicinity challenges, and have a robust command structure. The partners were to be understood especially with regard to their geographic location and utility to the Alliance, and the capabilities they are able to provide – NATO's attempt to integrate Russia into a common missile defence against Iran can be an example of this (HOLMBERG 2011: 531). In general, the terms used to describe this pole – Europeanised or defensive organisation – might really

be better summed up by the term *exclusive* organisation, as the arguments in their support used member states' safety as the main reference point.

The opposite pole argued for a transformation of the Alliance into a global provider of security from personal to state level, especially in regard to the issues of human rights and democracy. Implicitly, this understanding of NATO called for a closer integration and networking with any willing democratic partners inside and outside of Europe, while engaging in operations designed to protect human rights, prevent terrorism, and support democracy. Exemplified by the suggestions of NATO becoming "a global alliance of democracies" as a solution to the balance of power issue in international relations (HALLAMS, 2009: 423), the pole was termed a security or global pole, but, as argued above, its essence lies in its *inclusiveness* towards the wide range of bearers of human rights and democratic ideals across the globe.

Over the course of the last thirty years, NATO has been described by researchers as *exclusive* (BURTON 2018; COTTEY 2018; MOORE 2017) or *inclusive* (BUNDE – NOETZEL 2010; EDSTRÖM 2011; NOETZEL – SCHREER 2012; ORFY 2010) based on the way it communicates, operates, and trains, and with whom it engages. According to these researchers, it appears that the latest breaking point for the transition from an *inclusive* to an *exclusive* NATO occurred in 2014 following the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the developments in the Middle East at the time. While the change is accompanied by variations in all the above-mentioned dimensions, be it a new deployment of forces, new exercises and so on, there is one dimension that necessarily stands out – partner engagement. NATO's partnerships, as cases of strategic partnership (TYUSHKA – CZECHOWSKA 2019), are in themselves designed to achieve policy objectives (BAĞBAŞHOĞLU 2014; COTTEY 2018; EDSTRÖM 2011; MOORE 2017) almost in real time. It is much easier to cancel the participation of a partner's officers in an exercise or cancel a meeting on a particular project with a partner's delegation than to re-frame the standards needed for exercising a different type of operation, withdraw from a mission abroad, or even formulate a summit declaration. Furthermore, interaction with partners is one of the most publicly reported aspects of NATO's outward policy and, unlike the text of summit declarations, it is not veiled in diplomatic language and is not part of a wider ranging compromise. Consequently, the question of who and how NATO engages, reveals in concrete and trackable terms

whether its policy goals are based around the *exclusive* protection of its member states' territories or on the *inclusive* global protection of human rights and democracies by showing which partners and on what grounds it decides to engage. NATO's engagement with partners is therefore used as a proxy variable for tracking NATO's focus on being *inclusive* or *exclusive*. Uncovering which of the two rationales lies behind NATO's interaction with partners over the last decade is the main intention of this article. In this way, it also provides a contribution to the debate on whether NATO behaves as an *exclusive* or an *inclusive* organisation. In addition, it also fills the gap in the academic literature, as shown below, by showing which partner feature plays the most important role in NATO's decisions on interaction.

The analysis in this article takes the form of a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the differing intensity in NATO's interaction with its partners, which puts longer-perspective empirical data behind one of the two reasons. As such, it is the first quantitative analysis done on NATO partnerships using an originally created dataset built from NATO's public messaging. Formulating the answer starts with contextualising NATO's partnerships historically and within the academic research to display how they changed and which indicators can be used to track the reason behind these changes. The quantitative methodology explaining the data gathering, creating a new interaction categorisation for NATO's partnerships, and distilling the indicators, is described afterwards in order to prepare a way to confirm the argument made based on the literature. Then the results are discussed by exploring the data and the outcomes of the regression analysis. Subsequently, the results are illustrated on two short case studies of Japan and Sweden, highlighting the logic behind the selected variables. Finally, the conclusions are drawn in the last section.

PARTNERSHIPS IN THE LITERATURE

Starting at the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has developed a web of various types of partnerships with countries all around the world (NATO 2018D). With the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) frameworks in the early 1990s, NATO embarked on a way of supporting the transformation of former Warsaw Pact members into working western-style democracies.

Many of the original partners from Central and Eastern Europe included in this framework became full-fledged members between 1997 and 2008. Other European states remain in various frameworks of partner cooperation until today. In 1994, in addition to the PfP, NATO established the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) in its southern flank with seven countries from Northern Africa and the Levant. Unlike in the case of the PfP, due to the restrictions inherent in the North Atlantic Treaty, none of these states could really seek to gain NATO membership. In 2004, following the events of 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Alliance's partnership portfolio was extended with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) establishing a cooperation with four countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, excluding Saudi Arabia and Oman.

The key feature of the PfP, the MD, and the ICI is the multilateral format that interaction within these frameworks can take – NATO can engage countries bilaterally, but also in the 30+ framework. Finally, with the participation of several non-European countries in the Afghanistan and Kosovo operations, an informal and bilaterally based framework termed "Partners around the Globe" (PatG) was established with countries as far away from the Euro-Atlantic as Japan, Australia, or Colombia. Almost each consecutive NATO summit since the 1990s stressed the importance of working with partners in what was termed "cooperative security" (NATO 2009) in 2010.

The essence of these frameworks was, in various ways, to establish political dialogue on cooperation in the area of security and foster military-to-military cooperation and interoperability while engaging partners on a regional basis (with the exception of PatG). At the same time, any given framework limited the options for partner participation to a set of activities permitted by that framework. This changed in 2011 with the so-called "Berlin Package", in which all partners could pick and choose any activity open to one of the frameworks. The Berlin Package effectively blurred the lines between various frameworks and allowed for a flexible approach to any given partner on a bilateral basis. Consequently, while some NATO partnership formats continue to group countries in the same region under "one roof" – for example countries as different as Egypt and Israel are grouped under the auspices of the MD (NATO 2015) – these countries have equal access to NATO's activities as countries grouped in the

PfP or PatG frameworks. However, they are not necessarily being exploited equally. The latest development of NATO partnership policy came in 2014 with the establishment of the Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the Enhanced Opportunity Partners (EOP), which groups together countries across the frameworks in order to foster a military cooperation with the partners that make substantial contributions to Alliance operations.

