

# NATO's About-Face: Adaptation to Gender Mainstreaming in an Alliance Setting

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## Abstract

Scholars in global security studies have only recently focused attention on how and why international security organizations (ISOs) adapt. Since the United Nations Security Council's issuance of Resolution 1325, some ISOs have enacted changes to implement gender mainstreaming. The concept involves incorporating gender-based analyses in policy and planning and increasing women's representation. Drawing on interviews with seventy-one elites and a dataset of ninety-seven NATO gender guidelines, this article introduces an original argument for why NATO adapted to gender mainstreaming. Such adaptation is surprising given the military's historical resistance to gender considerations and that civilian bodies typically enact reforms. Findings indicate that other ISOs were substantially influential in the process and that institutional incentives built into NATO's military bodies drove military officials to implement mainstreaming in practice. Additionally, military elites perceived a link between gender mainstreaming and operational effectiveness, which further consolidated organization-wide adaptation. This study challenges long-held assumptions about militaries' resistance to gender-related changes. It also offers one of the first empirical assessments of gender mainstreaming in an ISO.

**Keywords:** gender, NATO, adaptation, operations, military

Historically, states and international security organizations (ISOs)—let alone national militaries and alliances—have not prioritized gender considerations in military operations.<sup>1</sup> These security actors rarely considered how operational decisions have unique effects on different genders in the population, have paid little attention to sexual- and gender-based violence, and have failed to include women in peace processes (Carpenter 2006; Hudson 2009; Sjöberg 2016). Why, then, did NATO—the world's most militaristic ISO—adapt to incorporate gender-related guidelines into its planning and operations?

In this article, we argue that it was NATO's military bodies—rather than its civilian bodies—that did the most to implement gender-related changes due to built-in in-

stitutional incentives. We conducted an empirical assessment of competing explanations for NATO's adaptation. Our finding about the military's lead on gender mainstreaming is surprising for two reasons. First, civilian bodies typically enact reforms in ISOs. Often, a security council<sup>2</sup> comprising state representatives makes the decision to reform, and the secretariat implements in partnership with military bodies. Second, military doctrines infrequently refer to gender. National armed forces have long resisted women's integration as they, for decades, resisted the integration of visible minorities, homosexual people, and, recently, transgendered individuals (Kier 1998; Barkawi et al. 1999; MacKenzie 2015; Schaefer et al. 2016). Nevertheless, we find that military bodies

1 See Appendix, Table A.1, for a list of acronyms.

2 Examples include the United Nations Security Council or African Union Peace and Security Council.

offer certain advantages for adaptation. That is, military bodies come equipped with an operational mindset and a rigid, implementation-focused hierarchy.

In this article, we define gender mainstreaming as the process by which organizations assess the differentiated impact of policies and activities on men and women during each phase of the decision-making process and across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of military intervention (True and Mintrom 2001; Catic and von Hlatky 2014). Gender mainstreaming is therefore distinct from the concept of women's underrepresentation in ISOs, although we acknowledge that the two terms are related. Increasing women's representation affects security outcomes by broadening perspectives and experiences shaping decision-making. NATO's adaptation to gender mainstreaming has wide-reaching implications because of the global scope of the Alliance's activities, including collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Thus far, an emergent literature has examined how ISOs such as NATO adapt in various ways (Smith 2004; Benner, Mergenthaler, and Rotmann 2011; Rynning 2012; Johnston 2017). Yet, few studies have examined *why* they adapt. Moreover, adaptation studies have focused on failures, divergent principal-agent preferences, and changes in structure but not related to gender (Nielson and Tierney 2003; Andrews 2012; Johnson 2014; Hardt 2016, 2017, 2018).

For NATO, adaptation is critical because it affects the organization's likelihood of achieving operational mandates negotiated by member states. We adopt Farrell's definition of adaptation as changes in "tactics, techniques, or existing technologies to improve operational performance" (Farrell 2010, 569), which is a contrast to a single, disruptive shift (i.e., military innovation) (Mahnken 2002). These collections of changes in tactics shape outcomes on the battlefield. As with adaptation studies, security scholars have yet to assess changes with respect to gender mainstreaming—instead having documented varied impacts of changes in civil-military relations (e.g., Böhmelt, Pilster, and Tago 2017; Talmadge 2017), strategy (Farrell 2010; Saideman 2016), and military technology (Rosen 1988; Grissom 2007) on national militaries' effectiveness.

This article asserts that NATO has adapted to gender mainstreaming to emulate other ISOs and that implementation of adaptation was largely driven by the rational behavior of officials in NATO's major military bodies (Appendix, Figure A.1). Geared toward success on the battlefield, the military adopted standard operating procedures (SOPs) to implement strategic directives, including those related to gender. The military's institutional design explains why it would be quick to

implement change that seems contrary to its cultural predisposition; the military's hierarchical structure imposes accountability to NATO's strategic commands, which is an institutional incentive to implement. When it comes to a strategic-level directive, there could be career consequences for inaction. By contrast, civilians at NATO lack SOPs and such corresponding accountability; therefore, they have not driven NATO's adaptation to the same extent despite professing support. Given the aforementioned design of ISOs such as NATO, one might expect that the civilians would be clearly in the lead when it comes to implementing gender mainstreaming, but our evidence shows that this is simply not the case. Our findings further indicate that the military perceived an operational need for such adaptation during the war in Afghanistan, which further consolidated the process of integrating a gender perspective in NATO operations.

To empirically assess adaptation, we established and employed qualitative content analysis on an original dataset (the NATO Gender Guidelines Dataset or NNGD) of ninety-seven publicly available NATO gender-related guidelines produced by major civilian and military bodies (Hardt and von Hlatky 2019). We also conducted interviews with seventy-one civilian and military elites at NATO Headquarters in Brussels and Belgium and interviewed a former NATO ISAF<sup>3</sup> commander.

We find that NATO's military bodies have adapted practices to incorporate gender-mainstreaming guidelines while efforts to do so by civilian bodies have stalled. Over time, perceptions of military elites have changed as they have increasingly linked gender mainstreaming with operational effectiveness, which has further entrenched these changes. Meanwhile, most NATO civilian elites publicly support gender mainstreaming but privately deprioritize it. Civilian gender experts receive few resources and only one permanent civilian post. Our findings indicate that the military has a more enduring path to change due to institutional incentives related to accountability, in contrast to the civilian side of an organization where political dynamics can easily derail change. A case in point relates to the US military's experience of moving forward with integrating transgendered individuals across ranks and services, despite resistance from the president and legal challenges in court (Mitchell 2018).

This study makes significant theoretical and empirical contributions to scholarship on adaptation in global security and to debates about gender in the security sector more broadly. First, we challenge existing literature on

3 International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) military operation in Afghanistan (2001–2014).

adaptation, which has previously focused on technological and doctrinal shifts, to incorporate human forms of adaptation such as gender mainstreaming. Scholars can no longer assume that militaries automatically resist gender-related changes. Second, we provide an original argument that can be generalizable to other ISOs grappling with controversial normative shifts (e.g., European Union [EU], United Nations [UN]) (Olsson and Möller 2013). Understanding organizational dynamics and the difference between civilian and military incentives for adaptation is key to successfully implementing new practices. Third, we provide one of the first empirical assessments of gender mainstreaming in ISOs. We introduce the first, to our knowledge, dataset of NATO guidelines (i.e., official documents) on gender mainstreaming. Many global security studies on gender have focused on women's participation and experiences rather than organizations' adoption of gender mainstreaming (Enloe 1989; Tickner 1992; Steans 1998; Enloe 2000; Goldstein 2003; Sjoberg 2014). Additionally, our research provides policy-makers with an understanding of how gender mainstreaming is implemented in practice in the world's preeminent military organization—an understanding that many NATO elites mentioned was lacking.

## Gender Mainstreaming as an Adaptation Challenge

### The Gender Turn in International Security Organizations

Adapting to gender-mainstreaming matters for military organizations because of the positive impacts evidenced on operational outcomes (Hudson 2009; Whitman and O'Neill 2012). Specifically, recent studies demonstrate that when militaries *do* integrate women's perspectives, they strengthen military capacity, improve intelligence-gathering, and decrease incidences of sexual misconduct (Harrell and Miller 1997; Bridges and Horsfall 2009; Detraz 2012). By thinking through unique situations that women and men encounter on the ground, civilian and military practitioners have incorporated innovative solutions (e.g., employing mixed-gender units and female engagement teams). Doing so can increase troops' situational awareness and produce intelligence that can save troops' lives by enabling communication between female soldiers and local women (Holliday 2012). Through a gender-based analysis, allied forces can better anticipate enemies' use of women as suicide bombers (Bloom 2012). Reconstruction efforts can be made more sustainable when both men's and women's needs are taken into account (Baksh-Soodeen 2005; Gizelis and Pierre 2013).

Alternatively, the consequences of *not* adapting to gender mainstreaming can be dire. Without access to critical intelligence about road-side bombs, weapons caches, and planned terrorist attacks, missions can fail. An inability to recognize the enemy due to a misplaced assumption that women do not take up arms (Henshaw 2016) can result in soldiers' deaths. Civilian casualties can mount when all-male troop contingents are unable to provide medical support to women and children due to local gender norms (Lowery 2017).

