



# СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ И РЕГИОНОВЕДЕНИЕ

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## DYNAMICS OF THE POLICY NETWORK IN THE ASPECT OF GLOBAL CRISIS PHENOMENA (ON THE EXAMPLE OF NATO)

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* A peculiarity of modern political reality is the interconnectedness of the processes of globalization and fragmentation in the world. In a new emerging paradigm of international relations, policy networks come to the fore. These are the network structures for managing public affairs, uniting a variety of political actors. The relevance of the study is due to the need for an objective evaluation of the development of the policy network in the context of global changes as well as forecasting potential threats in the field of international security. The aim of the work is to examine the dynamics of the policy network in the context of global crisis phenomena, using the example of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *Methods.* The theoretical basis of the research is the network approach and the concept of policy networks, which allow us to study the object from an interdisciplinary point of view and conduct structural studies at all levels of analysis. The complexity of the structure of policy networks requires the use of methods of scientific cognition – analysis and synthesis, media analytics such as the research of content, and expert opinions. *Analysis.* The policy network is characterized both by the resilience and stability of its structure, which allows it to function effectively in internal and external transformations, and by the complexity of the relations among its actors. Global policy networks are formed on the principles of mutually beneficial resource exchange to achieve common goals and solve individual problems. An example of how NATO has been functioning in the period 2020–2023 showcases trends towards the transformation of the policy network from disintegration to subsequent reintegration to obtain the desired result. In a crisis situation, NATO as a global policy network is experiencing the dynamics of “connected instability”, establishing new forms of actor relationships that require flexibility in political decision-making. *Results.* In conditions of global instability and uncertainty, policy networks play a supporting (safety-maintaining) role in the processes of supranational regulation, contributing to the creation of an effective architecture of multi-level governance. As a result of the research, the author comes to the conclusion that it is necessary to update the theory of the network approach to further develop mechanisms for describing the actors’ cooperation within the policy network.

**Key words:** network theory, policy network, crisis phenomena, globalization, fragmentation, pandemic, NATO, CSTO.

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## ДИНАМИКА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ СЕТИ В АСПЕКТЕ ГЛОБАЛЬНЫХ КРИЗИСНЫХ ЯВЛЕНИЙ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ НАТО)

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**Аннотация.** Введение. Особенностью современной политической действительности является взаимосвязанность процессов глобализации и фрагментации мира. В новой формирующейся парадигме международных отношений на первый план выходят политические сети – сетевые структуры управления публичными делами, объединяющие многообразие субъектов политического действия. Актуальность исследования обусловлена необходимостью объективной оценки развития политической сети в контексте мировых политических изменений, а также прогнозирования потенциальных угроз в сфере международной безопасности. Цель работы – анализ политической сети в аспекте глобальных кризисных явлений на примере Организации Североатлантического договора. **Методы.** Теоретическую основу исследования составляют сетевой подход и концепция политических сетей, позволяющие изучить объект с междисциплинарной точки зрения, провести структурные исследования на всех уровнях анализа. Усложнение структуры политических сетей требует применения методов научного познания – анализа и синтеза, медиааналитики – исследования контента, мнений. **Анализ.** Политическая сеть характеризуется одновременно устойчивостью и стабильностью структуры, позволяющими эффективно функционировать при внутренних и внешних трансформациях, и сложностью отношений акторов. Глобальные политические сети образуются на принципах взаимовыгодного ресурсного обмена для достижения общих целей и решения отдельных проблем. Пример функционирования НАТО в период 2020–2023 гг. показывает тенденции к трансформации политической сети от разобщения деятельности с последующей реинтеграцией для получения конечного результата. В кризисной ситуации НАТО как глобальная политическая сеть испытывает динамику «связанной нестабильности», организующую новые формы взаимоотношений акторов, требующие гибкости в принятии политических решений. **Результаты.** В условиях глобальной нестабильности и неопределенности политические сети выполняют поддерживающую (страховочную) роль в процессах надгосударственного регулирования, способствуя созданию эффективной архитектуры многоуровневого управления. В результате исследования автор приходит к выводу о необходимости актуализации теории сетевого подхода, дальнейшей разработки механизмов описания взаимодействия акторов внутри политической сети.

**Ключевые слова:** сетевая теория, политическая сеть, кризисные явления, глобализация, фрагментация, пандемия, НАТО, ОДКБ.

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**Introduction.** In modern international political discourse, the theories of policy networks gain increased relevance. The policy network is a complex structure of relatively stable relations between non-governmental and state institutions, where communication actors have common interests and act cooperatively to achieve their goals. At the same time, the network interaction of actors is characterized by a multi-level dialogue, which determines the process of political decision-making.

Currently, the largest policy networks influencing the development of the entire system of international relations are the United Nations (1945), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949), and the European Union (1993). Although they differ in the composition of participants, the nature of relations, resources, and goals, they can be attributed to global policy networks.