One of the most important features of these partnerships is the fact that there are no guarantees of mutual defence as attested by both official summit declarations (NATO 2018A) and the publicly available Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes between NATO and Australia (NATO 2017), and NATO and Japan (NATO 2018B). It is clear that without the commitment to common defence between NATO and its partners, the partnership is not a case of a military alliance understood traditionally as an official and formalised obligation of allied states to defend each member's integrity against non-member states by means of military force (REITER – GÄRTNER 2001). Instead, NATO's partnerships are instances of so-called strategic partnerships, a new phenomenon that developed after the end of Cold War and is intended to help the actors involved cope with systemic and issue-specific international challenges (TYUSHKA – CZECHOWSKA 2019: 8), which are traditionally related to the issue of balance of power but in the context of globalization (PAUL 2018). They are, therefore, used as policy tools to achieve specific outcomes and, consequentially, provide a gauge of how NATO behaves.

Changes in NATO's use of partnerships have been noted for decades by the academia, and their descriptions can be widely grouped into two different periods. Based on the available literature, the first period, roughly between 1990 and 2014, is generally characterised as inclusive. At this time, it has been argued, NATO used partnerships as a tool for political inclusion and security-building, and to enhance the Alliance's ability to operate further afield (BUNDE – NOETZEL 2010; DOKOS 2012; EDSTRÖM 2011: 12; NOETZEL – SCHREER 2012). This inclusive approach was accompanied by a focus on shared democratic values (ORFY 2010) and institutions (COTTEY 2013: 467) in order to construct a support network for protection of the global liberal world order (MOORE 2014: 81; WEAVER 2014: 58–59). Through its partnerships, the Alliance arguably tried to create a system of partnerships that would ensure "plug and play" interoperability for partners in defence of the global commons

(CHRISTIANSSON 2014: 67–68). Partnerships with democratic states were thus used to establish wide-ranging general rules of engagement, while those with un-democratic states were limited to functional areas (FLOCKHART 2013: 279). The approach can be exemplified by NATO's engagement with the Central Asian countries, which has been driven by the needs of the International Security Assistance Force operations (BAĞBAŞHOĞLU 2014: 96), or the growing chasm in the engagement with Middle East and North Africa partners (REICHBORN-KJENNERUD 2014).

The second period, since 2014 onwards, tends to be described by pointing to a shift to the exclusive pole. As the Russian annexation of Crimea unfolded, the Alliance was reported to renew the focus on the collective defence in Europe (MOORE – COLETTA 2017: 13). The renewed requirement of countering Russia while managing threats from elsewhere pressed NATO to reportedly focus more on the military utility and geo-strategic importance a partner can bring rather than the values it shares (BURTON 2018; COTTEY 2018: 69; KO – PARK 2014; MOORE 2017: 183–184). Some European partners – such as Finland and Sweden – were even labelled "informal allies" at the time (WIESLANDER 2019: 197, 217). In essence, this meant that the coordination with key partners continued on political and strategic level issues, while ensuring the maintenance of achieved technical agreements (FRÜHLING 2019). Nevertheless, after the transformation, NATO's engagement with some partners has also been described as unclear due to a lack of an identifiable pattern of who it engages and who it does not (MARQUINA 2019: 229–230).

While the listed literature on the subject suggests that from the perspective of partnerships NATO's position on the *inclusive* versus *exclusive* scale shifted towards the former over the last decade, it is also not apparent what the decisive partner feature it uses in its decisions to engage is. In theory, if NATO is truly shifting towards *exclusivity*, it should mean that it seeks to maintain the highest level of intensity with powerful partners and those dominant in key regions, and that it does so with a sufficient military capacity that could be of use in a major (global) conflict. At the same time, the closest partners – the "informal Allies" duo – are also long-established and functioning democracies that are tightly integrated into the globalised world economy and the so-called liberal world order. Accordingly, the identification of the decisive feature(s) behind NATO's partnership engagement is the necessary next step that

serves to uncover NATO's motivation for engagement and, subsequently, its position on the *exclusive-inclusive* scale.

In order to take this step, it is necessary to specify a way of measuring the intensity of NATO's engagement with different partners and operationalise the different independent variables for the two different organisation types. The method that links these two types of variables – the measuring of NATO's engagement as a dependent variable and the independent variables as proxies for the organisation type – needs to be described as well.

MEASURING INTERACTIONS: DATA AND METHODS

In order to figure out the reasons behind NATO's level of interaction with different partners there must be a way to measure it. For this purpose, a dataset of NATO-partner interactions per year for the period between 2011 and 2018 was created. The dataset is built on entries found on the websites of the NATO HQ and all commands belonging to the NATO Command Structure (NCS) within the Allied Command Operations (SHAPE, JFC Naples, JFC Brunssum, the Land Command, the Air Command and the Maritime Command). The other part of the NCS – the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and its components (JWC Stavanger and JFTC Bydgoszcz) – was excluded because of the insufficient archival data available on their websites.[1] The unavailability of the data constitutes a loss of information, but one that can be considered offset by the fact that the bulk of operational activity is conducted by the ACO.

Using an automated programme, these websites were searched for various interactions consisting of both military and civilian low or high-level meetings, trainings, exercise participations or observations, technical cooperation and projects, with an emphasis on only NATO-Partner bilateral interactions. The term "NATO-Partner bilateral interaction" in this context means that the partner country interacted in a bilateral or regional setting (in cases of the MD and the ICI) with an official in a NATO role. The case is clear when it comes to NATO civilian officials, while a military interaction can be a bit more contentious. Therefore, a meeting with a French or an American general would be included in the analysis only if this general has a role in NATO structures. On the NATO HQ website the search was

done by using their advanced search tools, and the results were limited to event reports and press releases. For military commands, a basic search was used. Both searches used the partner's name as it is used officially by NATO. Following this procedure, the search results were exported from the websites to an Excel sheet with their names, links and dates. These were then manually reviewed and refined to ensure there was no duplicity and to remove entries that contained the searched term in a different than stated context. As a precaution, the results were briefly cross-checked with the websites of partner ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) and defence (MODs) as long as they were in English or French and had a search function. In general, the partner countries reported less interactions than NATO; those reported by the MFAs were at the political-strategic level, and those reported by the MODs were more military and covered only a shorter period of time.[2] There was no discrepancy found in the reporting. Then two ways of quantifying the results were used.