The process of gender mainstreaming constitutes a type of adaptation because it comprises incremental shifts in tactics and techniques. It differs from a technological adaptation (Rosen 1994) since gender mainstreaming involves human capital, not military technology. Adapting to gender mainstreaming requires changing organizational practices to account for the gendered nature of its activities at the headquarters or in the field. As a concept, gender mainstreaming aims for gender to become "mainstream"—that is, part and parcel of the organization's tasks, by "making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes" (Walby 2005, 321). In ISOs, mainstreaming requires changes across all three levels: strategic, operational, and tactical.

Mainstreaming requires that decisions include gender considerations, such as the differentiated impact that actions might have on men and women or how gender norms might influence outcomes. For example, using a gender perspective, one could argue that local populations might perceive female civilian casualties differently from male casualties. The implications of this for current military efforts in Afghanistan would be to press military officials who are making targeting decisions to more carefully consider the impacts of strikes on women versus men.

NATO chose to formally uphold the principle of gender mainstreaming following the UN's adoption of Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000. The resolution (and its follow-on resolutions) called for an increase in the participation of women across all phases of international conflict management, highlighted the risk of sexual- and gender-based violence in conflict, and underscored the importance of using a gender perspective in policy-making and operational planning. In the past two decades since the resolution's issuance, NATO and other ISOs have adopted a myriad of new policies and practices in line with UNSCR 1325.<sup>4</sup> Several national militaries

4 The resolution built on the 1981 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) but had a special focus on international security and international conflict management.

are increasingly investing funding and staff to do so, but these resources are typically in short supply and are not always available for NATO activities or missions—particularly if they are in use for other operations (e.g., UN peacekeeping, etc.).<sup>5</sup> Collectively referred to as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, these UNSCR 1325–related policies and practices have included the appointment of male and female gender experts, training courses to provide staff and soldiers with gender expertise, annual reporting requirements, and external audits by civil society organizations.

To date, there has been no in-depth analysis of why—or how—NATO embarked on this gender turn. Thus far, research related to gender in international security has instead explored the impact of diversity on combat motivation and unit effectiveness (e.g., Kier 1998; Barkawi et al. 1999; MacKenzie 2015; Schaefer et al. 2016) and gender-based violence as a weapon of war (Cohen 2013) and the effects of gender inequality on conflict (Caprioli 2005, Melander 2005). The few studies that do explore gender mainstreaming in ISOs have been policy documents (Prescott 2013a) or focused on legal implications rather than empirically focused (Prescott 2013b), have focused on the representation of women versus men (e.g., head-counting) in ISOs including NATO (Olsson and Möller 2013; Obradovic 2014), or assessed the value of female leadership—without addressing the incorporation of a gender perspective into organizations’ day-to-day activities (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Whitworth 2004; Stefszyn 2005; Olsson and Tejpar 2009).

As a political-military organization and a treaty-based, multinational defense pact, NATO provides an unlikely laboratory for gender mainstreaming. The organization was created to be a collective defense organization during the Cold War and, most recently, gained renewed relevance following Russia’s incursion into (and ultimate annexation of) Crimea in Ukraine (Shifrinson 2016). Nevertheless, an organization with three aims—collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security—has sought to press on with gender-related reforms. These changes are not well understood. First, there

remains uncertainty regarding the consequences of adapting the principle of gender mainstreaming for military operations. Few national militaries—let alone ISOs—have fully implemented the principle and, therefore, managing those changes in a multinational environment appears particularly complex. Second, one would also expect the military to be resistant to gender mainstreaming as it could easily be dismissed as nonmission critical.

Much of the relevant scholarship has highlighted resistance in the military to gender reforms. Some studies have observed hypermasculinity in modern military culture, involving a resistance to the integration of women in combat and a systematic labeling of women as victims in conflicts (Rosen and Knudson 2003; Cohn 2012; Sjöberg 2015). This body of scholarship would suggest that an organization like NATO might be profoundly at odds with the gender turn given its strong military influence, perhaps even renouncing the link made between gender reforms and operational effectiveness (Whitworth 2005; Eichler 2013; Sjöberg 2015). However, as aforementioned, there exists a substantial body of literature in security studies to support that link. In addition to the latter scholarship, studies in management have shown how changing the gender composition of teams leads to better outcomes as more diverse perspectives are brought to bear on complex problems (Desvaux et al. 2017). Studies indicate that boards with women are more likely to generate higher profits and that companies with more women can be more innovative (Hewlett, Marshall, and Sherbin 2013; Bureau for Employers’ Activities 2019). The UN, for its part, has collected data to demonstrate how the inclusion of women as part of peacekeeping forces and peace negotiations improves outcomes. For example, “peace processes that included women as witnesses, signatories, mediators, and/or negotiators demonstrated a 20 percent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years. This increases over time, with a 35 percent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years” (Coomaraswamy 2015, 49). Some scholars have demonstrated that the incorporation of a gender perspective can increase operational effectiveness in studies of peacekeeping operations (DeGroot 2001; Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, and Parpart 2005; Detraz 2012). NATO has adopted the narrative, which emerged from its involvement in Afghanistan, that links gender and operational effectiveness.

Another decisive factor that led NATO to adapt was the organization’s drive to emulate what NATO officials perceived to be international best practices established by the UN and other organizations with an international security mandate. When comparing the UN and

5 Examples include the United States Army ([https://www.army.mil/standto/archive\\_2015-05-20](https://www.army.mil/standto/archive_2015-05-20)), United States military units ([https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=efl\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=efl_etds)), the Australia Defence Force (<http://www.defence.gov.au/Women/NAP/GenderPerspective.asp>), the Canadian Armed Forces ([http://www.wiiscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/WIISLogoExecutive-Summary-SVH-Fernandez\\_SvH.pdf](http://www.wiiscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/WIISLogoExecutive-Summary-SVH-Fernandez_SvH.pdf)), among other major militaries around the world.

other ISOs, we notice similar but distinct paths to gender mainstreaming. Insights from organizational theory and feminist international relations (IR) scholarship are especially helpful in uncovering how social practices are gendered within ISOs (Khalili 2010; Bourbeau 2017; Crawford, Lawrence, and Lebovic 2017, 153; Sjoberg 2016) and the various types of gender-based reforms that are introduced within organizations, from creating more equal opportunities for women to transforming the culture in male-dominated environments, including using a gender-mainstreaming lens (Ely and Meyerson 2000, 106–7).

With the creation of UN Women as its own entity, the UN has tracked progress through monitoring and raising awareness of gender-related issues. The UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka reiterated a central message of the WPS agenda. She said, "gender equality improves our humanitarian assistance, strengthens the protection efforts of our peacekeepers, contributes to the conclusion of peace talks and the sustainability of peace agreements, and accelerates economic recovery after conflict" (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2015, 1). For the EU, emphasis has been on information exchanges and sharing best practices since the adoption of the 2008 Comprehensive Approach on Women, Peace, and Security Council of the European Union 2008. The EU created the Informal Task Force on Women, Peace, and Security to support coordination across ISOs but primarily with the UN and NATO. Finally, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) offers technical briefings on gender mainstreaming to governments (OSCE 2018).

### NATO as a Conduit of Change

With respect to case selection, NATO constitutes a critical case because it is a treaty-based multinational defense pact with a purely security-focused mandate; gender mainstreaming is not perceived as an intuitive part of its core tasks. If we can explain gender mainstreaming in NATO, we can likely apply the argument to other ISOs with wider mandates encompassing multiple issue areas (e.g., EU, UN). If we cannot, we will then likely be unable to explain such adaptation in these other ISOs. Even with a top-down decision to adopt the WPS agenda, NATO faces challenges in adapting to gender mainstreaming across its core activities. First, the length of job contracts for NATO civilian staff at headquarters have decreased to only three years (Dijkstra 2015, 134), and there are longer gaps between postings, leading to scholars' concerns about retention of knowledge (Hardt 2018).

Whereas NATO elites likely have varying perceptions given differences in their respective cultures, NATO has provided a common definition of gender mainstreaming:

a strategy used to achieve gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, in all areas and at all levels, in order to assure that the concerns and experiences of both sexes are taken into account." (NATO 2017, 5)

We observe evidence of adaptation to gender mainstreaming (i.e., our dependent variable) in several key changes in the organization: (1) adoption of two high-level policies for civilians and military members (the NATO/European Atlantic Partnership Council [EAPC] Policy and NATO Bi-Strategic<sup>6</sup> Command Directive (NATO 2019), respectively), (2) the creation of the high-level post of Special Representative to the Secretary General on Women, Peace, and Security (wherein the individual reports directly to the secretary general), and (3) increases in the proportion of women serving in NATO operations over time.

The organization has also launched several initiatives to encourage more consistent gender-mainstreaming policies across allies, but they have primarily focused on recent and ongoing operations (Lackenbauer and Langlais 2013). The position of Special Representative on WPS was made permanent as of 2014. Additionally, the WPS agenda has appeared in the Secretary General's annual report and recent NATO Summit declarations. The most recent declaration states that "gender mainstreaming and increased representation of women in NATO civilian and military structures and in Allied and partner forces improve our effectiveness and contribute to a more modern, agile, ready, and responsive Alliance" (NATO 2018, par. 75). Additionally, NATO's Science for Peace and Security office has awarded grants to monitor the implementation of gender mainstreaming in NATO member states' armed forces and government departments with security mandates (Stoltenberg 2015, 89).