The United Nations (UN) is a universal platform for cooperation between countries. The European Union (EU) is a supranational formation

of European countries based on politics and economics, combining the traits of an international organization and a whole state, formally a political alliance with a military component. In the EU, networks are considered as a special form of governance. The European Union is a policy network with a multi-level governance system in which actors of different levels interact within a shared, complex network structure to achieve specific goals. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has a “crisis nature”. It was established in 1949 as a military-political union for the purpose of collective defense against the influence of the USSR.

The aim of the work is to study the dynamics of the policy network in light of the global crisis phenomena of 2020–2023, using the example of NATO. The study provides a general overview of the problem of the development of the global policy network and presents an example of the transformation of the policy network of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has become a true “stress test” for world politics and the global economy, and the crisis of the world order – the growing trends towards fragmented globalization.

**Methods and materials.** The word “network” in its casual meaning, “a system of communications located in any space” [5, pp. 319–320], has stepped into active speech in recent decades due to the transition of human civilization to the information society and the formation of a global infosphere.

The scholarly status of the “policy network” is not defined exhaustively. The theory of policy networks proceeds from the understanding of the organization of society as certain network structures of public affairs management, linking the government and citizens who share a common interest – a mutual interest of participants in each other. The main provisions of the theory of policy networks in political studies are related to the consideration of the policy network as an effective form of public administration organization.

Non-Russian scholars, despite the different approaches (structural (relational), network, etc.) and schools (Anglo-Saxon, German, Dutch, continental, etc.) to the definition of policy networks, coincide in that gradually the network form of social organization becomes dominant in the social order. According to the network

approach, with the development of Internet communications and information technologies, information has an increasing influence on people. When placed in virtual information networks, an individual becomes an interconnected part of constant network communication.

Manuel Castells understands a network society as an open, dynamically functioning social system in which traditional forms of personal and social dependence for an individual are displaced. The network is the resource potential for the development of society, providing different options for social change since, in the network structure, the citizens are relatively free to make decisions: “...this network logic produces a higher-level social result...” [4, p. 500]. At the same time, emphasizing the prospects of the network, Manuel Castells notes that the network structures are fraught with contradictions: “The presence or absence in networks and the dynamics of network interaction are a decisive source of dominance and change in our society” [4, p. 500].

According to Scott McClurg and David Lazer, “politics is essentially a network phenomenon” [9, p. 1]. The policy network, according to Rod Rhodes, has an institutional component and is formed in various sectors of politics as a complex of structural relations between the state and society through mutual sectoral interest. Accordingly, there are five types of networks: professional networks, inter-management networks, political communities, producer networks, and issue networks [15]. Keith Provan and Patrick Kenis believe that network efficiency will be higher in a resource-rich environment with overall network stability [14]. Tanja Börzel defines “policy networks” as “a set of relatively stable relationships, by nature non-hierarchical and interdependent, linking a variety of actors who share common interests regarding politics and who exchange resources...” [3, p. 254].

Russian scholars have been actively developing the theory of policy networks: L.V. Smorgunov, A.S. Sherstobitov, E.V. Savorskaya, I.A. Bykov, O.V. Mikhailova, A.I. Soloviev, N.A. Baranov, etc. The studies of the Russian scholars emphasize the increasing influence of policy networks on society, while the complexity of managing network structures is noted when “many other actors are involved in the political process” [19, p. 15].

L.V. Smorgunov rightly says that the “policy network” is a complex phenomenon: “In general, a policy network is a system of state and non-state entities in a certain field of politics that interact on the basis of resource dependence in order to achieve general agreement on a political issue of interest to all, using formal and informal norms” [19, p. 29]. The theory of policy networks “reconstructs the relations” between the state and society [19, p. 19], offering a new type of public administration: “governance without government” [19, p. 23]. Communication links are extremely important in a network system of relationships. In the network, not society as institutions, but relations and connections between them play a key role: “It is the mutual connections between subjects that make the network a network” [19, p. 34].

It is generally believed that there is no hierarchy in the structure of the policy network. However, the network in politics is a consensus form of governance, and network political relations are multidimensional in nature. For example, issue networks are distinguished by a large number of participants with a limited degree of interdependence.

In this regard, the definition of “network,” which can be applied to politics, proposed by the famous philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latura is of interest: “By this word I mean a string of actions where each participant is considered as a full-scale mediator... It (the network) indicates their objectivity, that is, the ability of each actor to force other actors to do unexpected things” [8, pp. 128-129]. The scholar’s point of view about special network relationships, which can be characterized by surprise and unpredictability, somewhat does not coincide with the provisions of the concept of policy networks, which emphasizes the active and conscious interaction of actors who make a political decision and participate in its implementation.

The complex dynamics of policy networks are noted by Ralph Stacy: “As the diversity increases, the energy within the relationship rises. The properties of the relationship then shift from stability and predictability towards randomness and disintegration. At some critical range in information/energy flow, connectivity and diversity, the dynamics of bounded instability appear... It is in this dynamic that novel forms of relationship may emerge” [20, p. 368].