Before addressing these two ways, three comments on the data are needed. Firstly, the question of partners included in the dataset needs to be discussed. Normally, it would be ideal to include all of the NATO partners in this research, but there are two partners that provide a particular challenge. The first of them is Russia, with whom the Alliance decided to suspend all practical cooperation following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (NATO 2019A). It means that even if Russia was included, there would be no available data on it since 2014. The second one is Afghanistan, which, after the conclusion of the ISAF operations in 2014, could be regarded as an ordinary NATO partner. Although its inclusion would cause an issue similar to that of Russia, the analysis of the partnership interaction with Afghanistan would not be complete from the temporal perspective. Furthermore, even after 2014 there was still a major allied military presence in the country during the tracked period – more than 17,000 soldiers (NATO 2019B) – which problematises the inclusion even further as it would be possible to argue that NATO-Afghan interactions happen on a daily basis and are very hardly measurable in the way other partnerships might be. Because of these reasons, both Russia and Afghanistan are excluded from this research.

Secondly, with regard to the timeframe, the data is limited to the time period between 1st January 2011 and 31st December 2018 as the selected

starting date coincides with the aforementioned "equalisation" of NATO's partnerships through the Berlin Package. Furthermore, it also captures the events and changes following the Arab Spring and the Russian annexation of Crimea and can, therefore, show if either democratisation, changes in stability, or difference in growth of power has an impact on the partnership intensity.

Thirdly, as for the data limitations, one of the most obvious issues with the data is that they are gathered from the partnership interactions that NATO publishes on its websites. Nevertheless, as NATO is a primarily military organisation, it is reasonable to believe that there are many more NATO engagements taking place that are classified and therefore not published. It is, therefore, possible that the data presented here do not really reflect NATO's interactions, and are instead only reflection of what NATO wishes others to see, while in reality it follows a different course of action. There are two reasons, however, why it is reasonable to believe it is not so. First, as Holmberg (2011) argues, NATO requires legitimacy for its functioning. This legitimacy is acquired through fulfilling the desires of the member states' electorates, since NATO members are, for all intents and purposes, democratic nations. As Widerberg (2015) shows, the government representatives arguing for one or the other position are acting on behalf of the demands from their nations. Consequently, in order to acquire the legitimacy for one or the other position, NATO's public messaging must truthfully display the fulfilment of the goals set up for it by the government representatives, while these are also checking the classified parts through the committee work. In this way, the national electorates see whether NATO is fulfilling what they asked their representatives to implement. A discrepancy on this side would result in a situation where representatives would have to publicly admit at home that NATO is doing other things than those it is communicating in order to appease their electorate regarding the issues in question, which would be in and of itself counterproductive and almost absurd. Second, NATO's public messaging is also directed towards its potential adversaries. Assuming that these adversaries do not have access to the classified materials that describe NATO's engagement with its partners, the publications also create a clear image of where NATO is engaged and what is it doing, and therefore serve also as a form of deterrence that informs the adversary's decision-making calculus. However, if this would not result in an on-the-ground change,

NATO would lose credibility in the eyes of its adversaries and therefore its deterrence would also suffer. Furthermore, any major cooperation of NATO with a partner that is not publicly reported would most likely be noticed and exploited by one of the adversaries or independent media, which would result in anti-NATO narratives, and claims of aggression and lack of transparency. As was discussed above, this is most likely the reason why NATO reports more engagements with its partners than the partners themselves – it is specifically trying to avoid being painted as an aggressive and secretive organisation doing things outside of public scrutiny. In combination, these two arguments show that the gathered data are a reliable depiction of NATO's engagement with its partners. It is so because if NATO portrayed itself as engaging partners other than those that it actually engages, its image at home would be suffering for its not fulfilling the demands of the electorates, and its deterrence would suffer because its adversaries would see that there is no action behind the words, which would also allow for painting the Alliance as scheming. It does not necessarily mean that the data are a perfect or an all-encompassing representation of NATO's engagement with its partners, but only that they provide an adequate picture of who NATO is engaging at least in terms of the ratio of interactions. Implicitly, it can be assumed that the ratio of interactions with partners that is reported publicly is approximately the same as the ratio that would be if all the classified interactions were reported as well.

Having these qualifications in mind, it is possible to move on to quantifying the results from the search. In general, these two quantifications establish the two dependent variables included in the research. Specifically, they differ in the amount of details they give about a specific partnership in a given year. But both of them provide the first systematic collection of data for the analysis of NATO-partner interaction.

Firstly, a simple count of events per year for each partner, termed Frequency, was created to give a basic quantitative picture of how many times the given partner and NATO interacted in various settings. It is based on the logic that any sort of interaction with NATO requires a certain amount of resources spent and a certain amount of policy commitment made; however these amounts are not differentiated for different types of interactions.

Secondly, a more nuanced variable, Intensity, is established by ranking each interaction on a scale from 1 to 4 depending on the type of the given interaction and then making a sum of all the ranked interactions per year and per partner. This scale and interaction categorisation, inspired by those developed by Goldstein (1992) and Schrodt (2012), contains two axes – a military/civilian and a representative/technical axis – as seen in Table 1. This second approach is based on the same logic as that mentioned above, that any interaction with NATO bears some "costs" for the interacting partner. Yet, here the costs are higher for different types of interactions:

→ *Political-technical*. Every civilian interaction that was not conducted at a ministerial or vice-ministerial level was placed in this category, including public-diplomacy events organised by NATO in the given country. It is argued that the lowest level of commitment and resources is expended by a partner on a civilian-technical level meeting about mutually-relevant issues or on allowing a NATO public diplomacy event on its territory. This is due to the generally low levels of decision-making powers that lower-ranking civilian staff have in their given institutions.

→ *Military-technical*. Every military interaction that did not include a flag officer level (OF–6 or higher) was included in this category, including exercise observations and participation. While it is similar to the previous type in the fact that the decision-making powers of staff officers are generally low, the argument is that the military-technical type of interaction bears higher costs than a civilian one because it demonstrates a willingness to at least partly align the armed forces and to allow for the option of creating new channels of communication between the given non-flag officers.

→ *Military-representative*. Every military interaction that involved a flag officer (OF–6) or higher was included in this category. Interactions of this type, for example meetings of Chiefs

of Defence, involve the same logic as the previous type, but furthermore show that the partner nation is willing to coordinate and cooperate militarily on a higher level. Furthermore, meetings involving flag level officers imply a higher level of commitment than mere staff meetings as generals have a higher degree of decision-making powers across the board.