NATO, like other ISOs, has developed specific UN-SCR 1325 guidelines and implementation strategies, whereas member states still have their own national policies that may or may not coincide perfectly with the Alliance (see the supplementary files for guidelines specific to NATO bodies). As a headquartered organization, NATO also faces implementation challenges across its own bodies. Below, we consider competing

6 NATO's two strategic commands—Allied Command Transformation and Allied Command Operations—jointly issued this directive.



explanations for why NATO has proceeded with gender mainstreaming.

## Theorizing NATO's Adaptation to Gender Mainstreaming

We introduce an original argument for NATO's adaptation and introduce a complementary proposition and an alternative explanation, leading to three core propositions to explain why and how adaptation occurred. Our argument (Proposition 1) below draws on rational institutionalist expectations and principal-agent studies to emphasize the importance of design and incentive structures in explaining adaptation. The first competing explanation (Proposition 2) presents what one would intuitively expect—that civilian bodies should drive NATO's adaptation and that it draws on civil-military relations scholarship. The second explanation (Proposition 3) is complementary to our argument and considers international practices literature, which states that NATO may be making efforts to adopt practices that elites have observed in other ISOs.

Additionally, one might consider a fourth potential explanation—that NATO member states' national militaries are responsible for adaptation. The organization is an intergovernmental one that relies on states to contribute troops to operations; NATO does not have its own forces. However, as noted earlier, most national militaries that are part of the Alliance have historically neither prioritized gender nor invested in gender-related resources and/or training. Given their limited capacities and lack of prioritizing in the area of gender, we are absent a compelling reason to expect that national militaries would have the motivation to drive NATO's adaptation of gender mainstreaming. We therefore dismiss the latter as a viable competing explanation.

### Military's Institutional Incentives

**P1:** *NATO's military bodies led the adoption of gender-related guidelines and practices due to their institutional design and standard operating procedures*

We argue that the military is rationally leading NATO's adaptation by following its own logic and institutional incentives. By institutional design, militaries—as “hierarchical institutions” (Avant 1998, 378)—are required to follow orders and to report back on the tasks that they undertake. In other words, officials in NATO's military bodies (e.g., ACO, ACT, IMS, MC [see acronym list in Appendix]) must act because they have a NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive to do so. Today, these

officials come from member states with professionalized militaries trained to systematically implement orders from the highest to lowest levels (Huntington 1981). Such an institutional design builds in accountability—incentivizing action. These officials perceive that if they do *not* comply, there could be career consequences enforced by military supervisors.

Driven first by these incentives to implement a Bi-strategic Command Directive, NATO's military officials have a secondary incentive to act based on their operational expertise. As agents, militaries' expertise benefits civilian officials—as principals—but can also be exercised to influence decisions (Avant 1998, 383). If military officials begin to associate gender mainstreaming with operational effectiveness, this association can be a sufficiently powerful incentive to *overcome* the military's historical resistance to considering gender in military operations. These shared perceptions about the role of gender in operations among military officials are likely to emerge over time from experience on the battlefield rather than being present at the outset. Therefore, we expect to find that the military will produce practical, detailed documentation and develop extensive training on gender awareness that reflects these changes in perception when it comes to gender and operational effectiveness.

By contrast, the multiple-principal design of NATO (Auerswald and Saideman 2014, 54) as an ISO leaves civilian bodies—such as the International Staff (IS) and North Atlantic Council (NAC)—without similar institutional incentives to change behavior. Civilian bodies as bureaucratic agents in headquarters only need to satisfy principals' (i.e., member states') minimum requirement of demonstrating that NATO does have gender awareness. Civilians can do so through symbolic, periodic public diplomacy campaigns to prove their commitment. They have no incentive—nor analogous requirements—to make substantive changes to day-to-day activities.

If Proposition 1 is supported by evidence, we expect to find that military elites express in interviews clear incentives for adopting more gender-related guidelines to facilitate implementation and overall display higher levels of gender awareness than civilian elites. We expect that civilian elites, in interviews, will be unable to provide clear examples of gender mainstreaming in their work. We also anticipate to find extensive guidelines on military implementation relative to the proportion of guidelines on civilian implementation. If Proposition 1 is incorrect, we would expect interviews with military elites to be devoid of a rationale for gender mainstreaming, and guidelines on military implementation should be sparse. Disconfirming evidence would also include interviews with

civilian elites that show that they are (1) well-versed in gender mainstreaming as a concept, (2) state that they are actively engaged in gender mainstreaming in their day-to-day work, and (3) indicate that they can provide concrete examples of how they are doing so. Further disconfirming evidence would consist of a plethora of gender guidelines in the offices of NATO's civilian bodies, such as the IS Public Diplomacy Division, and/or within the national civilian delegations themselves (e.g., US Mission to NATO).

### Civilian Leadership to Achieve Political Aims

**P2:** *NATO's civilian bodies led the adoption of gender-related guidelines and practices in response to a political decision, independent of military leadership.*

As a competing explanation, early civil-military scholarship would argue that civilians take the lead on adaptation because, in democratic states, militaries accept civilian control. Posen (1984) argues that, according to neorealism, civilians will particularly support change within military organizations when they are offensive-minded and seek to accomplish their political aims. Therefore, civilians' desire to achieve these aims can overcome military resistance and the uncertainties inherent to adapting a largely untested new principle.

"Civilian elites" within NATO refers to the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Assistant Secretary Generals, and other senior-level personnel working in the IS, which is NATO's secretariat. Applied to the puzzle at hand, Posen's argument would imply that action by NATO's civilian elites—through verbal and written guidance—would have been necessary to force militaries to adopt change. Moreover, implementation of change should have then occurred by way of military "mavericks," who were recruited by the civilian elites to ensure change happened across all levels. Similarly, Barany (2012) finds from a wide range of cases that civilian leaders maintain control in part due to mechanisms for keeping the military subordinate (here: NAC's supremacy within NATO) and to an internalized norm of commitment to civilian control (here: a North Atlantic Treaty stating commitment to democratic principles).

Additional bodies of scholarship have also argued that civilians take the lead when it comes to adaptation in security organizations. Feaver (2003) identifies six ways that civilian bodies do lead, monitor, and enforce change in actions within military organizations. Desch (1999) also argues that civilian control and, in particular, civilian leadership is critical for enacting change within such organizations. It is the structure of civil-military

relations that constrains militaries' capacity for resisting civilian control. Drawing on historical accounts of democratic leaders in major conflicts, Cohen (2012) went further to argue that civilians have enacted and should be expected to enact change at even the deepest levels in warfare where one would not expect them to have influence. In NATO, civilian leaders also have motives for implementation above and beyond seeking to exert control. It was political/civilian elites from major democracies who initially advocated for, and ultimately agreed to, UNSCR 1325; therefore, one could expect that NATO's civilian elites would be the ones championing gender mainstreaming.

An additional piece of scholarship would also assert that changes within civilian leadership and by civilian leadership at NATO can explain why the organization ultimately accepted gender mainstreaming. Situated in feminist security studies, Wright (2016, 353–54) argues that NATO's adaptation in this area is attributable to the work of civilian "femocrats." Femocrats, according to Prugl (2004, 69) and subsequently Wright, refers to (male and female) individuals who identify as feminists and initiate policy to advance women's causes. Wright argues that femocrats have organized committee meetings and conferences for decades. The accumulation of these civilian-led efforts, including the appointment of a NATO Special Representative on Women, Peace, and Security, has influenced hundreds of other civilian and military individuals within NATO to adopt gender mainstreaming.

What would be the observable implication of an argument in which NATO's civilian leaders convince other individuals within the organization to adapt to gender mainstreaming? In other words, what would civilian-led gender reforms look like? We would expect to find evidence that civilian actors are active in promoting gender mainstreaming in NATO and are either cooperating with military leaders to do so or attempting to hold the military to account when the pace of change is unsatisfactory. In interviews, levels of awareness should be higher among civilian elites and staff since civilian guidelines are emerging from a political decision and women's representation should have progressed at a faster pace than on the military side given that there are fewer professional barriers to entry. We should also find evidence that civilian bodies have produced more gender-related guidelines.

If Proposition 2 is incorrect, we would expect to find little to no evidence of civilian leadership on promoting gender mainstreaming or find evidence that the military is instead doing the job. Relative to the proportion of military guidelines among all gender-related guidelines, there would be few civilian guidelines on implementing mainstreaming. In interviews, we would expect to find

civilian elites hard-pressed to explain the relevance of mainstreaming for their work and perhaps even unfamiliar with gender mainstreaming as a concept altogether. Thus, disconfirming evidence for this proposition would boil down to fewer civilian guidelines on gender, fewer gender experts within civilian decision-making bodies, and fewer civilian elites indicating in interviews that they are actively engaged in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. If civilian elites say that they “do” gender mainstreaming but cannot cite a single examples of how they do so, such interview evidence would also be further disconfirming evidence for Proposition 2.