According to Ralph Stacy, the complication of the structure of networks entails a change in internal processes and relationships; that is, at different stages of network evolution, it is possible to build and organize, subordinate, and co-subordinate the positions of actors. Consequently, in a situation of “crisis” there is a transformation of the policy network; the interactions and relations of actors are adjusted.

Currently, the theory of policy networks is becoming more relevant in international relations, which is associated with the transformation of existing political structures and the emergence of a new type of network community.

E.V. Savorskaya notes that the nature of the influence of policy networks at the global and regional levels remains “extremely asymmetric” today [17, p. 5]. At the regional level, policy networks “as part of a unified system of supranational governance” have been functioning for a long time, and the mechanisms of “relations between individuals or groups of individuals” have already been analyzed, but at the global stage, the problems are not thoroughly studied; – there is no unified international system of governance institutions [17, p. 26]. In addition, the relations between actors in global policy networks “obey ... different laws” and are influenced by “a greater number of external factors” [17, p. 26].

In this study, the network approach is used, the adaptability of the tools of which makes it possible to consider the object in an interdisciplinary plan. The methodology allows to identify the specific properties of a policy network and predict the ways of its development: transformation, disintegration, reintegration, etc. The disadvantages of the network approach include incompleteness, vagueness of the boundaries of the study, the features of the network itself – the lack of static, its dynamism, variability. For the analysis, the traditional method of grouping data is used with the allocation of segments, which are the actors of the network (subjects of political action) that form its basis.

**Analysis.** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization includes civil and military structures, various organizations, and institutions (see Figs. 1, 2).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a rather complex structure that is based on the principle of management not on a geographical

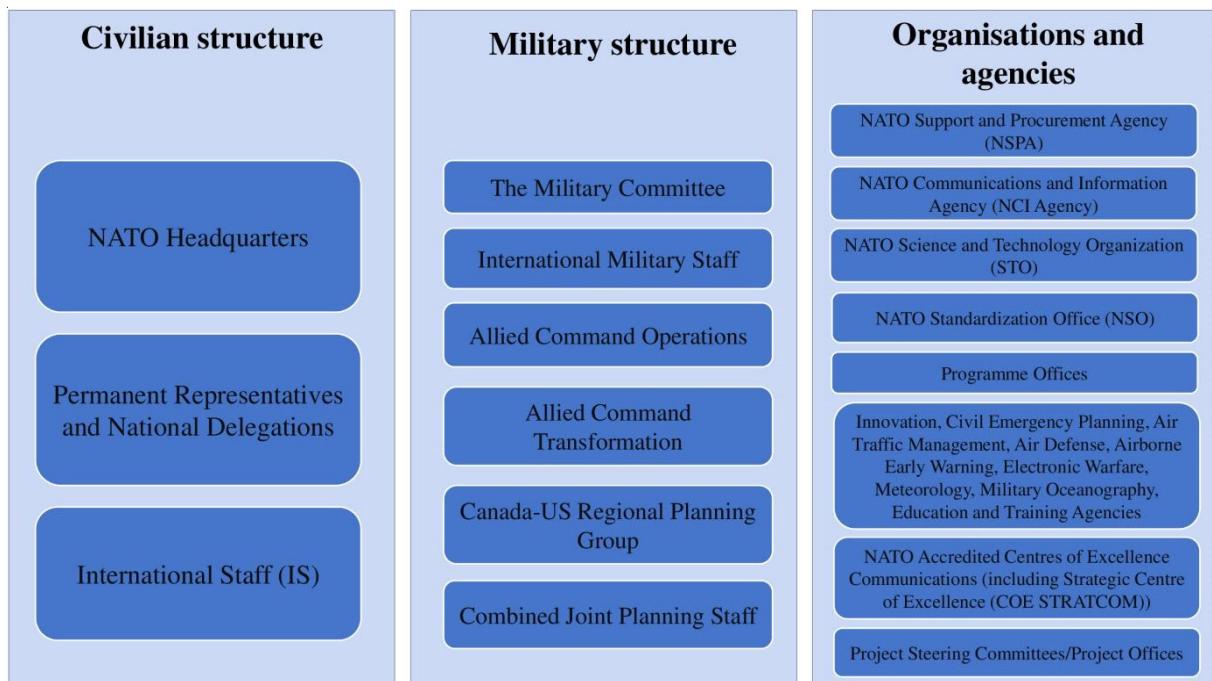


Fig. 1. NATO structure

Note. Source: [11].