→ *Political-representative*. Finally, any meeting that involved ministerial or vice-ministerial level officials or higher is considered in this category. Interactions of this kind generally involve people with the highest degree of decision-making power within their national administration and therefore showcase the partner's commitment to its partnership with NATO.

TABLE 1: INTERACTION CATEGORISATION

Representative – Technical \ Military – Political		
	Military-representative (3)	Political-representative (4)
	Military-technical (2)	Political-technical (1)

Obviously, the presented categories are not exhaustive in their typology of interactions and only serve as a conceptual tool for making a better sense of the interaction levels between NATO and its partners. As a final note, counts per year for individual interaction categories are also used as additional dependent variables for further details.

Whether NATO is behaving as an *exclusive* or an *inclusive* organisation should be identifiable by several key variables and how well they describe NATO's frequency and intensity of engaging each partner. Considering the debates about these two types of organisations mentioned before, the most important variables should be the partner's level of

power, in general and in its region, and its level of democracy. Supporting variables should include the partner nation's stability, integration into the liberal world order, and relations with NATO countries.

Starting with questions of power, it would be expected of NATO as an exclusive organisation to be engaging with more powerful partners, in general or regionally, in order to derive military utility in case of a major conflict. However, if it is an inclusive organisation, power considerations should not play a role. For this purpose, each partner's power was measured using the measurement suggested by Michael Beckley (2018). This measurement is made by multiplying the given country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP per capita (GDP*GDPpC). As this produces very large numbers, for the purposes of this article, a logarithm of the result is taken. According to Beckley's research, this way of measuring state power explains the results of wars and militarised international disputes better (8% and 6% increases in the explanatory power of the results, respectively) than other available indices (e.g. CINC). The data for GDP and GDP per capita are drawn from World Bank's World Development Indicators database (THE WORLD BAN 2019). For measuring general power, the result of the equation GDP*GDPpC was used. For measuring regional power, the difference in power between the partner and its strongest non-NATO neighbour (incl. sea borders) was computed (i.e. a negative difference implies the partner is stronger). At the same time, it needs to be noted that power measured in this way is a multiplicative interaction term. Consequently, based on the recommendations of Braumoeller (2004) and Brambor et al.(2006), the issue of the multiplicative interaction term is addressed by the inclusion of constitutive variables (GDPpC and GDP) in the regression, and the reporting of incidence rate ratios and marginal effects at different levels of the two newly included variables.

For measuring stability, the World Bank's Political Stability Index was used. It is sourced from the aforementioned World Development Indicators (KAUFMAN – KRAAY – MASTRUZZI 2019). The index measures *"perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically-motivated violence, including terrorism"*, and is therefore useful for explaining the interactions from both sides of the equation. If NATO is acting as an *inclusive* organisation, it should engage countries with lower political stability in order to assist with their stabilization. If NATO is acting as an *exclusive* organisation,

similarly to the power argument, it is expected to engage more stable countries that are able to contribute capabilities and offer infrastructure in case of conflict rather than receive assistance.

The level of democracy is measured by using the Varieties of Democracy dataset developed by Coppedge et al. (2021). The dataset contains five different indices for various ideal types of democracy, combining together several indicators, from factual to expert opinions, and ranking each country for each year on a scale of 0 to 1. All five indices (participatory, electoral, liberal, deliberative and egalitarian democracy) are averaged for the result in order to acquire the variable. The level of democracy should play a vital role in explaining the partnership frequency and intensity if NATO is behaving as an *inclusive* organisation. It should have no impact, however, if NATO acts as an *exclusive* organisation.

For measuring each partner's level of integration within the liberal world order at the cultural, economic, interpersonal, and political levels, the Swiss Economic Institute's Political Globalisation Index was used (GYGLI ET AL. 2019). The index integrates several components (trade, financial, interpersonal, cultural, informational, and political globalisation) to track the given country's overall integration into global flows. A generally high level of integration into the international system implies a stronger identification with established norms. From the *exclusive* behaviour perspective, this variable should not have any major impact on NATO's engagement with its partners. However, an *inclusive* NATO should engage more with those partners that are more and better involved in the international system without regard for their power. In this regard, this variable stretches the argument about the "alliance of democracies" as the basis for an inclusive NATO further, claiming that an *inclusive* NATO would engage even partners that are not necessarily democratic, as long as they are strongly integrated into the international order and behave accordingly.

Finally, when its *exclusive* mindset is pushed further, NATO might be willing not only to protect its members, but also to engage with countries that are closely tied to them. In this way, an alternative explanation for NATO's engagement with partners can be offered, where partners are engaged because they are included in one or more member states' "sphere of interest". As a proxy variable for this the total percentage of trade between

a partner and NATO member states is used. The trade volume is measured by summing up the export and import data from the International Monetary Fund's Direction of Trade Statistics (INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND 2019). Volumes of the given partner country's trade with NATO countries are added and then made into a percentage of the total volume of its trade per year. It is assumed that if NATO acts as an *exclusive* organisation, it will engage more with partners that have a higher trade volume with its member states. Otherwise, trade volume should not play a role in determining the interactions.

The relations between the thus-gathered dependent and independent variables are evaluated using a generalised linear model. Due to the count distribution of the data (Chart 1 for Frequency and Chart 2 for Intensity), the two options for the linear model are a Poisson regression and a negative binomial regression. In the present case, running a Poisson regression and the associated goodness of fit tests (deviance and Pearson) returns significant p-values, implying a strong over-dispersion of the data. Therefore, a negative binomial regression was selected for the study. Furthermore, since the data are gathered per year and per country they must be treated as panel data, which allows for controlling the individuum's unobserved sources of heterogeneity in the regression model by assuming its fixed or random nature. While there are several more advanced models available for this type of regression, the fixed and random effects models are, arguably, the two most commonly used. In general, the decision between one and the other should be based on the combination of assumptions about the type of heterogeneity and the conceptual nature of the data taken at theoretical level and the results of parametric tests (such as Hausman's specification test). In particular, the heterogeneity type assumption is related to whether the unobserved group-invariant variables are uncorrelated with the independent variables used in the model. If they are assumed to be correlated, then the fixed effects model is recommended; otherwise, the random effects model is to be used. From the perspective of political science, and especially international relations dealing with country-level panel data, it is reasonable to believe that any unobserved variables are correlated with the independent variables normally measured at this level – whether one uses GDP per capita, trade volumes, political party membership, or military spending as the independent variable, the geography, population, international organisation