### Emulating Like-Minded ISOs

**P3:** *NATO’s organizational bodies pursued gender mainstreaming to be in line with the practices of other international security organizations (ISOs).*

In addition to civilian-led change, a distinct but complementary explanation to understand the adaptation of gender mainstreaming at NATO involves emulation. Looking outward to other ISOs that have already implemented gender mainstreaming may be a natural reflex, as NATO might not want to be seen as lagging behind. In other words, as other international organizations like the UN, EU, and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) take on gender mainstreaming, there is also pressure on NATO to be socialized into the adoption of these new gender norms via formal and informal conversations that NATO officials have with counterparts in other ISOs (Hardt 2014). Previously, NATO has drawn on best practices and carried out benchmarking exercises to compare its own strategies with those of other ISOs (Hofmann 2009, 2011). This socialization process would be carried out by the community of gender practitioners located at various levels of ISOs, among those in national government bureaucracies, as well as among those in national armed forces (Flockhart 2004; Checkel 2005).

If other ISOs are influencing NATO, we should expect to find many cross-references to external policies, guidance documents, and toolkits in the Alliance’s own documents and that these might be mentioned by the interviews with officials, both on the civilian and military sides. We also should expect to find evidence of informal or formal exchanges among gender practitioners. If this proposition is incorrect, we should expect not to find evidence in NATO guidelines of references to other ISOs’ experiences with gender mainstreaming. Disconfirming evidence would also involve elites referring in interviews

to the uniqueness of NATO as a military alliance in its implementation of gender mainstreaming.

### Methodological Approach

To answer why and how NATO has adapted in the ways that it has, we employ two methodologies: elite interviews and qualitative content analysis of NATO guidelines. Interviewing elite practitioners reveals how they have observed first-hand the implementation of gender mainstreaming as a principle. Similarly, content analysis of publicly-available guidelines provides a systematic means for assessing how NATO’s policies have changed. Together, these two methods provide us with the closest approximation of implementation in the absence of access to classified documents and private meetings among practitioners (Maypole and Davies 2001; Aberback and Rockman 2002).

Before proceeding, we note that we operationalize our dependent variable by observing both the extent to which NATO’s bodies have adopted gender-related documents and to which elites within these bodies are aware of and are implementing the documents in day-to-day practices. If, in our findings, we observe evidence of changes in documentation and elite practices, we can safely assume that gender mainstreaming did indeed occur in NATO, and, thus, we can proceed with assessing competing explanations for *why* such adaptation occurred. (If we do not observe evidence of such changes, we then cannot assume that such adaptation occurred.)

### Elite Interviews

In elite interviews, we used a combination of semistructured and open-ended questions to provide practitioners with the most opportunity to share their experiences and understandings of gender mainstreaming at NATO (Appendix, Table A.2). Scholars in political science have previously emphasized that offering open-ended questions is more necessary for elites, as they are often less willing to be forthcoming in responses (Aberback and Rockman 2002). We invited elites to describe if and how they and others at NATO incorporated a gender perspective into their work in accordance with NATO’s bi-strategic command directive.

We interviewed a representative sample of NATO elite practitioners through first random and then, by necessity, snowball sampling.<sup>7</sup> Our criteria for subject recruitment

7 Following Institutional Review Board approval, we recruited subjects by email. First, we employed random sampling to interview NAC elites by contacting all NATO delegations through their respective websites. Second,



**Table 1.** Sample of NATO elite officials

Type	NATO body	Subjects
Civilian	International Staff (IS)	19
	North Atlantic Council (NAC)	30
	Partner States—Civilian Officials	3
Military	International Military Staff (IMS)	6
	Allied Command Operations (ACO)	4
	Military Committee (MC)	9
Total		71

**Table 2.** Sample of NATO gender guidelines

Type	NATO bodies and NATO-affiliated organizations	Number of guidelines
Military	ACO	9
	ACO/ACT (Bi-Directives)	2
	ACT	35
	IMS	3
	MC	4
	PTECs	14
Civilian	IS	10
	IS/IMS (Joint Policy)	1
	NAC	5
	EAPC	9
	Other NATO-Affiliated Organizations	5
Total		97

was that subjects had to be elites: practitioners in leadership positions with significant influence within NATO's civilian and military bodies (Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor 2013). Subjects also had to be engaged in the decision-making and planning of crisis management operations. To be truly representative, we continued sampling until we had included elites from member states in each of NATO's five geographic regions (e.g., north, south, central, east, and west).

As seen in Table 1 below, we interviewed seventy-one civilian and military NATO elites in Brussels, Belgium, over the course of three rounds of fieldwork: September 5–12, 2016, December 8–14, 2016, and December 6–9, 2017 (Appendix, Table A.3.) The nationalities of elites represented twenty-two of the (then) twenty-eight member states and three NATO partner states. The member state elites worked in five of NATO's leading organizational bodies involved in collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management.

we employed snowball sampling from these interviews to contact other NATO elites.

### Qualitative Content Analysis

We then established the NGGD—an original dataset of NATO guidelines related to gender—and employed qualitative content analysis to code and assess the data (Schreier 2012). Table 2 indicates the specific NATO institutions from which the guidelines were sampled. As a point of further clarification, the term “guidelines” refers to these formal documents, which encompass policies, military directives, training materials, and public outreach materials. For example, one guideline described an annual workshop on gender awareness, whereas another explained a training course on incorporating a gender perspective into operations. We therefore were able to further assess evidence in support of or against our propositions by investigating who created the guidelines, what were the objectives of these guidelines, who were the target audiences of these guidelines, and how these guidelines were distributed. We led a team of three research assistants to develop the NGGD. With respect to the scope of data collection, assistants collected and coded all guidelines that were (1) related to gender, (2) publicly available, and (3) produced by NATO's major civilian and military bodies. To collect the guidelines in a systematic manner, the research team conducted advanced searches of the official websites of each of NATO's major bodies, as listed on the publicly available NATO structure website.<sup>8</sup> We excluded all bodies that were listed on the site as “organizations and agencies” because the latter bodies (1) are not part of NATO's major civilian or military structures and (2) are involved indirectly, rather than directly, in NATO's day-to-day planning and operations. Searches of the websites specifically targeted documents with the word “gender” in the title. One should note that a limitation of our data collection is that we were only able to access documents that were publicly available and therefore unclassified. As a result, we did encounter some restricted sites, nine of which were on IS sites and two on ACT sites.

After data collection was complete, we supervised the coding process, which involved coding each document according to a series of categories that we had established as part of a codebook. First, for each category, assistants had to review the guideline and choose the appropriate subcategory among the options that we provided, and in accordance with our coding rules (see supplementary files). The categories concerned both the nature and content of the guidelines. We derived categories from our competing propositions for why NATO

8 The NATO Structure website is the closest that NATO comes to publicly providing an organizational chart. See (NATO 2018).

adapted in the way that it did, and we added descriptive categories to also assess how adaptation occurred. After reviewing the content of each guideline, assistants coded each guideline according to the category “Guid-Type” to determine whether the guideline was primarily focused on incorporating a gender perspective, focused on gender representation (e.g., counting of men versus women or increasing women’s recruitment), or related to antiharassment (e.g., a safer work environment for all genders).

Second, we included another key category, which allowed us to evaluate competing propositions about which kinds of NATO bodies (civilian or military) were likely establishing gender-mainstreaming guidelines. Assistants coded guidelines in the category “CivMil” as either civilian or military documents, depending on the type of body that made them available. Third, to understand the extent to which changes were actually being made, assistants coded several categories related to the content of the guidelines, including what was the guideline’s primary objective (“GuidObj”), who was the target audience (“TargAud”), whether the guideline provided or specified training, and if the guideline provided an action plan for making changes. Fourth, we were able to consider our proposition on international organization (IO) emulation by including categories related to the types of actors producing each guideline and the names of actors that may have coordinated in producing a given guideline. (The supplementary files includes a list of these and all other categories and subcategories.) Since we derived our categories from our propositions, we were able to appropriately assess the extent to which evidence supported or refuted each one.

The majority (86 percent) of all NATO guidelines related to gender concern the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Appendix, Figure A.2). Research assistants coded all ninety-seven guidelines as fitting into four possible categories: perspectives, representation, antiharassment, or none. We established these categories since NATO produces many other types of documentation related to gender, and we were interested strictly in the incorporation of a gender perspective. First, our category of interest—“perspectives”—comprised any documents that provided instructions directed at civilian or military officials on how to implement UNSCR 1325 in NATO. Second, the category “representation” comprised any documents that provided instructions, advice, or write-ups of conferences concerning efforts to increase the number or proportion of women in NATO. Third, the category “antiharassment” included any documents that provided advice, resources, or policies aimed at preventing and responding to sexual harassment in NATO. Fourth, the

category “none” included any documents related to gender that did not fit other subcategories. Only 4 percent of documents focused on representation, and 3 percent related to antiharassment policies. NATO documents that were identified as relevant for gender mainstreaming were coded based on their origins, objectives, and partners.

In terms of limitations, we acknowledge that these guidelines cannot be entirely comprehensive. First, there are likely more documents on NATO’s restricted network that is inaccessible to scholars. However, we would expect that if there *were* a significant body of classified documents on gender mainstreaming on the civilian side of NATO’s house, the content would not be in contradiction with the publicly available materials we found; we would expect for civilian elites to refer to them in interviews (neither of which is the case). Second, we only present findings based on NATO guidelines published prior to 2017 since we ended the document collection exercise in December of 2016, before conducting the bulk of our interviews in 2016–2017.