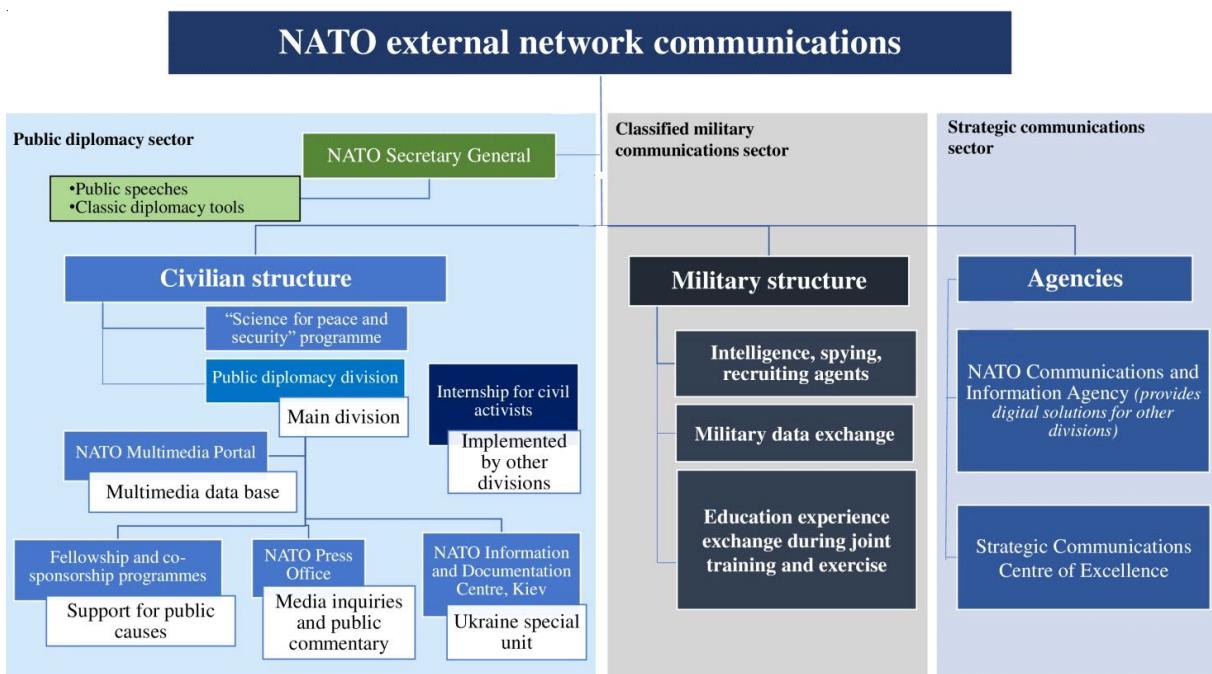


Fig. 2. NATO external network communications

Note. Source: [11].

basis but rather on a functional basis. NATO can be divided into segments based on either "hard" power (military institutions) or "civil" divisions that primarily utilize tools of diplomacy, propaganda, and counter-propaganda. It is the "soft power"

segment that contains the key images that are generated around the organization and represent it on the world stage.

NATO's main consultation forum that has political and decision-making power is the North

Atlantic Council. The activities of the Council are organized by dozens of subordinate committees that implement specific areas of NATO policy. The Council includes permanent representatives of all Member States.

The NATO Secretary General is the Chairman of the North Atlantic Council and is responsible for consultation and the decision-making process. His role in the media is important. The Chairman of the North Atlantic Council has the ability to significantly influence the perception of NATO in the world as a whole. By coordinating the activities of various departments, the Secretary General is the connecting figure of the global network consisting of actors (states), which helps to overcome internal network contradictions and develop a single alliance narrative.

The public diplomacy of NATO is based on the network principle. The NATO Public Diplomacy Division is part of the NATO Civilian structure and includes several departments and areas: NATO Press Office, NATO Multimedia Portal, NATO Information and Documentation Center (NIDC) in Ukraine, Co-sponsorship grants, and NATO Contact Point Embassies in partner countries [11].

The main function of the Public Diplomacy Division is the implementation of external communications for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Division specialists are working to strengthen the image of NATO, increase the credibility of the organization, and implement strategic policy through face-to-face communication activities and digital programs directly in the countries of presence and partner states.

In addition to the official structures involved in the development and promotion of the "Atlantic" agenda, there are other tools that serve NATO's public diplomacy. There is a tendency to universalize the organization, to include on the agenda not only military and political topics but also cultural, educational, scientific, and other issues. Cultural and educational events are organized by different departments of NATO, presenting the alliance as a whole. For example,

the Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program offers expert advice and financial support for individual activities related to civil security. The NATO Internship Programme provides an opportunity to boost the credibility and acceptance of the Organization's policies in the member states. Grants for civil activists and projects help to achieve strategic goals at the expense of civilian resources within the countries of NATO presence.

Activists can be non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations (NPOs), universities, think tanks, and other relevant civil society organizations. It is worth noting the multi-channel image policy of NATO, which is organized on the principle of involving the maximum possible number of political and public actors to build a positive image of the organization. For instance, the American Atlantic Council has been operating since 1961, created to support NATO and uniting many regional centers not only in America but also in Asia and Europe, designed to strengthen international security and promote global economic prosperity. In practice, the information influence of such structures often goes beyond the scope of the organization itself (legal, geographical, zone of influence, responsibility, etc.).