membership, historical relations, religion, and many more invariant and relevant variables are going to normally be excluded from these models. For these reasons and others, it has been generally argued that the fixed effects models should be used on panel data (SHIN – RAUDENBUSH 2010; VAISEY – MILES 2017) – it was termed as the recommended or even "golden standard" model. In this regard, the fixed effects model seems to be the reasonable choice for the presented data. Nevertheless, the application of Hausman's specification test to the random and fixed effects on the full data produced a negative χ^2 and thus failed to meet the asymptotic assumptions of the test. The comparison of models with dropped outliers (namely Ukraine), however, produced significant results ($\chi^2 = 32.51$, p-value = 0), which also implies the use of a fixed effects model. While the results of the Hausman test for full data can signify some problems with the use of the fixed effects model, the common practice in the field, along with the results of the data without outliers, justifies the use of fixed effects for the presented data. In this regard, the effects are considered fixed across countries and across years. The decision to fix effects by country is common due to the aforementioned reasons. However, the decision to fix effects by year is based on the assumption that there are unobserved variables for each year that affect all the observed countries. In particular, this means that individual years in the tracked time-scale are correlated with independent variables and are non-variant across all the considered countries. This should include effects such as NATO summits, disturbances within the international system, or, in theory, even planetary level variables such as the global temperature increase that occurred within the given year.

With both the negative binomial and fixed effects models selected, it is important to note that the commonly used conditional negative binomial regression there has been identified as problematic due to its inability to control for all stable covariates (ALLISON 2005; ALLISON – WATERMAN 2002). Instead, either the unconditional fixed effects model or the so-called hybrid (the within-between RE model) is recommended. The issue with the first model is that it is affected by a problem with incidental parameters and can yield inconsistent estimators. Nevertheless, the results offered by Allison – Waterman (2002: 264) and Greene (2011). encourage optimism regarding their consistency, especially when combined with the use of robust standard errors. Furthermore, as Michalopoulos – Papaioannou (2016) report, this method is becoming more and more used in the academic

literature dealing with panel data. The second option has been described as the most robust option available for panel data (BELL – FAIRBROTHER – JONES 2010), and it is achieved through expressing the time-variant covariates as deviations from the individuum-specific mean. Because of this, estimates from both models are reported for the full data, while the additional models (using individual interaction categories as dependent variables, and 2014 as the breaking point, as discussed below) are estimated using the negative binomial fixed effects.

While the thus-provided results are the basis for the conclusions in this paper, they can be rather abstract. Consequently, the comparison of the two cases with high variability in the level of interaction over the tracked period is provided as an illustration of how the identified variables work in practice. The independent variables are described first, followed by the description of how NATO's interaction frequency and intensity changed through the years for each of the pair. Then a short qualitative comparison of the nature of the interaction events is provided to highlight these changes.

RESULTS

Data exploration

TABLE 2: SUMMARY STATISTICS

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Frequency	7.58	7.47	0	50
Intensity	19.10	19.33	0	132
Political-Technical	.73	1.19	0	7
Military-Technical	3.57	4.05	0	23
Military-Representative	1.80	1.97	0	12
Political-Representative	1.47	2.21	0	17
Power (log)	14.89	1.19	12.66	17.48
Power difference	1.20	1.21	−1.18	4.05
Stability	-.14	1.00	−2.81	1.59
Democracy	.40	.25	.07	.87
Trade	.43	.21	.08	.82
Globalisation	69.26	12.35	41.12	92.10

Considering the fact that the presented data on NATO-partner interaction is the first of its kind, it is reasonable to explore it for any additional

insights before delving into the regression analysis itself. Table 2 provides the summary statistics for all the used variables, with the dependent variable in italics. Both the Frequency and Intensity statistics, along with the distribution plot (Figures 1 and 2; see the electronic attachment to the article), display a wide range between the different observations. This is confirmed by the boxplots for both the Intensity and Frequency variables grouped by countries (Figures 5 and 6; see the electronic attachment to the article). They show that the most varied interactions, in terms of both Intensity and Frequency, were observed in the cases of Georgia, Finland, Serbia, Sweden, and Ukraine. At the same time, as noted before, Ukraine is shown to be the clear outlier in the data. In terms of total numbers categorised by year and country (Figures 3, 4 and 13; see the electronic attachment to the article), it is firstly possible to say that there is a clear growing trend in NATO's interactions with its partners since 2011, with the most marked rise after 2014, drops in 2013 and 2017, and the maximum (417 interactions) in 2016. According to the categorisation by interaction type, this rise can mostly be attributed to the major increase in military technical cooperation.

Looking at Figures 1 and 2, and Tables 4 and 5, (see the electronic attachment to the article) this framing seems to be confirmed. Between 2011 and 2018 there was a major change in the preferred partners' geographic locations. Overall, the partners that were further afield and were prominent in 2011 saw a major decrease in interaction, while interaction with European partners reached new highs. A breaking point for the changes is the year 2015, when almost all European countries ranked highly above their previous ranks – as the most important examples, Sweden went from 12th place to 2nd, and Austria from 27th to 11th in the frequency ranking. The engagement with Europeans was also accompanied by an increase in NATO's interactions with Iraq and Israel, which dwindled until 2015. This means that the partners NATO interacted the most with changed. Countries such as Japan, Pakistan, and Australia, which were originally very prominent, and countries such as the Central Asian republics, which were originally moderately prominent, exchanged places with others, for example Iraq and Tunisia. Notably, in the frequency ranking, Japan and Pakistan went from the 4th place they shared in 2011 to the 18th and 30th place in 2018, respectively. Finally, it is interesting to note that North Macedonia, a partner that became a member state in 2019 (effective

2020), has drifted in and out of the top 5 during the tracked period, but it was never the most-interacted-with partner.