### Findings on the Adaptation to Gender Mainstreaming

Based on our analyses, we find that two factors explain why and how NATO adapted to gender mainstreaming. First, as we predicted, military officials committed to take immediate action on implementing strategic directives (here: NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1). They did so not because of a sense of conviction but because that is what militaries are institutionally designed to do. This finding challenges the conventional wisdom about militaries being particularly resistant to change when it comes to anything that would indicate deeper gender integration. While this might be the case in terms of the attitudes of service members, it does not impede implementation; in fact, our research shows that NATO’s military bodies outpaced their civilian counterparts with respect to implementation. Consequently, much of implementation focused on how gender guidelines can increase operational effectiveness, whereas there existed little guidance on how civilians should implement the NATO/EAPC policy. Second, NATO officials shared a widespread desire to emulate the practices of other ISOs, including the UN in particular. The presence of gender experts alone, however, proved insufficient for NATO to adapt. Treating gender as a low priority, civilian and military officials rarely solicited the advice of gender experts (and even sometimes dismissed them altogether).

In support of Proposition 1, the military was incentivized to adapt due to its institutional design. It is in

the military's DNA to set up a clear implementation plan when given any strategic directive, whereas civilians lacked similar incentives to act on the NATO/EAPC policy. Interviews with military officials indicated that these individuals could clearly articulate how gender mainstreaming applied to operational contexts. By contrast, many civilian elites—including in the highest-level positions—viewed gender mainstreaming as not their responsibility; rather, they treated gender as a “women's issue” that should fall under the purview of NATO's WPS office. In brief, we find that military bodies were institutionally more predisposed to translate guidelines into action, which offered them a clear advantage over their civilian counterparts who lacked similar standard operating procedures to enact gender mainstreaming adaptation.

To be clear, our findings do not suggest that the military is designed to be better at enacting *all* types of NATO reforms. Other major NATO reforms, such as instituting Partnership for Peace, updating NATO's tasks to include cyberdefense and counterterrorism, etc., were civilian-led and subsequently adopted by the military. Rather, we find that the military's lead on NATO adaptation to gender mainstreaming was the result of the unique combination of the military's institutional predisposition to follow directives and the growing support for implementation provided by high-ranking military elites with relevant combat experience in Afghanistan.

In contrast to our findings on the military, the view from civilian elites that gender was irrelevant to their day-to-day work is antithetical to the concept of mainstreaming, as described in the NATO/EAPC policy, which indicates that all men and women across the organization should incorporate a gender perspective in decision-making and planning. The civilian officials' views can also have strategic consequences for NATO operations since they are accountable for the policy and planning stage of operations. If the policy documents and directives that they produce exclude a gender perspective, military officials are less likely to recognize a need to include it, and, if they do, they have no civilian-led policy guidance on how to incorporate gender and must rely on military guidance.

In support of Proposition 3, we find evidence of emulation, which explains *why* NATO adapted its practices to be consistent with gender mainstreaming. That is, NATO followed substantially in the UN and EU's footsteps on the WPS Agenda and has borrowed best practices from these two ISOs. Guidelines contained extensive references to UNSCR 1325, suggesting that the Alliance has adapted UN directives rather than generating its own. The UNSCR 1325 and follow-on resolutions related to

WPS and to the incorporation of a gender perspective presented a clear impetus for NATO to change, as the resolutions conferred legitimacy to NATO's adaptation. Although implementation patterns between NATO and the UN varied with respect to organizational differences, it was clear that the UN's work and preferred terminology related to gender influenced the content of NATO guidelines. Similarly, interview evidence also contained numerous references to the UN and EU with the organizations lauded as role models for implementation. Despite differences in civil-military structures, both the UN and EU were helpful cases for exemplifying to NATO elites how adaptation to gender mainstreaming could occur.

### Military's Institutional Incentives

In support of Proposition 1, evidence from the interviews and NATO guidelines indicated that military bodies immediately moved forward with implementation—finding ways to apply gender mainstreaming to their work. The NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive served as a primary institutional incentive for military officials to modify their behavior. The directive sent a clear message that implementation was both mandatory and expected to enhance the military's capacity to achieve operational mandates. The directive also disseminated “gender” into the lexicon of NATO's military bodies in a way that was not replicated on the civilian side of the organization.<sup>9</sup>

For example, one of NATO's two strategic commands—ACO—has established a “gender structure” in each of NATO's military operations, which varies depending on the operation's size and scope. The gender structure can consist of gender advisors (GENADs) and gender focal points (GFPs). These individuals are critical because they provide expert advice to military commanders on how to incorporate a gender perspective into the operation, with GENADs reporting directly to the commander. (GENADs typically receive gender training before deployment.) NATO has had gender advisors in operations, including ISAF, Resolute Support in Afghanistan, KFOR in Kosovo, and the NATO Training Mission in Iraq.

Additionally, NATO's other strategic command—ACT—partnered with the Swedish Armed Forces

9 While we do not mean to suggest that there has been no resistance to UNSCR 1325 within militaries, we do contend that those in the armed forces have outperformed their civilian counterparts by developing tangible measures related to gender mainstreaming.

International Centre (SWEDINT) to offer “courses for Gender Field Advisors and gender trainers, providing subject matter experts for exercises and seminars, and collecting gender ‘lessons learned’ and analyses” (Prescott 2013b, 120). In our analysis of the NGGD, Sweden was the most significant non-NATO provider of gender training for military forces. However, Prescott notes that those individuals attending the courses were those from member states that required them to attend—leading to variation in who was trained and who was not.

Practical experience from the field reinforced the military’s institutional incentives to implement gender mainstreaming and further explains why NATO adapted its practices: military necessity. Many military officials who had served in Afghanistan and/or other operations told their colleagues at NATO Headquarters that gender was, in fact, a useful, if not crucial, consideration in operational contexts. In particular, war stories from three-star and four-star generals challenged decades-old assumptions that suggested that gender was irrelevant to war or that female soldiers diminished unit effectiveness (e.g., see MacKenzie 2015). Consistent with MacKenzie’s work, we find corroborating evidence to support the claim that applying a gender perspective led NATO militaries to request more female soldiers, as they had comparative advantages when it came to operating in conflict settings wherein the local women are segregated from men in day-to-day activities. These stories from generals offered counter-narratives to gender stereotypes about women not being well suited for combat roles; that is, certain military tasks were simply impossible to accomplish without applying a gender perspective and identifying this operational need to deploy more female troops. According to our interviews, military officials’ perceptions that a gender perspective *positively* affected military outcomes was critical for establishing their buy-in and that of other members of the military at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Consequently, framing gender in an operational context seemed necessary for military practices to sustainably shift. Below, we briefly review some of the corresponding evidence that emerged from interviews and from our analyses of NATO gender guidelines.

First, when asked about gender’s relevance for NATO, every military elite who participated in this study cited its positive impact on operational effectiveness by either explicitly using the words “effectiveness” or “effective” or by stating that gender supported “mandates” and “missions.” The following open-ended responses from members of the military illustrate how they adapted gender guidelines to their day-to-day work using the operational

effectiveness framing. Many military officials described the importance of having female engagement teams in Afghanistan due to their ability to gain access to critical intelligence, because female NATO soldiers could communicate with Afghan women.<sup>10</sup> Another military official reflected on how the experience of having served in Iraq affected the official’s perception of gender differences in civic engagement during a conflict:

Around the first elections in January 2005, in the period leading to these elections, there were some civilian Iraqis working in the administration, both male and female. Closer to the elections, the women would not approach the subject with questions as they felt more comfortable speaking about the election to other women, so they would approach female colleagues but not male.<sup>11</sup>

An interview with a former ISAF commander provided an illustrative example of developing a gender perspective as a leader and how this new perspective had strategic implications for NATO’s ability to achieve its mandate. The commander directed a unit in a special mission against Taliban forces in Nagraharp province, Afghanistan. During a lull in the fighting, the commander had a translator call out for all the Afghan women and children to be released. As shots resumed, a woman and child were injured. NATO forces were able to immediately rescue the child, however, Afghan cultural norms dictated that only an Afghan man—or a woman of any nation—could evacuate the injured woman. The commander found himself in a tight spot. All male Taliban fighters were dead, and there were no female soldiers or medics to assist. How would he act to support the ISAF mandate while respecting Afghan gender norms?

Ultimately, a tactical decision to send out male medics to assist an Afghan woman had strategic consequences. Furious with the fact that male NATO troops had evacuated an Afghan woman, President Karzai called the commander in for a contentious meeting that threatened the relationship that the commander had worked so long to preserve. Karzai’s support for the presence of NATO troops was critical for efforts to achieve the mission. The former ISAF commander said that the experience, from then on, “colored how he looked at things” related to gender. This story illustrates how military leadership in NATO linked the importance of a gender perspective with operational outcomes through experience. By implementing the directives on gender mainstreaming as an

10 A NATO military representative. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 6, 2016.

11 Ibid.

organizational reflex, the link between gender considerations and operational effectiveness became increasingly evident over time, which led to change and increased support from the military community. Here, practical experience on the battlefield demonstrated how a better understanding of gender norms could positively affect soldiers' abilities to do their job.