In recent years, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, boasting high propaganda flexibility, has been actively increasing social networking structures to directly influence online users by providing round-the-clock news coverage based on public contacts. The content of multimedia and NATO sites is systematically updated. At the same time, the trend is not to inform but to engage. At the moment, NATO is actively interacting with the audience on platforms such as Facebook \*, Instagram \*\*, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and LinkedIn. The pages are regularly updated, including information and the publication of content designed to involve various categories of Internet users in a dialogue. The content encourages community members to leave comments and interact with the elements of publications (surveys, maps, games, etc.). For instance, on Instagram,

\*The Facebook social network is owned by the terrorist and extremist organization Meta Platforms Inc, whose activities are prohibited in the Russian Federation.

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there is an interactive NATO map that points to all member states. The NATO Multimedia Center consolidates content hosted on various resources, being the central node of the network for media influence [11].

Let us define the features of the NATO network structure in comparison with the key provisions of the theory of the policy network (see Table). In this work, the criteria of the “policy network” are applied, obtained on the basis of existing scholarly approaches.

L.V. Smorgunov notes that intergovernmental organizations are “clustered structures of the global network” with multi-level management [19, p. 300]. The success of the functioning of the policy network is determined by the following factors: 1) the tripartite nature of the composition of the participants: “the public sector, civil society and business,” which allows the formation of effective “institutional mechanisms”; 2) adaptability of management mechanisms and openness to new participants; 3) speed and efficiency of response to external challenges; 4) subsidiarity and legitimacy of management [19, pp. 307-308].

In general, NATO’s policy network meets the indicators of “success.” To solve global problems, NATO actively cooperates with governmental and private institutions by expanding humanitarian projects, encouraging investors to channel resources into defense, and developing advanced technologies.

NATO is an intergovernmental network consisting of 31 member states (as of 2023).

The alliance is maintaining the “open doors” policy for new members. At the same time, the expansion of the actors of the military-political bloc (from the CIS countries, European countries, the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, and the Middle East) implies both multidirectional goals in the international arena and the preservation of the priority national interests of the member states. In practice, there is an increase in the interdependence of network members; the activities of national actors are often carried out with the “recommendations” of other members of the alliance.

Let us compare the NATO public diplomacy network with the tools for creating and maintaining the image of the opposite military-political bloc, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (hereinafter referred to as the CSTO), according to the theoretical model of graphs, whose positions on key political issues drastically diverge (see Fig. 3). Let us introduce five indicators that demonstrate the power and attractiveness of images:

1) presence in and promotion of new media channels;

2) interaction with civil society (degree of project focus on potential participants);

3) the development of the network of public diplomacy (the number of “soft power” institutions; forums, exhibitions, joint events, etc.);

4) coverage in the media (according to the Russian media segment) [18];

5) spending on soft power.

### **Comparative analysis of policy network patterns and NATO**

<b>№</b>	<b>Policy network criteria</b>	<b>NATO as a policy network</b>
1	Composition of network participants	Relationship actors. Tendency to expand the composition of actors. 31 participating country as of 2023
2	Type of institutionalization Type relationship	Intergovernmental network. The nature of the relationship is communicative. The presence of formal and informal norms
3	Sphere of politics	Military-political bloc. A broad approach to security. Unipolar approach to the world order
4	Degree of power concentration	Multilevel management. Co-administration of participating countries. The principle of collective leadership. The structure of NATO includes representatives of the member states. NATO activities are organized in the civil and military structures, organizations and institutions from specialized fields
5	Resource management	Resource consensus basis. Cooperative interests. Coordination. Consensual obligations in the use of army contingents and the conduct of combat operations. Interdependence
6	Structural characteristics	Open doors policy for new candidates. Candidates for membership in NATO go through a multi-stage process of accession, and they must not have problems that could weaken the defense and protection of the Organization. Ordered structure of links. Lack of periodicity and systemic connections. Horizontal interaction between network cells