What does this basic description of the data suggest? Firstly, it appears that throughout the last decade the importance of NATO partnerships increased as the Alliance interacted more frequently and more intensely with its partners. Secondly, the geographic variation and refocus to partners closer to Europe would appear to be related to NATO's attempts at reinforcement of its vicinity rather than its building of ties with likeminded countries around the world. While they have not been used as variables in the previous debate, the contextualisation of this change in the framework of the renewed tensions with Russia and the creation of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq can certainly come to mind, especially due to the temporal co-occurrence of these events after 2014. At the same time, the change could have been also related to the change of the ISAF operation to the NATO mission Resolute Support at approximately the same time, as nations away from Europe lost importance. More importantly, the change after 2014 presents an interesting option for the regression analysis. Based on the presented variation it would be interesting to see whether this period has a significant impact on the estimates if it is included as a dummy variable.

Regression analysis results

The estimates of the different models can be found in Table 3 (model specifications are addressed in the note below the table; see the electronic attachment to the article). There are four values relevant for the interpretation – firstly, the coefficient; secondly, the p-value, or the statistical significance of the independent variable; thirdly, the marginal effects (dy/dx in the table); and fourthly, the incidence rate ratio (IRR). As for the coefficients, it is important to remember that since a negative binomial model has been used the coefficient represents the difference in the logs of expected count for one unit change in the given independent variable *ceteris paribus*. The p-values are interpreted using the traditional 0.05 level of significance. With regard to the marginal effects, the reported values represent the average marginal effects for all covariates. In general, they signify the response of the dependent variable to a single unit increase in the independent variable.[3] Finally, the incidence rate ratio provides a

similar parameter as the marginal effects, but unlike them it shows how, *ceteris paribus*, a one unit increase in the independent variable would influence the dependent variable by a factor.

Looking at the results, it is apparent that across the models using the full data there are only two significant variables – power and power difference. Together, they are not significant only for models 7 and 8, which use political and military technical interactions as dependent variables, with power difference by itself also not being significant for model 10, which deals with political representative interactions. Their marginal effects and incidence rate ratios are also very high, which shows a very strong impact on the Intensity and Frequency variables. For power difference, this implies that NATO interacts more and with higher intensity with partners whose power difference with their strongest neighbour is in their favour. However, in terms of simple power measurement the data confirm that NATO engages countries based on their power but in the opposite direction to that which was expected. This suggests that NATO interacts more with partners that have a lower overall power. And this holds true for both frequency and intensity, meaning that both the quantity and quality of interaction are higher for less powerful partners. The results indicate that no other variable is significant, with some of them even operating in the opposite direction to that which was expected. For example, democracy is reported to have a negative impact on interactions rather than a positive impact, as was originally assumed. Thirdly, neither democracy, stability, trade, nor globalisation play a role in explaining NATO's interactions with its partners in the full data. Interestingly, stability explains the military technical type of interaction with a rather strong incidence rate ratio, albeit at a lower level of significance. Furthermore, negative stability is significant for the political representative dimension of the interactions, but it does not have a very strong impact on the final count according to the marginal effects and the IRR. Finally, the assumption of the change in 2014 seems to be proved correct, as the 2014 dummy in models 5 and 6 scored very significantly in terms of p-value, as well as in marginal effects and IRR. This means that the simple fact of the given year being after 2014 increases the frequency by 10 and the intensity by 27.

There are several implications arising from the results. First and foremost, NATO seems to be interacting with partners that are powerful in

their regions, which implies it is behaving as an *exclusive* organisation. The implication is supported by both the changes in the partner prominence in terms of geography relative to NATO, and the fact that the acquired data highlight the importance of contextualised regional power (negative power difference) in explaining both the quantity and the quality of NATO's interactions with its partners. The significance of negative power difference underpins the argument further, since it was expected that if NATO behaved as an exclusive organisation, it would seek to protect its member states' borders by engaging powerful regional partners to ensure their support in case of conflict. It is also supported by the importance of trade for military technical cooperation, as it shows that countries that are economically tied to NATO members are those deemed important for military engagement at the working level. At the same time, this implies a nodal structure of NATO engagement, as was discussed by Moore and Coletta (2017) – meaning that NATO engages with partners that are powerful in their immediate neighbourhood in order to counter relevant threats.

However, they need not be relatively powerful with regard to the roster of NATO partners. This suggests that while NATO seeks utility through engagement with regionally important actors, it does not seek only majorly powerful partners and is also willing to support those economically close to it through military technical engagement. In short, NATO interacts more and better with partners that are relatively powerful in their region, but are not powerful relative to other NATO partners. This can mean that overly powerful nations might be less easy to "rein in" into NATO's strategy, whereas the weaker nations that have a regional utility might seek to bandwagon with NATO to maintain their regional edge and acquire a larger patron that would support them. At the same time, the political representative engagement without any other dimension with unstable countries suggests that NATO tends to engage unstable countries more on the political-strategic level than by offering actual aid, while focusing more on the question of regional dominance overall.

Nevertheless, there are two countries with major interactions with NATO that lie outside of this logic – Ukraine and Georgia. For Ukraine, as can be seen in figures 14 and 15, while the relation of lower power and higher Frequency and Intensity holds, the power difference works in the opposite direction. For Georgia, it is the reverse – as figures 16 and 17 show (see the

electronic attachment to the article) – the increase in power difference works as it should (i.e. a higher power difference means lower Frequency and Intensity), but the increase in power increases Frequency and Intensity (see the electronic attachment to the article). Arguably, both Georgia and Ukraine are special cases as partners because they were both invaded by Russia in the last two decades; they are treated uniquely by the Alliance – Ukraine with the NATO Ukraine Commission and Georgia with the NATO-Georgia Commission, a framework under which no other partner operates; and both are very keen to join the Alliance despite the extreme geopolitical complexity of their situation.

Subsequently, it would be reasonable to run the models again but without these countries to see what effect dropping these two countries would have on the estimates. The results of doing so can be seen in figures 18 (Frequency) and 19 (Intensity), which re-confirm the previous results and mean that the general approach of NATO towards its partners still holds even in this case, with the cases of Georgia and Ukraine being different due to their unique situation (see the electronic attachment to the article).

Finally, the question of the developments before and after 2014 seems important based on the data. While the inclusion of the dummy variable does not change the coefficients of the other variables, it still shows that the temporal aspect is important. Because of this, it was of interest to run the regression with frequency on the data for the period before 2014 and those for the period after 2014 (the results are reported in Figures 5–8) to see whether there are different variables explaining the frequency and intensity before and after 2014 (see the electronic attachment to the article). The results indicate that before 2014 none of the tracked independent variables are significant, whereas power becomes relative after 2014. In theory, this could suggest that between 2011 and 2014 the partnership policy along with the nature of NATO's behaviour was in transition, while after 2014, with the developments in the international arena (Russia, the IS) the behaviour became clearer.