The ISAF commander said that, although a soldier's gender generally does not matter in operations, military leaders should consider gender in tailoring the selection of soldiers to the environments in which they engaged. The commander explained further:

Our experience was, when you spelled out whether there were casualties or not, if you are apprehending somebody who had a wife and children, they were likely to become hysterical. Having female soldiers—even through an interpreter—could help calm the situation. Certain male soldiers could do it too. But, generally speaking, we began to realize in certain situations—other than searches—to have a female soldier could calm them.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to elite interviews, guidelines related to gender provided further evidence that military bodies had a large lead in the production of gender guidelines, in the high degree of their gender awareness and in the multitude of gender mainstreaming strategies that they pursued. In contrast, civilian bodies had little incentive to make substantial changes in their own practices. The exception were the few civilian individuals working in the WPS office at NATO Headquarters or as gender focal points.

In assessing the *quantity* of guidelines, we find that NATO's military bodies produced more overall guidelines than the organization's civilian bodies (Appendix, Figure A.2), which is consistent with the view that militaries are geared toward implementation, by design. Of all of NATO's primary bodies, ACT is the most prolific, which is to be expected given that gender-based training is part of its mandate. The NATO body produced thirty-seven publicly available documents on UNSCR 1325 implementation, which makes up about one-third of all guidelines in the sample. This command likely had first-mover advantage given that its mandate is to lead the organization's transformation. However, ACT's training programs target military staff—as opposed to civilian staff—since it is one of NATO's two strategic military commands. Civilian bodies have access to these training packages but have not developed similar

training of their own to identify how gender mainstreaming works in civilian tasks. This was also reflected in the interviews:

We need to institutionalize it. I think mandatory training, not just for people in the field but here [at NATO HQ] . . . People often say the military is far more advanced than the civilian side and that the military side has had to progress because of the ways militaries function.<sup>13</sup>

With respect to the *content* of NATO guidelines, evidence indicated that military bodies prepared guidelines with clear intention for implementation. Qualitative content analysis of NATO guidelines indicated that the organization's military bodies (ACO, ACT, MC, IMS, and PTECs) produced the majority (69 percent) of all formal policies in the sample of guidelines. Research assistants coded guidelines as formal if they were classified in NATO doctrine as standard operating procedures (SOPs) and coded guidelines as informal if they were private documents that recommended but did not require action. (Less than one-quarter of all guidelines were formal policies.) Also, the objectives of many of NATO gender guidelines (fifty-four of them) concerned implementation “at home,” that is, in member states' militaries, as indicated in Figure 1 below. Many guidelines were also concerned with assessment and evaluation—another key component of military culture.

Moreover, discourse describing gender in military guidelines consistently emphasized how gender mainstreaming applied to operational contexts. Soldiers were expected to consider gender within various training situations, from providing appropriate uniforms and equipment to considering gender in addressing women civilians in the field. Some of the guidelines focusing on gender awareness included titles such as, *NATO ACT Promotes Global Gender Perspective Training*, *What Does It Mean to Integrate Gender Perspective?* and *Soldiers in Theatre Deserve Best Training There Is*. In contrast, civilian guidelines tended to focus on representation and awareness-raising.

Finally, with respect to guidelines content, NATO's military bodies were more likely to have action plans than NATO's civilian bodies. Action plans are a critical component in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 because they translate the broader aim of incorporating a gender perspective into concrete changes to existing policies and procedures.

12 Phone interview with a Former ISAF Commander, October 3, 2017.

13 A NATO Voluntary National Contribution official. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 7, 2016.



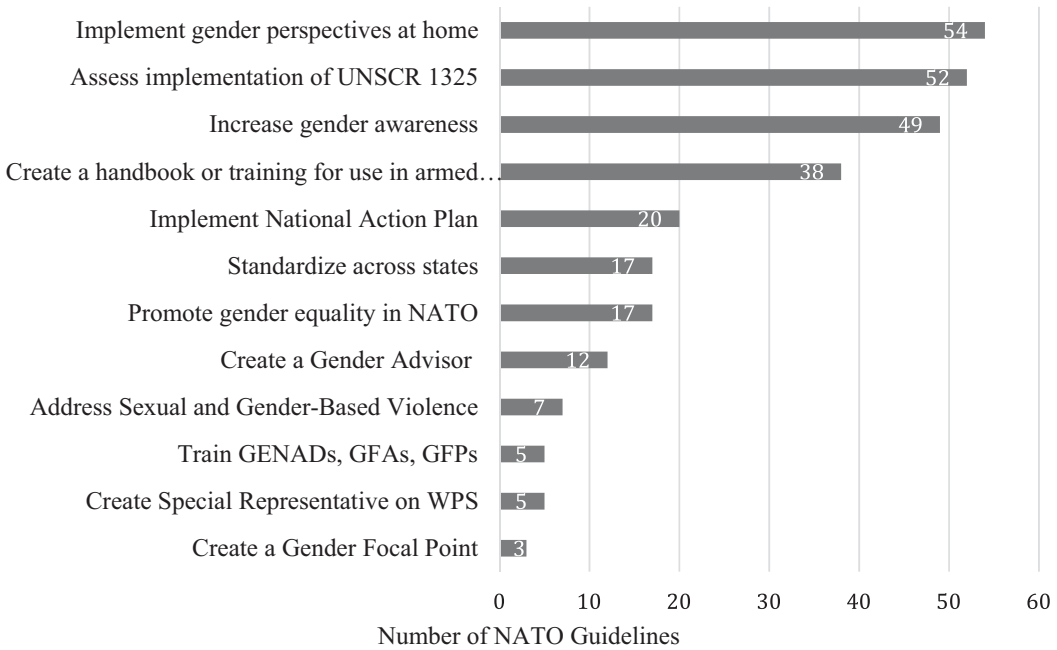


Figure 1. Objectives of NATO gender guidelines

Source: NGGD.

Notes: The number within each gray bar indicates the number of guidelines that were coded in a specific category. Some guidelines had multiple objectives, and therefore were coded multiple times.

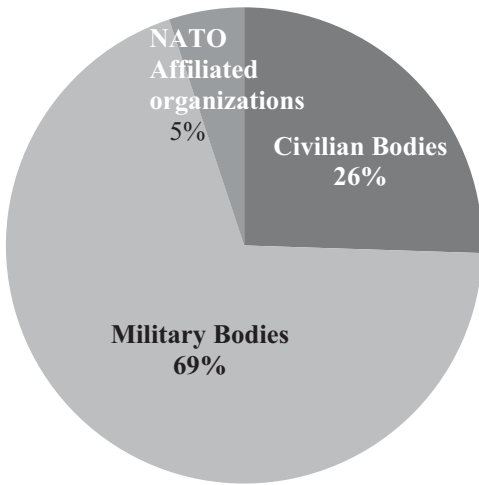
In contrast to the military’s experience, civilian officials had no incentive to prioritize implementation. Rather, we notice a moral hazard problem: appointing certain staff as gender focal points discouraged others from taking responsibility for gender-related reforms. These focal points became the “translators” of the gender file, which reduced the pressure on everyone else to learn about the integration of gender perspectives into their work. For example, one ambassador discussed a gender expert in their mission/delegation:

We have a person designated who’s working on gender issues. Their job is to coordinate the cooperation of gender issues in NATO and our country. So in their job description, they are not a gender advisor. But we consider that they will attend most of the awareness training or some other seminars, on gender issues and probably will be the most aware staff member. So if someone has an issue [that] has to do with gender, they will be the one who will be approached and asked for advice or assistance.<sup>14</sup>

14 A permanent representative of a NATO delegation. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, December 9, 2016.

Even the design of the NATO WPS office—an office of a civilian body—could have de incentivized civilians’ implementation by (inadvertently) sending a signal to the IS that gender issues are the sole responsibility of this office. Moreover, one IS practitioner observed that, even though the IS provides a NATO-wide Women, Peace, and Security action plan, divisions and delegations implement the action plan however they see fit. The absence of a clear “chain of command” on the civilian side means that there is less accountability when it comes to gender mainstreaming.

In sum, the majority of NATO’s gender guidelines are oriented toward military operations rather than civilian decision-making and policy-making activities. The policies, existing courses, NATO-commissioned studies, and main guidance documents are mostly military-driven. We can test this asymmetry by counting the resources that are meant for NATO armed forces against the resources that are intended for civilian practitioners within NATO. The significance of such a finding is that NATO processes involving the incorporation of a gender perspective are strongly influenced by military bodies and staff. Meanwhile, many civilians—from leaders to staff—are left in the dark as to whether or how to incorporate a gender perspective, as made clear by our interview data.



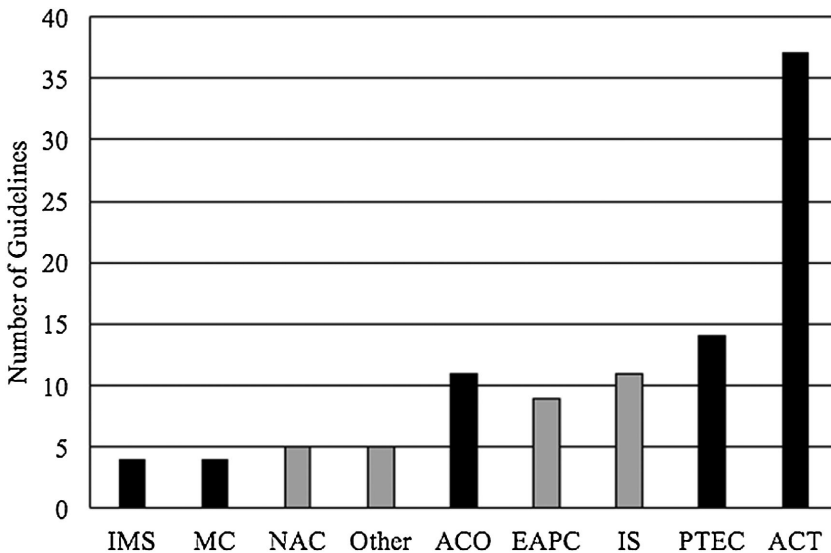
**Figure 2.** Origin of NATO gender guidelines  
 Source: NGGD.  
 Notes: *n* = 97.