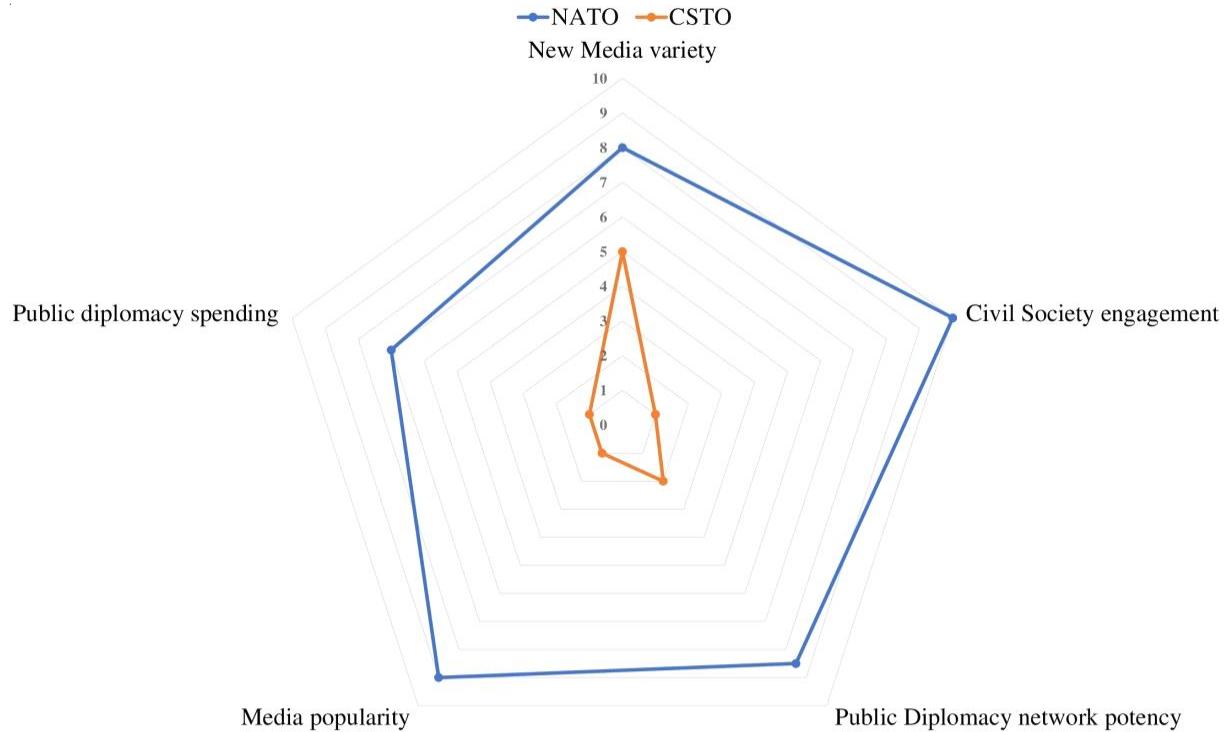


Fig. 3. NATO and CSTO images in the public sphere: comparison

Note. Source: [11; 13; 18].

The analysis showed that today, NATO is significantly superior to the CSTO in terms of the quality and quantity of activities in the field of public diplomacy. A feature of NATO's image policy is a strategic approach to ensuring the perception of the alliance by countries based on a well-thought-out approach to the image of the political network. The organization understands the need to win the trust of a global audience in order to secure regional dominance. To maintain a public image, NATO invests heavily in projects aimed at promoting and informing audiences about its goals and mission.

NATO's approach to soft power is characterized by the nature of foreign policy. In the context of competition for spheres of influence, proceeding mainly in the direction of "soft power" and the politics of images, NATO is actively seeking support among the population of member states, partner countries, and candidates for joining the alliance. This greatly facilitates the process of the integration of new regions of political dominance, especially in the post-Soviet space, where in a number of formerly Soviet states, the westernization tendencies have been intensifying.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization, on the contrary, fills the concept of "soft power"

and the politics of images with the opposite meaning: defensive. The CSTO is developing its own public agenda focused on maintaining international and regional security and stability, strengthening peace, countering external information influence, neutralizing threats to the information security of the member countries of the Organization, and protecting independence on a collective basis. The basis of the military-political potential of the Collective Security Treaty Organization is the "priority of political means over the military" [13].

Despite the fact that the CSTO is often criticized for the "hybrid nature of the organization... the lack of response to internal political crises in the member states of the organization," the further development of the organization is quite promising: "from a military-political bloc... to a multifunctional organization that has all the real instruments of response..." to the challenges of our time [2, pp. 115-116]. The advantage of the CSTO over NATO lies in the flexibility of its decision-making mechanisms. For example, in a conflict involving one of the organization countries, all members of NATO are obliged to act, while in a similar scenario, the members of the CSTO are not.

Scholars consider a possible evolution of NATO in several directions: 1) territorial expansion; 2) expansion of the area of responsibility; 3) expansion of functions. In each of these cases, there are opportunities and threats for the development of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which positions itself as a regional player with global goals and objectives.

Experts in the field of international defense and security note the difficulties in implementing the alliance's strategic policy. According to Linda Risso, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research in London, the implementation of NATO's communications strategy is complicated by the fact that NATO is a military-political organization that brings together allies and partner countries that have different competing goals and priorities. The political direction ensures the strengthening of public trust and support for the goals of NATO; the military direction promotes the mission of the alliance in the "architecture of global security" [16, p. 158]. Ideally, these two areas should "move in the same direction and have complementary practical goals" [16, p. 158]. And although over the past thirty years the alliance has been able to create a fairly effective institutional structure for strategic communications (StratCom) both within member states and beyond their borders, the organization has not been able to create a single narrative with a set of effective methods of influencing the audience.