All in all, while it seems apparent from the description of the impact of the variables on the data that NATO interacts more with countries powerful in their region but not very powerful in absolute terms, it might still be rather abstract. It would serve better to show how they work in

particular cases, especially those that were identified as varying in their intensity over the tracked period. As discussed in the methodology section, the two case studies provide a short comparison of Sweden and Japan – as two countries with high variation in their levels of interaction with NATO throughout the period – and a description of their respective data and how they interact with their position on NATO's interactions.

Case studies: Sweden and Japan

The cases of Sweden and Japan should illustrate the shift and the logic behind the significant variables identified above. Both countries score high on democracy (second and eighth on average), stability (sixth and seventh), and trade with NATO (fourth and third). In terms of power difference with their strongest neighbour – Russia in both cases – Japan has a strongly negative score (implying a major advantage for Japan), and Sweden scores mildly positively. A similar difference can be found in their power potential, where Japan is the strongest partner by a large margin difference (around 1).

Now looking at their individual interactions with NATO (Figures 9 and 10), there are several observations that are relevant (see the electronic attachment to the article). Firstly, Sweden's major increase in interactions between 2014 and 2015 is caused by the military technical cooperation, which has always been predominant in interactions with this country.

However, Japan's military representative interaction, which was dominant in the interactions with it between 2011 and 2014, went down over the following period. Similarly, the political technical cooperation with Sweden was almost non-existent before 2014, whereas it picked up afterwards.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent					
Power	−3.29***	−5.17***	−1.12**	−1.51***	−3.29***
(ST. ERROR)	(1.05)	(1.20)	(0.44)	(0.5)	(1.05)
DY/DX	−24.95	−99.74	-	-	−24.95
IrR	0.04	0.04	0.32	0.25	0.03
Power	−1.76**	−1.97**	−0.63*	−0.83**	−1.76**
Difference	(0.73)	(0.86)	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.73)
	−13.39	−38.02	-	-	−13.39
	0.17	0.17	0.53	0.46	0.17
Democracy	−0.69	0.08	−0.21	0.39	−0.69
	(0.75)	(0.93)	(0.70)	(0.87)	(0.75)
	−5.26	1.52	-	-	−5.26
	0.50	0.49	0.81	1.47	0.49
Stability	0.11	0.09	0.07	0.04	0.11
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.12)
	0.90	1.85	-	-	0.90
	1.12	1.12	1.07	1.04	1.12
Trade	−0.71	−0.64	1.35	1.72*	−0.71
	(1.04)	(1.17)	(0.87)	(1.02)	(1.04)
	−5.42	−12.49	-	-	−5.42
	0.48	0.48	3.88	4.88	0.48
Globalisation	−0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.02
	(0.01)	(0.022)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
	−0.11	−0.04	-	-	−0.11
	0.98	0.98	0.99	1.01	0.98
(GDPpC)	0.01	0.01**	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
(GDP)	$-2.45e^{-12}$***	$-2.18e^{-12}$**	$8.52e^{-13}$	$9.87e^{-13}$	$-2.45e^{-12}$***
	($6.05e^{-13}$)	($8.49e^{-13}$)	($7.14e^{-13}$)	($8.96e^{-13}$)	($6.05e^{-13}$)
2014 Dummy					1.48***
					(0.18)
					11.25
					4.41
LOG likelihood	−703.37	−1020.31	−794.01	−1109.77	−703.37

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Independent					
Power	−5.17***	−5.01	−0.14	−4.77***	−4.58**
(ST. ERROR)	(1.20)	(3.22)	(1.30)	(1.42)	(2.10)
DY/DX	−99.74	−3.66	−0.50	−8.60	−5.98
IrR	0.01	0.01	0.86	0.01	0.02
Power	−1.97**	−0.92	−0.20	−2.13*	−3.23
Difference	(0.86)	(2.23)	(0.95)	(1.08)	(2.05)
	−38.02	−0.67	−0.73	−3.85	−5.28
	0.13	0.39	0.81	0.11	0.02
Democracy	0.08	−1.47	−0.04	0.31	−2.27
	(0.93)	(1.76)	(0.94)	(1.20)	(1.63)
	1.52	−1.07	−0.16	0.56	−3.39
	1.08	0.22	0.95	1.36	0.10
Stability	0.09	0.56*	0.17	0.29*	−0.53**
	(0.13)	(0.30)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.21)
	1.85	0.41	0.67	0.53	−0.84
	1.10	1.75	1.18	1.34	0.56
Trade	−0.64	−3.71	2.17*	−1.02	−4.09*
	(1.17)	(3.25)	(1.20)	(1.69)	(2.44)
	−12.49	−2.71	8.84	−1.84	−5.79
	0.52	0.03	10.23	0.35	0.01
Globalisation	−0.01	−0.04	0.02	−0.03	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
	−0.42	−0.03	0.06	−0.06	0.005
	0.99	0.96	1.01	0.96	1.00
(GDPpC)	0.01**	0.01	$6.52e^{-6}$	0.01*	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
(GDP)	$-2.18e^{-12}$**	$-3.36e^{-6}$**	$-2.14e^{-12}$	$-2.45e^{-12}$***	$-9.95e^{-12}$
	$(8.49e^{-13})$	$(2.19e^{-12})$	$(1.42\ e^{-12})$	$(8.04e^{-12})$	$(2.15e^{-12})$
2014 Dummy	1.60***				
	(0.20)				
	30.85				
	4.96				
LOG likelihood	−1020.01	−255.49	−526.82	−459.04	−362.78

*NOTE: Models 1 and 2 are estimated on full data using an unconditional binomial fixed effects model with robust standard errors and treat Frequency and Intensity respectively as dependent variables. Models 3 and 4 are estimated the same way but using a within-between random effects (hybrid) model. Models 5 and 6 use Frequency and Intensity as dependent variables but include a dummy variable for 2014. Models 7–10 use the individual Intensity categories – counts of political technical, military technical, military representative, and political representative interactions – as dependent variables. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Since Power is treated as a multiplicative interaction term, GDP and GDPpC are included in all the models as composing variables. Their marginal effects at different values can be found in Tables 5 and 6 in the supplementary material. Asterisks next to the coefficient value denote p-values at the specific level of significance – * for p-value < 0.1; ** for p-value < 0.05; *** for p-value < 0.01.*

Secondly, the Japanese interactions did not dwindle compared to the original numbers, although they were reduced. Yet, it was the major increase in the reported interactions with Sweden that dwarfed the Japanese interactions. Upon further exploration of the event level data,[4] the different nature of the interactions is even more visible – while until 2014 the limited military technical cooperation with Japan was centred around its participation in the counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, from 2015 onwards the sporadic operational engagement with it takes place mostly in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea. The interactions of a military technical type with Sweden were always about exercises; however, since 2015 they picked up significantly, especially with regard to Air Policing and the Baltic Sea region maritime cooperation.