**Civilian Leadership to Achieve Political Aims**

From our analyses of NATO guidelines and interviews with elites, we did not find support for Proposition 2. We do find the presence of a civilian-military divide related to implementation, but what is striking is the lack of initiative to adopt change in civilian bodies relative to military bodies. Overall, civilians produced fewer gender-

related guidelines, and elites in civilian bodies—whether permanent representatives or NATO IS leaders—had low gender awareness, as they could often not identify how gender mainstreaming applied to their day-to-day work. Civilian elites struggled to identify why gender mainstreaming was important for NATO’s ability to achieve its aims and to explain how gender mainstreaming was relevant for the policy-making and planning that they did. Instead, in interviews, permanent representatives and other civilian elites in NATO Headquarters cited examples of gender mainstreaming as being relevant for soldiers but not for their own work. Figure 2 below indicates that almost three-fourths of all guidelines in the sample were produced by the military as compared to only 26 percent on the civilian side. In the subsequent figure (Figure 3), the chart shows a breakdown of these guidelines by NATO body. Among these guidelines, many pointed to civilian bodies hosting some conferences and workshops to increase awareness of UNSCR 1325. The guidelines provided little guidance as to how civilian personnel—permanent representatives, delegation staff, and IS—should incorporate a gender perspective into their day-to-day work.

In interviews, several civilian elites pointed out that gender mainstreaming was a low priority for NATO given what they considered many other high-priority issues. Permanent representatives recounted that the few



**Figure 3.** Guidelines produced by NATO bodies and affiliated organizations  
 Source: NGGD.

Notes: Gray bars denote a civilian body, and black bars denote a military body. The EAPC, PTEC, and Other refer to organizations affiliated with NATO. Although there are ninety-seven guidelines, research assistants coded three as joint documents from two NATO bodies—resulting in one hundred total.

times that gender arose in discussions or that a gender perspective was considered was for International Women's Day.<sup>15</sup> Even though most national delegations did have a designated individual responsible for the gender file, most of those individuals who were interviewed were unable to say what they were actually supposed to do with the file and said that they understood it to be low priority for their delegation. Some said that they did nothing with the file and, in at least one case, a civilian official asked the interviewers what they should be doing.

Rather than leading on implementation, civilian officials at NATO focused their energies on advocacy within and on behalf of NATO. For example, the Secretary General and the International Staff led a "He for She" public awareness campaign in which photos were distributed of high-level NATO officials (e.g., permanent representatives and high-level staff) holding up signs about the importance of gender equality and women's inclusion in the military. Another example involved the then-Special Representative on Women, Peace, and Security hosting a "Barber Shop"—an open discussion with NATO officials on what gender means to them. However, becoming aware of the UNSC resolution or gender mainstreaming did not lead civilian officials to understand that they should be engaged in quotidian gender mainstreaming or to understand how they should be doing so.

A further indication that gender mainstreaming was not civilian-driven was from the response of an Assistant Secretary General (ASG)—one of NATO's leadership roles. The ASG declined to be interviewed for this study, noting that gender issues should be instead handled by female colleagues at NATO. This response suggests that civilian officials at NATO—including some in leadership positions—incorrectly understand gender issues to mean exclusively women's issues.

### Emulating Like-Minded ISOs

Evidence from interviews indicated that NATO has chosen adaptation by responding to actions taken by other ISOs. Specifically, the organization has actively emulated the UN, the EU, OSCE, and AU (Aðalsteinsdóttir 2017, 2). Likely, NATO has done so due to supply-side factors (i.e., the resources and experiences with gender mainstreaming that the UN and others can offer) and demand-side factors (i.e., the specific needs identified by NATO officials). Much of the external

influence occurred through informal channels of interpersonal connections among gender experts across the ISOs. One civilian official working on WPS issues explained:

We have colleagues at multilateral institutions, UN, in New York and Vienna, and Geneva, and this issue is also there. And they are helping us. So it's an informal ganging up [laughter]. And we try to promote. And in the UN we have a female ambassador, which is very helpful. And she is really dedicated to this issue.<sup>16</sup>

Among ISOs, the UN was particularly influential in NATO's efforts to adopt gender-mainstreaming guidelines in the first place. One military representative said the UN exerted "certain strong pressure" on NATO to do so and observed that, like NATO, the UN had a "similar sense of crisis" and similarly viewed mainstreaming as a high priority.<sup>17</sup> (It was interesting to note that an individual from the military side of NATO's house perceived NATO as prioritizing mainstreaming in contrast to most civilian officials perceiving the opposite.) Also, in June 2016, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations met with NATO representatives in Dublin, Ireland, for the first annual meeting of gender advisors and gender focal points from civilian and military bodies, a UN-led initiative. The group of gender experts mostly discuss lessons, best practices, and training approaches.<sup>18</sup> Staff working on the WPS agenda in NATO and the UN also coordinate, particularly on areas where the two organizations have operations in the same area (Aðalsteinsdóttir 2017, 2).

With respect to demand, NATO hosts the annual NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP) and invites representatives from other ISOs, including the EU and OSCE, who have attended.<sup>19</sup> NATO officials expressed appreciation for this opportunity to network and build their contacts of gender experts.<sup>20</sup> These examples offer further evidence that communication among gender experts from different ISOs has become increasingly institutionalized.

Additionally, some NATO officials argued that the EU prioritizes UNSCR 1325 more than NATO does since the EU was "built on human rights" and "is, by origin, a

15 A NATO permanent representative. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, December 9, 2016.

16 A NATO International Staff Official. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 8, 2016.

17 A NATO military representative. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 7, 2016.

18 A NATO military representative. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 7, 2016.

19 A NATO International Staff Official. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 7, 2016.

20 Ibid.

political organization,” whereas NATO has “only recently become a political organization.”<sup>21</sup> The latter perspective suggests that NATO officials may look to ISOs like the UN and EU for lessons because they deem these organizations as having more successfully implemented UNSCR 1325 than NATO has. In the words of one NATO civilian, “if you look at the policy side, the EU has better policy development. It is more comprehensive, larger; there are more tools in the toolbox.”<sup>22</sup> As further evidence of NATO’s external motivations for adaptation, we observe that gender experts who we interviewed frequently referenced externally produced toolkits, handbooks, and courses and provided trainees with hard copies of certain resources, such as a handbook on gender produced by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (Balon et al. 2016).

## Conclusion

This article argued why NATO has surprisingly adapted its practices to include gender-mainstreaming guidelines, despite the military’s historical resistance to considerations of gender, and offers a detailed account of how the Alliance has proceeded with implementation. Two factors influenced NATO’s adaptation: institutional incentives built into the design of NATO’s military bodies and the substantive input of external actors (i.e., partner states and other ISOs).

We find that, rather than NATO’s civilian bodies as one would expect, the organization’s military bodies have led the implementation of gender-related changes. Military bodies are institutionally predisposed to produce practical guidance. In response, individuals are incentivized to take action because of a hierarchical structure designed to ensure accountability in the implementation of guidelines. Whereas gender training was available—although not mandatory—for the military, it was largely absent for civilians. This gap between civilian and military practices occurs because militaries produce guidelines automatically in response to strategic directives. Their operational experience further privileges a military lead, as soldiers learned first-hand the benefits of applying a gender perspective in NATO operations such as ISAF in Afghanistan.

Our research also indicates that civilian officials have done little to drive change in policy and planning at NATO Headquarters, despite their important role

in shaping operations and activities. Without requisite training or guidance integrated into SOPs or job descriptions, civilian officials lack incentives to adapt. Their gender-related activities were restricted to a few public awareness campaigns. Civilian officials also reported gender mainstreaming to be a low-priority issue relative to other files in their portfolios.

We also find that NATO draws much of its gender expertise from partner states and other ISOs. NATO emulated the UN and integrated the principles of its resolutions within its own policies, for fear of falling behind. NATO has also relied heavily on partner nations for the provision of training, but that training is primarily intended for military applications.

These findings translate into several theoretical and empirical contributions to the security studies literature. First, our study puts forward an original argument for why and how ISOs such as NATO adapt to gender mainstreaming. Thus far, military adaptation scholarship has primarily focused on the national level, with limited explanations of adaptation at the international level. Moreover, once a decision is adopted, there can be important differences between civilian and military incentives for implementation. Given the challenges of a multiple-principal institutional design, reforms can create appropriate incentive structures to encourage everyone—not only certain groups—to participate in the process of adaptation (Davis and Lawrence 1977; Bowman and Kogut 1995; Levinthal and Workiewicz 2018).

Second, much of the previous literature on change in militaries has generally excluded studies of human-focused forms of adaptation. Our study challenges adaptation scholarship to consider forms of adaptation above and beyond technological and doctrinal shifts. This research illustrates how one of the world’s most preeminent military organizations adopted an unconventional norm.