The formation of NATO strategic communications has been going on since the late 1990s. The development of the information policy of the Organization was significantly influenced by the events in Kosovo (1998–1999) and Afghanistan (in the 2000s), which prompted an unprecedented level of attention from the media and the public to the activities of the alliance. However, the Crimean events of 2014, when "the Russians effectively used information," should be rightly considered the beginning of a large-scale transformation of NATO's communication strategy [16, p. 164]. Linda Risso emphasizes: "The Russian use of information and disinformation gave NATO the same shock at the political-military level that the Taliban \*\*\* had given ISAF at the operational level a decade earlier" [16, p. 164]. The events around Crimea

and the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 led to the need to coordinate all the activities of the alliance. The result of the transformation is the 2017 NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications, the main goal of which is to shape the global information environment in accordance with the priorities of the organization. Today, NATO StratCom continues to be an evolving process influenced by many factors, including trends towards fragmented discourse [16].

The COVID-19 pandemic is becoming a global challenge for NATO, requiring "improvement of its organizational capabilities" [10, p. 56]. E.A. Antyukhova notes that at the initial stage of the epidemic, there were certain miscalculations "in the operational planning system" of NATO [10, p. 51]. In the conditions of competition for access to advanced medical resources and the economic crisis in the member states, "intra-bloc contradictions have emerged" associated with the interaction of the alliance members: American and European, new and old [10, p. 56].

In the spring of 2020, against the backdrop of a challenging epidemiological situation, "some members of the alliance found themselves in virtual isolation and were forced to independently take measures to tackle the pandemic" [10, pp. 59-60]. The absence of a unified policy of providing assistance to the NATO member states in emergency circumstances "raised doubts about the effectiveness of the principle of collective mutual assistance" [10, p. 60]. A "serious blow" to the prestige of NATO was Italy's consent to accept Russian assistance, which was perceived by the leadership of the alliance "as a direct challenge to the unity of the bloc" [10, p. 60].

E.A. Antyukhova emphasizes that, despite the tough economic and political situation, the actions of the NATO leadership during the pandemic were holistic. Thus, the schedule of military exercises was adjusted, and "a moratorium was introduced on any movement" of the NATO units from the United States to Europe [10, pp. 57-58]. The official statements of the spring of 2020 on COVID-19 (briefing by NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg on March 19, 2020, and the summit of the NATO Council of Foreign Ministers on April 2, 2020, etc.) emphasize the need to fulfill long-term goals and

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\*\*\* A terrorist organization whose activities are prohibited in the Russian Federation.

keep military spending at an unchanged level. The NATO leadership understands the critical need to rethink the resources of the alliance in a pandemic, in particular the need to coordinate the actions of military and civilian structures to resolve crisis issues [10].

The main role of the “NATO response mechanism to the COVID-19 pandemic” is assigned to the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), which performs the functions of facilitating assistance to NATO member countries and partners and interaction with international humanitarian organizations [10, p. 61]. Since April 2020, the “key structure of the alliance” in the fight against the pandemic has become the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (NATO MILMED COE), which has become an international platform for the exchange of information [10, p. 62]. The role of NATO communication systems responsible for monitoring, such as the NATO Situation Center (SITCEN), Intelligence Warning Systems (NIWS), and Crisis Response Systems (NCRS), has increased. NATO cooperation with the World Health Organization, the UN, and the EU has intensified.

The new “pandemic space” required coordination of efforts to ensure collective security [10]. The key direction of NATO’s activities in the pandemic period is the information support of the alliance’s policy, which includes not only informing about the situation around coronavirus infection but also “the formation of a positive public perception regarding the use of collective defense potential to counter a new threat” [10, p. 66]. The “disinformation campaign provoked by Russia” and “excessive dependence on China in some areas of goods production” are new challenges that appeared during the epidemic [1].

The pandemic has brought to the fore a number of issues regarding the further development of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. An acute discussion in academic circles is caused by the issues of the distribution of member responsibility within the alliance and the unification of NATO’s relations with the EU. The policy of the NATO leadership in the sphere of further increasing military spending in the crisis conditions of the epidemic is critically met both inside the bloc and outside it [10].

E.A. Antyukhova concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic was both a “serious challenge to the sustainability” of the Organization and “an incentive to develop new mechanisms for NATO’s activities” [10, pp. 79-80]. Already in June 2020, the discussion of the strategic concept “NATO-2030” started, whose implementation involves strengthening and expanding the international political influence of the organization.

The concept of NATO-2030 directly points to the “threats” that come from Russia and China with their principles of “sovereign democracy” and models of a multipolar world order. The most important goal of the alliance is to strengthen cyber defense to ensure collective protection from external information interventions [12].

Professor Thomas Flichy de La Neuville (France) believes that NATO often lacks “political will” [6]. In fact, by 2030, the Organization “may face opponents consisting of both States and non-State actors who will work independently or in concert...” [6, p. 76]. Among the factors of today’s “survival” of NATO, the scholar notes the instability of the modern geopolitical situation, in which huge bureaucratic military organizations have become completely inadequate to counter external threats, and the “shortage” of intelligence of American and European states that are unable to make effective coordinated decisions. However, the revival of NATO, according to the expert, will happen for another reason: the urgent need to ensure “internal order in countries deeply destabilized by migration” [6, p. 76]. The scholar predicts: “In 2030 the weakened American and European countries will be challenged by a resurgent Russia... Nevertheless, it [NATO] can still adapt and transform, investing even more in technology to solve new internal problems” [6]. The transformation of NATO into a global network by 2030 is possible, provided that the accumulated internal problems are resolved and effective tools are created to counter external threats [6].