The key insight from this short comparison is that while both countries have similar scores on other independent variables, Sweden has a lower absolute power compared to Japan, while it still is a relevant player in its region – a region that is right on NATO's borders next to Russia. In more empirical terms, it can be seen on the fact that while Sweden has been described as a special partner for a long time (COTTEY 2013) – even since the Cold War – there has even been a further qualitative change in this respect after 2014. It can be seen on the signing of the host nation support agreement (PETERSSON 2018), or on the fact that Sweden (along with Finland) sat at the NATO Summit in a special format for the first time in 2016 (BACZYNSKA 2016) – incidentally a couple of months after the publishing of the RAND report on wargaming in the Baltics that highlighted the importance of Swedish Gotland for defence of the region (SHLAPAK – JOHNSON 2016). Combined with the information from Figure 13, the increase of NATO's military technical interaction type after 2014 accompanies the shift in dominance from one partner to the other (see the electronic attachment to the article). It is most probably here where the logic of lower total power coupled with regional relevance became central to NATO's behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS: NATO AS AN EXCLUSIVE ORGANISATION

The presented paper started with the claim that the partnership interactions between NATO and its partners can serve as a measurement of NATO's behaviour in terms of the scale whose poles are being an organisation that is *exclusive* – defined by a focus on the defence of its members – and

being an organisation that is *inclusive*, namely focused on global protection of democracies and human rights. Based on the evaluation of the existing literature on NATO partnerships it was established that while an *exclusive organisation* as an ideal type would suggest that NATO attempts to maintain the highest level of intensity in its interactions with powerful partners with a sufficient military capacity that could be of use in a major (global) conflict in a particular region, an *inclusive organisation* would imply an engagement with like-minded democracies that are tightly integrated into the world order. These two ideal points were associated with particular indicators – power, power in context, and trade for the *exclusive* pole; and democracy, stability and globalisation for the *inclusive* pole. Levels of NATO-partner interactions were measured through an original dataset measuring quantity (Frequency) as well as quality (Intensity) through a new categorisation of these interactions. The relationship between the two and the identified independent variables was estimated using the unconditional negative binomial regression with fixed effects as well as the within-between (hybrid) model.

The presented results imply that NATO has drifted significantly towards the *exclusive* pole of the spectrum over the last decade. According to the findings, countries in Europe and the Middle East – regions where NATO was challenged by Russia and the IS – gained majorly in prominence, while countries that NATO engaged in other parts of the globe fell in their rankings. At the same time, the results from the regression analysis indicate that NATO engages primarily countries that are powerful relative to their neighbourhood, even though they are not the most powerful among the partners. Their levels of democracy, integration into the international institutions, and stability, do not seem to play any overarching role. It can be best seen on the cases of Japan and Sweden – both of which are globalised and stable democracies, but the interactions with the former stalled and even declined while those with the latter increased significantly due to its position in a region of importance for the defence of NATO members. The result also highlights the importance of geography for the relevance of power in NATO-partner interactions. In fact, the opposite direction of the power variable in the regression results implies that NATO would not seek engagement with powerful partners that might lie outside of relevant regions. Countries such as Japan, Australia and South Korea rank highly on the power variable, but are geographically far away from or not

particularly relevant for the core NATO interests in the Euro-Atlantic area, and NATO's interactions with them waned over the years. Outside of the particular identification of reasons for partner interaction intensity, the gathered data also suggest a major increase in overall NATO-partner interactions, which highlights an increased willingness to engage partners across the board.

There are several contributions the paper and its conclusions present for the wider academic debates. Firstly, the newly created dataset of NATO interactions, with their categorisation into political-technical, military-technical, military-representative, and political-representative interactions, allowed for their first quantitative analysis in several dimensions. Secondly, this analysis and its results contributed to the literature on NATO partnerships with support for positions (COTTEY 2018: 69; MOORE 2017: 183–184; MOORE – COLLETA 2017: 13) describing NATO, in the later years, as turning towards an *exclusive* – otherwise defensive or Europeanised – organisation that engages partners in a utilitarian and nodal way because of their particular contributions to countering Russia and the IS. Thirdly, considering the debate on the nature of strategic partnerships, at least from the NATO perspective and based on the presented data, it can be argued that questions of power and defence in engagement of partners are important in maintaining a high level of interactions. This contributes to the knowledge of NATO's reasoning for interaction with a given partner.

Considering these conclusions, the next logical step for further research would be to analyse the particular cases of countries that significantly fell or rose in prominence in terms of their interaction with NATO and identify in a more qualitative way how their geopolitical position within their region and overall power along with their trade engagement with NATO influence the way NATO interacts with them as partners. At the same time, it would appear fruitful to continue building the established dataset into the future to allow for additional quantitative analyses and descriptions of NATO partnerships as they develop in time.

ENDNOTES

1 This does not necessarily constitute a problem for the data reliability. It is true that from the perspective of activities, the ACT, along with the JWC and the JFTC, was responsible for the organisation of Major Joint Exercises, which generally drew partners' participation. However, according to a search on the ACO websites, these exercises – both their execution and planning events – were reported through other NATO websites as well since the ACO commands were their primary participants.

2 Most of the time, the website only contained events for the past year.

3 However, as the independent variables used here are continuous in nature, these values represent the instantaneous rate of change. More importantly, the interpretation of the instantaneous rate of change is dependent on the unit of measurement of the independent variable. In the presented case, the units of measurement are non-existent due to the index nature of most of the variables – because of this, the interpretation should be taken with caution.

4 See the annexed underlying data.

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