Third, this article offers an original empirical contribution by examining why and how NATO has changed its policies in response to the gender turn. Previously, the body of literature on gender mainstreaming in state militaries and in ISOs had not explained how the world’s most active and powerful military alliance—NATO—has embraced UNSCR 1325.<sup>23</sup> We also make an additional empirical contribution by introducing an original dataset on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and our detailed

21 A civilian member of a NATO delegation. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, September 12, 2016.

22 A NATO International Staff Official. Personal communication, Brussels, Belgium, December 8, 2016.

23 Prescott’s article (2013b) acknowledges that only a small subset of NATO member states advocated for the adoption of gender mainstreaming, but the study did not systematically or empirically explore the concept in NATO.

accounts of who does what at NATO with respect to gender mainstreaming.

This article also served to highlight critical civil-military differences in adaptation. An increased understanding of how and why ISOs adopt gender mainstreaming contributes to existing scholarship on military adaptation and provides ISO policy-makers with much-needed insights as they work to enhance organizational performance. With respect to generalizability, our argument about how institutional design impacts adaptation should be applicable to gender mainstreaming in other ISOs, including the AU, EU, and the UN.

In addition to exploring adaptation in other ISOs, future scholarship should involve systematic examinations of the conditions under which gender mainstreaming affects military operations. Through research, scholars can empirically test emerging hypotheses about the different ways that women's participation in security and defense may affect the strategic aims that ISOs such as NATO identify.

With respect to policy implications, one takeaway from this study is that establishing gender-expert positions (e.g., WPS office staff or gender focal points) without simultaneously mandating gender-related training can (inadvertently) deincestivize civilian officials from making any changes to their daily work. The situation presents a catch-22. Gender experts are necessary for people to learn how to implement gender-related guidelines, yet people can point to those same experts as a reason why implementation is not necessary. To increase adaptation across an ISO, civilian and military officials may wish to consider requiring organization-wide training to ensure common understanding of how individuals across an organization—even nonexperts—can mainstream gender into their work.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who agreed to be interviewed as part of our study, as well as the staff who facilitated our meetings in Brussels. We would also like to thank our colleagues for the feedback they provided at the ISA convention 2017, the ISAC-ISSS conference 2017, the ISA Workshop on the "Measurement and Conceptualization of Female Combatants," co-organized by Jessica Trisko Darden and Alexis Henshaw, as well as colleagues from the University of Sydney, including James Der Derian and Megan MacKenzie. Special thanks go out to the fantastic research assistants we hired as part of this project, funded by the NATO Science for Peace and Security program: Meaghan Shoemaker, Sara Greco, Lindsay Coombs, Jeffrey Rice, Hallee Caron, Misbah Hyder, Patricia Rodda, Alexandra Raleigh, Char-

lotte Duval-Lantoine, Carrie Reiling and Charlie Blatt. Other colleagues and friends provided very helpful feedback along the way, including Charles Glaser, Carrie Reiling, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Andy Vogler, Al Okros, Jennifer Freeman, Darleen Young, Beth Woroniuk, Mia Bloom, J. Ann Tickner and Carol Cohn.

## Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available in the *Journal of Global Security Studies* data archive. The dataset can be downloaded from Harvard Dataverse at this link: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VUHDGW>.

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## Appendix

**Table A.1.** List of acronyms

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ACO: Allied Command Operations
ACT: Allied Command Transformation
ASG: Assistant Secretary General
AU: African Union
DGIMS: Director General of the IMS
EAPC: European Atlantic Partnership Council
EU: European Union
GENAD: Gender Advisors
GFA: Gender Field Advisors
GFPs: Gender Focal Points
IMS: International Military Staff
IS: International Staff
ISAF: International Security and Assistance Force
ISO: International Security Organization
KFOR: Kosovo Force
MC: Military Committee
NAC: North Atlantic Council
NATO HQ: NATO Headquarters
NATO: North American Treaty Organization
NCGP: NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives
NGGD: NATO Gender Guidelines Dataset
OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PTECs: Partnership Training and Education Centers
RAs: Research Assistants
SACEUR: Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SACT: Supreme Commander of ACT
SG: Secretary General
SOPs: Standard operating procedures
SWEDINT: Swedish Armed Forces International Centre
UN: United Nations
UNSC: United Nations Security Council
UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS: Women, Peace, and Security

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**Table A.2.** Interview questions

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How does your delegation/nation/institution incorporate a gender perspective into day-to-day activities?  
 Does your delegation/nation/institution have certain gender objectives?  
 What have been the biggest sources of resistance to implementing those objectives?  
 What are the common narratives/messages/stereotypes/misunderstandings that exist about gender at NATO?  
 Does your delegation/nation/institution provide gender-awareness training?  
 Is there a gender focal point or other individual trained in gender awareness in your institution?  
 Which individual/s or institution/s are responsible for gender mainstreaming at NATO?  
 Do civilians versus military bodies have different understandings of gender mainstreaming?  
 How does gender matter for NATO operations?

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**Table A.3.** Dates and locations of interviews with NATO elites

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>NATO body</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Country</i>
1	7/12/2016 and 12/12/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
2	8/1/2016 and 12/12/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
3	9/5/2016 and 12/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
4	9/6/2016	MC	Brussels	Belgium
5	9/6/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
6	9/6/2016 and 12/9/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
7	9/7/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
8	9/7/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
9	9/7/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
10	9/7/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
11	9/7/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
12	9/7/2016	MC	Brussels	Belgium
13	9/7/2016 and 9/8/2016	MC	Brussels	Belgium
14	9/7/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
15	9/7/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
16	9/8/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
17	9/8/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
18	9/8/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
19	9/8/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
20	9/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
21	9/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
22	9/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
23	9/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
24	9/9/2016	MC	Brussels	Belgium
25	9/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
26	9/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
27	9/9/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
28	9/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
29	9/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
30	9/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
31	9/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
32	12/8/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
33	12/8/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium

Table A.3. *continued.*

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>NATO body</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Country</i>
34	12/8/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
35	12/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
36	12/9/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
37	12/9/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
38	12/9/2016	IMS	Brussels	Belgium
39	12/9/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
40	12/9/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
41	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
42	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
43	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
44	12/12/2016	Partner State	Brussels	Belgium
45	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
46	12/12/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
47	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
48	12/12/2016	IS	Brussels	Belgium
49	12/12/2016	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
50	12/13/2016	Partner State	Brussels	Belgium
51	12/13/2016	Partner State	Brussels	Belgium
52	12/6/2017	MC	Brussels	Belgium
53	12/6/2017	MC	Brussels	Belgium
54	12/6/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
55	12/6/2017	MC	Brussels	Belgium
56	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
57	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
58	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
59	12/7/2017	IS	Brussels	Belgium
60	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
61	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
62	12/7/2017	MC	Brussels	Belgium
63	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
64	12/7/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
65	12/8/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
66	12/9/2017	MC	Brussels	Belgium
67	12/9/2017	NAC	Brussels	Belgium
68	12/7/2017	ACO	Mons	Belgium
69	12/7/2017	ACO	Mons	Belgium
70	12/7/2017	ACO	Mons	Belgium
71	12/7/2017	ACO	Mons	Belgium

*Note:* In cases where two dates are listed, limited time cut short the interview that began on the first date, and it was therefore completed on the second date.



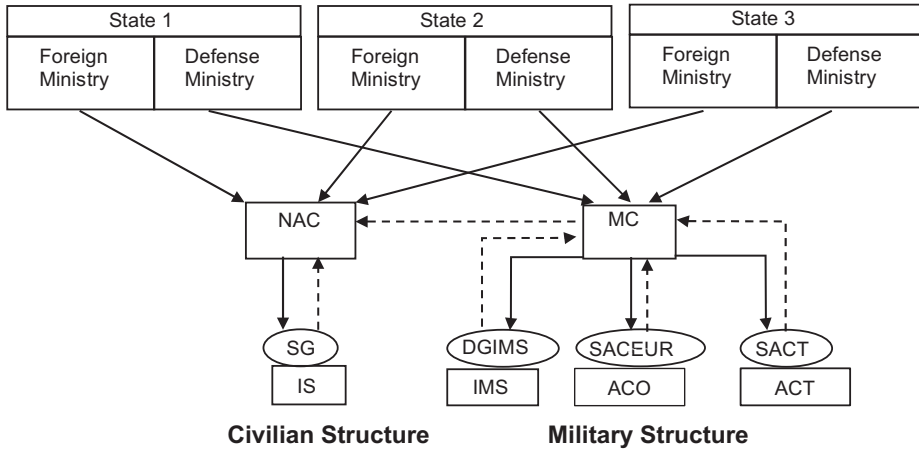


Figure A.1. NATO organizational chart<sup>24</sup>

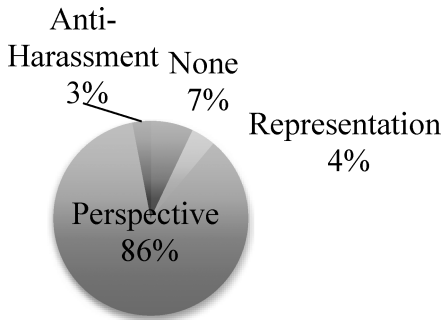


Figure A.2. Guideline types

24 Unofficial organizational chart based on information provided by an anonymous NATO Executive Management official and by the NATO Structure available online. This chart also appears in [Hardt \(2018\)](#).