Using the mechanisms of expansion and partnership, the alliance establishes close ties with other states, regardless of their geographical location, which indicates the global activities of the organization. But unstable network relationships significantly complicate the process of admitting new members to NATO. There are trends toward the independence of individual

member countries of the alliance in making political decisions. One example is Turkey, which has taken an independent position on Iran's nuclear program and the prospects for the development of military cooperation between NATO and the EU, as well as intensifying political ties with Russia and China [21], which indicates inadequate network integration and the formation of new forms of relations between actors that go beyond one particular network.

The NATO communication strategy focuses on the unity of the alliance, emphasizing that the member states act collectively when making political decisions. In fact, there is a dominance of key actors in the formation of the agenda. Despite the horizontal nature of relations in the policy networks, there are decision-making centers in NATO that maintain the maximum number of connections and, in fact, coordinate the activities of the entire network.

Experts note that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is used by the United States to implement national strategic goals, such as deterring Russia and China. Professor of Shanghai University of International Studies Cheng Yawen, exploring the phenomenon of globalization and competition on the world stage, notes that "globalization reflects the will of the dominant countries" [23]. The scholar calls the USA the main catalyst of the globalization process. According to the researcher, it was precisely because of NATO's expansion that Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine: "It was a matter of security, as well as economics in the context of the globalization process" [23].

Recently, NATO has been striving to eliminate contradictions between member states (between Turkey and Sweden and Finland) and create an image of unity – a cohesive union of member countries acting on the principles of collective will, membership in which is open to any state. Meanwhile, the constructed image of NATO does not reflect the influence of the new state of the world order.

Edward Wong and Ana Swanson, journalists of the American edition of The New York Times, evaluate the state of international relations after the events in Ukraine after 2022 and come to the conclusion that "the result of all the disruptions may well be a fracturing of the world into

economic blocs" [22]. In an expert commentary for this article, Dani Rodrik, a professor of international political economy at Harvard Kennedy School, notes that the United States seeks to promote the idea of globalization in order to increase the dependence of other countries on the American political and economic systems. The scholar predicts: "Your interdependence can be weaponized against you... The war in Ukraine probably put a nail in the coffin of hyperglobalization" [22].

In expert studies, the idea of a future fragmented international order is becoming more prevalent. In a broad sense, we are talking about global "fragments" of the world; in a narrow sense, we are talking about fragmented network structures – policy networks.

Zhao Huasheng, a professor at Fudan University, states that fragmentation without internal interconnections and relationships is simply "anarchy" [7]. Today, it is necessary to "work out the structural framework of joint existence" [7]. According to the scholar, today it is Russia and China that propose "forming an inclusive international system and order in which various elements will be integrated into symbolic coexistence and peaceful unification with common rules, all while maintaining differences" [7].

**Results.** A policy network is a public affairs management structure characterized by special consensus relations among participants who have common resources to form a collective political decision and achieve a common goal. It differs in variability and dynamism. The "flexibility" of the network allows it to change its composition: to form problematic subnets, exclude and introduce new actors, etc.

Despite the complexity of the structure and organization, the network is one of the most promising forms of public administration. In the modern conditions of instability in international relations, policy networks "are a kind of "safety net" in politics, which "contribute to its subsequent implementation," requiring networks to "gradually get out of the "hierarchy shadow" and institutionalization" [17, p. 6].

NATO is an example of a global policy network. The network nature of the NATO is determined by the variables that characterize it as a network: a large number of actors of various

natures interacting on the basis of consensus principles of mutually beneficial exchange of resources to achieve common goals; group interest, expressed in ensuring peace by political and military means; collective defense; lack of a vertical hierarchy of relationships; the presence of a special “network” political culture of decision-making; propensity to change; dynamism; and the possibility of expansion.

Crisis phenomena determine the evolution of NATO as a policy network and serve as an incentive to develop new mechanisms of governance aimed at enhancing the role of the organization in ensuring the security of the member states. During the “crisis” there is a disunity in the activities of the policy network and its further reintegration towards the optimization of the governance system, in particular the harmonization of cooperation between the military and civil structures.

NATO as a global policy network is characterized by the expansion of the composition of actors and areas of responsibility, which makes it possible to exert political influence and maintain control outside the alliance member states. At the same time, the lack of shared approaches among the member states to understanding strategic goals and the need to preserve their national interests entail instability and the possibility of forming new resource relationships among actors that go beyond the policy network.

It becomes obvious that the ongoing transformations of policy networks require the development of complex analysis mechanisms. The network approach allows for changes in the policy network both at the national and global levels. Further research within the framework of this concept requires the development of criteria for relations between actors, including the degree of impact of global economic and political factors.

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